

Kung Hei Fat Choy

In this Newsletter, Dan Waters writes about the development of Technical Education and Vocational Training in HK and its close ties to HK's Industrial History going back to 1863. As he explains he was closely involved in the Technical College, Wanchai after his arrival in Hong Kong in 1954.

Salt production has a very long history here. Colin Davidson explains the process with particular reference to the Tai O salt fields.

Amelia Allsop, Collections Manager at the Hong Kong Heritage Project, has kindly posted information about our group on HKHP's blog. I have had several positive responses to this.

This Newsletter sees the arrival of 'Queries and Answers'. Send in your HK Industrial History questions which I'll then insert. If you can supply information about the queries similar.

I would welcome contributions to the Newsletter. I am looking for short (under 300 words) articles on any subject related to the industrial history of HK. Even shorter pieces, just a few lines, about a product, process, person, industrial area, building, etc would also be very helpful. Non-copyright photos would also be a useful attachment.

Feel free to pass on the Newsletter, my name and email address to anyone you feel may be interested.

Best wishes

Hugh Farmer indhkh@gmail.com

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## New Subscribers

Here are people who have expressed interest in our group since the last newsletter:

Amelia Allsop, Collections Manager, The Hong Kong Heritage Project

John Carroll, Professor, Department of History, University of HK

John Elphinstone

Geoff Emerson, ex Vice Principal, St. Paul's College, HK

Gauran Mahajan

Sylvia Midgett

Simon Twiston Davies, recently retired CEO of CASBAA

## Queries & Answers

Please send your queries or answers to [indhk@gmail.com](mailto:indhk@gmail.com)

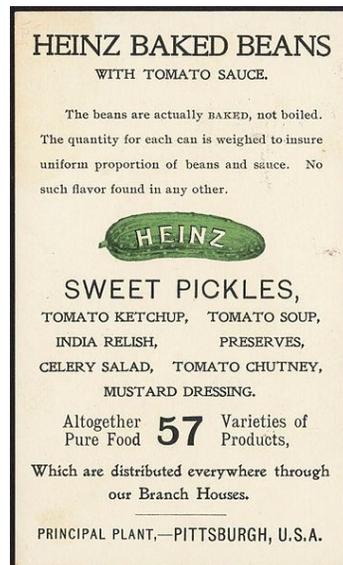
1. Hugh Farmer is currently writing a brief biography of Kwok Acheong (b? Canton d.1880 Hong Kong) who became one of the richest men in Hong Kong during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a compradore, ship owner, merchant and landowner. There is considerable information about his life and business interests. One of the latter was taking over the 'shipwright and engineering department' from the P&O Steamship Company in 1854. I can find nothing about this particular subject: where was the Dept, what particularly did it do and what happened to it post Kwok Acheong? Can anyone provide some answers? Also when was he born?

2. Kevin Hall writes to ask where the rickshaws used in Hong Kong were made. Can anyone help?

## Ketchup, Catsup, Catchup, Kiô-chiap or plain Tomato Sauce? - Hong Kong, Heinz and Yerks

Speaking of Kwok Acheong here is a quote from a report by Governor Pope-Hennessy written in 1881. "I went with Mr Kwok Acheong and two or three other Chinese gentleman interested in the factory in Yau-ma-ti, which was in a more or less rude state...I was glad to see what they were doing.

In addition to making soy, they made ketchup for the European market...the ketchup is sent in hundreds of barrels every year direct from Hongkong to a well-known house in London, [from where] thousands of little bottles of ketchup are sent to Chinese as well as European storekeepers here. In short the ketchup we consume as English is manufactured by Chinese in Hongkong, sent to England and... returned to us for retail."



Heinz launched its tomato ketchup in 1876, so the HK version might have beaten the American to it. But when did the Yau Ma Tei factory open? Neither was first however, one Jonas Yerks, also an American, is believed to have been the first manufacturer of the esteemed condiment, having done so in 1837.

### Hong Kong Industrial History:

#### A Brief Account of the Accompanying Role Played by Technical Education and Training - Part One

#### **Early British Hong Kong:**

As early as 1863 vocational training in carpentry, tailoring, shoemaking, printing, bookbinding and gardening were provided for a maximum of 30 boys by the Catholic Church led by Father Raimondi not far from Mission House in Wellington Street. In the 1870s up to 100 boys were taught carpentry, shoemaking and printing by Roman Catholic brothers in the Catholic reformatory at West Point.

