

The group was started in November 2012 and there are now over forty subscribers. This is encouraging, though more contributions would be welcome. I am going to issue two more email Newsletters, one in late June, another in mid-August. I will then set up a blog/website which should go online around the end of September.

In the interim I will think carefully about the layout of the website and what will be useful or necessary to take the group forward in terms of storing information about companies, industries, places, people, buildings etc. Also about contributing to, accessing and commenting on information on the website. I would be grateful for any suggestions you have as to what the website should look like, what it should contain and what readers might be able to do on it.

In this issue Linda Kernan writes about the history of Vitasoy which from once humble origins in Hong Kong is now a multi-national organization.

While researching San Miguel operations in Hong Kong I came across the Sham Tseng Brewery which opened in 1933 on what sounds like a day of considerable jollity not normally associated with industrial operations.

Contributions to the Newsletter are the lifeblood of this group. I am looking for short 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, would also be very helpful. Photos, maps, plans would be interesting attachments.

As you will see there has been a response to the 'Queries and Answers' feature. If you have a question about any aspect of HK's industrial history send it. If you can supply information about these queries I will also include this.

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

Best wishes

Hugh Farmer indhk@gmail.com

In this issue

* New Subscribers

* The Story of Vitasoy

Linda Kernan

* Sources

* Queries and Answers

* Bits and Pieces

* Corrections and Clarifications

*The Opening of the Sham Tseng Brewery

Hugh Farmer

New Subscribers

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

Annemarie Evans, RTHK

James Evans, HK Polytechnic University

Nick Florent, HK Polytechnic University

Fung Chi Ming

Simon Go, Founder and Project Manager, Hulu Culture

Paul Harrison, Phoenix Conservation

Linda Kernan, HK Polytechnic University

Jon Mackay

David Riach, HK Maritime Museum

John Smith, HK Polytechnic University

Dale Whitlock

*

The Vitasoy Story

Linda Kernan

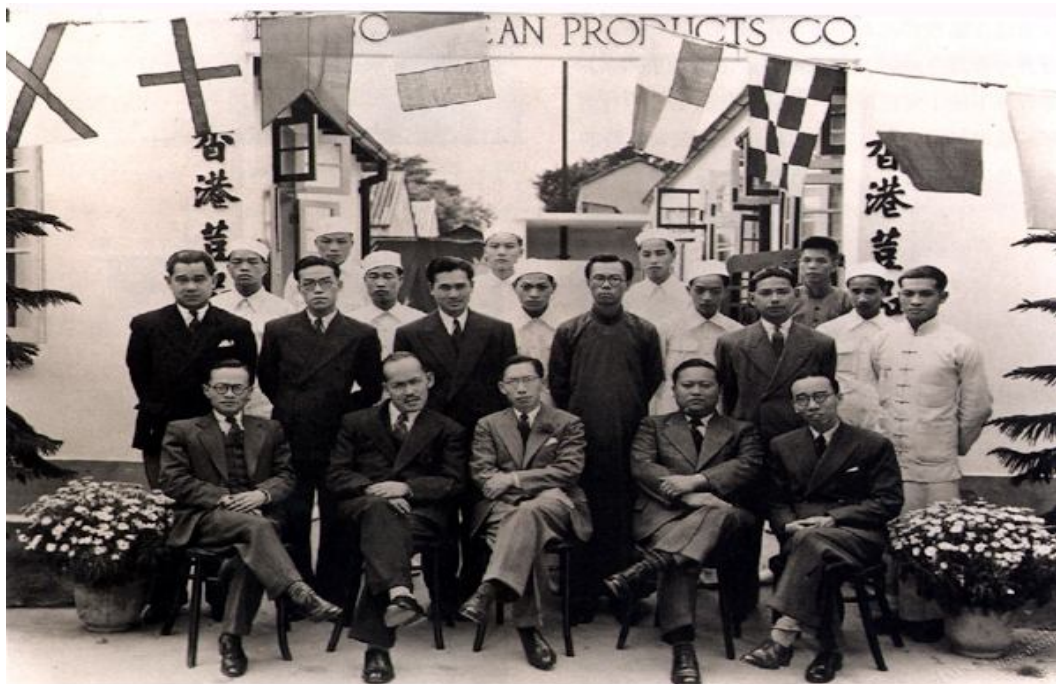
The history of the soybean and its byproducts stretches back more than 3,000 years in China. The humble soybean was known as the "Cow of China" because it was the main source of protein for the Chinese people. It took a local man, however, to spot the potential of the little bean and transform it into the most popular drink in Hong Kong today. Amazingly, its Tuen Mun factory churns out 540,000 litres of beverages a day, equivalent to one and a half a million packs of drinks. The name of the company is Vitasoy.

