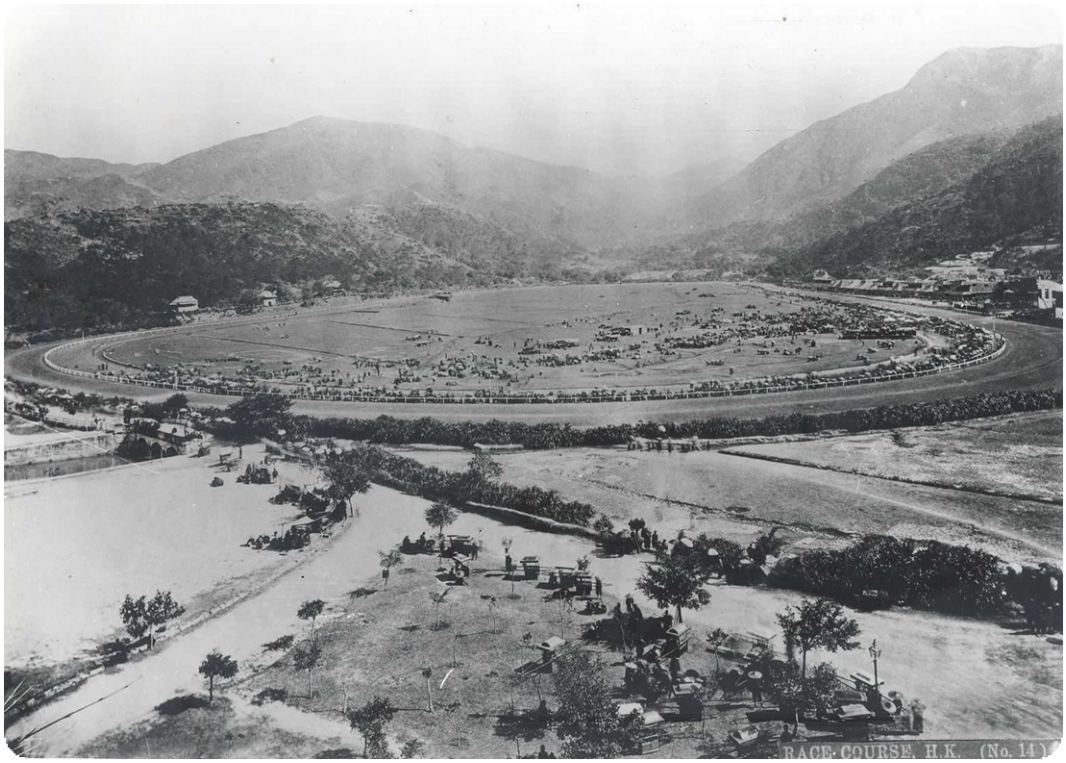
RACING AND THE CITY:

Hong Kong's History of Urban Development and Spatial Planning with Three Racecourses



A research report prepared for
The 8th Competition on Historical Photographs Writing Research

By
CHUNG King Lam & CHOI Ming Sum

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PROLOGUE

Both horse racing and spatial planning played a recognized part in the development of Hog Kong since 1841. The former constitutes an integral component of the collective memory of Hong Kongers, and the latter has always been controversial with its immense influence to the physical and economic contours of the city. Although both themes have received a paucity of retrospective treatment for their respective significance, attempts have been relatively few to examine whether they have been interacted at certain spatio-temporal junctures as they thrive in the same tiny spot of the world. It is out of such interest that we decide to produce this report, which picked up the bits and pieces of their interplay over time.

To elaborate, this report explores the multi-faceted historical connections in Hong Kong between racecourses, the most significant spatial manifestation of horse racing, and spatial planning, the mediator of urban development process. We assert that they have been in a dialectical relationship – discourses and realities of spatial planning and urban development affects how racecourses flourish, while the building and expansion of racecourses in turn can be spatially reformative to their environs. The three present and past racecourses in Happy Valley, Fanling and Sha Tin are scrutinized as points of departure for an alternative perspective to Hong Kong's urban development and spatial planning effort.

1. INTRODUCTION

To Hong Kong, horse racing has a history as long as that of the city's modern era, marked by the establishment of British Administration in 1841. The colonial masters imported their favourite equestrian pastime to Hong Kong, where it has evolved from upper-class leisure to popular excitement over the past century and three quarters. The famous promise "the race will go on" made by Deng Xiaoping on Hong Kong's continuity in the post-colonial era succinctly encapsulates how important horse racing is the city's social distinctiveness.

Central to this British legacy was racecourses, the most obvious spatial manifestation of its presence in a city. As many accounts (e.g. Ching, 1965; Lawrence, 1984; Moss, 2000) have pointed out, they are not only spaces of equestrian challenges *per se*, but also of various socioeconomic significances. They are some of the city's earliest nodes of social convergence, where the aristocracy meets the grassroots, and the Europeans meet the Chinese (Fig. 1.1). They have been stages of dynamic spectacles, where cheers of spectators and galloping of horses co-produce a carnival overture attracting plenty of overseas tourists. And not least they are pools of lucrative windfalls, where a day's totalized wagers can beat the annual betting on many racetracks in the West. Although all races in Hong Kong are now televised and bet placing possible at one's fingertip, tens of thousands continue to meet regularly on weekend afternoons and Wednesday evenings during the racing season in racecourses in Happy Valley and Sha Tin, a vivid evidence of the magnetic appeal of these emeralds in a concrete forest.

Despite widespread understanding of their extensive interactions with the society, spatially-sensitive accounts on the racecourses have been bounded by wires around the greens. Focusing on envelope design, capacity and facilities, many of them fail to situate the construction of racecourses in the broader context of Hong Kong's spatial planning and urban development. In fact, given their sizeable building footprint and high user-derived traffic demand, to name a few distinctive features, racecourses constitute a challenging land use category in the spatial planning of Hong Kong as a land-deprived and growingly congested metropolis. Discourses and realities of spatial planning and urban development affect how racecourses flourish, while the building and expansion of racecourses in turn can be spatially reformative to their environs.

Against this background, this report anchors on racecourses to present a cursory view of the dialectics amongst infrastructure initiatives, urban spaces and spatial planning practices. Drawing across official archives, academic inquiries, publications of the Hong

Kong Jockey Club (HKJC)[1] and online resources, it offers an illustrative and interpretive account of the birth and development of THREE (not two, as many would have thought) racecourses in Hong Kong, and how their histories have intertwined with those of the city's evolving urban landscape and its spatial planning.

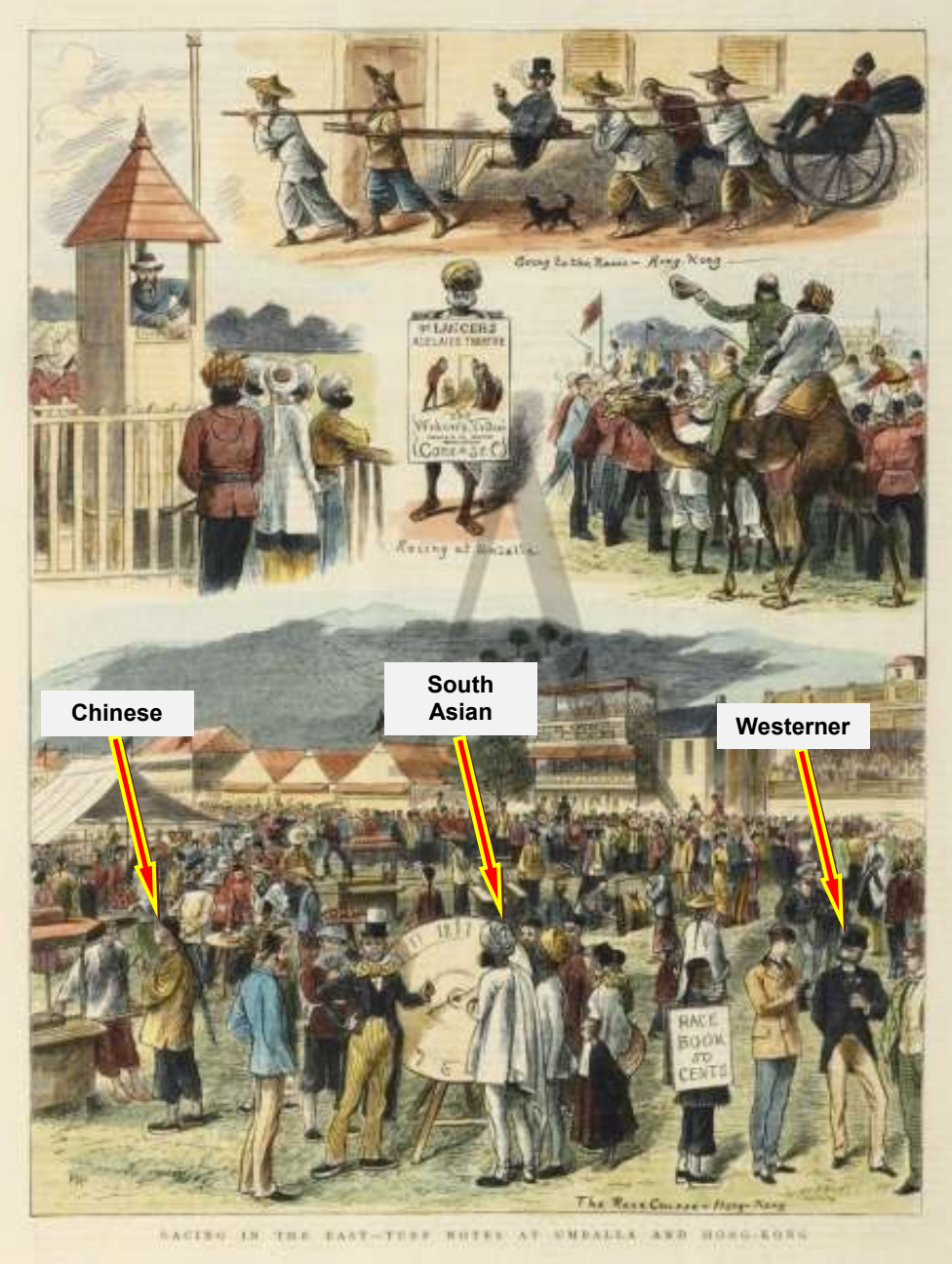


Fig. 1.1: Happenings in HVRC, 1881

Visitors to the racecourse came from a diverse ethnic spectrum.