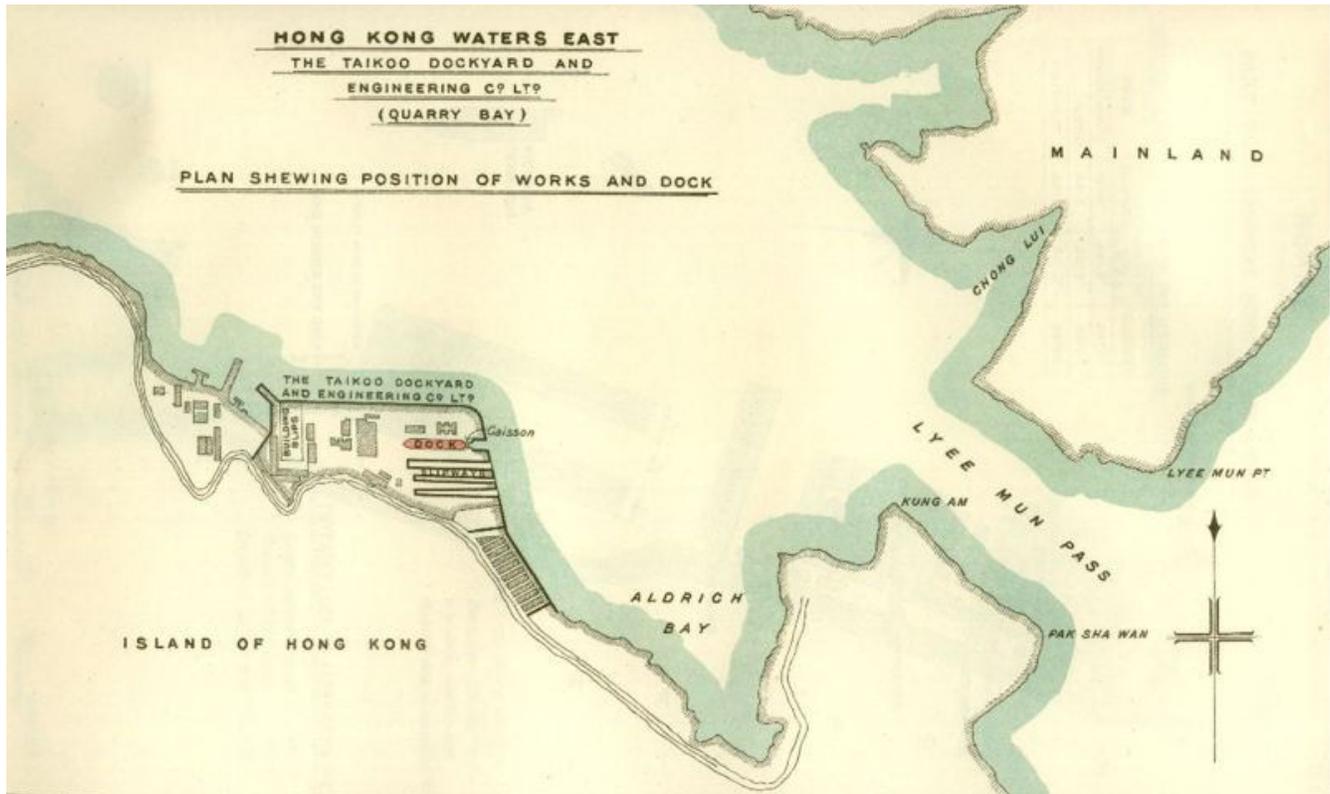
The Li Shing Scientific and Industrial College held its first prize giving in 1905. Although over 70 students had enrolled only 35 remained at the end of the course.

The so named 'Technical Institute' was founded in 1907, which formed a sub-department under the Government Director of Education. It had no building of its own but was based in Queen's College, then situated in Hollywood Road. Classes were run in the evenings and subjects included shorthand, sanitation, building construction and field surveying. Of the 161 students who entered local examinations in 1913, 116 passed.

#### **Between the Two World Wars:**

In 1926 the Salesian Fathers started classes in Commerce, shoemaking, carpentry, tailoring and printing, and, about the same time, the Taikoo Docks, situated at Quarry Bay, commenced evening classes for their apprentices. I remember Taikoo Dockyard, after World-War Two, as being a staunch

supporter of technical education. They organized a well-run apprenticeship scheme which produced many skilled craftsmen.



