2018 is a big year for anniversaries and some of them are Hong Kong's own. Of course, by comparison with the events in Europe, Hong Kong's losses that year - murders, drownings, fires and even the catastrophic Race Course Fire - pale into insignificance. That HK was felt to be 'out of the action', a safe (if not healthy) billet, can be seen by the long list of men who applied to the Governor for permission to sail 'home' to enlist. For many, that they were doing their share by keeping the British Empire's Far Eastern trade flourishing was not enough. Even the reports of Hong Kong men injured or killed at the front were too few and far between to remove the feeling of impotence many seemed to have felt. At a Police medal presentation in 1919 the Officer Administering the Colony commiserated with those men who had not been given permission to go to war - he understood how disappointed they must have felt. There is no 'consolation' in tragedy, of course, but Hong Kong could point to the Race Course Fire in February 1918 and the Gresson Street Affray that preceded it by a month. Now Hong Kong was suffering too, albeit from different causes and I suspect that for taking part or watching the vast funeral procession two days after the Gresson Street Affray, sadness and weariness of heart was only partly for the murdered policemen.

Bringing out the bodies from 6 Gresson Street

This autumn I was invited to write something on the Affray for the newsletter of the Royal Hong Kong Police Association. Rather than recount again the siege itself, it was an opportunity to explore the careers of some of the other people in the story - the 'bit-part players', if you will. What follows, therefore, are some potted biographies with a note on how each fits into the story.

Brining out the bodies from 6 Gresson Street

In the immediate aftermath of the gang shooting the remaining Chinese detective constables were scattered over the three floors of the tenement and in the street. There had been no reason to expect this not to be just a routine search, so none were prepared for this turn of events and with no-one in command there was little they could do, beyond getting outside help, which Constable Chang Tim did. So the first person really to have any inkling that something was seriously wrong was Lance Sergeant McWalter, that morning standing charge of No. 2 Wanchai Station, then on the junction of Wanchai Road and the Praya (Johnston Road) when Chang phoned

through. But just before recounting his career, since I've been able to find so little on the Chinese and Indian officers involved, its worth noting that Chang appears to be the same man as Lance Segt. C. 447 Chan Tim who was commended for 'intelligence and forethought' with the result that a gang of burglars had their den raided in March 1924, 'a large amount of booty recovered' and four men were brought it justice.

William Robertson McWalter was born in 1889 and had come to Hong Kong in October 1910 after a brief spell in his father's force, the Dundee City Police. He was appointed lance sergeant in 1915, and crown sergeant four years later. With the reorganisation of ranks he became a sub inspector in February 1922, and a full inspector in 1926. He didn't serve in the Fire Brigade, but worked in a number of Kowloon stations as well as in Wanchai. In 1914 he was commended by the Captain Superintendent for catching some house-breakers. In 1923 he took charge of the prosecution of the one gunman caught following an attack on an apartment on the junction of Portland Street and Jordan Road, in Yaumatei. Not dissimilar to the Canton Road affray the following month, Sergeant Fender and a Chinese constable were involved in a running gun battle with the assailants. McWalter received the Governor's commendation for his work in the case. Policing was certainly 'in his blood' - his uncle (Inspector William Robertson) and his younger brother were both in the HK force, and his wife had two brothers in the Dundee City Police. On his retirement in 1933, then Inspector General E.D.C. Wolfe said that he was an example of 'a very fine type of policeman' and noted that he seemed in excellent health so should be able to draw his pension for many years yet! He was still drawing this - £324 11s 4d - as the Second World War broke out.

Next to know of the state of affairs at Gresson Street - and first on the scene - was Inspector George Sim, in command of McWalter's station and on his way back there by tram, having prosecuted a petty larceny at the Magistracy. He noticed a man - Ng Ling, one of the gunmen - lying prone in the road and jumped off at the stop to investigate. As the first senior officer at the scene he took immediate charge, ordering the arrest of Ng Ling and sending the injured constables to hospital. Then, meeting McWalter hurrying up the Praya, Sim went with him to Lun Fat Street, where, from an upstairs window the pair could observe and perhaps fire at the escaping gunmen. Leaving McWalter at his post, he detailed four Indian constables to accompany him in pursuit of the fleeing men. Not as fleet of foot as they, the steep gradients of Ship Street and its environs meant that he had to lead from the rear, but was then in the right place to alert Sgt Henry Marriott of the presence of gang leader Ng Ming and ensure summary justice was delivered. Back in Gresson St., when all was quiet, Sim was still the man 'to do the needful', and went up to the first floor cubicle to organise and help with the carrying down of the bodies of his two murdered colleagues.

