

Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society

REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE SOCIETY, 2001-2002

Introduction

I am very glad to be able to state, at the beginning of my first Annual Report to the Society, that the outcome of the Society's work over the last year has been, taking the year as a whole, broadly satisfactory.

Complacency is something which the Council constantly strives to avoid, but, nonetheless, there is little which I am able to pinpoint as a matter of serious concern as of today. We can, of course, always do better, and I will be outlining in this Report some new initiatives introduced or under consideration by Council by which we hope that we will achieve such improvements. Council is, of course, always open to suggestions for improvement in the way we conduct our affairs, and, at the end of this Report you will have a further opportunity to raise questions and make suggestions for improvements. Similar comments or suggestions can also be made to me, or to any other Councillor, at any time, of course.

Inter-Branch Relations

Council has become concerned about the state of our relations with the parent branch, the Royal Asiatic Society, London, and with the other branches elsewhere in Asia, as well as with other Societies of a similar character and aim. Council has agreed that action should be taken to improve relations, and, as far as possible, to get the Society in a closer and more friendly relationship with them.

A good start to this was achieved in September when, as part of the Society's trip to Korea, the members who went on the trip had the opportunity of spending a most convivial and pleasant evening with the President and Members of Council of the Korea Branch at a truly magnificent Korean meal, arranged by the Korea Branch and paid for by the members of the Society who went on the trip. It is to be hoped that similar events, aimed at improving relations generally, can be arranged at suitable opportunities in the future. I would like to thank the President of the Korea Branch, Dr. H. Underwood, for his assistance and amicability on this occasion. I shall, on behalf of the Society, shortly be writing to the parent branch and the other branches with suggestions for improving contacts generally.

Membership

In perhaps the first place in Council's concerns is the state of our Membership. It is always difficult to say what the most desirable size for a Society such as ours is. If it is too small, then the income from Membership Subscriptions (which represents by far our largest source of income) will be too low to meet the expenses of our activities. If it is too large, then Members will find they cannot easily get onto the tours and other activities organised by the Society. To hit the happy medium is not easy. In practice, we have to see what the practical implications are for the size of the Society at any date, and then to see whether we need to take action to try to get an increase.

The changing demographic characteristics of the expatriate community in Hong Kong make this question of membership even more critical. Our membership is predominantly from the expatriate resident community in Hong Kong. For at least the last 25 years Council has tried to increase our membership from the local Chinese community, but so far with only moderate success. We have to accept, therefore, that changes to the make-up of the expatriate community will have immediate effects on the Society. When I joined the Society, in the mid-1970s, a substantial part of our Membership was of expatriates who expected to spend the whole of their working life in Hong Kong, or at least expected to live here for a decade or so. In these circumstances, our membership tended to be rather static. Relatively few people joined the Society for just a year or two, and the percentage of our membership which resigned and thus had to be replaced each year was low. Nowadays, however, relatively few expatriates come to Hong Kong for a long time, still less for the whole of their working life. Overwhelmingly, the expatriate community in Hong Kong consists, today, of people who will live here for only a few years, often only two or three. As such, we have to accept that a very high percentage of our membership will resign after only a couple of years. Last year, in fact, and the year before that, about a fifth of the entire ordinary membership resigned each year, mostly on leaving Hong Kong, and had to be replaced with new members if the overall membership was to remain the same size. If the Society fails to replace those members resigning on leaving Hong Kong, then, in very short order, the Society would face serious membership problems.

Because of this high annual turnover of members, Council decided we had to institute a major reform of our membership database. This task proved to be a major task, and took well over a year before it was completed earlier this year. We now know a lot more about the make-up of our membership, and in a more up-to-date fashion. I must here thank especially our previous Hon. Secretary, Dr Peter Barker, who recently left us on relocation to Chicago. It was his hard work which, above all, enabled the successful completion of the new database to be achieved.

At the moment we have a total of 605 members of the Society, comprising 451 Annual Members and 154 Life Members. Of these 605, 492 are resident in Hong Kong, and 113 are resident abroad. 402 are Single Members, 174 are Joint Members (representing 87 couples), 9 are Institutional Members, and 20 are Student Members. 111 new members joined the Society during the year. This was significantly more than the number who resigned on leaving Hong Kong or for other reasons.

