

## 編語

許舒博士(James William Hayes) 於2023年7月6日在澳洲悉尼離世，享年92歲。許舒博士1956年前來香港，在香港政府擔任32年公職，1988年退休。他幾乎一半的時間是在新界服務。許舒博士不單熱心推動保存新界傳統和文物，亦積極研究新界歷史，曾出版多本著作。許舒過去搜集大量香港地方文獻，除慷慨讓學者作學術研究和出版外，更悉數贈予香港及國外大學圖書館。

本通訊今期特設紀念專號，以誌許舒博士對本港研究的重大貢獻。

---

# Memories of James Hayes

Patrick H. Hase

I first met James in late 1972. I was a newly appointed Administrative Officer. James was then Assistant Director (Hong Kong) of the Urban Services Department, and I was posted as Administrative Assistant to help him out. We quickly became friends, and that friendship lasted without any break for over fifty years. James was my first friend in Hong Kong, and my dearest.

James quickly discovered that I was a historian, and he urged me to join the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch, and to interest myself in the history of Hong Kong: I joined the Society within six months, and within a few months more James had manoeuvred me onto the Council of the Society. Joining the Society was, by far, the most momentous decision of my time in Hong Kong. The Society has taught me almost everything I know about the New Territories and its history. I will always be indebted to James for getting me interested in New Territories history.

I vividly remember the first afternoon trip I made with the Society – it must have been in the Au-

tumn of 1973. James was leading a walk through the marshes which used to stand where Tin Shui Wai is today. This was before any development of any kind there. I remember the narrow, winding Lau Fau Shan Road, just barely one lane wide, with tall reeds on either side cutting out the sky, and the narrow path on a bund over the marshes, and a smell that you felt you could cut with a knife. I fell in love with the New Territories that day, and regret, to some degree, that these pre-development areas have now gone, for good or bad. Other early visits with James that I remember fondly are my first visit to the Tai Po Kau Forestry Reserve, and my first visit to Stanley. He was a superb organiser of visits to places of interest in the New Territories. He would always do a “dummy-run” beforehand to ensure he had the timings right, and that nothing new had occurred since his last visit that he was not aware of. He urged me to do the same when, in due course, I started to organise trips myself. It was excellent advice, and I tried to live up to it.

On one occasion James invited me to go with

him to visit the Aplichau Kaifong. This was my first dinner with a local organisation. The Kaifong had also invited an ink painter, a specialist in painting tigers (he signed his paintings “the friend of tigers”). He painted two paintings that evening, and he gave one to James and one to me: that was my first Chinese ink paintings, and it hangs today in my dining room in England. I was fascinated with the painter’s technique and skill. I was also fascinated by the way James chatted with the senior Kaifong figures, treating them as dear and honoured friends. I vowed that, when the time came, I would do the same.

James was very well read in the English language books on China and its history and ethnography. He used to embarrass me deep inside when we spoke together: he would refer to this or that book, which I had never heard of, but which he had read in detail. Even now, I know he had read and knew these books to an extent that I never will.

Much of James work was on the port-towns of Cheung Chau and Tai O. I never visited either of them with him, unfortunately, but I have listened to him talk of them for many hours. He loved them. He formed in me a clear idea of these two towns, so that, when I did visit them, on my own, they lived for me in a way that they never would have otherwise.

It was in those first months of my friendship with James that I first read his seminal book *The Hong Kong Region*. I was immediately fascinated by the book. It was the first thing I ever read on the history of the New Territories. It was so good – well researched, well written, easy to read, difficult to put down. It immediately inspired me. I wanted to do the same sort of research, based on interviews with village elders at least as much as on written documents. I have tried, but with, I fear, less success than James, to follow his example.

I attended many lectures given by James. They were always excellent, and full of interest and information. He had a habit, however, of breaking off and

falling into anecdotes – always fun, but occasionally a little annoying.

