



Telephone/Fax : 2813 7500  
e-mail address : membership@royalasiaticsociety.org.hk  
web address : www.royalasiaticsociety.org.hk

## MARCH 2009

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# Future Activities

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## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING The Hong Kong Club • Friday 24 April

The Annual General Meeting and Annual Dinner will take place at the Harcourt Suite, 1/F, Hong Kong Club, Central. The Annual General Meeting will start at 6.15 pm and dinner will be at 7.30 pm for 8.00 pm. This has always been a popular occasion and we do hope you will be able to attend. Guests are welcome at the dinner but priority will be given to members.

This year we are fortunate that Mr. Jonathan Wattis, a specialist antique and art dealer with a gallery on Hollywood Road, has agreed to be our speaker. Mr. Wattis has focused on pictures and maps of Hong Kong and East Asia for nearly 25 years. His talk “Fascinating Views of Hong Kong 1771–1866” will contain a selection of unusual early images of Hong Kong and the stories about these pictures, helping to fill some visual gaps in the fascinating history of this Island off the South China Coast. Mr. Wattis began work at Christies South Kensington, London in 1977. Within a few years he had gone from floor sweeper, to porter, to clerk, to specialist. He then left Christies and travelled across Asia for nearly a year. He arrived in Hong Kong in 1984 and has since made it his home.

The AGM will also feature a selection of photographs from recent RAS visits, and a number of members’ recent publications available for people to buy. Most of all, however, the AGM gives members an opportunity to meet and mix and to hear about what their Society has been doing – and what it plans to be doing in the coming year.

The cost per person is \$350 for members and \$380 for non-members, which includes a full dinner and two bottles of wine per table during dinner. Any further drinks will be at members own expense. Please fill out the booking form on page 16 and return it, together with your cheque in payment, **no later than Friday 17 April**. Note: If you would like to come for the AGM but not stay for dinner, please let Katherine Fenton (2813 7500) know so that extra seating can be arranged for you.

*Please note: The Hong Kong Club has a strict dress code which requires that gentlemen wear a tie. No jeans, any garment in denim, or trainers are allowed. Please note also that the event will be booked and signposted in the name of the Hong Kong Club member Mr. David Holdsworth.*

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## WALK The Urban Transformation of Hong Kong – West of Pottinger Street Saturday 25 April

Following the publication of the RAS book *A Sense of Place: Hong Kong West of Pottinger Street* and the very successful book launch held on 4 February, we are pleased to announce this Saturday morning walk. We will meet at the Conservancy Association Centre for Heritage (CACHe): Annex Block of the Western Community Centre, 36A Western Street, Sai Ying Pun, Hong Kong. The Centre is located in a small, charming heritage building built in 1922 and is a non-governmental and non-profit organization promoting conservation of Hong Kong’s culture, heritage and history. It receives funding from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust as well as from the public.

The tour will be guided by Hendrik Tieben and Woo Pui-leng of the Department of Architecture, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Roger Ho, Executive Director of the CACHe. Participants will be taken through the streets west of Pottinger Street with the guides focusing on the challenges and potential of existing urban heritage.

Participants must wear walking shoes as parts of the walk will be on steep, uneven terrain. The walk will last about two hours and an optional, self-paying dimsum lunch will be held after the walk finishes.

**Date/Time:** Saturday, 25 April, 10 am at CACHe  
**Cost:** Members \$100, Guests \$150 (Each member may bring only one guest)  
**Booking:** Please return the booking form on page 17 to Geoffrey Emerson  
**Enquires:** Geoffrey Emerson at 2550 4374 or emerson@netvigator.com

# Future Activities

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**Meeting Place:** The CACHE, behind the Western Community Centre, 36A Western Street, a steep street connecting Bonham Road (at the top) with Queen's Road West (at the lower end). King's College (a red brick building) is at the top of Western St at the corner of Bonham Road. Take a bus to the main entrance of HKU on Bonham Road and walk back to King's College and down Western St., about 10 minutes. Or walk up from Queen's Road West, just before the start of Pokfulam Road. Walk through the Centre or around to the back to find the CACHE. (Geoff's mobile – 6012 0700 or 9078 2948.)

*NOTE: As always, applications will be accepted on a 'first come, first served' basis and there will be a Waiting List if necessary. All applicants will be notified if they are successful or on the waiting list. There can be no substitutions or additions other than by the Waiting List.*

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## LECTURE

### **Duck Hunting on the Yangtze River, 1910 to 1912 ~ and other matters City Hall • Friday 8 May**

Mr Kim Salkeld, a Hong Kong Civil Servant, will talk about the experiences of British Naval Officers serving on the China station at the end of the Edwardian era, drawing on the shooting diary and photographic collection of Surgeon Lieutenant Bertram Bickford of HMS Thistle, Admiralty records and various other contemporary records from Hankow, Hong Kong, Peking and London. The talk will illustrate Lieutenant Bickford's exploits as a sportsman on the banks of the Yangtze and visits to Hong Kong. The involvement of the officers and men of HMS Thistle and other naval forces in the Hankow Riots of early 1911 and the subsequent Wuchang Uprising of 10 October 1911, an event that helped precipitate the collapse of the Qing Government, will also be described.

Mr Salkeld had his early schooling in Singapore and England. He graduated from Cambridge University with a degree in History in 1980 and since then has worked as an Administrative Officer in the Hong Kong Civil Service. He is currently the Land Registrar. He has previously talked to the Royal Asiatic Society on 'Life at Government House', drawing on his time as Deputy Private Secretary to the last Governor between 1993 and 1997, as well as on historical material. Lieutenant Bickford was his great-uncle. The photographs collected by Lt. Bickford are now held by the Hong Kong Museum of History.

