

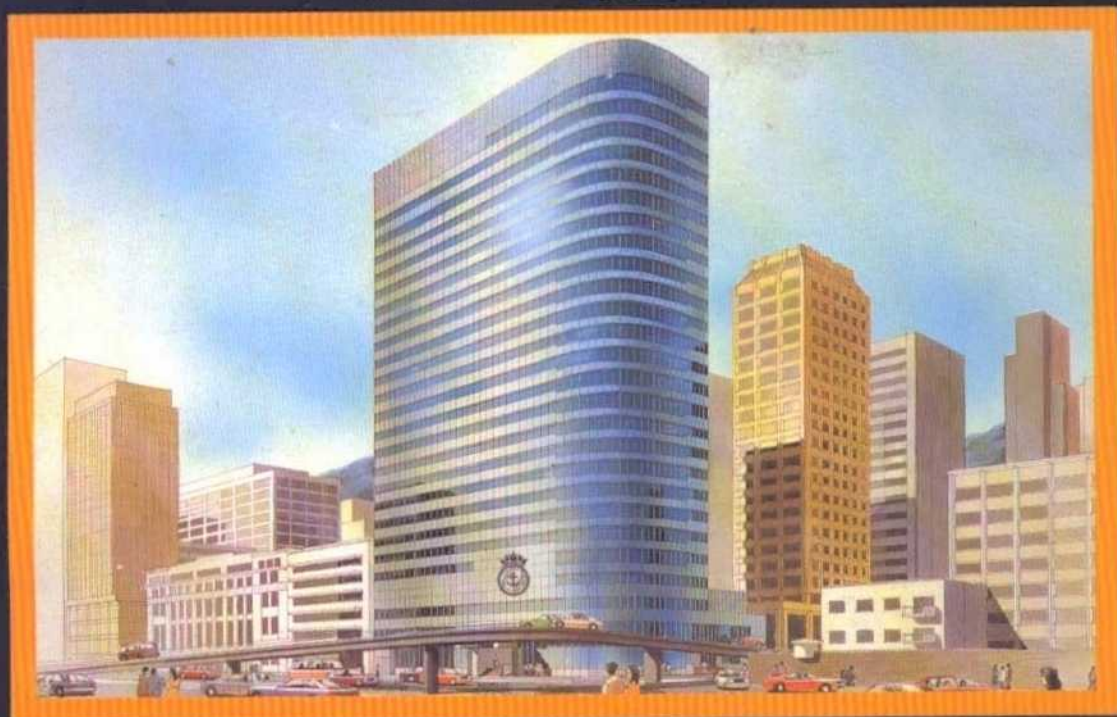
GOLDEN



JUBILEE



1934 ~ 1984



**CHINA FLEET CLUB
ROYAL NAVY HONG KONG**

Message from the Chairman of the Trustees, Captain F.A. Collins, R.N.



It is with great pleasure that I find myself being granted the honour of writing a few words of introduction to this book on the occasion of the China Fleet Club's Golden Jubilee.

The Club has a great history, not so much in time but in the strength of purpose, endeavour and a strong belief in the necessity to provide somewhere for the sailors and marines of the Fleet to relax and enjoy themselves in reasonable surroundings at reasonable prices. This belief has continued to this day and you will read in the Club's history the trials, tribulations and setbacks which occurred, all of which had been overcome in one way or another to enable the Club to improve its services and facilities to meet the modern demands of the men of the Fleet and their families. The new club when completed in 1985 will undoubtedly be the best club in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines.

It would be remiss not to mention that this success has been achieved over the last 50 years by the professional and skilful guidance of the Trustees, the encouragement and assistance of former Commodores and Captains-in-Charge, Hong Kong, the determination of the club's committees to succeed and the hard work of the various managers and their staff. But without its members there

would be no club and it is yesterday's sailors who have made it what it is today just as your support ensures that the sailor of tomorrow will have a club he can be proud of.

The Club's membership and support has widened considerably since it first started for the Fleet alone and is now open to all three services in Hong Kong and the navies of other nations including the US Seventh Fleet who are great contributors. Nevertheless, the aim of the Club is to provide a service for the sailors and marines of the Fleet which encompasses the women's services as well, and this has not changed. It is the Club's intention to encourage naval visitors to Hong Kong from the UK on package tours or reduced rate holidays to maintain this aim, once the new club is completed.