*A map showing the location of Taikoo Dockyard built between August 1902 and August 1907.*

Up to then what was achieved in Hong Kong, in the scope of technical education and numbers of students, was limited. A more positive move was made in 1931 when the Government formed a committee under the chairmanship of Sir William Hornell (later to become Vice-Chancellor of Hong Kong University). It made three important recommendations.

As a result, in 1932, the Junior Technical School (JTS) was established which was the government's first venture into technical education. It provided a comparatively narrow four-year course mainly as pre-apprentice training for the engineering trades. In 1957 this school changed its name to the Victoria Technical School, and its scope of study moved to secondary education with some degree of technical bias.

Further progress was made when the Catholic Salesian Fathers established the Aberdeen Trade School in 1935. This provided general education together with technical training comparable to an apprenticeship. I first visited the School in January 1955 and I was impressed by the standard of the projects on display. This Trade School was absorbed into the secondary school field in 1957 as was the JTS as explained above.

The Far East Flying Training School, which trained pilots and engineers for civil aviation, was established in 1934. It was ensconced at Kai Tak alongside the old airport.

The first government post-secondary Technical College was established in Wood Road, Wan Chai, in 1937. At the time of opening it ran classes in building, mechanical engineering (largely automotive engineering) and marine wireless operation.

All this meant that, in December 1941, at the time of the attack by the Japanese, technical education was being provided at secondary school, trade school and at post-secondary levels, but all on a limited scale.

### **After World War Two:**

Before the Second World War Hong Kong was largely engaged in entrepot trade and there was limited manufacturing. There was however, in addition to private shipbuilding and repair yards, the Royal Naval Dockyard which was phased out in the late 1950s. There was also a brewery, two sugar factories, Green Island Cement, tobacco processing, commercial ice manufacturing and the manufacturing of sweetened ginger-- which was incidentally a favourite of Queen Victoria. When the People's Republic of China came to power, in 1949, with the Chinese hinterland largely closed severely limiting trade, Hong Kong found itself in a position of export or starve.

Early Post World-War Two products consisted of plastic flowers, the manufacturing of wigs came and passed quickly, and Hong Kong was said to be the largest producer of flashlights in the world. The colony also made plimsols and gum boots, enamelware and thermos flasks, and toys and garments. In addition, a very small number of manufacturers, such as Haking Wong Industries, moved into the making of higher class products, in the latter case good quality, reasonably priced, cameras.

In 1947, after the end of World War Two, the Trade School (renamed Technical College) in Wood Road, Wan Chai, the Junior Technical School, the Aberdeen Trade School, and a number of private centres running evening classes were providing technical education which largely concentrated on theory. For many years the Catholic Tang King Po Middle School in Kowloon also ran a trade school section which organised classes in printing, shoemaking and tailoring. This trade school was phased out in the mid 1970s. It was decided that lower-secondary school pupils, at that age, needed general education rather than learning a trade.

I joined Her Majesty's Colonial Service in London, in 1954, and set sail for Hong Kong on the RMS Canton. The usual mode of travel for government servants in those days was by ship, and arriving in Hong Kong harbour the stunning scenery, at any time of the day or night, was an unforgettable sight. A few civil servants came by seaplane, a journey which took five days. They only flew during daylight, and the plane landed on water and passengers spent the night in a hotel.

Once in Hong Kong I was ensconced in Winner House Hotel, at North Point, and I travelled by tram to Wood Road, Wan Chai, where the old Technical College was situated. In those days there were two classes on the trams. The lower deck cost 10 cents and the upper 20 cents. The College was constructed of good quality facing bricks which had been imported from England. This was not unusual in earlier times as bricks and manhole covers were often shipped to Hong Kong as ballast. The college had been built at cost price by members of the Building Contractors' Association on the understanding that sons of contractors could be educated there. An additional floor was added to the college in 1953 making a total of three storeys.

