Hong Kong Rotarian Edward Cock

Commodore of Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club & President of Hong Kong Scouts

By Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) (Rotary China Historian)

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Edward Cock (谷克太平紳士), MBE, AMICE, MINA, JP, (1884-1969) was an Active Member of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong (香港扶輪社) in the 1930-40s holding the Classification "Ships & Nautical Equipment – Shipbuilding" when he was the chief manager of The Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock Co., Ltd. (香港黃埔船塢有限公司). Simultaneously, Edward served the community as President of the Boy Scouts Association Hong Kong Branch (香港童子軍總會) from 1934 to 1940, as well as Commodore of the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club (香港皇家遊艇會) from 1937 to 1940.

Edward Cock spent almost his whole life in association with the sea, as a sailor, as a naval architect, as the Chief Manager of the Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock Co., Ltd., as a member of the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club and, after he retired, as Commodore of another Royal yacht club. Why he chose the sea is unknown, but in his early life the sea was never far away.

Edward was born on 15 December 1884 in Sheviock, Cornwall, England. His mother Caroline was also bearing two daughters, both younger than Edward. His father, Alfred William Cock, was a butcher. By the time Edward was six the family was living in Portsea, an island lying just off the southern coast of England and containing most of the city of Portsmouth, a major operating base of the Royal Navy. Perhaps this proximity to the sea and the navy was what stimulated him to pursue a naval related career.

Edward attended the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, and on 22 October 1906 received his certificate. In February of that year he was initiated into the Royal Naval College and United Services masonic lodge.

By 1911 he had graduated from the Royal Naval Constructors Course and was working at the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors at Portsmouth. The Corps is a civil institution of the British Royal Navy for training in naval architecture, marine, electrical and weapon engineering. Edward's militarily important war work was recognized in 1918 by appointment of Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (M.B.E.) by George V, King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions, and Emperor of India.

In 1921, Edward and his wife, Clementina (née Mitchell) travelled to the British Crown Colony Hong Kong, where he took up a position as Assistant Manager of the Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock Co., Ltd. Continuing his masonic activity, Edward was initiated into the Lodge of Perseverance, the Freemasons of Hong Kong (香港共濟會恒毅分會).

By 1922 Edward was on the Sailing Committee of the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club and racing his yacht "Sea Lark" in the Heyward-Hays Class. His sailing skills grew and in 1924 he was a member of the St. George's Society team that out-sailed the St. Andrew's Society and in the following year was in the team that defeated the Shanghai Yacht Club in an Interport Regatta in Hong Kong.

Edward further developed his professional qualifications and in 1924 became a civil engineer.

Sailing was not Edward's only recreation and in 1924 he helped establish and became President of the Kowloon Golf Club (九龍打球會), with a 9-hole course near Kowloon City (九龍城) on land formerly used for rifle ranges. The golf club continued until the Government resumed the land in 1952.

Edward's stature in the community grew and in 1928 he was appointed an Unofficial Justice of the Peace for Hong Kong by Governor Sir Cecil Clementi (香港總督金文泰爵士). He became President of the Kowloon Residents Association (九龍居民協會) and in 1929 was objecting to the amount of land granted to the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (九廣鐵路公司) at the Kowloon Peninsula, arguing that some of it should be used for recreation grounds and tennis courts for the general public and that trains could just as well depart from Hung Hom (紅磡). Edward became President of the St. George's Society and a member of the committees of the Navy League as well as Diocesan Boys' School (拔萃男書院).

In 1930 Edward lectured at the Hong Kong University Engineering Society (香港大學工程學會) on "The Evolution of Ships".

In 1934 Edward served on a Special Jury that convicted Ng Loi-Yuen (吳來園) of murdering a child, Michael Pine. Ng was hanged on 29 March 1935, the same day that Edward was elected President of the Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders (香港工程師及造船師學會).

