



**RASHKB/AMO VOLUNTEERS
CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER**
(May 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- Due to confidentiality protection legislation personal contact numbers, addresses and other personal information will not be published in the Newsletter.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. Annual General Meeting

The AGM and Annual Dinner went off well. The new format with photographic displays, book displays, power point presentation and guest speaker certainly helped to make the evening a great success.

3. Future Newsletters

You will find in this Newsletter several items under the heading of **AMO Activities**. It is hoped that this will be a regular feature. Volunteer **Bill Greaves** will be the contributor. (*Many thanks, Bill! Ed.*)

4. AMO Activities

(i) Heritage Landscapes

A consultancy for the preparation of a brief history of the Haw Par Mansion private garden (part of the former Tiger Balm Gardens), is now underway by **Dr. C K Chan** of HKU. Although tree surveys are now required to be carried out by developers, this is the first such consultancy commissioned in Hong Kong for a garden history, as part of the Conservation Plan for the site. Hopefully, this will be the start of more such research projects, so that greater importance is given to the role of the garden in built heritage studies. One can think of other obvious sites where some research would be very worthwhile, such as Bethanie and the adjoining old Dairy Farm premises in Pokfulam. There must be many others. Any suggestions anyone?

(ii) Wall Trees

On the subject of trees, AMO are now engaged in a joint research project with **Dr. Jim Chi-yung** of HKU Geography Department, into “historic retaining walls”, a subject he has been much involved in, particularly regarding mature wall trees.

(iii) Shek Wan Ceramics

Another interesting research project in progress is an appraisal of the Shek Wan pottery decorations at Tai Fu Tai – this involves a close inspection of the ceramics on the roof ridges of the building. The specialist employed is **Dr. Ma So Mui**, who carried out a similar study at the Tsing Shan Monastery last year.

(iv) Lawson’s Bunker

A further phase of the excavation of Lawson’s Bunker, Wong Nei Chong Gap Road, is now in progress and the lower portion of this fortification has been uncovered, revealing the full height of the original concrete blast wall and making the lowest bunker now fully accessible.

Metal detectors are definitely not being used! Instead, the contractor is employed to use careful and controlled excavation techniques to reveal the structure and to make the site better understandable. In any case, it is not expected to find any significant WWII artifacts, as this site was thoroughly “picked over” by the Japanese Army in 1942, the British Army in 1945 and by Mainland squatters in the 1950’s; but you never can tell!

(v) Hungry Tiger

Something different – at Tin Hau Temple, Causeway Bay, the temple manager has requested AMO to change the head of the plaster tiger in the Tiger Courtyard, as worshippers find the tiger “too fierce looking”.

Rather than getting involved in the merits of “fierce” tiger expressions, compared to “angry”, “infuriated” or just “displeased” looking tigers, AMO have asked the temple dignitaries to provide a picture of their preferred tiger expression.

One important feature on the forehead of the tiger is the “Prince” mark, formed by three horizontal stripes with a vertical bar (王) in imitation of the Chinese character for “Prince”.

Watch this space for further big-cat news!

(vi) Comments

Any comments, suggestions and especially offers of heritage assistance, would be most welcome – please contact wgreaves@lcsd.gov.hk.

5. Pacific Asia Travel Association

The *South China Morning Post* writer **Kevin Sinclair** was presented with the PATA award for heritage on 24 April 2006 at a ceremony in Pattaya, Thailand. The award was for the “Living Villages” series about New Territories communities which was mentioned in the March Newsletter.

6. Sau Mau Ping Temples

Sau Mau Ping residents held a protest outside CGO on 19 March 2006 demanding that the government not demolish three Buddhist and Taoist temples to make way for a new flyover. The temples, which are illegal structures, are 40 years old. The residents claim that the temple deities have supernatural powers to help people with bad luck, health problems, romance, and exorcise evil spirits.

7. Decking Over Nullahs

The Drainage Services Department are now formulating plans to deck over 16 nullahs as part of a Hong Kong-wide initiative announced in the former Chief Executive Secretary's 2005 policy address. Three sections of the nullah alongside Nga Tsin Wai will be decked over soon, also the nullah in Lung Chu Street, Shekkipmei. The latter project has aroused the wrath of the Conservancy Association because a number of red stem banyan trees which are growing out of the stone walls of the nullah will have to be cut down. It appears that the Shamshuipo District Council have decided to go ahead with the work despite opposition to the plan.

8. Crown Wine Cellars

Some Volunteers may remember our visit to the Crown Wine Cellars at Shouson Hill last year with the AMO. The story of how they came about was revealed recently in the *SCMP* Business supplement by reporter **Anna Healy Fenton** interviewing the club manager **Gregory De'eb** for her regular feature "Secret of My Success" which appeared in the newspaper on 1 April 2006. Four of the original 12 pairs of old wartime bunkers were salvaged and restored into successful wine cellars. Rumour has it that further bunkers may be restored in the future.

