

The Volunteers
- Voluntarii et Volantes -

**RASHKB/AMO VOLUNTEERS
CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER**
(January 2006)

1. Introduction

Welcome to the RASHKB/AMO Volunteers Conservation Newsletter. The following explanatory notes are given by way of introduction :-

- The Conservation Newsletter is a roundup and review of the latest built heritage conservation news and current affairs in Hong Kong, including conservation news items of interest from other countries;
- The Conservation Newsletter is published bi-monthly for RASHKB Volunteers and Council Members. It is compiled and edited by Council Member **Bob Horsnell**;
- The views expressed in the Newsletter only reflect the personal views of the Editor and contributors and are not necessarily those of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch;
- Contributions on built heritage conservation and related issues are welcome and should be sent to RASHKB, G.P.O. Box 3864, Central P.O., Hong Kong;
- Due to confidentiality protection legislation personal contact numbers, addresses and other personal information will not be published in the Newsletter.

2. Tai Fu Tai

Tai Fu Tai's garden is now looking quite presentable. Most of the area has been turfed except for a vegetable patch and two paved sitting-out areas. Gravel paths have been formed and a platform of granite planks built over the pond. The outhouses have also been repaired and tidied up.

3. Lawsons Bunker

The underground structures which have been excavated so far are proving difficult to interpret. If anyone reading this thinks they can help please contact **Bill Greaves** at the AMO who is in charge of the dig.

4. Preserving Hong Kong's Heritage

The *South China Morning Post* featured an interview with **Dr. Louis Ng**, Executive Secretary of

the Antiquities and Monuments Office, in the newspaper's regular feature *Close Up* on 19 December 2005. Dr. Ng was being interviewed by reporter **Quinton Chan**. The interview contained a number of "off-the-cuff" remarks and erroneous statements on preserving heritage in Hong Kong. Dr. Ng was taken to task by **Paul Surtees** several days later in the *SCMP's Talkback* e-mail forum on 21 December 2005.

5. **King's College**

King's College in Bonham Road may be declared a monument later this year. Dating back to 1926 the school is fondly remembered by leading politicians and businessmen in the community who studied there. The school building was badly damaged in the Japanese Occupation by looters who took away all the wooden windows and roof timbers for firewood. The roof originally was a pitched roof covered with Chinese tiles. After the War it was decided to demolish what remained of the old roof, and construct an additional floor and a new flat roof. The school is noted for its classical structure with red brick facades, classical granite columns, arcaded corridors and sunken garden.

6. **Lo Pan Temple**

Lo Pan Temple in Belcher's Street, Western may also be declared a monument later this year. This temple was built by the Contractors' Guild in 1884. It is the only urban temple dedicated to Lo Pan, the patron saint of builders. There is another Lo Pan temple near Sha Tin and a few on the mainland. Declaration of the temple as a monument will mean that the temple authorities can receive help with finances and expert advice to ensure that it is properly preserved. The temple was visited by the Volunteers a few years ago.

7. **Lei Cheng Uk Tomb**

The Lei Cheng Uk Han Tomb in Shamshuipo reopened again recently after being closed for nearly a year for repairs to the structure. The reopening ceremony coincided with the 50th anniversary of the tomb's discovery in 1955 by construction workers. A cruciform shape with brick vaults, the 2000 year old tomb when discovered did not contain a corpse and may in fact never have been actually used as a tomb. It may have been built in preparation for a death or the deceased's body may have been removed. Some artifacts were recovered which are now on display.

8. **Government House**

Chief Executive **Donald Tsang** and **Mrs. Tsang** moved into Government House earlier this month after a \$14.5 million refurbishment. The structure, layout and partitioning have been preserved as much as possible to retain the historic character of the building. The colour of the external walls has however, been changed from white to light grey and the windows given a light yellow trim. Construction of Government House started in 1851 and took four years to complete. It was extensively remodelled by the Japanese during the Occupation. It was declared a monument in 1995.

9. **Allotments**

Great minds think alike goes the saying! In the September Newsletter the idea of using government land awaiting development for allotments was suggested. In the *SCMP's Talkback* forum on 15 December 2005 a letter from **Nicole Bailey** appeared suggesting the same thing. The writer had put the suggestion to the Lands Department two months before but there was no reply. Several Volunteers have gardening interests, so how about lobbying the Lands Department?

