

George Ernest Marden

The First Hongkonger served as Rotary International Director

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George Ernest Marden (馬頓), affectionately known as “Gem” in Rotary, was the first Hong Kong citizen served Rotary International as Director in 1951-1952, and concurrently the Committee Chairman of The Rotary Foundation Fellowships (i.e. scholarships).

Gem first joined Rotary on 26 October 1925 as an Active Member of the Shanghai Rotary Club (上海扶輪社) in the Republic of China (中華民國), and later was elected Club President in 1928-1929. After the World War II, he moved to Hong Kong in 1948 and joined the Hong Kong Rotary Club (香港扶輪社) as a Senior Active Member (資深社員). In 1949-1950, Gem was elected Governor of the 57th District of Rotary International -- the territory was compiled with South China (the portion of the provinces of Fukien (*Fujian*) 福建省, Kwangtung (*Guangdong*) 廣東省, Kwangsi (*Guangxi*) 廣西省, Kweichow (*Guizhou*) 貴州省, Yunnan 雲南省); and the British Crown Colony Hong Kong 香港 as well as the Portuguese Territory Macao 澳門. In late 1951, all of the 3 Rotary districts 57-58-59 in China were dissolved by Rotary International. To supervise the remained functioning clubs as well as extension of new clubs in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao, an Administrative Advisor (equivalent to today's Special Representative) was appointed by Rotary International in lieu of a district governor. In 1953-1954, Gem was appointed to perform such duty.

Other than service in Rotary, Gem was the President of The Boy Scouts Association, Hong Kong Branch (香港童子軍總會會長) from 1953 to 1959. The Chief Scouts at the time were the Hong Kong Governors Sir Alexander Grantham (香港總督葛量洪爵士) and Sir Robert Brown Black (香港總督柏立基爵士), consecutively. Formerly, Gem was Mason, member of Lodge Cosmopolitan and Rising Sun Royal Arch Chapter; Member of Shanghai Club, Shanghai Race Club, Cercle Sportif Francais, Royal Air Force Association, etc.

George Ernest Marden (Hong Kong) – 57th District Governor (1949-1950)
Addressed at the 42nd Rotary International Convention, Atlantic City, U.S.A., 1951

Vocational Service – The Four-Way Test

It is some years since it was first suggested to Rotary clubs that they encourage their members in the use of what was called the Four-Way Test and you will all by now be familiar with its simple emphasis on truth, justice, friendliness, and helpfulness, presented by means of the desk plaque or the framed card

Many of us have launched independent business careers and please God men ever will, with a little capital, much hope, some doubts, and a determination to spare neither time nor effort to succeed, and I doubt whether we have (by and large) in the beginning, consciously added to this the thought that our success shall be attained honestly or ethically. Indeed, we are more likely to have intended to get there by hook or by crook than by any planned adherence to copy-book maxims.

But we will quickly have learned that a business needs something more than capital, more than staff, plant, or material or stock, more even than that “know-how” which is nearly indispensable – it needs the germ of that yeast of goodwill which will in a favourable climate multiply and increase so that it becomes the very business itself.

There are perhaps some substitutes for goodwill. In fact, they sometimes masquerade so successfully under its name that auditors and accountants mistake them in balance sheets and appraisals. Such things as favourable locations, monopoly in its various forms, or even the personality of the operator himself, but consider how vulnerable they are. Where the public is bound to the business only by the galling tie of necessity, immediately an alternative source of supply or service is uncovered the fatal lack of goodwill becomes apparent and the downgrade is reached.

But if profit is an essential don't be misled into believing that there is a God-given right to a minimum of customers. Nothing has ever been written into a free constitution, or grown up with the experience of centuries to give anyone an inalienable right to sell his goods to people who don't want them. He must earn the sale not only with adherence to those fair-trading practices which certain developed economies have made necessary, but by reputation, quality standards, and honesty of dealing and purpose. The small man has not the protection and advantage of trademarks and brand names, essential though they are both to seller and purchaser in the wider field and he must offer something in their place – the certainty in the minds of his customers that they are getting a fair deal.

