

Memoir of the London Mission Building

by Cecilia, Ah Kam's daughter

This historic building was once the residence of the missionaries of the London Missionary Society. Beyond its beautiful architectural features, it carries something far more precious — the stories, faith, and dedication of the people who lived here over the past century. Their presence has given this building a spirit and meaning that go far beyond bricks and mortar.

Those who called this place home included missionaries, doctors, headmistresses, and teachers from Ying Wa Girls' School as well as the devoted domestic helpers who quietly supported the life within these walls. Together, they formed a small but deeply connected community.



The residents who lived here devoted their lives to serving Hong Kong. Their contributions and pioneer work in education, healthcare, and evangelical work were far reaching. Even today, we can see the fruit of their labor in well-established institutions, from Hop Yat Church, Ying Wa Girls' School to Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital.

The missionaries and teachers who resided here were highly educated and accomplished professionals. Yet what stood out most was their humility, kindness, and genuine care for others. Ah Kam (1929-2025) worked here in the late 1950s to the early 1970s and witnessed many seasons of life within this building. Through her vivid memories, we glimpse moments of joy, dedication, friendship, and quiet faithfulness. The companionship she shared with the residents was sincere and deeply touching.

Over time, some residents returned to their home countries, while others completed their earthly journeys and went to their heavenly home. Among those Ah Kam served, she formed especially close bonds with Rev. Lee Ching Chee (李清詞牧師) and Ms. Betty Barr (白麗詩姑娘). Their friendship lasted for more than half a century — sustained through visits, letters, and enduring affection. Ah Kam passed away on 27 April 2025, and Rev Lee followed on 27 May of the same year. Ms. Barr continues to live in her birthplace, Shanghai. Through

her connection, I am deeply grateful to have the opportunity to take part in this meaningful occasion to celebrate the 230th anniversary of London Missionary Society and to share in the remembrance of lives so beautifully intertwined.

What I share is drawn from the precious documents carefully preserved by Ah Kam for over six decades as well as from her cherished recollection of her life in the London Mission Building. I offer these reflections with heartfelt gratitude — for this building, for the people who once lived here, and for the enduring legacy of faith, friendship, and service that continues to inspire us.

Ms. Betty Barr, Rev. Lee Ching Chee (1932-2025) and Ah Kam (1929-2025)- An Enduring Bond Beyond a Working Relationship

Their encounter at the London Mission Building marked the beginning of a friendship that would endure for more than sixty years — transcending distances and the test of time. What began as a working relationship gradually grew into a deep and lasting sisterhood.

During their years at the London Mission Building, daily life was enriched by lively cultural and language exchanges. Ms. Barr fondly recalled how Ah Kam patiently helped her navigate the nine tones of Cantonese. In return, Rev. Lee would at times assist Ah Kam in understanding English grammar. These small yet meaningful acts of mutual support strengthened their friendship and reflected the spirit of shared learning that bound them together.

Ah Kam cherished many delightful conversations with Ms. Betty Barr and Rev. Lee. She once recounted how Rev. Lee playfully asked who among them was the “biggest” (誰最大). With characteristic wit, Ah Kam replied, “You may be the boss in rank, but I am the eldest sister in age.” The three of them burst into laughter and continued giggling for quite some time.

They were then in their thirties — young in years, yet already united by a friendship that would last a lifetime.

Ah Kam deeply admired Ms. Barr’s gentle and caring nature. She often spoke of Ms. Barr’s ever-present smile and her gracious temperament, recalling that she never seemed to grow impatient or upset with anyone. It may well have been this quiet and steadfast joy — so naturally expressed in her daily life — that moved Ah Kam toward baptism and the embrace of Christian faith. In 1964, Ms Barr presented Ah Kam a Bible on her baptism which was kept to this day.



Ms Barr, in Ah Kam's eulogy, wrote:

"My Elder Sister, Ah Kam

Ah Kam was an important part of my life in Hong Kong. I was there from 1959-1972 and she worked for me at least ten of those years.

During my time in Hong Kong I shared several of the flats in that yellow building with Margaret Pilkington and Valerie Hepple, teachers of English at Ying Wa, and Rev. C.C. Lee, a well-known Ying Wa teacher. They, too, enjoyed Ah Kam's company.

Ah Kam helped me greatly in the early days when I was struggling with the nine tones of Cantonese. We never spoke in any other language. She had a great sense of humour and we had many laughs.

One special picture in my mind is of her standing on the steps outside our front door waiting for me and holding a large umbrella. Heavy rain had begun to fall when I was out and she knew I had not taken an umbrella with me. That was typical of her love and concern for us.

Ah Kam was much more than a helper to me. She was a friend - and even an elder sister."



Throughout the years, they shared in one another's joys and significant events in life. In 1958, Ah Kam bid farewell to Rev. Lee as she boarded a vessel to pursue theological studies. Yet their bond did not end with that departure. When Rev. Lee later returned to Hong Kong, Ah Kam would occasionally accompany her to the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where she taught theology. She fondly recalled the long train journeys from Tsim Sha Tsui Station — journeys that seemed to take ages, yet were made precious by companionship.

