

Royal Sussex Lodge No. 501 EC Visit Shanghai 2006.

On 24 March 2006 members of Royal Sussex Lodge No.501 EC initiated a visit to Shanghai together with ladies and members of the Irish & Scottish constitutions. The motley crew was led by the WM of 501 EC Bro. Eric 'Commander' Edmondson, and arranged by W. Bro. Mark Sutherland. The main event in the three day programme was a visit to our former Shanghai Masonic Hall and to extend the hand of friendship to the hall de facto occupiers. Also from the historical aspect to garner the extent the building had been renovated or modified since earlier visits.

Secondly, to meet informally members of the Shanghai Square & Compass Club affiliated to The Grand Lodge of F&AM of China .

Thirdly, to visit the former Episcopal Cathedral near the Bund. The writer was particular keen to enter the cathedral having failed to do so on two earlier attempts to identify the foundation stone and inscription. For some years the cathedral was under the control of the Security Bureau and entry was denied to outsiders.

This was the writer's third visit to Shanghai in recent times to try and discover more about our long Masonic heritage in China.

### **The Shanghai Masonic Hall 1931**



This former 1931 Masonic Hall is the fourth Masonic hall constructed in Shanghai (*see left*). The first was constructed in Nanking Road in 1835. The second in Canton Road in 1861. The third and more imposing hall was built in 1865 on 30 The Bund opposite the public gardens until the hall's demolition in 1928. See right the 1931 Masonic Hall Beijing Road West today.



One can see that an additional floor has been added and the trees have reached maturity

On our arrival at the former Masonic Hall at 1623 Beijing Road West (formerly Avenue Road) our group was courteously greeted by Dr. Zhu Yan-miao the Vice-President & Secretary-General and his colleagues of the Chinese Medical Association Shanghai Branch (CMASB) who have been the de facto occupiers since 1957. In 2003 I met Dr. Zhu in Hong Kong over lunch when he was given a personal tour of our Masonic Centre in Hong Kong. After the formal courtesies we were permitted to look over the building at will. The staff kindly lifted the hidden sunken board in the cavity built into the floor formerly used by the Scottish brethren in their Chapter ceremonies. The shallow cavity was clearly shown on the original plans. The cover over the cavity was lifted on an earlier visit by a group of the DGL of HK & FE and the board exposed only after some difficulty and for the first time in many years. At that time the inscribed letters on the board probably had not been revealed since the mid 1950's when the Light of Freemasonry spluttered out on China mainland and finally extinguished!

On a previous occasion the wooden honour boards situated on the ground floor on which the names of the Masters of the lodges would have been depicted were varnished over and the names totally indecipherable. On this occasion the thick varnish of three of the boards had been cleaned so that one was able to partially decipher some of the names. From archives it was able to determine the lodges from the uncovered names of the Masters of the lodges on the boards i.e. Doric Lodge No. 1433 EC warranted in 1873 and Tuscan Lodge No.1027 EC warranted in 1874 and St. George's Lodge No. 4575 EC warranted in 1923.

## Shanghai Masonic Hall Revisited 2006

We do not yet know whether the CMASB intend to clean the remainder of the honour boards but this was a step forward.



See above photos left to right:

1. A former panel from the 1865 Masonic Hall on 30 Bund now in the 1931 Masonic Hall former 'small lodge' room on the ground floor. The old 1865 Masonic Hall wooden 'all seeing eye' had been removed from its original position above.
2. St. George's Lodge No. 4545 EC Honour Board and the names of the Masters of the lodge.
3. The board raised from the cavity used by Rising Sun Council No.129 SC warranted in 1869.

Internally it was found that the building had been recently renovated and some parts extended. The original ground floor tiles and staircase had been replaced possibly laid over the original ones which were visible on earlier visits. Much of the former layout and original wooden fixtures are still in good condition. The former refectory had been repainted and the wooden panels on the walls remain in situ.



On earlier visits the foundation stone (left) was covered in thick white paint although the words Shanghai Masonic Hall was still just visible. This time the earlier stone inscription had been chiseled off so that the original inscription is clearly visible underneath. Note also the dodgy looking characters loitering outside the hall by the N.E. corner foundation stone.



