ANOTHER DONATION TO THE
HONG KONG BRANCH OF THE FOR THE ROYAL
ASIATIC SOCIETY

DAN WATERS

Our Branch possesses a number of archives and artefacts, including photographs. Details of these are given in an article by Dan Waters entitled, Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society: Possessions on Permanent Loan to other Institutions (JHKBRAS, Vol. 37, 1998, p. 177). In addition, 515 books and a number of items were kindly donated to our Branch by the late Arnold Graham. Please see Arnold Graham 1905-1996 by Dan Waters (JHKBRAS, Vol. 38, 1998-99, p.305).

In order to build up our collection, in February 2001, HKBRAS member Barbara Park suggested I write to Douglas Franklin who lives in Brisbane, Australia. Mr Franklin was very helpful and replied that he had some photographs in good condition and that he would be pleased to donate some to HKBRAS. We are extremely grateful to him for this donation.

The late Frederick Percy Franklin (father of Douglas Franklin who made the donation) emigrated from Bournemouth, England, to Sydney, Australia, in 1912. He joined the Australian army in 1915 and served in France. He first came to Hong Kong in 1922, when he was appointed Manager of the Hong Kong Telegraph. This was the daily afternoon paper published by the South China Morning Post.

As the Japanese approached the Colony all able-bodied British subjects were required to register for essential services. Frederick Franklin joined a British Royal Engineers unit. He was wounded on Christmas Day 1941 - the day Hong Kong fell. His wife, two daughters and son, Douglas - who was 14 at the time - were evacuated on British Government orders to Sydney in August 1940, together with 3,000 women and children.

When Hong Kong fell Frederick Franklin was captured and spent the whole of the war in the Argyle Street Prisoner of War Camp. After the war he returned to the South China Morning Post offices, then in
Wyndham Street, and set about getting the rusting machinery operating again. Luckily he was able to find pre-war newsprint in a disused godown and a working electric generator, which he transported to Wyndham Street. He had been appointed by the Royal Navy Commander in Chief of the liberation fleet as Press Liaison Officer and Controller of Government Printing, pending the return to civil administration.

As a result, Hong Kong’s first post-war newspaper came out on 30th August 1945. It was a single column sheet, nine inches by five, and in bold type under a big heading read: ‘Fleet Entering.’ Twenty thousand copies were run off and it was circulated free of charge. The same evening it was changing hands for one dollar. The following morning it was worth five dollars.

Frederick Franklin died in 1955 and was buried in the Colonial (now Hong Kong) Cemetery in Happy Valley. His son, Douglas, returned to England after war service with the Royal Australian Navy. He qualified at Cirencester, in England, and joined the Colonial Agricultural Service and was posted to Nigeria. After that country was granted independence in 1960 Douglas returned with his family to Australia. With his experience of tropical agriculture he joined the Agricultural Department in Papua New Guinea. His story and that of his family is fairly typical of many Britons and their relatives who enjoyed a peripatetic existence in the days of Empire.

Items donated by Douglas Franklin to our Branch comprise the following:

1. Presentation specimen (1 5/8 inches high by 2 inches diameter) of the first telephone cable connecting Canton (now Guangzhou) and Hong Kong, dated 1st September 1931. This was presented to Mr Franklin senior. His son today confirms that, in those days, there was splendid co-operation between the two cities

2. This consists of an ivory canister, about 3 inches high, which contains 30 “fortune sticks” inscribed on both sides. They are similar to the larger bamboo version frequently found on altars in Chinese temples in Hong Kong. After shaking the canister, if done correctly, one fortune stick “worms” its way up and drops out. One then reads the
inscription. The ivory canister is accompanied by a book to which one refers to read one’s fortune. In Cantonese, this method of fortune telling is called Cow Tsim.

3. A copy of the Hong Kong Telegraph Pictorial Supplement dated 2nd June, 1934. It includes a group photograph of staff and pupils of the Peak School among who is Douglas Franklin’s sister - Sylvia. Other photographs in the supplement include the construction of the Shing Mun dam, the latest fashion and high society of the day.

4. Photograph taken some time before Mr Frederick Franklin’s wedding in 1925. Mrs Franklin had been a nursing sister employed at the Government Civil Hospital in Western District. She originated from Scotland.

5. The old Peak Church, taken in 1925, where Frederick Franklin and his bride were married.

6. Saint John’s Cathedral Choir, on the steps of the Cenotaph in Statue Square, taken at the Armistice Service in 1938. The statue of Queen Victoria, under the canopy, is in the background. The Cenotaph is a smaller version of the one in Whitehall, London.

7. Christmas Fancy Dress Party at the Peak Hotel, 1924. The hotel was demolished after World War Two.

8. Snapshot of Mr Franklin senior with Sir Robert Ho Tung, one of Hong Kong’s most famous sons. Robert Ho Tung died in 1956. Although Eurasian he normally wore Chinese clothes.

9. Snapshot taken in 1924 of Frederick Franklin and the lady who later became his wife, together with a friend in front of a matshed at Repulse Bay. The three are in “whites” and, apart from pith helmets, the two men are dressed very much as we dressed in the 1950s and ’60s. Mr Franklin was wearing shorts and knee-length socks and his male companion was wearing a Saigon linen wet-wash suit.

10. Another snapshot taken in 1924; again, all three are wearing similar attire. Father sits on the running board of the car, which is definitely 1920s vintage.
11. and 12. Two World War Two shots of British soldiers although regiments and locations are not known.

13. and 14. Photocopies of the old British Central School at 136 Nathan Road, Kowloon, now the Antiquities and Monuments Office. This is where Douglas Franklin studied from 1936 to 1937. He then went to King George the Fifth School until he was evacuated to Australia in 1940.

15. A 1960s map of Victoria Peak District (photocopy).

16. Two newspaper cuttings dated 17 May 1955 giving accounts of the funeral and life of Mr Franklin senior.

17. A Hong Kong one-dollar bank note with the head of King George VI (1936-1952) on it.

Further information is written on the backs of photographs and snapshots.

All the above have been placed by HKBRAS, on Permanent Loan, with the Hong Kong Museum of History, where they are available for display and research purposes.

May I repeat that HKBRAS is extremely grateful to Douglas Franklin, a true Hong Konger having been born here, for his generous donation.