**Speaker:** Mr Kim Salkeld

**Date/Time:** Friday 8 May, 6.30 pm

**Venue:** 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, City Hall High Block, Central

**Booking:** This lecture is free and open to the public, with no booking required

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## LOCAL VISIT

### **Holy Spirit Seminary College, Aberdeen & The Maryknoll House, Stanley St Anne's Church, Stanley Saturday 16 May**

Have you ever noticed the brick building with a Chinese tile roof and cross near the Jumbo Restaurant in Aberdeen, or the similarly-styled brick building atop the hill above Stanley, and wondered what they are? Here is your chance to find out.

These two heritage buildings, both built before World War II, will be the focus of our visit, with a dimsum lunch on the Jumbo Restaurant included. The Aberdeen building was built by the Jesuits and is today the Holy Spirit Seminary College. The Maryknoll House at Stanley was built as the headquarters of the Maryknoll Fathers in South China. It provided a language school for priests coming out to China and a resthouse for the Fathers. In Stanley we will visit also St Anne's Church, where Father Elmer Wurth will tell us about its history and work today.

# Future Activities

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We will meet at the old Star Ferry pier in Central at 9:30 am, visit the Seminary first, before lunch in Aberdeen, and then go on to Stanley. After the Maryknoll House, time permitting, we will have an hour in Stanley village for self-paying tea, if desired, or a bit of shopping, returning to Central before 6 pm.

**Time/Date:** 9:30 am, Saturday 16 May  
**Meeting Place:** The old Star Ferry Pier, Central  
**Cost:** Members \$300, Guests \$400 (one guest per member only)  
**Booking:** Return the booking form on page 18 to Geoffrey Emerson.  
**Enquiries:** Geoffrey Emerson at 2550 4374 (on the day of the visit, mobiles 6012 0700 or 9078 2948)

*NOTE: As always, applications will be accepted on a 'first come, first served' basis and there will be a Waiting List if necessary. All applicants will be notified if they are successful or on the waiting list. There can be no substitutions or additions other than by the Waiting List.*

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## LECTURE

### **Mrs. Carrie Lam, JP – Hong Kong Heritage & Conservation The Helena May – Friday 22 May**

Mrs. Carrie Lam, JP, Secretary for Development in the Hong Kong Government Offices will speak to us about the issues facing her office. Mrs Lam is in charge of the government department responsible for heritage and conservation issues. This area has become of a much higher profile in recent years, in great measure thanks to the energy and passion that Mrs Lam has brought to her job. It is inevitably impossible to please all the various and often conflicting interest groups that become involved in heritage and conservation, but the greater importance that has recently been given to such matters must be seen as a good thing for Hong Kong. Mrs Lam will also be accompanied by Mr Jack Chan, Commissioner for Heritage.

**Speaker:** Mrs. Carrie Lam, JP  
**Date/Time:** Friday 22 May, 7.00 pm (cash bar from 6.30 pm)  
**Venue:** The Garden Room, The Helena May, 35 Garden Road, Central  
**Cost:** Members \$50, Guests \$70  
**Booking:** Please send cheque and booking form on page 18 to Katherine Fenton

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# Recent Activities

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## OVERSEAS VISIT

### Bhutan - Journey to the Land of the Thunder Dragon

Reported by Michael Broom

Kuzuzangpo! in Bhutanese (*dzongkha*) means welcome. This is certainly what the RAS HK Branch Group received when a fourteen member party visited the Kingdom of Bhutan in January 2009. Our journey to the 'Kingdom in the Sky' started at 4 o'clock in the morning when members, who had travelled from as far afield as Singapore and Canada, gathered at Suvarnabhumi International Airport.

Bhutan in the twenty-first century is still a rather mystical land, which to many appears remote and underdeveloped; still something of a 'Shangri-la' perhaps hidden in the Himalayas, but as we were to discover in the course of our journey the Bhutanese are far from being a remote and backward people. Guided by the fourth *Druk Gyalpo* (King), an absolute monarch, whose policy of 'Gross National Happiness' has led to the country's gradual development, the Bhutanese proved to be a remarkably friendly and hospitable people with a rich and vibrant culture. The fifth king is leading Bhutan in the first steps of parliamentary democracy after the first national elections for a bi-cameral legislature in early 2008. Bhutan is a small, landlocked, mountainous country nestling in the Eastern Himalayas, which with a land area of 38,394 sq km is not much bigger than Switzerland and with a resident population of approximately 635,000 people. On its northern border lies China (Tibet) while its eastern, southern and western frontiers border several Indian provinces. Our journey, over the next thirteen days would take us across the central part of Bhutan from Paro in the west over high mountain passes and through deep alpine valleys to Mongar in the East and back again.

Our scheduled Druk Air flight was delayed but we eventually left Bangkok for an uneventful flight to Dhaka. The onward flight to Paro, however was very different, as the dusty plains gave way, first to foothills, and eventually magnificent views of the Himalayas with the summit of Mount Everest clearly visible, silhouetted against the blue sky. In Paro the National Museum, founded by royal decree, is located in an old watch-tower (*ta dzong*) and boasts a fine collection of Buddhist art, including sculptures and figurines, some dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Following lunch we set off for the Punatsangchhu Resort in the Punakha Valley. As we were to discover the weather at this time of the year can vary from place to place and as we drove from Paro the blue skies and sunshine gave way to a drop in temperature so that by the time we reached Dochu-la (3,088 m), the stupas we had stopped to see were wreathed in thick mist. After a long and eventful first day, most of the group were looking forward to dinner and an early night; however the staff at the resort had thoughtfully prepared a special cake accompanied by 'Coronation Rum' for members to celebrate the new year (it was after all New Year's Eve), but for most of us 2008 slipped quietly away with hardly any Auld Lang Syne.