Finally, I would like to wish the China Fleet Club every success in the future and hope that the next fifty years will see it reach new pinnacles of achievement.

Good Luck.

Captain-in-Charge, Hong Kong.



THE CHINA FLEET CLUB
ROYAL NAVY,
HONG KONG

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The Early Years ... The Royal Naval Canteen

Until the China Fleet Club was opened in 1934 the Royal Navy Canteen looked after the needs of the Men of the Fleet in Hong Kong. That predecessor of today's Club, even before the First World War, was situated close by the old "Blue Buildings" on the corner of Arsenal Street and Hennessy Road.

But by 1920 the future of the Canteen was in question. The Commander-in-Chief, China Station, reported that the Hong Kong Government was considering a reclamation scheme to widen and straighten Queen's Road which would mean the demolition of the Canteen.

Perhaps this was timely. The old Canteen was in such a bad state of repair generally, no modern sanitation even, that plans were afoot to spend something in the region of \$10,000 on redecoration and repair.

The premises had been purchased at an original cost of \$40,000 and their value in 1920 was between \$120,000 and \$150,000.

There were delays over the next three or four years while the possibility of a Union Jack Club for both the Army and Navy was considered. But in 1924 the decision was made to abandon this idea and to concentrate



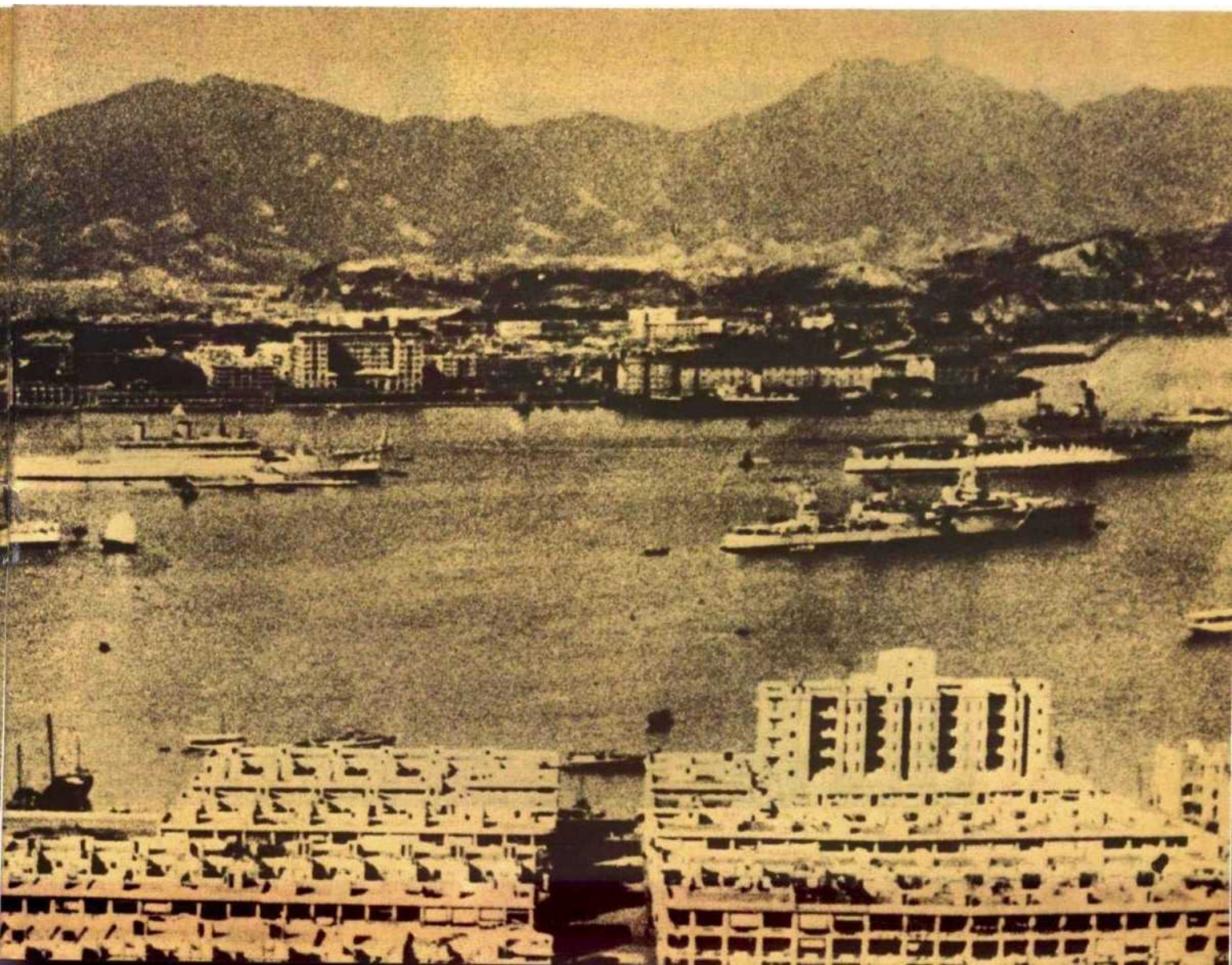
on a Club for naval personnel leaving the Army to go its own way.