(Source: *The Graphic*, 4 June 1881; reproduced in http://www.antiqueprintroom.com/image?acd8372258ff53480b68687b39147238)

[1] Granted with Royal Charter, the Club was known as "The Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club" between 1959 and 1996.

Following this introduction which sets out our underpinning lines of thought, Section 2 begins our investigation with Happy Valley Racecourse (HVRC), Hong Kong's first regular venue of horse racing, whose inception was facilitated the 19th century planning discourse and whose subsequent days demonstrate how the city and nature are in a persistent tug-of-war. We then head north to Fanling in Section 3, tracing the much obscured socio-spatial history of a short-lived yet famous racing club and its racecourse during the early 20th century. Section 4 moves on to the post-war years and focuses on the interplay of new town development and the building of Sha Tin Racecourse (STRC). We conclude in Section 5 with a recap of the saliency of Hong Kong' spatial planning and urban development we can observe from the building and operation of these three racecourses.

2. TUG-OF-WAR IN THE VALLEY

Now ringed by heavy traffic and commercial and residential development, HVRC is one of the world's most urban race tracks. Built at the confluence point of mountain streams (Fig 2.1) in a valley now known as Happy Valley, the racecourse is destined to engross with floods in a tug-of-war, which continues well from the 1840s to present-day. This wrestling with nature has become more strenuous over time as the racecourse indirectly engendered considerable physically destabilizing changes to the valley.

Fig. 2.1: A 1845 map extract featuring Happy Valley

HVRC would be erected on the drainage basin of multiple tributaries (circled) in a year's time.

(Source: Lt. T. B. Collinson's 1845 map of Hong Kong; reproduced in Nicolson, 2010, p.2)

Before being named as Happy Valley by the British, the area which HVRC dominates had been called Wong Nai Chung (黃泥涌; also variegatedly Romanized as, for instance, Wong Nei Chong or Wong Nei Chung) for a few hundreds of years. The area was one of the earliest settlements at the northeast of Hong Kong Island (Fig. 2.2). Wong Nai Chung literally means 'yellow mud stream' in Chinese, which referred to the creek collecting waters from Wong Nai Chung Gap and surrounding areas.

Fig. 2.2: Wong Nai Chung (黃泥涌) as depicted on a map drawn during the reign of Emperor Wangli (1573-1620)

(Source: Guo Fei, *The Grand Record of Yue* (粵大記)]; reproduced in Huang & Deng, 1998, p.917)

The muddy nature of the stream could be explained by the area's geomorphology. Happy Valley can be divided into three zones: steeped hills on three sides, the broad valley floor, and the lower slopes in between the two. Comprised of medium-grained granite, one of the most commonly found intrusive igneous rocks in Hong Kong (Nicolson, 2010), the hills are vulnerable to weathering and erosion, resulting in precipitous slopes. The loosened materials were carried away by mountain streams, which were tainted with a distinctive yellowish colour. While heavier debris were dropped at the footslopes, finer alluvium managed to flow to the valley floor, where they deposited and accumulated.

Irrigation convenience and soil fertility attracted settlement to the Valley, owned by the Tang Clan of Kam Tin, as early as in Ming dynasty. Rice cultivation was practiced and had thrived well to sustained in 1841 a village with 300 inhabitants (Bridgman & Williams, 1841; Fig 2.3), or 5% of the population on Hong Kong Island of the time.

Fig. 2.3: Wong Nai Chung Village, c. 1870-75
One can tell from the vernacular Chinese style of the buildings the long history of the Village.
(Source: Multimedia Information System, Hong Kong Public Libraries)

As the largest expanse of flat land available upon their arrival, the colonial government immediately eyed on developing Happy Valley into the commercial centre of Hong Kong Island. The idea was however abandoned quickly because of the high death tolls caused by malaria in the Valley (Nicolson, 2010). No one then knew the fatalness of mosquito-borne parasites, the cause of malaria, at the time. Nor did the physicians at that time discover the use of Quinine in curing the disease and preventing the contagion. Due to the grave demand for burial ground of the malaria hit, the Hong Kong Colonial Cemetery (now Hong Kong Cemetery) was established in 1845 in the Valley, justified by its abundance of land and distance from major development along the Victoria Harbour. This transformation promoted the renaming of Wong Nai Chung as 'Happy Valley', a common euphemism for cemeteries (Nicolson, 2010).

Nonetheless, in contemporary times, the name 'Happy Valley' has been more frequently associated with the joy-bringing races which commenced within the area since 1846. Not giving up to exploit the Valley, the British later decided that the flat terrain was ideal for

hosting horse racing events, one of their greatest leisure interests, despite critical opinion about the uncomfortable juxtaposition of a racecourse with cemeteries (Nicolson, 2010; Fig. 2.4). Subsequently, then Governor Sir John Davis filed a request in 1841 to the Whitehall for support on draining the swamps in Happy Valley. To avoid disapproval, Sir John cunningly abstained from declaring his intention to build a racecourse, but described the act as a planning initiative for public health (Moss, 2000).

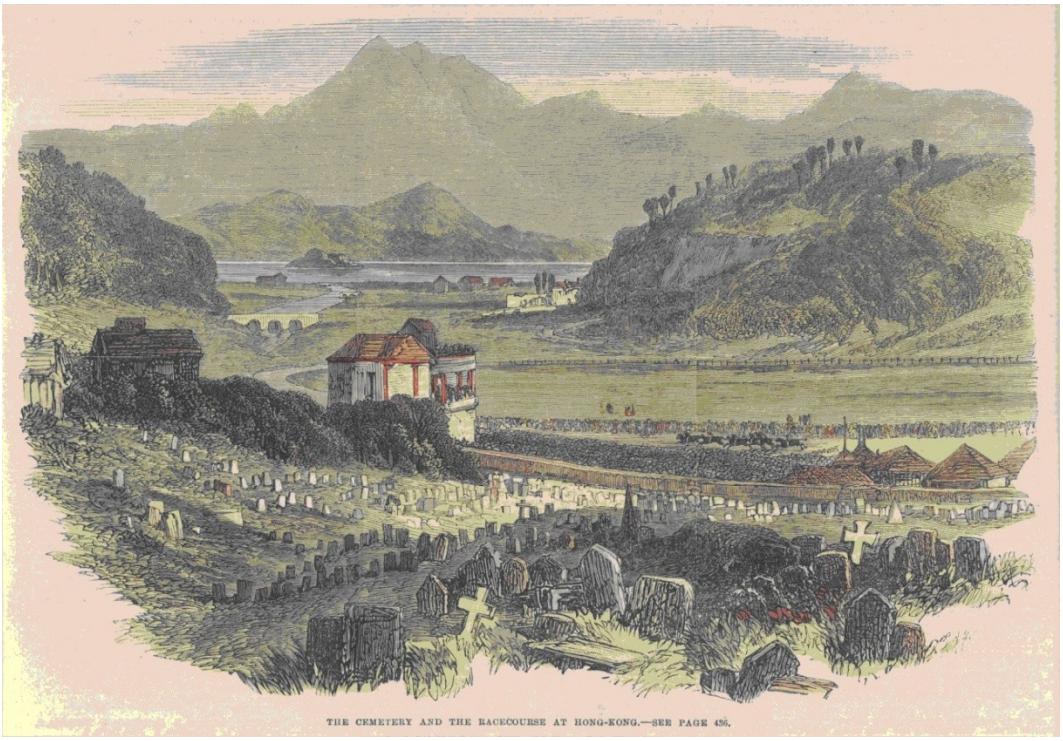


Fig. 2.4: Hong Kong Colonial Cemetery and HVRC, 1845

The two sites were built almost back to back, separated by a road in between.
(Source: *Illustrated London News*, May 1866; reproduced in
http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hong_kong_cemetery/introduction/index.html)

To understand Sir John's argumentative approach, one needs to review the public health paradigm of his time. Based upon a theory of miasma and contagion, Victorian Britons saw outbreaks of infectious disease, which became more common in their cities, as a result of the accumulation of damp and filth. In response, the famous 1842 Chadwick report on sanitary reforms (cited in Winslow, 1980, p.248) suggested that,

> [W]here those circumstances are removed by drainage, proper cleansing, better ventilation, and other means of diminishing atmospheric impurity, the frequency and intensity of such disease is abated; and where the removal of the noxious agencies appears to be complete, such disease almost entirely disappears.

Endeavours to reclaim poorly-drained environment, such as swamps in the Happy Valley case, were thus well justified for restoring urban salubrity. In draining the Valley, agricultural activities in the area were curtailed. In 1844, the government first prohibited indigenous villagers from practising paddy farming, which required keeping their fields waterlogged. Later in the same year, they took a step further to evaded owners of the low-lying farmland with a total compensation of only HKD 9,000, an amount reported to be far below the land's actual value (Gauld & Gould, 2002).

By 1846, the racecourse was ready (Ching, 1965). To our astonishment, race meeting was initially an annual event lasting two to three days only during the Lunar New Year, when merchants and different folks of life could excuse themselves from their businesses and fully engaged in the activity. The racecourse was also far less developed than the one we see today: by 1858, it was only equipped with some simple structures and matshed stands, stables, and booths for the meetings (Fig. 2.5).