New Year's Day saw the group refreshed and rising for an early breakfast, after which we travelled to Wangdue *dzong* (fortress) from where we were able to view the wide valley through which the Sunkosh *chhu* (river) flows. Like many of the *dzongs* we were to visit, this one was constructed with two main courtyards surrounded by two storey quarters constructed of wood and stone. Even today, the *dzong* is a focus of both civil and monastic life, occupied by government offices and courts and accommodating monasteries. From the outside these buildings, painted white with ochre decoration look truly amazing and impregnable.

We continued our journey that was to take us via Trongsa to Rinchhenling Lodge. The drive gave us the opportunity to admire the spectacular mountain scenery as the narrow road wound its way through pine forests and along river gorges. We were fortunate to have good weather but outside the temperatures were quite cold. Following the lunch stop, our journey continued over Yutong-la (3,400 m) where snow began to fall. Having reached Rinchhenling Lodge we were glad to find that the rooms were all equipped with wood burning stoves called *bukari* and ample stocks of pine logs stacked outside our doors.

The chanting of Buddhist monks conducting a *puja* (prayer ceremony) in the main house mixed with the calls of the ravens and crows as we made our way to breakfast. Our next destination was the town of Mongar 198 km to the east, which if we were lucky would take seven hours. We made good progress in the morning via the pass at Sheytong-la (3,400 m) where grey snow clouds gathered and snow began to fall. Driving on our route took us along the Sengor – Yadi Highway, hardly wide enough for two vehicles to pass, and we reached Thrumsing-la, which at some 4,000 metres would be the highest point on our journey. Unfortunately, the smaller, slower baggage van had got stuck in deep snow. Our temporary stop on Thrumsing-la Pass was recorded by two members of the group building a snowman by the roadside; one wonders what the Bhutanese made of it? Despite this unscheduled stop and rather late lunch we completed the remaining 100 km and eventually reached Mongar

# Recent Activities



RAS Group Thrumsing-la

Photo by Michael Broom

Archery is the national sport in Bhutan and as Saturday was *'The Meeting of the Nine Evils'* and a public holiday, we had hopes of seeing the national sport being played. After an early visit to Mongar Dzong we proceeded to the local football pitch where the men of Mongar were competing with the men from Trashigang. The competition was uniquely Bhutanese, with competitors dressed in their *goh* (men's robe) and carrying what appeared to be traditional hand-made long bows some 5 feet (153 cm) in length made from oak, maple or bamboo. It seemed something of an act of faith that fellow team members and opponents stood so close to the small rectangular targets erected against the bank but the marksmanship was incredible. The afternoon was blessed by warm sunshine, which made it ideal for the drive to Themnangbi Village to enjoy some snacks and *ara* (local spirit) and also visit a lhakang (Temple). Of particular note was the blaze of colour presented by the wild rhododendrons growing everywhere and where we also saw young men playing with *khuru* (large darts), another national sport. The next morning we left Mongar early for the long drive back to Bumthang. The inward journey had afforded us some amazing views of the cultivated rice terraces, which formed incredible patterns when viewed from the tops of the valleys. Bhutan is an agricultural country producing a variety of crops and fruit in the fertile valleys fed by an abundance of water. Farmers keep large herds of milk and small beef cattle as well as pigs, poultry and some sheep. There are also research stations for the breeding of horses and cattle. Enterprises in Bumthang include breweries, one producing 'Red Panda' beer, similar to German Weiss beer; cheese production made from milk produced by a herd of Swiss cows imported by a local Swiss entrepreneur; and a local weaving centre.

Over the next few days, we ventured forth to visit various temples and other places of interest including the Kurjey *Lhakang* (lit.- 'house of the gods) one of the sacred places of the Guru Rinpoche and the Tamshing Monastery with its 13<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist wall paintings. Along the way, we met people from surrounding villages, dressed in their distinctive regional dress. Particularly interesting were the brightly coloured embroidered jackets with traditional patterns worn by several of the women.

Trongsa *Dzongkhag* (administrative district) is situated almost in the middle of Bhutan. From the *Puenzhi* (Four Friends) *Lodge* we had a fine view of the mountains. Watching the sunrise over the peak of Black Mountain was a wonderful sight even though the temperature outside was only four degrees. Our itinerary made it possible for the group to see the *tsechu* (religious ceremony), consisting of dances performed in various costumes by highly accomplished Buddhist monks representing manifestations of the Guru Rinpoche. The final day of the ceremony is brought to a climax by the unfurling of an enormous Tankha in front of a distinguished assembly of guests including civil and religious officials and presided over by the Chief Lama of the monastery.

# Recent Activities

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Punakha Dzong, built in 1637 by Bhutan's founder Shabdrung Nawang Namgyel is the holiest of the dzongs in the Kingdom and serves as the winter residence of the *Je Khenpo* (the supreme abbot) and members of the Central Monk Body, and is of special significance as it was here that HM King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the fifth *Druk Gyalpo* received his religious blessing as part of the 2008 coronation ceremony. These special rites take place in an ornate building within the monastic courtyard of the dzong.



