

*The Volunteers*  
*- Voluntarii et Volantes -*

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

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Due to confidentiality protection legislation personal contact numbers, addresses and other personal information will not be published in the Newsletter.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

Since our last site meeting there has been some rapid changes in the garden now that the turf has been laid and the site is starting to look reasonably civilized. The next phase of the project is more restoration to the outbuildings which should start before Christmas.

We have planted a *Lichee chinensis*, passion fruit, Buddha's bamboo (*Bambusa ventricosa*), *Ficus pumila*, one lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) and some *Wisteria sinensis*. The idea is to only plant stuff that has been available in HK for at least 100 years. To come are: Common Lantana, water Cypressus (to hide the concrete piling), and some more (undecided) climbers for the boundary wall. The next phase also includes flower pots and planters, artwork and revealing the archaeology of the site.

The buildings comprising (what we call) the Old Peanut Oil Factory are proving difficult to interpret, as it has seen many uses and was built at different periods – any thoughts are welcome.

Volunteers' helpful advice from the last visit is being incorporated where possible either now or in the next phase.

*(Thanks to Volunteer Bill Greaves for the above report. Ed.)*

### **3. Lawsons Bunker**

Many Volunteers may remember visiting Lawsons Bunker, which is part of the WWII military installations around Wong Nei Chong Gap, which featured prominently in the defence of Hong Kong Island in December 1941.

Some further excavation has been undertaken and it is now possible (just!) to get inside some of the actual concrete bunkers, also the site is more understandable now that a lot of the covering silt has been removed. No WWII artifacts yet found, although a toy gun (from about 1950's?) raised some false alarms! Although later thinking about its provenance – it was probably bought by a refugee family from the mainland for their kid who all lived in these squalid conditions, maybe for many years. It might be seen as another fine, but of course very different example of self-sacrifice at this historic spot.

On Monday 5<sup>th</sup> December, the Consulate of Canada in Hong Kong will hold a “low-key” unveiling ceremony on the site and the few remaining army veterans from the battle, with their relatives and some officials from Canada will attend. Anyone interested would be welcome, I am sure – it starts about 9:15 am.

*(Thanks to Volunteer Bill Greaves for the above report. Ed.)*

### **4. Red Brick House, Yau Ma Tei**

The old former Waterworks Engineer's Office in Shanghai Street, Yau Ma Tei known as the Red Brick House has recently been restored and renovated externally. It is a Grade I historic building built in 1895. The building is a small two-storey structure built with red brick walls in Flemish bond and a Chinese tiled roof. Ornamental wrought iron railings to the balconies (now enclosed) and two-ring rough brick arches over the windows give the building an English cottage appearance. Internally the ground floor features columns and arches which support the upper floor. Original skirtings, matchboarded ceilings, cornices and ornamental ventilation grilles still survive. The interior still has to be renovated, but the Antiquities and Monuments Office have yet to decide on a suitable adaptive re-use for it. If anyone has any suggestions please send in your views to GPO Box 3864.

### **5. The Old Yau Ma Tei Cinema**

Just around the corner from the Red Brick House can be found the old Yau Ma Tei Cinema next to the Market. This cinema closed down some years ago and has remained semi-derelict ever since. Recently it has undergone basic structural repairs and has been given a facelift externally. The front facade facing Waterloo Road features an interesting neo-Classical round-arched Palladian style Diocletian blind or blank window with stepped voussoirs. The recent works have uncovered concealed classical style columns on either side of the main entrance. Further research is needed to restore this facade to its original appearance. The old cinema which was built in the late 1920s is a Grade II historic building. Like the Red Brick House, the interior still has to be renovated and the Antiquities and Monuments Office would welcome suggestions for adaptive re-use.

### **6. Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre**

The Antiquities and Monuments Office recently opened its new Heritage Discovery Centre in Kowloon Park, Tsim Sha Tsui. The Centre has been adapted from a pair of two-storey military barrack blocks built in 1910 as part of Whitfield Barracks. They are classified as Grade III historical buildings. The Centre is a permanent venue for the Antiquities and Monuments Office to stage exhibitions and educational activities to promote understanding of local heritage and its preservation. The Centre is now staging an exhibition of archaeological discoveries from Sha Ha, Sai Kung featuring relics of the Han and Song dynasties.

### **7. Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre**

The Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre Project has been jointly launched by the Hong Kong

Baptist University, Hong Kong Arts Development Council and Hong Kong Arts Centre with an aim to turn the vacant Shek Kip Mei Factory Estate into a hub of arts and culture which contributes to the nurturing of creative talents, the prosperity of local cultural and creative industries as well as the long-term arts development in Hong Kong. Consultation sessions will be held soon and you can express your views by completing the questionnaire online at <http://www.hkadc.org.hk/cac>.

