

*Mr. & Mrs. T. Ling  
No 5 Guildford Road, B1  
The Peak, Hong Kong*

12th January, 1984

The Rt. Hon Margaret Thatcher, MP,  
Prime Minister,  
First Lord of the Treasury  
and Minister for the Civil Service,  
10 Downing Street,  
London, SW1,  
U.K.

(b)

Dear Prime Minister,

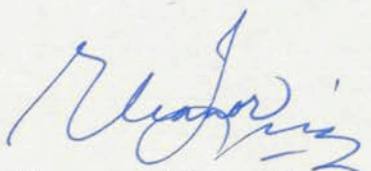
You probably will not have seen the recent articles in the South China Morning Post about David and Carolyn Newbigging, who leave Hong Kong this week, so I enclose copies.

David Newbigging is 50 this month and is in top mental and physical condition. His "little bit of experience" of Hong Kong and China in particular is unrivalled by any other non-Chinese in Hong Kong with the possible exception of Sir Edward Youde in the context of China. He knows more about China than many of the Chinese in Hong Kong - I dare say this being a Chinese myself and one who was born and educated in Hong Kong. David is well-known and highly regarded in China where, as I am sure you know, "old friends" are particularly important. I would even suggest that his 25 years of close involvement with China are unique amongst British businessmen and have made him a worthy successor in this respect to the late Sir John Keswick.

.../Cont'd. p.2

David Newbigging is as loyal to Britain as he is to Hong Kong and to Jardine, Matheson & Co. Ltd. I hope you will forgive me for recommending, therefore, that you make use of his experience, determination and cool head in the many complex issues which we all face in this part of the world. Dedicated and highly intelligent, he has a proven track record in public service, thus I, my family and many of my friends (one could loosely categorise us as the "young professionals") hope that he will continue to have an opportunity to make a worthwhile contribution to Hong Kong, our home. For we are only too aware that Sino-British relations impact greatly on our lives and community, particularly over the issue of our Future.

Yours sincerely,



Eleanor Ling (Mrs.)

**C**AROLYN Newbigging pulled the lanyard which fires the legendary Jardine's gun at East Point at the stroke of midnight. As the roar of the blank shell from the 2.1 ins gun echoed over the Harbour it not only signalled the beginning of 1984 but also the end of her husband's 30-year career with the Colony's most venerable hong.

For David Newbigging, it signalled the end of the longest chapter in his life.

"I've been a one-company man," the former taipan told me last week as he looked out of his temporary office on the 48th floor of Connaught Centre, the distinctive skyscraper in Central which was erected under Henry Keswick's direction as the very obvious symbol of Jardine Matheson and Co and its historic links with the Colony the early hong traders did so much to found.

"I joined the firm straight from the Army when I was 20 and I'll be 50 in January so Jardines has been my entire adult life."

That part of his life ended with the roar of the gun at midnight and David Newbigging prepared for the next chapter.

At 50, there's plenty of life left yet in the man who became a director of the main board of Jardines at the age of 32, a managing director in 1970 at 35 and chairman and senior managing director in 1975.

After three decades, loyalty to the company is deeply ingrained; he is reticent about discussing the behind-the-scenes boardroom struggles that resulted in his departure from Jardines "a bit earlier than I would have expected."

Nor will he talk about the policies and personnel changes implemented by his successor, Jardines' new taipan, Simon Keswick.

He may no longer be with the company for which he worked all his adult life; but he remains, at heart, a company man.

This attitude, he stressed, will follow him into his new, uncertain, career.

"I'm not yet sure what I am going to do," he says. "I have been offered a few directorships in Britain but I have not yet made any definite decisions."

"I would also like a couple of international arrows in my corporate quiver."

"I'm turning over a new business leaf and would like a small portfolio of interests, not so many as to be over-committed but a variety of directorships in firms for which I can do something constructive."

"One has to be realistic; just because you have been a reasonably large fish in the Hongkong pond does not necessarily mean that people are going to be queuing up wherever you go to snap you up."

"I've never worked in a senior position in Britain. I'm not part of the fabric there, so I will take it quietly at first and see what the future holds. Fortunately I'm in excellent health and am prepared to work hard."

"But Hongkong is not the sort of place where it is conducive for a former quote taipan unquote of Jardines to hang around. For a start, it would not be fair on one's successor."

In the three decades he worked for Jardines, David Newbigging says he has been through some good times and bad times.

Looking back, 1967 looms in his mind as a time when nobody knew what the outcome would be.

But 1983, he says wryly, with the focus continually on the issue of 1997, was even more dramatic than the outright confrontations of the disturbances.

The past 15 months seemed to have had an even greater impact on corporate affairs than the riots and bombings of the 1960s.

