

Friends of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch, London

Chairman's Annual report 2016

Fraternal greetings to the society in Hong Kong.

As of early March only 49 people were paid up as members of the Friends for this year. That will go up a bit but we have to accept that numbers are slipping, although we continue to enjoy lunches, lectures and outings with a good group of regulars. This is a review of our events over the past year.

We had our AGM in May 2015, when Dr Pat Hase talked to us on *Forgotten Heroes: the Magistrates of San On*, revealing the fascinating results of his research into the San On County Gazetteer of 1688.

At least once every two years we make a longer outing to somewhere in the UK where we can look at collections of Chinese material, and arrange talks by local academics or Chinese-related organisations, although we do mix in other activities as well. In August 2015, 16 members went on a four-day visit to Bath, organised by Kirsty Norman. We started with a private guided evening visit to No. 1 The Crescent, to look at life in 18th century Bath, ending in the kitchen with drinks with the guides. We visited the Fashion Museum for handling sessions to look at and discuss Chinese export shawls, and the Museum of East Asian Art where again we had handling sessions, looking at Chinese ceramics. Martin Palmer of the Alliance for Religions and Conservation (based in Bath) gave us a fascinating walking tour looking at religions in Bath through the ages, and we also had a curator-led tour of the beautiful Holburne Museum in Sydney Pleasure Gardens containing a large collection of decorative arts and paintings, highlighting examples of Chinese influence on European decorative arts. A highlight of the visit was a Chinese dinner hosted in her stunning home by Charlotte Pinder, a former member of the RASKHB.

In October, Dr. Gillian Bickley from Hong Kong gave an interesting talk on Lt. Cmdr. Henry C. S. Collingwood-Selby, RN and his life in China, and then in Hong Kong in the year before and during the Japanese Occupation. She has co-edited a [book](#) of Collingwood-Selby's documents.

By one of those strange coincidences, the writer of this report had himself given a talk a few weeks earlier and was surprised to find Dr Bickley and her husband in the audience, something all the more remarkable as the venue was a small hotel in Andorra.

We were honoured in November to have a talk by Dr Susan Whitfield of the British Library updating us on the work of the [International Dunhuang Project](#), of which she is the director. The audience was fascinated by some of the stories that surround the vast Dunhuang repository of manuscripts, artefacts, textiles and coins and its preservation.

Members marked the Year of the Monkey at the beginning of the week of new year with our traditional lunch at Joy King Lau restaurant in London's Chinatown. The establishment remains a favourite and Kirsty Norman, as usual, selected an excellent menu. As the meal came in unexpectedly under budget, members (who had pre-paid) were each presented with a lai see packet with a fiver in it, which added to the general happiness!

Two weeks later, to coincide with his visit to England from Hong Kong, David Bellis gave us a very well attended talk themed around views of and from Victoria Harbour, and using some more of his huge collection of pictures as can be seen on his website www.gwulo.com.

Several members were able to attend the funeral of our member Keith Stevens in Kent in August last year. Keith had not taken an active part in our activities for some time but he was much loved and respected by many both for his scholarship and his wonderful sense of humour.

We are due to hear a talk from his friend and colleague Gary Tiedemann on Keith's life and work on 2 April. Keith's three daughters and their families are planning to join us. Gary divides his times between Shandong University in Jinan in China, where he is a professor of Chinese history, and the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, where he is a professorial research associate at the China Institute.

Our venue remains the Royal Asiatic Society near Euston Station, whose only shortcoming is a shortage of Chinese restaurants in the neighbourhood. Our talks are invariably preceded by a lunch and so we alternate between a Szechuan restaurant and a south Indian vegetarian establishment with a wonderful buffet.

At our AGM in May, we are due to hear from Very Rev Stephen Sidebotham, the former Anglican Dean of Hong Kong, about the work of the church there and in China.

At this and any other of our very sociable events, Hong Kong members are most welcome.

Paul Bolding, March 2016