## 8. Stanley

A report in the *South China Morning Post* on 20 October stated that the Housing Department appears to have scrapped its controversial plan to chop down scores of trees in Stanley to create a horticultural park, in the face of opposition from green groups. The park, intended as a tourist attraction, was to have been built on the hillside between Murray House and the Ma Hang Estate. The 48,000 square metre site would have been granted to the non-profit making Ding Yuen Arboriculture Foundation. A scaled-down plan for a park which will save all the trees on the site is the latest proposal.

In another *SCMP* report on 12 November a major renovation project for Stanley waterfront was announced. The Town Planning Board has approved a scheme for turning the main street into a tree-lined promenade. Under the plan, the waterfront will get a new walkway built of timber and a total of 107 semi-mature trees will be planted to provide shade and form a green backdrop to the waterfront. The temporary market site will be turned into a piazza with 20 kiosks selling fresh food, drinks and refreshments, ornaments and souvenirs.

## 9. Wedding Card Street, Wanchai

Lee Tung Street, or Wedding Card Street as it is more commonly known because of the number of shops printing and selling wedding cards, remains in the news. The Urban Renewal Authority (URA) want to demolish all the old buildings and redevelop the area into a residential and retailing complex with high-rise buildings. After nearly two years of an uphill battle against the redevelopment, most of the residents and shop-keepers have moved out. Those who remain have until next month to surrender their property or face eviction.

The campaigners may have lost their battle to save the street, but their efforts have won recognition from the city's professional planners. The Hong Kong Institute of Planners has awarded a silver medal to an alternative plan for Lee Tung Street produced by a community group, although it was rejected by the Town Planning Board in August. The scheme included renovation of some old tenement buildings in Lee Tung Street, pedestrianization of the street, five new apartment blocks, and the preservation of three 1930s shophouses (*tong lau*) in Queen's Road East.

## 10. Mallory Street & Burrows Street, Wanchai

In the Hong Kong Institute of Planners' annual awards a Certificate of Merit was given to the URA's Mallory Street Project for Conservation and Revitalisation. Under the scheme six old shophouses in Mallory Street will be preserved and converted into units for the use of cultural and creative industries. Four old shophouses in Burrows Street will unfortunately be demolished to make way for a 3,000 square feet theme garden, but the street facade will be preserved, if technically feasible. The URA has invited RASHKB to submit comments on the proposals.

The site which is now occupied by Mallory Street and Burrows Street was originally a shipyard and timber yard owned by the Whampoa firm of **T. Hunt & Co.** Later the site appears to have been acquired by the American firm, **Burrows & Sons**, and **Mr. Lawrence Mallory**, who gave their names to the streets. The old shophouses date back to the 1920s, and according to the URA were built by the Hong Kong Land Investment Company. Shops occupied the ground floors and the upper floors were used for either storage or residential purposes.

## 11. Living Villages Campaign

Those readers who have been following the *South China Morning Post's* "Living Villages Campaign" will have been heartened by those rural communities who have taken moves on their own initiative to preserve their old villages and make them clean, safe, pleasant and enjoyable environments for residents and visitors. Hopefully, the recognition and publicity about these villages will encourage

residents in other places to think how they can improve their own surroundings.

## 12. The Border Area

The Chief Executive has accepted in principle a proposal to open the currently restricted area along the Border between Shenzhen and the New Territories for eco-tourism and manufacturing. He said in his recent policy address that a committee would be set up to study the idea. Concern has been expressed about the impact such development would have on the Border Area's diverse wildlife and pristine rural environment. Wildlife could be killed off by pollution from factories and by destruction of their natural habitats. Old villages and their associated traditional farmland, burial grounds and *fengshui* woods would also be affected. Let us hope that the study commissioned by the Chief Executive will address these concerns.

## 13. Former Gate Lodge, The Peak

An article appeared in *Apple Daily* on 26 September on plans to spend \$142.6 million on enhancement of the Peak area as a premier tourist attraction. As part of the project the open piazza outside Peak Galleria will receive a make-over with incorporation of Victorian style elements including gazebos, benches, sun-dials, stone pillars and carvings. The Former Gate Lodge in Mount Austin Road will be transformed into a public gallery with historical photographs of Victoria City on display.

The Former Gate Lodge was declared a monument in 1995. It was researched some years ago for the Antiquities and Monuments Office by Volunteer **Colin Davidson**. The Lodge dates back to 1902 and was the Gate Lodge of the Former Mountain Lodge, now demolished. The Gate Lodge is an attractive little building in the Classical Revival or Renaissance architectural style with stucco walls grooved to imitate stone, decorated with a moulded cornice and projecting string courses, with a series of triangular pediments at parapet level. It is a well-known landmark on the Peak.

