

Benjamin Wylie, JP

The First Rotarian Newspaperman in Hong Kong

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Benjamin Wylie (衛理太平紳士), JP, (1884–1956) was one of the 79 charter members in 1930 of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong (香港扶輪社) and served the first Board of Directors, holding the classification “Printing & Publishing - Newspaper Publishing”. He was Managing Director and General Manager of the 《South China Morning Post》 (南華早報) (SCMP) and the 《Hong Kong Telegraph》 (士蔑西報) during the mid-20th Century.

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 were 79 leading citizens: 31 Chinese, 46 Americans and Europeans, 1 Indian and 1 Japanese. The Club was admitted to Rotary International on 20 February 1931.

Later, Wylie invited Henry Ching, OBE, JP, Editor of 《South China Morning Post》, to join the Rotary Club of Hong Kong but as an Additional Active Member (增額現職社員 old fashion membership of the last century). It was because his “boss” Wylie has already joined the Club as Active Member holding the Classification “Printing & Publishing – Newspaper Publishing”.



Kowloon Residents' Association

In Ho Man Tin (何文田) and King's Park (京士柏), Kowloon, Hong Kong, there is a Wylie Road (衛理道) running south–north from Gascoigne Road (加士居道) to Waterloo Road (窩打老道). “Wylie Road” is named after the late Benjamin Wylie, JP, a co-founder of the Kowloon Residents' Association (九龍居民協會) in honor of his pre-Pacific War philanthropic contributions to the Kowloon area. The road was completed and opened in 1956

According to Hong Kong historian Miss Vivian Kong on 《The Kowloon Residents' Association and interwar Hong Kong's civil society》, the formation and activities of The Kowloon Residents' Association were:

On 24 January 1920 the 《South China Morning Post》 published a contributed article, 《The New Kowloon: A Dream》. Set twenty years in the future, the piece depicted a Kowloon that was no longer “the foot-stool of the Peak”. Kowloon, in this “Dream”, was now a “large and prosperous city” that had “large and luxurious hotels, a well-equipped European hospital, an up-to-date fire station, [and] houses to suit all pockets”. No longer did residents have to “bail surplus soda water in an endeavor to imitate a bath”: now the water supply “is never at fault”!

The anonymous author admitted this sounded “unreal”. And unreal it was for the many attendants at the inaugural meeting of the Kowloon Residents' Association only four days prior. To these white-collar middle-class residents, the Kowloon of 1920 lacked the urban development it deserved. “Old Kowloon”, the section of Kowloon Peninsular south of Boundary Street, was ceded to Britain in 1860, and in 1898 Britain leased “New Kowloon” as part of the New Territories for 99 years. Since the 1900s, Kowloon's affordable rent made it a popular residential option for middle-class families in the colony. But urban development there, especially medical facilities and public transportation, did not grow accordingly to support its rapidly expanding population, an issue that began to receive increasing attention in the 1910s.

In December 1919, 122 residents in Kowloon came together to form a Kowloon's Resident Association (KRA) to “periodically meet and discuss improvements in these districts with special regards to Housing, Lighting, Police, Communications, Sanitation, Water, etc.”. The Association would grow steadily in the following years, and its membership would triple by 1931.

It was a multi-ethnic association. It was first known as 九龍西人居民協會 (meaning ‘Kowloon Westerner Residents' Association’) because of its predominantly white leadership: between 1920 and 1925 most of its committee members were white, with the exception of a few Portuguese. Some of KRA's earlier activities also demonstrated racial prejudice against the Chinese population in the colony. They had, for instance, suggested the formation of another European residential reservation in Kowloon to enforce racial segregation. But things changed in 1926 when three prominent Chinese residents, S. W. Tso, B. Wong-Tape, and Wong Kwong-tin joined the executive Committee. The Association had its first Chinese vice-president in 1928, and three years later, F. C. Mow Fung, a returned Australian Chinese became its first Chinese president. The 379 members of its 1931 membership had at least 85 Chinese, 6 Eurasians, 58 Macanese, 1 Filipino, 3 Parsi, and 5 Jews. Of these 379 members, 13 were women.

These members worked together to pressure the government for more public works in Kowloon. They met regularly to discuss issues of concern to the neighborhood. They criticized government policies. They drafted proposals for public works needed and approached relevant government departments. They acted as an advisory body for the colonial government and helped officials solicit public opinion --- in 1938, for example, they asked all Kowloon residents to send them answers to a questionnaire for the Rents Commission. Results of KRA activities were evident: after its lobbying, the government introduced a motor bus service in Kowloon in 1921, enlarged the area's postal service, and opened the Kowloon Hospital in 1925.

But facilitating urban development was not their only objective: they also wanted political reform for Hong Kong. They formed the Association not only because they wanted to pressure the government to develop Kowloon, but to have a say on how precisely it would do so. The KRA's founding president, B. L. Frost, made this clear in his inaugural speech: "We want more representation and better representation on the Legislature".

