

ROYAL ASIATIC  
SOCIETY  
HONG KONG BRANCH



*The Volunteers*  
*- Voluntarii et Volantes -*

**RASHKB/AMO VOLUNTEERS  
CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER**  
( September 2005 )

**1. News from Council**

At the last Council meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> August it was decided that the Volunteers' Conservation Newsletter should be available on-line at the RASHKB website. It is therefore necessary to give the following explanatory notes :-

- 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.
- Due to confidentiality protection legislation personal contact numbers, addresses and other personal information will not be published in the Newsletter.
- 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.

**2. Hollywood Road**

Property developers and more than 100 antique shop owners are proposing a series of landscape enhancements for Hollywood Road and its surroundings, aiming to boost tourism and improve the area's living environment. The proposals, which would cost almost \$10 million, include tree planting, extension of pavements, repaving and introduction of railings, bollards, banners and planters in selected parts of Hollywood Road and nearby streets. The three-phase plan also covers sections of Lyndhurst Terrace, Ladder Street, Upper Lascar Row, Tank Lane and Bridges Street – where part of the historical Sun Yat-sen trail is located. *Source : SCMP 16.9.05*

**3. Government House**

We now all know that the Chief Executive is to move into GH and that renovation work is underway. There have been suggestions in the newspapers that GH should be opened up more to the public with guided tours laid on. However, there is not much to see internally and visitors might be disappointed. The Japanese architecture is interesting and it is remarkable that it still survives. The two gatehouses are also interesting examples of Greek Revival Regency style architecture. For some reason the Japanese architect who carried out the alterations to GH did not touch the gatehouses which remain in their original form.

#### 4. Pacific Asia Tourism Association

RASHKB has been approached by the Pacific Asia Tourism Association (PATA) offering to fund conservation projects to encourage tourism. If anyone has any suggestions please send them in to G.P.O. Box 3864.

#### 5. Heritage Lottery Fund

The Heritage Lottery Fund in the U.K. is celebrating its tenth year of distributing funding raised by the National Lottery for heritage projects. Grants range from multi million pound investments in iconic sites and buildings to small grants for heritage and conservation projects. Regeneration of run-down historic areas is encouraged and applications for awards over one million pounds must include a conservation training plan as part of the project. You can learn more about HLF on [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk).

#### 6. Bethanie & Dairy Farm, Pokfulam

As reported in the main RASHKB newsletter, work will start shortly to convert Bethanie and the old Dairy Farm octagonal cowsheds into a School of Film and Television for the Academy for Performing Arts. As part of the renovation works the stained glass windows in the chapel will be restored.

#### 7. Macau's Heritage

Many of Macau's landmarks have recently been added to Unesco's World Heritage list. The announcement was made on 15<sup>th</sup> July at a conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in Durban, South Africa. A total of 29 sites, which played a key role in the earliest encounters between east and west, have been added to the list. The sites incorporate many Portuguese buildings that were the first of their kind on Chinese soil. They include churches, seminaries, fortresses, a university, a hospital, a theatre, a lighthouse and a cemetery. *Source : SCMP 16.7.05*

#### 8. Knutsford Terrace

The *South China Morning Post* ran a features article on 7<sup>th</sup> July by Susan Jung on Knutsford Terrace in Tsim Sha Tsui which is quite near to the Antiquities and Monuments Office in Nathan Road. The article was all about restaurants and bars and their cuisine, but the area is worth visiting for its continental style atmosphere and *alfresco* dining. Knutsford Terrace, Knutsford Steps and Knutsford Hotel take their name from Lord Knutsford, Secretary of State for the Colonies (Colonial Secretary), 1890.

#### 9. Former RAF Officers' Mess

The former RAF Officers' Mess and Annex Block which are Grade I historical buildings in Kowloon Bay are now being converted into accommodation for an Academy of Visual Arts for the Hong Kong Baptist University. This is a new venture for HKBU and the site will house the academy until it moves into its new campus home in 2008. The buildings which were built in the 1930s during the RAF's so-called Expansion Period (1935-39) were designed in Neo-Classical Colonial style with Art Deco influence. The long colonnaded verandahs give the impression of a Louisiana plantation house in the Deep South. The buildings were formerly used by the police as a Detective Training School. Wartime relics still survive in the compound including an old air raid shelter, a Nissen hut and mysterious secret tunnels! The HKBU Estates Office has agreed with the Antiquities and Monuments Office to set up a small heritage corner in the new academy to showcase the history of the site.

#### 10. Central Market

Two e-mails appeared recently in *SCMP's "Talkback"* forum appealing for the preservation of Central Market which is under threat of redevelopment. The building is a Grade III historical building in Modernist or Bauhaus style and is probably the last building of this type still surviving in Central. Instead of another office block or shopping mall, the suggestions were to turn the building into a branch library,

making use of the underground space for loading and unloading of delivery vans serving shops and offices in the area. *Source : SCMP 29.7.05*

#### 11. Wedding Card Street

As we all know Wedding Card Street is to be redeveloped by the URA and many of the shops there have now closed down having accepted URA's offer. Some are still holding out, however, and in support of their campaign a photographic exhibition entitled "Street As Museum" has opened at Lee Tung Street A-Link, UG/F, C. C. Wu Building, 302-308 Hennessy Road, Wanchai, (11:00 am – 8:00 pm daily). Not seen at time of writing.