Is it the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? There is an old proverb used by the business man of my youth and earlier, some of you may have heard it. “Don't cry ‘Sticking Fish’ “. This belongs to the era when every apprentice was expected to learn

what were called “the tricks of the trade”.

Rotary encourages its members to scorn any tricks in any trade that are not to the direct advantage of the customer and the Rotary form of the old proverb is very different from the original. It is “Don’t sell stinking fish”.

Is it fair to all concerned? Your goodwill and your reputation for honesty depends upon your treating your customers or clients or constituents – call them what you will – your readers or your public if you are an author or a journalist – with impartial fairness. Don’t overlook that it says all concerned; that includes your employees – the girl who may have to stand too long and the commuting assistant who must wait over for a later train.

Will it build goodwill and better friendship?

Will your customer appreciate it even if he won’t want to come right around and thank you for it there and then?

Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Do you know deep inside you that it will be good to happen?

Ask yourself these four questions in relation to your customer or client, your employee or partner, your stockholder or banker.

Remember that the number of men who got themselves or their business out of trouble by worry and concealment in the hope of better days is not ten percent of those that got deeper and deeper in that same trouble. Realize that frankness brings the help and assistance of all interests concerned and you will be convinced as I am, that *honesty is still the best policy!*



October 1949, Hong Kong – Rotary International President Percy Hodgson (standing) and lady Edith (at his right) addressed The Rotary Club of Hong Kong where President Fung Ping-Fan was presiding (in front of the club banner), and District Governor George E. Marden appeared at the right margin of the photo.



13 October 1949, Canton -- R. I. President Percy Hodgson (bow tie) and lady Edith accompanied by Canton Rotarians laid wreath at the Huanghuagang Mausoleum of the 72 Martyrs (黄花崗七十二烈士墓) (the Revolutionists of 1911), District Governor George E. Marden (5th from left) accompanying.



George Ernest Marden (Hong Kong) -- Rotary International Director (1951-1952)
Addressed at the 43rd Rotary International Convention,
Mexico City, Mexico, 25-29 May 1952

International Service

When I accepted the invitation to speak to you today on International Service, my mind went back to some remarks made in discussion at an earlier international convention by an experienced Rotarian, who is actually present at this meeting, when he warned us of the danger of confusing international service with international affairs and it is, I suggest, particularly necessary at this present time that we keep that distinction in mind.

Our object – our sole object – is service, and the international avenue to that service is

at the same time most likely to be fruitful in results and most likely, if approached in a thoughtless manner, to lead to misunderstandings.

Your present board has given much consideration to this fourth avenue of service and has set forth anew to the plainest of language our united aim and the responsibilities, both of the individual Rotarian and of the Rotary Club. Our aim is simple and we should remember that it grew spontaneously within Rotary as we developed to international status – the simple wish to advance understanding, goodwill, and peace through the fact that you and I and all of us all over the world, united in thought as we are by our common membership in Rotary, might direct that united thought towards the common good of all communities. Nothing more. The individual, the loyal citizen which we expect every Rotarian to be, will help to create a well-informed public opinion. That is the gist of it – the removal of ignorance and prejudice follows logically and with knowledge most come understanding and from understanding can come what we all desire – Peace.

The Rotary Club will inevitably take cognizance of international matters, indeed it should seek to insure that its members are correctly informed upon them, but it is the very negative of international service to be drawn into action on international affairs which are the provinces of governments. Even discussion, particularly if it is likely to be reported in the press, should stress those points on which a measure of agreement seems possible, leaving criticism to other agencies than Rotary. Remember that what may seem to be just and reasonable comment – not even criticism – can easily be removed from context and distorted so as to create rather than to eliminate points of disagreement. Please do not imagine that I recommend any sacrifice of principle. I merely suggest that a Rotary Club should deliberately refrain from aggravating an international situation in any way whatever.

The individual as such will take whatever action and make whatever statements his conscience and his convictions may impose upon him but the association of the name of Rotary with one side of a controversial international question can only weaken our aim of service. When an utterance by Rotary cannot reasonably be expected to ease an existing tension Rotary will remain silent. Indeed Rotary International itself will neither take action nor express opinion on political subjects and it seeks to insure that its position be not prejudiced by one of its constituent clubs.