The story of Vitasoy began in 1939 when Dr Kwee Seong Lo became involved with Chinese refugees. He was concerned about the malnutrition of children and the fact that many Chinese

immigrants were lactose intolerant. Soy foods were traditionally known as “The meat without bones” meaning they were a rich source of oil, proteins and calories. Dr Lo believed soy milk could help the poor and malnourished.

In 1939 Dr Lo and four of his friends formed the Hong Kong Soya Bean Products Company (HKSBP) with capital of HKD15,000. The original plant and processing equipment were designed by these founders and the company was located in Causeway Bay.

It officially began operations on 9th March 1940. The day after, exactly nine bottles of the product, Vitamilk, as it was initially named, were sold, at six cents a bottle. The company employed a dozen boys on bicycles to deliver the bottles door-to-door. They had to be sold quickly or the milk would spoil. A year later, the sales figure was still only a mere 1,000 bottles a day.



The opening of Hong Kong Soya Bean Products Company Ltd., on March 9, 1940

The company had to suspend production during the war, and the factory was occupied by the Japanese, but on returning to Hong Kong two weeks after their surrender, Lo found most of the production equipment intact. He borrowed HKD50,000 from a friend and by November 1945 Vitamilk was again in production. The product was now sold through retail outlets, reaching the mass market.

The loan was paid off within a year, and by 1949 the company had accumulated enough capital to buy a piece of land in Aberdeen and started to build a new plant. However, before it was finished HKSBP had acquired the franchise for Greenspot, a large California-based manufacturer of orange concentrate. When the Aberdeen factory opened in 1950 it was used for bottling of Greenspot orangeade while Vitasoy remained in the Causeway Bay factory.

Three years later, Vitamilk was further improved by the introduction of sterilisation, meaning the product did not need refrigeration.



The factory, Aberdeen, 1953

Business boomed and in 1962 a new 6-storey, 300,000 square foot factory was opened in Kwun Tong doubling production capacity. By the end of the first year it was already operating at 90% capacity. Production used the most modern, mechanized equipment, including a continuous automatic sterilizer for the sealed bottles.



The Kwun Tong factory, 1962

By the late 1960s Vitasoy had captured 25% of the Hong Kong soft-drink market, and in 1968 an estimated 78 million bottles were sold, second only to Coca Cola's 100 million.

In the mid-seventies, there were two innovations. Firstly, the product was packaged in the new Tetrabrik Aseptic Packaging, which was constructed of seven layers of paper and plastic coated

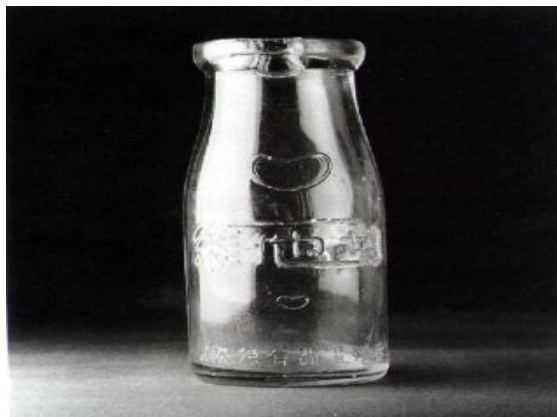
material. Secondly, the milk was UHT (ultra high temperature). These factors meant the milk had a shelf life of six months. Consumers found the new packaging to be both convenient and hygienic and sales boomed to four million cases each year.

1987 saw the Group relocate once again, this time to a new plant in Tuen Mun. This 1987 computerized facility, one of most advanced production plants in the region, involved an investment of HK\$100 million and a purpose-built structure of 366,000 square feet.