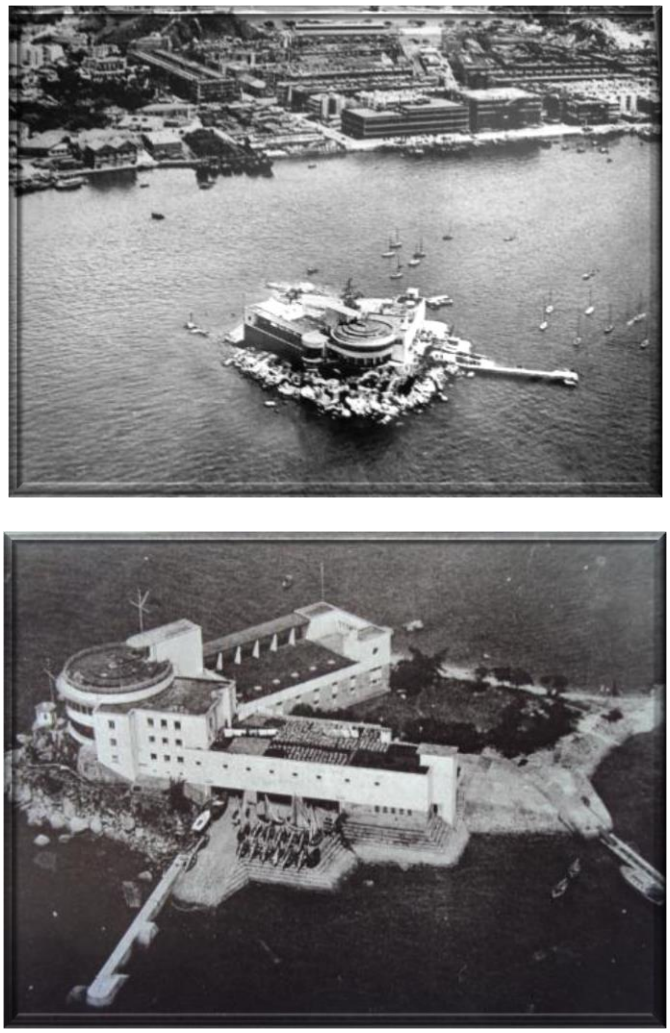
In 1934 Edward became a member of the Advisory Committee of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (香港義勇防衛軍團), in which he eventually held the rank of Major.

Clementina, his wife, was also involved in the community, becoming President of the Helena May Institute (梅夫人婦女會) and active in the Union Church (香港佑寧堂).

In 1932 Edward became Chief Manager of the Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock Co., Ltd. and, putting his naval constructor experience to a civilian purpose in 1933, in conjunction with Harold Stewart Rouse, a noted amateur yacht designer who preceded him as Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club (RHKYC) Commodore, co-designed and supervised the construction of the 45 ft. teak ketch "Tai Mo Shan".

Edward enjoyed success with "Sea Lark", winning the Macao Race in 1934 and 1935 from fleets of 15 and 16 yachts respectively.

In 1936 Edward became RHKYC Vice-Commodore, in which capacity he chaired a sub-committee looking for a new home for the Club, as the government land reclamation was to render the North Point (北角) Clubhouse untenable. He initially suggested Middle Island (熨波洲), but Kellett Island (奇力島/吉列島/燈籠洲) was the eventual choice.



1940s – The Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club located on the Kellett Island at the Causeway Bay off the Hong Kong Island northern coast.

Edward also dedicated his spare time on youth service by serving the Boy Scouts Association Hong Kong Branch as a Vice-President. In 1934 until 1940 he succeed his fellow Rotarian Dr. The Honourable Robert Hormus Kotewall (羅旭龢博士), CMG, *Hon*LLD (*HKU*), JP, as President whose behalf he lobbied hard for public financial support (*read the news clipping on Pages 6-7*). In 1937 he organized an outing to Junk Bay (將軍澳) for 120 Boy Scouts (童子軍) and Wolf Cubs (小狼隊). In 1938 he played Santa Claus at a children's party on the Canadian Pacific Steamships liner, RMS "Empress of Japan".

In 1937 Edward was elected RHKYC Commodore, serving three years in this position, but that year brought what is regarded as Hong Kong's worst typhoon.

The Great Hong Kong Typhoon of 2 September 1937 was an un-named typhoon. The wind was so strong that observatory instruments capable of registering winds up to 125 mph broke down. The maximum recorded gust was 130 knots, 149 km/h, but the piston of the anemometer hit the stops at 130 knots and the true maximum gust could not be recorded. The typhoon was so powerful that it caused a 9.1 meter storm surge that swept through the villages of Tai Po (大埔) and Sha Tin (沙田). The villages suffered massive damage and an estimated 11,000 casualties. During the night the Italian ship "Conte Verde" ran aground at Cape Collinson (哥連臣角), but was refloated and repaired by the Hong Kong & Whampoa Dockyard.

Widely known in shipping circles, Edward was invited to the September 1938 launching of the "Queen Elizabeth"---the world's largest passenger ship.



Edward would have been sadden to have witnessed her destruction by fire in Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour (維多利亞港) on 9 January 1972 while being converted into an intended floating "Seawise University".



1972 -- The demise of the Seawise University, aka Queen Elizabeth liner, in Hong Kong harbour

In recognition to his success in refloating the "Conte Verde", in 1939 Edward was invested with the Insignia of Commendatore of the Crown of Italy.

Following in December 1941 outbreak of the Pacific War (1941-1945), the British Crown Colony Hong Kong was captured and occupied by the Imperial Japan's military forces for 3 years and 8 months. Both Edward and Clementina were interned by the Japanese in the Stanley Internment Camp (赤柱拘留營). Since all members of British and American nationalities were interned, the Rotary Club of Hong Kong has thus to be disbanded.