George Sim, born1873, had transferred from a Scottish force in 1897 and was swiftly promoted to lance sergeant and then full sergeant in 1900, passing exams in Cantonese and Hakka. Between 1906 and the beginning of 1908 he had the rural

posting of Sham Shui Po, with its attendant duties as Rural Sanitary Inspector and Supervisor of Distilleries. Then he took leave, during which he married a girl from his hometown. He was now taking acting inspector roles and by 1912 was in charge of Aberdeen station, where the supervising of the harbour and of boat painting were added to his Sanitary Dept. duties. By 1918 he was forty-four, living with his family in quarters above Wanchai station and maybe hoping to eke out a few more years of employment since he had four young children.

Some of his career - particularly its sad end - is told in a long footnote in my book, but I think its worth retelling here as it shines a particular light on the expectations the Force had of its men at this time. It's all very well to say 'that's how things were then', but I think that George Sim was a casualty of that year. In the words of Captain Superintendent Messer, crime seemed to concentrate in his district during 1918, for along side P.C. Johnstone's murder followed quickly by Gresson Street and the Race Course Fire there were at least two other murders as well as a series of violent robberies and a number of gruesome accidents involving the trams. In the aftermath of the Fire, Sim had yielded to the request of a prominent Portuguese family to find their relative and had personally opened scores of coffins to identify the victim. Meanwhile, his whole station was severely overworked, Sim himself often starting at 6 a.m. and finishing well after midnight. He had not told his superiors that, following the Gresson Street affray, he had received three anonymous letters threatening to kill him. His work was appreciated by his superiors, and Sim was under consideration for a second medal for his labours. On Sunday 10th November 1918, the wife of a suspected murderer was being kept in the station as a witness. At 9 p.m. that evening, Lance-Sergeant McWalter found Sim's youngest girls on the stairs asking for their father, who they said was in the Chinese mess room with a Chinese lady. McWalter looked into this room from the verandah where he saw Sim having sex with the prisoner's wife.

The following day, with rumours of the Armistice coming through, his colleagues found him again forcing himself on the woman and this time in a wild, raving fit. They took charge and transported him to hospital where he was swiftly diagnosed as having a severe mental breakdown and watched to ensure that he did not try to do away with himself. Initially, it was proposed to prosecute him, but the doctors persuaded the government that in his medical condition no such charge would be upheld. He was quietly compulsorily retired, with a 25% reduction in pension, and returned with his family to Scotland, to a farming life, and, one hopes, some rest and easing of his mind. True to form of the day, the rape victim was not mentioned again.

At this point in the story I should recount the careers of PC Tung Wai, who was at a Lun Fat Street window with McWalter and was injured by the gunmen. I should speak about the Indian constables who chased the Ng Ming and his accomplice. However, the nature of the colonial records and English newspaper reporting at the time is that I have precious little information about any of these men. PC Mullah Singh was murdered by the unnamed gunman - Singh, like all the other victims that day, was a married man. PC Tana Singh was severely injured in the leg and after

some months trying to work, had to be retired on a special pension. PC Magher Singh also took part in the Canton Road affray, was injured and, now a lance sergeant, was awarded the 4th class medal for his bravery. These men, it seems, scarcely get their fifteen minutes of fame.

Back in Gresson Street, armed members of the Force, the Police Reserve and Government departments were joining in the response. Frank Allen, of the Sanitary Dept. and a member of the Police Reserve had taken the unenviable post of Wardmaster of Kennedy Town Plague Hospital in 1897. Then 26 years old, he had probably transferred from the army when his regiment were in HK. Maybe Government posts were thin on the ground just then, or perhaps he had gained some medical experience in the Army, but he only had to work there for six months before he was able to move into the Sanitary Dept. as an inspector. He worked his way up the grades there, but obviously hadn't forgotten his time in the Kennedy Town Hospital, for when the position of Plague Inspector became available in 1903 - at a salary 30% higher than his 1st class inspector post, he stepped into it straight away. Perhaps also a member of the Volunteers, Allen brought his service rifle along with him and went up to the roof of the Seamen's Mission, on the corner of Gresson Street and the Praya, from where he could cover the front entrance of No. 6.

