

A Report to the Royal Asiatic Society (Hong Kong Branch) from the Friends of the Hong Kong Royal Asiatic Society (U.K.)

Once again it is my privilege to present a report to the Annual General Meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society in Hong Kong, and what a pleasure it is.

First of all, though, the Friends would like to send its greetings and all good wishes to those in Hong Kong. We can only admire at a distance the growth of the Society, and what it is now achieving. This is well brought out in your very informative newsletters and journals, both of which convey a picture of liveliness, historical eagerness and relevant research. The Society was revived in 1959 with “ the object of encouraging an active interest in East Asia, and in particular China, through the medium of lectures and discussions and by publishing an annual journal”. These objectives have certainly been achieved, and we are all the beneficiaries.

By the nature of our distance from East Asia and our far-flung membership, the Friends achievements in the U.K. are more modest. We are only entering our fourth year of operation and we number approximately 75 members. However, what we may lack in numbers is made up by the enthusiastic response of those who attend the quarterly meetings: members do come from all parts of the U.K., and one member comes from Belgium. This is all very encouraging and augurs well for the future.

Since I last reported, the Friends’ programme has continued to be held quarterly, normally at London University SOAS, preceded by lunch at Sheng’s Tea House. It started with the A.G.M. in May 2000 followed by a lecture by that well- known Hong Kong personality, Mr. Anthony Lawrence. Anthony gave a very lively and personal picture about H.K today. He informed us of the gradual physical evolutionary changes but at the same time explained that the human side was much the same as it was when he first went to Hong Kong fifty or so years ago. Interspersed with anecdotes of examples, the talk lived up to the highest expectations and the Friends would like to thank him again for taking time out in his busy U.K. annual visit.

We were particularly fortunate in our next event, which took place in August 2001 in Salisbury, to visit the Cathedral and the Salisbury museum where we also heard a lecture by Dr. Patrick Hase on ‘Traditional South China Agriculture’. To find this latter combination, i.e. Patrick in Salisbury in August and South China Agricultural instruments in the Salisbury museum, may appear somewhat far-fetched; however, by the end of the fascinating and extremely well researched lecture and a visit to the museum to actually see the agricultural instruments, which formed part of the Pitts River ethnographic collection, there was no doubt that all members had experienced a day well worth it. Our sincere thanks go to Patrick for giving us his time and for educating us on a subject about which most of us knew absolutely nothing.

The Friends have for sometime been trying to arrange a tour to Northern France to view the World War I battlefields, and in particular the Chinese Connection, when around

100,000 Chinese labourers were brought over from the Far East to support the war effort just “behind the lines”. Several of them died in the process and are buried in the cemeteries. For various reasons the trip had not taken place except by the inveterate few, but we were fortunate in having the next best thing, i.e. a talk by Brian Fawcett, which took place on Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2001. Brian has been researching the Chinese Labour Corps for sometime and the Friends were particularly fortunate to hear the results of his research and to see a short video/film of First World War relevant events. The fruits of his labour have recently been published in the 40<sup>th</sup> volume of the Journal of the Society, and Radio 4 in the U.K. will shortly be giving a half-hour programme on the subject.

And our programme does not end there. Recently, on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2002, forty-five members and guests sat down to celebrate the incoming Year of the Horse at the Joy King Lau Chinese restaurant. Not only did we welcome Dr. Patrick Hase and his wife Aileen, who were fortunately in the U.K. again, but we also had Mr. and Mrs. S. F. Bailey (Bill), who was the first Chairman of the Hong Kong Arts Centre in the 1970’s and 1980’s, and was very supportive of the Society when it was a Constituent Member of the Arts Centre.

Now, however, we are preparing ourselves for our next far-flung visit at the end of April to take place in Cornwall, when about twenty-five members will visit the Gardens (Caerhays, Trewithen, Pine Lodge, Heligan, and the Eden Project) with a particular reference to an Asian Connection. This visit is being co-ordinated by one of our members Mrs. Penny Byrne who lives in Fowey and to whom we are particularly grateful. This will be followed by our own A.G.M in late May at SOAS and then by a talk by David Mahoney on the subject “Awards to Britons in China”. David has been collecting medals for some 50 years, and now specialises in medals to Britons who lived and worked in China. If any Hong Kong member is in the U.K. at these times please make yourselves known to any member of the committee.

Finally I would like to pay thanks to all members of the Friends’ Committee, who keep us on the road, i.e. Mrs. Rosemary Lee and Mrs. Anita Wilson, (Events Organisers), Mr. Paul Bolding (Secretary), Mr. Roger Chandler (Treasurer), Ms Kirsty Norman, Mr. David Mahoney and Mr. Keith Stevens (Committee Members). It is very heartening to have such support for what we are trying to achieve.

March 2002

David Gilkes (Chairman)