THE HONG KONG AMATEUR DRAMATIC CLUB
AND ITS PREDECESSORS

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THE PROLOGUE

To set the mood for an article on Amateur Dramatics in Hong Kong, I quote a prologue to the performance of "the screaming farce", 'I've Written to Brown' presented on 21 April 1871 by the Hong Kong Amateurs.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the pleasing task
Is mine tonight your kindly smiles to ask,
For those who now behind the curtain wait,
With biding, anxious hearts to learn their fate. . .
So let your verdict generous be, the while
We strive a pleasant hour to beguile.
But who can now a pleasant hour boast,
With thirteen steamers daily up the coast —
Sharebrokers pressing one to sell or buy —
With telegrams each minute from Shanghai —
With stern Welsh witnesses, who'd rather brook
A Judge's ire than kiss a dirty book,
And, by their word prepared to stand or fall
Say they'll be — if they will swear at all!
With piece goods market all to pieces gone,
Through sales of damaged shirtings ex the Don,
And, piling agony, beyond endurance
With Oily Phantom's new Chinese Insurance;†
Where, of our interests most august protectors,
They've such a crushing army of Directors!
Since last we met, though some enlivening rays
Of social light have cheered our nights and days,
A quiet Picnic to Victoria Peak
Photos in High Life, taken once a week

† The American firm of Olyphant and Company organized in 1871 at Hong Kong the Chinese Insurance Company. It was the first insurance company on the China coast to cater especially to Chinese shippers and merchants. Its Board was composed of both Chinese and foreigners.
Some of the local references are lost to us today, but then they brought smiles, if not laughter. A history of the Amateurs picks up some of the lighter side of life in Hong Kong in the past.

THE CURTAIN RISES

Soon after Hong Kong was established as a British military base in China officialdom encouraged amateur theatricals as a wholesome diversion from the tedium of military life.

The first attempt to bring drama to Hong Kong was to have been a combination of professionals and amateurs, but the project came to an abrupt end before it was well under way. A flamboyant Frenchman from Singapore named Gaston Dutronquoy announced in November 1842 that he had obtained the permission of the authorities to erect a theatre “on a grand and imposing scale” behind his tavern, the London Hotel, which was located on Queen’s Road.

He informed an interested public that though the Theatre was not yet built, the actresses had already arrived. Backed by a claim of official sanction and available talent, Mr. Dutronquoy with his own flair for the theatrical announced “to the nobility, gentry and clergy of this flourishing and opulent Colony that their Theatre is advancing rapidly towards completion. It is on a most splendid scale, and what with the pieces that will be performed, the scenery that will be produced, and the splendid assemblage of rank, beauty and fashion which they hope to be honoured with, there is no doubt but that the blaze of splendour will dazzle the eyes of all beholders”.

† As I wrote this paper more for entertainment than scholarship, I have not included documentation. The notices and reviews of the plays have been found in the local press: *The Friend of China, The China Mail, The Hong Kong Register, The Daily Press, The Hong Kong Telegraph* and *The South China Morning Post*. The appended list of performances and dates has been compiled from the same sources.
by their spotless virtues”. A claim that must have raised a few eyebrows.

While the actresses were available, there seemed some doubt about the actors. Lord Saltoun, Commander of the Forces, noted on the 25 November 1842 that the Theatre was to open on Wednesday, “But who are to be the actors, I have no idea. I believe some amateurs from the navy”.

Once opened, the life of the Theatre was short. Mr. Dutronquoy departed from Hong Kong quite suddenly on the 17th of December. It was alleged that he had to close his Hotel and Theatre under orders from the authorities and pay a fine of $500. This was denied by his agent who stated that the reason for the closure was because Mr. Dutronquoy had “received personal violence added to insult and abuse the preceding evening”. One wonders if the “spotless virtues” of the actresses may have been the cause of his troubles.

The next notice of dramatics is in December 1844 when a proposal to form a company of amateurs under the patronage of the Governor was announced. It was expressly stated that the authorities regarded the project as a “protection against vice”. Little action took place, however, until the winter of 1845-46 when a group had been organized, a venue secured, and five bills put on between December and June at Aqui’s Theatre in the Lower Bazaar.

This theatre had been erected some few months previous to the amateurs’ first performance there. It was intended for Chinese entertainment, but, being available, it was used by the Hong Kong Amateurs even though it was in the heart of the Chinese section of the city, an area which was usually avoided by the European population of the day.

Loo Aqui, the owner of the Theatre, was a leader of the Chinese community. It was alleged that he was allied with pirates but during the recent British-Chinese hostilities he had been very useful in securing provisions for the British forces. As a reward for these services he had been permitted to take up a number of lots in the Lower Bazaar, the area which was allotted to Chinese who had aided the British. On his property, Loo Acqui
established brothels, a gambling hall, opium divans, a temple, his family house and the Theatre.

As the location and arrangements of Acqui's Theatre were not very satisfactory, there was a movement to build something more suitable. Immediately after the first performance of the Amateurs, it was announced that plans for a new theatre were under consideration. The China Mail, 8 January 1846, gave its full support:

We are glad to learn there is at length a fair prospect of a Theatre being erected in Hong Kong. The project was suggested last year, and as it not only met with general approbation from the public, but received the sanction of His Excellency and the support of the civil and military servants of the Government, it is rather inexplicable how it was suffered to drop. We are indebted, we believe, to the same parties who lately favoured the public with an amateur performance in the Lower Bazaar, for taking the matter up again, and they seem now to have begun very properly by first testing the feelings of the middle classes upon the very important point of subscriptions. We are assured that the amount already subscribed for is more than half what will be required to erect a spacious building, adapted alike for the purposes of a Theatre and a Ballroom, or a hall for public meetings. With some proofs of support from the community at large, we trust the Governor's patronage will be continued, and the merchants and official gentlemen will take the matter up in good earnest, and complete what has already been auspiciously begun. When the plans are sufficiently matured we would suggest the propriety of bringing them before the public in a well defined shape, by circular, or advertisement in the public papers. For this purpose our columns will be at the service of the committee gratuitously.

A meeting to enlist shareholders was held at the house of Leonard Just, a watchmaker, in February 1846. The eventual outcome of the meeting was the erection of the Victoria Theatre on the hill behind the Hong Kong Club. The lot was up Wyndham Street somewhat to the south of Wellington Street.
The ground had been originally purchased from the Government as a speculative venture by one of Hong Kong's early entrepreneurs, George Duddell. His name is perpetuated in Duddell Street.

THE VICTORIA THEATRE

Duddell sold the southern half of the lot in March 1846 to the Trustees of the Hong Kong Theatrical Company. They were John Cairns, editor of the Hong Kong Register, Robert Strachan, a small-scale merchant, and Edward Farncomb, Hong Kong's first enrolled solicitor. Two years later, after the building was erected, the Trustees had to convey the lot back to Duddell due to financial difficulties.

The new theatre was described as "large and well adapted to the climate, it affords good accommodations both for the dispensers of the drama and the audiences". It was named the Victoria Theatre.

The first performance in the new building was on 1 November 1848 under the patronage of H.E. Governor Bonham. The announcement stated that "The Proprietors of the above Theatre, having received assistance from a few young Gentlemen, lovers of the Drama, whose desire is to add to the few amusements of the Colony; the Public are respectfully invited to witness their feeble efforts at an Amateur performance". The programme consisted of "the popular farce, 'The Weathercock', to be succeeded by a comic song, the whole concludes with the Farce, 'The Rival Valets'". Newspaper reviews reported that the Theatre was "well ventilated and brilliantly lighted — in short the arrangements and decorations throughout reflect the highest credit on the manager".