*Punakha Dzong*

Photo by Michael Broom

Arriving in Thimphu, Bhutan's capital and seat of government, it seemed we had entered another world with its modern dual carriageway roads, street lighting and five star hotels. That evening a special dinner was held at the River View Hotel which was preceded by a performance of traditional Bhutanese dance and music. In the morning we visited the National *Chorten* (shrine) built by Queen *Ashi Phuntsho* Choden Wangchuk in memory of her son King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1928-1972), the third *Druk Gyalpo*. Our itinerary included a visit to the very modern Thimphu Textile Museum, which has a superb collection of costumes. Also on display was a priceless collection of royal crowns, '*Raven Crowns*', belonging to former kings. The crown takes its name from the centrepiece which features the stylized head of the raven, Bhutan's national bird. Later we were able to visit a traditional hand made paper making factory and a weaving factory where we were spell bound watching workers, mostly women, weaving the most intricate of patterns from memory.

Our last morning saw an energetic group comprising Mei Wah, Terry, Richard, Alex, William and Mike venture to the Tiger's Nest ( *Tagsang Pelphug*), perched on the edge of a cliff some 800 metres from the valley below. Our walk to the lookout took approximately forty-five minutes followed by a narrow flight of 474 steps cut out of the cliff, which descended into a chasm and across a small bridge. Having crossed the bridge we then ascended a further 238 steps. The *lhakang* is a complex of three small chapels, including one built around a cave, in which it is said Guru Rinpoche meditated for three months.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, so the Chinese saying goes, and after thirteen days and over a thousand kilometres travelling along narrow mountain roads, through thick forests and over high snow covered passes our journey to Bhutan came to an end. For most of us this had been our first visit to Bhutan, one that left an indelible impression of the sheer natural beauty of the country and the warmth and friendliness of the Bhutanese people. The visit was made possible by the efforts of the group's leader Dr Brian Shaw and his wife Felicity whose planning and attention to detail throughout the journey made it a thoroughly interesting and successful visit and to whom all participants in the RAS Group would like to extend their appreciation for this journey to the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon'. *Tashi delek* ! (blessings and good luck!).

# Recent Activities

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## LECTURE

### La Salle College – Hong Kong's Heritage

*Reported by Geoffrey Emerson*

Mark Huang, an old boy of La Salle College in Kowloon, spoke to a large, very appreciative audience of RAS members, friends, fellow old boys and even three generations of his family members on Friday 9 January 2009, at The Helena May. Mark not only gave an outline of the College's history in Hong Kong but also told interesting stories of using such sources as Google, Wikipedia, Ebay and HK Government sources to discover information about the College.

The La Salle Brothers, dedicated to education, especially of the under-privileged, first came to Hong Kong in 1875 and ran a school in Central mainly catering to Portuguese and Caucasian boys. It later became the well-known St Joseph's College, now on Kennedy Road. By the end of the 19th Century and early 20th Century, Kowloon was expanding rapidly and many Portuguese moved across the harbour. The Brothers established a school on Chatham Road and later purchased a 10-acre site north of Prince Edward Road and began construction of a magnificent domed school in 1928. Using excellent slides in a PowerPoint presentation, Mark showed all these changes through maps and old photographs.

In 1939, soon after war was declared between Britain and Germany, the College was taken over by the HK Government as an interment camp for German nationals. Before Mark and his 'team' started research, almost nothing was known about this internment, but searching on Google, they found a German internee, Gerhard Neumann, had written a book with a description of his experiences, a goldfield for Mark and his team of researchers.

During the battle of Hong Kong in 1941, the Japanese arrived at the College on 12th December and took it over as housing for their soldiers. The Brothers were able to remain in the building until mid-January 1942. During the battle, three teachers and 12 old boys died. Mark mentioned that the grave of one of the old boys, Ronald Maxwell, who was killed in Wanchai on 23rd December at age 22, is easy to see today just outside the main entrance to St John's Cathedral in Central. After the war classes resumed in 1946 but the Hong Kong Government took over the College in 1949 to use 'temporarily' as an army hospital. The temporary occupation lasted some ten years! During that time the College used wooden buildings in nearby Ho Man Tin. Mark spoke of some of the many well-known graduates of the College including the most famous one – Bruce Lee, who studied there from 1951 to 1956 and was much better known for his naughtiness than for his scholastic ability. However, Mark told us, Bruce went on to excel in America both in his education and eventually, of course, his movie career.

A rather sad slide showed the magnificent old building being torn down in 1978, as the Brothers felt the need for a modern edifice and facilities and accepted an offer from Li Ka Shing to build a fine new school in exchange for a bit more than three acres of the original ten. Luxury housing now stands on those three acres. Today La Salle continues to follow its motto, 'Faith and Zeal' – Faith in God and Zeal in education. Our thanks to Mark and his team of fellow alumni in providing the RAS with a memorable and, rightly, educational evening.

*The Hong Kong Lasallian Family bulletin, **The Gateway**, is published every month, containing profiles of past Brothers, current school news and reflections. This is a useful research source for anyone interested in church history. To receive a hard copy or to be put on their mailing list contact Mr Paul Tam at 9375 4363 or email him at paul\_ktam@yahoo.com.hk.*

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# Recent Activities

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## LECTURE

### **200 Years of China Trade – Perspectives from the Fifth Generation**

*Reported by Christopher Young*

Dr. George Cauthery, a scion of the Heard family, discussed the rise and fall of Augustine Heard & Co. (“AHC”), a Sino-American trading company from 1840-1875. AHC started in Canton, moved to Hong Kong, and had offices in Shanghai, Canton, Macao, Hankow, Hanyang, Kukiang, Foochow, Yokohama, Nagasaki, and Kanagawa. AHC was to be involved with HSBC from its start and an intimate trading partner of Jardine Matheson. With 1028 volumes, and 153 cartons, in the joint Yale/HBS Heard Archive (at Harvard Business School) the firm left a legacy for scholars, not just the family.

