

**Press release**  
**26 September, 2012**

**‘Asia through a lens’:  
Collection of early photos released online includes images of Hong Kong, China**

As China and Hong Kong prepare to mark National Day on October 1, The National Archives (UK) has put hundreds of early photographs online as part of its [‘Asia through a lens’](#) project.

The images from the British Colonial Office’s Photographic Collection date back to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and include pictures of buildings, people and places across Asia.

The photographs are a vivid reminder of the dramatic changes which have turned Hong Kong from an island of several thousand people to a modern metropolis and home to more than 7 million people.

In addition to rarely-seen images of Hong Kong and China, the latest collection includes black and white photographs of Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Sri Lanka among others.

The pictures have been uploaded to the photo-sharing website [Flickr](#) and The National Archives hopes that visitors will tag and contribute comments and suggestions to help improve the descriptions.

**Highlights from the collection include:**

- Images relating to the Boxer Rebellion in China at the turn of the century
- Street scenes of Peking (Beijing) in the 1920s and 1930s
- Panoramic views of Hong Kong harbour taken in the 1860s
- Views of Government House, the Happy Valley race course, and Chinese New Year celebrations in Hong Kong dating back to the 1860s
- 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs of the Straits Settlements and Malay peninsula (including Singapore, Malacca, Dinding, Penang)
- Hand-coloured prints of Singapore, Java, Indochina, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Japan and the Suez Canal, dating from the late 19th century.
- The temple and ruins of Anuraddhapura, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) taken in the early 1870s by the Kandy-based English photographer Joseph Lawton.
- Original pencil sketches and watercolours of North Borneo from the 1870s

Steven Cable, photographic records specialist at The National Archives, said: *“This collection of images from across Asia includes some of the more exotic sections of the Colonial Office’s photographic library. Although depictions of British colonies in Asia form the core of the collection, over the years additional material from across the continent has found its way here and China is particularly well-represented. This set includes historically important photographs recording the Boxer rebellion.”*

The latest online release of pictures from the Colonial Office collection is part of The National Archives' ongoing 'World through a lens' project aimed at widening access to its collection.

Earlier this year, photographs of [Canada](#) released on to Flickr attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors in the first few days. In 2011, The National Archives' ['Africa through a lens'](#) project resulted in more than a thousand extra user-generated descriptions.

For more information, pictures and interview requests please contact The National Archives' press office on 02083925277 or e-mail [press@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:press@nationalarchives.gov.uk)

### **Notes to editors**

The Colonial Office Library's photographic collection, catalogue reference CO1069, was transferred to The National Archives in Kew, west London, in 2005 following the closure of the Colonial Office Library and was made accessible to the public following conservation work in 2008.

It is made up of more than 35,000 photographs, sketches and drawings from across the British Empire and offers a unique insight into life in the colonies from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The pictures were taken, painted and drawn in response to instructions from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Granville, who as Secretary of State for the Colonies in the 1860s requested that governors arrange for the taking of photographs of "noteworthy buildings and scenery...together with individuals peculiar to the colony". His instructions coincided with technological developments in the new art of photography.

Over the years, changes in overseas departments saw photographic items from the Foreign Office, Dominions Office and Commonwealth Relations Office find their way into the collection.

The majority of photographs relating to India are held at the British Library alongside the East India Company and India Office records.

### **About The National Archives**

**For the record, for good...**The National Archives is a government department and an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). As the official archive of the UK government and England and Wales, we look after and make available to the public a collection of historical records dating back over 1,000 years, including records as diverse as Domesday Book and MI5 files.

Our 21st-century role is to collect and secure the future of the record, both digital and physical, to preserve it for generations to come, and to make it as accessible as possible. We do this by devising technological solutions to ensure the long-term survival of public records and working to widen access to our collection. The National Archives also advises on information management across government, publishes all UK legislation, manages Crown copyright and leads the archive sector. We work to promote and improve access to public sector information and its re-use.

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