

FLEET HOUSE 1985



THE NEW CLUB 1980 - 1992

EARLY 1980 BROUGHT the next step towards redeveloping the Club and it was decided to go to Tender for a new Club on its present site, the winning Tender to provide temporary accommodation for a period of 3.5 years. Four companies tendered, with Sun Hung Kai coming out the winner. Although Sun Hung Kai later withdrew their tender, they allowed the offer of temporary accommodation to stand. Hong Kong Land then offered to take on the redevelopment, and this was accepted.

The temporary Club, situated in Sun Hung Kai Centre was very successful, if with somewhat reduced facilities, for members. Nevertheless, long-standing favourites like Tombola, Folk Shows, and of course Mollie's Music Hall, continued to make their appearance.

The new Club was opened by H.E. Sir Edward Youde G.C.M.G., M.B.E., the then Governor of Hong Kong, on 31st May 1985 and occupied the first nine floors of Fleet House, a 25 storey building in Wanchai, on exactly the same site as its predecessor.

The Club contained a magnificent array of facilities and was fitted out at a final cost of some \$43,000,000. The facilities included (from the ground floor up), a Reception area for hotel bedrooms, a multi-purpose Auditorium, Jewelry, Naval Tailor and Gift shops, three bars, a splendid restaurant with seating for approximately 200 people, two squash courts, a Bowling Alley and Snooker room and two floors of accommodation totalling 38 en-suite bedrooms. Also provided



The Consort Lounge

were a Ladies and Gents Hairdresser, a Video library/souvenir shop and two floors of 50 shops leased to the United States Navy Contracting Department.

No expense had been spared during the fitting out period. From the elegant marble floors of the foyer to the real leather arm-chairs in the Kelly Bar, everywhere was evidence of sheer luxury.

The Club continued its previous role of playing host to visiting warships of NATO friendly Nations, and over the following years thousands of sailors from all over the world made it their first port of call in Hong Kong.

Thanks to the foresight of the architects and the project management team, the Club was able to be a little more ambitious with regard to the



The Chichester Lounge



The Kelly Lounge (Ratings only bar)

production of shows in the Auditorium. Consequently, besides the perennial Mollie's Music Hall and plays by local drama groups the Club now attracted performers from around the world. Among those to appear were THE DRIFTERS, MAX BOYCE, BILLY CONNOLLY, GERRY & THE PACEMAKERS, THE SEARCHERS, CANNON & BALL, JIM DAVIDSON, THE SUPREMES, DANNY LA RUE, SHEP WOOLLEY, THE STYLISTICS and THE BARRON KNIGHTS. The list went on and on and the shows invariably played to packed houses.

The China Fleet Club was functioning as it was always intended to provide a service and entertainment to the Men of the Fleet.

The ever-popular Tombola sessions continued twice a week, attracting members of all denominations, many of whom had come along regularly since the end of the war. Some almost certainly still seeking their first house snowball!

Membership was extended to include a wider selection of the local community and at one point stood at some 2,500 Associate Members. This meant that the restaurant and bars were invariably filled to capacity and business was brisk indeed.

In early 1987 came the dramatic news from London that it was intended to withdraw the RN from Hong Kong by 1992. It was at this point that the Trustees began considering the future of the Club, taking into account the certainty that, in any event, it could no longer operate after 1997. After much discussion at many meetings it was decided that there was little choice but to investigate possible sale of the building. This was done, first with the Hong Kong Land Company, the building developers, and later by Tender to all interested property groups in Hong Kong. When the tenders were opened later in the year an offer of HK\$160,000,000 with 5 years rent free occupation of the Club floors of the building was on the table, and after much deliberation by the Trustees, was accepted. The effective date of the sale and lease back was 28th December 1987.

The China Fleet Club now had some £11,000,000 in the coffers. The next big question was what to spend it on.

Throughout the whole of 1988 the subject was discussed around the committee table and gradually a plan to build another China Fleet Club in the U.K. began to take shape. Location was the biggest problem but eventually a suitable site was found in Saltash in Cornwall, just across the



The Amethyst Restaurant

Tamar Bridge from Plymouth. Architects and project planners were engaged to present their ideas and work began with the ground breaking ceremony on 14th April 1989.