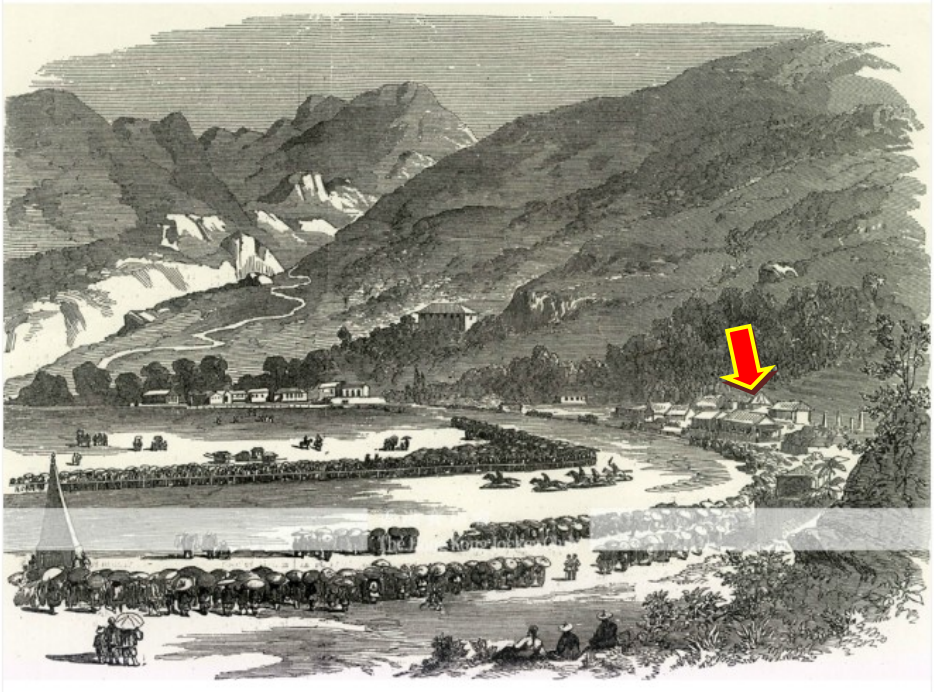


Fig. 2.5: Southern end of HVRC, 1858

The two sites were built almost back to back, separated by a road in between. Wong Nai Chung Village (arrowed) stood along the contour of the bending track.

(Source: *Illustrated London News*, 16 May 1858; reproduced in https://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkjc/All_Items/Images/201201/t20120130_48724.html)

Meanwhile, to further improve the drainage of the racecourse area, the government began channelizing a winding stream running from Happy Valley to Wan Chai to safely divert excess flows past critical reaches from the course of Wong Nai Chung into the

Victoria Harbour. This engineering work was undertaken in Sir John Bowring's governorship between 1854-1859, and the waterway was named Bowrington Canal (Fig. 2.6). However, local Chinese were in a habit to refer the waterway to its old name, Ngo Keng Kan (鵝頸澗, literally 'goose neck creek'), which derived from its long and narrow characteristics. To strengthen the dykes and prevent silting, the government planted many Chinese banyans on both side of the waterway. This added charm to the Canal, which became one of the 'Eight Fabulous Scenes of Hong Kong' in the 1880s (Chung, 2009).

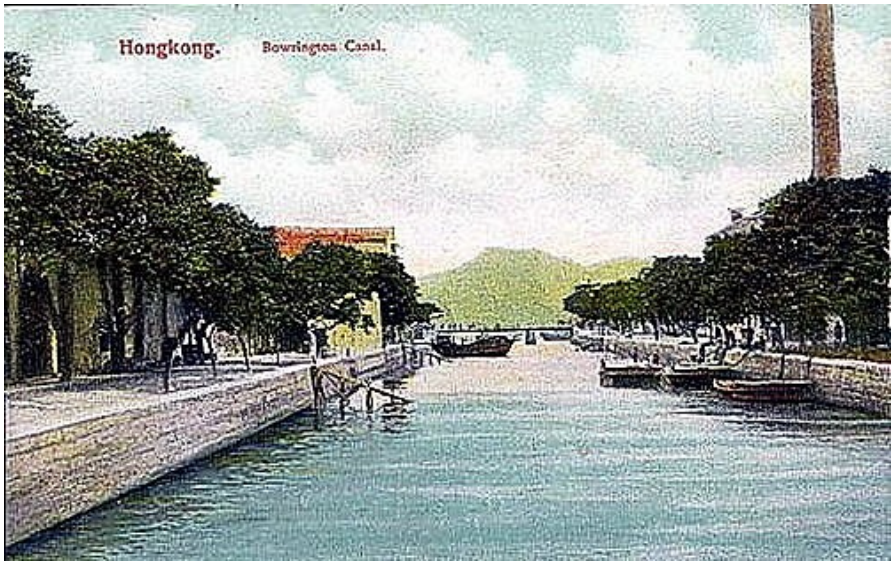


Fig. 2.6: A postcard showing Bowrington Canal, c. 1910s

Engineering measures channelled HVRC's nightmare into visitors' pleasure.
The canal would be made subterranean a decade later due to urban expansion in Wan Chai.
(Source:http://madamebianca-cwb.blogspot.hk/2013/01/blog-post_9973.html)

A photo taken in 1873 (Fig. 2.7) captures the various changes we have so far accounted in Happy Valley. Looking into the Valley from the sea, the photo gives a panoramic view of HVRC and its once country setting. Matshed stands were erected along the western side of the track (A), while more spectators could be found on the side of the infield at the northwestern turn of the track (B). A drainage system had been constructed, comprised of scratching mark-like open nullahs in the infield (C) and Bowrington Canal (D) to which they were linked downstream. Situating next to the Canal was the grazing plot (E) for cattle from the Wong Nai Chung Village (F), whose settlements were obscure in this photo. With modern transport means not yet available, sedan chairs were the primary means for the riches to arrive at HVRC (G).

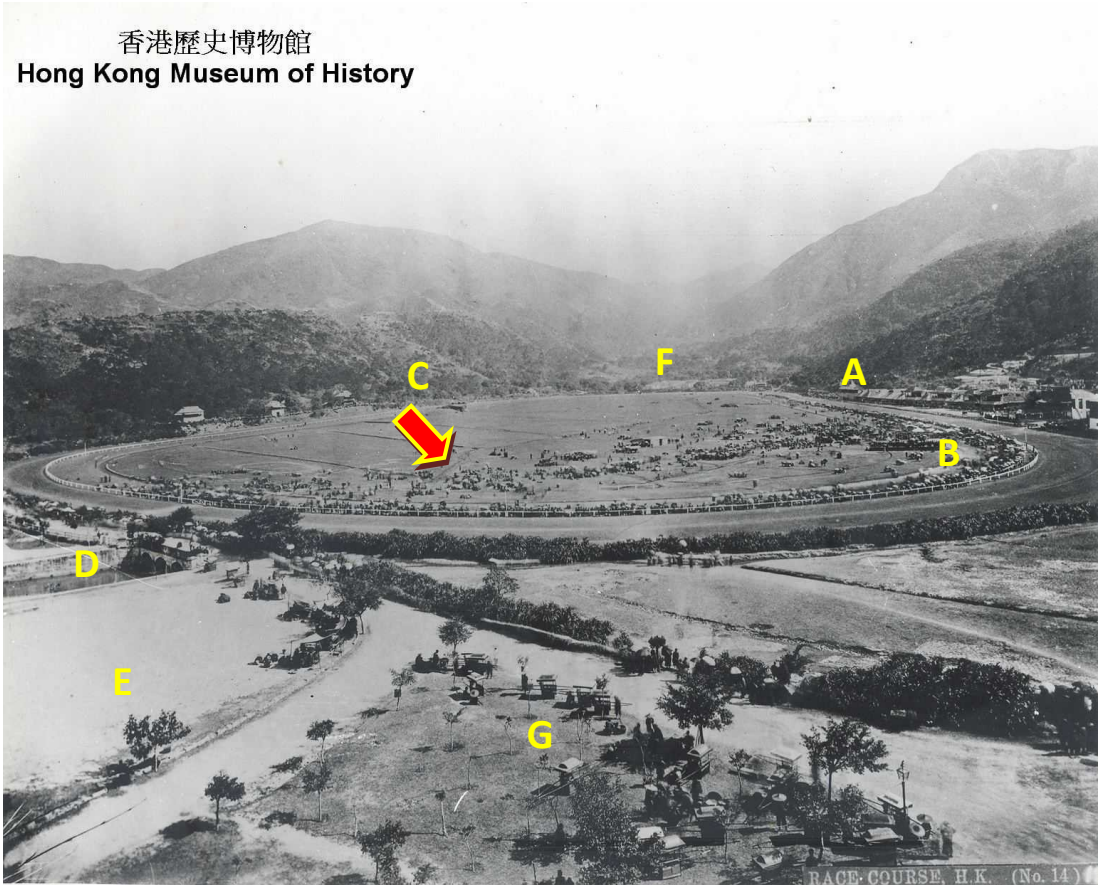
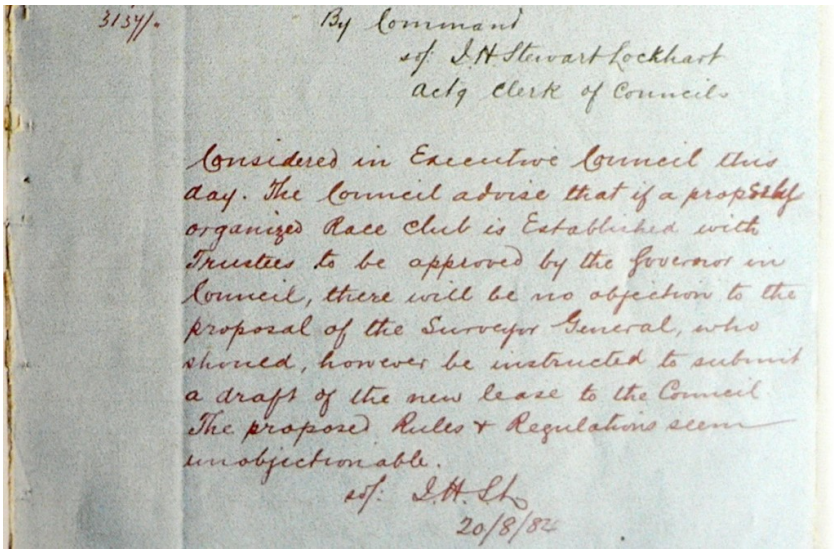


Fig. 2.7: A panoramic view of HVRC, 1873

(Source: http://www.welovehkasso.com/welovehkhist/activity/Activity_14_01_images/Activity_14_01.htm)



3134/.

