



Weihaiwei & Liu Gung Tao



The British China Fleet & The Craft



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They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old.

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning.

We will remember them.

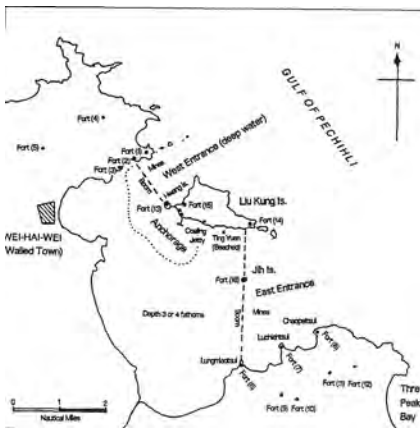


Early Days to 1914

Weihaiwei and the China naval base of the island of Liu Gung Tao was the main base of the Chinese Northern Fleet ('Peiyang') for many years principally engaged in thwarting piratical attacks plaguing the coast. (See early photo of Liu Gung Tao top)

In May 1894 a nodal point of China's history occurred at the Battle of the Yalu River when the Northern Chinese Fleet was comprehensively defeated by the Japanese fleet. In January 1895 the Japanese 2nd Army captured the Weihaiwei fortifications after 23 days of fighting and the island of Liu Gung Tao. By early 1895 Weihaiwei and Port Arthur were in Japanese hands.

By 1897 Germany attempted to increase its control over the Shantung peninsula and established a naval base at Qingtao. With Russian expansion in Manchuria the Russians took back control of the naval base of Port Arthur. In order to offset the Russian threat in May 1898 Britain signed a treaty with China to obtain the territory around Weihaiwei at the tip of the peninsula. The treaty ceremony was signed aboard HMS Victorious at Weihaiwei.



The territory under British administration comprising 300 square miles was commonly known as Weihaiwei. The mainland commercial port of Port Edward and naval base of Liu Gung Tao island was governed by a commissioner. A Chinese Regiment was also raised under the command of British officers.

In 1889, a German, Major von Hanneken was employed to supervise the defence of the anchorage and by 1894 a series of 16 fortifications had been constructed on either side of the bay and Liu Gung Tao including a hospital, naval college and a coaling jetty. (See map left)

In 1899 to 1900 anti foreign sentiments were so aroused the Boxers backed by Imperial soldiers attacked Tientsin and the Peking Legations. It was only on the second attempt before a larger international coalition was able to gather and free the cities from siege. Thirty four Royal Navy China Fleet ships landed naval brigades with the Weihaiwei Regiment at Tientsin. The coalition of nations finally marched into the Forbidden City as it did some 50 years earlier. The Empress Dowager had already departed to Xian.

On August 1900 Japanese troops landed at Amoy so the British deployed the HMS Goddess to Gulangyu and marines were put ashore. Both nations withdrew their troops later.



In September 1901 two Lodge warrants were issued one for King Edward VII Lodge No. 2937 EC and one for Daintry Lodge No. 2938 EC named after the Liu Gung Tao base Commander Bro. J.D. Daintry RN a PM of Trident Lodge No. 2465 of Bermuda. Both lodges met on Liu Gung Tao in a rented converted old Chinese house in Drake Street.

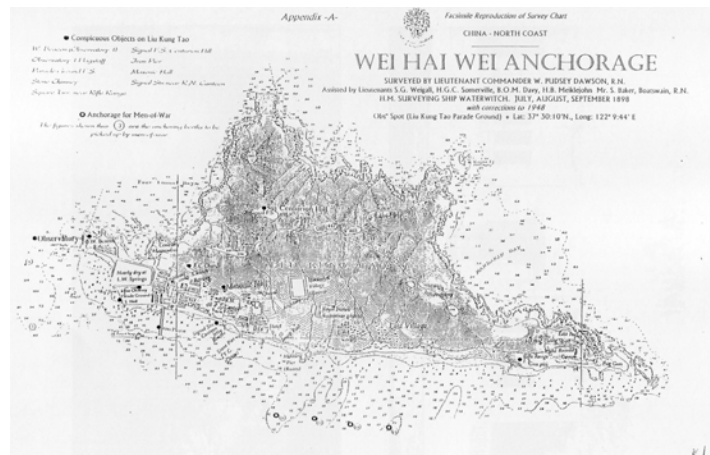
In 1902 Japan and Britain signed the first alliance with an oriental power.

By 1902 Weihaiwei settled down under British administration Commissioner Hon. Stewart-Lockhart and his deputy R.F. Johnson. (Two streets in Hong Kong still bear their names) (See photo of Commissioner Stewart-Lockhart right)



Navy personnel found the climate at Weihaiwei more comfortable and healthy than Hong Kong during the summer steamy heat if not the flesh pots.