The Heards left England for Massachusetts in 1647. By the late eighteenth century they were established in distilleries, property, West Indies trade, and politics in Massachusetts’ Senate. By 1801, a 23 year old Heard was interred in Whampoa. The next Heard in Asia fared better. Augustine Heard arrived in 1809 as a supercargo, or master seller. By 1834, Augustine Heard had progressed from supercargo to Captain to ship investor to partner in the great American trading firm Russell & Co., in Macao, and had retired to Massachusetts to look after American interests; but, Russell & Co. looked to be foundering and there was internal dissent.

In 1840, Augustine Heard formed AHC which was headquartered in Canton. Within short order four Heards of the next generation had been apprenticed to management and become partners in what was, swiftly, a family business. Almost immediately after its establishment, Jardine Matheson requested AHC to take over its China business, as during the First Opium War British companies were forbidden to conduct trade with China. The value of this trade was over USD 10 million per annum for the couple of years this lasted and the profits from this provided AHC with a very useful source of additional capital to finance the growth of its business.

The Second Opium War saw AHC move headquarters from Canton to Hong Kong and continue to expand its now very solid business by opening up in Japan (Yokohama) by 1859 and commissioning the first steamer (700 tons displacement) to arrive in Asia in 1861 for coastal and river shipping. The main focus of AHC’s trading business was shipping cotton from the USA and to a lesser extent, opium from India. On the journeys back from China cargoes were mainly tea and silks. Other activities included coastal shipping and river shipping in the Orient (rice from Siam and Formosa); insurance agency; and machining, iron works, and baking in Hong Kong.

AHC spent fortunes acquiring a palatial residence in Macau, a massive presence on the Bund in Shanghai, and Heard House in Hong Kong (now the Court of Final Appeal), among many other assets and extravagances. Cash flows had been immense, but, times were changing. The eponymous Augustine had long since retired, and besides John Heard who opened up the Japanese trade, many of the Heard scions in partnership were not the best at cash flow management. There was a culture of excessive expenditure at AHC (and other firms). This, combined with four other factors, led to the demise of AHC. First, AHC did not substitute sail for steam on her great sea voyages (possibly due to challenges discovered by being a first mover in steam-driven coastal and river shipping). Second, the coastal and river shipping markets were taken over by local firms. Third, the advent of telegrams shifted the balance of control of information away from the traders to the buyers. Finally, the establishment of banks in Hong Kong exposed all the trading firms to increased competition, as capital to build ships and finance trade had been a significant barrier to entry to competitors. These factors reduced profit margins then profits entirely. By 1875, AHC was bankrupt.

The Heard family, however, was still successful. They had been associated with HSBC since its founding and, while AHC’s failure, apparently, almost brought the young HSBC down, the Heard/Hunter family seemed to have a near permanent place on the Board of Directors in the Bank’s early years. Various family members worked in the bank virtually continuously from its founding until 1999. Heard and Hunter family members occupied directorships, deputy directorships, a chairmanship, and other management positions.

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# Recent Activities

## BOOK LAUNCH

### *A Sense of Place: Hong Kong West of Pottinger Street*

4 February 2009 was an important day for the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch. Our newest publication *A Sense of Place: Hong Kong West of Pottinger Street* edited by Veronica Pearson and Ko Tim-keung was launched to the public. And the public and our members responded well. A reception was held at the offices of Joint Publishing Company Ltd where members and others enjoyed wines and canapés, and listened to various speakers. Ms. Pearson and Mr. Ko had tired hands by the end of the evening after all the book signing they did. They still came away with smiling faces, as you can see in these photos.



*Ms. Veronica Pearson and Mr. Ko Tim-keung, the editors*



*Mr. Robert Nield, our President*  
Photos by Peter Stuckey

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## LECTURE

### **What History Books Do Not Tell You About Hong Kong! and The Origin of the Hang Seng Index**

*Reported by Christopher Young*

Nicole Kwan discussed aspects of Hong Kong history based upon Stanley Kwan's memoirs which she assisted with. Ms. Kwan examined three topics: the yinhao's functions in pre-WWII Hong Kong; the role of US forces and Hong Kong interpreters in China during WWII; and, the CCP in Hong Kong in the 1930s and 1940s. Stanley Kwan, MBE, talked about the origin and history of the Hang Seng Stock Index via a video recording.

A yinhao was a native Chinese bank. The yinhao business model comprised: gold, silver, and/or currency trading/speculation, mortgage lending, and/or currency exchange. The Hang Seng Yinhao was founded in 1933. There were around 300 yinhao doing business with local Chinese people and firms, whom the international banks would not transact with. While the global depression and WWII winnowed the yinhao ranks; the survivors became commercial banks as Hang Seng did in 1952.