By Command
of J.H. Stewart Lockhart
Actg Clerk of Councils.

Considered in Executive Council this day. The Council advise that if a properly organized Race Club is Established with Trustees to be approved by the Governor in Council, there will be no objection to the proposal of the Surveyor General, who should, however be instructed to submit a draft of the new lease to the Council The proposed Rules & Regulations seem unobjectionable.

cf. J.H.L.
20/8/82

Fig. 2.8: Minutes of meeting on HKJC's formation, 20 Aug 1884

Prepared by Stewart Lockhart, acting Clerk of Councils, this minutes recorded the advice of the Executive Council on the establishment of "a properly organized Race Club"

(Source: http://racingmemories.hk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/1884-08-20LockhartRaceClubproposal-detail-1024x666.jpg)

As the business of HVRC developed, HKJC was founded in 1884 to formalise the administration of the territory's racing (Fig. 2.8). Apart from scheduling for more races to meet the growing racing appetite of local people, the Club, and certainly the government as well, was entrenched in a protracted struggle with flooding, which recurrently attacked HVRC at the turn of the 20th century (Ching, 1965). Such problem was made even worse as new communities mushroomed around the racecourse in the decades to come.

In spite of the presence of cemeteries, settlers began flocking into the area in the late 19th century, partly appealed to the environmental improvement coupled with the development of HVRC, and partly driven by the chronic problem of land shortage on Hong Kong Island. An increasing portion of the hillsides was conquered by settlements, as well as two well known urban escapes. The first one was Cheung Yuen, initially built as a private villa in 1903 (Cheng, 2010). It was converted into a semi-public entertainment venue, which proved to be a huge hit among visitors, on the advice of a fung shui master to the ill-health house owner. Later on, another amusement park, Yu Yuen, was built next to Cheung Yuen. With pavilion, ponds and even zoos, Yu Yuen was regarded as one of the most exquisite amusement parts at that time (Fig. 2.9). However, after the 1918 fire in HVRC (see Ching, 1965), one of the worst fire disasters in Hong Kong's history, the area was haunted and visitors were discouraged. The dive in patronage led to the closure of the amusement parks.

Fig. 2.9: A postcard depicting the tea house of Yu Yuen, c. 1915

(Source: http://www.welovehkasso.com/welovehkhist/activity/Activity_11_01_images/3.jpg)

Urbanization in the Valley was not hold back by the fire, as the tram was extended to Happy Valley in 1919 to greatly enhance the area's accessibility (Fig. 2.10). In 1923, the

government announced its vision to develop Happy Valley into a high class residential area (Ha, 1995). The whole Wong Nai Chung Village was to be evacuated and their traditional houses demolished to allow official reselling of the land to private developers. After negotiations, villagers with official deeds were compensated with land in other villages, while the rest were only to be resettled in the lodgings along the southern hillside of Happy Valley, in a precinct now served by Kwai Fong Street, Tsun Yuen Street and Lun Hing Street. As for the former site of the Village, an assemblage of new roads, including Village Road, Shan Kwong Road, Yik Yum Street and Yuk Sau Street were constructed (Cheng, 2009). Of particular interest to our horseracing focus here was Shan Kwong Road, on whose end a HKJC stable was built and in use until 1987.

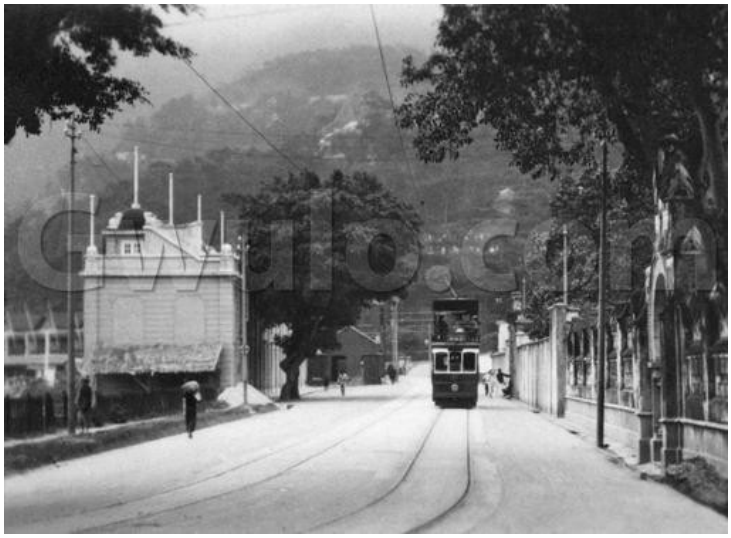


Fig. 2.10: A tram running on Wong Nai Chung Road, 1925
HVRC was on the left of the road, while Hong Kong Cemetery on the right.
(Source: http://gwulo.com/sites/gwulo.com/files/imagecache/Preview/2012/gwulo-a184b-2kpx.jpg)

Insufficient construction regulations to the aforementioned development caused HVRC a headache. Soil profile of the Valley's undulating ranges was destroyed and the loosened was often carried downslope by torrential rains (Ching, 1965). The open big nullah running across the infield (highlighted in Fig. 2.7), more often than not, spew mud and sand whenever it rained, forming huge amount of deposits over the racecourse. As such, HVRC was badly inundated many times in the history of the early 20th century, particularly during the 1920s (Fig. 2.11). In that decade, many destructive typhoons and rainstorms were observed, bringing sever damage to the racecourse. Quoting a statement made acting Clerk of the course in 1929 (cited in Ching, 1965, p.190-191):

> The drainage difficulties that occurred last summer were unprecedented, and this is attributed largely to the building operations on Stubbs Road, lose earth being washed

down the hillside and choking up the Cemetery nullah, which runs into the Racecourse nullah near the Judge's box. This in turn blocked up the Racecourse nullah, and the wall at the Village gave way during the typhoon on August 18, practically all the water from Wongneichong Valley being then discharged across the course.

Fig. 2.11: HVRC after downpour, 1922
Flooding has recurrently hit the racecourse after heavy rains.

(Source: http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkplaces/AllItems/images/201107/t20110722_42864.html)

In the post-war years, HVRC and the Valley as a whole continued their physical evolution. As the racecourse strives to stretch its capacity (see Section 4), high-end apartment buildings, now ringing the racecourse from three sides, are also growing taller (Fig 2.12) , thereby commanding a better view of the racing turf. Yet, with all the changes, they are still under constant threat of flooding. Within just the first the decade of the new millennium, HVRC was already stricken by three episodes, in August 2000, April 2006 and June 2008 (DSD, 2012; Fig 2.13). The latest project is the billion-dollar Happy Valley Underground Stormwater Storage Scheme by the government, which features the construction of a stormwater storage tank with a capacity of 60,000 m^3 beneath HVRC's infield, now accommodating 11 football pitches. Such high cost of defending Happy Valley, in addition to those spent over the past century and three-quarters, warrants our reflection on whether the decision to open up the area for racing and subsequent urbanization was made wise enough.

Fig. 2.12: Happy Valley, 1953 (top) and c. 1980s (bottom)

(Source: top – http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkjc/All_Items/Images/201201/t20120130_48699.html; bottom - http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkplaces/AllItems/images/201107/t20110723_43745.html

Fig. 2.13: HVRC after downpour, June 2008

(Source: Agence France-Presse; retrieved from http://s1.djyimg.com/i6/806071204501366.jpg)

3. UNFORGOTTEN GLAMOUR IN THE NORTH

Espoused by local mass media reports, it is a commonplace impression that equestrian sports in Hong Kong are limited to horse racing along a flat track and, to the wealthy minority, polo games. It is also frequently said that HVRC monopolized all local horse racing events until the completion of STRC in the 1970s. In reality, both understandings are fallacious. Not known by most living in the territory, a haven of equestrian sports of much wider varieties once flourished during the 1920s and 1930s in Fanling, one of the most sizable pre-war European enclaves in the New Territories (Gillingham, 1983). A hallmark of those invigorating years was the now-demolished Kwanti Racecourse (Fig. 3.1), located not far from today's Fanling town centre.

Fig. 3.1: Location of Kwanti Racecourse (circled)

Another point of interest on this map, published by Hong Kong University Press in the 1950s, is the Hunter's Arms (arrowed), the clubhouse of racing patrons in Fanling

(Source: http://gwulo.com/sites/gwulo.com/files/images/1930s_laffans_plain_map.img_assist_custom-320x270.jpg)

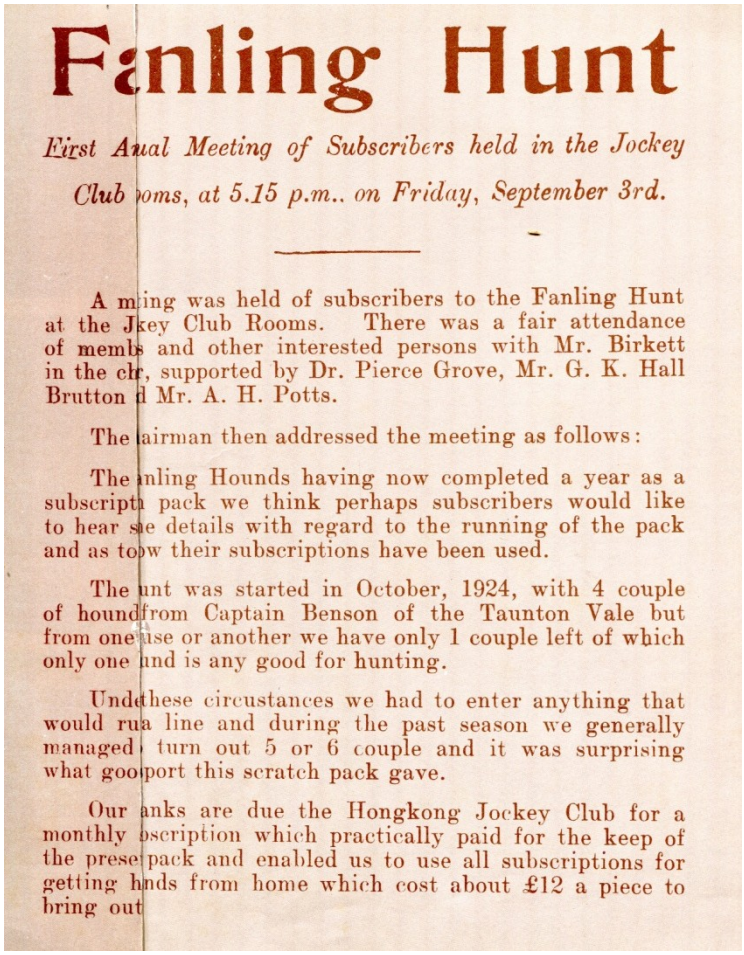
The run-up to a racecourse in Kwanti was predisposed by the geopolitics and early urbanization of the New Territories. After acquiring the region in 1898, the British Administration had hesitated to initiate any major development in the New Territories. The new addition was intended to be a buffer zone between the colony and the possible attack from European powers in China, and because of the uncertainly of when China would ask for the return of the region, as a territory leased for 99 years (Gillingham, 1983). As a result, the New Territories had retained a strong rural aura until the launch of post-war New Town development programme (see Section 4).