Dr Lo died in 1995 and was succeeded by his son Winston.

In 2012 Vitasoy International Holdings Limited employed over 3,000 people with total sales of USD478 million and operations in Australia, China, and the USA as well as in Hong Kong.

This is one traditional product which is *not* going to die out.



The original Vitasoy bottle

*

Sources

Here are some more sources to further your research and interest:

hongkongfirst.blogspot.hk Hong Kong history

www.huluhk.org seeks to preserve indigenous HK culture

www.hkmaritimemuseum.org/eng/resource-centre is a central repository for publications and archival documents on the maritime heritage, culture and history of Southern China

www.poheritage.com/all-links P&Os extensive list of world wide websites many with a nautical flavour

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk The UK government's official archive. Contains old maps of Hong Kong

*

Queries and Answers

2. Rickshaws

Kevin Hall wrote to ask where the rickshaws used in Hong Kong were made. James Chan suggested that they do not appear to have been manufactured outside Japan.

Fung Chi Ming has responded. He says "James Chan is correct in saying that rickshaws were first imported into Hong Kong from Japan in 1874. But as time went by they were locally produced. There were a number of shops where they were made, located in many parts of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon. One of these shops was located in Ki Ling Lane (奇靈里) near to Des Voeux Road West in Western District.

When I made a visit to Ki Ling Lane one afternoon in the early 1990s, I saw that the rickshaw shop (a pre-WW2 shophouse, I think) was surrounded by hoarding and about to be demolished. I took a photo of it. It was eventually demolished and replaced by a modern high-rise. Quite sad that a piece of heritage has been lost."

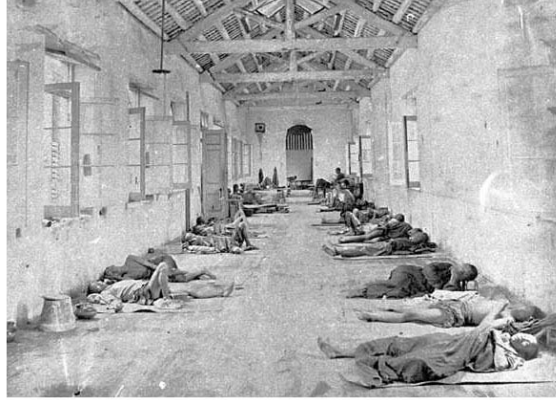
[CM is the author of the book *Reluctant Heroes: Rickshaw Pullers Hong Kong and Canton 1874-1954* Hong Kong University Press, 2005. The above information about the manufacture of rickshaws in Hong Kong is not mentioned in the book.]

3. Location of Glassworks Hospital, Kennedy Town

"moddsey" through gwulo.com says that the location of the Glassworks was on Victoria Road just up the slope and past the end of Kennedy Town. "moddsey" adds that there is a photo of the Glassworks, circa 1898, on p73 of "City of Victoria" pub Urban Council.

David Bellis through <http://gwulo.com/node/15673> has found an 1897 Map (UK National Archive reference MPH 1-412) which shows a 'Glass Works' between Davis Street and Cadogan Street in Kennedy Town. However, moddsey's location and David's are different and it is unclear whether there were two 'glassworks' in the area or whether the building in moddsey's photograph was used for a different purpose.

Can anyone clarify this and/or supply information about the glassworks (or two) itself. Did it ever actually produce glass and what happened to the building(s) after the plague ended?



1894 Plague patients in a temporary hospital in the glass works in Kennedy Town
[http://www.grs.gov.hk/ws/english/resource/health_and_hygiene/public_health/Health_and_Hygiene_13_pic_no_2.html]

5. *Mui Wo salt pans*

Eric Spain enquired whether there were salt pans in Mui Wo around the time of WW2. Frank Watson has found that in a 2005 interview with the then 82 year-old Mui Wo resident Wong Chau-fuk, Mr Wong states "The land beside the pier and the bust stop was originally the sea...there were some businessmen who set up a salt field nearby, but water kept seeping up out of the ground and the salt wouldn't crystallize. I remember working there with my dad. After the salt field closed we went back to farming." Mr Wong was born around 1923, so it looks as if Eric's suggestion is correct. However, more conclusive evidence is needed. A map showing Mui Wo around the end of WW2?