When he and his family leave Hongkong in a couple of weeks, David Newbigging will be travelling through America, the Far East, Middle East and other areas where he has served the company, saying goodbye to former colleagues.

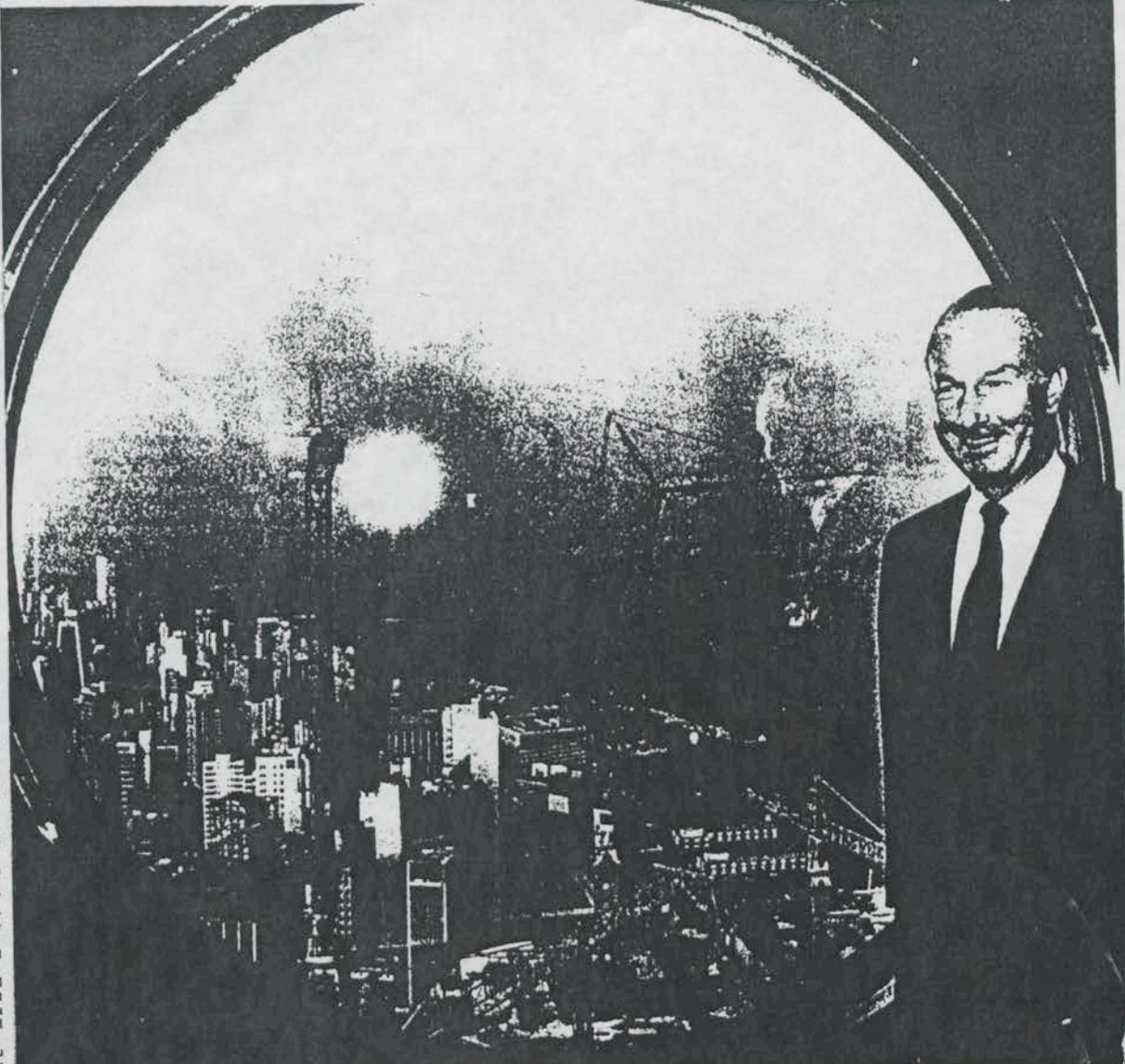
After a skiing holiday in Europe, he will be casting his eyes about in April to decide on his future.

The future, he says, looks promising, partly because of a trend in Britain to recruit generalist managers to the boards of British companies.

"I would hope that whatever little expertise I have managed to build up in this part of the world in the past 30 years might be of interest," he explains, adding the cautionary note that situations change so rapidly that one swiftly becomes out of date after leaving Hongkong.

But one thing is certain about his future, he says. He will not be poaching business from Jardines.

For example, if people in Britain ask me



From the 48th floor of the Connaught Centre, the building cranes behind David Newbigging are busy atop the rising structure of Exchange Square. The ambitious new building is a symbol of faith in the future of Hongkong, he says. And our future, no matter the constitutional arrangements, is a viable one.