A possible site had been selected for a new Canteen on reclaimed land on Arsenal Street and Queen's Road. It was estimated then that \$1,400,000 would be needed for this project and that could be met as follows:

From the old Canteen	\$500,000
Compensation from the HK Government for the old site	\$400,000

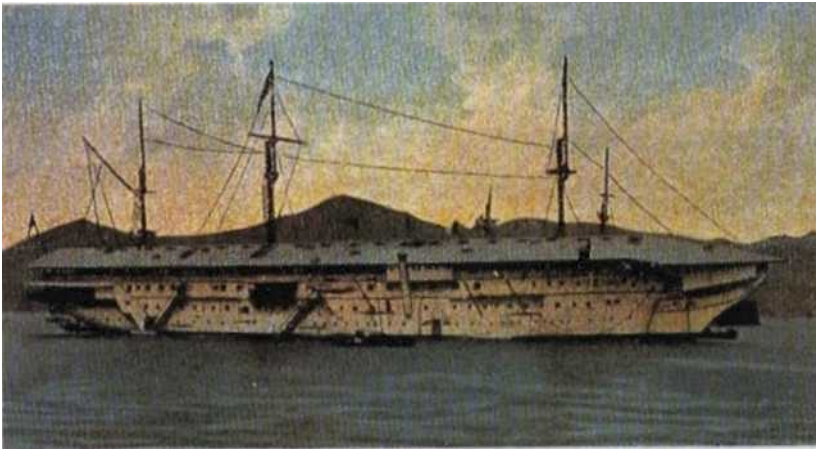
and the balance of \$500,00 made good by an Admiralty grant.

Further delays were caused when the Admiralty objected to the site - it was too near the Naval Arsenal! During the next few years the Naval Dockyard expanded considerably and a good deal of land changed hands between the Admiralty and the Hong Kong Government, the net result being that the Naval Arsenal was transferred to Stonecutters Island.