The appeal of the picturesque landscape in the New Territories to the British and other Western expatriates was somewhat discounted by both social and geographical factors. First, accessibility of the region to the rest of the territory, whose development was then clusters along the coasts of the Victoria Harbour, was all but limited. The first arterial between Kowloon and the New Territories completed its construction in 1904. Linking Tai Po, then the British administration centre for the New Territories, it was named Tai Po Road, and subsequently extended in 1913 to Fanling, where highways to the border radiated out (Lau, 2006). To the masses who did not drive however, the real lifeline to the New Territories was only opened up in 1910, when the Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR) began service on five stations: Kowloon, Yau Ma Tei, Sha Tin, Tai Po and Fanling.

A second concern was security. Apart from possible violent encounters with some of the Europhobic indigenous residents, were startled by then the region's widespread banditry (Gillingham, 1983). However, as a military stronghold, Fanling represented a haven amidst instability. Its north-eastern part was home to two British army barracks, Gailiopi Lines (or San Wai Camp, named after a nearby walled village) and Burma Lines. The Hong Kong Police Force also built a large training ground in the area (Lau, 2006). The plain where this cluster of defence infrastructure was found is called Kwanti (now Kwan Tei), or 'military place' in Cantonese, where Southern Sung army once stationed during the dynasty's final years (Chu, 2013).

The auspicious setting – in both natural and social terms – of Fanling made it ideal for the British "to reproduce the comfort and familiarity of home for those living in an alien land" (Sinha; in Leonard, 2010, p.1255) characterized by a variety of emerald pastimes, a rather unintended consequence of British spatial strategies to the area. A well-known initiative was the Hong Kong Golf Club, which acquired 400 acres from local farmers under government assistance to build the territory's first full 18 holes for the exclusive use of the some of the Colony's richest. Another, scarcely mentioned but had ironically opened to a much wider social spectrum, was the Fanling Hunt.

Established in October 1924 as a simulation of English shire hunt (Fig. 3.2), the Fanling Hunt brought together a group of enthusiastic rider-hunters whose interest could hardly be pursued over the precipitous terrain of Hong Kong island. Since its inception to the Japanese occupation in 1941, it organized hunts three times a week from October to April on a regular basis. From the Hunter's Arms, the clubhouse in Fanling, members went on horseback to "chased the civet cat and the South China Red Fox across the stony wastelands with full paraphernalia of cap, horn, stirrup-cup and imported English hound" (Morris, 1997; Fig. 3.3).



Fanling Hunt

First Anual Meeting of Subscribers held in the Jockey Club ooms, at 5.15 p.m.. on Friday, September 3rd.

A m ing was held of subscribers to the Fanling Hunt at the Jkey Club Rooms. There was a fair attendance of membs and other interested persons with Mr. Birkett in the ch, supported by Dr. Pierce Grove, Mr. G. K. Hall Brutton d Mr. A. H. Potts.

The airman then addressed the meeting as follows:

The nling Hounds having now completed a year as a subscripti pack we think perhaps subscribers would like to hear se details with regard to the running of the pack and as tow their subscriptions have been used.

The unt was started in October, 1924, with 4 couple of hound from Captain Benson of the Taunton Vale but from one use or another we have only 1 couple left of which only one nd is any good for hunting.

Undthese circustances we had to enter anything that would rua line and during the past season we generally managed turn out 5 or 6 couple and it was surprising what goo port this scratch pack gave.

Our anks are due the Hongkong Jockey Club for a monthly oscription which practically paid for the keep of the prese pack and enabled us to use all subscriptions for getting hnds from home which cost about £12 a piece to bring out

Fig. 3.2: Notice of the Fanling Hunt's first annual meeting, 1925

The Fanling Hunt was (and for subsequent years would be) in good relationship with HKJC, then a major patron of the Hunt.

(Source: Somers, 1975, p.49)

Fig. 3.3: The Fanling Hunt in full chase, late 1930s

Hunting activities could extend from Fanling into other parts of the New Territories.

(Source: Gillingham, 1983, p.157)

The hunting ventures soon stimulated a growing interest in riding. In response, the Hunt decided to include a wider variety of equestrian sports in its programme, supported by the construction of a racecourse comprising of a steeplechase field and training ground in Kwanti in 1925 (Gillingham, 1983). This was a year after the Gymkhana Club, a club running skill-based equestrian contests in Happy Valley (Fig. 3.4), acquired a summer grazing ground on the same plain for its ponies (Ching, 1965).

Fig. 3.4: Gymkhana Club meeting at HVRC, 1907
Riders dressed up in "ladies nomination" for a contest.
(Source: http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkjc/All_Items/Images/201201/t20120130_48473.html)

In contrast to the dominance of flat races in HVRC, race meetings in Fanling, commenced in 1926 (Fig. 3.5), initially comprised of two types of skilful races. The first type was steeplechase, in which riders compete to transverse a variety of obstacles, such as fence and ditches, within the shortest time. The second type was hurdle race, also a timed event, which required horses to jump over a series of hurdles (Fig. 3.6). These new meetings not only appealed to the laymen, but also military riders from nearby barracks. It was reported that British servicemen won the majority of races back then (Kan, 1991).

FANLING HUNT RACES.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30th, 1926.

ENTRIES for The STEEPLECHASE MEETING at FANLING KWANTI RACE COURSE, Fanling, CLOSE on SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16TH to Mr. A. H. POTTS. c/o Benjamin & Potts, from whom Entry Forms may be obtained.

Fig. 3.5: Call for entries to steeplechase race in Fanling, October 1926

This was believed to be one of the earliest races hosted by the Fanling Hunt

(Source: http://gwulo.com/sites/gwulo.com/files/images/fanling_hunt.jpg)

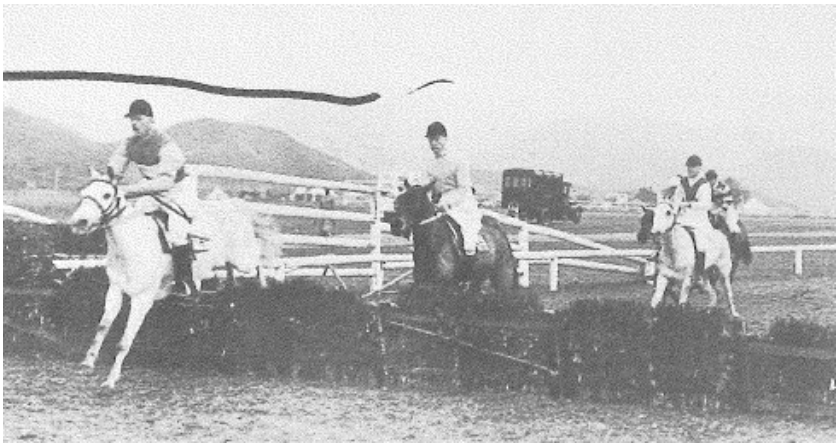


Fig. 3.6: Hurdle race at Kwanti, 1928

(Source: Gillingham, 1983, p.155)

Within just a few years, the Fanling races succeeded in building up its reputation across the territory, and posed pressure on an upgrading of the area's transport infrastructure. As the 1927 *Colonial Annual Report* points out:

> In anticipation of heavy traffic during Fanling Hunt Race Meetings, the approach road to Fanling Station was widened for parking purposes. The level cross for the main road between Fanling and Taipo was timbered and extended to allow for the turn of motor vehicles proceeding down the road of Shataukok (Jarman, 1996, p. 235).

Other than automobiles, special train trips running between Tsim Sha Tsui and Fanling non-stop on race days provided racegoers with a convenient way to ride to the racecourse. Not surprisingly, there were also train services to bring the horses dispatched from Happy Valley to Kwanti (Somers, 1975).

The prominence of equestrian races eventually led to the renaming of the Hunt Club to Fanling Hunt and Race Club in 1929 (Gillingham, 1983). As participants and visitors grew further, the Club expanded the Kwanti Racecourse (Fig. 3.7) to include a flat course, catering the introduction of regular betting-linked flat races (Fig. 3.8) to its meetings which appeals to the Chinese masses, a sand track and practice jumps. In addition, the Club leased a total of 50 acres for an exercise track-cum-grazing ground aside the Beas River (Ching, 1965).