9. The Peak Lookout

The lease on the Peak Lookout, formerly the Peak Café, expires in mid-July, so that the Government Property Agency will be gazetting and tendering soon. There is expected to be stiff competition from bidders. The building was originally constructed as a shelter for sedan chair bearers at the turn of the 20th century. The AMO classify it as an "Arts & Crafts" style building, which some have described as similar to a mountain lodge. It will be interesting to see who wins the tender.

10. Hong Kong Cemetery

A long article by *SCMP* reporter **Polly Hui** appeared in the newspaper on 23 March 2006 on the Hong Kong Cemetery. Landscape architect **Kenneth Nicholson** was interviewed and lamented the fact that the cemetery did not appear to be protected under current legislation. Nicholson considered that the cemetery was a cultural landscape which should have protection in Hong Kong's conservation legislation. As well as having many interesting historical gravestones and monuments, the cemetery is rich in ecological resources being home to many exotic tree species, butterflies, moths and fruit bats. The architect hopes through his research to demonstrate the need for integration of built heritage and natural heritage conservation and how it can be achieved.

11. Victoria Prison

The Victoria Prison open days were immensely popular with thousands of people queuing up to get in according to the *SCMP* on 14 April 2006. The newspaper article appropriately entitled "Stonewalling" went over the case for preservation versus tourism related development. The future of the site, which is being considered together with the Central Police Station and the former Magistracy building, appears to be in limbo at present due to the lack of a clear policy over preservation. There has been no word from the government on when it will put the site back out to tender.

12. Old Dairy Farm Cowsheds

In 2003 the government assigned two 19th century cowsheds, which formed part of Dairy Farm's original farm at Pokfulam, to the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. The cowsheds are to become part of the Academy's expanded campus at Pokfulam that is to be located in the adjacent 19th century former French Mission building, known as Bethanie. The cowsheds project will see one of the two adjoining octagonal buildings becoming a 150-seat fully equipped multi-purpose theatre, and the other one will provide foyer reception and exhibition space. Dairy Farm has sponsored the conversion of the cowsheds which will be named the Wellcome Theatre. The grand opening was held on 19 April 2006.

13. Bethanie

The former French Mission building, Bethanie, mentioned above dates back to 1885. It is a Gothic Revival style building with a 1930's International Modern Style annex. The conversion work for the APA is being funded with \$74.2 million approved by LegCo in 2003, a further \$2.2 million contribution from the Dairy Farm group and other donations. The original exterior of the building will be kept, but the interior is being renovated. As part of the restorations original stained glass windows from the chapel are to be returned from their current home in Zetland Hall, the freemason's headquarters. The APA is aiming at opening the new accommodation at Bethanie in September 2006.

14. Island House

Island House was recently featured on the TV news on 23 April 2006 on the Chinese and English channels as it celebrates its centenary this year. Construction of the house on Yuen Chau Tsai began early in 1904 and was finally completed in March 1906 after manpower problems. The house which is a declared monument, is classified by the AMO as a building in the "Arts & Crafts" style which was popular in the Edwardian era. Originally built of unpainted red brick walls (now unfortunately painted white) the house features arched and colonnaded verandahs, a pitched roof of Chinese pan-and-roll tiles, and gauged brick arched fireplaces internally. A further distinctive feature of the house is a tower which originally contained a water tank and a beacon to assist vessels navigating Tolo Harbour. Island House was formerly the official residence of the District Commissioner, New Territories and is now currently in the custodianship of WWF who are charged with the responsibility of maintaining the fabric. A booklet sponsored by Hang Seng Bank has been produced by WWF to celebrate the centennial anniversary.

15. Urban Renewal

You often hear people say that Hong Kong is "losing its identity". What they mean is that a visitor sees a modern city of high-rise and skyscraper buildings similar to many other large cities in the world. There are few buildings that one can identify as Hong Kong icons, unlike for example "Big Ben", St. Paul's, Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament which are immediately recognizable as iconic London buildings.

Local urban designers and architects have expressed concern about the way old streets, buildings and neighbourhoods are being erased from the map to make way for typically uniform-looking high-rise towers built on sprawling shopping podiums.

The *SCMP* Property supplement published a report by **Yvonne Liu** on 19 April 2006 on the changing face of the urban area and the loss of the city's character. Unless our old fashioned town planning system is changed to become "more flexible and sensitive", the acceleration of urban redevelopment will continue unabated according to the article.

16. Street Furniture

Another report in the *SCMP* on 17 April 2006 by **Patsy Moy** focused on the poor design of street furniture in Hong Kong. Street furniture is a collective term for road signs, traffic lights, lamp posts, litter bins, railings, telephone kiosks, letter boxes, bollards and other public facilities on streets. The *SCMP* article quoted spokespersons from the Hong Kong Institute of Planners and the Polytechnic University who

lamented the poor design of Hong Kong's street furniture which failed to match the environment and character of the city.