The Society has, therefore, over the year, managed to increase its membership by a reasonably substantial figure (the increase, when compared with the figure given in the last President's Report would seem to be much more substantial, but a good deal of the apparent increase is due to a change in the way we calculate Joint Memberships, and is thus to some degree illusory).

Over this last year, the Council has advertised the Society in a number of ways. In particular, we have run a series of advertisements in *Dollarsaver*. Councillors also regularly give talks to various community groups (e.g. Rotary Clubs), and also on the radio, and this provides excellent advertising exposure for the Society. Councillors giving academic lectures also often give their academic affiliation as "The Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch", and this, too, provides useful exposure. I would like at this point to thank my predecessor, Dr Dan Waters, in particular, for the many talks he has given, and the tremendous help this has been to our advertising campaign. The Society's web-site, which Dr Waters discussed at some length in his

Report to last year's AGM, is another valuable advertising resource. Council has also been successful in getting our talks and other events included in the regular lists of "What's On" in the print media, notably in the SCMP and HK Magazine. Of course, as always, our main source of advertising is by word-of-mouth: we become known to potential new members to a large extent because existing members talk to their friends and urge them, too, to join. So please carry on this good work, and tell everyone you meet what a splendid body we are!

At the moment, our overall membership is such that our talks and visits are well supported, but not seriously over-subscribed. Council's view is that, if we can continue to replace those members who resign on leaving Hong Kong or for other reasons, then our current membership levels are acceptable. Council does not, therefore, feel that any intensification of our current advertising campaign is called for, at least as of today. We shall continue to advertise in local magazines, to give talks and in every other way advertise our existence and presence to potential new members as at present, but will not start any major new initiatives aimed at generating new Ordinary Members, unless applications from new members start to show a worrying drop-off.

Council is, however, concerned about those members who leave Hong Kong without informing us or formally resigning from the Society. We only learn about these disappearances when the annual membership fee is not paid, and then only after we have written letters, and sought the defaulting members out. This causes a great deal of work, and some expense, all of it nugatory. I must appeal, therefore, to everyone here, and everyone who will read this report, for them to let us know if they are leaving Hong Kong, or feel they need to resign from the Society for some other reason, so that we can keep our membership books up to date, and do not have to spend a couple of months each year reworking our membership database to cope with resignations only coming to light because fees are not paid!

Council also remains concerned about the low level of local Chinese membership of the Society. As I mentioned above, this has been a concern of Council's throughout the 25 years I have been on Council, and remains a concern today. We have a substantial number of local Chinese members, but not enough, and, of those members, relatively few take part in our various activities. Council will continue to keep this aspect of our membership under review. Council would like to target its action towards encouraging local Chinese in certain particular occupations and positions to become members, and will consider further ways of achieving this.

To some degree, our shortage of local Chinese members is a reflection of our poor numbers of Student Members. If we could succeed in getting more students to become Student Members there would be a good chance that they would retain membership after they left full-time education. Council has discussed ways of improving the numbers of Student Members, and will consider the issue again later.

Council is also aware that the number of Institutional Members is unsatisfactory. We would like the *Journal* to be available in every University which has a School of Chinese or Oriental Studies, but, to date, we are very far indeed from achieving this. Even within Hong Kong sets of the *Journal* are not yet available in all our tertiary institutions, nor in more than one of our Public Libraries. Various possibilities as to how to improve the position have been considered, and Council will continue to look into the matter. One possibility under active consideration is a new category of membership - Honorary Institutional Membership - which

would make it easier for the Society to send sets of the *Journal* to appropriate tertiary institutions on a reciprocal or zero-cost basis where this seems appropriate.

Income

Our Honorary Treasurer will shortly give his Report on the finances of the Society, and I do not want to say anything here which he will discuss later in greater detail, and, doubtless, greater accuracy. However, I must say that the overall position of our finances at the end of last year was generally satisfactory. The Society is in a sound financial state. We made a very small net deficit for the year (about half of one per cent of our total expenditure), but our cash income from all sources is holding up well. Council does not consider that there is any need at this point in time to seek an increase in our Membership Subscriptions, although Council reserves the right to seek such an increase next year, should the financial position during the year make this prudent.