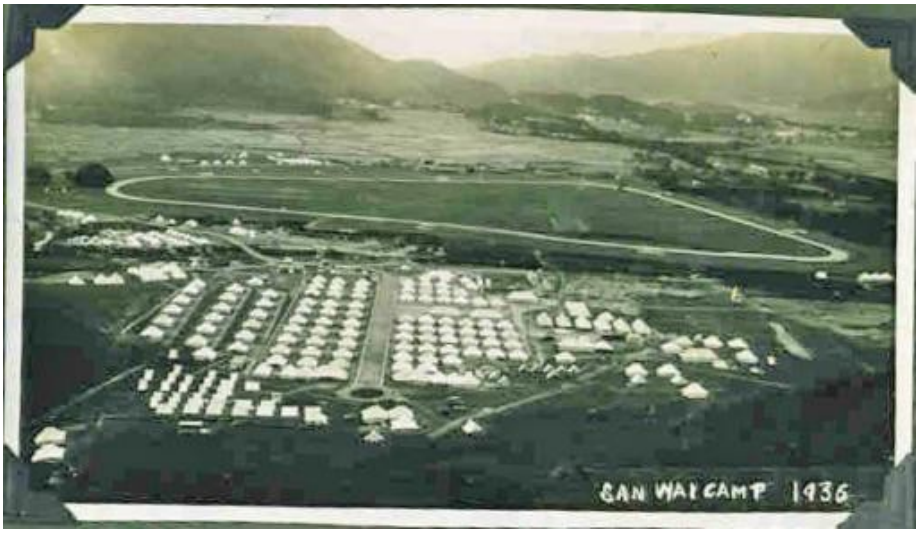


Fig. 3.7: Kwanti Racecourse, 1936

In front of the Racecourse was San Wai Camp of the British army.

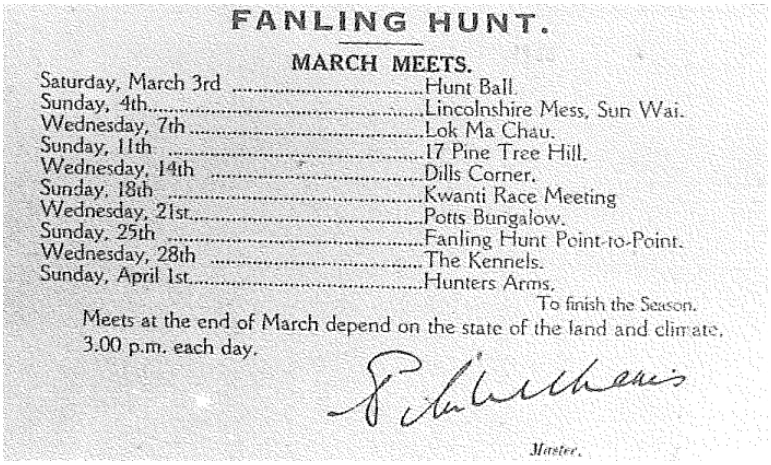
(Source: http://gwulo.com/sites/gwulo.com/files/images/fanling_hunt.jpg)

Fig. 3.8: Flat racing in Kwanti Racecourse, 1932

This photo was taken in the Fanling National of the year, the annual spectacle of the racecourse.

(Source: http://racingmemories.hk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/1932-03-20-SUNNING-Winner-of-the-Hunan-Stakes-Fanling-Kwanti-winning-600.jpg)

By the 1930s, the whole spectrum of country pleasure available in Fanling in general, and the Hunt in particular (Fig. 4.9), made it an attractive site to the expatriates. They include Kam Tsin Lodge of Sir Douglas Clague[2], former president of Hutchison International, the garden residence of John J. Paterson[3], taipan of Jardine Matheson and Co., and the Wayfoong Bungalow for taipans of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. But the most well-known to Hong Kongers must be Fanling Lodge, the summer retreat of Governors during the colonial times, and now the Chief Executives. Surrounded by the Fanling Golf Club, it was built during 1932 and 1934 at the order of then-Governor Sir William Peel, who had a keen interest in golf and horse riding (Miners, 1987). In fact, Peel often made the Fanling Lodge available to his fellow riders in the Hunt for Hunt garden parties (Gullingham, 1983).



FANLING HUNT.

MARCH MEETS.

Saturday, March 3rd	Hunt Ball
Sunday, 4th	Lincolnshire Mess, Sun Wai.
Wednesday, 7th	Lok Ma Chau.
Sunday, 11th	17 Pine Tree Hill.
Wednesday, 14th	Dills Corner.
Sunday, 18th	Kwanti Race Meeting
Wednesday, 21st	Potts Bungalow.
Sunday, 25th	Fanling Hunt Point-to-Point.
Wednesday, 28th	The Kennels.
Sunday, April 1st	Hunters Arms.
	To finish the Season.

Meets at the end of March depend on the state of the land and climate.
3.00 p.m. each day.

Master.

Fig. 3.9: Notice of meetings of the Fanling Hunt, March 1934

There was a mix hunting, racing and social meetings, and the venue was not limited to Kwanti.

(Source: Gillingham, 1983: 157)

The prosperity in Fanling ended abruptly in December 1941 as the Colony fell to Japanese invading from the Chinese mainland. After the war, the Club only hosted one race in 1946 (Kan, 1991), and eventually dissolved because British Army absorbed the Kwanti Racecourse into its adjacent barracks (Ching, 1965). As for its facilities near Beas River, they passed on the Hunt's racing legacy as they become part of today's HKJC Beas River Country Club. Concurrently, real estate projects developed in recent years around have preserved the European aura, such as the cul-de-sacs named after Swiss and British places in Valais and The Royal Oaks respectively, and, even closer to the area's equestrian history, a cluster of bungalows named after the famous Goodwood Racecourse in England.

[2] See *Mingpao* report at http://www.mpfinance.com/htm/Finance/20090708/News/ek1_ek1d1.htm

[3] See discussion at http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=160684

4. A NEW TOWN, A NEW RACECOURSE

Spanning over 250 hectares along the lower course of Shing Mun River, Sha Tin Racecourse (STRC) appeared on the drawing board of HKJC in 1971, and inaugurated for its first race seven year later. Its centrepiece was a triplet of racing tracks – a 1,900-metre long 100 feet grass track, a 75 feet all-weather track, and a now-defunct 35 feet training track (Lee, 1979, p.16; Fig. 4.1). Originally built with a single grandstand for 35,000 spectators, it was prompted by the rapidly expanding population of racegoers to welcome an additional grandstand in 1985, thereby raising its total capacity to 85,000. For the rest of the general masses, STRC has also become a popular respite with its 20-acre-plus landscaped infield named after of HKJC's former General Manager, General Bernard Penfold (Fig. 4.2).

Fig. 4.1: Aerial view of STRC, 1981

(Source: http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkplaces/AllItems/images/201107/t20110723_43575.html)

Fig. 4.2: General Penfold (right) the opening ceremony of STRC, 1978

Penfold Park, located at the centre of the racecourse, was named after him.

(Source: http://racingmemories.hk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/1978-10-07-General-Penfold-Mr-Locking-and-Mr-Li-Fook-Wo-with-Penfold-Park-Painting.jpg)

The reason for building a new racecourse was twofold (Lee, 1979). First, in the post-war decades, it became more and more frequent for HVRC to hoist a red flag at its grandstand (Fig. 4.3), which indicates a full-house race meeting. For instance, the red flag was hoisted 15 times, or just above one-third of the meetings, in the 1973/74 season[4]. To maximize its capacity for the proliferating crowd of racegoers (Fig. 4.4), the capacity of HVRC was repeatedly expanded through building new and taller enclosures to reach a maximum of 55,000 (Fig. 4.5). At the same time, the racing season was also lengthened, and eventually followed by the introduction of Wednesday night races since 1973. Both practices were proven unsustainable – land constraint means any attempt to advance HVRC's capacity would be unfeasible, and worsens the traffic jam around Happy Valley on race days, while intensified use of tracks arrest the turf from properly rehabilitating.

Second, there was a paradigm shift in the operation of the horse racing sector. Since its introduction to Hong Kong in 1841, horse racing had been an amateur business. Jockeys came from all walks of life, from servicemen and bankers to salesmen and brokers. However, as horse racing developed rapidly into a commercial spectator sport, HKJC decided to transform horse racing into a professional industry after the summer of 1971. With jockeys becoming a full-time employment, more meetings are required to provide them a livelihood. Given the overstrained capacity of Happy Valley, HKJC proposed to the government in autumn 1971 to build a second racecourse in Sha Tin.

[4] See http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkjc/All_Items/Images/201201/t20120130_48629_cht.html

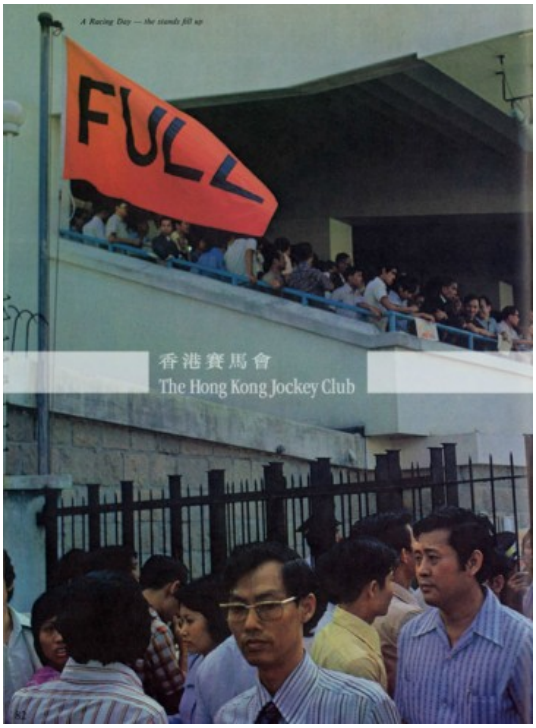


Fig. 4.3: Full house at HVRC, 1970s

(Source: http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkjc/All_Items/Images/201201/t20120130_48629_cht.html)

Fig. 4.4: Grandstand of HVRC packed by racegoers, 1970s

(Source: http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkjc/All_Items/Images/201201/t20120130_48628.html)

Fig. 4.5: Grandstand of HVRC, c. 1930 (top) and 1983 (bottom)

The 'clock tower' grandstand (top), accommodating 4,500 spectators at most, was demolished by the 1950s to give way for a series of taller structures erected gradually between the 1960s and the 1980s (bottom) we see today.

