

ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

HONG KONG BRANCH

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NEWSLETTER

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20th MAY 2007

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Friday 8 th June	Lecture	Carl Crow: his Newspapers, his Adverts and the People he Knew
Friday 22 nd June	Local Visit	Visit to the 'new' Bethanie and to the Chinese Cuisine Training Institute
Summer Break		
Friday 10 th August	Lecture	Rock Carvings in Hong Kong - Evidence of a Possible Link to Folk Religion
18 th August – 1 st September	Overseas Visit	Explorer Tour to Western Mongolia

Lecture at the Helena May

Friday 8th June

Carl Crow: His Newspapers, his Adverts and the People he Knew

Carl Crow arrived in Shanghai as a young man in 1911 fresh from Missouri. His job was to launch the China Press – Shanghai's first American-run English language newspaper. Over the next 25 years he became one of the most popular Shanghailanders and a well-known character along the China coast. He launched a number of magazines and newspapers, started a ground-breaking advertising agency and wrote one of the most influential and best selling books on China ever – *400 Million Customers*. He became not just a well-known journalist in China but was one of the major interpreters of China to the world outside through his writing for a host of publications including the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Reader's Digest* and *Liberty*.

Paul French, author of *Carl Crow - A Tough Old China Hand: The Life, Times, and Adventures of an American in Shanghai* (published by the Hong Kong University Press), will give a presentation which takes you back to a China and a Shanghai between the wars and looks at the fortunes of those foreigners who made Shanghai their home and business base as well as re-assessing the importance of Carl Crow's legacy and journalistic work. Copies of this book will be available at the talk.

Paul has lived and worked in Shanghai for many years. He is a widely published analyst, journalist and commentator on China and foreign business in the country. He is the author of *One Billion Shoppers -*

Accessing Asia's Consuming Passions after the Meltdown, written with Matthew Crabbe and inspired by Carl Crow's similarly titled book. Recently, French has written the well-received *North Korea: The Paranoid Peninsula - A Modern History*.

Speaker: Paul French
Venue: The Blue Room, The Helena May, 35 Garden Road, Central
Time/Date: 6.00 for 6.30pm, Friday 8th June
Cost: \$50 for members, \$70 for guests (there will be a cash bar)
Booking: Please complete the booking form on page 15 and return to Geoffrey Emerson

Local Visit

Friday 22nd June

Visit to the 'new' Bethanie and to the Chinese Cuisine Training Institute

In June 2005, the Society visited Bethanie in Pokfulam. This beautiful heritage building was built in 1875 by the Missions Étrangères de Paris and used for almost a century as a sanatorium. In 2003, the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts began work to restore the building as its second campus. We saw the site before the restoration work had been finished and now that the work is complete we will return to see the amazing results. Together with the adjacent historical Dairy Farm cowsheds, Bethanie now boasts two performance venues, an exhibition hall, a chapel and a museum.

Next to Bethanie is the more recently built Chinese Cuisine Training Institute, which is a state-of-the-art training school for restaurant staff in the Chinese tradition. It is renowned for the very high quality of its Chinese cuisine and service, so following our visit to Bethanie, we will enjoy a sumptuous Chinese dinner at the Institute. This is an unusual opportunity for us to visit an educational institute normally open only to students and members of the CCTI diners' club.

We will meet at Bethanie at 5.00pm and following our visit there walk next door to the Institute for dinner. Members will be allowed to bring only one guest each. Meet just inside the South Gate of Bethanie, which is at 145 Pokfulam Road, the same entrance as the CCTI and Vocational Training Council Skills Centre.

Bethanie is located on Pokfulam Road, about half a mile past Queen Mary Hospital towards Aberdeen. Many buses can be used from Central, Wanchai and Admiralty including 7, 4, 40, 40M, 94, 37A and cross-harbour buses 970 and 973. Alight at the Pokfulam Village stop, just before Chi Fu Fa Yuen. A large primary school, St Stephen's Girls' College, is located at the bus stop. Bethanie is just on the other side, the west side, of Pokfulam Road. There is car parking at the CCTI; if you plan to drive, please include your license number on the booking form. This will probably be a popular event, first come, first served. We need to give exact numbers to the CCTI for dinner reservations by 8th June so be sure to book before that date.

Time: 5:00 p.m.
Place: South Gate of Bethanie, 145 Pokfulam Road, Pokfulam
Cost: \$300 for members, \$350 for guests
Dress: Smart casual
Booking: Please complete the booking form on page 15 and return to Geoffrey Emerson before June 8th

SUMMER BREAK

Lecture at Central Library

Friday 10th August

Rock Carvings in Hong Kong - Evidence of a Possible Link to Folk Religion

Hong Kong has a number of rock carvings dateable to the Bronze Age. Several others of simpler design may date to the Iron Age. Macau and Zhu Hai have similar carvings. This rock art may be related – at a considerable distance – to the earth god altars and certain other folk religious practices still extant today. This talk will be followed by a visit to two carvings on Hong Kong Island at Big Wave Bay and Wong Chuk Hang on 13th October 2007.

William Meacham is a well-known archaeologist affiliated with the University of Hong Kong, where he is an Honorary Research fellow at the Centre of Asian Studies. Former Editor (1972-1985) and Chairman (1985-1996) of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society, he has worked in Hong Kong since 1970. He discovered and directed two seasons of excavation in the pivotal site of Sham Wan on Lamma Island, and he directed the year-long archaeological salvage operation on Chek Lap Kok prior to the construction of the new airport.

