

The Reading Room

I mentioned at a previous assembly that I'm in the process of writing a book. The topic for this work is the history of St. Paul's College and in particular the connections between the school and the Church both here in Hong Kong and overseas. Before I could start writing the storyline it was necessary to spend many months researching the topic and uncovering as much material as possible related to the theme of College and Church. I really enjoyed the early stages of this project when my research uncovered facts and details that had remained unnoticed or forgotten over the decades. As a researcher I found this very rewarding.

So where does one start when researching a topic? As many of you would do I began on-line finding out what had already been written by whom and when. A great deal of information could be obtained through Google searches and items posted on Wikipedia. But one can only go so far using these methods. Google often provides only a snippet or a preview of the books that might be of interest. Wikipedia, of course, has to be verified to guarantee that what has been written is indeed correct. Putting Google and Wikipedia to one side, there is nothing more rewarding than discovering first-hand new material that is written in a book.

My research has taken me to a number of libraries in Hong Kong and England. There is no question that my favourite library is the one at Lambeth Palace in London. In this Library, situated in a very special place within the walls of Lambeth Palace, is The Reading Room. The Reading Room is not open to the public and one has to obtain special permission from the Lambeth Palace Librarian to use the room. The reason why The Reading Room is of such great interest to me is that it contains volumes of letters written by the gentlemen you see along the walls of this Hall – the former Principals of St. Paul's College. These letters tell of life in Hong Kong 160 years ago; interesting stories about our College; and the problems encountered by our school particularly in the early years. These letters have not been digitally scanned and uploaded to the internet. They can only be accessed in The Reading Room. I'm sure you can understand the excitement of reading the original hand-written letters of these early principals.

Sitting in The Reading Room you are surrounded by many thousands of religious books dating back hundreds of years. In this environment you cannot help but become enthusiastic about the task ahead. I'm sure you

would agree when I say that the environment plays an important part in how you learn. In my case, The Reading Room in Lambeth Palace offered the most conducive place to study when compared to other places where I have worked.

This is why I have decided to set up a Reading Room in our College. Our Reading Room will be a place where you can read, write and hold small group meetings. It will be a special room with comfortable chairs in which to read as well as some tables for writing. My plan is that The Reading Room will be open at lunchtimes, after-school and over the week-ends. As public and school examinations approach it might also be a place where senior boys may wish to study.

The Reading Room will house a serious collection of special books. I have asked Mr. Ngan, the Head of the Chinese Department, to draw up a list of 100 essential books of Chinese Literature that everybody should read in their lifetime. I have also asked Mr. Chan, the Head of the English Department, to come up with his 100 books of English Literature that we should all have read. This might sound a little familiar to last week's Chapel service when the Rev. Martin talked about the 100 places in the world we should visit before we die! I have asked Father Robert to draw up his collection of essential books that cover comparative world religions. Our College ought to possess the key works of Christianity. But we should also have books of similar importance to Buddhists, Jews, Moslems and other faiths. The Reading Room will also house a great collection of Biographies of people who have shaped our world or changed the way we think. I have asked Mr. Wong, the College Librarian, to draw up his list of 100 significant people whom fit this definition and I'm sure that he will want to include Mahatma Gandhi, Mao Zedong, Mikhail Gorbachev, Charles Darwin and Stephen Hawking.

As the College Librarian, Mr. Wong will have a key role to play in the design and management of The Reading Room. However, The Reading Room will not be set up within the College Library but in its own specially designated area. I have three locations in mind and have asked Miss Kwan, the College Project Manager, to discuss these possibilities with the architect. At this stage I shall keep the three spaces a secret although you might like to tell me during the week if you can guess where they might be located!

Mr. Wong, Mr. Ngan, Mr. Chan and the Rev. Martin will now commence the task of identifying these essential texts and purchasing books for The Reading Room. All the books will be in hard cover and remain in our College for many years to come. I shall also be asking you to give your ideas and suggestions as to the furnishing, use and operation of The Reading Room. Furthermore, we will explore the possibilities of providing e-books to be read on iPads or laptops in addition to the main collection of hard cover books.

The Reading Room will be an important addition to our College and a place that will be enjoyed by many boys, teachers and alumni in the years ahead.

Dr. J.R. Kennard