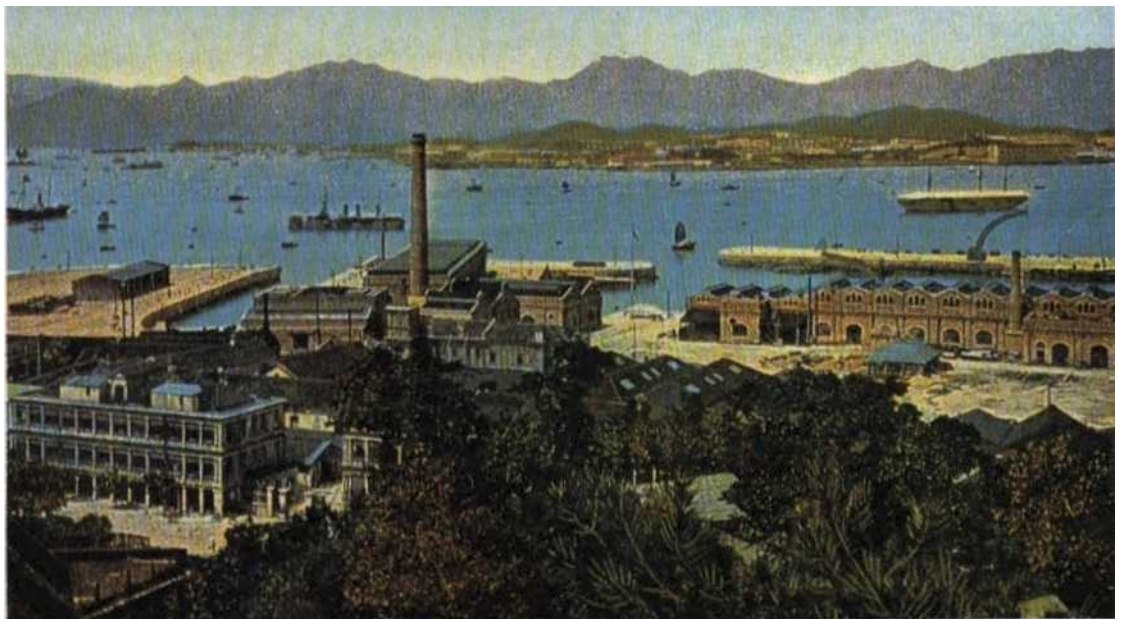




Blue Buildings - Praya East, Hongkong.



Hong Kong and
H.M.S. Tamar at
the turn of
the Century.



A New Club

In 1929 notice was formally received from the Government that the Royal Naval Canteen would have to be evacuated, the Government offered compensation for the old site and made an offer of a site on Gloucester Road where a new Canteen could be built.

One might have said the Club was home and dry at last - not quite! Money, or the lack of it, raised its ugly head. The compensation the Hong Kong Government had offered was nowhere near sufficient to meet the cost of a new building, which at that time was in the region of \$735,000. All that could be raised was:

From the old Canteen	\$166,000
From the Weihaiwei Canteen	\$ 30,000
Government compensation	\$154,000

A balance of \$385,000 had to be found!

Admiralty turned down a request for an interest-free loan of £20,000 but after considerable discussion with the Treasury a "gift" of £5,000 was eventually approved in July, 1931.

After many meetings and discussions to find ways and means to raise the necessary capital for the new Canteen, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank came to the rescue. The late Sir Vandeleur M. Grayburn, then Chief Manager of the Bank, agreed to an overdraft to cover the cost of erecting and furnishing a new building to take the place of the old Canteen. "Blue Buildings", a name given when the old building became the Canteen, because of the colour of the exterior, is still commonly used by members of the Club.

With this assurance from the Bank, plans went ahead for the new building. Messrs. Leigh & Orange were appointed Architects and Mr. A.S. Mackichan started preparing constructions plans for consideration by the naval authorities. Plans were submitted for a six-storey building, plus basement. Provisions