Picture by C. Y. Yu

# Going with a bang

## 30 years of service come to an end

CONVERSATIONS  
with Kevin  
Sinclair



advice about doing business with China, I'll direct them to Jardines because the firm has the best organisation in China trade," he says.

If that is so, much of the reason can be credited to David Newbigging. He first began going to China to do business at the age of 25 and has been a regular visitor ever since.

"When we wanted to set up three offices, in Peking, Shanghai and Canton, people scoffed and said it couldn't be done," he says. "That just made me more determined to do it."

He did it. David Newbigging may be reticent about his personal future, but about the future of Hongkong he is more definite.

"Hongkong has a future, a viable future, no matter what constitutional arrangements are worked out," he says with confidence.

This confidence is echoed by his decision to retain investments in Hongkong.

"I have put my money where my mouth is," he proclaims.

Although he will not go into details about the reasons he is leaving Hongkong, he says his departure from the House of Jardines has, ironically, much to do with his backing Hongkong.

Looking back to the way in which the company's balance sheet came under pressure, he speaks of the 1980 cross-share deal with Hongkong Land, aimed at keeping con-

rol of the real estate giant and of Jardines itself out of the hands of competitors.

In the context of that aim, he maintains, it was the right thing to do.

But then came three simultaneous developments — "unanticipated by myself and probably everyone else in their timing" — which added together came up with a recipe for disaster.

The property market plummeted.

The question of Hongkong's future was brought implacably to the forefront of public attention in the aftermath of Mrs Thatcher's 1982 visit to Peking.

And the international recession added the final straw.

"I backed Hongkong," he says simply.

"I did not take Mrs Thatcher's trip to China to make Jardine Matheson start thinking of 1997," he says. "We had been planning for the eventuality for years. The date had always been known and prudent management had been making provision for it."

And as for the Hongkong Land deal which did so much to provoke Jardine's liquidity problems, he says: "The property outlook is dismal at present but if it comes back, then Hongkong Land will come roaring back with it."

"Hongkong Land tends to reflect the fortunes of Hongkong itself."

That future, he repeats, is a viable one.

"If it was not thought viable in 1980, one would have said to hell with it, let's get out of here, and sell up."

"As it was, we went through with the Hongkong Land deal which put the balance sheet under strain, but if we had not done so

people would have said Jardines was chicken livered and would have asked why we did not stand up and fight."

For the past several weeks, David Newbigging has been divesting himself of his many posts and positions both in the commercial world and the many other fields in which he has had a keen interest.

The midnight gun which signalled his official departure from Jardines also sounded the knell that saw him step down as an official of the Royal Hongkong Jockey Club.

So, too, will he depart from the many boards of public companies on which he has served.

David Newbigging feels strongly that being head of a major organisation like Jardines is a role that calls for the incumbent to fulfil a wide range of public services.

These he has done assiduously: the Tourist Association, TDC, Community Chest, Missions to Seamen, China Fleet Club, the Chinese University, the Universities and Polytechnic Grants Committee. ... these are but a handful of the voluntary roles he has filled.

As head of the most noted trading house in Hongkong, he has also served his stint as chairman of the Chamber of Commerce.

Wife Carolyn, too, has made her contribution; working for spastics, children's charities and other worthy causes. (The job of the wife of Jardine's taipan, says David Newbigging,

calls for dedication and toil well above and beyond the call of marital duty.)

One of the last roles he will surrender before his departure from the Colony is his seat on the Executive Council, a position he has valued greatly because of the contribution it allowed him to make to the Hongkong community in the widest sense.

That position he will give up only a few days before he is due to leave in the middle of this month.

Working in his Exco role, he says, has given him an insight into Hongkong far beyond the narrow commercial viewpoint. (It has also made him an admirer of the quiet, intellectual approach to his job of the Governor, Sir Edward Youde, a man he describes as one who gets on with the job rather than attempting to win popularity polls.)

The situation today, he maintains, is calmer and more stable — but still somewhat fragile.

"Hongkong, of course, has got its problems, like everywhere else, but I believe these problems will be overcome."

In his 30 years with Jardines, David Newbigging has seen many changes. One of the most significant, and most welcome, he believes, is the way in which there is more relaxed and easier relationship between all races in Hongkong.

This is also reflected inside Jardines, he says, where local executives are now climbing the managerial ladder to positions of greater seniority.

"Chinese executives used to tell each other not to join Jardines because there was no chance of advancement," he says. "That is no longer true."

A similar change has taken place in Hongkong society as a whole, he says, with a closer mingling of all the peoples who make up the community.