The problem is not confined to Hong Kong. English Heritage started a campaign in October 2004 called "Save Our Streets" encouraging residents to report bad examples of street furniture in their areas to their MPs or local council elected representatives. English Heritage has published a free booklet and CD-Rom on this subject and more information is available on www.english-heritage.org.uk/saveourstreets.

Australia, too, is concerned about the appearance of their heritage precincts and traditional main streets in cities and towns. The National Trust of Australia (NSW) has produced a booklet of guidelines entitled "Streetwise" on the subject which is available from the National Trust Gallery Shop, GPO Box 518, Sydney, NSW. The booklet is written by conservation architect **Elizabeth Vines** and covers practical issues of improvements to street facades, signs, streetscapes, town squares, street furniture and public art. It is, like the English Heritage booklet, profusely illustrated and the two booklets make good companions.

17. Old Stone Retaining Walls

Volunteer **Geoffrey Lam** wrote in about Mid-Levels stone walls. He says there is one particularly interesting one at the intersection of Robinson Road and Park Road. Normally walls have overhanging trees and foliage, but this one is quite remarkable in that there are several enormous stone or marble columns built into the wall, and at some stage they must have served as an ornate part to an individual dwelling dating back to the colonial days. Has AMO taken note of this? According to the Property Page of the *SCMP* some weeks ago, it looks like the residents living in the premises above the wall – Jade Garden, No. 105 Robinson Road – have the intention to sell off their units by invoking the 80% threshold sales condition. Should that go ahead, Geoffrey hopes that the developer will not tear the old wall down. *(So do we Geoffrey. Thank you for your contribution. I have drawn it to the attention of the AMO. Ed.)*

18. Wanchai Market

A recent e-mail from **Bryan S. Alexander** of Pokfulam to the *SCMP*'s "Talkback" E-Mail Forum queried what the government's latest plans are for the old "Bauhaus" style Wanchai Market building. It is a truly remarkable piece of architecture being triangular in plan with rounded corners in "streamlined moderne" Art Deco Style (not really Bauhaus which is strictly cubist and angular in style). It certainly would be a tragedy if this unique building was destroyed to make way for yet another multi-storey skyscraper.

19. St. Joseph's Chapel, Sai Kung

St. Joseph's Chapel on the Sai Kung island of Yim Tin Tsai was recently in the news (*SCMP* 8 May 2006) because of a special Mass held there by **Cardinal Zen**. St. Joseph's was built in 1890 and was one of the first RC churches in Sai Kung. It is a simple mission style church which was restored last year and won an UNESCO heritage award of merit. The Antiquities Advisory Board accorded it Grade III historical building status in 1990 in view of its historical and architectural merit.

20. Lord Wilson Heritage Trust Grants

Applications are now being invited for grants from the Lord Wilson Heritage Trust. Grants are allocated for the promotion of the objectives of the Trust to preserve and conserve the human heritage of Hong Kong, and to foster public awareness of heritage preservation. Application forms and guidelines can be downloaded from the following website : <http://www.lordwilson-heritagetrust.org.hk/app/index.htm>. Deadline for submission of applications is 30 June 2006.

21. Tin Hau Temple, Ma Wan

Volunteer **Dr. Gillian Bickley** recently visited Ma Wan under the north end of the Tsing Ma Bridge. Originally a simple place with one little town and a few fishing villages, Ma Wan has been

transformed over the past few years by redevelopment. Gillian is particularly concerned about the future of the little Tin Hau Temple there, which is about 150 to 200 years old. Almost all the villagers of Ma Wan Town have been relocated to the new village development area to the northwest of Ma Wan and the villagers want their temple to be relocated there as well. The AMO are opposed to the idea and want the temple, which is a Grade III Historical Building, preserved *in-situ*. At the time of writing the matter is still unresolved. (*I hope this answers your query, Gillian. Ed.*)

22. Robotic Maintenance

The Louvre Museum in Paris, which is one of the oldest in the world, features in the opening and closing scenes of the film *The Da Vinci Code*. The film (*not seen at time of writing. Ed.*), apparently is packed with Renaissance imagery and scenes set against the backdrop of some of Europe's finest classical architecture. The famous glass pyramid on the roof of the museum is cleaned by a self-propelled robot which crawls on the sides of the structure for two days at a time every three weeks. Robotic maintenance and cleaning of buildings is quite common in Japan, but does not seem to have caught on in Hong Kong. The robots climb up the buildings by means of suction pads or by means of special vertical tracks incorporated into the walls of buildings.