The KRA did manage to get the government to speed up its development of Kowloon. With regards to its political demands, they had asked repeatedly for a Kowloon representative in the Legislative Council, which they eventually did get. In 1929, Governor Sir Cecil Clementi added two unofficial seats to the Legislative Council, one representing the Chinese community and the other Kowloon residents. The two appointees for these seats, [S. W. Tso](#) and J. P. Braga, were both KRA members.

But the KRA also wanted a municipal government. As early as October 1920, only ten months after its formation, the KRA urged the government to form a Kowloon Municipal Council to celebrate the jubilee of Kowloon as a British territory. This proposal was not successful, but they were persistent. In 1930, even after Tso and Braga were appointed to the Legislative Council, they did not forget and asked the government again for a municipal council.

For these 3 names mentioned in the above article, they were also charter members of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong:

- (1) Dr. The Honourable Ts'o Seen-Wan (曹善允博士), CBE, *HonLLD (HKU)*, JP – Vice President 1930-1932; President 1932-1933
- (2) The Honourable Benjamin Wong-Tape (黃炳耀), OBE, JP – Club Secretary 1930-1932
- (3) Wong Kwong-Tin (黃廣田) – Club Director 1930-1932



Stanley Internment Camp

Benjamin Wylie was a significant figure in the newspaper's history. After outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Wylie expressed high hopes for the Jewish refugees from Europe arriving in Shanghai (上海), Republic of China (中華民國), believing their professional and industrial skills would greatly benefit China.

Wylie was particularly known for his role during the Pacific War (1941-1945) resulting the Imperial Japan's occupation of the British Crown Colony Hong Kong. Wylie was, at his age of 58, a civilian internee at the Stanley Internment Camp (赤柱拘留營) during the Japanese occupation.

Stanley Internment Camp was a civilian internment camp in Hong Kong during the Second World War. Located in Stanley (赤柱), on the southern end of Hong Kong Island, it was used by the Japanese imperial forces to hold non-Chinese enemy nationals after their victory in the Battle of Hong Kong (香港保衛戰) in December 1941. About 2,800 men, women, and children were held at the non-segregated camp for 44 months from early January 1942 to August 1945 when Japanese forces surrendered. The Camp area consisted of St. Stephen's College (聖士提反書院) and the grounds of Stanley Prison (赤柱監獄), excluding the prison itself.

The internees numbered at 2,800, of which an estimated 2,325 to 2,514 were British. The adult population numbered at 1,370 men and 858 women, and children 16 years of age or younger numbered at 286, with 99 of whom were below the age of 4. The Camp was under the control of the Japanese Foreign Affairs Department, but according to historian Geoffrey Charles Emerson, the Japanese forces had not made plans for dealing with enemy civilians in Hong Kong. As such, the Camp was provided with few necessities, and the internees were left to govern the Camp themselves. Committees were formed for such matters as housing, food, and medical care. The national groups remained mostly independent of each other except for matters of welfare and medical care. Very few government servants were selected to serve on these committees. Due to anti-government sentiment, most internees blamed the government for the quick surrender of Hong Kong.

Following the Japanese surrender in August 1945, Wylie returned to work at the SCMP before the internment camp was formally liberated. Wylie was one of the three key staff members (along with editor Henry Ching and journalist George Giffen) who bravely went to the occupied office to demand space and prepare the SCMP's first post-war edition, which was published on 30 August 1945.

Disembarking in Hong Kong at War's end in 1945, leading units of the relieving British fleet were surprised to find a newspaper in circulation, announcing the arrival. It was a single sheet special edition of the SCMP, of which the report of the liberation of Hong Kong remains one of the journalism's classic reports.

South China Morning Post & The Hongkong Telegraph.

Address:
1-3 Wyndham St.
HONGKONG
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2444; 23849;
26766; 20884.

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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1945.

PRICE M.Y. 10

TOKYO SURRENDER CEREMONY

JAPAN NOW UNDER ORDERS OF
GENERAL MacARTHUR

SOLEMN SIGNING OF DOCUMENTS

On a specially erected platform on the quarter-deck of the United States battleship Missouri, with the Stars and Stripes flag which had been flying at Pearl Harbour unfurled above, the surrender ceremony took place in Tokyo Bay this morning. The weather was miserable, but it was decided that the ceremony would be held, rain or shine.

An aerial display accompanied the proceedings and there was also a message by President Truman broadcast from White House at Washington.

Mr Shigemitsu, Foreign Minister, was among the Japanese delegates who signed on behalf of the Emperor of Japan, the Japanese Government and Japanese Imperial Headquarters, thus committing their country to be placed under the direct orders of General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces.

The ceremony was broadcast and relayed by Z.B.W. but reception was not very clear.

Surrounded by Allied battleships and other warcraft anchored in Tokyo Bay, the historic appending of signatures to the instruments of

At the conclusion of the entire proceedings, which lasted for about three quarters of an hour, the National Anthems of the United States and Great Britain were played.

