

## THE ABE IN HONG KONG AND CHINA

As reported in the President's Page this month, January 2007 saw Council formally agree the formation of an Overseas Branch in Hong Kong. The Association was also elected into membership of PI-UK China, a collaborative venture of leading UK Professional Institutions with interests in China. These activities are the culmination of work which has been ongoing for the past three years as part of the activities in pursuit of the prime objectives of the Association and the promotion of the Building Engineer.

In March 2004, the then President Arwel Griffith, together with Honorary Secretary Patrick Reddin and Chief Executive David Gibson, participated in a trade mission to Macau following which they spent some time in Hong Kong during which they met with ABE members, representatives of the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors (HKIS) and the Chartered Institute of Housing Asian-Pacific Branch, as well as visiting a number of Universities. This visit was fully reported in Building Engineer in May 2004 and the various meetings and seminars in which the team participated provided a useful initial link with Hong Kong.

The University visits were aimed at establishing links in the education field and presentations were made to both students and fellow professionals. The discussions with the Hong Kong Polytechnic University also led to the accreditation in 2004 of four degrees (two at Masters level) as acceptable for membership of the ABE. These degrees will shortly be due for re-accreditation. Discussions were also held with the University of Hong Kong and the City University of Hong Kong, although there have not yet been any accreditations of their various applicable degrees.

A year later, in March 2005, saw Chris Dawson as President, Arwel Griffith now as Immediate Past President and Chief Executive

David Gibson return to Hong Kong with the primary aim of finalising discussions with Flaming 21 Limited, a Hong Kong-based training company for construction-related companies and professional persons, for them to act as agents in the People's Republic of China (PRC) for a programme to deliver the monitoring and accrediting of post-graduate diplomas in construction management and contract administration. Candidates successful in the examination process would then be eligible to take a professional interview and progress to membership of the Association of Building Engineers and the Society of Professional Engineers. The first such diploma was to be delivered by Guangzhou University, and the team travelled to Guangzhou and met with both students and academic staff. More detail on the visit and Guangzhou University were contained in Building Engineer in May 2005.

Mr Teddy Chun-wah Ng, Director of Flaming 21 Limited, has continued to promote the course but has had limited success so far partially, I suspect, due to the current position in the PRC over membership of overseas professional organisations.

Whilst in Hong Kong on other business in May 2005 I attempted to meet with some ABE members who had previously been involved in the discussions so far mentioned but this did not prove possible due to tight schedules on both sides.

November 2005 saw a visit to the Association's Headquarters by a delegation from the People's Republic of China Ministry of Construction who were on a fact-finding mission to the UK in order to develop a better understanding of the UK and European construction industries, our methods, market structure and the role of the professional bodies. It was hoped that the meeting would help develop the profile of the Association within the Chinese market and also help to develop a collaborative relationship between the ABE and the Chinese Officials.

In February 2006 I was again in Hong Kong primarily to present a paper at the Fire Asia 2006 Conference on Effective Fire Safety Management and undertake some work for the Institution of Fire Engineers. Whilst there I took the opportunity to meet with some of the many ABE members in Hong Kong and, with the assistance of Teddy Ng and Keith Chow of Flaming 21 Ltd, I conducted a professional interview for a member who wished to upgrade his membership. On a separate occasion I met with ABE members Bernard Hui and Barnabus Chung. Originally it had been planned to have a larger group but the timing of the meeting had to be changed at short notice. I had noted prior to that visit that the ABE has a large number of members in Hong Kong and in a report on my visit (Building Engineer May 2006) I expressed a hope that during my term as President I would be able to bring more of them together and forge links with other professional groups with which I have contacts as a result of regular annual visits in connection with IFE business since 2001.

June 2006 saw me travelling to Beijing as part of a trade mission and with the aim of gaining as much knowledge as possible about the place of professional organisations in the PRC. I provided a brief summary of that visit in my President's Page in the August 2006 Building Engineer in which I observed that my meetings in



Beijing, whilst not having any immediate results, produced much useful information on the status of Professional Organisations in China, that I would be following-up on some of this information and be reporting on the findings later.

One organisation that I found out about in Beijing is called PI-UK China, which is a collaborative venture of a number of leading UK Professional Institutions with interests in China. It is interesting to note at this point that in 2003 the CIC had started a process through its Futures Group to look at the benefits in collaboration between professional bodies in terms of activities and membership within the PRC. At that time the ABE did not consider it appropriate to become involved but by 2004 the group had developed and, recognising that the PRC is a fast-developing economy with investment in construction being a primary vehicle for achieving its developmental objectives, those organisations involved at the time signed a Memorandum of Understanding. Using Shanghai as a base, the group aimed to develop a 'show case' for and administrative base for UK-based professional institutions working together in China and through collaborative efforts to expand into other parts of China as opportunities arise.