In 1903 the navy base budget at Liu Gung Tao was only 16,000 sterling due to the high cost of the Boer war. However, after the Boxer rebellion wireless telegraph greatly improved naval communications. *(See naval survey and photo of Liu Gung Tao c.1920)* *(The naval survey below clearly indicates the Masonic Hall on the hill above the barracks.*



The two lodges on Liu Gung Tao were finally consecrated in January 1903 by W. Bro. T. W. Kingsmill PDDGM EC.

In 1904 British was allied with Japan but the Japanese fleet attacked the Russians at Port Arthur and humiliated the Russians in 1905 at the Battle of Tsushima. Both belligerents were banned from entering the Weihaiwei roads. British ships temporarily withdrew. Once things calmed down again the navy personnel returned to routine, exercises and recreation at the station.

In 1905 two of HMS Hecla's squadron HMS Exe and HMS Dee were washed ashore in a typhoon but the ships were repaired. In 1910 in bad weather the C. in C. Admiral Winsloe ordered full power trials on four heavy cruisers. HMS Bedfordshire pranged the Samarang Rocks and unfortunately several men were drowned. *(See the Naval Cemetery right)*



In June 1906 three brethren from Shanghai travelled to Weihaiwei to consecrate the first Mark Lodge of Northern Lodge of Mark Master Masons No. 583. It was the first Mark Lodge erected outside Shanghai. It was intended to erect a Royal Arch Chapter in Weihaiwei. A petition was drawn up and forwarded to Hong Kong for transmission to England but it is believed that the petition was lost on board a gunboat.

While Daintry Lodge flourished the sister lodge No.2937 EC failed due to insufficient numbers and so the warrant of Lodge was returned to Grand Lodge in 1908.

In 1909 the Foundation Stone for a Masonic Hall high above the naval moorings was laid on Liu Gung Tao officiated by W.Bro. H.B. Ching of Lodge No. 2938 EC. In June 1910 the Masonic Hall with club and dining facilities and meeting room was consecrated on Liu Gung Tao by R.W.Bro. R. S. Ivy DGM. .(1910 Hall right)



It must have been a boon for the brethren and their visitors to find a tranquil corner where they could meet on the square and for a gin and tonic on the balcony overlooking the ships coming and going below

By 1911 China was in turmoil and continued unabated for another 40 years after the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty by the Nationalists led by Sun Yat Sun.

World War I

In 1914 matters were coming to head in Europe and Britain and Germany were at War. Germany still held a stronghold at Tsingtao but when war broke out between the two nations. German citizens in Hong Kong were interned in August of the year. The German East Asiatic Squadron with some capital ships such as the Scharnhorst under Vice Admiral Graf von Spee had already sailed from Tsingtao.

Naval confrontations came to a head when the British fleet was defeated by the German fleet at the Battle of Coronel on 1 November 1914 but on 8 December at the Battle of the Falklands the British hit back. The 2nd Battalion of the Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry (the Regiment the writer was commissioned in 1958-National Service) was carried by HMS Triumph to Tsingtao.

With assistance from our Japanese allies Tsingtao was captured and participated in the hunt of the successful German commerce raider SMS Emden. HMS Triumph intercepted and escorted two German ships to Weihaiwei while the Japanese continued to patrol the Indian Ocean until 1917. (*SMS Emden right*)



The HMS Empress of Russia refitted in Hong Kong which took part in the hunt for the Emden was deployed to guard Weihaiwei manned by a Chinese crew and British and French gunboat crews and volunteers.

In 1918 the stubborn land and naval war finally came to its awful demise bringing both nations thankfully to their knees.

1920 -1931

In 1920 the China Fleet was the third largest fleet of the Royal Navy comprising four main groups including aircraft based carriers. After the war at the Weihaiwei station was probably the heyday of naval life there. There was plenty of opportunity for summer recreation sailing, swimming, golf and excursions. Winter was less comfortable but one could ice skate as the sea froze near the edges. At this time of the year the majority of ships steamed south to Hong Kong as at this time the climate was much more amenable. Sovereignty of Weihaiwei was earmarked for its return to China under the Balfour Declaration but the issue was delayed.

In January 1927 things were hotting up apart from the weather. An attack was thought likely on Shanghai and the China fleet steamed to Shanghai to support the Shanghai Volunteer Defence Corps in their defence of the International Concessions. Thirty-five ships from seven nations were on standby at Whangpu. As things became more composed the C. in C. Vice Admiral Tyrwhitt (1870-1951) and his family departed for Liu Gung Tao for R& R on the 'Petersfield' a converted minesweeper.