Unfortunately the Governor was unable to be present due to a recent injury. The reporter remarked that this was "a circumstance to which doubtless is attributable the absence of a number of fair colonists, who would have otherwise graced the occasion. Nevertheless the house was filled with an audience of highest respectability".

"Respectable" audiences were necessary to make the venture
acceptable to the better parts of the community. There were those who looked with disfavour on the theatre. The behavior of the habitues of the pit, as well as vulgarities in some of the productions of the day, brought the stage into disrepute among the strait-laced. Attitudes were beginning to change, however; in part this was due to attendance at the theatre of that most moral Queen, Victoria.

As for the quality of the inaugural performance at the Victoria Theatre in Hong Kong, a reviewer said of the actors, "though somewhat behind the great houses, yet they were such as to give hope of good things ere long. It must be borne in mind, that with several of the performers it was their first appearance on any stage". On the other hand, so few were interested in appearing on the stage, it was a matter for concern as "the corps dramatique consists of only eight members — it does not auger well for the general diffusion of dramatic talent among the 'aspiring youth' of the colony". At the next performance, the reviewer faced the dilemma of how to criticize amateurs and still not discourage them. He gently suggests that "we may perhaps be allowed to hint, that a little more time and attention would not be ill-bestowed by the performers in studying the characters they assume as some are considerably over-acted. But our wish is not to be censorious".

After this initial burst, amateur dramatics limped for three seasons and then faced death. In 1852 under a heading "The expiring drama" amateurs were invited to attend a meeting at the City Hotel "to plan for a series of productions for the season in order to prevent the demolition of the Victoria Theatre". There was a revival of interest and the season opened in January. It was noted that the new group, which called itself the Victoria Amateurs, was received "with unmingled applause by the fullest and most fashionable audience we ever witnessed in the Theatre — or anywhere else in Hong Kong".

Revived interest in amateur dramatics was necessary if the Theatre was not to be converted to other uses for it was not a paying venture for its proprietor, George Duddell. The Anglican Bishop had offered to lease it from him for conversion into a Sailors Home. Duddell, however, had interests of his own in
seamen's boarding houses and did not welcome pious competition. Rather than lease it to the Bishop he preferred to turn it into a sail-loft. However, the meeting at the City Hotel to revive interest in drama raised enough money by subscription to lease the building for another season.

The building was to be used not only as a theatre, but as a venue for Balls, meetings and other public purposes, but further funds were needed for refurbishing the building which had fallen into disrepair through infrequent use and the natural effect of time. The newly formed Theatrical Committee reported that "the interior will require repainting, and considerable alteration in seats. The roof ought to be lined with wood. This would improve appearance and acoustics. The stage should be lengthened by carrying it back some twelve or fourteen feet". The Committee also reported that they had been successful in securing a group of amateurs who agreed to perform on the condition that tickets be issued gratis, "so as to secure attendance alone of the respectable portion of the community". This stipulation suggests that the earlier efforts of amateurs may have failed because rowdies had taken over and driven away audiences.

Although the season got off to a good start, there was not sufficient financial support to sustain it. No more performances are reported in the Theatre. The last notice I have found of the building is in 1859 when an auction was advertised at the "Old Theatre next to the Oriental Hotel".

PORTUGUESE AND GERMANS

Through the years notices of performances by Portuguese amateurs appear. The first mention is in 1847 for a production at the "Theatro da Sociedade" at which music was provided by the visiting Macao Band. In 1852 the "Theatrino Particular" on Wellington Street announced a performance of Portuguese amateurs. One of the pieces presented was by young boys aged between eight and fifteen. The next year the boys performed in the Victoria Theatre under the direction of the schoolmaster, Mr. J.J. da Silva e Souza. As an entre-act four young girls performed a Spanish dance, the "Guarrache".
With children performing there was no question of respectability. It was announced some weeks after the first performance that “several ladies having expressed regret at not witnessing the late performance of the Portuguese children, Mr. Souza, with the consent of the parents, and at the request of the Committee, has consented to repeat the performance at an early date”.

In 1866 the Portuguese community built a club house at Shelley and Elgin Streets. Attached to it was a small theatre. It was used not only by Portuguese amateurs but, before the opening of the Theatre Royal in the City Hall in 1869, it was the venue for the productions of the Amateur Dramatic Club. The Theatre portion of Club Lusitano was demolished in 1873.

The Germans built a club house on Wyndham Street in 1872. It contained a small auditorium. German amateur groups used it for plays and operettas. More appreciated by the non-German speaking community were the concerts and the appearance of Liedertafel singing groups.

THE A.D.C — BORN IN A MATSHED

An Amateur Theatrical Society was formed in 1860. Its membership was made up of both civilians and military officers.

For the 1860-61 season they erected a new matshed. It was said that in its internal arrangements there was “no lack of comfort, indeed elegance has received its share of attention”. It included a continental innovation — the prompter’s box was placed in the centre in front of the curtain “according to the French custom”.

The Committee of the Society came under attack for alleged misuse of funds. At the second performance of the 1861 season it was deemed necessary to make a public statement refuting accusations which had appeared in the local press. The Committee had been charged “with spending the profits in cold fowl and sherry behind the scenes.” Two professional ladies of the stage also figured in the accusations. The newspaper account of the public explanation concluded with the sentiment that “Hong Kong thanks the Amateurs and has fullest confidence in the
management. We hope they may not be out of pocket as the Garrison Company was last year."

After the initial ballyhoo about the Committee, described as a "scolding given in true washer-woman style", which only amused the town, the season was a great success. A slightly sour note was injected into the 1862-63 season because only four performances were given, while it had been announced when advertising for subscriptions that there would be six. Complaints compounded in 1863-64 when prices were advanced to a sum which was thought to be "just beyond the limit to which a class were prepared to pay for entertainment". Consequently, the theatre for the first performance was only half filled.

The 1865-66 season also began inauspiciously. At a meeting in November to arrange for the coming season, there was such poor attendance that it was feared the Amateurs might have to give up.

When the Amateur Dramatic Corps looked back on its history, it gave its founding date as 1860, however, in the announcements of the group in the 1860s it is called the Hong Kong Amateur Theatrical Society.

THE THEATRE ROYAL

Amateur dramatics took on a new vigour with the organisation or reorganisation of the theatrical group in 1860. Revived interest emphasised the need of a suitable theatre. Until the opening of the Theatre Royal in the City Hall in 1869, various makeshift arrangements had to be made after the Victoria Theatre was closed in the 1850s.

In 1861, the *China Mail* looked toward the future:

We hope the time is not distant when a neat permanent building constructed on the best known principles of acoustics will take the place of the temporary mat sheds, which need so much exertion on the performers part, and indulgence on that of the audience. The acoustics are bad. Now that the capability of having these entertainments annually is beginning to be procured, it would be well to take measures soon, to
see what should be done toward erecting a permanent theatre”.

The year following, 1862, plans for a Theatre and Assembly Room were on view at the Hong Kong Club. They were estimated to cost $34,000, but a newspaper reporter was more realistic. In his opinion “a glance shows it would cost $60,000 at least”.

Something as ambitious as this had to wait some years. It was finally realized with the opening of the City Hall in 1869. In the meantime, mat sheds, a large room in St. Andrew’s School and the Club Lusitano were used.

A public meeting in 1864 resolved that the Amateur Theatrical Matshed should be kept and a committee appointed to see to its preservation. One happy feature was the debt-free state of the theatre following a successful season. During the 60s there were notices of the Queen’s Theatre on Queen’s Road East. It was probably the adapted godown mentioned in the columns of Jarrett in his series “Old Hongkong” in the South China Morning Post. A Theatre Royal was on military ground, used not only for performances by the Garrison but also by visiting professional dramatic companies. In 1865 it was announced it was to be pulled down “for much needed barrack improvements”. After its demolition, the Garrison amateurs used the Murray Barracks Canteen.