A major feature of James’ life was collecting. Whenever he was working with village elders he would ask about written documents originating in the traditional village environment, and, whenever he had a moment to spare he would trawl through the second-hand bookshops and junk stalls looking for the same things. He was extraordinarily successful. He managed to collect hundreds of original traditional land deeds, and dozens of pieces of calligraphy written by village scholars. Almost all have been placed in academic libraries or other depositories. His success can be measured when you see that two-thirds of surviving land deeds from the wider New Territories area were collected by him. He was in the right place at the right time: while I managed to collect a few, there are now almost none left to find.

In due course, James became President of the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch, and I sat on Council with him. He was an excellent President. The Society meant a great deal to him (he had been a Member since just a few months after the Branch was re-established in 1960), and, on Council it was easy to see that he really deeply wanted to see the Society grow and prosper. He told me that, as with me, so with him – the Society had taught him a great deal about the New Territories. Every meeting of the Council was dominated by James putting everything he had into debates as to where the Society should go, and how we should get there. It was never “just a committee”, but heart-felt and deep. I tried to model my time as President on James, albeit with little success.

James was physically a small man, slim, rarely well-dressed or smartly turned-out; he bustled here and there, often with an untidy bundle of envelopes of documents under his arm. He usually had a smile. James wrote fast, and in a handwriting that was close to totally unreadable. I have many pages of notes made by him (often Photostat copies), and deciphering

them often took weeks of effort. His drafts were covered with arrows moving text here and there, blue, red, green, crossed out, re-inserted – never a simple matter to get to what he wanted to say. He suffered from a high blood pressure, and had been told he had to give up smoking, which he found difficult. He would bring a cheroot to work, cut with a razor into three pieces, and, after lunch, he would lock his office door, and sit back and smoke one piece, quietly and restfully: it calmed him down if the stresses of the morning had got a little much for him. Heaven help any of his colleagues who disturbed him during this precious quarter-of-an-hour!

A marked feature of James' character was his extraordinary generosity: not only was he extremely generous with his time, giving advice (especially as to books which ought to be consulted) and offering suggestions for improvement, but he was happy to supply copies of notes of interviews, copies of his collected land deeds and anything else from his vast holdings of material that would be valuable. Most of my books could not have been written without access to the things which James sent me. I have tried to be as generous to others as James was to me.

I worked for James on several postings. He was a very fine public servant. He believed deeply that the role of the public servant in Hong Kong was simple: to do whatever he could for the people. He served the people he was responsible for, with all his heart. He never felt his work was “just a job”: it was a vocation of service. He was very careful to ensure that I understood this and would follow the same path. I have tried, all through my Government career. The village elders he had dealt with remained his close friends until the day they died: after his retirement to Sydney

for many years he returned once a year and gave a dinner party for his friends. Always there were one or two Cheung Chau elders. I felt honoured to be invited as well. I remember well on one occasion development in Tsuen Wan required the removal of the grave of the First Ancestor of the Chan clan of Sam Tung Uk, It took three months of hard work before James and the Sam Tung Uk elders agreed a suitable new site and the grave was removed and relocated. There had been an outbreak of illegal burials on the hills, and James had ordered these graves to be removed. His staff decided that all new graves should be cleared, and the contents cremated. Alas, the new Chan clan grave was there, and it was cleared with the other graves. The Chan clan elders came in a steaming fury to James, and he was so angry that he turned purple in the face (I feared he would have an apoplexy), but there was nothing to be done.

To me, James was more than a teacher and a mentor (although he was both to a very large degree). He came to understand that I was psychologically rather frail, and liable to fall into despair if things weren't going well for me. He would quietly urge me not to fall into depression if my research work seemed to be going poorly, making it clear that he believed in me, even when I started not to believe in myself. He read in draft everything I ever published up to a couple of years ago, and would give me wise and deep advice. When my Government career hit the rocks he was always quietly there to help me. Personally, I owe him more than I can ever say.

Hong Kong without James will be a poorer place. His memory and inspiration, however, will remain, and will continue to be what drives everything I do.