That group finally became PI-UK China and was officially launched at a function at the RIBA in September 2006 with its Constitution being ratified in December 2006. There is an active and committed Board of Management which meets regularly in London, and an equivalent, but smaller, body in Shanghai under the leadership of Professor James Ding of Tongji University.

Following my earlier trips, I was convinced that if we wished to expand internationally an early move would be to establish a branch in Hong Kong to enable the nearly 200 members there to participate together in professional activities. Towards this end, Council agreed a set of basic rules for Overseas Branches during its meeting in September 2006.

In November 2006 I again visited Hong Kong, this time principally on behalf of the ABE and, with the invaluable assistance of Teddy Ng and Keith Chow of Flaming 21 Ltd, hosted an evening seminar for existing members and others during which I talked about the formation of an Overseas Branch of the Association. The evening was a success, largely helped by an excellent presentation on 'Fire Engineering in Hong Kong' by Chief Fire Officer Charles Chu of the Hong Kong Fire Services Department, a long-standing personal friend. A major outcome of meetings with members and of the seminar was the formation of a Committee in waiting and I am pleased to announce that at the meeting of the Council on 20 January 2007 the creation of the Hong Kong Overseas Branch was agreed. Teddy Ng, Keith Chow and their colleagues who have volunteered to form the Branch Committee will have a lot of work to do and we all wish them success. One of their aims will be to establish good links with like-minded professional organisations and thus provide a facility for dialogue across the entire spectrum of the built environment.

During this visit I also had meetings with representatives from Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the City University of Hong Kong and also obtained some information from the University of Hong Kong. As noted earlier, there is a need to revisit our earlier



accreditations and I am sure we will be in a position to accredit other degrees. I now have good contacts with academic staff at the two Universities, most of whom I have previously dealt with in connection with fire engineering degree courses. I look forward to the opportunity to take this activity forward and thus provide more opportunities for people in the area to seek membership of the Association.

Following various discussions between June and December 2006, and bearing in mind other developments in ABE involvement in the area, it was decided at a meeting of the Presidential Committee of the ABE to seek membership of PI-UK China and this was granted at their meeting in January 2007. We are now linked with 15 other professional organisations through PI-UK China, a unique initiative which recognises China as a key focus for built environment, construction and engineering activity internationally and aims to provide access to a range of knowledge on the built environment and engineering professions, and to develop opportunities for collaboration between Chinese and UK professionals.

Between them the 16 organisations in membership cover the principal disciplines across the spectrum of landscape, construction engineering and the built environment, and together represent more than 500,000 individual members.

PI-UK will work with government, universities, associations and firms in China to enhance professional relationships and collaboration and provide access to UK professional qualifications. With major construction and development projects under way, and a commitment to sustainable development under the Kyoto protocols, China is a huge and rapidly growing market, and Chinese students and professionals are keen to share knowledge and expertise with world-class practitioners in the UK.

One of PI-UK's ongoing projects is a study of career paths in China and the comparison between UK professional training and



Chinese qualifications and accreditation systems. Early in 2006, with the help of colleagues at the British Council, PI-UK established an office in Shanghai which will become a permanent presence. With mutually supportive links to China, experts at the DTI, UK Trade and Industry, and the China Britain Business Council, PI-UK is forging valuable relationships with key players in Chinese government, higher education, associations and industry.

I and the entire team believe this is a major development and, with links with established British organisations, there are considerable opportunities for the ABE in China as a whole. Whilst it is important to remember that Hong Kong is a part of the PRC, being a Special Administrative Region, it is a special case and needs to be dealt with in a different manner but a successful Branch there can provide a useful springboard into the mainland. Furthermore, the contacts I had made during a dinner in Berlin in May with representatives of the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST) should also prove useful. CAST is an NGO and operates to provide a bridge between China's scientific and technological community and the Chinese Government. They have recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UK Engineering Council aimed at assisting China to obtain

membership of the various worldwide groupings that assess engineering qualifications and register Engineers.

I have had professional involvement with Hong Kong and China for over six years and am looking forward to developing links in the area further and to visiting Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong again. Visiting Beijing around the time of the Olympic Games during 2008 may not be such a good idea, however, as indications are that it will be a very busy and somewhat expensive place.

I noted in my report on my visit to Beijing in June 2006 that I had noticed many changes in the three years since my previous visit and I understand that the heavy traffic on the inner ring roads (there are six in all) and on the main east-west road which passes through the centre of the City has continued to get even worse. Hopefully the continued use of priority lanes for public transport and the completion of the extensions to the metro system will help ease the problem before the influx of thousands of visitors for the Olympic Games.

As illustrations of the importance of the construction sector to China and the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong this article is accompanied by a number of photographs.

**David B Smith CEng PEng FEng FIFire FCII SFPE**



*The Great Wall of China*



*Po Lin Monastery Temple*



*Jumbo Restaurant,  
Aberdeen Harbour, Hong Kong*



*Temple of Heaven*