Speaker: William Meacham
Time/date: 6:30pm, Friday 10th August
Venue: Activities Room 1, G/F, Hong Kong Central Library, Causeway Bay
Cost: This event is free and open to the public with no booking required

Overseas Visit

18th August - 1st September 2007

Explorer Tour to Western Mongolia

The Society has arranged an Explorer Tour to Western Mongolia. A sufficient group for the tour has now formed and arrangements are being made with the Mongolian Agent. Further applications can still be considered if they are made very soon.

For those who have already signed up the final payment is due by 10th June 2007 please. Details were given in the March 2007 newsletter which is reproduced on the RASHKB website. For further information you can contact peterstuckey@yahoo.com.hk.

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Bhutan Study Tour

Having spent months organizing the Bhutan trip in February, at the last minute Felicity Shaw had to leave Brian in sole charge due to family illness. In spite of these difficulties, and Brian himself not long recovered from serious surgery, the trip went without a hitch and everyone returned enthusing about the stunning landscapes, the wonderful Bhutan people, the traditional ceremonies they were privileged to witness and the excellent organisation that went into this event. Ron Clibborn-Dyer, who also stood in as Guard of the Second Bus, has now very kindly written a report of the tour. This is rather longer than our usual activity reports but it will give all members who have not yet been on one of the Shaw's trips a flavour of Bhutan and some idea of why these study tours are so popular. Some members have been on them two or three times. After a well-earned break, Brian and Felicity will no doubt be planning another Bhutan tour before long.

In February, once again Dr Brian Shaw led a very successful RAS trip to Bhutan. The arrival on Druk Air, Bhutan's national airline, was spectacular as the aircraft flew close to some of the highest mountains in the Himalayas and then spiraled down to land in the narrow Paro valley. This visit was especially planned to witness the 300 year-old domchoe ceremonies in memory of clashes with the invading Tibetans. These ceremonies took place at the magnificent Punakha Dzong, which stands at the confluence of the Phochhu and Mochhu rivers. In its huge 'courtyard', we observed traditional dances, performed by the monks wearing colourful costumes and elaborate masks and war-like re-enactments of the pazap warriors.

This is best described in the following extract from "*Seeing with the Third Eye: Growing up with Grandma in Rural Bhutan*" by Sangay Wangchuk, Thimphu: published by the author, 2006, a copy of which the author presented to each of us on the trip.

"The Punakha Drupchen (Punakha Dromchoe) is a great homage-paying to all the protective deities and great leaders of the past and it also reflects that we were all once warriors. The Serda held on the last day of the first phase of the festival is a colourful procession led by the monk body, and warriors galloping with their commanders in different directions. Each of the eight warrior clans who participate in the festival has a bard who sings the glories of the wars and pays homage to their war deities. The bard is called a lhenpoen and they should have a great voice to sing the Lhenma, a story of the war that the warriors had against both human and supernatural beings.

"The history of the Serda dates back to the mid-17th century. It all started over a relic called Ranju-Kharsarpani, a bone figurine representing Chenresig, the lord of compassion which appeared from one of the spinal vertebrae of the great saint Tsangla Gyare after his cremation. This holy relic was prized by the Buddhists of both Bhutan and Tibet and thus became a "bone of contention". In order to end the frequent

wars with the Tibetans, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal enacted a great procession. During the procession, all the monks and warriors carried a replica of the relic to the side of the Mochhu. From the other side of the river, the Tibetans saw the Bhutanese throwing the relic into the water. They were surprised at such a foolish act and the wars over the relic came to an end. The original relic is still in the good hands of the Central Monk Body. Every year the Punakha Dromche ends with the Serda procession to commemorate the event."

Everything in Bhutan is spectacular, from the architecture of just about every building, including the airport, schools and even petrol stations, to the National Dress that is worn by almost the entire population. The concept of Gross National Happiness as the nation's goal, as opposed to Gross National Product or any other development slogan, is to be applauded, and the National Ban on Smoking was most effective – with only two individuals being observed smoking by the writer over the entire visit. The national habit of Beetle Nut chewing and spitting is very evident, but bubble gum chewing seems to be the preference of some of the younger members of the community.

On a public holiday, we were able to observe the National Sport of Archery. The preferred shooting range is 150 metres and the small wooden target was almost invisible to the naked eye of most of our members. The song and dance routine performed before, during and after an archer takes his shot, was quite amusing to watch. The traditional wooden bows previously made and used in Bhutan, have given way to the highly professional and very expensive American-made bows. These contrasted with the national dress of the archers, together with the modern designer sports shoes favoured by many of the participants.

We were there in time to see the early Rhododendron trees beginning to bloom in the mountainous forests. The first to bloom seem to be very large and very red. The flowers are eaten by the locals – they have a slightly bitter taste and are understood to clean the palate and to help with stomach upsets. The spectacular Red Rhododendron arboretum is the most widely distributed tree rhododendron in the Himalayas, found over a wide range of altitudes and in many different forms, some of which have been described as separate species. On a subsequent trip to Nepal, we were told that Rhododendron petals are also used to make a cordial. The flowering spikes are often used as offerings in Hindu and Buddhist temples.