There will be many amongst us advocating action or pronouncement – some will remind us that he who is not for us is against in – all in absolute conviction and good faith – and we may even be charged with appeasement. It is perhaps unfortunate that an ugly connotation has attached itself to the word “appeasement”, but I suggest that notwithstanding the changes of nearly two millenniums, peacemakers are still blessed.

I have recently attended conferences in Rotary districts where the very existence of Rotary is evidence of international service. In one of them four distinct races – many more actual nationalities – work together in Rotary fellowship. It was most impressive to observe

the complete harmony and friendship and more – the ability and the will to discuss without embarrassment and without diffidence, in perfect good faith, problems of inter-racial and international goodwill affecting deeply and vitally the very clubs and members discussing them. And don't miss the importance of this close contact of differing nations – not the grandiose sweep of power conferences – any sovereign rights and high contracting parties which the word “International” conjures up before our eyes, but the simple contact of the heart between Rotarians of differing races – the same contact that you and I and all of us are enjoying at this very moment. Is there diffidence between us? Feelings of superiority inferred? No, there is only the trust and friendship which Rotary gives to us and which it is our simple aim to engender in all the world.

But most of our clubs do not provide ready-made opportunities for international service – it is but once a year that we meet in international convention and, although all of us here will take back to our clubs something that we have gained from our contacts, thus continuing a leavening started by participants in earlier gatherings such as this is and that is all to the good, nevertheless only a small portion of our number is privileged to receive such inspiration and we must plan for the instruction of those others in our program – a worldwide association of men engaged primarily in seeking their living but motivated by a common ideal of service. That is our object. There is no mention of the foreigner in it and how often do we find that word “foreigner” used in a bad sense? The hated foreigner, the dirty foreigner – all the derogatory adjectives in the dictionary are applied to him – all the prejudice which ignorance has fostered is apparent in the general use of the word.

Your club will ask you “But what shall we actually do to promote our fourth avenue of service” and “But do these simple letters to Rotarians in other countries and such things on observance of their national festivals actually accomplish anything.”

You may inform them that our object is Service and when we consider the slow transformation in the meaning of the word “service”, connoting as it did for centuries and still does in the dead languages of the world “slavery”, to the glorious meaning now given to it world-wide reminding those of us who live in the East of the Confucian illustration of the lotus flower with its root in the slime of the pond growing steadily upward until its blossom expands to the sun – I am led to believe that humble insistence by Rotary on serving will accomplish the same glorious results.

I recently heard a rebuke from the platform given at a Rotary meeting to a questioner who had asked about the special function of “foreigners” in the Club. “There are no foreigners in Rotary” said this member of a young nation, “We are all Rotarians” and that is the thought I hope to leave with you today – no foreign parts or foreign ways or foreign dress, but merely other Rotarians living differently from you, of course under conditions necessitated by their geographical places in the world but actuated by the same spirit and seeking opportunities to co-operate with you in reaching our common goal.



November 1951

Rotary International Director George E. Marden addressed to the Hong Kong Rotarians at his Home Club



1954 – In Taipei, Taiwan, an intercity forum was held that brought Rotarians of Hong Kong, Macao, Kowloon, to the host city to acquire a better understanding of Rotary through general discussion. Manuel Adeva, then Club President, introduced the speaker at his right, George Ernest Marden, Past R. I. Director.

Life or Death for Hong Kong

By George Ernest Marden (financier and ship-owner)

《The Rotarian》 magazine, January 1959.

[This was a special feature in the Magazine---TRADE a path to Peace in the Pacific---Marden was one of the men from 5 nations of the Orient telling why increased commerce was so important to their homelands and to their region.]

The Crown Colony of Hong Kong, including the leased territories, has a total area of 391 square miles, of which only 80 square miles is---or can be---cultivated. It has a population of 2,677,000 and its natural resources of fishing and agriculture could support perhaps a quarter of this number. Foreign trade therefore means to Hong Kong more than a mere difference in the standard of living and, as will be seen later, it is not being melodramatic to call it the difference between life and death.