The Society is now more than forty years old. Over that period, we have made small operating surpluses in most years. As a result we now have a substantial balance of Accumulated Funds. This balance stands at present at well over \$600,000. Council has come to the conclusion that a cash balance of this size is an embarrassment to a Society like ours. After considerable debate in Council, it was felt that a Fund should be set up from which the Society could make grants to assist research into the study of Hong Kong. It was felt by Council that grants towards the costs of production of monographs or collections of essays on Hong Kong would be useful to the academic community in Hong Kong generally, or else to assist translation of important works from English, including collections of articles from the *Journal*, into Chinese, or vice versa, or perhaps from Japanese into Chinese or English, or in some other way to assist the field of Hong Kong studies.

Council decided that it could allow about half the accumulated balance to be put into the Fund, that is, about \$300,000, while still leaving enough of a cash balance to meet all anticipatable demands on it for the Society's needs. Council has also agreed that this capital sum should not be spent, but only the income from the interest on it. Council also came to the conclusion that a grant, to be worthwhile, would normally require to be in the region of \$20,000. In other words, the sum the Council felt it could put into the new Fund would allow for only one grant a year, or perhaps two in a good year. This is less than Council would wish. Council therefore felt that it would be desirable to encourage donations into the Fund, hopefully to allow the Fund to reach up to a million dollars, which might allow as many as four or five grants a year to be made.

To do all this it was necessary to amend the Constitution to allow the disbursement of grants in this way, and this was achieved in the context of the amendments to the Constitution agreed at the last AGM and the EGM later in the year. It was also necessary, in order to put the Fund into a legal position which might encourage large commercial companies to donate to it, to make the Society a Registered Charitable Institution, and this, too, was achieved during the year.

Council is still considering the details of the new Fund, and has set up a Working Party to make detailed recommendations. In due course members will be informed of the details, once they have been agreed. It is likely that before the next AGM a full-scale donation drive will have been begun: members will, of course, be kept fully in the picture. In the meantime, preliminary discussions with the University of Hong Kong Press on the possibilities of establishing a series

of monographs, funded by the Fund, and possibly to be called the "Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong, Local History Series" have shown considerable promise. Even though the Fund is not yet formally in being, donations of a little under \$2,000 have already been made to it, which is a hopeful sign. Please watch this space for further details!

Library

Our Hon. Librarian will shortly give a Report on the work of the Library of the Society for the year, and I do not wish to anticipate what is in that Report. However, I must mention the move of the Library from its previous crowded location in the City Hall to far more spacious and satisfactory premises at the new Central Library in Causeway Bay, since this is one of the most important achievements of the Society during the last year. The Society has been looking forward to this move for several years. Now our books are housed in a fine space. They have all been treated with appropriate preservation measures. Our rare and valuable books are housed separately in a secure room. Now the Library is kept in a way appropriate to its status as one of the most important research libraries in Hong Kong.

I am glad that so many members of the Society took advantage of the two visits the Society arranged to see the Library in its new setting. As you no doubt are aware, the books in the Society's Library are on permanent loan to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. They remain ours, however. They are available to any member of the public to read, but only in the Reference Library of the Central Library. Members of the Society, however, who present their Membership Cards, can borrow our books (other than the rare and valuable ones). Furthermore, members may go into the stacks and work there (a small desk for the use of members has been provided). The Library is an important asset, and I am particularly glad to be able to report on its present flourishing and satisfactory situation.

Council is anxious to continue to expand the Library, and thus to continue its development as a major research source for the study of Hong Kong and its region. Most of the expansion of the Library over the last decade has come about through donations of suitable books to the Library by members, although some books have also been purchased by the Society. Some donations, such as the marvelous donation of a large number of books from the estate of the late Arnold Graham, have been particularly noteworthy. I would like to appeal to members to consider donating books to the Library where they have volumes which would seem suitable.

The Library is designed as a collection of books which would otherwise not be available for public consultation in Hong Kong, or which are otherwise not easily available for consultation. Such books might be rare books, or else specialist books, or perhaps collections of material relating to a particular firm, community, or interest group, in whatever language. Books written or edited by members are particularly welcome. The list of Additions to the Library attached to the Hon. Librarian's Report shows the sort of volumes the Library would welcome.