The general public expressed its appreciation to the military for permitting the theatre to occupy their ground. It had, however, been a hot, stuffy place, poorly ventilated.

**TYPES OF DRAMA**

All the early productions of the amateurs were described variously as farce, burlesque, comic drama, facetious tragedy, vaudeville comedy or burlesque extravaganza.

Perhaps the first play of a mere serious tone was given in 1875, when “Plot and Passion” by Thomas Taylor and J. Lang was presented. It was noted, however, that a drawback to such a play was its love scenes, as these were difficult when played by males only companies. The reviewer thought that while it
was commendable that the A.D.C. had departed from farce and burlesque, its venture into something more serious was not altogether successful; but the fault may have been not in the type of drama but in the type of characters of the particular play. It was the opinion of the reviewer that “In selecting plays they should have no out-of-the-way characters. A success at home may not be suited to Amateurs, such as these in Hong Kong. Some dramas are written for special actors”. He suggested that “perhaps the amateurs could give a selection — perhaps one or two scenes, or an act — from a standard play, for example the scene between Woolsey and Cromwell in Henry VIII.” This had been done by the Hon. Mr. York at the inauguration of the City Hall’s Theatre Royal in 1869 during the visit of His Royal Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh.

The suggestion was not taken up, and the Company attempted another serious piece, the popular play “The Caste”. In this the amateurs had to compete against the standard set by performances given a short time before by two different travelling professional companies in which actresses played the female parts. The comparison was not kind to the amateurs. As usual, the reviewer was reluctant to criticize, but he did venture to say that the performance might tend to lessen subscriptions for the next season. He thought too much had been spent on the costumes, when in fact, in his view, “people go to see acting not wardrobe”.

The A.D.C. returned to something lighter, and in 1876 put on a very successful burlesque, “The Field of the Cloth of Gold,” by William Brough. The opening scene in the London production had been the harbour of Calais, in Hong Kong it was the Praya between City Hall and the Bath House of the Victoria Recreation Club. The field of the cloth of gold was East Point. Though it was agreed that there was not much scope for dramatic talent in the piece, it was pronounced “an undoubted success, and far surpasses, in splendour of the get up, number of performers, and brilliancy of the scenes, anything hitherto placed on the boards of this colony”. Unfortunately, its lavishness had to be paid for and it took several seasons before the A.D.C. had a balance.

One of the perennial favourites was the burlesque “Alladin the Wonderful Scamp”. It was given in 1863, 1867, 1875
and 1877. The burlesques were particularly popular because local references could be injected into them. For instance in the 1877 performance of Alladin, the following takes place in the Sultan's Palace:

We ha'n't been asked to Government House; perhaps
Sir Arthur's busy packing up his traps.*
The time, alas, is drawing very nigh
When I shall have to call and say goodbye
Adding, 'Good voyage, and good wind, good water"
Both to Sir Arthur and his charming daughter.
I'm sure that everybody here who knows him
Is very sorry we're about to lose him,
And when he leaves as I can only hope
That we may job along as pleasantly with Pope†
Free from disasters, typhoons and tornados
Or "rows" like those which happened in Barbadoes. =

The musical finale was composed by a local music teacher, Professor Felix Panizza. The scenery was painted by Mr. Kerr (probably Charles Morland Kerr, accountant at the Oriental Bank) and Mr. Marciano Baptista, Junior, whose father had been a pupil of Chinnery at Macao. In the second act Queen's Road was depicted as a thoroughfare in the capital of China.

ENTER THE LADIES

Before 1879 there were no ladies in the productions of the A.D.C. Female roles were taken by men. This was acceptable for farces and burlesques but not so suitable for realistic love-scenes. A review of a production in 1870 noticed, however, that "Miss de la Courcy has certainly the happiest way of performing female parts. Her performance showed her knowledge of the woman's character".

* Sir Arthur Edward Kennedy, Governor of Hong Kong April 1872 — March 1877.
† Sir John Pope Hennessy, Governor of Hong Kong April 1877— March 1882.
= There had been disturbances during Governor Hennessy's administration at Barbadoes.
But things changed with the appearance of Mrs. Ayres* on the amateur stage in 1879 in the production of Sheridan's "The School for Scandal". Two other ladies were courageous enough to join her. Mrs. Ayres used the stage name of Mrs. Bernard. The other ladies were listed as Mrs. Hockey (Mrs. Atwell Coxon) and Madame Chervau (probably Mrs. Vaucher).

At every performance Mrs. Ayres received enthusiastic notices: On her appearance in 1880 in "New Men and Old Acres", the reviewer said,

It is an unqualified pleasure to see this gifted lady on the stage. Her ease, grace and perfect action are something wonderful and her power to depict character amounts to something like genius. She was the gay, true hearted girl of eighteen to the life; and as she portrayed the joys and sorrows of the English girl, she swayed the audience to tears and laughter as she willed.

In a production given a year later, it was noted.

This power to move the feelings of an intellectual and intelligently-critical audience is not given to many amateurs, especially to ladies who kindly consent to promote wholesome public recreation in this way; but Mrs. Bernard has certainly given the most conclusive proofs that such may be achieved in this direction and it is hoped that the example thus shown by her and the other ladies who have taken part in these innocent enjoyable entertainments will by followed by others. Her last performance in Hong Kong was in September 1883 when she appeared in "She Stoops to Conquer". As usual, the reviewer was enthusiastic.

One great advantage enjoyed by Mrs. Bernard is her apparently perfect confidence in her own powers. The result of this confidence is an ease, naturalness and accuracy in her acting, which must be envied by other amateurs who have not graced the boards as often as Mrs. Bernard. Mrs. Bernard also gets an excellent conception of the roles in which she plays, bringing out all the points and idiosyncrasies of the characters she is representing.

* Probably wife of Dr. P.B.C. Ayres, Colonial Surgeon 1873-1897.
In 1886 a musical sketch was introduced entitled “Cups and Saucers”. It was written by George Goldsmith, Junior, as a satire against the craze of the day for collecting blue and white china at exorbitant prices. There were only two characters, one male, one female, the latter played by Mrs. Fraser-Smith, wife of the editor of the *Hong Kong Telegraph*. It contained the song “Foo-chow chan — aring, ching a ring China”.

The Club announced another serious production for 1888, “The Rivals”. There was the inevitable comparison with the earlier performance of “The School for Scandal”.

When it was announced that the A.D.C. had resolved to play Sheridan’s comedy of “The Rivals”, many residents entertained the feeling that they had undertaken too much, although against this idea it could well be argued that the performances here of “The School for Scandal” were most enjoyable, it was argued that Sheridan’s masterpiece was placed before the Hong Kong public when the A.D.C. was in the heyday of its existence. Furthermore the successions of costume and scenery possible in “The School” were not available in “The Rivals”. Looking at both of these performances, however, and taking into account the gorgeousness of scenery and dressing in “The School” as well as the exceptional ability of several of the actors who have passed away from these shifting scenes, we do not find that the A.D.C. did an unwise thing in deciding upon “The Rivals”. The Amateurs and the public have had their share of burlesque and of modern pieces of late; and it was, we think, a healthy change to come back to the legitimate comedy of the last century.

The reviewer noted that two of the actors in “The Rivals” were well on their way to filling up a gap left by the retirement of Mr. Hockey (Mr. Atwell Coxon) and Mr. Treab (Mr. Beart), an accomplished comedian. One of the newcomers was Mr. James Whittall later to become a taipan at Jardine Matheson and Company.