The Colony was founded as a trading center, and its population grew in line with the growth of the services it rendered as a distribution point for the whole of Southeast Asia. It quickly recovered after World War II, but then came the exodus from China as the Communist armies advanced southward and the Colony was faced with the need to support its new inhabitants.

Some of the refugees brought skills with them and some brought capital and the infant industries they set up grew lustily---so well, in fact, that with their aid the Colony gained breathing space and survived the catastrophe of the complete cessation of trade with the mainland. As a young producer seeking to compete with established suppliers, Hong Kong has met with strong opposition, political as well as commercial, in all parts of the world, but the resilience of its merchants and the enterprise of its factories have so far prevailed.

Most countries think of foreign trade in terms of the export of an agricultural surplus or of a small part of its manufactures together with the import of food and of goods of a quality or kind not readily produced internally. The text is often preached that it is only upon the support of a vigorous home market that a worth-while export trade can develop.

In Hong Kong there is almost literally no home market---its millions live too near to the subsistence level for there to be one!---and it must import most of its food.

But whilst paying for these food imports the exports from Hong Kong bring to the underdeveloped areas of Indonesia and Southeast Asia generally the beginnings of a rise in their standards of living. The simplest manufactures of cotton, rubber, enamel-ware, iron and steel, brass, and copper bring clothing, shoes, and the means of cooking to millions and millions who would otherwise be without them, for they have not the wherewithal to buy the more elaborate product of the older manufacturing countries. It is Hong Kong's low cost of

manufacture that permits the villagers in, say, Borneo to own a flashlight, to wear cotton clothing and rubber shoes.

This low cost is a characteristic and is, of course, bitterly criticized and resented by our competitors, but is seldom realized that factory labor constitutes only a very small portion of our needy people, and that the wages paid in all the modern factories are very much higher than the average wage level in the Colony. There are so-called cottage industries and small operators where earnings are pitifully low, but they enable whole families to exist.

Hong Kong's political vulnerability has been pointed out alike by friendly and adverse critics world-wide, but it is not too much to say that without the foreign trade which means so much in terms of living, it would immediately become an area where conflicting ideologies would endanger peace, where the specter of starvation would stalk, where there would be a conflict between agencies of differing ideological background in giving and demanding political credit for the very aid which our foreign trade now makes unnecessary.

Hong Kong has never wailed or wilted under its troubles. It has seldom had other than a bad press almost universally, but I repeat that without its foreign trade it will cease to exist either as the result of privations or by being swallowed into the maw of totalitarianism.



George Ernest Marden (3 July 1892, England - 23 February 1966, London) was born into a naturalized British family of German extraction, George Ernest Gumprecht (who later adopted his mother's maiden name, Marden) joined the army on leaving school and was posted to the British Crown Colony Hong Kong, arriving in 1912. Shortly afterwards he bought himself out of the army and took a position in the Chinese Maritimes Customs (CMC) (中國海關總稅務司) in Canton (*Guangzhou*) (廣州), Republic of China.

The Chinese Maritime Customs Service was a Chinese governmental tax collection agency and information service from its founding in 1854 until it split in 1949 into services operating in the Republic of China on Taiwan, and in the People's Republic of China. From its foundation in 1854 until the collapse of the Ch'ing Empire in 1911, the agency was known as the Imperial Maritime Customs Service (大清皇家海關總稅務司).

Following the outbreak of the First World War in Europe, Marden returned to England in 1915, re-enlisted, and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. He was awarded the Military Cross later that year. He married Dorothy Scales in 1916 during a period of home leave, and returned to the War as a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps. He had been a Major in the Shanghai Volunteer Corps Reserve of Officers during his years in Shanghai International Settlement after 1919.

In 1919 Marden returned once more to China with his wife and one-year-old son John.