We observed several specimens of the Sword of Damocles Tree, *Oroxylum indicum* [Bignoniaceae] the fruit of which is a long seed pod 2-4 feet in length and 3 inches wide suspended conspicuously from the branches which are often bare of leaves in winter, looking like a hanging sword from which the popular English name is derived. The pods contain large numbers of flat winged seeds that bear an apparent double 'Om' and 'Yin Yang' sign and these may be seen throughout the Buddhist world as strings of offering in temples and shrines. I have seen them in temples and monasteries in Tibet, Mongolia and Nepal. The seeds are used medicinally to cure upset stomachs. There was one large Sword of Damocles Tree at the entrance of the Wangdue Dzong, and a very old Bhodi tree in the inner courtyard of the Punakha Dzong. The Pipal Tree, *ficus religiosa*, is known throughout history as the Bodhi Tree, under which Shakyamuni Buddha, then known as Gautama, attained enlightenment some 2,500 years ago.

The trip included an ascent to the highest cliff-side monastery in Bhutan, the Tatsang Monastery, known as the 'Tiger's Nest'. It is said to be one of the first places in Bhutan where, in the 8th century, the Guru Rinpoche - Badmasambava - flew on the back of a tiger and spent three months meditating in the cave on which the Monastery was built. Some of the more active members climbed the entire way to the Monastery whilst, in the absence of tigers, others chose to ride part-way on ponies or mules.

We also paid a visit to the Chimi lhakhang, the Temple of Lam Drukpa Kinley, the divine madman. This beloved eccentric spiritual master from the 15th century used very worldly means to convey his spiritual messages - now remembered in graphic forms of erect phallic symbols which can be seen on many buildings throughout the country, and wooden phalluses hung over doorways or from roof corners to ward off negative elements. On the high snow covered Dochu La pass, there were hundreds of Daphne shrubs in flower – the perfume was wonderful. The bark is used in handmade paper and we later visited a small factory to observe the process.

A long winding mountain road took us over another high pass and down to the Gangtey valley where the Black Crane spends part of its migratory life. The Hotel at Gangtey is a very modern one with splendid facilities, but the lack of electricity does not allow full use to be made of the underfloor heating in the luxuriously appointed rooms. Overhead power lines are not allowed in this valley as these could become a hazard to the endangered Black Cranes. Buildings in this area use solar panels to provide some of their basic electrical needs. Generators are also used. At Gangtey we visited the Gangtey Gompa under renovation, and it was here for the first and only time that I was to see a splendid mural depicting a deity

riding on a turtle with nine fish heads, the significance of which is not explained, even in the very comprehensive encyclopedia of Tibetan iconography.

We returned over the Dochu La Pass to the Punakha Dzong to watch the spectacular procession of colourfully dressed pazap 'warriors', musicians, laymen, monks and the Abbot, descending the steep Dzong steps to head for the river, where further ceremonies took place. This part of the Ceremony was witnessed by the King's son, wearing his royal yellow shoulder cloth (kabne). Later, some of our members were privileged to speak to him and to shake his hand.

The last day of the Tsechus ended with the unveiling, at dawn, of a HUGE appliquéd thangkha called a thongdroel – it covered a wall, four storeys high. This thangkha was much revered by the great crowd who slowly passed by it, pressing their foreheads on it, to bring them the enlightenment they seek. Four hours later, the thangkha was slowly lowered, carefully rolled up by hundreds of monks and carried away for storage. It was the culmination of an amazing festival, and slowly the Bhutanese crowd, in their finest colourful clothes and jewellery, returned from whence they came.

The penultimate day of the visit was spent in and around the capital, Thimpu, where we visited handmade paper and weaving workshops, an excellent Folk Heritage Museum, the National Library and various arts and crafts emporiums. We returned to Paro, spending our last night where we began this fascinating trip, at the Gantey Palace Hotel. Early the following morning, the Royal Asiatic Society members flew back 'home', taking with them, photos and memories of the few exotic days that we were privileged to experience in this little Kingdom of Bhutan and its delightful people.

Ron Clibborn-Dyer

Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong

John Carroll's talk at the Helena May on 20th April was another very well attended event for which there was a waiting list. Brought up in Hong Kong, and currently an Associate Professor of History at the University of Hong Kong, John has made an extensive study of the meanings and implications of colonialism in modern history. He argued that after the Opium War Hong Kong's colonial nature helped to create a local Chinese elite, who found opportunities in the colonial system to develop business and trade. There was co-operation between Chinese and British leaders resulting in the expansion of capitalism and political and economic development in China, the Chinese helping to make Hong Kong an active member of the British Empire.

A review of John's book, of the same name as his talk, says, "The writing is clear and the variables and arguments are developed in a captivating, systematic fashion... His careful scholarship considers events and contexts as he weaves and supports a clearly defined thesis." And there is no better way to describe John's talk, which was delivered authoritatively and engagingly and which clearly showed his extensive research and also his passionate interest in Hong Kong's history.