Ms. Kwan's second topic dealt with the development of a cadre of over 1,000 English/Chinese interpreters in China, who went to the Interpreter Training School in Kunming to assist the USA's war effort. The USA Lend Lease Act of 1941 allocated 1.6 billion USD (about 20 billion in 2009 USD) to China for the war effort, including equipping 30 Chinese divisions, providing a 500 plane air force, and establishing lines of communication to China within the China-Burma-India Theatre. Claire Chennault's 100 volunteers, the American "Flying Tigers" air force was also set up with a supply of 100 P-40 fighter planes from the USA. The USA's goal was to assist the Chinese retake North Burma and build the Ledo Road and Pipeline from India, across North Burma, to connect with the Burma Road leading to Yunnan to remove the logistical strain of supplying China by air over the Hump. Assistance was through training and advising which required translators. Many of the interpreters were 3rd and 4th year English or engineering university students from China, and several hundred were from Hong Kong. This band of brothers included Stanley Kwan.

# Recent Activities

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Finally, Ms. Kwan discussed the CCP in Hong Kong in the 1930s/1940s. The 1925-1926 Canton Hong Kong strike/boycott was the first CCP success in China. Following a purge in China, the Guangdong (Canton) leadership fled to the safety of Hong Kong. From 1937-1945 there was significant CCP cooperation with the British in Hong Kong including wartime alliances with shared intelligence, escapes from concentration camps, evacuations, and some guerrilla efforts. 1945-49 was a golden era in Hong Kong culture and saw a rise in Chinese nationalism linked to CCP cultural and political activities—and significant CCP recruitment of students and young adults.

Families, such as the Kwan family, would be riven, not just by political differences, but by the outcomes when members chose to go to China to help the CCP after WWII. In 1949, two of Stanley Kwan's brothers chose China and the CCP. It would be over two decades before family members would meet again.

Mr. Kwan had joined Hang Seng in 1962 and was tasked, in 1969, by Hang Seng's Chairman Ho with creating a Hang Seng Index ("HSI"). Chairman Ho wanted the HSI to be the Dow Jones Industrial Average of Hong Kong. Speculation in the media, as to which companies would be included in the basket of constituent stocks, referred to the proposed HSI as the Old Pal Index (Chairman Ho had cultivated very close relationships with his commercial clientele). Chairman Ho, however, left Mr. Kwan free reign to select the basket of companies, specifying only that: the HSI's basket contained 33 companies because Hang Seng was founded on 3/3/1933.

The three primary HSI inclusion criteria Mr. Kwan generated were that the: principal operational base of the company that issued the stock must be in Hong Kong; stock must satisfy a minimum average market value for the past twelve months; and, stock must satisfy a minimum aggregate monthly turnover for the past twenty-four months. Mr. Kwan researched the Hong Kong Stock Exchange archival records, on a daily basis, back to its opening in 1947. Eventually he determined that 31 July, 1964, would be the base day, valued at 100, for the HSI, and the HSI was launched on 24 November, 1969, with a valuation of 158.

The HSI was a hit with investors, and a challenge. The HSI was updated by hand, twice a day, until the advent of computerisation, in 1981. Two share price copiers and two calculator operators went, twice a day, to the blackboards at the Hong Kong Stock Exchange to tabulate all trades in the constituent 33 stocks and compute the updated HSI valuation. Indexes show market valuation and volatility. Mr. Kwan remarked especially on the gyrations of the HSI during the oil crisis of 1973, the hopes over China's economic open door policy from 1978 onwards, and the fears over Hong Kong's future after the British-Sino negotiations of 1983. Mr. Kwan retired in 1984. He noted that:

*as the rise and fall of the Hang Seng Index indicates, Hong Kong has had its share of economic ups and downs. But it has always rebounded at the first opportunity. Hong Kong is a small city, but it is a great city full of opportunities and a city of risk-takers. The fact that Hong Kong has had to live under the shadows of two giants — China and Britain — has been a blessing in disguise.*

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## VISIT "The Hidden Shenzhen" Reported by Jenny Day

Thanks to popular demand, Ted and Karen Rule's very enjoyable visit to "The Hidden Shenzhen" last year was repeated on 28 February. The route this time was via the Shenzhen Bay Bridge, from which we had a good view of the beaches of oyster shells, mangroves and fishing farms of the northwestern New Territories.

Ted and Karen met us at the border and the first stop was the Shenzhen Museum, which reopened in the Shenzhen Civic Center in December 2008 and is now one of the best museums in China. One floor shows the history of the city in Reform and Opening and another is dedicated to the earlier history with some archaeological discoveries over 7000 years old. The ground floor is reserved for special exhibits and at this time there was an outstanding exhibit of bronzes. The museum deserves much more time than our schedule permitted and many in the group plan to return. Ted assured us that this is very easy to do from Hong Kong: take the MTR to Lok Ma Chau; having passed through Immigration in the same building there is the entrance to the Shenzhen metro; take line No. 4 and go three stations to the Civic Centre.

# Recent Activities

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After dim sum lunch at Portofino, Shenzhen's premier dim sum restaurant in Overseas Chinese Town, the group visited Nantou Ancient City, which was the county seat from the Ming Dynasty until the 1950s. In contrast to the modern city outside the city gate, here was all the familiar bustle of daily Chinese life. Ted led us down the narrow streets lined with traditional Chinese shops and stalls, to see well-restored silver shops, brothels, ancestral temples and even an opium den.



*Gateway of Nantou Ancient City*

Photo courtesy of Bjorn Adahl

The next stop was the Chiwan Tomb of the Young Emperor of the Song Dynasty, who died strapped to the back of his Prime Minister, who committed suicide in the face of advancing Mongol forces. Restored in the 1980s, this large site is colourful and well-maintained, although whether it is indeed the actual tomb of this emperor, the last of that dynasty, is in question. Close by is one of China's Tin Hau temples which was founded at the behest of Zheng Ho whose ship had been almost wrecked in a typhoon nearby. This splendid temple, built in Ming Imperial style, is very large, at one time having 2,000 resident monks. Finally, a late afternoon stop near the Ming Hua ship at Shekou Seaworld was an opportunity to watch the entertaining activities of locals in the public square.