A first of a series of Christmas pantomines was staged in 1889. It had “splendid spectacular effects, light and appropriate
music, a dazzling transformation scene, and a rollicking harlequinade.” It enlisted a great many people for the leads, chorus and orchestra.

Not everyone in Hong Kong was happy about pantomimes. In 1891 in the “Beauty and the Beast” “the indiscreet censure lately passed by the Bishop upon the Pantomime was noticed in a verse or so—and a comical but somewhat misplaced representative of his Lordship appeared in the Harlequinade”.

The A.D.C. tried its hand at light opera in 1894 with the performance of Gilbert and Clay’s “Princess Tote”. It was described, however, as “vapid and unattractive”. The Choral Society had for some years been presenting light operas and had already given “Iolanthe” and “The Gondolier”. In subsequent years the A.D.C. did “Trial by Jury”, “Yeomen of the Guard”, “His Excellency”, and “The Gondolier”.

During this same period along with the works of Gilbert and Sullivan other currently popular musical plays were staged.

THE GENIUS OF MR. SINCLAIR

With more frequent visits of professional companies, the A.D.C. increasingly found it difficult to sustain interest and attendance. This resulted in financial losses and threatened the future of the Amateurs. A new era arrived when Mr. Walter Sinclair assumed direction of A.D.C. productions in 1912.

Sinclair was imaginative and venturesome and mounted productions that were different from those presented by the travelling companies. The A.D.C. took on new life.

Among Sinclair’s innovations was his introduction to Hong Kong of the playwright Lord Dunsany. In 1921 he presented an evening’s programme of four Dunsany plays. One of these was “The Compromise of the King of the Golden Isle”. It was the play’s world premier. The setting was Chinese. During the interval preceding it, to set the mood, a group of Chinese amateur musicians played Chinese music. It was particularly noted that the music “was not unpleasing, for people who have heard only the cymbals and tom toms may find music in the sweetness of some of the native banjos and fiddles”.

The opportunity to give a world premier came about in this fashion. Early in the year Mr. Sinclair directed students at the University of Hong Kong in two Dunsany plays. They did not attract much public attention, but Sinclair sent photographs of the production along with some newspaper notices to Lord Dunsany. As a result he wrote a play about the Gold Isles and sent the manuscript to Mr. Sinclair with the intention that it also should by performed by the students. Unfortunately, they were not able to do so, so Sinclair as one of the popular A.D.C. directors decided to have a Dunsany evening and include "The Compromise of the King of the Golden Isles". It was full of colour, filled with pomp and ceremony. It is interesting to note that the late Noel Croucher served as a bodyguard in one of the crowd scenes and that Sinclair had consulted Sir Robert Kotewall and Mr. Fung Yuk-shum to get authenticity for the Chinese costumes and other details.

In 1926 the A.D.C. performed Dunsany's most successful play "If," His plays have been described as "decorative drama". Many of them had settings in the Near and Far East.

W. Sinclair was both an innovator and a man of cosmopolitan tastes. During the years he produced plays for the A.D.C., the repertoire ranged from Shakespeare to the future and from fantasy to realism.

The Hong Kong Mummers presented "Twelfth Night" in 1913. It was directed by Mr. Siegler, a name assumed by Mr. Sinclair for some of his early productions in Hong Kong. He later abandoned this pseudonym. "Twelfth Night" was billed as the first amateur production of Shakespeare in the Far East. This claim was corrected by the Tokyo A.D.C. which had presented "As You Like It" in 1906, "Midsummer Night's Dream" in 1911 and "The Merchant of Venice" in 1912. The Hong Kong A.D.C. had assisted Miss Janet Waldorf and her small company of professionals in "As You Like It" in 1899. It was scheduled for an outdoor performance on the Parade Ground, but this was rained out and it was held in the Theatre Royal. Weather did permit a second performance on the Parade Ground. In 1922, the A.D.C. under Sinclair produced "The Tempest".

"The Blue Bird" by Maeterlink was given in 1914. It was
described as a “fairy play”. It was an ambitious effort with 100 performers, 50 children, 50 trained birds and a special corps de ballet of 25 and an orchestra of 25. It was a great success. In keeping with the title the theatre was decorated in blue. As the performance was in aid of the Prince of Wales Fund, massive oil paintings of the King and Queen and Prince of Wales painted by Yee Cheong of Wyndham Street,* were prominently displayed.

A similar production, not quite so lavish, was put on the next year. It was a fairy ballet entitled “Snow White and the Frog Prince”. It was in aid of the Belgium Relief Fund.

Another very elaborate production was “Kismet”, an oriental extravaganza, in 1916. It was in aid of the Star and Garter Fund. All the productions during the war period were in aid of some war related fund. Original music for “Kismet” was written by Mr. Norman Peterkin of the Robinson Piano Company.

“Pinkie and the Fairies”, yet another extravaganza, was staged in 1919. It had over sixty performers. The late Sophie Weill Odell appeared as one of the fairies — a proper introduction to a long association with the stage through her impresario husband Harry Odell. The programme for “Pinkie and the Fairies” listed all the productions of the A.D.C. since 1870.

Not all Sinclair’s plays were along the exotic line. In 1916, there was “The Angel in the House” — the success of this play depended on subtle satiric portrayal of character. It put a great demand on an amateur group. Even more demanding was the 1925 production of Shaw’s “St. Joan”. It was hailed as the greatest triumph of the A.D.C.’s existence. “A great play, magnificently acted” — “Memory fades and achievements diminish; time weaves a dusty web over the past and the glamour of a praise-worthy act wears off. History never dies, nor will this epoch-making performance of the A.D.C. be forgotten when the social history of Hong Kong is compiled”.

Sinclair also appreciated the sophisticated humour of Noel Coward. “I’ll Leave It to You” was staged by him in 1922. It had been Coward’s first play produced in London, some two years previous to its Hong Kong appearance.

* Hong Kong Daily Press, 1 Apr. 1884, Advertisement: Yee Cheong, portrait painter, studio corner of Wyndham and Wellington Streets.
Coward was followed, in 1923, with a science-fiction drama, "R.U.R." or "Rossums Universal Robots". It was written by Karel Capek, a Czechoslovakian. The reviewer linked some political events with the theme of the play: "Saturday night brought us definite news of the elections at Home indicating how the workers of the country, dissatisfied with their lot, turned upon the Government and rose in support of the red flag of Labour. It was a coincidence that on the same night the Hong Kong A.D.C. introduced to the Colony a race of soulless, voteless men-machines, made by man in his own image to do the work of the world while the rest of us recline leisurely in our armchairs; told us they developed discontent and turned and rent their human tyrants".

Walter Sinclair left Hong Kong in 1925. He continued his directing career in Toronto, Canada and the United States.

After his departure, the A.D.C. largely reverted to comedy. It would be unfair, however, to suggest that all their productions fell into the category of the title of a 1925 piece of the A.D.C., "A Little Bit of Fluff". In the years immediately preceding the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, plays were presented by such respectable authors as Emlyn Williams, Terrance Rattigan and Somerset Maugham.

THE LOCAL SCENE

Opportunities were seized to inject local allusions in productions. As an example we give excerpts from the burlesque "Fra Diavolo" given by the Rifle Brigade. The author J. H. Thresher used the original by Byron only as a skeleton on which to lay topical references. His efforts were described as having a decided Gilbertian vein.