AGM and Annual Dinner

Our AGM and Annual Dinner were held at the Hong Kong Club on 27th April and again there was a full house with 79 members and guests attending. In his speech, President Robert Nield welcomed the Society's special guests for the evening: Mr Arthur Hacker, the evening's Guest Speaker; Dr Patrick Hase, Immediate Past President; Dr Joseph Ting, ex-Curator of the Hong Kong Museum of History and also a past Council Member; Mr Simon Chu and Ms Sarah Choy of the Public Records Office; Miss Agnes Lee of the Hong Kong Public Libraries; Mr Tony Nedderman, the Society's Auditor; and Ms Ruth Benny, the Society's web administrator.

In recognition of their long association with the Society and the tremendous amount of work they have done on our behalf, and for the general community, Robert appointed Pat Hase and Joseph Ting as Honorary Fellows, presenting each with a framed certificate to mark the occasion. Robert also acknowledged the commitment of Geoffrey Emerson, Activities coordinator, working long and hard to put together such an excellent programme of events throughout the year.

In her Annual Report, Julia Chan, RAS Librarian, reported that there have been 280 donations to the Society's library over the past year and that we now have over 6,000 volumes in all. Adrian Churn, outgoing Treasurer, reported that our membership has shown a satisfactory growth and our finances are strong, with net assets increased over last year's.

After dinner, well-known local writer and artist (and RAS member) Arthur Hacker wittily led us through his recent book, *British Hong Kong: Fact and Fable*, accompanied by on-screen illustrations in his

unique curlicue style. Some of our guests came that evening specifically to hear Arthur and they were not disappointed, also buying large numbers of this book as mementos of the evening.

During the year the Society arranged two overseas trips and several local visits, and before and after the AGM a PowerPoint display was running showing photos taken at these events. Thanks go to Colin Day who put this presentation together, and who also took most of the photographs.

(Note: Annual Reports from the President, Librarian, the Volunteers and the Friends of RASHKB in UK may be found on the website.)

Almost Forgotten Aspects of the Dragon Boat Festival in the North-west New Territories

In visiting temples and ancestral halls, particularly in the New Territories, many of us no doubt have noticed the wooden heads of dragons in a corner gathering dust and appearing neglected. We may not have paid much attention or given much thought to such relics. Those who attended Professor Dick Irving's very interesting talk on 4th May at the Central Library will certainly pay more attention to dragon heads in the future.

With a superb PowerPoint presentation – at times close-up insert of details were juxtaposed against larger photographs. For example, using a well-known Allom engraving of a large dragon boat passing the Canton factories in the early 19th Century, Dick zeroed in on details shown of the boat and men involved. Sixty years ago the festival was less of a 'race' and more a formal occasion to 'greet' and even inspect the young men of neighbouring communities who used the boats to 'strut their stuff'. Racing, in the form of overtaking another boat, or fighting, tended to take place beyond the view of the crowds, on the way to or from the designated 'greeting' venue.

Dick also spoke about the similarity between dragon heads and crocodile heads, suggesting a relationship centuries ago between dragon boats and the many crocodiles then in local waters. This led to a question from the audience about the evidence of crocodiles in the area. In reply Dick mentioned two things. First, Chinese written history does refer to hunting crocodiles and in the 1980s bones believed to be those of crocodiles were found.

Another question was in response to Dick's describing that the boats were preserved by the villages from year to year by sinking them into the mud of the estuary. The question was how mud preserved the boat and did not promote decay. Dick explained that it was not a simple process but great skill and experience was needed to bail out all the water first and then apply very salty mud. All in all, a fascinating talk!

Cinnamon - the Enigmatic Spice

Cinnamon has been a favourite spice for thousands of years, but only when the subject is addressed by an enthusiastic Oxford history graduate and cinnamon plantation owner does the whole story of its ancient pedigree come to life. The 80 members and guests who attended the talk given on 11th May by Miles Young were treated to what he referred to as a "ramble through the history of cinnamon," linking this well-known but little-understood commodity to such classical greats as Herodotus, Theophrastus, Pliny and Sappho. We learned that cinnamon has had more impact on history than many of its peers in the spice cupboard, from this businessman-turned-planter who bought his plantation when he visited Sri Lanka on a very different sort of business trip a few years ago.

The harvesting of cinnamon follows an agricultural process that has not changed at all over the last millennium or more and which has proved incapable of mechanical adaptation. The branches of the cinnamon tree are first softened, and then the bark is taken off to reveal the inner layer. It is this pith that is then dried and rolled into the tubes that we now see in up-market coffee establishments.

Cinnamon has in recent years undergone an upsurge in popularity, although Mr Young cautioned us that what is often passed off as cinnamon in such products as the North American cinnamon bun is, in fact, a different substance altogether – cassia, and he quoted an early English authority on the subject as having pronounced that "cinnamon is for lords and cassia for the common people."

Cinnamon features no fewer than three times in the Bible, two such references being in relation to the spice's qualities as an "aid to romance." Indeed, uses in ancient times included as a cosmetic – it still features in certain products of Dior and Tommy Hilfiger; as a gastronomic aid (being added to wine – still the practice with the Christmastime favourite, mulled wine); as a religious aid, when it was used in the process of embalming; and various medical uses.

This huge subject, including references to Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, Arab, Ancient Egyptian and British traders, was delivered at a fast pace and with tremendous authority, knowledge and enthusiasm. Miles concluded by saying that, for all the reasons he had outlined in the foregoing hour he could not give a history of cinnamon. But that is exactly what he had done. We hope that his talk might lead to an article in a forthcoming edition of the Journal.

