

building. All that remains of those records (Rural Committee minutes, Village Representative election results, DO and Assistant DO reports, postal records and remittance data, school construction notes, village wells and water works, dispute adjudications, village census data, school board minutes, etc.) are in the notes taken by a handful of scholars.

A concerted effort needs to be made—soon—to locate, recover, and copy New Territories colonial records before they are lost forever. One hopes that someone of John Strickland's abilities and skills will undertake this important project. The records incorporated in *Southern District Officer Reports*, together with other New Territories materials that are yet to emerge, will be gratefully received by future generations of scholars who have no living memory of Hong Kong's colonial encounter. Many who read this journal have materials that are relevant to this endeavour. Do not delay. Contact the Hong Kong Public Records Office today.

*Thomas Sutherland: A Great Victorian*, by Malcolm Sutherland.

Leiston, Suffolk: Leiston Press, 2010, 128 pages. ISBN 978 1 907938 02 3, £10.

(Reviewed by Peter Cunich)

The name of Sir Thomas Sutherland (1834-1922) is not a familiar one in Hong Kong despite the fact that Sutherland Street in Sheung Wan is named after him. One of the large number of Scots who contributed so much to the early years of Hong Kong's development, Sutherland came out to the Far East in 1854 to be a clerk in the local P&O agency after two years of learning the ropes in the London head office. A young man of intelligence and considerable business acumen, he rose quickly through the ranks to become the superintendent of the Hong Kong agency and a major figure in the business community by the mid-1860s.

Described as 'a little king in Hong Kong', Sutherland was chairman of the Hong Kong and Whampoa Dock Company when it was established in 1863 and was appointed to the Legislative Council in 1864. In the same year he drew up the prospectus for the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank and became the first deputy chairman of the Bank's Court of Directors in 1865. He was clearly not one of those young men who, having failed in London, tried Hong Kong. Indeed, the most successful part of his career still lay

ahead of him when he left China in 1866. Appointed assistant manager of P&O's London head office in 1868, managing director in 1872, and finally chairman of the board of directors in 1881, Sutherland was the guiding genius behind the rapid expansion of the firm's large fleet of ocean liners, ordering bigger and better ships from Caird & Co in Greenock (which he represented as Member of Parliament, 1884-1900) and Harland & Wolf of Belfast. Between 1881 and 1915 he oversaw the expansion of P&O's fleet from 154,000 tons to 505,000 tons and in 1914 he arranged the merger of P&O with Lord Inchape's British India Steam Navigation Company. He was also a key player in negotiations for British use of the Suez Canal and became a director of the Suez Canal Company from 1885. Sutherland was knighted in 1891.

It is perhaps surprising that such a major figure in the history of British imperial commerce and finance ('the founder of HSBC') has escaped the biographer's notice for so long. In the story of Sutherland's life there is enough scope for a significant contribution to the history of a key phase in the development of the British Empire as well as an opportunity to illuminate an aspect of Hong Kong's early commercial history which is still largely unexplored. For this reason Malcolm Sutherland's small volume is a welcome addition to the published biographical material on early Hong Kong residents. Unfortunately, the promise of insights into Sutherland's career from previously unknown family papers (the Helen Sutherland papers, now in the Tate Archive in London) remains largely unfulfilled because it appears that few archival sources are available to shed light on Sutherland's twelve years of residence in Hong Kong. The author seems not to have used any original sources relating to Hong Kong and has not even made use of the Sutherland Papers at the National Maritime Museum in assessing his chairmanship of P&O ('These papers have been well trawled over by other researchers and have not been re-examined', p. 2). The biography seems to be based almost entirely on published sources but there are no footnotes to check on the actual sources used. The author is somewhat hagiographical in his approach to his subject and many readers will find the chapters on 'Sutherland's Many Awards' and 'Sutherland—the Man' rather old-fashioned. While this biography gives a good overview of the entire career of a man who was said to be 'a fine leader of men', this reader nevertheless found the book rather disappointing for what it failed to say about Sir Thomas Sutherland's early career in Hong Kong.

P&O occupied a very important place among the European shipping firms represented in Hong Kong during the second half of the nineteenth century and Thomas Sutherland was responsible for opening up a number of new steamer services, most notably the route to Nagasaki and Yokohama. There were many important developments in shipping during the 1850s and 1860s and it is not clear why so little is said in this biography about Sutherland's work in the Hong Kong office at the time. Is it simply that too few archival materials survive to track Sutherland's career in Hong Kong and the rise of P&O under his superintendence? While this is understandable (although not confirmed by the author) there are other aspects of Sutherland's Hong Kong career that are also dealt with in a rather unsatisfactory way. Sutherland had close social and business dealings with Douglas Lapraik but apart from their involvement together in the founding of the Hong Kong and Whampoa Dock Company we hear nothing else of their relationship. And what of Sutherland's other social and business connections? Who were his friends and business associates? Likewise, Sutherland's private life in Hong Kong is a closed book, and the only insight we are given into his twelve years of bachelorhood in the colony is the rather bald statement that there is no evidence that Sutherland ever kept a Chinese mistress. Small infelicities such as the author's reference to the 'Middle Level' instead of Mid-Levels will grate with Hong Kong readers. On Sutherland's involvement with the setting up of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, the account in this biography is inferior to that given in the first volume of Frank King's history of HSBC (1987), but we do learn rather more about Sutherland's leading role in P&O from 1868 than is apparent in David and Stephen Howarth's history of P&O (1986).

While this book is a useful addition to the biographical literature on early Hong Kong residents, there is much more that could have been said about Sir Thomas Sutherland's early career in Hong Kong. Sutherland's later career is more fully evaluated, as are his family life and involvement in charitable and community work, but perhaps a little more space could have been devoted to the 'Bohemian days' before his marriage in 1880 (pp. 97-100) and questions such as 'What did his contemporaries think of Sutherland?' (pp. 102-4). Despite these shortcomings, this biography provides a good overview of Sutherland's life and career, but it is to be hoped that a fuller biography of this extraordinary Victorian will one day be written.