PROJECTS AND ENQUIRIES

DAN WATERS

The main role of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society is to organise lectures and visits both within and outside the Territory. We also publish an annual Journal together with other occasional publications and mount infrequent exhibitions. But in addition, the HKBRAS also undertakes various projects. Some of these are carried out by its Volunteers who assist the Government Antiquities and Monuments Office. See JHKBRAS, Volume 40, 2000, page 231.

Your Branch also receives enquiries, often from overseas, requesting assistance or information about Hong Kong history and the like. We normally help the enquirer if we can and treat it as a form of community service.

A typical example was in 1998 when we received a letter from the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia. They had received enquiries about the locations of seven graves thought to be in Hong Kong, ‘Could we help?’ Yes, we would try. This project has been written up in some detail under the title, “Tracing Graves in Hong Kong: Research Methodology,” by Dan Waters, see JHKBRAS, Volume 38, 1998-1999.

Then again two of our members living in England, Mrs Rosemary Lee and Captain Tony Bromfield, were undertaking research for the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia, about a Captain Samuel Plant. He was an authority on navigating the Upper Yangtze. There is an article about the good Captain and his wife in JHKBRAS, Volume 41, 2001.

In 1999, we received an enquiry from Australia from Victoria Brown. She wanted information about her great-grandmother, Miranda Main (née Mann), who was headmistress of Kowloon British School during the first decade of the 20th century. Again we were able to help.

Then we had an enquiry from a relative of Lieutenant Henry Dallas who died in Hong Kong in 1844. Up to World War Two there was a memorial to him in Saint John’s Cathedral. ‘No,’ we were informed, it
was not possible to erect a replacement plaque in the cathedral. The authorities concerned would not permit it.

Another interesting case was that of a clock made by Douglas Lapraik in Hong Kong in the mid 19th century. This story has been written up by the enquirer, Dr Peter Hansell, and an account is published in this volume of *JHKBRAS*.

Other enquiries have included a request from a family member about Thomas Child Hayllar who was Attorney General in Hong Kong in the middle of the 19th century. On similar lines, Francis Howell was also enquiring about family members named Eckford who worked in China and Hong Kong during the past two centuries.

On another occasion we received an enquiry from a HKBRAS overseas member for information about what appear to be bullet marks on the low boundary wall which runs along the east side of lower Stubbs Road. Although they were probably caused by machine gun fire during the attack by the Japanese, in December 1941, we have not been able to glean any detailed information about the actual incident.

Another enquirer, an academic living in New Zealand, wanted to know whether there were any roads, buildings or any monuments at all in Hong Kong in memory of Nurse Edith Cavell. She was executed by the Germans in Brussels, on 12 October 1915, for assisting Allied prisoners escape. As far as we know there is nothing erected in her memory in Hong Kong.

A gentleman from Britain wanted to learn more about his maternal grandfather who joined the colonial service in 1910, whereupon he was posted to Hong Kong and subsequently to Canton to learn Cantonese. During the run-up leading to the Sun Yat Sen Revolution, probably in May or June of 1911, the group of Hong Kong cadets was accosted by over-zealous Chinese officials. One of the cadets then drew his revolver and shot an official. The British gentleman has said that, according to family lore, his grandfather, Samuel Burnside Boyd McElderry, was able to calm the situation and talk the group out of the encounter. In spite of searches at the Hong Kong Public Records Office (who were extremely helpful) and elsewhere, no information has been gleaned about this incident.
The HKBRAS has a fairly large and talented membership with people specialising in a variety of fields. If you have helped in any way with answering any of the above enquiries, or with any of our projects, we offer our thanks. In this regard we should offer a special word of thanks to our Honorary Vice President, the Reverend Carl T Smith, whose card index "Smith Collection" has been particularly useful for reference purposes. I must add that the above list of projects is not exhaustive.