Visit to Miles Young's House

The day after his talk, Miles Young invited RAS members to lunch at his home. This was an unforgettable treat: Miles's house is at 1 Chatham Path, a ten minute (steep) walk up from May Road. The house, a two-storied colonial home with no vehicular access, was built in the 1920s and now houses Miles's remarkable collection of Chinese modern art and sculpture. On arrival, either on foot or by the 1 Chatham Path shuttle, a golf cart, members were given cool drinks. Then Miles gave a brief introduction to the house and talked about his art collection. He told us a little about the 'life' of the house, particularly that it was used for a while as a school, but Dan Waters was able to step forward and supply information about its architect, and when it was built. Architect Tony Lam also spoke briefly about the architect.

Members then went indoors to see the art collection, which is expertly displayed in just about every room in the tastefully decorated house. The house was large enough to easily absorb sixty of us wandering from room to room. After exploring the many rooms and admiring the remarkable collection of artworks, we all met on the roof where tables were laid for lunch. Miles provided a delicious meal – with, of course, cinnamon in the sauce - and wine for everyone. It was a perfect day, with warm (no, hot) sunshine, a backdrop of lush greenery and reasonable visibility towards the harbour.

There are all too few of these beautiful old houses still in existence today and it was a delight to see 1 Chatham Path being used as a private home. This was a special occasion that everyone will remember and we give heartfelt thanks to Miles for his exceptional hospitality.

FEATURE ARTICLE

The highlight of the Annual Dinner in 2006 was Hugh Baker's entertaining account of some of the joys and pains of learning Cantonese. He said at the time that this would be his last talk, but he has found a little more up his sleeve especially for this newsletter and here, to lighten the day, is:

Of Rocking-Horses and Iron-Jockeys: An Ode to Cantonese

What's so fascinating about Cantonese? I don't know. Ask the lover why he loves. I can't even answer the much simpler question 'Why do you like kippers so much?' And to explain why to those who have never learned Cantonese or eaten kippers or loved it is as hard as trying to explain colour to someone with only black and white vision.

I started by learning Mandarin, as it was known before Political Correctness insisted on calling it Putonghua. That was fun, and it opened up a new world to me, but I cannot say that I was more than just interested. And then out of the blue came an offer of a grant to do anthropological fieldwork in Hong Kong and it became necessary to learn Cantonese, since in the 1960s almost no-one spoke Mandarin, certainly not in the New Territories village where I was going to live for eighteen months.

At once it became clear that this was a very different language. Mandarin textbooks were full of pofaced translation exercises about how many pens were on the desk and how one could enter a room by grasping the door handle in the right hand, turning it to the left and gently pushing the door open, stepping over the threshold, and carefully closing the door behind one. Honest. I can still remember the Mandarin word for 'threshold' and more than forty years on am still waiting for a chance to use it! So boring! So colourless!

But Cantonese... ah! I confess that even now I don't know the Cantonese for 'threshold' (and further confess that I don't care). But very early on I learned how to shout through the bathroom door to someone that they couldn't come in to clean their teeth because I was on the loo! No-one even went to the loo in Mandarin, or not in my textbooks anyway. Poor northerners, they must be so uncomfortable.

Cantonese textbooks can't keep away from daily life because that is what Cantonese is about - living life with zest and excitement, getting fun out of what we all have to do anyway. You've got to eat, so why

not enjoy it to the full, and your language must be stuffed (as it were!) with all the necessary vocabulary to express the joy you get from buying, cooking and above all eating food (NB not ‘consuming’ it - leave such pompous expressions to the dreary non-Cantonese world). If life is eating and gossiping and making love and playing tricks and arguing and, yes, going to the loo, then that is what a proper colloquial language talks about, and if it’s earthy, well at least earth comes in different colours and with smells and fertility and liveliness and a basic importance to us as human beings. When Cantonese says something at you, you know you’ve been said at.

And if the language ever seems to be in danger of getting boring, someone is sure to come up with a new expression to liven it up again. Again and again as I learned I found new hand-grenades of verbal pleasure exploding in my ears. I thought it was quite cute when I found out that the word for a bicycle (*daan-che* 單車 ‘singleton vehicle’) had fathered the word for a motor-bike (*din-daan-che* 電單車 ‘electric singleton vehicle’), but that just showed how easily tickled I was - it was even more exciting to find that Cantonese had moved on to call a motor-bike an ‘iron steed’ (*tit-ma* 鐵馬) and its rider an ‘iron-jockey’ (*tit ke-si* 鐵騎士).

What fun that teachers are referred to as ‘man’s downfall’ (*yan-ji-waan* 人之患), borrowing the first part of a quotation from the philosopher Mencius “Man’s downfall lies in loving to teach others” (*Yan ji waan joi hou wai yan si* 人之患在好為人師).

If something makes you feel anxious or scared it’s called ‘teeth-smoking’ (*nga-yin* 牙煙), as good a description of clenched jaws as you could come up with. Those cement lorries with the revolving drum are known as ‘snail trucks’ (*tin-lo-che* 田螺車), not because they drive slowly but because of their shape.