As befitting a production of the garrison some of the local allusions were military, as for instance the following references to the barracks at Kowloon. During an altercation between Lord and Lady Allcash, the Lord says to the Lady:

... Madam, drive me not.
For if you do, I'll show you soon what's what;
I'll make things fly, just like the late typhoon
Smashed up the matsheeds over at Kowloon;  
And here, perhaps, I may be allowed to say  
Apropos of nothing in the play,  
These Kowloon matsheeds are a perfect bane;  
They're hot and stuffy and let in the rain;  
And oh! those musical and parched mosquetoes  
When they are hungry, dent they fairly us.  
The British soldiers should have bricks and mortar.  
Our Ayran* brother has them, then we oughter.

Then there were the opinions of life at the lower end of the military hierarchy. Giocomo and Beppo treat sarcastically the soldiers life — they have just been encouraged to “go and enlist — you’ll have extensive pay”. Giacomo replies:

And get boiled beef for dinner every day.  
A soldier’s life ain’t quite all beer and skittles,  
There’s too much guard and not enough o’ vittles.

And as for Beppo:

Me be a soldier — not much. I couldn’t stick it  
What price the slow march in defaulter’s piquet,  
Instruction drill and then fatigues, although  
We don’t mind working for the good old P. and O.**  
I rather fancy we should greatly like  
To see the coolies go again on strike.  
A dib a day, more beer than we can carry  
Is better than parade in Happy Valley  
If that were all they did I would enlist.

The long delayed unveiling of the Queen Victoria Jubilee statue† in Statue Square drew comment when Fra Diavolo, being pounced upon by villagers, expresses surprise:

Well, landlord, may I beg an explanation  
Of this great rising of the population?  
Perhaps another statue has been found

---

* Native Indian troops also stationed at Kowloon.

** During a coolie strike in 1895 soldiers were used to load and unload cargoes.

† The statue was commissioned in 1890. It was not unveiled until May 1896.
After nine years a lying-underground
That wants unvieling; is it the Duke of Connaught?
I fear we cannot hold him tho' we ought.
Has Chater† found his long-last C.M.G.
Or is the new club†† opened by the sea?

Even the Kowloon-Canton Railway is referred to a dozen or so years before it became a fact.††† Fra Diavolo comments on reading a newspaper:

Next comes the news China is awaking
Railways in all directions she is making.
Fancy from Kowloon city setting forth,
'Change here for Shanghai, Peking, and the North'.

One of the lyrics gave tips for cutting a figue during the pre-race season:

If you want to know the way to be a genuine Hong Kong sport,
Listen to me.
A griffen* you must have of course, no matter of what sort.
At five o'Clock o' morning you must trudge to the course;
A stop watch in your pocket is the game;
And though you need not know a job about a horse
They may think you Morny Cannon all the same.
Come along with me, come along with me.
With boots and breeches spick and span,
The latest pattern from Ah Man.**

† Sir Paul Chater, Hong Kong merchant and philanthropist. Made Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George 1897.
†† The Hong Kong Club moved from Queen's Road and Wyndham Street to its new building on the Praya (now Connaught Road) 26 July 1897.
††† William Danby, Civil Engineer, was requested by Chinese authorities to make a survey of a railway line from Canton to Kowloon (Daily Press 30 Aug. 1884). In 1888 a group of Chinese capitalists in Hong Kong revived a scheme to build the railroad. They received permission to proceed from the Peking Government in 1890. A survey team began work in July 1890 (Daily Press 12, 18 June, 17 July 1890). The project fell through. One of its promoters, Lo Hok-pang, formed another syndicate at Canton in 1892, but again the proposal had to be dropped. (Hong Kong Telegraph 28 Oct. 1892).
* One of the China ponies sent from North China to Shanghai and then to Hong Kong.
** A Chinese tailor.
And then a good old China Hand you'll Be.

Such references brought drama down to the daily life of the theatre goer in Hong Kong.

HOME GROWN PLAYWRIGHTS

The Hong Kong Daily Press in 1894 published a play by Henry E. Pollick† entitled “Soso: A Drama of the Day”. It does not seem to have been staged in Hong Kong.

“The Cook: an Idyll of the Peak” was produced at the Theatre Royal in 1912. It was written by R.M. Crosse, of the Royal Artillery. The plot revolved around a search for a cook when a mess of the 445th Regiment, comfortably stationed at the Peak, had to replace their competent cook who had disappeared a few days before the expected arrival of the Brigadier General.

Two years later Mr. Crosse wrote another more ambitious piece which he characterized as “a musical stunt in two acts” entitled “The Idol’s Eye”. The first act was set in England at a garden party. The second act’s setting was the How Kwik monastery in the Province of Kwangtung. One of the principal characters Lai On is the “boy” of an official in the Chinese Maritime Customs. He penetrated into the monastery to secure the Idol’s jade eye by the pretext of becoming a novice. In case any should have been put off from attending by the problem of the language a Chinese character might use, they were informed that “Lai On speaks both grammatical and ‘Pidgen’ English during the piece. Grammatical English is used where Lai On would naturally talk and think in Chinese. ‘Pidgen’ is reserved for his conversation with foreigners”. The How Kwik monastery scene enabled Mr. Crosse to introduce Chinese religious ceremonies and temple music into the play.

At the time, the public was being captivated by musicals with an Oriental setting, and Mr. Crosse, who was soon to return to England, hoped to have his work produced there. I do not know if he was successful.

† Pollick may not have been a resident of Hong Kong.
The Regiment Amateur Dramatic Society put on in 1876 at the Garrison Theatre two short pieces, “Maud’s Peril” and “John Brown John’s Holiday”. Both were written by an anonymous local resident.

Capt. Bunbury wrote a burlesque entitled “Butter Cup Bower” for presentation at an open air fete to raise funds for the Alice Memorial Hospital in 1886. It was repeated several months later as the dramatic portion of “A Musical and Dramatic Entertainment” to raise funds for an annual treat to the children of non-commissioned officers and men of the Garrison.

GARRISON AMATEUR GROUPS

We have noted that the first amateur dramatics were encouraged as diversion and entertainment for the military. Through the years various army and navy amateur groups have been organized in Hong Kong.

They performed under different names. These often included the name of the ship, regiment or unit of the performers. In the 1860s a group called the Garrison Amateur Theatrical Society was active. It was composed of officers. In 1897 there is notice of The Garrison Dramatic Society. The Military Mummers flourished from 1889 to 1892. In the 90s other groups called themselves “The Sons of Neptune” and “The Beetles”.

During the 90s it was popular to put on productions called “Grand Assault at Arms” accompanied by “Military Spectacular Exhibitions”. An 1893 production of this type concluded with “a grand representation of an attack on the Fortress of Ali Musjid”, and at another in 1898 by a naval group from H.M.S. Powerful, the finale was three “real life Tableaux”: Ready for Action, Battle Scene, and the Death of Nelson. At this particular performance Prince Henry and Princess Irene of the Prussian royal house were present. A patter song was introduced expressing these hopeful sentiments:

One word before I end my song
To welcome in far Hongkong
The grandson of our Gracious Queen†

† Prince Henry’s mother was Victoria, the Princess Royal, daughter of Queen Victoria, and wife of Frederick III, of Germany.
The Sailor Prince, of course, I mean;  
To welcome him, may he always be  
Found playing on the side of the Royal Navee.

The military groups were at times strengthened by the addition of actresses. Until the time when Hong Kong resident ladies appeared on the stage, the actresses were from visiting professional companies.

Actresses not only provided beauty but at times a necessary gentle touch. The 20th Regiment was performing the farce "Turn Him Out" in 1867, all was progressing well when suddenly one of the players became temperamental and refused to proceed. To sooth the anger of the audience, which was becoming boisterous, the guest actress, Miss Annie Hill, was prevailed upon to announce the suspension of the performance. While a male would have been greeted with hoots and catcalls, the gallantry of the audience gave Miss Hill hearty applause. Some felt, however, that the incident might be a serious threat to the reputation of all garrison performances.