Not long after their 1945 release, the couple returned to their home in Jersey, in the Channel Islands. Before leaving they posted this message in the《South China Morning Post》:

ANNOUNCEMENT

Mr and Mrs Edward Cock send love and best wishes to their friends still in Hong Kong, and especially thank those who shewed them kindness while they were interned. They are leaving sooner than they expected, so have been unable to say "goodbye" personally.

Edward continued his involvement with sailing and from 1950 to 1952 served as Commodore of another yacht club---the Royal Channel Islands Yacht Club.

On 7 October 1967 Clementina died in Jersey aged 84, followed in 1969 by her husband, Rotarian Edward Cock, aged 85. They had no children.

APPENDIX

Excerpted below is a piece of news coverage on《Hong Kong Daily Press》4 April 1934 of which was reporting Edward Cock being elected President of the Boy Scouts Association Hong Kong Branch:

Boy Scouts Association Hong Kong Branch
CHIEF SCOUT PRESIDES AT ANNUAL MEETING
Departure of Commissioner and President's Retirement

Presiding at the annual meeting of the Hong Kong Branch of the Boy Scouts Association, His Excellency the Governor (Sir William Peel) as Chief Scout, commended the work of the local movement and appealed for funds to clear the overdraft incurred in connection with the Saiwan Camp.

The impending departure of the Colonial Commissioner (Rev. G. T. Waldegrave), the retirement of Dr. The Honourable Robert Hormus Kotewall from the position of President which he had held for eight years, and an invitation to local Scouts from Australia in connection with the visit of the Chief Scout, Lord Baden Powell, were referred to at the meeting.

Commissioner Expresses Thanks

The meeting was held at Sandilands Hut.

His Excellency was met by Dr. Kotewall (President), the Rev. G. T. Waldegrave (Commissioner), and other members, and proceeded to perform the ceremony of presenting the Prince of Wales' Banner to the No. 10 (St. Paul's College) Hong Kong Troop, the winner in last year's competition. His Excellency was supported by Lady Southorn, Colonial Commissioner of the Girl Guides.

In the course of his speech which he prefaced with the intimation of his departure shortly, the Rev. G. T. Waldegrave, the Commissioner stressed the help he received in particular from the Assistant Commissioner, the Rev. N. V. Halward, Mr. Champkin, Colonel Robertson, Mr. Christian, Mr. A. White, Mr. S. Mitchell, Mr. Wayman and others who in different ways had loyally done their bit, and to these gentlemen he expressed his sincere thanks.

He also recalled the services rendered by Sir Henry Pollock, Sir Henry Gollan, Sir Joseph Kemp, and Sir William Shenton, and referred with regret to the retirement of Dr. Kotewall from his office as President of the Association.

The Commissioner referred with gratitude to the interest taken by His Excellency the Governor and Lady Peel, remarking that by the kindly nature of that interest a fatherly and motherly touch had been given to humanise the more formal inspections and parades which His Excellency from time to time had been good enough to hold.

Steady Development

After the Commissioner had closed his address, His Excellency commented on the report as being both interesting and eminently satisfactory, the Hong Kong Branch of the Association having steadily developed from year to year until it had reached a very high standard indeed. His Excellency attribute this to the work of the Commissioner, which has been closely associated with the development of the local movement.

His Excellency spoke of the imperial and international aspects of the movement. To this he added a third, that of the family aspect which it was sought to develop also between the two branches of the local movement.

After thanking the Commissioner and the Chief Scout for their kind references to his work, Dr. Kotewall said that he was relinquishing his office as President with a certain amount of relief, but mingled also with a feeling of genuine regret, for he would miss the amiable association of the active workers from the Commissioner downwards. He referred to the great advancement made during his eight years of office, the result of combined energy and good work of the officers and committees, and above all the Commissioner, the Rev. G. T. Waldegrave, who has been the fibre of the Association, and had endowed it with his example and ideals.

Saiwan Camp Debt

After further reference to the good work done by the Commissioner in turning the boyhood of the Colony into useful citizens, the President said that one way to demonstrate appreciation was to make a special endeavour to raise at least HK$6,000 in order to liquidate the debt contracted in the purchase of the Saiwan Training Camp site before the Commissioner leaves.

In closing the President wished the Association ever increasing success.

Dr. Kotewall's retirement from office was marked by the presentation of a memento. The Vice President, Mr. Edward Cock, was elected to the position of President.

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Remarks:

(1) Mentioned in this piece of news, there were these Rotarians of Hong Kong Rotary Club: Dr. Robert Hormus Kotewall; Sir Henry Edward Pollock; and Sir William Edward Leonard Shenton.

(2) Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) has served the Hong Kong Scouting as

(a) in 1970s, Headquarters Commissioner (Public Relations) of the Scout Association of Hong Kong; and

(b) in 1980s, Assistant Regional Commissioner (Kowloon) (when he was also Secretary and Director of the Rotary Club of New Territories 新界扶輪社.)