

Friends of the Hong Kong Royal Asiatic Society 2005 Annual Report

1. The Friends' Annual Chinese New Lunch, to welcome the Year of the Dog, was held on 18th February 2006 at the Fung Shing Restaurant, Soho, London. Over 50 members and their guests, some of whom had come a considerable distance, were present. This celebratory occasion gave us the opportunity to review events of the previous year and to catch up with the activities and lectures being held by the Friends and the Royal Asiatic Society. It was fortuitous that the Chairman had only returned from Hong Kong the day before and was therefore in a position to report that the Society in Hong Kong was flourishing with a wide range of events, including some exciting local and overseas trips. Your Chairman was able to attend a council meeting in Hong Kong and a very auspicious lunch given by the President, where no less than three past Presidents were present.
2. The continuing link and interaction between the Society in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom is important for both parties. The Friends value these connections for the good reasons that all of them remember the very happy, fruitful and educational times they experienced in Hong Kong. Some friends contributed, and still do, to the journal, which continues to be a valuable academic source of information and will undoubtedly be so in the future. At present there are around 75 Friends, about the same number when the organisation was set up eight years ago. Financially we are in good shape and indeed last year contributed £1,000 to the Society's "The Sir Lindsay and Lady Ride Memorial Fund" which was set up recently to provide assistance for authors who would not normally be able to publish their work through their own academic institutions. And it is pleasing to note that the first publication is off the press.
3. The Friends' programme in the last year has been interesting and variable. At last year's Annual General Meeting (May 2005) we were privileged to hear Professor Peter Drewitt from the University of Sussex talk on "Did Hong Kong have a Neolithic?" The short answer was yes, and Professor Drewitt was able to show this in his slides, and in his own practical experience. Many of the Friends at the lecture had indeed walked over the areas, particularly on Lantau Island, which Professor Drewitt was describing.
4. In September (2005) The Friends were able to welcome the Royal Asiatic Hong Kong's Past President, Dr Dan Waters, who was on a visit to the United Kingdom. He spoke on his recently published book with the catchy title "One couple, Two systems" This proved to be a particularly relevant lecture which outlined not only the importance of communications and food in a dual cultural marriage and differing customs, habits and lifestyles of spouses but also the importance of getting along with in-laws and spouses' friends and encountering new experiences and opportunities. The different attitude and the changes in peoples' perception to mixed marriages were also highlighted, and were backed up

by relevant statistics. Thank you, Dan, for a well-informed and researched lecture.

5. The Lecture "Primary Colours: Afghan Blue and Burmese Red" by Ms Victoria Finlay given in November 2005 was also well informed and researched. Ms Finlay, who has worked as a journalist in Hong Kong for eleven years, some of which were spent as an arts editor of the South China Morning Post, gave a fascinating account of how in 2000 and 2001 she went looking for the remote Lapis Lazuli mines of Afghanistan to see where the ultramarine blue in Michelangelo's paintings came from: in addition she gave an account of her travels in Burma to the fabled Ruby mines. The Friends learnt a great deal about the myths, legends and histories of an area that has been closed to foreigners for many years.

Every two or three years the Friends go on a "Field Trip" and in recent years they have been to Oxford, Cornwall, Bristol and Bath, towns which can boast some very interesting oriental aspects in their museums and art galleries. This year (March 2006) twenty-seven Friends travelled to Durham and experienced a very full and fascinating week-end. This involved on the first day a guided tour of the Cathedral and a very enlightening visit to the Oriental Museum. In the latter case we were fortunate to be guided by Emeritus Professor Keith Pratt of the University of Durham and the Deputy Director of the Museum and heard talks on the Museum's collections of old Chinese coins (collected by a missionary in China in the 19th Century old Chinese fabrics (The Moule Collection), and to see the Chinese wood-cut exhibition. A tour of the Museum with its Chinese, Japanese and Korean artefacts and porcelain proved to the Friends that this was indeed an exceptional museum.

The second day was taken up with a visit to the Botanical Gardens, where we were treated to a lively tour by the Head Gardener, whose knowledge of the Oriental flowers, shrubs and trees surprised us all. Finally, the Friends visited the Bowes Museum at Barnard Castle, which in content and history is almost up to the standard of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

For the above weekend, the Friends owe an enormous thanks to Ms Kirsty Norman, whose organisation from the student accommodation (surprisingly good!) to the arrangement of the meals, talks and visits was outstanding. Thank you, Kirsty.

6. The Friends 2006 Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 20th May at 2.30 p.m. at the London School of Oriental and African Studies. It will be preceded by a lunch at 12.30, for those who can come, at the usual place (a new Poons). The formalities for the A.G.M. will be kept to the minimum since it will be followed by a lecture to be given by Dr Susan Whitfield, Director of the International Danhuang Project (IDP) of the British Library. All Friends, Members and Guests of the R.A.S. in Hong Kong are cordially invited.

7. Finally I would like to place on record a sincere thanks to those on the Committee who have kept the friends going, Mr Keith Stevens, Mrs Rosemary Lee, Mr Paul Bolding. (Secretary), Ms Kirsty Norman, Mrs Mary Painter and Mr Roger Candler (Treasurer). Roger has been Treasurer for the last six years and has regretfully decided to retire –thank you Roger for your dedication. Mrs Bernadette Mackenzie-Ross has kindly agreed to take up the position and we welcome her with gratitude.

From all Friends in the United Kingdom our best wishes for your A.G.M. and a successful year.

March 2006
David Gilkes (Chairman)