Trouble was brewing at Chingwangtao port and as British citizens were under threat the Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire Regiment garrisoned at Weihaiwei embarked on the cruiser HMS Berwick (*left*) to restore order. Carriers HMS Hermes & Argus provided air support. (*HMS Hermes below*)



In 1927 the cruiser HMS Hawkins visited Shanghai. There were over 20 members of the Craft aboard. The District Grand Master in Shanghai gave permission for the brethren to hold rehearsals in the Masonic Hall on the Bund. Between 1928 and 1931 the flagship HMS Kent was a regular visitor to Weihaiwei

In August the DGM EC Bro. H. J. Clark was in Weihaiwei arranged for a formal Lodge of Instruction. A Liut. Commander serving on HMS Berwick and a chief engine room artificer serving on HMS Petersfield were appointed Preceptors. Thus the China Fleet Lodge of Instruction came into being on a regular basis known as the CFLI under the auspices of Daintry Lodge.

During 1929 branches were formed for HMS ships Cornwall, Suffolk, Hermes and Berwick.

Meetings of various branches were held in Yokohama, Kobe and northern China ports and up the Yangtze River at Hangkow and Hong Kong in southern China.

In 1930 the HMS Cornwall branch of the CFLI visited Manila and gave a demonstration of Emulation working before the brethren of the Scottish and Philippine constitutions. The HMS Cumberland branch also visited the West Indies.

A decision was made in 1930 to return Weihaiwei territory to China but Britain retained the right to use the base at Liu Kung Tao and a garrison at Tientsin for a further ten years.



In 1931 the submarine Poseidon while carrying out exercises was in collision of the Chinese coaster Yuta. The submarine capsized and sank and 22 men were lost. It also saw the HMS Petersfield the C. in C.'s yacht running aground on Tung Yung Island. In January the Cumberland branch of the CFLI visited Freemason's Hall in London.



In troubled times the navy brethren and their ships were usually the first to be redeployed. With the recession of Weihaiwei was compounded by the Sino - Japanese problem. Due to the help of mainly Hong Kong lodges it was still possible for Weihaiwei brethren to complete their degrees despite the exigencies of the service.

Dark War Clouds in Sight

In May 1937 the China Fleet were in Hong Kong to celebrate the Coronation of King George VI. In July 1937 sparked off beginning of further Japanese aggression in the Far East with the 'Marco Polo Bridge'

incident in Peking. Nine D Class destroyers were deployed from Liu Gung Tao along the China Coast. By the end of 1937 Japan was in control of large areas of China.

On the Yangtze HMS Capetown was caught marooned off Hangkow 700 miles inland for nearly 3 months until the ship could reach the sea with Japanese assistance and arrived in Hong Kong on 27 December and then to Liu Gung Tao.

In January 1938 the Japanese encroached on Weihaiwei and matters became extremely tense. The Chinese guerillas attacked the Japanese who retaliated with offshore bombardments. In September Prime Minister Chamberlain and the French Prime Minister met Hitler in Munich. The fleet was put on high alert.

The confrontations between the Chinese and Japanese forces severely dislocated trade and supplies in Tientsin compounded by severe flooding. There was with 4 feet of water inside the Masonic Hall. During 1938 the Craft carried on but by 1939 things became more difficult to meet.

On 25 October 1939 the Japanese forces occupied the Wuhan area and the Masonic Hall premises became the headquarters of the Japanese special police.



The same year it was necessary for all Navy families in Weihaiwei to be evacuated to Hong Kong by the oiler HMS Appleleaf. When the Japanese cruiser Kuma entered the harbour the ship confronted the cruiser HMS Birmingham and each trained their guns on the other. The Kuma retreated. That summer the destroyer HMS Westcott had leave shore curtailed at Liu Gung Tao due to Japanese enforced night curfews. *(see Westcott left)*

War again was imminent. It was considered that Weihaiwei and Hong Kong could not be held and the Fleet was redeployed to other sectors. What could be salvaged at Liu Gung Tao was taken by the depot ship HMS Medway. Much of the buildings were left under care. Daintree Lodge was closed and the warrant left in the keeping of Bro. R.H.Lackey and the warrant was taken from Singapore to Hong Kong by submarine.

The Masonic Hall was left with Mr. C.P. Sai the caretaker. The Chinese dockyard was already under control by the Japanese.

The 10 year extension of the lease granted in 1930 was due for renewal on 1 October 1940 and was provisionally granted by the Nationalists. The arrangement was ignored by the Japanese and on the expiry of the 1930 agreement on 30 September 1940.