The China Fleet Country Club is covered in some depth elsewhere in this book. Suffice to say that it was at this point that it became clear to those of us who had known the Club in Hong Kong that the name CHINA FLEET CLUB would live on.

Meanwhile back in Hong Kong there was still much to be



The Sports Floor



The Bowling Alley

done. The Club continued its business of providing a friendly haven for the sailors and their families from H.M.S. Tamar and the patrol craft and also to the many visitors from around the world.

Gradually time slipped away however, and in late 1991 and the early months of 1992 the Trustee's investigated ways of saving the Club in Hong Kong. Many options were explored and one by one were rejected, until it became apparent that without the support of a wealthy benefactor there was no hope

of keeping the Club open. If the Club was to remain after 27th December 1992 it would have to pay floor rental charges equivalent to something in the region of HK\$4,000,000 per month. This sum was simply beyond the financial resources available and could not be recouped from the day-to-day business of the Club. It was therefore decided on 24th June 1992 that the Club would close, in accordance with a previously arranged contingency plan, on 30th November 1992.



A Standard Double Room China Fleet Club 1985



**A SELECTION OF SHOPS
ON 7TH AND 8TH FLOORS**

CLOSURE THE LAST SIX MONTHS

THE DEATH KNELL had been sounded. A magnificent chapter in the history of the Royal Navy in Hong Kong was coming to an end.

Because this book was written and published within the last six months of the life of the Club it is, of course, impossible to describe events that actually took place. However, the reader might gain insight into this period by being aware of what was planned, and also allowing the Author a little crystal-ball gazing.

First and foremost was the disposal of fixtures and fittings. The responsibility for this aspect of the closure had been given to CPO John McHale, who previously had been the Club's Deputy General Manager. Besides the obvious list of artifacts that had been accrued over the years, every single item of any value was identified and the completed list forwarded to interested parties in Hong Kong and the U.K. This drew an encouraging response from all quarters. Most items were sold but some, like the Club's mini bus, were donated to military establishments. The Video Library, containing 700 videos was shipped back to the China Fleet Country Club along with a good number of other items. The Juke Box came to rest in the Bull & Bear pub in Central. Other clubs in the area vied for the crockery and glassware. Disco lighting and sound equipment found its way to a variety of clubs and bars. Gradually the list was whittled away until most items had been accounted for in one way or another.

The entertainment programme was both much and varied. The last OKTOBERFEST sponsored by San Miguel Breweries was held in the Auditorium on Saturday 3rd October and featured the Oompah Band of the Royal Regiment of Wales. This was quickly followed by the appearance of comedian Jim Davidson on Saturday 10th and Sunday 11th October, both shows playing to a full house.

A party for the Club's main suppliers of food and beverage was held in the Auditorium on Wednesday 28th October, to thank them for their generous sponsorship of various functions over the years. Representatives from San

Miguel, Carlsberg and Fosters were among those present.