#### 12. Acid Rain

The high levels of acidity in rain were recently reported in the *South China Morning Post* by **Cheung Chi-fai** in an article on pollution. **Lee Ho-yin**, Acting Director of the architectural conservation programme at the University of Hong Kong, was quoted as saying that acid rain posed a direct threat to heritage buildings as it could damage traditional constructional materials such as fired clay bricks, timber and lime plaster. Dr. Lee said that most heritage buildings were built of traditional materials which are more vulnerable than modern materials to acid rain. Acid rain will dissolve these organic materials over a relatively short period – in years rather than decades. Many of the timber and plaster surfaces are decoratively painted in mineral paint, and acid rain will ruin the paintwork quickly. **Professor Ho Kin-chung** of the Open University's environmental science programme was reported as saying that more evidence had to be collected to determine the source of the pollution. *Source : SCMP 22.8.05*

#### 13. Unesco Asia-Pacific Heritage Conservation Awards

Two historic private buildings in Hong Kong have won international heritage awards recently. St. Joseph's Chapel (b. 1890) in Yim Tin Tsai, Sai Kung and the Tung Wah Coffin Home (b. 1899) in Sandy Bay, Pokfulam gained awards of merit at this year's Unesco Asia-Pacific Heritage Conservation Awards announced earlier this year. *Source : SCMP 14.9.05*

#### 14. Ping Shan Police Station

The Grade III old Ping Shan Police Station (b. 1898) near Ping Ha Road, Yuen Long is being converted into a heritage centre for the display of artefacts from the Tang clan's culture and history. Conversion work started in February and will be completed early next year ahead of the centre's opening in October 2006. *Source : SCMP 14.9.05*

#### 15. Maritime Museum, Stanley

Past President **Dr. Dan Waters** attended the opening of the new privately run Maritime Museum at Stanley and was suitably impressed by the displays. **Ted Thomas** in a letter to the *South China Morning Post* on 14<sup>th</sup> Sept. was also impressed and even suggested that Chinese maritime engineering might have saved the *Titanic* if its technology had been incorporated into the design of the hull of the ship!

#### 16. Illegal Use of Government Land

From time to time, public warnings are issued about illegal use of government land. Such activities range from annexation of land by farmers for extension of orchards, dangerous excavation of slopes, illegal cultivation of plants, shrubs and trees, illegal irrigation from natural water courses, and the erection of UBWs (unauthorized building works) such as rain shelters for morning walkers, wayside shrines, makeshift huts, etc.

It may be that these activities are a simple manifestation of people's need to have a garden – something only a few people can have in Hong Kong. One answer to this might be the allocation of allotments at low peppercorn rents on land no-one else wants such as waste land beside railway tracks and cemeteries, even designated areas of public parks and reclamation areas which lie fallow for years. Allotments are a familiar sight in the U.K., many people maintaining one in addition to their own garden.

Anyone in favour of forming an allotment society?

#### 17. Lei Yue Mun Holiday Park

The joint visit with AMO staff on 31<sup>st</sup> August went off successfully, the weather being kind to us. The purpose of the visit was to introduce the young curators to colonial barrack architecture, but we also visited the Chapel, **Driver Hughs'** memorial, the Jockey Club stables and the Sai Wan Fort. The old barracks have been completely transformed since HKG took over and are a very good example of adaptive re-use and what can be done. More research is needed on the Fort if anyone is interested in volunteering their services.

#### 18. Nga Tsin Wai Tsuen

The joint visit to Nga Tsin Wai Tsuen on 9<sup>th</sup> July was also successful although we had to take shelter from the rain for a while. The purpose of the visit was to give the AMO curators a practical task in conservation using standard forms to assess the heritage value of the village and recommend a suitable conservation process. All took part enthusiastically and there was a good turn-out considering it was a rainy Saturday morning.

#### 19. Compulsory Purchase

Developers are lobbying the government for a rule change that will allow them compulsory purchase of any block of flats if they have acquired 80 per cent of that block. The present level is 90 per cent. The developers argue that it is the only way to clear up urban decay. The 90 per cent level is still much too tight if there is to be widespread redevelopment of moribund old blocks, they argue.

Source : SCMP 16.9.05

#### 20. Conservation News from Afghanistan

Readers may have noticed recently a report in the *South China Morning Post* on plans to restore the giant carved stone Buddhas in Afghanistan destroyed by the Taliban. Another restoration project now nearing completion is the Bagh-e Babur garden in Kabul laid out in the early 1500s by **Babur**, founder of the Mughal dynasty in India. It has been funded by the U.S. and German governments, in collaboration with the Aga Khan Trust, a major benefactor of heritage repair projects in Asia. Bagh-e Babur is due to re-open next spring.

