

Sir William Edward Leonard Shenton

Charter Member & Director of Hong Kong Rotary Club in 1930

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Birth of The Rotary Club of Hong Kong

The British Crown Colony Hong Kong located at the south China coast was the first prospect of Rotary International to extend Rotary landing on the continent of Asia. The story has to be dated back to June 1918. However, failure reports were received after several attempts not until the visit of Jim to Hong Kong in 1930 – the last goal of his Far East Rotary Extension Mission in two and a half years. The birth of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong (香港扶輪社) was given by the voluntary mission of Past President “Jim” James Wheeler Davidson of Calgary Rotary Club, Alberta, Canada, and who was the 3rd Vice-President of Rotary International in 1926-1927, with the assistance of his wife Lillian and daughter Marjory. Jim was an explorer, writer, United States diplomat, merchant and philanthropist. Affectionately, Jim was honoured as “The Marco Polo of Rotary” who established most of the first Rotary clubs in countries of the Orient.

In overcoming the previous experiences of failure by others, Jim’s first approach to each new country would be contact of the government officials from whom he had letters of introduction. He approached the difficult problem in Hong Kong without any fears of failure. He was fortunate in the fact that the new Governor, Sir William Peel, had come to Hong Kong from Kuala Lumpur, The Federated Malay States, and that he had attended the official inauguration meeting of Kuala Lumpur Rotary Club in 1929 there. As Sir William was seated next to Jim at that dinner meeting, Jim was able to tell him much about Rotary.

With eight introduction letters issued by Governor Sir William Peel (香港總督貝璐爵士), Jim was able to invite a group of potential members to the organizing meetings through the

efforts of leading citizens, Dr. Robert Hormus Kotewall (羅旭龢博士), William Edward Leonard Shenton, Sir William W. Hornell (康寧爵士), Dr. Arthur W. Woo (胡惠德醫生), etc.

Sir William Woodward Hornell (康寧爵士), Kt., C.I.E., M.A., Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong (香港大學校長) in 1924-1937, was elected Charter President of the Hong Kong Rotary Club. The Honourable William Edward Leonard Shenton was elected to serve as a Director of the Board.

The inaugural dinner meeting of the Hong Kong Rotary Club was held on Tuesday, 8 December 1930, at the Lane Crawford restaurant (The Café Wiseman) in the basement of the newly built Exchange House, the center of industry and finance in Hong Kong. The charter members included 79 of the leading citizens: 31 Chinese, 46 Americans and Europeans, 1 Indian and 1 Japanese. The Club was admitted to Rotary International on 20 February 1931.

Within the Greater China, Hong Kong Rotary Club remains today the oldest with more than 80 years of regular weekly meetings. The Club is the home of most number of Rotary International officers, including vice-president, director, administrative advisors, and district governors, and was also the home of many knights bachelor bestowed by the sovereign heads of the British Empire.

A Brief Biography of Shenton

The Honourable Sir William Edward Leonard Shenton (18 March 1885 – 20 November 1967) was an English solicitor who worked in Hong Kong.

Born in Morestead near Winchester, England, he was the son of William Shenton and Eleanor Johnson. He went to the Northgate School at St. Thomas, Hampshire, around 1901. He arrived in Hong Kong in 1908 and rose to the head of the well-known Hong Kong legal firm of Deacons (的近律師行). He was also the chairman of the Union Insurance Society of Canton, Ltd. (於仁保險有限公司), which was a major Hong Kong-based insurance company regarded in the early 20th century as one of the four leading British businesses, or “hongs” (四大行), of colonial Hong Kong alongside Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation (香港上海滙豐銀行), Jardine, Matheson & Company Limited (怡和洋行) and John Swire & Sons Limited (太古洋行).

Later, William was appointed by Hong Kong Governor Sir Cecil Clementi (香港總督金文泰爵士) an Unofficial Member of the Executive Council and Legislative Council of Hong Kong (香港行政局/立法局非官守議員) temporarily in 1927 and again from 1928, until his retirement and returned to England in 1936. He was also member of the legal sub-committee of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce (香港總商會).

In January 1933, William was bestowed Knight Bachelor by George V, King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions, and Emperor of India.

William married Erica Lucy Denison, daughter of civil engineer Albert Denison of Hong Kong. He had one son and one daughter. His daughter, Yvonne Eleanor Mutch Shenton, a keen horse woman, was married to Cecil Edward Sanford Barclay, son of Sir Colville Herbert Sanford Barclay, the 14th Baronet.

Sir William E. L. Shenton died on 20 November 1967 in Isle of Wight, England.

《APPENDIX》

Excerpt from the Archives of Hong Kong Legislative Council 1933

Hong Kong Legislative Council 2nd February 1933

PRESENT:-

His Excellency The Governor (Sir William Peel, K.C.M.G., K.B.E.)

His Excellency The General Officer Commanding The Troops (Major-General O. C. Borrett, C.B., C.M.G., C.B.E., D.S.O.)

The Colonial Secretary (Hon. Mr. W. T. Southorn, C.M.G.)

The Attorney General (Hon. Mr. C. G. Alabaster, K.C., O.B.E.)

The Secretary for Chinese Affairs (Hon. Mr. E. R. Hallifax, C.M.G., C.B.E.)

The Colonial Treasurer (Hon. Mr. E. Taylor)

Hon. Mr. E. D. C. Wolfe, C.M.G. (Inspector General of Police)

Hon. Commander G. F. Hole, R.N. (Retired) (Harbour Master)

Hon. Dr. A. R. Wellington (Director of Medical and Sanitary Services)

Hon. Mr. R. M. Henderson (Director of Public Works)

Hon. Sir Henry Pollock, Kt., K.C.

Hon. Sir William Shenton, Kt.

Hon. Mr. R. H. Kotewall, C.M.G., LL.D.

Hon. Mr. J. P. Braga

Hon. Mr. S. W. Ts'o, O.B.E., LL.D.

Hon. Mr. T. N. Chau

Hon. Mr. W. H. Bell

Mr. R. A. C. North (Deputy Clerk of Councils)

ABSENT:-

Hon. Mr. J. J. Paterson

MINUTES:-

Congratulations to Sir William Shenton

H. E. The Governor ---

Before proceeding with the orders of the day I should like, on behalf of the members of this Council, to tender our sincere congratulations to one of our members, Sir William Shenton, on the honour which was conferred upon him by His Majesty the King on the occasion of the New Year, in recognition of his services to this Colony. I will not attempt to recite the list of such services as they are all well-known to you and such a recital would take a long time. It is sufficient to say that I know of no public service which he has been called upon to perform which he has not performed with zest and energy. His advice and help have been of great assistance to myself and my predecessors and also to many Government servants, and on my own behalf and their behalf I tender to him our sincere thanks.

I understand Sir William contemplates going Home on leave in the near future and I hope he will return to us for I am sure you will agree that his retirement would be a great loss, not only to me but to the Colony.

(Applause)

The Hon. Sir Henry Pollock ---

On behalf of the Unofficial members I desire to associate myself entirely with the words of His Excellency.

The Hon. Sir William Shenton ---

Thank you.

Standing Law Committee

H. E. The Governor ---

There is one item not on the Agenda. As this is the first meeting of the Council this year, it is necessary to appoint the Standing Law Committee. I propose to appoint the following members who have agreed to serve: – The Hon. the Attorney General (Chairman), the Hon. the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, The Hon. Sir Henry Pollock, The Hon. Sir William Shenton and the Hon. Mr. S. W. Ts’o.

(Both Shenton and Ts’o were charter members of Hong Kong Rotary Club.)