When I arrived in Hong Kong there were about 20 teaching staff at the Technical College which included around eight Britons. There were departments of Building, Mechanical Engineering (largely automotive engineering) and Telecommunications. A department of Commerce had been opened in 1953 and a department of Nautical Studies in 1956. A Textile Department started in 1957. Before I started teaching I spent 10 days touring industrial establishments accompanied by a fellow lecturer, Mr Ko Cheuk-luen. This I found to be invaluable as it allowed me to 'get my feet on the ground'. After all Hong Kong was, in those early days, in many respects quite different to England.



*A group of Technical College building students on a site visit half a century ago. Dan Waters can be spotted, standing, at the end of the group. The College always placed emphasis on workshop classes and contact with industry. Full-time students were taken on regular site visits and they were attached to industrial establishments during the summer holidays.*

At the time the only University was Hong Kong University which boasted, among others, Departments of Architecture and Engineering, The second university, the Chinese University, was not established until 1963.

*to be continued...*

*Dan Walters*

### Demolitions and Re-use

The SCMP 19th January 2013 mentions a plan to turn the 50-year-old Wing Hong industrial building in Cheung Sha Wan into a commercial building.

<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1131191/ura-spend-hk17b-renovating-cheung-sha-wan-factory-1960s>

If you hear of any recent/current HK industrial demolitions, re-use please send them in.

## Tai O Salt Production



*The location of the Tai O salt fields immediately to the south of present day Tai O*

Salt production is one of the earliest 'industrial' activities recorded in Hong Kong. Records indicate that salt-working probably began here in the third century BC, more than two thousand years ago.

Because of the high profits that could be made, the salt industry was controlled as an Imperial Monopoly. The earliest salt fields in the area were probably in the Deep Bay and Tuen Mun areas, with the Imperial Salt monopoly extending to Lantau Island in the tenth century AD.

Salt fields were first constructed in Tai O in the mid/late eighteenth century. Much of the output was smuggled out of Tai O to Macau, Hong Kong, the Pearl River Delta and through Hong Kong to other places on the coast.

Following the arrival of the British, there was a formal decision that the Tai O salt industry should be encouraged and expanded. Apart from smuggling, Tai O salt was traded legitimately to the Philippines and some was sold within Hong Kong, mostly for industrial uses.

From 1936 onwards, the Japanese blockade of the coast of China removed foreign salt from the coastal areas of China, which encouraged a vast increase in the salt-smuggling trade out of Tai O. This had a profound effect on the attitudes and behavior of local society.

This trade died away somewhat after the Japanese occupied Hong Kong, but was replaced with a boom trade in salt to Hong Kong and Macau, where foreign salt was no longer available.

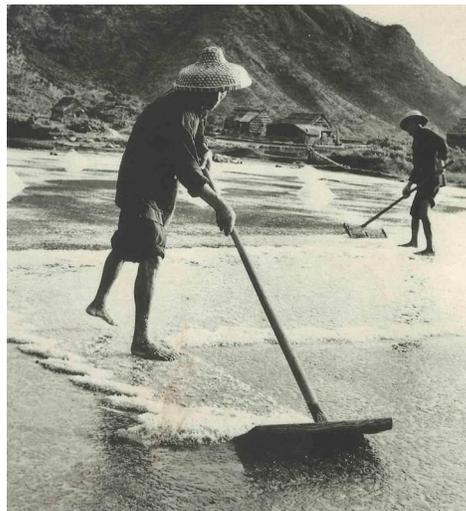
After the Second World War, the competition from foreign imported salt became overwhelming, and from 1955 to the mid 1960s the salt field operators gradually closed business.

A few of the old salines continued to be worked by the old salt workers as squatters until 1967/70, when the construction of the Tai O road destroyed the sluice systems.

Salt production reached its peak in the 1920s and 1930s, when there were about 102 acres of salt fields in Tai O, arranged in four areas on either side of the village.

Salt farming was a seasonal activity. The fields were farmed between mid September and April of the following year, after which they were abandoned during the summer rainy season, when the salt field workers had no income. Some of them had to borrow money from the salt companies to survive these times. There were three salt companies before the Second World War: Yat Sing, Tin Sang and Hap Fung. All three companies had their own salt godowns or warehouses. In earlier days the salt was transported in sacks made of grass, which were very heavy.

There were two salt farming methods. The first was known as “water funnel”. Sea water was channelled into the salt fields, after which in order to increase the salt content water was diverted from one field into the next. The process continued seven or eight times until the salt content of the water was so dense that a testing device, called a “Shek Lin Ji”, would float on the surface. Salt workers also showered the salt fields with condensed salt water from time to time, which was known as “sowing salt seeds”. In the dry season, especially when the wind blew from the north, each salt field could produce over 60 kilograms of salt.