To go on a river cruise is ‘to ramble the river in a boat’ (*yau-syun-ho* 遊船河), so when motor-cars came along and people went out for a drive in the countryside, nothing seemed more natural than that they should call it ‘rambling the river in a car’ (*yau-che-ho* 遊車河). The next step was easy for a language with creativity - standing in a lift going up instead of down, someone shrugged off the annoyance by saying that they were ‘rambling the river in a lift’ (*yau-lip-ho* 遊獵河). It’s a standard term now.

Quirky, inventive, colourful, unexpected, self-aware, self-deprecating, self-gratifying, fearless of hyperbole, obliquely penetrating, full-frontally bludgeoning, persuasive, shrill, subtle, subversive, Cantonese contributes to life as much as it reflects it. It is a proud parent and loves to play with its offspring words, punning and twisting meanings to get greater joy out of life.

“Eating dog is illegal? Oh, but I never eat it, though I do sometimes enjoy a meal of ‘three-and-six.’”

Well, that’s alright then. Or is it? What is ‘three-and-six’?

“Three and six is nine, even a kindergarten child knows that.”

And all Cantonese speakers know that ‘nine九’ is pronounced *gáu*, but of course it can only be a coincidence that ‘dog狗’ is also pronounced *gáu* can’t it?

“What do you think of Ah-Wong’s new girl-friend?”

“There’s an aircraft on fire! (*fei-gei fo-juk* 飛機火燭).”

“Pardon...?”

“There’s an aircraft on fire: it’s burning the clouds (*siu-wan* 燒雲).”

“Wow, lucky Ah-Wong!” (*siu-wan* 燒雲 puns into *siu-wan* 銷魂 ‘bewitching, charming’).

And, watching a speed-mad iron-jockey tearing along a New Territories highway, the traffic policeman snorts:

“He’s a Japanese ship! He’ll be dead before long.”

Bit tricky this one. You will have noticed no doubt that all Japanese ships have names that end in *Maru* 丸. So however long the name of the ship, sooner or later comes *Maru*. The character *Maru* 丸 is pronounced *yuen* in Cantonese and so is the word for ‘the end’ (*yuen* 完). So ‘Japanese ship’ means ‘Sooner or later will come his end.’

There’s loads more of this kind of thing, but I’m afraid that if I go on about it you the reader will be ‘Foreigner’s mooncake’ (*Faan-gwai-lou yut-beng* 番鬼佬月餅). You know what foreigners call mooncake - they call it ‘mooncake’ - and ‘mooncake’ sounds like the Cantonese *mun-gik* 悶極 which means ‘extremely bored’.

As a student, for two summer vacations I worked in an amusement arcade in an English sea-side resort, and it was my privilege that the next stall was a Bingo game run by the best ‘barker’ in town. ‘Ginger’ he was called and he could charm the passers-by out of the street and then magic the sixpences out of their pockets - all done with brilliant patter. I admired him enormously, and it was from him that I learned that language mattered. But it wasn’t the Queen’s English that he used, it was a language of his

own fertile inventiveness. His favourite expression, reserved for moments when the crowds were slow in reaching for their purses, was "It's like trying to get manure out of a rocking-horse today!" Ginger would surely have taken to Cantonese like a duck to water.

Dr. Hugh Baker, CUHK

12-day Study tour to Persia's Caspian Coast With Brian and Felicity Shaw

Brian and Felicity Shaw are proposing a study tour to Iran at the end of September. Please note that, due to time constraints, this trip is not being organised through the Society. Anyone interested should contact Brian (bcshaw@gmail.com) or Felicity at fshaw@hkucc.hku.hk. Brian states:

The proposed tour is appropriate for those who have already visited Iran's major attractions (Shiraz and Persepolis, and Esfahan) and wish to extend their knowledge of the history and architecture of more of the varied ethnic groups in traditional Persia. We will use two internal flights (from Tehran to Tabriz at the start and western end of the visit, and from Mashad in the east to Tehran on the final day, to connect with return flight to Doha and on to Hong Kong), but otherwise we will travel in comfortable "high-rise" buses with excellent viewing as we move from place to place. All chosen hotels are 4-star except at Mashad (5-star); all meals are included.

Departure from Hong Kong will be after midnight on Friday 28th September, i.e. 29th September, returning to Hong Kong at 2.25pm on 10th October. The total cost will be in the region of \$25,500. For a full itinerary, booking form, map of the region, accommodation details and breakdown of costs please contact Brian or Felicity.

For those members who have not yet visited Iran and its classical architecture, there may be an opportunity next year to travel to western Iran "in the footsteps of Alexander the Great" before going on to the classical sights (this will require 14 days but can incorporate Hong Kong public holidays in September and October 2008).

CHANGES ON COUNCIL

At the AGM last month we said farewell to three Council Members, Adrian Churn, our Treasurer for the past year, Dr Betty Wei, a Council Member for four years, and Bob Horsnell, who has been a member of the Society for 15 years and a Council Member since 1998. Adrian has left to devote more time to his expanding business and we thank him for guarding the treasury over the past year. Betty is regretfully standing down in order to devote more time to her many other commitments. Bob will be sorely missed as Co-ordinator of the RASHKB Volunteers and the Society's chief liaison with the Antiquities and Monuments Office. He has also been editing the Volunteers' very informative newsletter and a search is currently under way for his successor.

When Adrian offered his resignation, Peter Halliday kindly stepped forward to take his place, thus vacating the position of Hon Editor of the Journal, which has now been filled by Dr Peter Cunich, of the History Department, School of Humanities, Hong Kong University. There being no outside nominations for Council Members, Geoffrey Bonsall and Colin Day were elected to be full Council Members, having served as Co-opted Members for the past year.

