

## **The Hall**

The Principal and Chaplain spend more time each day in the school hall than anybody else. Twice the time to be precise. As the hall can accommodate only 600 we need to hold two assemblies each morning for the 1200 students and 80 teachers. Being in the hall for an hour a day over the past four years has given me plenty of time to think about ways it might be upgraded and improved.

The hall was opened in 1965 in the new Stewart Building. Immediately, it became the focal part of the school and a welcome change of venue to the norm of holding assemblies in the open air. School halls always hold special memories. It is the first place a boy will experience when he arrives at his new school. It is also the last place that a graduating student will spend before leaving their alma mater. The hall brings back memories of musical performances, photo days, blood donations, guest speakers and exhibitions. The Hall has also been used for many dinners and dances. It is also the most requested place that old boys wish to visit when returning to the College.

So what were my ideas for the hall upgrade? A coat of paint might have freshened up the place but I was keen to see a full renovation - the first since 1965. The hall was looking tired and in need of urgent attention before the start of the 160th anniversary celebrations. Two years ago we renovated the Wong Ming Him Hall. The architect was very sympathetic to my brief for this building - to retain the historical exterior whilst delivering a classical interior using modern materials. Rembert Lai, an alumnus, answered by call and delivered a renovation of exceptional quality. It was without hesitation that I approached Rembert to work on the school hall.

I enjoy visiting other schools especially when I can come away with new ideas for my own school. In 2007 I attended an IBSC conference held at the Roxbury Latin School in Boston. Roxbury Latin is a school steeped in history and tradition. Many of its buildings are new but constructed in a manner that retains the feel of times past. The interiors are clad in wood and stone with marble floors. The result is a campus that displays a 'college feel' whilst embracing tradition in a contemporary setting. Could we do the same with our school hall? I took many photographs in Boston and showed these to Mr. Michael Mak (Vice Principal) and Miss Karen Kwan (Project Manager). Fortunately, they understood my concept! As did the architect, Rembert Lai. His design for the hall replicated what he had accomplished in the Wong Ming Him Hall - a blend of the old with the new.

One interesting feature at Roxbury Latin is the widespread use of sayings on the walls of each of its buildings. In their hall, for example, are the words: *O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come* (Isaac Watts 1719). The use of well-known text and phrases appealed to me. I asked the architect to leave a panel above the main doors of the hall for a verse or saying. It has only been in recent days that I have decided that on the four panels, two inside and two outside the hall, should be inscribed the 4 watchwords of our College Song: Justice, Honour, Truth and Virtue.

I also asked the architect to leave space on the balcony panel for an appropriate saying. My original idea was for a text from the Bible but the Revd. Robert Martin, the Chaplain, suggested that a well-known education saying by Confucius might be more relevant. He was correct, of course, and I have asked Mr. Ngan, the Head of Chinese, to come up with an appropriate saying that can be written in Chinese on this panel. A major difference will be seen in the balcony. This space has the flexibility to be enclosed and used as a lecture theatre or film venue. The seating capacity has been increased to 200; more than enough to accommodate a year group. I am sure that the balcony will be in high demand by groups across the school and by the community in general.

Work on the hall renovation will be completed in mid-October. The immediate impression will be a hall that appears larger and brighter; and hopefully not as cold as the hall of old! The false ceiling beneath the balcony has been removed making the back of the hall appear more open. The lighting is 30% brighter. The air-conditioning pipes have been concealed by a false ceiling and regulated to prevent sub-arctic conditions! Finishing touches often make all the difference. We shall be placing eight flags in the hall, four on each side of the stage. Six of the new flags will represent our Houses while the other two will be the College flag and the Hong Kong SAR flag. I have also asked the Chaplain to suggest an appropriate religious symbol for the hall - a cross or an icon of St. Paul or both.

The Class of 1979 has generously donated the new audio-visual system. But the pièce de résistance will be the new organ - a mighty instrument not found in any school in Hong Kong. The organ will uphold our fine tradition of training organists and breed a new generation of student organists. I hope that we will soon be able to hold organ recitals for our boys and for the broader community.

Assemblies will recommence in late October. The first official function will be the Annual Foundation Dinner on Saturday 4 December. The Hall will be rededicated on the Feast of St. Paul in late January. May our newly renovated Hall serve our College well in the years ahead!

J.R. Kennard

*The photographs below were taken at Roxbury Latin School, Boston*

- 1. The stage in the Hall*
- 2. The dining room*
- 3. A corridor*