The second salt-producing method was “sand funnel”. Pipelines were installed to draw sea water into a field. Salt workers would then dig the field loosely to mingle sand with the salt water. The salt water would then drain back into the pipelines and be led to other salt fields. Workers had to sow salt seeds to increase the salt content, and the same testing method was applied. If a sudden rain came in the middle of the night during a farming season, workers would need to rescue the salt product by immediately harvesting, or they would lose this crop.

Today, very little remains of this once all important industry. The outline of some of fields may still be seen, defined by man-made bunds, but the fields have now become mangrove swamps or are disused fish traps. The memory of the old industry lingers in Tai O, where some of the older inhabitants remember the trade and a few relics may still be seen. However as the years pass, salt production in

Tai O has become, perhaps sadly, confined to history.

With thanks to Wong Wai King and Scott Wilson for the above information

Colin Davidson

### Biography Of Alfred Herbert Rennie

b. 17<sup>th</sup> November 1857 Ontario, Canada. d. 14<sup>th</sup> April 1908 Hong Kong.

*Here I am primarily concerned with the time Rennie spent in Hong Kong when he established the Hongkong Milling Company. For more information about the man a very useful source is: 'The Dictionary of Hong Kong Biography' listed below.*

Rennie arrived in Hong Kong in 1890 as sales representative for an American company Portland Flouring Mills whose principal stockholder was TB Wilcox. He went into partnership with Paul Chater and Hormusjee Naorojee Mody and persuaded them to invest in that became the Hongkong Milling Company. He also used his own money saved during his time the Portland Flouring Mills. He hoped to sell his flour in Hong Kong and China and especially to the buyers who had been his customers for the latter company. The HK Milling Company started production in January 1907.

Hongkong Milling Company established a number of substantial buildings in Junk Bay (Ngau Mei Hoi) and installed the most modern equipment available. However, his mill failed and for a number of reasons. There was too large a capital investment and the mill was too big ( "a two thousand barrel mill"). There was no demand in China for millfeed, a byproduct which provided much of the profit for the American and Canadian millers. As a result Rennie try to use it to feed several hundred pigs most which died.

Buyer's in China remained loyal to Wilcox's brands, therefore sales at the HK mill were slow. A cargo of Indian wheat introduced weevils into the mill and proved difficult to get rid of. Rennie issued false financial statements indicating large profits which caused considerable skepticism amongst those in the milling trade.

As if the above wasn't enough Rennie had been buying wheat in advance, which appeared a wise move as prices were rising. The price collapsed and milled wheat could be delivered to Hong Kong at a cheaper rate than Rennie had bought wheat for shortly before.

The *China Mail* reported, "Heavy losses appeared to be ahead of the Company on the cargoes purchased, those coming forward, and those arranged for, and this fact preyed upon Mr. Rennie's mind."

Rennie committed suicide on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1908 off Lei Yue Mun on his way by boat to the mill in Junk Bay. Apparently he did this by throwing himself overboard with a dispatch box tied to his neck. Another account suggests the box floated as did Rennie. A boatman was able to get to him with a lifebuoy but Rennie kicked him away.

*There was a common misconception that Rennie had committed suicide by hanging himself at his mill. The Chinese name for Rennie's Mill, originally Diao Jing Ling, meaning 'Hanging Neck Ridge', was later changed to the considerably more cheery if clumsy Tiao Jing Ling or 'Ridge of Regulated Scenery'. This would be Tiu Keng Leng in Cantonese. And the latter is the name given to the modern housing development after Rennie's Mill town whose residents were strongly supportive of the Kuomintang cause, was demolished immediately prior to the handover in 1997. All rather confusing!*



*Rennies Mill enclave in the 1950s.*

#### Sources

1. HKBRAS Journals Vol. 28, 1988 "The HK Milling Company's Failure"
2. pp366-367 "Dictionary of Hong Kong Biography", Ed.M Holdsworth + C.Munn  
HK University Press, 2012
3. <http://www.onlinebiographies.info/or/wilcox-tb.htm>
4. *China Mail* 16<sup>th</sup> April 1908
5. *The Hong Kong Telegraph* 1<sup>st</sup> May 1908

#### Kowloon Walled City Two

I would like to thank member David Bellis for reminding me about the book:

*"City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City"* Girard G. and Lambot I. Watermark ,1993  
The following article draws heavily on this book which may still be available in bookshops and is certainly to be found in HK Public Libraries (915.25 GIR).