In spite of such fears, the Band Company disregarded adverse publicity and presented themselves to the public. According to a report, there was in attendance "a gay concourse of people, with many ladies and their friends". At times rowdy behavior discouraged respectable patronage. At a performance at the Garrison Theatre in 1867 it was said that "some behaved in a style savoring more of a 'penny show' than a respectable theatre, where ladies form a portion of the audience". Performances put on and patronised by the military were more subject to the plague of rowdyism than those produced by the A.D.C. in the dignified setting of the Theatre Royal at City Hall.

Another hindrance to military performances was the ruling by the military authorities that no placards could be posted announcing productions. In retaliation, some pranksters put up posters over town announcing a forth-coming play by an officer's dramatic group, though no such production was ever intended.

Despite such difficulties, Hong Kong has had a long history of performances by the Garrison.
The last performance of the A.D.C. before the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong was in February 1940. It was "The Circle" by Somerset Maugham. After the war the A.D.C. was not reorganised under that name. The present Hong Kong Stage Club considers itself as carrying on the tradition of the Hong Kong Amateur Dramatic Club.
APPENDIX

THE HONG KONG AMATEUR DRAMATIC CLUB AND ITS PREDECESSORS — Significant Dates and Performances.

(Authors and dates of first publication or production from A. Nicoll, A History of English Drama, "Handlist of Plays").

(Note: only ADC productions are noted here; professional performances, and performances by Garrison groups or other amateur groups not detailed here).

1844/45 — 18 Dec. 1844 — proposed to form a dramatic company of amateurs under patronage of H. E. Governor Davis.

1845/46 — 3 Jan. 1846 — Tues. last performance given by "Corps Dramatique" at Aqui's Theatre in the Lower Bazaar.


28 Apr. 1846 — Amateur performance Mon. evening.

27 June 1846 — Amateur Performers fifth and last performance at Aqui's Theatre.

8 Jan. 1846 — at length a fair prospect of a Theatre being erected in Hong Kong. Idea suggested last year. Half of funds needed already subscribed.

9 Feb. 1846 — Meeting of shareholders of proposed Theatre at house of Mr. Just, corner Queen's Road and Pottinger Street.

1848/49 — 1 Nov. 1848 — first public performance by amateurs in new theatre (the Victoria) erected by Mr. Duddell. "The Weathercock" (J. T. Allingham, 1805) — followed by a comic song, concluded with farce "Rival Valets" (J. Ebsworth, 1805).

1 Dec. 1848 — Amateurs second performance.

"Fortune's Frolic" farce (J. T. Allingham, 1799)
"Bambastes Furioso" burlesque tragic operetta (W. B. Rhodes, 1810)
"The Weathered" farce

1852/53 — 8 Nov. 1852 — meeting at City Hall of persons interested in the revival of drama in Hong Kong. To take measures for preserving the Victoria Theatre to the community for purpose it was originally erected. Committee of four to organize Theatrical Company.
1 Dec. 1852 — first performance of amateurs under new management.

12 Feb. 1853 — Victoria Amateurs.
“Twice Killed” farce (John Oxenham, 1837) “Slasher and Crasher” farce (J. M. Morton, 1848)

19 Mar. 1853 — meeting at Victoria Theatre for purpose of forming a Corps Dramatique to arrange for another performance at an early date.

20 Apr. 1853 — “Animal Magnetism” farce (Mrs. E. Inchbald, 1758)
“A Kiss in the Dark” farce

19 May 1853 — last night of season of Victoria Amateurs.
“Time Tries All” dramatic drama (J. Courtney, 1848)
“Toothache, or The Prince and the Chimney Sweep” farce

1853/54 — 27 Oct. 1853 — Meeting at Victoria Theatre of those interested in theatricals to make arrangements for the coming season. (I found no notice of any performance for this season).

1860/61 — 3 Jan. 1861 — “Still Waters Run Deep” (T. Taylor, 1855)

29 Jan. 1861 — new theatre, Hong Kong Amateur Theatre, performance by officers and gentlemen who have organized this establishment:
“A Bachelor of Arts” (P. Hardwicke, 1853)
“A Nice Firm” (T. Taylor, 1853)


28 Mar. 1861 — theatrical season drawing to close.
Appreciation to the Committee. Difficult to see how the Amateur Theatrical Company could have managed without aid from the garrison.

1861/62 — Dec. 1861 — first performance of season:
“Cool as a Cucumber” (M. W. B. Jerrold, 1851)
“The State Secret (A. Snodgrass, 1821, or T. E. Wilks, 1836) in same commodious erection as served so well for last year’s performances.

23 Jan. 1862 — second public performance of Hong Kong Amateur Theatre:
“Not a Bad Judge” comic drama (J. R. Planche, 1848)
“The Critics” facetious tragedy (Sheridan, 1779)

1862 season — “Cramond Brig” (W. H. Murray, 1826)

1862/1863 — Dec. 1862 — The theatre a reproduction of last year’s design.
“Uncle Zachary” comic drama (John Oxenford, 1860)
“Fearful Tragedy in Seven Dials” (Charles Selby, 1857)
12 Feb. 1863 — second amateur performance of season last week.

30 Apr. 1863 — amateurs gave fourth performance on Wed.

1863/64 — 17 Dec. 1863 — first performance — subscription:
"Follies of a Night" vaudeville comedy (J. R. Planche, 1842)
"A Kiss in the Dark" — given also in 1853.


31 Mar. 1864 — fourth and last performance of season:
"Tailor of Tamworth" (also known as "State Secrets", T. Wilks, 1836) — given also in 1861. "Alladin, the Wonderful Scamp" burlesque (T. C. Bryon, 1861)

16 June 1864 — public meeting resolved the Amateur Theatrical matshed should be kept up.

1864/65 — 13 Oct. 1864 — meeting of those interested in Amateur Theatricals — agreed to continue them in next season in usual way.

2 Jan. 1865 — a visiting professional group, the Lewis Company, gave first subscription night to the subscribers of the Amateurs

1865/66 — 9 Nov. 1865 — check given to movement for organizing a new Amateur Theatrical Corp by non-attendance at public meeting. To be hoped they shall not collapse in consequence.

1866/67 — 3 Jan. 1867 — at new Club Lusitano Theatre — first performance of season of Amateur Dramatic Society:
"Sent to the Tower" farce (J. M. Morton, 1850)
"Alladin, or The Wonderful Scamp" burlesque extravaganza (T. C. Bryon, 1860) — also given in 1864.

4 Feb. 1867 — second subscription night of Hong Kong Amateur Theatricals:
"The Area Belle" farce (Brough and Halliday, 1864)
"Shylock, or the Merchant of Venice Preserved" burlesque (F. Talfourd, 1853)

1866/67 — 7 Mar. 1867 — Hong Kong Amateur Theatricals third subscription night:
"Slasher and Crasher" (J. M. Morton, 1848) — given also in 1853.
"Raising the Wind" (J. Kennedy, 1803)

23 Mar. 1867 — Hong Kong Amateur Theatricals fourth subscription performance.

1867/68 — 28 Sept. 1867 — Hong Kong Amateur Theatrical Society propose giving five subscription performances this season.
25 Nov. 1867 — first performance of season — at Club Lusitano Theatre:
“All that Glitters is not Gold” comedy (J. M. Morton, 1851)
“Cox and Box, married and settled” farce (F. C. Burnard and J. M. Morton, 1867?)