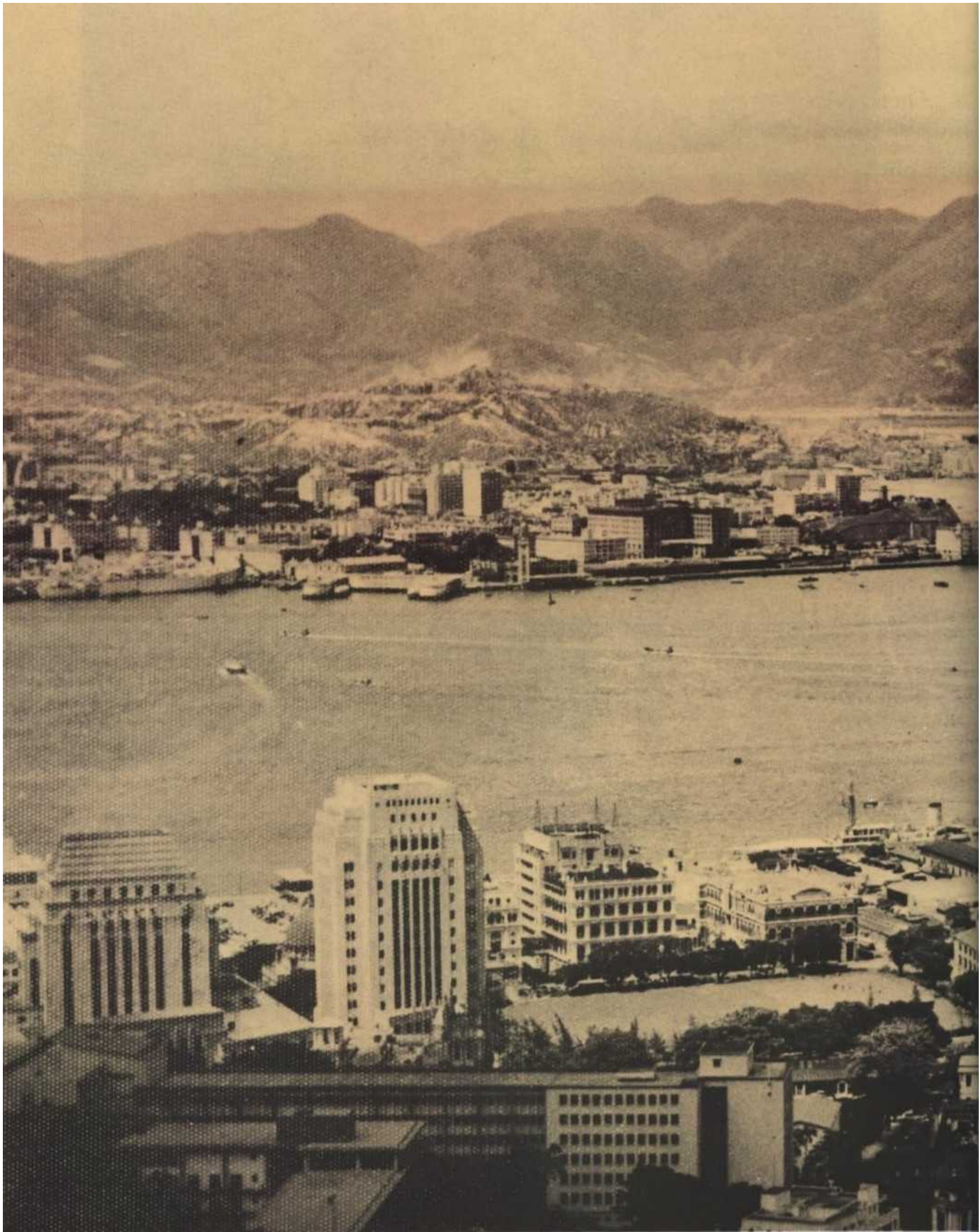
were made for Bars, Billiards Rooms, Reading Rooms, Dining Rooms, Cubicles, Dormitories, Offices, Staff Quarters, Kitchen, Laundry, Boiler House, a Mineral Water Factory and a Theatre.

The plans were provisionally passed and tenders called for. But great consternation was caused when the receipt of the tenders showed the costs far exceeded the original estimates. A signal received from the Commander-in-Chief read "The Trustees of the Club are placed in a most difficult position, from which they must extricate themselves". The Commander-in-Chief was unable to sanction such a large outlay over and above the original estimated costs.

After more conferences held by the Naval authorities, Architects and Contractors, a revised plan was produced. This reduced the size of the building by one storey and other savings were made by the use of cement "other than Green Island Cement" and also by the use of less expensive materials for internal construction, and smaller lifts.

The revised plans, with their great reduction in overall costs, were eventually approved and work finally began. The list of contractors sounds a bit like a slice of Hong Kong's history: Messrs. Lam Woo & Company, Dodwell & Company, Jardine Matheson & Co., Messrs. W. Jack & Co, Hong Kong Electric and the HK & China Gas Company.

Further appeals were made to the Admiralty for financial assistance, and an Admiralty Fleet Order was issued to all units of the Royal Navy asking for contributions. The response was generous. In addition to the donations from the Fleet, the Admiralty donated £7,000 from a surplus from the old Naval Savings Bank. And the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank handed back, as a gift, the Interest which had been charged on the bank overdraft over approximately three years.





The China Fleet Club (1934 - 1939)

It had already been established during all those meetings in the 1920's regarding the status of the Canteen, that it belonged to the Men of the Fleet.

On 11th January, 1933, the foundation stone of the China Fleet Club, as it had been renamed, was laid by Admiral Sir Howard Kelly, G.B.E., K.C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O., then Commander-in-Chief, China Station.