Perhaps we saw the best of Shenzhen that day; architecturally interesting, well-spaced new commercial buildings, wide tree-lined boulevards, bougainvillea in profusion, inviting public parks and, by the Shenzhen River, birds which had probably flown over from Mai Po, just three miles away. But at the heart of this modern city of 14 million people history is still alive today and we thank Karen and Ted again for sharing their extensive knowledge with us.

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# Of General Interest

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## Retracing the Chan Chak Escape Route

*By Tim Luard*

At 3.15 pm on Christmas Day, 1941, Hong Kong became the first British colony in history to surrender to a foreign power. A few hours later, while everyone else grimly prepared to submit to Japanese rule, a high-level British and Chinese escape party slipped away in a small motor launch from Aberdeen to try to make their way to Free China.

My father-in-law, Colin McEwan, was one of a three-man squad from Z Force — run by the British secret service group, the SOE — charged with organizing and leading the escape. After being forced to abandon their launch under heavy fire, most of the VIP escape group — including the one-legged Admiral Chan Chak, China's top man in Hong Kong — succeeded in swimming to Ap Lei Chau and making their way onto five waiting Motor Torpedo Boats. They sailed to Ping Chau in Mirs Bay and contacted guerrilla forces on the mainland who escorted them across eighty miles of rough country frequented by bandits and Japanese patrols to the nearest Chinese Nationalist-held town, Huizhou.

On Christmas Day 2008 my wife Alison and I set out to try and walk the same route. Alison got the idea for the 80-mile walk while preparing her late father's diaries for publication in the Royal Asiatic Society's 2005 journal with the help of Dr Dan Waters, former RAS president in Hong Kong. Having just taken early retirement after 23 years as a China specialist with the BBC, I busied myself tracking down accounts left by other members of the escape group and poring over wartime maps to try to work out their route. We were aware that what was then a remote region of paddy fields, rivers and hillside paths was now a booming industrial zone, thick with oil refineries, nuclear power stations and flyovers. But that didn't lessen the thrill of re-enacting a dramatic dash for freedom undertaken at a crucial historical moment by an exotic array of characters. In fact in some ways it served to make it all the more interesting.

Finally we were ready to go. Together with Françoise — a friend from Cheung Chau days in the 1970s - and Serene — an unfailingly cheerful “fixer” who spoke fluent Hakka — we got the train to Shenzhen and bus to Nanao, on the Dapeng peninsula, between what used to be known as Mirs and Bias Bays. At first sight, today's Nanao seemed a far cry from the diaries' descriptions of a collection of fishermen's huts set between a lovely valley and a lonely, sandy beach. But an elderly man led us behind the reclaimed waterfront with its blocks of flats and garish hotels and showed us the town's original layout of simple one-storey houses, with a fishing village at one end (where the dried seafood trade still flourishes) and a farming village at the other (still lined with vegetable plots if no longer rice fields).

We had an early setback when we went in search of Gaotie, the tiny village up in the hills where the escapees spent the first day in hiding. We soon discovered it was now under a reservoir. We found a semi-abandoned village nearby, however, its tiled roofs embraced by trees. A Hakka woman told us it looked similar to the old Gaotie, where she'd been living as a small child in 1941. She remembered Japanese atrocities but couldn't recall the Hong Kong escapees.

We set out along the coast. Given the large number of new private plots, each with its own seafront, this now involves much tricky rock scrambling. Walking as they were by night, with the wounded admiral being carried in a bamboo sedan chair, it is to be hoped that the path was better in 1941. The route then turned inland to Wang Mu, where we found the Kuan Yin temple being energetically restored and enlarged. An aged fortune teller inside said she had heard of the British sailors spending the night on the temple floor. Just down the road is the fortress of Da Peng Suo Cheng, the base of the 1941 guerrillas — and of many gangs of bandits and pirates before them - and a fine example of an old walled city. It's now become a living museum. There wasn't a single tourist there, though, and in fact we didn't see another foreigner the whole week.

Then came a frustrating time trying to find the old smugglers' path across the mountains. Reservoir police in jungle camouflage tried to put us off with stories of snakes and impassable growth. But we finally found a beekeeper with a machete who agreed to escort us. He even brought along the son of a former guerrilla. They studied my old Japanese army map and confirmed that this long-abandoned path was the one used by the original group. In fact the going wasn't as strenuous as the diaries had led us to expect. But we did feel for those sailors, unused to walking, with their heavy weapons and haversacks full of blankets and tinned bully beef. The old stone path led over the ridge (where one young captain had collapsed from exhaustion), down through woods and out into a valley of lychee orchards and endless rows of lettuce. It was a delight - especially compared to some of what came later.

# Of General Interest

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When faced with the horrors of yet another massive highway or construction site we occasionally struck off-route, to find back-streets and byways that led to quiet villages with duck ponds, temples and ancestral halls, all still largely intact. Like Alison's father and his fellow escapees, we were met almost unfailingly with friendliness and an old fashioned hospitality. And much curiosity — though possibly not as much as the sight of seventy-odd unshaven British sailors and soldiers must have aroused then. Luckily, the Chinese admiral was an easily recognizable figure, and villagers rushed out to greet them with tea and rice.