10. **Blue House, Wanchai**

The Blue House in Stone Nullah Lane may be turned into a folk museum run by St. James' Settlement if the proposal is approved by the government. Blue House dates back to the 1920s and is one of Wanchai's historical landmarks. The museum will display a collection of old items and artifacts donated by current and former residents. The collection includes old furniture, wedding relics and miscellaneous household items. There are also plans to open a souvenir shop and a tea house inside the museum.

11. Yu Lok Lane, Western

The Urban Renewal Authority recently gazetted a new plan to redevelop 21 old residential blocks in Yu Lok Lane in Western at the junction of High Street, Centre Street and Third Street. Part of a pre-war building in the lane that still has most of its original features will be preserved. The new \$357 million project will provide a 30-storey elevated luxury residential block and a public park. The URA claim that none of the old blocks was historically or architecturally significant except the one selected for partial preservation. Most of the old blocks are Chinese style tenement shop-houses known as *tong lau* which were once common in southern Chinese cities. Most of the buildings have no toilets and have been extensively altered to house more people.

12. No. 28 Kennedy Road

The Hong Kong Design Centre has its headquarters at 28 Kennedy Road, well known before the 1997 handover as the Joint Liaison Group offices. The building is an elegant colonial-era mansion having been home at different times to the Banque De L'Indo Chine (1905), the Japanese Residents Association (1931), and various educational institutions. It was acquired by the Hong Kong government in 1954. The Design Centre would like to know more about the history of the building. Can anyone help?

13. Central Police Station Update

Last year a joint survey conducted by the Conservancy Association, Central and Western district councils and the Hong Kong Institute of Architects found that 90 per cent of 1,851 respondents wanted the Central Police Station compound, which includes Victoria Prison, to be turned into a public museum. Only 6.5 per cent backed development on the site. It is understood that the Home Affairs Bureau is currently studying views obtained from the public and the best adaptive reuse for the buildings. An architect with experience of historic buildings in Britain recently wrote in to the *SCMP's Talkback* forum, to say that he was staggered by the architectural quality of the buildings, and that Hong Kong had the unique opportunity to make the compound an outstanding site which would be the pride of the community and a destination for those from afar for generations to come.

14. Hollywood Road Police Quarters

Government plans to sell the Hollywood Road Police Quarters site have been delayed after town planners ordered a reassessment of the site's historic value. Remnants of the old Queen's College which used to be on the site include the historic boundary walls and some flights of granite steps. The old red brick underground public toilet in Staunton Street at the south corner of the site was built in 1918 and has nothing to do with Queen's College. Residents and activists have launched an appeal to have the site rezoned and turned into a historical and cultural compound. A Sun Yat-sen museum and memorial park has been suggested, because of Sun Yat-sen's supposed connection with the old school. It now appears that Sun never studied at the school. No-one seems to be interested in preserving the old police quarters on the site which were built in the 1950s following calls from Commissioner MacIntosh for improved social and living conditions for the police rank and file.

15. Below the Border

Hong Kong reporter **Kevin Sinclair** has started a new weekly column in the *South China Morning Post* entitled *Below the Border* on Chinese customs. The two latest articles have been on Che Kung, the God of Gambling, who has temples dedicated to him in Sha Tin and Sai Kung, and also on the practice of "ghost marriages" to unite deceased people in marriage. For anyone interested in Chinese customs and legends, these articles are a must. Very interesting, readable and worth preserving the newspaper clippings. Maybe Kevin could be persuaded to put all the articles together and publish them in a book.

16. Visions of Space

ATV World are running an interesting series on architecture at present called *Visions of Space*. The programmes, which last one hour, are screened at 8:00 p.m. on Fridays. Each programme show-cases an important architect of the 20th century. The last two architects to be featured have been Hitler's architect, **Albert Speer**, and the Modernist architect, **Mies Van Der Rohe**. Recommended viewing.

17. Heritage Discovery Centre

The new Heritage Discovery Centre in Kowloon Park is now highlighting the winning entries of the Hong Kong Heritage Awards 2004. The winning projects exemplify heritage preservation and conservation and include the restoration works of Tung Wah Coffin Home and the Yuen Long Heritage Trail. Open Mon - Sat, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., Sunday & public holidays, 10 a.m. – 7 p.m., (closed Thursday except public holidays). Entry free. Inquiries 2208 4400. Ends March 31.

18. Next Newsletter

The next Conservation Newsletter should be out around the end of March. Contributions are welcome and should be sent in to G.P.O. Box 3864.

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