#### 21. Conservation News from Moscow

We have all read about the destruction of old courtyard houses in Beijing as part of redevelopment of the city. Similar destruction is sweeping through the Russian capital as hundreds of old and historic buildings in the city centre are declared unsound and demolished. The campaign group, the Moscow Architecture Preservation Society (MAPS), has taken up the plight of Moscow's heritage and set up its own website [www.maps-moscow.com](http://www.maps-moscow.com) to highlight the crisis.

#### 22. Conservation News from the U.K.

The National Heritage Training Group in the U.K. has reported a serious shortage of skills such as dry stone walling, earth walling and thatching putting Britain's listed and historic buildings under threat. The industry needs to recruit 6,500 people in the next year to meet the immediate demand. As a result, the NHTG is campaigning to encourage more people to join this sector, and is developing a Skills Action Plan with industry and education providers.

#### 23. News from Nowhere

Whilst on furlough in the U.K. the Editor took the opportunity to visit the Red House at Bexley Heath in Kent designed for **William Morris** by his friend the young socialist architect **Philip Webb** in 1859. The house is a red-brick fairy tale creation (with even a wishing well in the garden), Gothic Arts and Crafts

in style, resembling a Victorian parsonage or Board of Education School. The home of architect **Ted Hollamby** for many years, the Red House is now in the care of the National Trust. Recommended and well worth a visit.

Another far grander Arts and Crafts house is Standen near East Grinstead in Sussex also designed by **Philip Webb** in 1891 and completed in 1894 for **J. S. Beale**, a successful London solicitor who made his money during the railway boom. Standen is considered to be Webb's masterpiece and it was also his last commission. The house was designed to blend in with an existing farmhouse complex and various vernacular styles and all sorts of local materials were used. The interior is particularly interesting for the **William Morris** textiles and wallpapers and ceramics by **William De Morgan**. Also in the care of the National Trust, Standen is a little tricky to find but well worth it when you get there.

To compliment the Arts and Crafts visits, the Editor also visited the village of Penshurst outside the gates of Penshurst Place in Kent. The purpose of the visit was to see the Old Smithy and the Old Post Office designed and built by the Victorian country house architect **George Devey** in 1850. With their red tiled roofs, half-timbering and roughcast rendering the buildings blend perfectly with the other old cottages and shops in the village. Devey was a pioneer in English Vernacular Revival and his work was much admired and copied by the later Arts and Crafts architects. Penshurst Place and Gardens is also open to the public and makes an enjoyable day out.

The title of this piece *News from Nowhere* was the title chosen by **William Morris** for his book about a visionary Utopia in the future in which he set out in story form his ideas on socialism and rebirth of arts and crafts.

#### 24. Out of Context

The following amusing quotations come from *Context*, the journal of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation. Enjoy!

- "Does the Church insure itself against acts of God? If it does, doesn't it show a certain lack of faith? And if it doesn't, doesn't that show a lack of acumen?"

*Sir Sydney Chapman, MP  
to the House of Commons*

- "You know an area is in trouble when the charity shops move out."

*Alun Jeffers, Lisburn  
Townscape Heritage Initiative*

#### 25. Exhibitions

The following exhibitions may be of interest to conservationists :-

- **Hong Kong Streets and Spaces**, Peter Cookson Smith's sketches of the city's streets and spaces over a two-year period. Mon-Fri, 10:00 am – 8:00 pm, Sat, 2:00 pm – 6:00 pm, Goethe-Gallery, Goethe-Institut Hongkong, 14/F HK Arts Centre, 2 Harbour Road, Wan Chai. Inquiries : 2802 0088. Ends September 22.
- **History of Ta Teh Institute Exhibition**, featuring artefacts and historical photos of an arts college established by the Communist Party. Mon-Sat, 10:00 am – 6:00 pm, Sun and public holidays, 10:00 am – 7:00 pm (closed on Tue), HK Museum of History, 100 Chatham Road South, Tsim Sha Tsui, \$5, \$10. Inquiries : 2724 9042. Ends October 3.
- **Hedda Morrison's Hong Kong, Photographs 1946-47**, freelance photographer Hedda Morrison's candid shots of Hong Kong and Beijing in the 1940s. Mon-Sat, 9:30 am – 6:00 pm, Sun, 1:30 pm – 5:30 pm, (closed public holidays), University Museum and Art Gallery, HK University, 94 Bonham Road, Pokfulam, free. Inquiries : 2241 5500. Ends October 9.

**26. Membership**

A warm welcome is extended to new member of the Volunteers **Sue Spencer**. We look forward to meeting her soon at one of our next outings.

**27. Next Newsletter**

The next Conservation Newsletter should be out around the end of October/early November. If you have anything to contribute please send it in to G.P.O. Box 3864.

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