Any donations of volumes would be most gratefully received. Books donated would be given the most scrupulous and loving of care by the staff of the LCSD, and can be assumed to be well looked-after and available to the public on a permanent basis. Film, tape, CD material, photographs (which, following a recent agreement with the Hong Kong Museum of History will be put on permanent loan to the Museum) would also be welcome.

A Catalogue of the Library has been prepared by the LCSD Library Staff. Council is in discussion with LCSD to see if it is possible for copies to be made available to members at a suitable fee, possibly in a slightly revised format. Members will be informed in due course of any successful outcome to these discussions.

Lectures and Visits

For many members, it is the lectures and visits put on by the Society which are the main reason for their continuing membership. Appended to this Report are lists of the lectures and visits mounted by the Society during 2001-2002. The Society takes a four week break during the middle of the year. Members will note that the 16 lectures given by the Society (including the two given on Saturday December 8th to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Fall of Hong Kong) represent a programme of, on average, one lecture every three weeks. This is a splendid achievement, especially considering that the programme is administered, and mounted, on an entirely voluntary basis. My thanks, and admiration, for this marvelous programme go to our excellent Hon. Activities Co-ordinator, Mrs Valery Garrett and her hard-working Committee. Without them it would not be possible for me to be able to be as positive as I am on the work of the Society.

Members who have suggestions for future talks are always very welcome to give their suggestions to Mrs. Garrett or to any other Councillor.

In addition to the Lecture Programme, Mrs. Garrett and her Committee have also put together during this last year a very fine programme of visits: eight to locations in Hong Kong (including the two to the Central Library in Causeway Bay) and a further two to locations outside Hong Kong, that is, to Korea in September and to Bhutan in February. These ten visits represent a visit every 4½ weeks of the Society's year. Details are given in the Appendix to this Report.

While it would be invidious of me to single out any of the talks or visits, I feel I nonetheless have to mention especially the Society's February 2002 visit to Bhutan. This is the first time the Society has visited Bhutan since 1980, and the tremendous success of this visit is due to the hard work put in to it by Dr. Brian Shaw (who also led the 1980 visit). I would like, on behalf of the Society at large, to thank Dr. Shaw most sincerely.

I am glad to be able to report that the programme of lectures and visits has been agreed for the next six months, and sketched out for much of the following six months. The upcoming programme, I can promise, is just as exciting as the programme undertaken in the last year. Among the visits will be a major overseas visit to Phnom Penh and Angkor Wat, at the end of September and the beginning of October. Members interested in this visit should keep an eye open for further details in the upcoming Newsletter!

The Journal and other Publications

During the year, the Society reached a milestone. For the last decade, publication of the *Journal* has always been a year at least behind schedule – in some years three or four years behind. This year, with the publication of Volumes 39 and 40, we have at last come back on schedule, and are now completely up-to-date.

On this issue, I should explain that Volume 40 bears the date "2000". This is short for "2000-2001". The *Journal* for any year should be published after the AGM at which the Financial Accounts for the year in question, and the President's Report covering that year, are presented to Members. Thus Volume 40, for 2000-2001, could only have been published after the 2001 AGM. Volume 41, for 2001-2002, can similarly only be published after this AGM. It is Council's policy that any Volume should be published sufficiently soon after the AGM so that it is in members' hands before the next AGM. Volume 40, therefore, should have been published, as it in fact was, after the 2001 AGM, and be in members' hands before today's AGM, which it was as well. So we are up to date at last! My thanks go to our hard-working Hon. Editor (Journals), Dr Peter Halliday, for having achieved this.

Editing the *Journal* is no easy task, especially as it is done entirely on a voluntary basis, and takes up an immense amount of time. It is true that computerisation has made the job a little easier than when the Hon. Editor had to deal with a mass of manuscripts in various degrees of illegible handwriting, but it is still hugely time-consuming and problematic.

The *Journal* is the premier academic periodical for Hong Kong studies, and, as such, gives the Society an important place within the academic community, in both Hong Kong and overseas. As I have mentioned above, Council would like to see more sets of the *Journal* in more academic libraries, and is actively considering how best to achieve this. I hope to be able to report more on this issue in next year's Report.