## 14. Underground Streams

The *South China Morning Post* recently reported on the restoration of an underground stream in South Korea's capital Seoul. The stream called Cheonggyecheon or "Clear Stream" was culverted in the 1960s to allow an elevated highway to be built over it. A 500-year old bridge was also uncovered and refurbished and is one of 22 bridges spanning the restored waterway.

Hong Kong also has underground culverted streams as can be seen by a study of street names such as Conduit Road, Nullah Road, Tank Lane, Blue Pool Road, Stone Nullah Street, etc. An open nullah in the centre of Waterloo Road, Kowloon Tong was culverted and covered over as recently as the 1970s. The Secretary for Environment, Transport and Works **Dr. Sarah Liao** wants to create a greener city – how about restoration of some of our underground streams, Sarah?

## 15. Central Market

The latest idea for the Central Market site scheduled to be auctioned early next year, is to require the developer to devote at least half of the 4,000 square metre site to open space. The idea comes from **Keith Griffiths** of the architectural firm Aedas and reported in the *South China Morning Post* on 14 November. Apparently **Mr. Griffiths** does not think Central Market worth saving as it is described in the *SCMP* article as an "unappealing mundane example of Bauhaus architecture."

The building may not look attractive but its historical importance lies in the structure which is a demonstration of **Le Corbusier's** so-called "Five Points of a New Architecture". The reinforced concrete trabeated structure of columns or *pilotis*, beams and slabs mean that the exterior walls or building envelope become a 'free facade' liberated from traditional load-bearing constraints, allowing long horizontal openings for light and ventilation. Because the *pilotis* are carrying the loads, each floor becomes a 'free plan' allowing interior non-load bearing partitions to be arranged at will to fit functional demands, an important point in considering adaptive re-use.

Preservation of the building facade only and not the structure, as has been suggested by some, gives paramountcy to the facade, a primacy which is mistaken. The facade is not emphasized architecturally as its form derives from the structure, as in the dictum 'form follows function'. Preservation

of the facade and not the structure is therefore artificial and completely meaningless in the conservation context.

## 16. Old Muslim Cemetery

Many people will probably know that there is a Muslim Cemetery and Mosque at Cape Collinson, but not many will know that there used to be an old Muslim cemetery in Kowloon. It was known as Kowloon Cemetery No. 3 and it was established in 1930 behind Pui Ching Middle School in Ho Man Tin. It covered an area of about 5.5 acres and was intended for the burial of deceased Indian soldiers in the British Army. There was also a mosque nearby for funeral rites. The cemetery was resumed by the Government in 1962 for redevelopment in exchange for the Cape Collinson site. The old Muslim Cemetery at Ho Man Tin is mentioned in **Martin Booth's** autobiographical book "Gweilo-Memories of a Hong Kong Childhood" (Transworld Publishers, 2004).

## 17. More Conservation News from Afghanistan

Recently two newspapers (*SCMP*, 2.10.05 and *Apple Daily*, 3.11.05) reported that the USD60 million proposal to rebuild the two giant sandstone Buddha figures in the Bamiyan Valley destroyed by the Taleban regime in 2001, was impractical and has been abandoned. Instead a scheme to project laser images of the Buddhas onto the valley cliffs is proposed by Japanese laser artist **Hiro Yamagata**. The Afghan government is backing the proposals but is waiting for approval from Unesco which has designated the cliffs a world heritage site.

The *South China Morning Post* also ran a photo feature on 15 October on Afghanistan's waning brickmaking industry. Traditionally made mud bricks baked in kilns are now being replaced by concrete or cinder blocks which last longer. Making bricks is a time consuming laborious process and now only a few people still make a meagre living working at the brick kilns on the outskirts of Afghanistan's capital city, Kabul. Of Kabul's 150 kilns, which only four years ago were bustling, only about 20 are now in operation.

## 18. Mandarin Oriental Hotel

This famous hotel will close on 28 December for a USD140 million renovation which will take about eight months to complete. An exhibition of historic photographs and pictures of the Mandarin from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s is on display at the hotel before it closes.

## 19. Conservation Conference

The Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors is holding its annual conference entitled "Development and Preservation – Which Should Give Way To Which?" at the JW Marriott Hotel on 3 December. For enquiry, please contact **Donna Yu** at the HKIS Office (tel. : 2526 3679).

## 20. Legislative Council Building

There will be a chance to see the inside of this old building at the forthcoming Open Day on Saturday, 26 November from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. Enquiries : tel. 2869 9265.

## 21. Membership

A warm welcome is extended to new member of the Volunteers **Ong Yi Li**. We look forward to meeting her soon at one of our next outings. A current list of Volunteers is attached at Appendix A.

## 22. Next Newsletter

The next Conservation Newsletter should be out around the end of January, 2006. If you have anything to contribute please send it in to G.P.O. Box 3864.