Inspector Sim, labouring up Ship Street and along into Schooner Street there encountered Naval Dockyard policeman Sgt Henry Marriott. Marriott, woken from his bed after night duty at the dockyard, was able to fell the gang leader with just the few bullets he had in his service rifle. Marriott - a famed local boxer - would stay in HK, and died during internment in Stanley Camp. Richard Morgan has written a great article on him which is also on this site at https://www.socialhistoryhk.com/additional-characters

When the gunfire in Gresson St. was restricted to just the ground floor of the house a search of the upper floors was made by six men, led by Revenue Officer George Watt. Back in 1904 the then twenty-year old Watt had transferred from the Dumbartonshire Police, along with his brothers, John and Robert. As A52, he rose steadily, until by 1913 he held the post of Acting Sergeant, on a salary of £120 a year. During most of his police service he had also served as engine driver in the Fire Brigade. There were a limited number of detective allowances - in 1912 Watt was not in receipt of one, but was paid an additional $20 a month for work on fingerprint identification. Not infrequently men in or attached to the Detective Branch had the longest Fire Brigade service - presumably because they were quartered within easy reach of No. 5 Station. There then seems to be some overlap between those who are in the Detective Branch with men who would make the career move that George Watt now made, to the detective arm of the Imports and Exports Dept as a Revenue Officer. This was a particularly attractive move as his salary increased immediately by 100% with no loss of benefits. The brothers kept their connections with home, bringing out their sisters Agnes and Amy and arranging the marriage of the former to their good friend and colleague, Sgt. Alexander Taylor in January 1911, while George persuaded Margaret Pirie from their small hometown

of Maud, Aberdeenshire, to make the journey out to HK to marry him. In 1921 he was promoted to Chief Revenue Officer at a salary of £480 - increases in police pay meant that this was now much closer to the pay of a senior inspector in the Force. George Watt retired back to Aberdeenshire on health grounds in 1929.

The Harbour Master's Dept., housing the Import and Export Dept.

Also among that party searching the house that afternoon was 35 year old Sgt. A50 George Walter Cockle, who had joined the Force twelve years earlier and aside from a brief spell in the northern New Territories, was able to serve as either engine driver or foreman in the Fire Brigade almost continuously until 1921. He received a commendation from the Captain Superintendent in 1924 - Sub Inspector Cockle had shown great diligence investigating the case of a very vicious dagger attack by a group of robbers in Tsing Kai Lane, close to No. 2 Wanchai Police Station. Two men were caught the same day and a third later arrested - at the court they each received 10 years hard labour and 10 strokes of the 'cat'. Cockle just missed promotion to full inspector when he was invalided out of the Force the following year. He, too, was still drawing his pension in 1940.

Tim Murphy as Chief Det. Inspector

About Police Reserve Henry Hanson, the member of the search party who first noticed the mortally injured Detective Constable Kwong Sang underneath the bed, I have been unable, to date, to find a single thing. Also part of that party was, appropriately enough, Sgt. Tim Murphy since he was from Newmarket, Co. Cork, as was Mortimor O'Sullivan and his career is covered in my book. He then also accompanied Inspector Sim, Captain Superintendent Messer and the Governor, Sir Henry May, up to the cubicle to view the carnage. As Captain Superintendent on leave in 1895 May had travelled to Newmarket to interview four candidates for the Force, including brothers Mortimor and Patrick O'Sullivan.

By now all the shooting was restricted to the back part of the ground floor, and Sergeant Bob Wills

volunteered to creep round the back lane and try to get into the back yard of No. 6 Gresson St. While he did establish the whereabouts of the gunman, he was shot in the thigh for his troubles and was taken to hospital. Robert Henry Wills had joined midway through 1903, aged 26 from a home force. He gained a fourth class medal before retiring as Sub-Inspector in 1922, on a pension of £165 12/- per year.