19 Dec. 1867 — Hong Kong Amateur Theatrical Society second performance:
“Romeo and Juliet” burlesque
“Little Toddlekins” farce (J. Mathews, 1852)

1870/71 — 4 Nov. 1870 — Amateur Dramatic Club first performance of season at Theatre Royal, City Hall.
“Diamond Cut Diamond” farce (W. H. Murray, 1838)
“Orpheus and Eurydice” burlesque (H. J. Bryon, 1863)

20 Apr. 1871 — “I’ve Written to Brown” farce (T. J. Williams, 1859) burlesque by Francis Talfourd.

28 Apr. 1871 — “Ici, en Pariais Francais” (T. J. Williams, 1859)
“Shylock, or the Merchant of Venice Preserved” burlesque (F. Talfourd, 1853) — also given in 1867.

1871/72 — 26 Jan. 1872 — “The Two Bonnycastles” farce (J. M. Morton, 1851)
“Massanielle” burlesque (R. B. Brough, 1857)

21 Feb. 1872 — “The Rifle and how to use it” farce (J. V. Bridgeman, 1859)

11 Apr. 1872 — “Castles in the Air” comedy (T. W. Robertson, 1854)
Instead of “Castles”, the production may have been “Caste” by T. W. Robertson (1867)

1872/73 — 3 Jan. 1873 — “Locked In” farce (J. P. Wooler, 1870)
“The Cricket on the Hearth”

13 Feb. 1873 — “Kenilworth, or Ye Queen, Ye Earl and Ye Maiden”, burlesque

13 Apr. 1873 — “The Blighted Being” farce (T. Taylor, 1854)
“Checkmate” comedy (Andrew Halliday, 1869)

1873/74 — 30 Oct. 1873 — “Plot and Passion” (T. Taylor and J. Lang, 1853)

15 Nov. 1873 — “The Spitalfield Hospital” farcical comedy
“Not such a Fool as she Looks” (H. J. Bryon, 1868)

2 Mar. 1874 — “A Romantic Idea” (J. R. Planche, 1849)
“The Steeple Chase” (J. M. Morton, 1865)

1874/75 — 5 Apr. 1875 — “Ticket of Leave Man” (T. Taylor, 1863)
26 May 1875 — "An Unwarranted Intrusion" farce (J. M. Morton, 1868)
 "Alladin" burlesque (J. S. Bryon, 1861) — also given 1863, 1867.

1875/76 — no production on record.

1876/77 — 11 Nov. 1876 — "The Field of the Cloth of Gold" (Wm. Brough, 1868)
 19 Feb. 1877 — "Alladin, or the Wonderful Scamp" (J. S. Bryon, 1861)

1876/77 — 8 May, 1877 — "Not Such a Fool as She Looks" (H. J. Bryon, 1868) given in 1873.

1877/78 — 7, 12, 13 Jan. 1878 — "Nine Points of the Law" comedy (T. Taylor, 1859)
 "The Boots at the Swan" farce (Charles Selby, 1842)

1878/79 — apparently no production this season.

1880/81 — 11 Nov. 1880 — repeat of "New Men and Old Acres"

1881/82 — 1 Nov. 1881 — "A Wonderful Woman" (C. Dance, 1849)
 "The Area Belle" (W. Brough and A. Halliday, 1864) — given in 1867.

1881/82 — apparently no production this season.

1882/83 — 23 Jan. 1883 — "The School" (T. W. Robertson, 1869)

1883/84 — 25 Sept. 1883 — "She Stoops to Conquer" (O. Goldsmith, 1773)

7 Dec. 1883 — "The Wedding March" eccentricity (W. S. Gilbert, 1873)
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1885/86 — 17 Dec. 1885 — "Chiselling" farce (J. J. Dilley and J. Albery, 1870)
"Nine Points of the Law" (T. Taylor, 1859) — given in 1878.

18 Feb. 1886 — "The Overland Route" (T. Taylor, 1860) — second performance of season.

9 Mar. 1886 — "Weak Woman" (H. J. Bryon, 1875) benefit with Canton Amateurs for burned Canton Theatre.

7 Apr. 1886 — "Heads or Tails" (J. Palgrave Simpson, 1854)
"Chiselling" farce (Dilley and Albery, 1870) given in 1885.

1886/87 — 18 Nov. 1886 — "A Widow's Hunt, or Everybody's Friend" — comedy (J. Sterling Coyne, 1859)

30 Dec. 1886 — "Cups and Saucers" musical sketch (G. Grossmith 1878)
"Our Wife" comedietta (J. M. Morton, 1850)

13 Apr. 1887 — "A Comical Countess" (Wm. Brough, 1854)
"Our Soldiers" comedy (H. J. Bryon, 1873)

1887/88 — 8 Nov. 1887 — "Withered Leaves" comedietta (J. W. Broughton, 1875)
"The First Night" comedy (J. M. Maddox, 1853)

17 Jan. 1888 — "The Rivals" (Sheridan, 1775)

1888/89 — apparently no production this season.

1889/90 — 26 Dec. 1889 — last performance 1 Mar. 1890 — Grand Christmas Pantomime:
"Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves"

1890/91 — 26 Dec. 1890 — "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" pantomime
30 Mar. 1891 — "The Two Roses" (J. Albery, 1870)

1891/92 — 24 July 1891 — "David Garrick" comedy (T. Robertson, 1864)

26 Dec. 1891, 23 Jan., 20 Feb. 1892 — Christmas Pantomime:
"Beauty and the Beast"

27 Feb., 1 Mar. 1892 — "Betsy" (F. C. Burnard, 1879)

21, 30 Apr. 1892 — "Turned Up" (or "Too Much Married")
comedy, (M. Melford, 1886)
1892/93 — 12, 15 Nov. 1892 — "Honour Bound" (W. S. Gilbert and Sydney Grundy, 1880)
    "On Bail" a farce (W. S. Gilbert, 1877)

1893/94 — 26, 28, 30 Dec. 1893, 3, 6, 9, 16, 24 Jan. 1894
    "Princess Toto" (W. S. Gilbert and Clay, 1876)

1894/95 — 30 Jan. 4, 6, 9, 12, 16, 18, 23 Feb. 1895 — Pantomime:
    "Robinson Crusoe"
    17, 20, 24 Apr. 1895 — "The Magistrate" (A. W. Pinero, 1885)

1895/96 — 26, 28 Dec. 1895 — "Dandy Dick" (A. W. Pinero, 1887)
    8, 10, 20 Feb. 1896 — "Trail by Jury" (Gilbert and Sullivan, 1888)

1896/97 — 19, 21 Dec. 1896 — "Cups and Saucers" (G. Grossmith, 1878)
    — given in 1886.
    "Charley's Aunt" (Brandon Thomas, 1892)

1897/98 — 19 Nov. 1897 — "A Pair of Spectacles" (Sidney Grundy, 1890)
    19, 21 Feb. 1898 — "The Duchess of Bayswater and Co." comedietta (A. M. Heathcote, 1888)
    "A Pantomime Rehearsal" (C. Clay, 1891)

1898/99 — 17, 19 Nov. 1898 — "Our Bitterest Foe" (G. C. Herbst, 1874)
    "Sugar and Cream" comedietta (J. P. Hurst, 1883)
    "The Steeple Chase" (J. M. Morton, 1865) — given in 1874.
    5, 7, 9, 11, 14, 17, 18 Jan., 1, 3 Feb. 1899 — pantomime "The Yellow Dwarf, or Harlequin the Knave of Hearts"

1899/1900 — 4, 6 Nov. 1899 — "The Magistrate" (A. W. Pinero, 1885)
    — given in 1895.
    12, 13 Dec. 1899 — "The Mother In Law" farcical comedy
    (G. R. Sims, 1881)
    12, 15, 17, 24, 26 Feb. 1900 — "Yeoman of the Guard"
    (Gilbert and Sullivan, 1888)

