

## **2005 Annual Report of the Friends of the Hong Kong Royal Asiatic Society (U.K.)**

The Friends' annual Chinese New Year lunch was held on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2005 at the Joy King Lau Restaurant, Leicester Street, London. 52 members and their guests enjoyed a wonderfully long and celebratory occasion, and gave us the opportunity to review the events of the previous year and to catch up with the activities and lectures being held by the Royal Asiatic Society in Hong Kong. We were particularly pleased to welcome Mrs. Mary Painter, who had just left Hong Kong and was Assistant Secretary of the Society for many years. The present high standard of the Society's Newsletter is very much due to her tenacity and expertise.

This is the seventh year of the establishment of the Friends in the U.K. and it is pleasing to report that by and large the organization continues to fulfil what it set out to do, i.e. provide a platform for members of the Society who had returned from Hong Kong to the United Kingdom and to meet those in a similar situation, to hear a lecture on a relevant subject about once a quarter, embark on a field trip or a visit once every two years, and maintain a strong link with the Royal Asiatic Society in Hong Kong, through various visitations and the Journal. At present the Friends number around 75, which is about the same as when it was set up in 1998. New members are always welcome.

During the last year the Friends were privileged to hear several distinguished speakers. One of the most notable (May 2004) was in collaboration with the Royal Society for Asian Affairs given by Mr. Keith Stevens on China/UK. "Training Chinese Guerrillas (1941-1945): a token operation in wartime China". How best could the beleaguered British offer military assistance to China, having just lost Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong and Burma? At first a hundred British and Australian commandoes were sent to train Nationalist guerrillas but it fell by the wayside for several reasons and was replaced by a small team of British Chinese-speaking officers, both infantry and medical, to train the Chinese. In the end only a small token force was sent to train Chiang Kai-shek's guerrilla forces in central Zhejiang in sabotage and demolition. The lecture was well illustrated with fascinating slides of conditions in wartime China. Further collaboration with the Royal Society of Asian Affairs could follow in the future.

In June 2004 the Friends held its annual general meeting at the premises of the School of Asian and Oriental African Studies, preceded by lunch at Poons, and followed by a talk by Mr. Michael Gillam, "Samuel Cornell Plant, First Senior River Inspector on the Upper Yangtze (late 19<sup>th</sup> century). Mr. Michael Gillam, a descendant of Captain Plant, narrated the dramatic start to his life at sea, his adventures in Iran, his life on the Yangtze in the "Pioneer", "Junie" and "Shuting", and his work with the Chinese Maritime Customs. Mr. Gillam concluded with the tragedy of Captain Plant's last voyage (he died on ship) and the historical legacy which he left behind. This was a very successful and informative lecture with slides, and it was good to welcome Dr. Dan Waters, past President of the

Royal Asiatic Society in Hong Kong (and who has done a great deal of research on Captain Plant's family) and also Dr. Solomon Bard, a doyen of the Royal Asiatic Society in Hong Kong, and over from Australia.

The Friends have been fortunate over the last two years to welcome as a lecturer and member, Dr. Frances Wood, Head of Chinese, Manchu and Mongolian Collections at the British Library. On this occasion (September 2004) she gave a guided tour in the British Library at the "once-in-a-lifetime exhibition to see Silk Road treasures excavated by Aurel Stein, with particular reference to the journey eastwards from Samarkand to the borders of ancient China". There are few people more knowledgeable on this subject than Dr. Wood, and the Friends were grateful for the time and trouble she took to enlighten us on one of Central Asia's explorers and the significance of those journeys.

Our last lecture of the year (November 2004) was given by Dr. Mary Turnbull on "Personal Reflections on Colonial Administration and Academia: Malaya, Singapore and Hong Kong". Dr. Turnbull has published and commented extensively on the early history of the Straits Settlements and in this lecture she was able to give an enlightened insight into the conditions and events in the 1950s and the gradual evolution towards independence of Malaysia and Singapore. Her subsequent career in the History Department at the University of Hong Kong gave the audience an intriguing outline of the development of that university in the 1960s onwards and her personal involvement.

The Friends' 2005 Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> May at 2.00 p.m. at SOAS. It will be preceded by a Chinese lunch at Poons and followed by a lecture given by Professor Peter Drewett, Professor of Archeology at the University of Sussex. He will speak on the development and progress of the Antiquities and Monuments office in Hong Kong and some of the buildings that have been preserved or not, as the case may be. All members and their guests, whether in the United Kingdom or overseas, are cordially invited to attend.

I would again like to conclude this report by thanking all those who serve on the Committee, particularly Mrs. Anita Wilson and Mrs. Rosemary Lee, for arranging activities, Mr. Roger Chandler (Treasurer), (the accounts are in good shape), Mr. Paul Bolding (Secretary), Ms. Kristy Norman and Mr. Keith Stevens (for sound and academic expertise). Also thanks to all those who take the effort and time to attend the activities and lectures; some come considerable distances, and without them it would be difficult to continue the Friends of the Hong Kong Royal Asiatic Society.

March 2005

David Gilkes (Chairman)