The book contains an undated map of KWC ground floor which shows most of the street names given below.

For a general description of KWC

try: <http://www.scmp.com/article/296184/kowloon-walled-city> and:  
<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Kowloon-Walled-City>

Newsletter 3 mentioned the numerous small factories located in the Kowloon Walled City. Further research provides more information on these. As the KWC had been demolished by April 1994 the addresses included no longer exist.

First, two rather surprising products, one now almost forgotten, the other I presumed was manufactured during this period only in large, automated factories, but no....

Wooden Ruler maker

Cheng San operated this 600 sq.ft unit in Tai Chang Street from 1968 to 1990. He initially employed seven or eight people but when demand dropped he worked alone. He produced ten different kinds of rulers from 12" up to 36". He lived on the premises and rarely left KWC except to eat breakfast. (No longer made in HK wooden rulers are still manufactured in China, India and elsewhere.)

Golf ball maker

At its peak the remarkable Tai Kong Plastic Factory was producing 10,000 balls a day...a day!. It was run by Chan Kwong in Shing Ngam Road from 1972 until possibly when the KWC was demolished. Initially five or six men were employed, and a further thirty or more women who worked at home. After a few years automatic machines were used. During its peak production period the factory operated twenty four hours a day.

Fish dumpling maker

[At one time up to 80% of fish balls consumed in HK were made in KWC. As an aside HK currently produces about 13 billion fish balls a year which is about 200 per resident per year! ] Lam Leung Pom of G/F 58 Lung Chun Road, however does not appear to have been one their manufacturers. His specialities were minced fish, fish dumplings and squid balls (annual consumption rates of the latter unknown). He operated in KWC from 1983 in a unit of 480 sq.ft. employing five full-time workers, making about 300 catties of minced fish and dumplings per day. He sold the minced fish to about two hundred shops, the fish dumplings to several dozen places and the squid balls to around one hundred shops.

### Noodle factory

One of these was operated by Chan Wai Shui on Lo Yan Street from 1979 to the early 90s. About 500 catties of noodles and 50 catties of *won tun* pastry were produced each day. (A catty is around 1 1/3 pounds or 600 grammes.) Mr Chan had about fifty regular customers.



### Muslin maker

Yu Hing Wan ran this on Mung Chun Road. He was still operating in 1993 when the KWC started to be demolished. He was then in his mid 80s and thought to have been the last of HK's producers of muslin which apparently at one time was a major industry before the emergence of synthetic materials. [I can find very little information about muslin in HK – if anyone finds out something of its manufacture here please let me know.]

### Candy/Sweet Factory

Located on 12 Sai Shing Road from the early 70s it produced a wide range of sweets which were sold locally to HK wholesalers and also sent to Macau. The sweets were also delivered to toy factories where they were put inside some of the toys. The factory was operated by Lee Yo Chan. At its peak he employed ten full-time workers and twenty temporary sweet wrappers. Many of the latter were children who worked after school for as little as half an hour.

### Cooked meat factory

From 1981 to around 1993/94 Yim Kwok Yuen roasted pork, selling about three pigs a day rising to twenty to thirty during festivals during which Mr Yim and his staff didn't sleep. Geese and chicken were also roasted at his premises in Lo Yan Street.



### Rubber factory

This was operated for around twenty five years on Lung Chun Back Road by Gui Bon. Specific dates are unavailable. The production process involved several steps depending on the finished product. Toilet plungers appear to have been the main item along with badminton shuttlecocks and sink plugs.

In addition to the above there were units involved in manufacturing plastic flowers, weaving, clothes, several metal-working shops, toys, those fish balls and several "secret factories". Information on the latter would be welcomed!

*Hugh Farmer*

You might be interested in the following:

A Royal Asiatic Society/ HK Public Libraries Talk (conducted in English).

*"My experiences as a District Officer (Kowloon City) and the Kowloon Walled City clearance"*  
by Gordon Jones. 6.30-7.30pm Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2013, 8/F, City Hall. Entrance Free