Higher Dignity
General MacArthur said that the conflict between

TOUR OF ISLAND

Everything Orderly
And Quiet

H.E. the Lieut-Governor, Mr F. C. Gimson, made a tour of the island at midnight in company with the Commissioner of Police, Mr J. P. Pennyfather-Evans, Mr Sloss, Chief Censor, told the Press that they found everything quiet and orderly.

Mr Sloss added that no breaches of the curfew were observed. The curfew order would be strictly maintained and would continue in operation until further notice.

Mohammedans Complimented
Mr Pennyfather-Evans stated that this is the month in which Mohammedans fast. Despite this they were doing duty extraordinarily well.

forget the battleship Missouri. Japan's power to destroy and kill had been taken from her and her army and navy, or what was left of it, were impotent.

Expressing first and foremost gratitude to Almighty God for the ending of war,

BLACK MARKET

SHOCK FOR STANLEY
INTERNEES

INFORMATION DEMANDED
ON TRANSACTIONS

GOVERNMENT ORDER

A sensational statement regarding black market operations, particularly in Stanley, was issued by Mr D. J. Sloss, Chief Censor, at a Press conference this morning.

He said: The people in the prisoners-of-war and internment camps have paid Japanese yen, frequently at artificial rates, by the issue of sterling and dollar cheques, by promises to pay written or verbal, and in other ways. "A Government Order is now issued requiring the immediate return in a prescribed form giving particulars of such transactions.

"In the meantime buying and selling in any shape or form of such cheques or promises to pay is declared illegal. Copies of the form of the return will be furnished to

LETTERS HOME

Naval Plane to Carry
Special Mail

NO CABLE SERVICE YET

Those in the know were lucky enough to get off a message to their friends in England this morning.

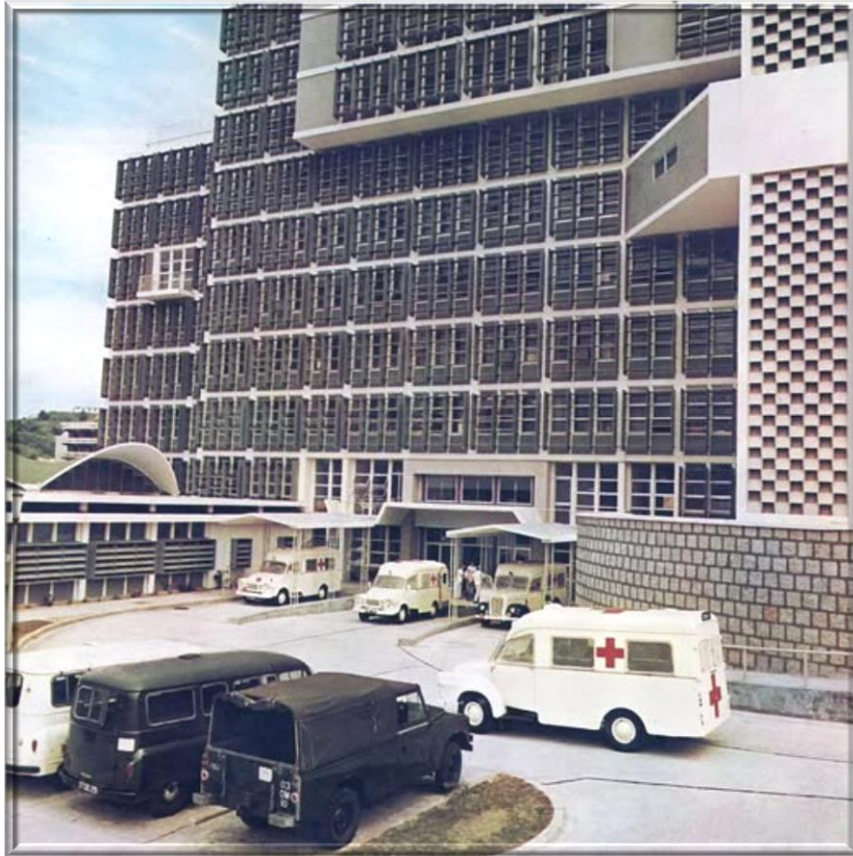
A naval plane is being despatched to carry official letters to England because of the impossibility of clearing the jammed communication lines out of the Colony.

By courtesy of the Royal Navy, room was found in the mail bags for some private mail. This invitation closed at 10 a.m.

Warships in harbour transmitting messages have been overwhelmed with work and, with Cable and Wireless facilities out of action for a few days there has been almost complete silence between Hongkong and the outer world. This is evidenced by the scant references to the Colony in British broadcasts despite the radio talks given by a foreign news commentator and the messages filed by correspondents travelling.



1926-1970 -- South China Morning Post Building at Wyndham Street, Central District, Hong Kong.



Opened in 1967, closed in 1996, then demolished, the British Military Hospital had been the iconic structure on Wylie Road, King's Park, Kowloon, Hong Kong.