(Source: top – http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkjc/All_Items/Images/201201/t20120130_48705.html; bottom – http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkjc/

HKJC's choice of the New Territories in general and Sha Tin in particular was intertwined with the post-war urban planning strategy in Hong Kong which decisively shifts the territory's population gravity further northward. Due to successive socio-political upheavals in the Chinese mainland since the late 1940s, large numbers of mainlanders sought refuge in Hong Kong, resulting in a significant surge in the city's

population density. Growing residential and industrial needs could no longer be accommodated within the downtown area, and there was an urgent need to decentralize population and development. As such, the government undertook a preliminary investigation in the 1950s to locate potential new growth role in the New Territories (Bristow, 1989). Sha Tin, where a small yet flourishing market town had developed under private auspices along the Kowloon-Canton Railway (Ho, 2004), was earmarked as one of the ideal sites for building new towns (Fig. 4.6). Although a blueprint for an urbanized Sha Tin was drafted in 1961, successive shifts in population projections, public housing targets and budgetary constraints necessitated the new town to be re-planned until it could break the ground in the late 1960s. It was right at this juncture the second racecourse proposal conjured up in HKJC's leadership, and Sha Tin, with its strategic location and extensive provision of space for development, became a favourable choice to erect a bigger Mecca of local racegoers.

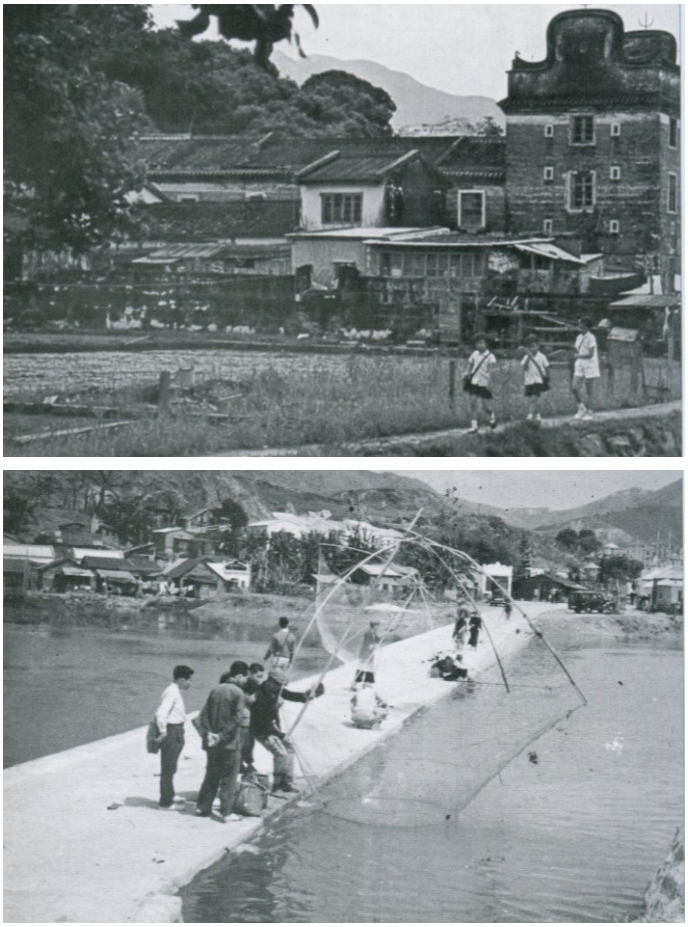


Fig. 4.6: Shatin in the 1950s

These two photos underscored the traditional, rural lifestyle characterizing Shatin before it was transformed into a new town. Farming and fishing were then widely practised.

(Source: Cuppleditch, 1997, p.86)

There was little reason for the government to reject HKJC's proposal, which promised Sha Tin with a massive recreational ground and large tracts of greenery without spending the government a penny. In one of the early development scheme formulated in 1965 (Fig. 4.7), the government envisaged transforming 500 hectares of the new town's watershed into settlements for a million people (Bristow, 1989). However, driven by voices both from within and beyond the bureaucracy, the Colony Outline Plan released in 1971 advocated the necessity to plan for a higher quality of living, and territory-wide standards of provision for community facilities were revised upward substantially. The provision of open spaces, having been the most prominently featured component in the British new town model, no doubt were to be expanded. As such, the 1972 scheme for Sha Tin articulated that "[a] system of open spaces should be provided to give identity to and linked the main concentrations of urban development" (Bristow, 1989, p.159). Highlighted by A. R. Crosby (1976), the Chief Planning Officer of Sha Tin, this goal was realized as a system of 560-hectare officially-funded open spaces, comprising of forested slope serving as extension of the Lion Rock Country Park, 'district open spaces' serving the whole new town, and 30 ha 'local open spaces' which scattered across public housing estates in the new town. Against this background, the 250-hectare STRC was no doubt a valuable addition to this system. Notably, with its meticulously created ripples, the Penfold Park has not only become a haven of waterfowls but also urbanites seeking a peace of mind in a yet dynamic natural setting.

Beyond greenery, two more defining features of Hong Kong's new town development through the course of STRC's construction – reclamation as a main source of new land resource, and the reliance of railway transport. First, STRC is a racecourse born out of water. Its current side was reclaimed from Tide Cove or Sha Tin Hoi along the shorelines of Fo Tan. A comparison of aerial photos taken in 1963 (Fig. 4.8) and 1976 (Fig. 4.9) demonstrates how significantly the water body was narrowed. The remaining navigation channel now forms part of Shing Mun River's lower course. In fact, the reclamation project for STRC was then the largest in Hong Kong. It involved levelling four crests in Sha Tin for 16 million tons of fill materials, unloaded by trucks into the waters at a stunningly rapid rate of one every eight seconds (Lee, 1979, p.12). 160 acres of land were formed in the borrow area and transferred free-of-charge to the government with road paved (ibid, p.42). For instance, private residential development took place over some 20 ha of borrow area's legacy, then known as Areas 43 and 46 of the new town, from 1980 onwards (STNTDO, 1980, Section. 1.17). They have developed into two clusters of sought-after low-density communities along today's Lok Lam Road and Kau To Shan Road. With "estimates in 1977 put the figure at a conservative $500 million and some forecasts of the market value of the land went as high as $900 or $1,000 million" (Lee,

1979, p.48), no wonder HKJC can claimed that the STRC project "has been a net economic gain for the community" (ibid, p.7).

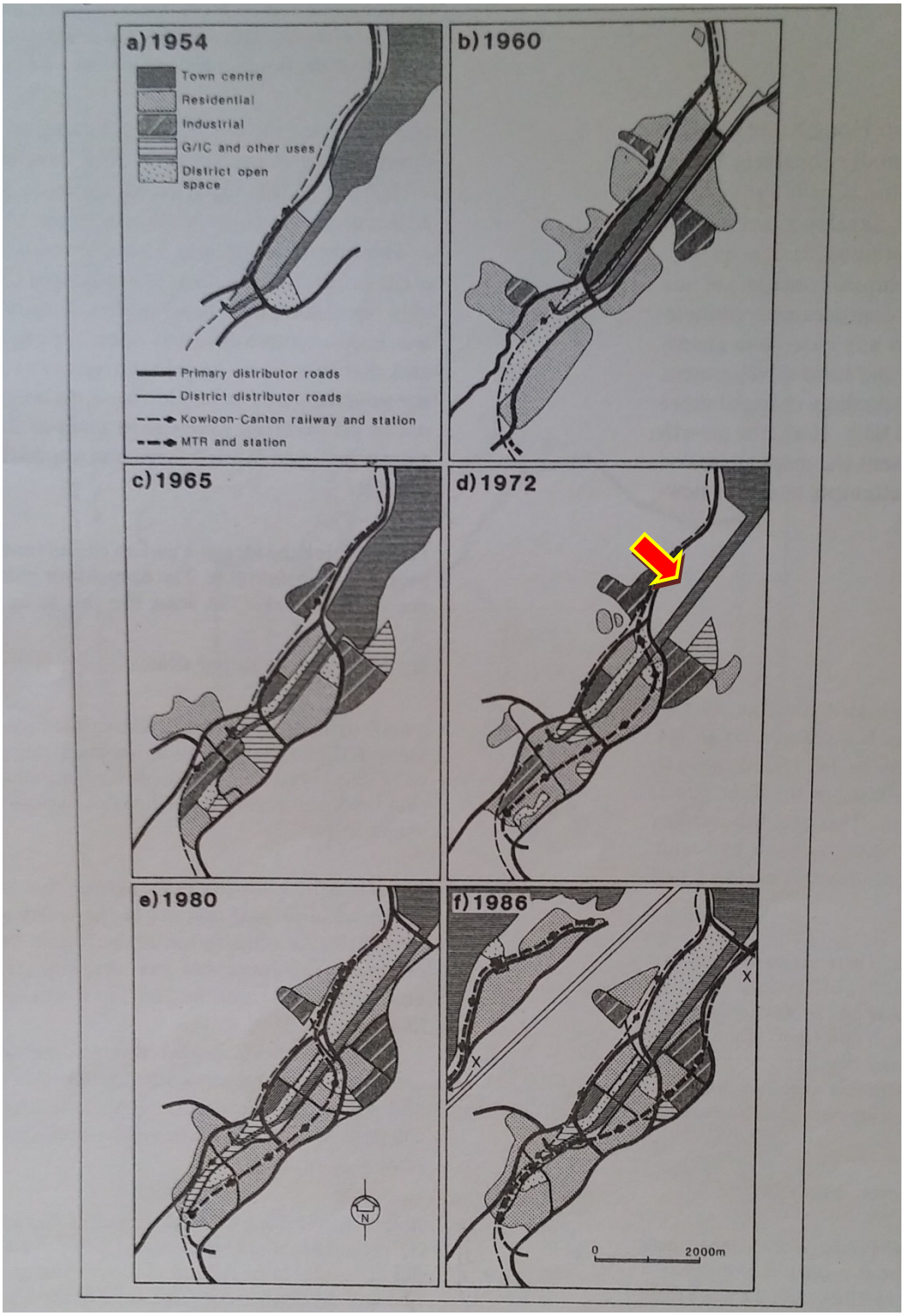


Fig. 4.7: Sha Tin new town development scheme, various years

HKJC's reclamation proposal was immediately incorporated into the 1972 version of the development scheme, and the reclaimed area was in 1980 categorized as 'district open space'.

