



Shanghai the Centre of Freemasonry in Northern China



Shanghai Masonic Hall No. 30 The Bund 1865

The Bund 1870



The Shanghai Masonic Halls

In 1849, a warrant was granted to Northern Lodge of China No.570 EC in Shanghai. The first Masonic meetings were held in houses of Chinese construction in Shanghai not far from the Episcopal Church compound close to the Bund.

In 1856 the first one-storeyed Masonic Hall in Shanghai was constructed in Nanking Road (formerly known as Park Lane). A second hall was built in Canton Road in 1861. Consul W.D Medhurst recommended the hall be designated in Chinese as the 'Kwei Keu Tang' - Square & Compasses Hall." The compass and square produce perfect circles and squares. By the sages the human relations are perfectly exhibited."

In July 1865, a Foundation Stone for a more elegant structure was laid further along the Bund at Number 30 The Bund Shanghai - the third Masonic Hall. Several Masonic Lodges and Orders operated in Shanghai under charters granted by various country's Grand Lodges including England, Massachusetts, Scotland, Ireland, Germany and later the Philippines.

The Hall site 30 The Bund had a commanding view of the Whangpoo (Huangpu) River opposite the Public Gardens on The Bund esplanade. The ceremony of the Foundation Stone laying on 3 July 1865 was accompanied by great pageantry. Before the corner stone was finally lowered in place, a time capsule containing a number of items was placed in the cavity below. The Masonic Hall centre in 1886 below.



Despite extensive alterations over the years made to the building in 1912 including lighting by electricity and heating further extensive repairs were needed following a fire in 1918.

Ten years later The Bund property was deteriorating and finally sold to a Japanese company clean of the land in 1928. The 1912 Foundation Stone and time capsule was kept with a view to establish a new centre. The last Masonic meeting on 30 The Bund was held on 20 April 1928, a Convocation of Zion RAC No.570. The English, Scottish and Irish constitutions moved to temporary premises at No. 8C Yuen Ming Road. The American Craft members decided to construct their own Masonic Hall in the French Quarter Route Du Four. The American 1928 building is still standing on the original site.

The new Bund committee found a site for the proposed new Hall at an extension at 1623 Avenue Road now Beijing Road West and the ground was handed over in 1929. The Foundation Stone laying took place on 17 January 1931 and the building was dedicated on Saturday 26 September 1931 in ample form. In March 1932, only five months after the dedication of the new Shanghai Hall, Japanese Marines landed in Shanghai. Following the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941 the Japanese military raided the Hall interrogating the District Grand Master, Secretary and Treasurer English Constitution who were interned for the duration of the Pacific War.

From the Ashes of War



From the ashes the first post war meeting of Royal Sussex No. 501 EC was held in January 1946. The warrant of the Lodge miraculously remained intact due to the quick thinking of Bro. Moss who managed to enter the Shanghai hall in 1941 and bravely walked out past the Japanese sentry with it secreted in his person after where it was hidden by him undetected to the end of the war! The first meeting of the English District Grand Lodge of Northern China after the War probably took place in March 1946 when DGM EC R.W. Bro. Nation resigned following his Japanese internment camp incarceration.

Following the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China in 1949 the Masonic Halls were simply appropriated by the Communist authorities. A number of Lodges & Orders disbanded throughout China returned or transferred their Charters. A few Shanghai Lodges and Orders granted under the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland & Ireland transferred their Charters to Hong Kong in the 1950s.

Shanghai Masonic Hall Revisited

In 1995 after nearly half a century since Freemasonry in the PRC ceased a party of ladies and brethren visited the 1931 Hall now occupied by the Chinese Medical Association Shanghai Branch since 1957. In May 2001 a second party made a social visit to the former Shanghai Masonic Hall.

A third visit to the Hall was made in March 2006 by some members of Royal Sussex Lodge No.502 EC, Irish and Scottish brethren and ladies extended the hand of friendship to the de facto occupiers Dr. Zhu Yan-miao the Vice-President & Secretary-General and his colleagues of the Chinese Medical Association Shanghai Branch (CMASB) An opportunity was again taken to record any modifications of the building for the record.

On 12 November 2011 after eighty years has quietly slipped away since the Foundation Stone laying in 1931 of the Masonic Hall 1623 Avenue Road (Beijing Road West) a fourth party of brethren and their ladies were looking forward visiting the old Hall but to find Dr. Zhu has since retired. "Dui bu qi 对不起 sorry, a person said. "The 'Man with the Key' bu zai 不在" and is not here meaning we do not know when he is coming back! "Mei you ban fa 没有办法, no way out as the man in charge took the key with him and won't be back before you leave so there is no hope to obtain what you want to do". "Mei you wen ti 这是没有问题 we said, if we all believe the things will work out OK, then maybe they will"! So it came to pass and members were still able to look around the building and take photos but many rooms were locked. On request the writer offered a brief to the party on Freemasonry in Shanghai and the 1931 Masonic Hall in the same room former District Grand Secretary EC where the DGM EC, Secretary and Treasurer were interrogated by the Japanese Naval authorities in 1942.



Conclusion

Despite desperate wars and civil confrontations the 1931 Hall main building and interior has changed little over the years. Many original doors and brass knobs, tiles and Masonic symbols remain including the shallow 'vault' formerly used by the Scottish craft. The original hall committee planned to install air conditioning but did not persevere with the plan. One has to accept the ubiquitous air conditioning units and lift installed in the entrance hall for today's convenience and comfort.

Over a hundred and fifty years ago has passed since members of the English, Scottish and Irish Lodges and Orders carried out their peculiar Masonic labour in Shanghai with warm attachment. The current members in Hong Kong continue to devote and support unsullied our Grand Lodge's original Masonic precepts.

The 1931 Shanghai Masonic Hall remains an icon and memorial to the Lodges and Orders who are still working in Hong Kong. See below photos of the 1931 Foundation Stone 2001 left & 2011 right.



While in Shanghai on 14 November 2011 the writer walked past all the buildings on the Bund from number one to the end at 33 in the east. The site of number 30 of our old Masonic Hall and number 31 appears to have been used to construct the Peninsula Hotel Shanghai opened in 2010 and numbered 32. Number 33 The Bund formerly housed the British Consulate-General. The building has been renovated and in 2010 re-opened as No 1 Waitanyuan, a private dining government facility.

The photo left is the Masonic Hall No.30 The Bund in 1886. Right is the author standing on The Bund with number 29 and number 32 The Peninsula Hotel in the background.



"Adiu! a heart-warm, fond adiu! Dear brothers of the mystic tie!" (Robert Burns 1759-96)

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See also website <http://web.me.com/briancoak>