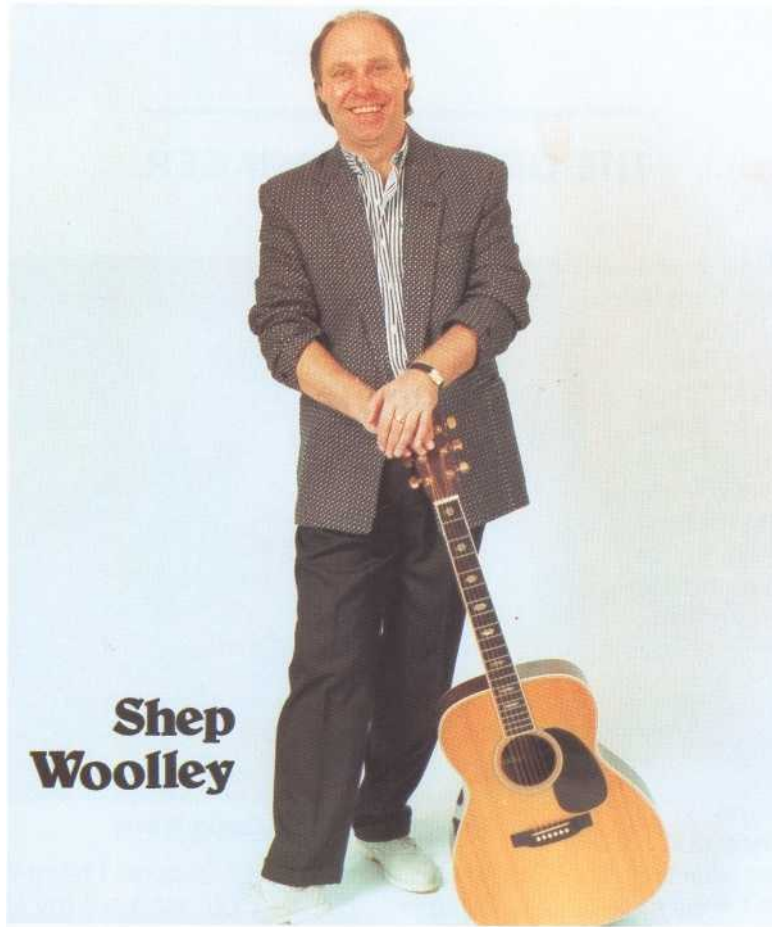
Australian bush band "The Sundowners" appeared in the Consort Lounge on Sunday 1st November and the following Sunday was the night the Full Member's in Hong Kong said their last goodbye's with their own farewell party. The evening was hosted by ex-RN rating Mr Shep Woolley and top of the bill was rock band "Marmalade" who had been generously sponsored for this evening and flown from the U.K. by British Airways. Special guests in attendance were CAPIC Hong Kong, Captain T.L. Sunter RN; X.O. H.M.S. Tamar, Commander M.J. Norman RN; B.S.O. H.M.S. Tamar, Commander M.K. Hemsworth RN; and CAPIC'S Secretary, Lieutenant Commander G.W. Burn RN.

Monday 23rd November was the turn of the staff. The Club closed at 8 p.m. on this day and apart from a skeleton staff left behind 'on duty', all enjoyed a sumptuous dinner at a nearby seafood restaurant.

The Club also hosted a farewell cocktail party for Associate Members on Wednesday 25th November in the Auditorium. Many of those present had been members and faithful supporter's of the Club since the end of the war in 1945, and made it known what the closure meant to them.

As many thousands of British sailors will know, Tombola was synonymous with a run-ashore at the China Fleet Club. It was perhaps fitting then that the last programmed event to be held in the Auditorium was a grand Tombola evening on Sunday 29th November. It was "empty the coffers" time of the snowball fund which had been built up over the years by the regular players.

And so to the last day. That well worn cliché "end of an era" was never more appropriate than in these circumstances. The China Fleet Club, which had been a national landmark in Hong Kong for nearly 60 years, had closed its doors for the last time.....



**ENTERTAINMENT AT THE FULL MEMBER'S CLOSURE PARTY
SUNDAY 8TH NOVEMBER 1992**

THE GENERAL MANAGER

I FIRST CAME to Hong Kong and the China Fleet Club in 1963 on board H.M.S. Plymouth, which was part of the 22nd Escort Squadron and included H.M. Ships Diana and Cambrian. In those days the tallest building in Hong Kong was the newly opened Mandarin Hotel, the principle method of transportation from Tamar to the Club was by rickshaw and the Northern Boundary of Hong Kong Island stopped at Gloucester Road.

I was fortunate enough to return to Hong Kong on many occasions throughout the '60's culminating in what turned out to be my last visit, for some years, on H.M.S. Albion in 1971. I still hold some happy memories of those heady days in the old Colonial era of Hong Kong.

A great deal had changed, of course, when I returned again in 1985 to take up my position as the Assistant Manager of the China Fleet Club, though there was little doubt that the same aura of excitement and social activity remained.

One of my earliest recollections of the kind of thing I was to experience in the following years occurred one morning whilst doing 'rounds' of the bars prior to opening. I enquired of a young barman if he had any problems. "No problem" he replied, and on passing him I noticed that a pipe located in the ceiling of the bar was leaking and water was dropping at a fairly steady rate into a bucket on the floor. I returned to the barman and pointed out the leaking pipe to him as a major problem. "No problem" he stated, "I have many bucket"!