In 1977, Rev. Lee attended the 72nd birthday banquet of Ah Kam's mother. In 2006, she was present at Hop Yat Church to offer her blessings at the wedding of Ah Kam's daughter. They journeyed through life with sincere care for each other. Frequent visits and gatherings sustained their friendship across six decades.

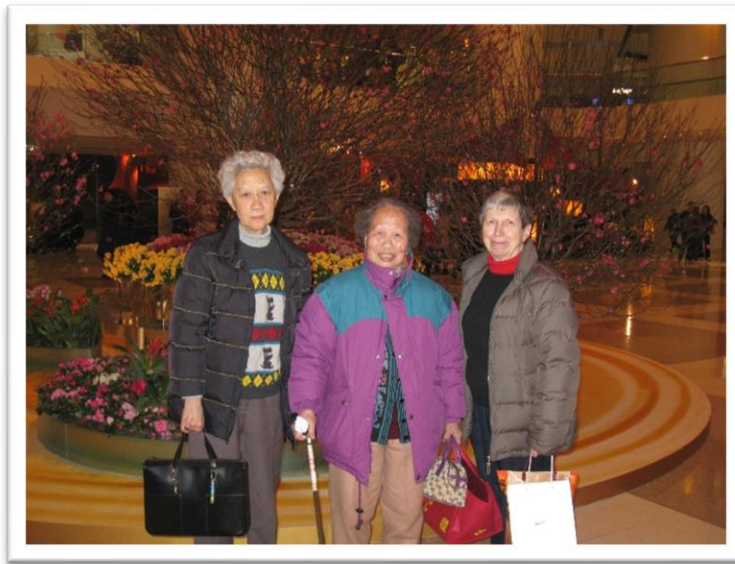
My last glimpse of Rev. Lee was on 11 February 2025 during a brief video call. Despite her own frailty, she asked those present to contact me, as she wished to know Ah Kam's latest health condition. I reassured her that although Ah Kam's heart and kidneys were weakening, she remained stable. Upon hearing this, Rev. Lee was visibly relieved.

On 26 April 2025 — Rev. Lee's birthday — Ah Kam was admitted to hospital once again that evening, and our family was called to remain by her side. On 27 April 2025, God gently called her home. With some hesitation, I informed Rev. Lee of Ah Kam's peaceful passing the following day. Although Ms. Barr had earlier mentioned that Rev. Lee was no longer able to communicate easily, she managed to respond with a brief note-- "Thank you for letting me know."

Ah Kam passed away peacefully on 27 April 2025, one day after Rev. Lee's 93rd birthday. One month later, Rev. Lee rested in God's loving arms. They both bid farewell to their earthly homes at the Haven of Hope Christian Service Chapel, one after the other, and now together rest in their eternal residence in Heaven.



Their enduring bond far transcended a working relationship. What began with a simple encounter at London Mission Building blossomed into a lifelong sisterhood, and their legacy of faith, friendship, and service continues to inspire those who remember them.



In the London Mission Building, two other remarkable figures made a lasting impact on the lives of its residents:

Ms Margaret Pilkington (貝景恬姑娘)

Ms Pilkington, Vice Principal of Ying Wa Girls' School, gave English lessons to Ah Kam in a systematical manner during her stay. They corresponded with each other after Ms Pilkington returned to the U.K. in 1961. In the letter, Ms Pilkington mindfully wrote in very basic English so that Ah Kam could understand with ease.



[Source of Photo (Ms Pilkington) :
https://www.ywgsaa.org.hk/english/images/people/memory/pilkington/appeal_letter.htm

September 21st 1961.
- 一九六一年九月廿一日付

Dear Ah Kam,

Thank you very much for your letter. You write English very well. Now I am in my home. I like it very much.

But I miss you very much. Now I must wash my dresses and iron my dresses. I must clean my bedrooms. I am very sorry you are not here in England.

My mother is very well. I am very well, too. But I miss Hong Kong very much.

I am very sorry I cannot write to you in Chinese. Please write to me again. Do not worry about me. Please take care of Miss Bass and Miss Hepple.

With love,
Margaret Pilkington
貝景恬

Source: Ah Kam's collection - Letter from Ms Pilkington (1961)

Dr Edward Hamilton Paterson 巴治安醫生(1920-2013)

Dr. Paterson was sent to Hong Kong by the London Missionary Society in 1951. He was Senior Surgeon at the Nethersole Hospital from 1951 to 1973 and was also Medical Superintendent from 1963 to 1978. His wife Mrs Barbara Paterson (1921-2012) was a teacher at Ying Wa Girls' School. Ah Kam once injured her ear during ear piercing, it was Dr Edward Paterson who sutured the wound for her. This little kind act spoke for itself that Dr Paterson advocated the concept of 'hospital without walls'.

Together, their contributions exemplify the spirit of care and dedication that characterized the community at London Mission Building.



[Source of Photo (Dr Paterson) :
<https://www.hkcccc.org/2025/11468/>]