1900/01 — 24 Nov. 3 Dec. 1900 — "Our Flat" (Mrs. M. Musgrove, 1889)

1901/02 — 15, 19 Nov. 1901 — "Trying It On" farce (W. Brough)
    "Plantation Revels" minstrel variety

1902/03 — 13, 14, 15 Nov. 1902 — "Liberty Hall" drama (R. C. Carton, 1892)
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30, 31 Jan., 2 Feb. 1903 — “His Excellency the Governor” (R. Marshall, 1898)

1903/04 — 14, 16, 17 Nov. 1903 — “Lord and Lady Algy” (R. C. Carton, 1898)

11, 12, 14 Dec. 1903 — “The Importance of Being Earnest” (Wilde, 1895)

1903/04 — 13, 18, 19, 20 Feb., 11, 12 Mar. 1904 — “His Excellency” (W. S. Gilbert and O. Carr, 1890)

1904/05 — 19, 20, 23, 24, 26, 28 Nov. 1904 — “Dorothy” comedy opera (B. C. Stephenson and A. Collier, 1886)

21, 23, 28, Jan. 1905 — “Jane” (H. Nichols and W. Lestrey, 1890)

7, 8, 10 Apr. 1905 — “One Summer Day” comedy (H. V. Esmond, 1897)


15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21 Feb. 1906 — “Princess Toto” (W. S. Gilbert and F. Clay, 1876)

31 Mar. 2, 3 Apr. 1906 — “Lady Hunsworth Experiment”


1906/07 — 20, 21, 22 Dec. 1906 — “The Hobby Horse” comedy (A. W. Pinero, 1888)

15, 16, 18 Feb. 1907 — “Facing the Music” farcical comedy (C. H. Darnley, 1899)

1907/08 — 20, 21, 22, 25 Feb. 1908 — “The Liars” comedy (H. A. Jones, 1897)


1909/10 — 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, Jan., 18, 19 Feb. 1910 — “The Toreodor” — musical comedy

12, 13, 16 Apr. 1910 — “Mice and Men” comedy (M. L. Ryley, 1901)

1910/11 — no production.

1911/12 — 13, 27 Jan. 1912 — Grand Variety Entertainment and Harlequinade “as performed at Drury Lane in 1870”.
21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27 Mar. 1912 — "The Gondoliers" (Gilbert and Sullivan, 1889)

1912/13 — 25, 26 Oct. 1912 — "A Pair of Spectacles" (Sydney Grundy, 1890) given in 1897.

17, 19, 21 Dec. 1912 — "An Ideal Husband" (O. Wilde, 1895)

1913/14 — 25, 28, 29, 30 Oct., 1 Nov. 1913 — Hong Kong Mummers (personnel same as A.D.C.) "Twelfth Night" — Shakespeare.

21, 26 Feb. 1914 — Centennial Performance: Three Episodes "A Privy Council" (W. Drury and R. Price, 1904), "Between the Soup and the Savoury" (Gertrude Jennings, 1910), "The Open Door" (Alfred Sutro, 1906)

1914/15 — 7, 10, 14 Nov. 1914 — "The Blue Bird" a fairy play (M. Maeterlink, transl. by A. T. Mattes, performed London 1909)

2, 6, 9 Jan. 1915 — "Snow White and the Frog Prince" — a fairy ballet in 3 parts and 4 tableaux.

1915/16 — 14, 6, 11 Mar. 1916 — "An Angel in the House" (B. M. Hastings and E. Philipps, 1915)

1916/17 — 15, 16, 18, 30 Dec. 1916 — "Kismet" oriental spectacular (E. Knoblauch, 1911)

1917/18 — 23 Feb. 1918 — Mr. A. P. Stokes assisted by members of A.D.C. "Acid Drops" "Five Birds in a Cage" "The Rest Cure"

23 Apr. 1918 — "The Witness for the Defence" (A. E. W. Mason, 1911)

1918/19 — 7, 9 Nov. 1918 — "The Barton Mystery" a spoofic fantasy (Walter Hackett, 1916)

21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29 Mar. 1919 — "Pinkie and the Fairies" a fairy play (W. G. Robertson, music F. Norton, 1909)

1919/20 — Apparently no production.

1921/22 — no production.

1922/23 — 12, 13, 18, 21 Oct. 1922 — “I’ll Leave it to You” (N. Coward, 1920)
26, 27, 28, 30 Dec. 1922, 1, 2 Jan. 1923 — “Tempest” (Shakespeare)

1923/24 — 8, 10, 12, 15 Dec. 1923 — “R.U.R.” (Rossums Universal Robots) (Karel Capek, transl. by P. P. Silver, adapted by N. Playfair, 1922)

1924/25 — 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22 Jan. 1925 — “St. Joan” — (G. B. Shaw, 1923)
25, 26, 27, 28 Feb. 1925 — “French Leave” — farcical comedy (Reginald Berkely)

1925/26 — 2, 3, 4, 5 Dec. 1925 — “A Little Bit of Fluff” farce
2, 3, 4, 5, 6 Mar. 1926 — “If” (Lord Dunsany, 1921)

1926/27 — 13, 15, 17, 18, 19 Nov. 1926 — Dramatic Medley
“A Matter of Time” (Ronald Jeans)
“The First and the Last” (John Galsworthy, 1921)
“The Burglar and the Girl” (Mathew Boulton, 1913)
“The Man in the Bowler Hat” (A. A. Milne, 1925)
19, 22 Mar. 1927 — “The Last of Mrs. Cheyney” — Frederick Lonsdale, 1925)

1927/28 — 19, 21, 22, 23 Nov. 1927 — “Bulldog Drummond” (H. C. McNeile and Gerald du Maurier, 1921)

1928/29 — 16, 20, 24 Nov. 1928 — “The Sport of Kings” (Ian Hay, 1924)
— performed at Star Theatre, Kowloon.
19, 21, 22, 23, 26 Feb. 1929 — “On Approval” (Frederick Lonsdale, 1926)

1929/30 — 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 Mar. 1930 — “And So to Bed”

1930/31 — 12 Nov. 1930 — performance at Helena May Institute “Snobs”
“Half an Hour”
15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 Nov. 1930 — “The Middle Watch”
a romance of the Royal Navy (Stephen King-Hall and Ian Hay, 1929)
7, 10, 11, 13, 14 Mar. 1931 — “Art and Mrs. Bottle” (Benn W. Levy, 1929)

1931/32 — 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 Nov. 1931 — “Dear Brutus” (James Barrie, 1917) last A.D.C. performance at the Theatre Royal, City Hall.

1933/34 — 11, 12, 13, 14 Apr. 1934 — "The First Mrs. Fraser (St. John Ervine, 1929) performance at China Fleet Club — venue to 1941.

17, 20, 21, 23, 24 Feb. 1934 — "Ten Minute Alibi" (Antony Armstrong)

1934/35 — 5, 6, 7, 8 Dec. 1934 — "Fresh Fields" (Ivor Novello)

1935/36 — 18, 19, 20, 21 Dec. 1935 — "Musical Chairs" (Ronald Mackenzie)

1936/37 — 4, 5, 6, 7 Nov. 1936 — "Night Must Fall" (Emlyn Williams)

1937/38 — 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 Dec. 1937 — "Outward Bound" (Sutton Vane)

23, 25, 26, 27 Feb. 1938 — "French Without Tears" (Terrence Rattigan)

1938/39 — 8, 9, 10 Mar. 1939 — "The Shining Hour" (Keith Winter)

1939/40 — 22, 23, 24 Feb. 1940 — "The Circle" (Somerset Maugham)

(Note: all notices are taken from the English newspapers in Hong Kong, in most cases from editions of the dates given).