Huizhou marked the end of the most dangerous and difficult part of the journey. Most of the escape party carried on by river, road and rail all the way to Chungking to give the world its first news of the Fall of Hong Kong. But Colin McEwan and his SOE colleagues stayed behind to form the nucleus of the new British Army Aid Group, helping other escapees and gathering intelligence for the rest of the war. Sadly we arrived in Huizhou just too late to find any remains of the old American 7th Day Adventist Mission — now part of the People's Hospital — where the escapees finally found beds and baths. The last vestiges of the mission — a building where Colin McEwan and his fellow BAAG officers later established their mess - had been knocked down just a month before our visit, we were told. [The building had been seen by RAS members on a group visit in the 1998 and by Elizabeth Ride, daughter of BAAG's founder and leader Sir Lindsay Ride, as recently as 2005]. We did speak to a 95-year-old Baptist minister, So Kum Yung, who remembered helping the escape group. And we found the old church at St Joseph's Catholic Mission still standing, alongside the new one. It's now used for storage and meetings. A nun showed us where the old Rectory was — it was another BAAG base but is now housing the toilets!

*Photos and more details of our re-enactment can be seen at our blog -- <http://timalisonontour.blogspot.com/> Any one with any information on the escape is urged to add a comment to the blog or email [timluard@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:timluard@blueyonder.co.uk)*

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## **SUBMISSIONS INVITED FOR THE PROVERSE PRIZE**

To celebrate their lifelong love of books, two Life Members of The Royal Asiatic Society (Hong Kong Branch), Verner and Gillian Bickley, have established a new annual literary prize. The Proverse Prize is offered for an unpublished full-length work of fiction, non-fiction or poetry, submitted in English. (Translations are welcome. Work may be previously edited, acknowledging the editor.) Anyone over 18 on 1 January this year is eligible to enter. The first prize is HK\$10,000 and the winning submission will be offered a publishing contract by Proverse Hong Kong. The Prize is offered for the first time in 2009. The closing date for the first round is 30 May 2009. Full details at [www.geocities.com/proversehk/proverse\\_prize](http://www.geocities.com/proversehk/proverse_prize).

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## **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED**

We have been very fortunate that several of our members have shared their note-taking and writing skills with us. This is how we receive the information on events and trips that the RAS has conducted, and that we all share and enjoy in the Newsletter. Over the years, this task has fallen mostly on the shoulders of the same people. It is time to give them some assistance and add to our "pool of writers". Please seriously consider using your talents in this area. You would need to attend the lecture or participate in the activity, write up your notes and have them reviewed by the speaker or activity sponsor, and submit them to the Administrator. "Write-ups" can vary from a few paragraphs to a page in length and photographs are welcome.

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## **MEMBERS' EVENING**

RAS members are fascinating and knowledgeable people and the Activities Committee would like to invite you to share your enthusiasms with your fellow members. A Members' Evening is planned for a Friday evening in Autumn in which members will speak for approximately ten minutes on a topic they are interested in followed by questions from the audience. It is hoped that this will be an informal event giving members the opportunity to share their passions. If you are interested in participating, please contact Katherine Fenton at [membership@royalasiaticsociety.org.hk](mailto:membership@royalasiaticsociety.org.hk) or telephone 2813 7500.

# Members' Contribution

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## THE LOST BUDDHAS

### Chinese Buddhist Sculptures from Qingzhou

New South Wales Art Gallery, 29 August – 23 November 2008

By Elizabeth Teather

In the twelfth century CE, several hundred statues of Buddha, many broken, were carefully buried by persons unknown in a pit in what was to become part of the foundations of a school playing field in Qingzhou, Shandong Province, PRC. They were discovered by construction workers in 1996 in a remarkably well-preserved condition. Thirty-five of them were transported to the New South Wales Art Gallery, Sydney, in 2008 to comprise the exhibition *The Lost Buddhas: Chinese Buddhist Sculpture from Qingzhou*. Most represent the Historical Buddha Shakyamuni. The earliest date from the period 500-534 CE and the latest from 550-577 CE — the golden age of Buddhism in China. The distinctively sinocised facial features made it clear that, by this period, Buddhism was thoroughly at home in China.

I visited the exhibition last November, and found it an unforgettable experience. Each figure glowed in its own soft golden spotlight, separated from the others by what seemed like curtains of darkened space. All were carved from limestone, some emerging from a block which retained its solid rectangular form, the later ones free-standing, i.e. carved in the round. Some were accompanied by bodhisattvas, one on each side.

It was the later, single sculptures, some life-size, that made the deepest impression on me. The clean, precise finish to eyebrows, eyelids, nose and lips, the merest hint of drapery folded close, as if wet, to limbs and torso, the satiny finish to the surfaces — these were sculptural details reflecting an inspired skill. An awesome presence emerged from the statues' intensely focused, inward gaze. I felt as if this presence vibrated in the quiet space. Such was the response to the exhibition that the gallery opened early on certain days for those who wished to meditate in peace alongside the statues.

If you are interested in this exhibition you can obtain the catalogue (141 pp, AUD 35) from the Gallery. It is edited by Edmund Capon, the Gallery's Director, and Liu Yang. It contains photographs of all the images on display, and fascinating essays. On p. 22, Capon sums up the significance of the Qingzhou find as follows:

*"The attenuation and subtlety of expression in the Qingzhou sculptures are less about style and iconography and much more about the exploration of emotive and sensual sensibilities in a way that is without precedence in the history of Chinese Buddhist sculpture. It is as though the human figure had ... supplanted the image as icon".*