In the meantime, as Dr. Waters mentioned last year, we hope soon to have a contents-list for the *Journal* with some full texts in an on-line web-site format. We had, indeed, expected this to be available well before now, but Hong Kong University Libraries, through whom this project is being undertaken, found their contractor unsatisfactory, and eventually the contractor had to be replaced. A new, and, hopefully more satisfactory contractor is now in place, and Council hopes that this project will now be completed by the summer. Please keep an eye on the Newsletter for details.

During the year, apart from the *Journal*, the only other publication with which the Society was associated was the publication of a Polish translation of Han Su-yin's *The Crippled Tree*. The translator of this novel asked for the Society's assistance. The Society accordingly acted as publisher for the work, and co-ordinated dealings with the printer. No cash assistance was required. A copy of the translation will be available for members in the Society's Library.

The Volunteers

The Society has a group of Volunteers who do voluntary work for the Antiquities and Monuments Office, both by visiting historic buildings with a view to grading them, and by assisting with archaeological excavations undertaken by the Office in Hong Kong. The group provides tremendous support for the Office, while, at the same time, providing those members who give up their time to the job with the perfect opportunity of getting to know Hong Kong's antiquities on an intimate level. I must express the Society's thanks to the Volunteers, and especially to Mr. Bob Horsnell and Mr. Bill Greaves, who run the group so noticeably well.

During this last year the group has visited a number of historical buildings and sites, and in particular has been researching the Tiger Balm Gardens, and some of the remaining structures

connected with the old RAF Station at Kai Tak, a few of which still remain from before the War. Buildings under consideration for grading in old Wanchai have also been researched. On the archaeological side, the group assisted Dr Solomon Bard in his important excavations in the garden at Tai Fu Tai, San Tin, where a number of interesting finds were made, including a very large garden pavilion, a well-laid pathway, and a large pool with a small pavilion built over it on a granite platform.

The Volunteers remain very much a group in being, and have a programme of work stretching over the next few months. Members interested in joining the group should contact Bob Horsnell: anyone willing to give up a weekend-day on a regular basis would be considered!

The Friends

The Society has a sister organisation in the United Kingdom, the Friends of the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch. It comprises members of the society who have retired from Hong Kong, but who retain their interest in Hong Kong and its history. The Friends meet on a quarterly basis, usually in London, but occasionally elsewhere in the United Kingdom, for lectures on Hong Kong and its history, on each occasion with the lecture preceded by a good Chinese meal. I shall, in a few moments, read the President of the Friends 's Report for 2001-2202 to you. The current President of the Friends is Mr. David Gilkes, who was, before his retirement from Hong Kong six years ago, President of this Society. I had hoped that David would be here to read his Report himself, but, unfortunately, his travel dates did not fit – he arrives here in a few days time, but not early enough to be here tonight.

I must urge all members leaving Hong Kong to return to the United Kingdom to become members of the Friends, and thus to keep alive their interest in Hong Kong studies, and their connection with the Society. Indeed, members who are still resident in Hong Kong, but who return to the United Kingdom each year should also consider membership of the Friends alongside membership of the Society, since there is, for instance, usually a lecture given by the Friends over the Summer, when many members are likely to be in the United Kingdom. Contact details for the Friends are given from time to time in the Newsletter, or can be had from the Assistant Secretary. The Friends currently have 70 members, and usually some 25 or 30 of them attend lectures and social events: members joining the Friends can thus expect to find at their meetings plenty of old friends from Hong Kong! I cannot urge you too strongly to join this excellent organisation!

Conclusion

During the past year, Council decided to award Honorary Life Membership of the Society to Dr. Dan Waters, our previous President, and to Dr. Solomon Bard, a Founder Member of the Society.

Dr. Waters is well known to most of you, and does not need me to say much about him here. All I need to say is that I personally have benefited greatly from his advice and assistance through the year, and recognise fully the weight of gratitude I owe him. As I said last year, when you elected me President, I am very much aware of the high standards Dan and my other predecessors set for me to live up to, and I remain of the same view today! Dan's helpfulness to me has made my life much easier than it might have been. Thank you, Dan!