Now there is no indication that the building was a Masonic Hall!

### Square & Compass Club Tea Meeting



Our next stop by invitation was to meet with the Shanghai 'Square & Compass Club' at 178 Urumchi Road. The Club are a small group of Chinese brethren living in Shanghai affiliated to the brethren of the Grand Lodge A&FM of China (Taiwan). We had tea with some of the the brethren in a two storey building in the former French Concession. Outside the building the sign over the door stated The Committee of the Chinese Political Consultive Conference (CCPPCC). After entering the building and from old photos and archives it was easy to come to the conclusion that the building was in fact the former American Masonic Hall constructed in 1928 (178 Route Dufour). The interior had been renovated but it is possible that some of the panels and wood work could be original. Some panels and doors came from the Bund 1865 Masonic Hall when it was demolished in 1928. The Club finds it is a convenient place to meet here if only informally.



## *Shanghai Masonic Hall Revisited 2006*

The 1928 American Masonic Hall foundation stone was laid on 27 May 1928 and the original inscription stated:

*'This Corner Stone Laid in the Name of the Great Architect of the Universe A.L. May 27 5028 A.D. 1928'*

Photos left to right above:

1. 1928 American Masonic Hall. 2. Hall Information Board. 3. Hall Staircase. 4. Wooden Paneling.

Regretably, there was insufficient time to research the building further or to find the foundation stone.

### **The Episcopal Trinity Cathedral**

The relationship between the Craft and the Anglican Cathedral is of some importance in our Masonic heritage in Shanghai. The foundation stone laying of the cathedral in 1866 was a grand public event. The procession commencing at the Masonic Hall on the Bund along the streets to the cathedral site and the laying of the stone was a full Masonic ceremony according to ancient Masonic custom.



On Sunday morning 26 March a small group of the brethren and ladies went to the former Trinity Cathedral at 201 Jiangxi Road. At first it was not possible to get into the building and it looked deserted. Eventually it was found that the main gate was unlocked and with a bit of determination we were able to get inside the compound after all. There was a private security guard patrolling but when it was explained in puto3nghua and we were from Hong Kong the guard was affable enough to allow us to wander around and take photos.

The original inscription on the foundation stone read as follows:



*"The Foundation Stone of the Trinity Church, Shanghai, laid with Masonic Ceremony, under the direction and superintendence of the D.P.G.M. of Freemasonry for China E.C. on 24th May, 1866. Being the Birthday of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria.*

*H.B.M's Consul. Chas. A. Winchester, Esq. C. E. Parker, Esq. D.P.G.M. Trustees: Wm.G. Cuthbertson, Esq. and Wm. Keswick, Esq. Treasurer: Hy. Dickinson, Esq.*

*Architects: G.G. Scott Esq., R.A. & William Kidner Esq., Builders: Messrs. S. C. Farnham & Co. Consular Chaplain: Rev C.H. Butcher M.A."*



# Shanghai Masonic Hall Revisited 2006



Left is a photo of the interior of the cathedral in c.1900 and right the cathedral in March 2006. The former interior is similar to that of the nave of St. John's Cathedral in Hong Kong. The beautiful roof beams are hidden today by a false ceiling. Cinema style seats had been added as the building was used as the Huangpu Town Hall. Other buildings were in use as a recruitment office of the PLA.



The Victorian styled red and black brickwork still looks attractive. See the interesting string instrument mosaic right on the floor after clearing the dust with water. It is understood that the Security Bureau has already handed over the cathedral to the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) of the Protestant Churches in China (The China Christian Council). On our visit it was clear that the building is in the process of being cleaned up. It is understood the cathedral is to be renovated to its original architectural plans drawn up by Sir Gilbert Scott including the construction of a new spire on the tower.



Sadly, we were unable to identify the foundation stone. There is a time capsule under the stone including inter alia Royal Sussex Lodge 501 EC & Lodge Cosmopolitan 468 SC bye laws! Our long Masonic connection with the cathedral and the foundation stone is there somewhere still awaiting discovery.



Brian L. Coak

April 2006

See <http://web.mac.com/briancoak/iWeb>

*Shanghai Masonic Hall Revisited 2006*