So with some shuffling of chairs and exchanging of hats, the Council is now ready to service the Society for the coming year. Thank you, both Peters, for undertaking these commitments to the Society.

A CALL FOR HELP

Being run entirely on a voluntary basis, your Society is always in need of help in one way or another – both in terms of manpower and finance. As I mentioned in my Annual Report at the AGM, I would hate

members to think that their Society is run as a closed shop. The fact that there were no new nominations for Council membership might easily imply this, but we would welcome with open arms anybody who would like to get more involved. There are jobs both large and small which can easily be shared more widely. One of the larger ones relates to managing our public profile with the various government bodies that we are close to. With the retirement of Bob Horsnell, we are at present without a leader in this field. Less demanding tasks that can always use volunteer help include assistance with the organisation of our various activities and the recording thereof with photographs and videos. Please approach me or any Council member if you would like to get more involved.

The other area is finances. Although our Ride Fund is at present sufficiently well endowed to publish a number of new titles over the next few years, the pot will quite quickly run dry. And there are other projects that can not make headway without proper funding. It is surprising how much easier a difficult project becomes if there is some cash waiting to be spent on it! There are a number of members who have ideas for books that we could, and arguably should, produce – if only we had the funds. Any donations – large and small, specific or general – are always greatly appreciated, and you can be sure that they will be put to good use.

Robert Nield, President

HOT OFF THE PRESS

Last year saw the publication of *Rickshaw Pullers in Hong Kong and Canton, 1874-1954*, the first book in the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Studies Series. We are now very pleased indeed to announce the publication of the second book in this series:

***For Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors* by Dr Janet Lee Scott**

Ex-RAS Council Member Janet Scott retired from Baptist University in 2005 and is now living in the United States. For some years she was our Activities Coordinator and has spoken to the Society on more than one occasion about her area of research, Chinese paper offerings. Retirement has allowed her the time to finish the definitive book on the subject. Professor James L. Watson of Harvard University says in his review, “This is a book that all specialists on Chinese religion, arts, and material culture need to read. Scott invested years of research into this project and is the world’s leading expert on Chinese paper arts.” The Society is proud to add this publication to their Hong Kong Study Series. *For Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors* is available in local bookstores and from Hong Kong University Press (www.hkupress.org) for \$195.

***Streets: Exploring Kowloon* by Jason Wordie**

RAS Member Jason Wordie’s latest publication is now in the bookstores. *Streets: Exploring Kowloon* follows on from *Streets: Exploring Hong Kong Island* and again takes the reader to many of the unknown corners of Hong Kong. With clear maps and excellent photos by Tony Hedley, John Lambon and Colin Day this book is a must for those who love to explore Hong Kong and will reveal much that none of us knew about lesser-known Kowloon. And leave a space on your bookshelf for Jason’s forthcoming book, *Streets: Exploring Macao*. *Streets: Exploring Kowloon* is available in local bookstores and from Hong Kong University Press (www.hkupress.org) for \$195.

***Sightings* by Gillian Bickley**

Gillian’s latest illustrated book of poems was launched at a party at Hong Kong University last week. In *Sightings; a collection of poetry with an essay, “Communicating Poems”*, Gillian draws inspiration from events, artefacts and people she has encountered in her travels over various continents, and also stimulating books which she has read. A reviewer says, “Bickley has made use of everyday life situations and turned them into life lessons. *Sightings* inspires us to slow down and taste the sense of the city.” *Sightings* is distributed by the Chinese University Press and is available through selected Dymocks bookstores, St. John’s Cathedral bookstore, Chinese University Press, www.cup@cuhk.edu.hk and from the publisher, Proverse Hong Kong (www.geocities.com/proversehk).

CARL SMITH'S INDEX CARDS

It is hard to fully express our gratitude to the Rev Dr Carl Smith for donating his collection of index cards.

When Carl first came to the territory in 1960, the paucity of books on Hong Kong history forced him to do his own research and excavate information from primary sources, an exercise that quickly grew into a mission. He combed through all kinds of materials: government records ranging from land leases and wills to Gazettes and Blue Books, newspapers, church records, tombstones, genealogies, Colonial Office documents etc., many of which had never been studied before. Moreover, he painstakingly entered his notes onto index cards under various headings -- individuals and firms; institutions such as schools, hospitals, churches, associations and the administration; geographical classifications such as buildings, streets and land lots. Now amounting to over 100,000 in number (some written on both sides), the cards' contents have extended to cover the history of Macao and other China coastal cities as well. Many scholars have benefited from using the cards. Indeed, one may say that no serious scholar could any longer afford to study these areas without referring to them, which testifies to the landmark effect of Carl's labour.

In 1995, the Collection was microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah and a copy was donated by Carl to the Public Records Office which digitized and indexed them. The digitized cards can be retrieved on-line at the PRO and the index can be searched on the PRO's website. For many years, Carl could not decide what to do with the original cards and his decision to donate them to the RAS came as such a wonderful surprise. They are now deposited at the Hong Kong Central Library in Causeway Bay as part of the RAS Collection. We are grateful to the Library for ordering special tailor-made steel cabinets to house the cards so that they will be properly protected. Carl's effort at collecting and filing all the information can only be described as monumental. The picture I have in my mind is of an ant trying to climb Mount Everest—and, with his deep passion and relentless perseverance, he has overcome.