Now it was certain that there was only one gunman, who had locked himself in the outside privvie, the police, led by their former boss, the Governor, tried to persuade him to give himself up. When this man, later identified as Ah Leung, asked if he would be shot if he did, one of the Constables, Ho Hung recognised that he was speaking Mandarin. One fluent Mandarin speaker on the spot was … the Governor. But perhaps fortunately for decorum, former policeman John Charles Wildin, who also spoke both Cantonese and Mandarin had arrived. It was agreed that he would break into the cubicle and try to reason with the man. Wildin had joined the HK Police from the Navy in 1900, taking his discharge in the colony when he was 21 years old. He was a very able policeman and rose to Acting Detective Sergeant, collecting on the way considerable language proficiency and two merit medals for brave conduct. But, as George Watt found later, the opportunity to double his salary as Revenue Officer really could not be turned down. His Captain Superintendent, Francis Badeley must have been particularly loathe to lose this man, but it was a familiar frustration for the executive staff of the Force.

The Late Mr. J. C. Wildin.

Wildin prospered in the Imports and Exports Dept., so much so that Sir Henry May wrote to the Colonial Office about him in August 1917. He explained that he had transferred to the department in 1909 and had now been on the maximum salary of £270 for three years. This, he said, compared unfavourably with that of the Chief Detective Inspector and some others (although he didn't mention that there were plenty of inspectors in the Force with longer service who would have been very pleased with £270 …). But he justified the increase to £300 and a change of title to Chief Preventive Officer by noting that his responsibilities had recently enlarged to include controls on morphine, cocaine, arms, Chinese coins etc. and were still growing. In 1916 he and Revenue Officer Langley (another former policeman) had had a great coup with the haul of 300 taels of prepared opium hidden in false walls of a steamer saloon. But that was nothing to his scoop early in 1920 of 80,000 tael (over 3000 kilo) of the drug. Outside of his work he, like Henry Marriott, was a keen boxer and chairman of the HK Boxing Association for many years and kept and exhibited both dogs and poultry at shows. He did not marry, but it seems that his sister kept house for him. He was not to enjoy his enhanced status and pay long - most unexpectedly he died on 23rd December 1920 - resting for a little in the office of the Canton Boat Wharf, when the assistant went

to call him to the desk, it was found that he had had a massive heart attack and was already dead.

It is perhaps a little curious that all these men from the Import and Export Dept should have hurried to help at Gresson Street. Their offices were in the Harbour Building, the Marine Dept. Headquarters building on the waterfront below No. 5 Police Station, on the corner of Connaught and Rumsey Roads. As former policemen, they would have been keen to come to the aid of their colleagues, especially when the Force had been depleted by so many men going to War. But the speed with which they arrived suggests that the phone lines of Hong Kong were active that morning.

Incidentally, many of the men we have met were married, for by this time government departments and the police had a higher proportion of married men than usual, since they were not permitted to enlist to fight. This was not from any consideration of them as family men, but the prohibition on travel for women and children would leave families stranded in Hong Kong and the government with larger separation allowances to pay.

Samuel (l) and Robert (r) following gun carriage carrying body of Henry Goscombe Clarke. 24.1.1918

Finally, two men who were not mentioned by the newspapers as being present in Gresson Street, but like Inspector Patrick O'Sullivan, would certainly have hurried to the scene, were Samuel Clarke and Robert Marks, brother and brother in law of the murdered sergeant. Both Samuel and Henry had followed their father into the police in London, and then both transferred to Hong Kong, Samuel first in 1899 and Henry a few years later. Samuel had risen to be a sergeant in 1908 but then - now a familiar story - moved to be a Revenue Officer in 1910. And in this we have the precise explanation for the presence of so many from this department in Gresson Street that morning. One of their own had lost a brother, and they were out in force to do what they could for him. Samuel Clarke would later be appointed Chief Preventive Officer soon after Charles Wildin's death. Ethel Clarke, their eldest sister, came out to stay with her brother and married policeman Robert Marks, who stayed in the Force and was promoted to the inspectorate in 1925.