(*Source : SCMP Technology Supplement, 16 May 2006. Ed.*)

23. Conservation News From Germany

Anyone visiting Europe this year, in particular Dresden, should visit the reconstructed Baroque Cathedral, the Frauenkirche, designed by Dresden's city architect **Georg Bahr** and completed in 1738. The design of the domed cathedral was heavily influenced by St. Peter's, Rome. The cathedral, which took 16 years to build, became one of the landmarks of central European architecture. It was destroyed by Allied bombing in February 1945 and collapsed into a vast heap of rubble.

The reconstruction project began in January 1993 and was completed in October last year. Some 3,800 original stones from the 8,500 salvaged from the rubble were re-used. The project saw the most intensive use of traditional building and decorative crafts skills on one site in living memory, with contributions from workshops and fundraisers around the world. However, lack of detailed records meant that around 40 per cent of the interior's reconstruction has been based on extrapolation and art-historical research. The cost of the reconstruction was astronomical (£122m!).

(*Source : Bulletin of the Society of Professional Engineers, U.K., Issue 53, Spring 2006. Ed.*)

24. Hau Wong Temple, Kowloon City

The newly restored Hau Wong Temple in Kowloon City will reopen on 22 May 2006. About \$4 million was spent on renovating the temple which is believed to have been built around 1730. The temple was built to pay tribute to **General Yang Liangjie**, known as Hau Wong, for his loyalty and bravery in protecting a young emperor of the Song Dynasty who was forced into exile in Hong Kong. Beautifully and sensitively restored, the temple is well worth a visit.

25. Central Market

We shall soon know the fate of the old Central Market building. The Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) will meet on 18 May 2006 to decide whether to preserve it or recommend demolition allowing redevelopment of the site. The AAB will explain its decision to the Central and Western District Council on 25 May 2006.

26. Pokfulam Prison

The *SCMP* ran a feature article on 14 May 2006 by reporter **Donald Asprey** on the former detention centre for political prisoners in Pokfulam. Built in the 1950s by the Royal Engineers, the site encompasses the upper part of the wartime Jubilee Battery. In spite of its notoriety some people, including former detainees, would like to see the site preserved. The *SCMP* has asked their readers to write in with their views on whether the former detention centre should be given special heritage status. Write in or send

your e-mails to talkback@scmp.com.

27. Sir John Soane

ATV World screened an interesting programme on 11 May 2006 on the English architect **Sir John Soane** (1753-1837). He studied under **George Dance** the Younger and **Henry Holland** and did the obligatory "Grand Tour" of Italy to study ancient classical architecture. His work was superficially "neo-classical" or "pseudo-classical" but very original. His best-known works are the Dulwich College Art Gallery and his own house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London which is now the Sir John Soane Museum. He used all manner of architectural tricks such as mirrors to reflect light, exaggerated arches and vaults, geometric shapes, recessions, ingenious top-lighting or lantern lights, astylar facades, and complicated spatial arrangements. His work did not please his contemporaries who were outraged by its modernity. The TV programme explained how Soane's work is now becoming more understood and appreciated especially by American architects.

28. Questionnaire

Many thanks to all of you who completed and returned the recent questionnaire. The information you provided will be helpful in deciding the future role of the Volunteers and enabling Council to formulate a position on the Central Police Station/Victoria Prison issue. Those of you who volunteered to help update Dr. Bard's book "In Search of the Past" will be contacted soon by our President **Robert Nield**.

29. For Your Diary

- "A Nostalgic View of Hong Kong and China", an exhibition of early maps and memorabilia, Picture This Gallery, 603 B, 9 Queen's Road Central, HK., 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Tues to Sat, until 27 May 2006. Tel : 2525 2820; Website : www.picturethiscollection.com.
- "Hong Kong During The Occupation", photos and memorabilia exhibition, HKU Gallery, Pokfulam, until 28 May 2006. Website : www.hku.hk/hkumag.
- Applications now invited for HKU's Architectural Conservation Programme. For further information : Tel : 2241 5654 or E-mail : acp@arch.hku.hk or URL : <http://acp.arch.hku.hk>.
- "Sha Tin Culture Development", exhibition of village life and traditions, Hong Kong Heritage Museum, Tai Wai. Open all week from 10:00 a.m. (except Tuesdays). Until 29 May 2006. Tel : 2180 8188. Website : <http://hk.heritage.museum>.
- Saturday afternoon lectures at HK Heritage Discovery Centre, Kowloon Park. Enquiries : tel. 2208 4407. Website : <http://www.amo.gov.hk>.

30. Membership

The latest Volunteers' membership list is attached at Appendix A. Welcome to new member **Adrian Churn**.

31. Next Newsletter

The next Newsletter should be out around the end of July. Please send your comments and contributions to RASHKB, G.P.O. Box 3864, Central Post Office, Hong Kong.

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