Dr. Solomon Bard has been a doctor in private practice, a medical officer to the Hong Kong Regiment during the fighting against the Japanese, and was the first Student Medical Officer of Hong Kong University. He conducted the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra and the Hong Kong Philharmonic for many years. He has been an archaeologist of distinction in Hong Kong for more than four decades, and today, at an age of well over 80, he is still vigorously active in this field. He has long supported the Society, being a Founder Member. Council considered that no-one had made more of a contribution to the cause of heritage preservation and education in Hong Kong, and, for this reason decided to offer him Honorary Life Membership.

I am very glad to say that both Dan and Solly accepted the offer made to them.

I would like to conclude this Report with heartfelt thanks to everyone who has helped me personally and the Society in general over the year with their enthusiastic support. In the first place my thanks must go to my brother Councillors, both elected and co-opted, and especially to the Vice-Presidents, Mr. Robert Nield and Dr Elizabeth Sinn, and to the Honorary Vice-President, Rev. Carl Smith. I owe all of them more than I can say. Of the other Councillors several have already been thanked above, and do not need to be mentioned again here, but I would like to mention Mr. Peter Stuckey, who nobly stepped in as Acting Honorary Secretary when Peter Barker had to leave Council at short notice to go to Chicago, and our Assistant Secretary, Mrs. Mary Painter, without whose hard work the Society would, in very short order, fall apart. Many, many thanks to you all!

Dr Patrick H. Hase
President,
Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch,
March 22nd 2002

APPENDIX

Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch

Activities for 2001/2002

Date	Lectures
2001	
Fri 20th April	Dr Janet Lee Scott on <i>The Fung Che of Hong Kong</i>
May 4th	Happy Harum on <i>The Last Emperor's Garden Restored after 75 Years.</i>
May 18th	Pauline Poon Pui-ting on <i>Domestic Servant Girls: the Po Leung Kuk.</i>
Fri 1st June	Drs Gillian and Verner Bickley on "How Hong Kong History entered the Space Age".
Fri 3rd Aug	Hugh Phillipson on <i>150 years of Hong Kong's Water Supply.</i>
Fri 31st Aug	William Shang on <i>Imagination and Reality in the Drawings of William Alexander.</i>
Fri Oct 19th	Kim Salkeld on <i>Life in Government House.</i>
Fri October 26th	Cesar Guillen Nunes on "Macau's St Paul Façade: a Re-table-Façade?".
Fri 16th Nov	Dr James Hayes on <i>Village Culture in South China.</i>
Fri Dec 7th	Dr Dan Waters on <i>Hong Kong in the 50s and 60s</i>
Sat Dec 8th	Tim Ko and Jason Wordie on <i>60th Anniversary of the Fall of Hong Kong</i>
2002	
Fri Jan 18th	Dr Paul Van Dyke on <i>Daily life in the Pearl River Delta during the era of the Canton Trade.</i>
Fri 1st Feb	Susannah Hoe on <i>Lady Macdonald and the Empress Dowager, Summer 1900.</i>
Fri 8th Feb	Prof Paul Cohen on <i>Humanizing the Boxers.</i>
Fri 15th March	Jonathan Wattis on <i>South China and the Pearl River Delta in Western Maps.</i>

Date	Visits
2001	
Sat April 28th	<i>Sam Tung Uk Museum and Hoi Pa</i> led by Valery Garrett
Sat 26th May	<i>Mount Davis and Pinewood Batteries</i> led by Tim Ko.
Sat 18th Aug	<i>Preview of Hong Kong Museum of History</i> led by Dr Joseph Ting.
Sat 15th Sept	<i>Tour of the new Central Library in Causeway Bay</i> led by Julia Chan and Dr Pat Hase (two visits)
Sat Sept 22nd	<i>Private View – Chinese Textiles</i> given by Valery Garrett and Chris Hall.
Fri Sept 28th to Wed Oct 3rd	<i>Korean Palaces in Seoul</i> led by Dr Pat Hase.
Sat 10th Nov	<i>Visit to Dolphins</i> led by Lindsay Porter.
2002	
8-19th Feb 2002	<i>Bhutan</i> , led by Dr Brian Shaw.
Sat Feb 23rd	<i>Guided tour of the Cultural Relics of the Great Wall Exhibition at the HKMH</i> led by Dr Joseph Ting