He became headmaster of the CMC training school. Using his experience of business, gained through the CMC and earlier as a junior in a London trading company, he formed in 1925 G. E. Marden & Co., Ltd., providers of lighterage and customs brokerage services. The firm was floated on the Shanghai Stock Exchange in 1930 as Marden & Company. On the other hand, Shanghai Tug and Lighter Limited was a British firm founded as 1857 in Shanghai by Captain Thomas Reed Wheelock. Marden founded Marden & Company in 1925 and then merged with Thomas Wheelock's tug company to form Wheelock & Marden Co., Ltd. (會德豐馬登股份有限公司) in 1932, but with Marden as chairman. Over the next 12 years the company grew steadily, principally in the fields of shipping, lighterage, storage, ship brokerage and ship breaking.

Wheelock & Marden Co., Ltd. actively expanded its business, covering areas such as steel, insurance, real estate and investment trust management. It became an English-funded company in the Shanghai of the time, with scale on par with major English brands, such as Jardine Matheson and Swire Group.

Wheelock & Marden Co., Ltd. was originally based in Shanghai in its early days, so how did it become an English-owned brand rooted in the hearts of Hong Kong people?

Outbreak of the Pacific War on 7 December 1941 resulting the Shanghai International Settlement (上海公共租界) was soon captured by the Imperial Japanese forces. Along with many of the foreign residents of Shanghai, Marden was evacuated to England in 1942, but he was able to continue managing his Shanghai shipping business, which he renamed "Wheelock Marden & Co., Ltd. (會德豐有限公司)". He returned to Shanghai in 1946, only to leave again two years later, establishing himself, his family, his cash and his companies in Hong Kong.

Having experienced many wars and turmoil, Marden spent his whole life shuttling back and forth between China and England. After witnessing China's rise and fall, the change of regime in the Chinese mainland, he lacked confidence in Hong Kong's prospects.

As a result, his business expansion plans changed, and he decided to return to his aspirations towards shipping businesses, offering more liquidity to reduce political risks. If war strikes again, the business can also be quickly moved to other places.

Variouly considered as a controversial corporate raider or a dynamic entrepreneur, Marden retired to London in 1959, leaving his huge corporate empire in the capable hands of his 40-year-old son John.

John Louis Marden (馬登), C.B.E., J.P. (1919-1999) was also a Rotarian of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong, and was the Club President in 1964-1965. He later was elected to serve as Rotary International District 345 (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao) Governor in 1967-1968. Hence the Rotary Club of Hong Kong made a record of "the home of Father & Son district governors".



List of some companies with which George E. Marden was associated

Chairman of Directors

Wheelock Marden & Co., Ltd.; International Investment Corporation Ltd.; The Hong Kong & China Gas Co., Ltd. (香港中華煤氣有限公司); Harriman Realty Co., Ltd.; Conres & Co., Ltd.; Allied Investors Corporation Ltd.; Eastern Asia Navigation Co., Ltd.; Far Eastern Aviation Co., Ltd.; Far East Flying & Technical School Ltd. (遠東航空學校); Far Eastern Prospecting & Development Corporation Ltd.; Hong Kong Realty & Trust Co., Ltd. (香港置業信託有限公司); The Loan & Investment Co., Ltd.; Oriental Mortgage & Finance Corporation Ltd.; Shewan, Tomes & Co., Ltd. (新旗昌洋行); The Textile Corporation of Hong Kong Ltd. (會德豐紡織有限公司); Wheelock Marden & Stewart Ltd.; Lane Crawford Ltd. (連卡佛有限公司)

Director

China Underwriters Ltd.; The China Engineers Ltd.; The Dairy Farm (牛奶公司); Ice & Cold Storage Co., Ltd.; L. Dunbar Co (1950) Ltd.; The Hongkong & Shanghai Hotels, Ltd. (香港上海大酒店有限公司); Hong Kong Tramways Ltd.; John D. Hutchison & Co., Ltd. (和記洋行有限公司); Fagan (H.K.) Ltd.; Hong Kong Rolling Mills Ltd.; Mountain Lead Mines Ltd.; The Pressure Pilling [sic] Co. (Hong Kong), Ltd.; Reiss Bradley & Co., Ltd.



George E. Marden at Shek O Residence (Image source: David Fong / Pinterest)