In October 1940 it was reported that arrangements in Tientsin were made for Lodge No. 2938 EC to work in Hong Kong under dispensation.

On September 1940 sailors and marines from the cruiser Iwate landed on Liu Gung Tao and took control of the island. The remaining British personnel and equipment were evacuated. The 42 year association with the Royal Navy at Liu Gung Tao reverted to the Japanese again whom the British had taken possession in 1898.

WWII in the Pacific

On 7 December 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour and Hong Kong on **8 December** was attacked by air and by land. **On 11 December** Japan declared War on Britain. *(See left & right below)*



On January 1941 an Iranian citizen Bro. Mohamed Nemazee hurried to the Hong Kong Masonic Hall in Kennedy Road. He found the lodge regalia boxes had been broken into and regalia scattered over the floor. With great presence despite the danger he took some of the warrants and minute books and records including the Warrant of Lodge No. 525 E.C. The Warrant was sent to Shanghai hidden in the vaults of the Banque del'Indo Chine until recovered in 1945. In 1942 all the Lodges in Hong Kong including Zetland Lodge No. 525 EC went into recession and all non - axis civil residents in Hong Kong and POW's were interned.

The Masonic Hall the centre of the Craft in Shanghai was searched and the DGM EC and Secretary were interrogated. Likewise, brethren in Manila and Japan were brutalized. In Japan Bro. C. Rodriguez-Jiminez Secretary of Lodge Star in the East No. 640 SC was Consul General for Venezuela. He persuaded the authorities to let him take the unexamined minute book. He and some members of the lodge left Japan on the Ms. Gripsholm on July 1942. (*See left*) The members aboard the Gripsholm held an Emergency Meeting of the Lodge en rout to Rio de Janeiro under dispensation. The records eventually reached the Grand Lodge of Scotland through the courtesy of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia.

Post WW II

By 1945 saw few fine ships of the China Fleet surviving the war. The carriers Hermes, Eagle and the cruisers Dorsetshire & Cornwall and the depot ship Medway were lost in action.

The gallant men and women who made the supreme sacrifice during the war their hallowed names are written on plaques and memorials and they have not been forgotten.

Following the Japanese surrender in 1945 Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist army was opposed to the Communist army under Mao Tse-tung for the control of China. On 24 August the Red Army 18th Group occupied Chefoo and Weihaiwei. By October 53,000 American marines landed in Northern China.

Following the Pacific war life was left confusing and in disarray and many Masonic records lost or destroyed. The war opposing armies of Mao & Chiang added to the chaos.

In 1945 after internment Hugh Owen -Hughes went back to the 1919 Military Hospital in Bowen Road and he found most of the hospital still standing. The hospital was raised over blocks leaving a cavity below the ground floor. He rummaged around underneath and recovered the precious records. Bro. Nemazee saved the warrant of Lodge No. 525 from certain destruction by the Japanese Zetland Lodge 525 held a meeting in February 1946.

Bro. J.H. Bolton Jnr. who was serving in the Royal Navy in Hong Kong and the son of a PM of Daintree Lodge averted Daintry warrant's return by the brethren of Hong Kong to Grand Lodge. Bolton Snr. living on the Isle of Wight and sixty pre-war members rallied to revive the lodge.

In 1947 the Grand Lodge granted the transfer of Daintry Lodge No. 2938 E.C. to Hampshire 7. Bro. Cmdr. J.D. Daintry the 'father' of the Lodge assisted in the resuscitation of the lodge. The lodge retained its naval character and annually hold a 'Chinese' dinner. On September 1952 W.Bro. Daintry witnessed the consecration of Daintry Chapter before he was finally called to the GLA.

In January 1949 the northern cities of Peking and Tienjin were in communist hands and by April gained control of the Yangtze valley. The Chinese had no intention of leaving their chief port into foreign hands. The

communists expropriated all buildings including the Shanghai Masonic Hall and was used by a trade union. Other Masonic Halls including the hall in Liu Gung Tao in China were seized.

Freemasons Return to Weihaiwei

In October 1998 an informal group of Freemasons and their ladies under the banner of the District Grand Lodge of Hong Kong & the Far East EC arrived in Weihaiwei and landed on the island of Liu Gung Tao.

But that is another story!



The writer standing on the balcony on the former 1910 Masonic Hall in 1998.

Many sailors and families and members of the Craft will look back fondly on their stay on the pleasant little island for which the British had an association for nearly half a century since 1898. The China Fleet and Weihaiwei will go down in naval history as one of the most interesting periods in the annals of the Far East. (See the Hall meeting room c.1920 & former Masonic Hall in 1998 below)



St. John's Chapel



Former Masonic Hall





References



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