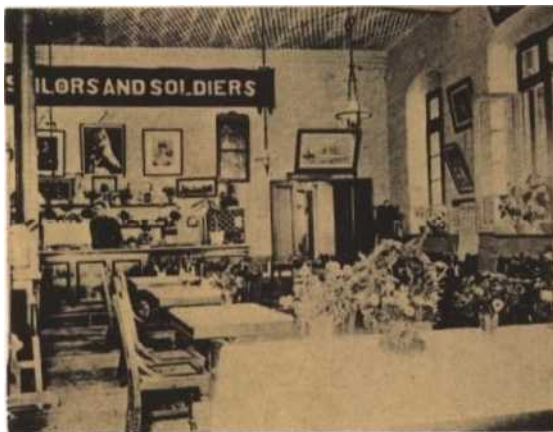
The China Fleet Club stands on Government land. Then, as today, it embraces an area of 19,757 square feet. It is leased to the Trustees of the Club for 999 years; the lease was antedated to 25th June, 1863, and executed on 20th June, 1934. The Crown Rent for the property was, and is, \$408 a year.

When the Theatre was completed and opened on 27th December, 1933, it was immediately booked by the Hong Kong Amateur Dramatic Club for rehearsals and production of plays. Tombola was a great favourite too and was played in the Theatre three evenings a week. The Club took a 10% share of the takings. Tombola has never lost its popularity and is still played in the Club regularly.

On 21st March, 1934, the China Fleet Club was formally opened by Commodore Frank Elliot, R.N., Commodore, Hong Kong, and the following officials were appointed:

Honorary Treasurer:	Accountant Officer H.M.S. "Tamar"
Manager:	Chief Petty Officer (Executive).
Assistant Manager:	Sergeant, Royal Marines
Bed Ticket Office Staff:	Four Marines
Secretary (part-time):	Chief P.O. Writer, H.M.S., "Tamar"

During 1934 The China Fleet Club was legally established as a Corporation, and on the 18th May, the Governor signed an Ordinance entitled "An Ordinance for the Incorporation of the Trustees of the China Fleet Club." This Ordinance made the Trustees of the Club, as appointed by the Commodore, or Officer-in-Charge of R.N. Naval Establishments in Hong Kong, a Corporation with the power to hold and deal with its property. The advantages of having the Club incorporated



are that in the event of either of the Trustees leaving Hong Kong new Trustees can be appointed by the Commodore-in-Charge to ensure continued operation of the Club.

The China Fleet Club was completed and finished at a total cost of \$1,250,000.00.

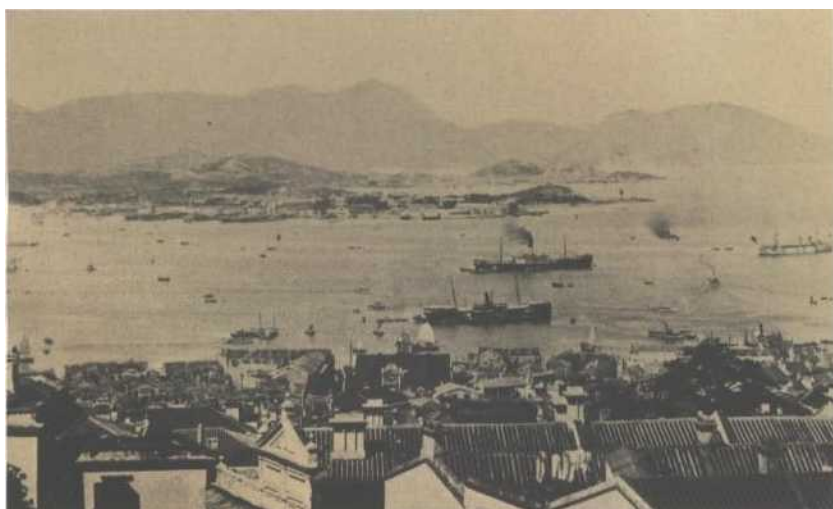
By the end of the first year of operation the Club showed a profit of \$35,000. However, prices of Beer, Wines and Spirits were rather high compared to other Clubs in Hong Kong and the Club was not patronized as well as it could have been. So in 1935, the number of Boys employed was cut by 25 per cent, and the cost of meals, wines, beer and spirits reduced by 10 per cent. The Mens Bar was enlarged, taking in a Reading Room. These moves were very satisfying, and the Club became very popular throughout the fleet.