Over the years, the Royal Asiatic Society has benefited enormously from his wisdom as Councillor, Vice-President and Hon Vice-President. More specifically, he has contributed to the strength of the Society with his many articles, talks and guided visits. Now, with the gift of the Index Cards he is again demonstrating his generosity toward the RAS -- and the Hong Kong community at large. I have personally thanked him many times in private and in public, but let me thank him again on behalf of the RAS in the only way that is befitting—with the sincerest thanks and deepest humility.

Dr. Elizabeth Sinn, Vice-President

LIBRARY DONATIONS

In the past couple of months the following items have been donated to the RAS Library. Our thanks go to Douglas Franklin, Dr Dan Waters and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

Douglas P. Franklin

- Franklin, Frederick Percy, 1890-1955. Poetry written while a prisoner of war in Hong Kong, 1941-45; edited by Douglas P. Franklin. Brisbane, Qld. : Boolarong Press, 2004.
- Herklots, G.A.C. Common marine food-fishes of Hong Kong [by] G.A.C. Herklots and S.Y.Lin. 2. enl. ed. Hong Kong : Published by G.A.C. Herklots at the University, 1940.
- Herklots, G.A.C. Flowering shrubs and trees. Vol.1. Hong Kong : [the Author, 1947?]
- Herklots, G.A.C. The Hong Kong countryside. Illus. by the author and A.M. Hughes. Hong Kong : printed by the South China Morning Post, 1951.
- Herklots, G.A.C. Orchids: first twenty. Hong Kong : The University, [1947?]
- The Hong Kong Naturalist : a quarterly illustrated journal principally for Hong Kong and South China. Vol. 4-10. Hong Kong : Newspaper Enterprise, 1933-1938.
- Journal of the Hong Kong Fisheries Research Station, Vol.1 No.1. Hong Kong : printed by the South China Morning Post, 1940.

Dan Waters

- Dr Dan Waters on history of the Supreme Court building (CD)
- Dr Dan Waters on history of the Supreme Court building (audiocassette)

- Dr Janet Scott on paper offerings (CD)
- Dr Janet Scott on paper offerings (audiocassette)

From Leisure and Cultural Services. Dept of Antiquities & Monuments Office

- Leisure and Cultural Services. Dept of Antiquities & Monuments Office
Heritage explorer (CD)

IMPORTANT NOTICE! - A LAST REMINDER

There are still some members who have not yet paid their membership dues for 2007. You will be contacted personally in the next couple of weeks but if your dues are not paid before the end of June your membership will expire and you will be deleted from our mailing lists. If you have any doubts about your membership status, please contact Jenny Day at membership@royalasiaticsociety.org.hk.

OF INTEREST TO MEMBERS

Wonders of the Earth on Show at Hong Kong's First Mineral Fair

Saturday 16th June, 10.00am to 7.00pm

Naturally created wonders of the earth will star at Hong Kong's first Mineral Fair at the BGCA Auditorium, 3 Lockhart Road, Wanchai, conveniently close to Wanchai and Admiralty MTR stations. This pioneering event is organised by the Mineralogy Society of Hong Kong and will feature mineral and crystal specimens, gemstones, books, equipment, fossils and rough and polished stones. Admission is free and open to members of the public. For more information visit www.minsohk.org or call Anthea Strickland on 2857 3740.

The Lost Collections of Sir Paul Chater

On June 23rd Council Member Geoffrey Bonsall, Honorary Adviser on Historical Pictures to the Hong Kong Museum of Art, will be giving a public lecture at the Museum on 'The Lost Collections of Sir Paul Chater'.

Venue: Lecture Hall, B/F, Hong Kong Museum of Art, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon

Time: 2.30-4.30pm

Booking: No reservations are required and admission is free - first come, first served

Lectures at the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre

The Antiquities and Monuments Office will be holding two Special Lectures in the next few weeks. These are part of their Education Activities programme and are co-organized with the Hong Kong Institute of Architects and Hong Kong Architecture Centre. On Saturday 2nd June Mr George Martin, Assistant Planner in the City Planning Division, City of Toronto, Canada will be giving an Introduction to Urban Planning and Heritage Conservation in Toronto. This lecture will be in English. On Saturday 23rd June, Mr. Tang Kwan Chi, Elder of Ping Shan Tang Clan, will speak on the History of the Tang Clan in Ping Shan, and this lecture will be in Cantonese.

Venue: Lecture Hall, Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre, Kowloon Park
Haiphong Road, Kowloon

Time: 3.00-5.00pm

Booking: No reservations are required and admission is free - first come, first served

The Siam Society – Study Trip to Laos

The Siam Society under Royal Patronage in Bangkok has a very active programme of talks and visits and welcomes any of our members who may be visiting the city. In July they will be leading a Study Trip to the Plain of Jars and Luang Prabang in Laos, departing Friday 27th July, returning on Monday 30th July. The cost, excluding visa fee, is 35,000 baht for members, 38,000 baht for non-members. For further information please contact Khun Prasert at info@siam-society.org. Further information about this trip can be found under Events/Study Trips on the Siam Society's website, www.siam-society.org