The above interview is at <http://hk.asia-city.com/city-living/article/mui-wo-rural-committees-wong-chau-fuk>

6. *Parasols –made in Hong Kong?*

Hugh Farmer was recently on holiday in Burma and visited the town of Patheingyi (Bassein) where he visited the Shwe Sar Umbrella Workshop which produces exquisite hand-made parasols. He mentioned this to group member Malcolm Morris, who lived in Hong Kong in the 1970s. Malcolm remembers his mother using a parasol which he thinks she bought in the Yue Hua Chinese Products Emporium store in Jordan. Umbrellas were certainly manufactured in Hong Kong but does anyone know whether parasols were?

7. *Origin of the word 'Godown'*

Newsletter Five mentioned the term 'godown' and suggested it originated from 16th Century Portuguese, 'gudão' or possibly an Indian language. Godown remains a common term in many parts of India and was frequently used in 19th century Hong Kong (eg The Hong Kong and Kowloon Wharf and Godown Company, Limited) and Chinese ports.

Hugh Farmer has a copy of the wonderful book *Hobson and Jobson – a glossary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words and phrases...* ed W Crooke Pub 1886 which includes the term signifying 'a warehouse for goods and stores; an outbuilding used for stores; a store-room'. The entry says that the word passed from "eastern settlements" where the Malay word *gadong* was in use having come primarily from South India either from Telugu *gidangi* and/or Tamil *kidangu* meaning 'a place where goods lie' (or Singhalese *gudāma*). However, many Malay words are Tamil so it is suggested that the term went from south India into Malay (and Javanese), and then back again as an Anglo-Indian word.

Did it then move to Macau through Portuguese influence and thence to Hong Kong? Can anyone make the connection?

Hobson and Jobson's first use of the term is from 1513 "...in which all his rice and a *Gudam* full of mace was burned."

*

Bits and Pieces

RAS Re-use is a special interest group formed within the Royal Asiatic Society (Hong Kong Branch) which focuses on the adaptive re-use of old buildings in Hong Kong. On 6th April 2013 Colin Davidson organised a visit to the Jockey Creative Arts Centre in Shek Kip Mei. This former industrial building has been converted from a flatted factory into an Arts Centre, which now accommodates over 100 artists and art organisations.

Four presentations were given during the visit. I gave one on three interrelated subjects: The 1953 Shek Kip Mei Fire, the first public housing – Mark 1 Resettlement buildings and the 1957 Government Resettlement Flatted Factory Programme.

For more information on the conversion: <http://www.jccac.org.hk>

HF

*

At the RAS Re-use visit I met Simon Go who is the founder and project director of Hulu Culture, a non-profit organization promoting local heritage and culture. Simon showed us examples of some of the products which made Hong Kong famous during its industrial heyday. The "Made in Hong Kong" period. (see 'Factory Girls' below)

www.huluhk.org

HF

*

The Hong Kong Maritime Museum opened at Central Ferry Pier 8 on February 25th 2013. It's well worth a visit not least because it has information on several aspects of Hong Kong's industrial history. These include shipyards and ship breaking. I didn't know that the latter happened here. However, it goes back to at least 1861 when the Bombay (Mumbai) built *Minden* was sold for demolition. HF

*

The SCMP of 18th April 2013 contained an article of interest. It reported that a Director of Audit's report had found that sixteen public heritage sites either were not being maintained or had not been used for periods of up to twenty years. The audit considered it unsatisfactory that ten government-graded buildings had been left unattended. One of the sites with a grade one rating is the 1887 Old Dairy Farm Senior Staff Quarters in Pok Fu Lam. This is the oldest remaining building of the dairy company. Note the word 'proposed' on the map.



A map of Pok Fu Lam showing the remains of the Dairy Farm (Source: South China Morning Post, 25 October 2010).