Swept along by this unique logic and the frantic pace of life in the Colony the early years of this period slipped away very quickly indeed.

Phil Baldwin, the then General Manager, and his family departed in April 1989 and I was appointed to replace him. So began my tenure as the General Manager and it seems appropriate at this point to express my thanks to those people who have made the experience such a pleasurable one. First and foremost must come the



General Manager 1992 ... David Watts

unstinting support I have received from my wife, Dana. She has kept my feet on the ground and was always around to assist on the social scene when needed. Another worthy of a particular mention is Mr Yu Lin Sang, the Club's House Manager, who has guided and advised me through a great deal of the decision making process.

There is little doubt that behind every contented Manager stands an efficient Secretary and I have been fortunate indeed to be served by the very charming Fiony Lau and for the last year by the equally charming Caroline Field.

There have been many others who have contributed to the well-being of the Club and these must include the ex-officio Officers from H.M.S. Tamar who have given their time and their advice freely over the years. I thank them for their support.

Throughout the Club staff there is a rich vein of talent and skill and humour and a host of other attributes that make them a warm and friendly unit and a pleasure to work with.

It remains only to say what a privilege it has been to be associated with the running of the Club over the last 7 years. It has been an interesting and very exciting experience that promises to live long in the memory. May I close by offering my sincere best wishes and future success to the China Fleet Country Club in England. I am sure it will carry on the fine traditions established here many years ago.

THE STAFF 1992



HOUSE MANAGER 1992 ... MR. YU LIN SANG



CATERING STAFF 1992



BEVERAGE AND GENERAL STAFF 1992



HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS 1992

From left:

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Ning Chi Keung | (Sports Centre) |
| Ying Wim | (Catering) |
| Stella Lee Sul Lan | (Beverage) |
| Wong Kwok Chu | (Function Rooms) |
| Paco Poon Yeuk Heung | (Technical) |



OFFICE STAFF 1992

From left:

- Cobo Lui Yuk Lam** (Stock Control)
- Caroline Field** (Secretary)
- David Watts** (General Manager)
- Yu Lin Sang** (House Manager)
- Nerissa Ho Yuen Mei** (Accountant)



THE TWO LONGEST SERVING MEMBERS OF STAFF

Mr. Tong Lo Hing 45 Years (Left)
Mr. Lam Chin Fuk 47 Years



STAFF WITH MORE THAN 15 YEARS SERVICE

TASK FORCE HONG KONG



THE FIRST REAL squadron to be based in Hong Kong was the 120th minesweeping squadron, which sailed into Hong Kong waters in October 1958. It consisted of HM ships Damerham, Dansham, Davenham, Glentham and Hovingham.

After four years of successful operation it was decided to reinforce the Hong Kong Squadron, and in October 1962 HM ships Dufton, Penston and Lanton of the 8th minesweeping squadron arrived to make up the numbers. These ships carried out frequent Borneo patrols until the end of the confrontation in Malaysia in 1966.

In 1967, economy measures were introduced, one of which was to move the squadron to Singapore, leaving only a guardship in Hong Kong. HMS Chichester which was stationed here

from 1974 until 1976, was Hong Kong's last guardship and the China Fleet Club's Chichester lounge was named after her. In 1969 the 6th mine countermeasures squadron was permanently transferred to Hong Kong. The squadron consisting of HM ships Maxton, Bossington, Kirkliston, Sheraton and Hubberston adopted the Chinese dragon on their squadron badge and displayed it on the funnel of each ship, a tradition which continues to this day.

1971 saw the replacement of HM ships Bossington, Sheraton, Hubberston and Maxton with Beachampton and Yamton. While in the next year Wasperton, Wolverton and Monkton completed the new look Hong Kong squadron renamed the 6th patrol craft squadron, in line with its new role. By this time minesweeping equipment had been removed from each vessel.



HM SHIPS BEACHAMPTON, WOLVERTON, WASPERTON, MONKTON AND YARNTON OFF NINE PINS 1982