BOOK REVIEWS

Solomon Bard (2002), *Voices From the Past: Hong Kong 1842-1918*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 383 pages, with a Message from Joseph Ting, $250.

Quoting from Joseph Ting’s Message, ‘...there are various approaches to the study of history. In *Voices From the Past: Hong Kong 1842-1918*, Dr Solomon Bard has chosen to view Hong Kong’s history through the columns of newspapers at before. Through these the time - an approach which has perhaps not been sufficiently explored newspaper excerpts, people from the past speak directly to us expressing contemporary views, ideas, daily concerns, both important and trivial. Although compiled from the English-language newspapers only, I believe it is still a valuable contribution to our knowledge and appreciation of this period of Hong Kong’s history.’

Solly’s book is, essentially, a series of extracts from English-language newspapers of the period, accompanied in many instances by editorial comments - and sanctimonious sermonising on occasions - by himself. The trouble with history is that it is all too easy to comment upon it using today’s “values” (which in many cases are not better - and oftentimes worse - than those that they superseded) rather than the values of the day.

The question, of course, is are we to believe the newspapers of the 19th and early 20th centuries any more than we believe them now? The term “newspaper” has become increasingly a contradiction in terms, with the media’s inclination to comment on the news rather than report it. This is easy if one is a frontline spectator, not directly involved.
Solly's book is a pleasant coffee-table read and quite humorous in places. The best aspect of it, for me, is the collection of early photographs. Some are well known, others are unusual and interesting - particularly of spectacular buildings long since demolished (critics would say destroyed). Solly's preservational instincts come through strongly here, an issue on which we are decidedly of the same mind.

PETER HALLIDAY

Gillian Bickley, The Development of Education in Hong Kong, 1841-1897, as Revealed by the Early Education Reports of the Hong Kong Government, 1848-1896 is a contribution towards the conservation and understanding of one aspect of Hong Kong's heritage while also providing a resource for the study of Hong Kong history. This book, sponsored by the Council of the Lord Wilson Heritage Trust, presents as part of Hong Kong's heritage the official record of the early educational work of the British Hong Kong administration, in place from 1841 to 1897. The Reports now published together in sequence, corrected and edited, for the first time, give insight into the development of Hong Kong society, particularly of course its educational system and the administration of education, but also the relationships between and among the different groups of people living in Hong Kong, with their varying aspirations and different ways of living and thinking. This