See: http://www.amo.gov.hk/form/Brief_Information_on_proposed_Grade_I_Items.pdf
page 166 for an Historic Building Appraisal of the quarters

*

Amelia Allsop, Collections Manager at the Hong Kong Heritage Project, kindly sent me details of a short film made by her colleague Melanie Limade in 2008. It's called "Stories of Factory Girls" and includes interviews with women who worked in Hong Kong during the 1960s and 70s. You might be interested in finding out what working life was like in that dynamic manufacturing period.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8g1-chayPM&list=UUcRAM-NoyvZacJhXk6wKdgg&index=22> HF

*

In 1845 James Adnams became the first saddler to open a shop in the Canton Bazaar, HK. He was also a harness maker and coach trimmer. Canton Bazaar, established in 1842 was on Queen's Road.

*

Industrial Demolitions

On 19th January 2013 the Urban Renewal Authority announced a plan to turn a 10-storey industrial building in Cheung Sha Wan into a commercial building at a cost of HKD1.7 billion. The 50-year-old Wing Hong Factory Building on Yu Chau West Street has about 40 owners and 40 business operators. Under the plan, the 1,400 square metre building will be replaced with one of 16,700 square metres. Completion of this project is expected in 2019-2020.

*

Corrections and Clarifications

Newsletter 3 stated that the Lin Ma Hang mine operated from 1917 to 1858. However, this brief introduction gave the impression that there was no activity before 1917. In fact lead was discovered in the late 1860s, the lowest workings of the mine, called the Portuguese Workings, date from the 19th century and the main vein was first discovered in 1915 by Chinese miners. Incidentally the latter was apparently the first "proper" mining tunnel in Hong Kong and was approximately 0.9 km long with a diameter of about 2.3 m.

*

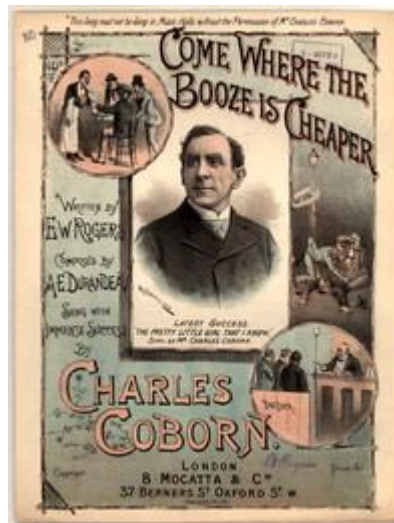
The Opening of the Sham Tseng Brewery

Hugh Farmer

On 30th August 1933 Hong Kong Brewers and Distillers Ltd officially opened its brewery in the presence of several hundred prominent Hong Kong citizens. A fleet of 100 cars enabled them to make the 12-mile journey from Hong Kong island, and also Kowloon, to the Sham Tseng plant west of Tsuen Wan, by mid-afternoon and back to town when the inspection of the plant and the sampling of the new beer had been completed.

The General Officer Commanding, Major General OC Borrett officiated at the ceremony and his wife formally opened the doors of the main building using a silver key. The guests gathered in a huge matshed decorated with bunting and hung with flags. Several speeches were made, including one by JH Ruttonjee who was managing director of the brewery (his father had been a trader in wines, spirits and provisions in Hong Kong since 1884).

SH Dodwell, Chairman, also addressed those present and pointed out that the Sham Tseng beer would be about half the price of the imported product. It seems to have been a very jolly afternoon, no doubt encouraged by liberal consumption of the product, as he recalled the old 19th century music-hall song, "Come where the booze is cheaper".



Credit: [Library of Congress, Music Division](#)

Despite Mr Dodwell's proud boast the brewery was not a success and had to be liquidated (pun intended). Before long however another company was up and running under the modified name of Hong Kong Brewery and Distillery Ltd. This one fared well and became a profitable enterprise.

Though taken over the Japanese during the war it was returned in reasonably good condition. In 1948 the brewery was sold to Colonel Soriano, the head of San Miguel Corporation of Manila, for HKD6 million, after negotiations that allegedly took just under one hour.

The site of the Sham Tseng cum San Miguel brewery is now Bellagio, a private housing estate.



The San Miguel Brewery at Sham Tseng

Let's end this newsletter with a rousing chorus commemorating that August day nearly eighty years ago.....

Come where the booze is cheaper!
Come where the pots hold more!
Come where the boss is a bit of a joss!
Come to the pub next door.

*