From then on the men used the Club a great deal more and on return from the North, billiard and snooker competitions were organised. Silver cups were presented by Messrs. H. Ruttonjee & Son and members of the winning teams were presented with replicas of the cups, given by a lady interested in the Club. Medals purchased from Club

funds were presented to the runners-up. These competitions were held annually until 1940.

During the 1930's the Theatre was engaged for long periods by the H.K. Amateur Dramatic Club, the Philharmonic Society and the H.K. Singers. It was also extensively used for Ship's Concerts, Military Concerts, dances organised by the Fleet, and also by the Cheerio Club of Hong Kong. Boxing contests were also held in the winter.

Although prices had been reduced and the Fleet spent less time in Hong Kong - Singapore being an established naval base - considerable profits continued to be made. By 1938 the overdraft at the Bank had been reduced to approximately \$75,000, and all debts in connection with the construction and furnishing of the Club had been paid. The improved financial situation gave considerable satisfaction besides dispelling any doubts as to the Club's ability to pay its way in the future. Letters of congratulation were received from the Admiralty and the Commander-in-Chief, China Station.



The War Years and Occupation

The Club carried on and although turnover was somewhat reduced, it showed a profit for 1939, 1940 and 1941.

1940 brought rumours closer to home, this time of increased Japanese war activity in the Far East, and on July 1st, 1940 British women and children in Hong Kong were evacuated.

The following twelve months saw Hong Kong preparing for war. The China Fleet Club was selected as the first Headquarters for the Royal Navy, being required to accommodate the Officer's and Ship's Company of H.M.S. "Tamar" at the first sign of hostilities.

The Chinese compradore was instructed to purchase, and maintain, a three months' supply of foodstuffs, and to keep this stock in reserve against emergencies.

The rumours became reality when Japan declared war on 8th December and Hong

Kong was brought into the conflict. The Club manager was informed at 5.15 that morning that England was at war with Japan and War Operations Orders went into immediate effect.

All Service ratings on shore leave were cleared from the Club so that the Officers and Ship's Company of H.M.S. Tamar could move in. Orders were also received to prepare accommodation for R.N.R., R.N.V.R. and H.K.R.N.V.R. Officers and ratings and an unknown number of Chinese. Further orders stated that all Officers and Men in uniform, civilians attached to Naval establishments and Chinese ratings who reported at the club were to be accommodated and fed. All meals were to be supplied by the Club's Compradore under the instructions of the Manager.

By 7.30 on the evening of 8th December, 1941, the China Fleet Club was on a war footing, everything had gone according to plan.



It's interesting to know that the China Fleet was like in those days. The Fleet, at that time, consisted of the 8th Cruiser Squadron, comprising five or six ships of the "County" or "London" Class cruisers; the 8th Destroyer Flotilla comprising the old "D" Class destroyers; the aircraft carrier, H.M.S. Eagle, H.M.S. Medway, submarine Depot Ship and Submarines; a M.T.B. Flotilla, a score or so of gunboats and a few sloops. The Shore Establishments didn't exist then, and the Ship's Company of TAMAR was accommodated in the old "Tamar". The veteran with her white sides and tall yellow masts lent a lot of atmosphere to the Dockyard, but was doomed to be scuttled in the harbour during the war - a sad loss.

A small naval air station was already in operation before the War, at Kai Tak.

Towards the end of the 1930's it became obvious that the Club was not large enough to cope with the needs of such a fleet. The Architects were asked to prepare plans for the

addition of a new wing to the Club and for an additional floor on top of the existing building. The Hong Kong Government was approached and it was tentatively agreed that the plot of land adjacent to the Theatre should be purchased by the Club and a seven-storey building erected there. The Chief Manager of the Hong Kong Bank was approached, and, without hesitation, agreed to guarantee on overdraft of \$1,000,000.

The idea was to allocate the new wing of the building for the use of Chief and Petty Officers, and others of similar rank. The existing building was to be for the exclusive use of junior ratings, and the existing kitchen was to be completely modernised.

Then came 1939 and rumours of war. All plans for the modernisation and extension of the Club were suspended on 3rd September, 1939, when Europe was plunged into World War II.