(Source: Bristow, 1989, p.150)

Fig. 4.8: Aerial view of Sha Tin, 1963

Reclamation for STRC was halfway through. Borrow areas were just across the road.

(Source: Survey & Mapping Office, Lands Department, 1963)

Fig. 4.9: Aerial view of Sha Tin, 1976

Reclamation for STRC was halfway through. Borrow areas were just across the road.

(Source: Survey & Mapping Office, Lands Department, 1976)

This "killing two birds with one stone" approach was regarded ingenious to the land-hungry colony and has been enshrined in an unquestionable manner by the colonial government to obtain precious virgin land for further urban expansion. On Hong Kong island, since the 1920s the Colonial government had attempted to level Morrison Hill for reclamation along the coast of Wan Chai, while the levelled site created room for recreational, religious and education land uses. On this site Morrison Hill Technical Institute was established in 1936 (Fig. 4.10). Across the Victoria Harbour, rocks from Tai Wan Shan were used to fill up Hung Hom Bay and laid the foundation of today's Whampoa Estate and Whampoa Garden (Fig. 4.11).

Fig. 4.10: Morrison Hill (arrowed) viewed from The Peak, 1929

The hill had turned barren as excavation went on.

(Source: http://gwulo.com/sites/gwulo.com/files/images/dummy_128.preview.jpg)

Fig. 4.11: Kowloon Dock and remains of Tai Wan Shan (arrowed), 1982

(Source: http://www.hkmemory.org/landscape/img/9.2/land-059.jpg)

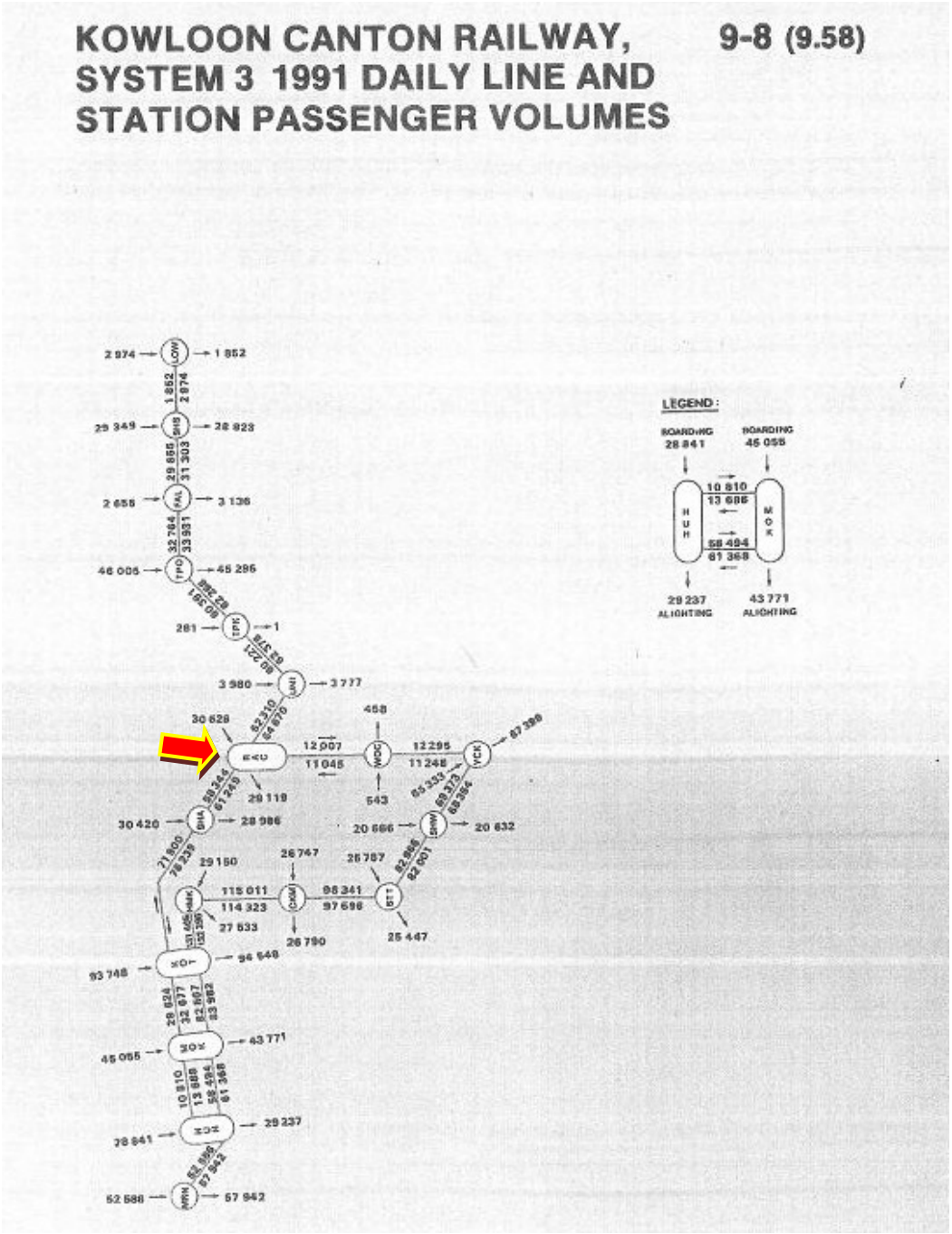


Fig. 4.12: Daily passenger volume forecast for KCR system with Sha Tin Loop

The Racecourse station was denoted as RAC.

(Source: http://scl.railc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/002.jpg)

Concomitant with reclamation is the favouritism of rail-oriented commuting solutions, and accessibility considerations for STRC offer yet another piece of evidence to this tendency. With tens of thousands racegoers flocking from all corners of the territory into Shatin during their regular weekend (and occasionally Wednesdays') pilgrim, STRC needs to be easily accessible, and railway transport appeared early in related discussion.

In the *Integrated Transport Study* released in 1976, government-commissioned consultants

proposed the construction of Sha Tin Loop, a rapid transit serving the south-eastern bank of Shing Mun River. It would serve as a branch of KCR to connect commuters in the new town with the metropolitan area (Fig. 4.12). The interchange between KCR's main line and the Loop's northern end was proposed to be right next to STRC, and be named as Racecourse station (RAC). As reflected by its high boarding and alighting estimates, which stands at 30,000 a day, RAC was expected to have a much larger service watershed than what its name suggests. We can say with some confidence that it would have covered industrial precincts in Fo Tan for commuters working there.

Due to concerns of financial viability, the Sha Tin Loop plan was subsequently discarded, and intra-town commuting needs were satisfied by the now well-known grade-separated cycleway system, complemented by bus routes. Nonetheless, a Racecourse Station for KCR was built and put into service during racing days since 1979 (Fig. 4.13). Railway thus, like other parts of Hong Kong, forms the backbone of transportation of STRC, which is also supported by a few special routes of franchised bus and minibus. Without this station, arteries leading to STRC, notably the Tolo Highway, would be clogged by large number of vehicles during every racing day – as in the case of Happy Valley – and hindered the normal flow of traffic between the northern part of the New Territories and the downtown.

Fig. 4.13: Train riders marching into STRC from KCR Racecourse Station

Railway is a popular transport option among racegoers.

(Source: Lee, 1979, p.38)

5. CONCLUSION

This report is far from being, nor does it aim to be, a systematic treatment of the intertwined history of racecourse building, urban development and spatial planning in Hong Kong. Nonetheless, anchoring on the city's three racecourses, it seeks to unfold some of the significant moments and experiences in Hong Kong's urban development and spatial planning.

In Happy Valley, the chronic shortage of flat land, on the Hong Kong Island at least, was evident as early as in the chain of considerations leading to the siting of HVRC. Pressure of development has juxtaposed our homes and pleasure ground to hazardous sites even since this city was built. The repeated flooding of HVRC reminds us that our prosperity is always at the mercy of nature, and planning has to be undertaken with a good dose of environmental sensitivity.

In Fanling, during our revisit of the life and death of Kwanti Racecourse, we are opened to the history of the small yet vibrant European enclave in the pre-war New Territories, much to the contrary of such vernacular images as walled villages, temples and clan halls we would evoke. While the racecourse has gone with the wind, the pursuit of equestrian interest of these Europeans leaves an obvious legacy to the area's development, both physically and symbolically.

In Sha Tin, the flourishing of STRC reflects quite a number of underpinnings of Hong Kong-style urbanization, notably large-scale reclamation, master planning of new towns and transit-oriented development. Official planning directives influenced HKJC's spatial decision for a new racecourse, while the arrival of STRC was a planning surprise which continues to benefit the new town's environment.

To conclude, all rising from a humble background – swampy land, rural field and reclaimed site, the three racecourses of Hong Kong have not only witnessed, but also played a part in, the variegated challenges to and responses made by their metropolis which was once equally humble. Further retrospective inquiries into them, as well as other building around us, shall produce a more fruitful understanding of how the city we call home has been weaved by a complex of seemingly unrelated yet interdependent bodies and minds.

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- "Antique Paint Room" website (www.antiqueprintroom.com) – Fig. 1.1
- Bristow, M. R. (1989) – Fig. 4.7
- Cuppleditch, D. (1997) – Fig. 4.6
- Gillingham, P. (1983) – Fig. 3.3, 3.6, 3.9
- "Gwulo: Old Hong Kong" website (gwulo.com) – Fig. 2.10, 3.1, 3.5, 3.7, 4.10
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- Huang, G., & Deng, G. (1998) – Fig. 2.2
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- "Racing Memories" website (racingmemories.hk) – Fig. 2.8, 3.8, 4.2
- Shatin to Central Link InfoSite (scl.railc.org) – Fig. 4.12
- Somers, G. V. (1975) – Fig. 3.2
- Survey & Mapping Office, Lands Department – Fig. 4.8, 4.9
- "We Love Hong Kong" website (www.welovehkasso.com) – Fig. 2.7, 2.9

END OF REPORT