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The Shoreline Limit of Land Gained from the Sea

In Hong Kong, land has now attained such high values in consequence of the increased prosperity of the colony and the influx of the population, that it now has been found remunerative even to reclaim sites from the sea at great expense.

The above quote was written or spoken by a well-known man in the Hong Kong community. But who was he and when was it written?

I asked three of my friends this question. Their replies were:

1. "Probably the Governor, Sir Cecil Clementi, in the 1920s."
2. "The Director of Public Works, post-war, around the late 1940s."
3. "I reckon it must have been the Director of Planning in the 1980s."

All good answers, but none is correct. It came much earlier than any of these guesses. The author or speaker was **Sir Paul Chater** and the year was **1887**.

By that year, reclamation in Hong Kong was nothing new. It commenced immediately following the establishment of the Colony of Hong Kong and played a necessary part in the first official sale of land lots in 1841. Records state that the sale was, in fact, delayed, as the Royal Engineers in charge of the setting-out were unable to complete their work on the

marine lots. These lots had water frontage and, no doubt, some reclamation was required.

The initial reclamation process after the British took control of Hong Kong was relatively inexpensive, as the water offshore was shallow and material for filling the sea near at hand. By 1887, Sir Paul was one of Hong Kong's first land development entrepreneurs and Hong Kong's reclamation had, therefore, extended along the shoreline of the northern coast of Hong Kong Island in several locations. Thereafter, the process of reclamation became more expensive, as the parts of the sea to be filled were in deeper water and fill material had to be transported from farther away. That was what sparked Sir Paul's comment on the "remunerative" aspect of the reclamation process. Of course, reclamation continued for over a century after his pronouncement, but with the adoption of the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance in 2004, all future harbour reclamation that had not yet been approved was banned.

So, what is this comment on reclamation leading up to, you may ask?

As a land surveyor, I have thought for some time that a portion of the original shoreline near Hong Kong's CBD (Central Business District) should be recorded on the ground by metal markers placed along footpaths and public open areas. This would provide the Hong Kong public and visitors with a good visual impression of the extent of reclamation that has taken place in that part of Victoria Harbour.

This is not a new idea. I saw metal shoreline markers in Wellington, New Zealand many years ago and later similar markers off Darling Harbour

in Sydney. These are always of interest to visitors and I think such a depiction of a portion of Hong Kong Island's original waterfront would make a great attraction. It is hard to imagine how much of the CBD stands on reclaimed land and descriptive notices with appropriate maps would provide further information on this.

My next suggestion is that the HKIS could play an important role in the process of marking the location of the original HWM (High Water Mark). Land surveyors could provide the necessary historical information from maps and land records to enable the location of the 1841 shoreline to be accurately marked, but anyone with an interest in geography and the historical development of Hong Kong could pitch in.

With government approval, this project could soon proceed and I believe that the Hong

Kong Tourism Board would fully support it. The HKIS could also assist in arranging a design competition for suitable metal plaques to be placed along the original shoreline feature.

The '**1841 Shoreline Walk**' would make a popular addition to other historical walks that already exist in Hong Kong.

Members Corner Needs Contributions from You!

Editorial Board invites articles for the Members Corner, a regular column in *Surveyors Times* for members to share their views on current topics and future trends, implications of new technologies and recent court decisions, the sharing of lessons learnt in members' professional practices, the highlights of new practice notes, the introduction of practical apps and ideas gained during members' recent gatherings with fellow professionals, good-natured and industry-related humour, etc.

An article need not be restricted to the professional practice of a surveyor, but neither is it intended to express a member's views on everything. It should connect or have implications for fellow members, be they serious thoughts on the constitution or future of the profession or simply as a gadget or trick that can benefit the day-to-day practices of surveyors. Articles should not be political or directly related to one's personal benefit for fear of litigation from individuals or organisations. The sensitivity and security of information presented also need to be borne in mind.

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