"One of Hongkong's strengths is the multi-cultural chemistry of our community in which people cross the barriers quite easily. This is very important."

"When I first came to Hongkong I remember being as frustrated as hell because one just couldn't get over the barriers and get to know people no matter how hard one tried."

"Now, the situation is different and it would be tragic if this multi-national recipe was destroyed."

If David Newbigging describes himself as a "one-company man" that can partly be blamed on destiny.

His father, the late D.L. Newbigging, was Jardine manager in Tientsin and young David was born in the bosom of the hong.

Evacuated from Hongkong in 1940, he was to spend most of the war years in Canada with his mother. His father, along with many other Jardine men, was to be interned behind the wire at Stanley. His health broken by imprisonment, he died not long after the war.

After being commissioned into the King's Own Scottish Borderers, David Newbigging considered the Army as a career, but opted instead to apply for a job with his father's old firm.

Accepted, he started in the shipping department in London and after three months training was sent to Hongkong.

His first job, he recalls whimsically, was as a "ship jumper," and his duties called on him to look after freighters bringing the trade of the world to Fragrant Harbour.

It gave him a fish's eye view of business, what was being bought and sold, imported, manufactured and re-exported through the port.

Last week, he looked down from the 48th floor to the harbour, choked once again with shipping loading cargoes that are boosting our export-led economic expansion.

Like many young Jardine Matheson executives, he was posted around the region and to London carrying out a number of different tasks.

But Hongkong was to be his base and his first love.

"I still love it," he said, simply, last week as he looked out of the window of the modest office he was occupying during his last days. It was on the other side of the building from the imposing taipan's suite he once called home.

He hopes his personal future holds out the opportunity of doing something for Hongkong.

"After 30 years, you just don't kiss the place goodbye forever," he says.

How can he be of use? What can he do to help put forward Hongkong's case to the world?

"God knows if I could contribute anything, but if I could I would be delighted," he exclaims.

"I've got a little bit of experience," he says with understatement. "Perhaps I could be of some use."

After heading the Noble House for more than eight years, having been a managing director for longer than anyone else since World War II and having played a centre stage role in many aspects of Hongkong public life, David Newbigging prepares to take his leave with a great deal of sadness.

But it is regret tinged with gratitude for the active, driving life he has led in Hongkong.

And it's a fair bet that David Newbigging — and his "little bit of experience" — may well be called on in future when Hongkong has need of a knowledgeable friend in London or elsewhere.

# A very private person who loves the high life

IF IT hadn't been for a sudden attack of laryngitis, she would have missed out on one of the most fantastic adventures of her life, reflects Mrs Carolyn Newbigging.

There she was at the start of Chris Bonington's Everest ascent in 1981, stuck at base camp and feeling very sorry for herself.

Not for long. "Well," said Carolyn to herself, "if I can't go along with the rest, I'll explore."

Somehow, she managed to find a Tibetan driver and an interpreter and the unlikely trio set off.

"We went to this amazing ruin," she recalls, "opened a trapdoor and climbed down to a cave full of Buddhas and butter lamps."

"It was amazing down there."

"I felt like Aladdin! I took stacks of photos, but when I got back to Hongkong I couldn't find the roll of film anywhere."

"Then one day, I reached into the pocket of my thick mountaineering jacket and there it was — ruined."

"The jacket had been washed with the film still inside."

Carolyn Newbigging loves mountains and it's fitting that she's lived on the Peak for the past 15 years.

High places, away from the public eye, suit her.

As the wife of Jardine's taipan, she could have wallowed in the spotlight, exploiting her unique social position to the hilt.

Instead, she chose the lowest of profiles; an intensely private young woman best known for her behind-the-scenes community work and steadfast refusal to grant interviews to the press.

The irony of it is that

Carolyn Newbigging knows all about the publicity machine.

In fact, that's what brought her to Hongkong in 1967 when the riots were at their height.

"It wasn't the most appropriate time to arrive, I suppose, but I'd been working as an account executive for S.H. Benson (a public relations firm) in London and when I heard there was an opening in Hongkong, I decided to come over."

**AS the wife of the taipan of Jardine Matheson, Mrs Carolyn Newbigging could have wallowed in the spotlight, exploiting her unique social position to the hilt.**

**Instead, as ZELDA CAWTHORNE found out in a rare and exclusive interview, she chose the lowest of profiles; an intensely private young woman best known for her behind-the-scenes community work and steadfast refusal to grant interviews.**

"At the time, it seemed the right moment to make the break."

"I was happy in London, but the two girls I was sharing a flat with suddenly got jobs overseas and I thought 'Why not?'"

"Bobby Knight, the boss of Benson's in Hongkong then, met me at the airport and I'll never forget his first words: 'Hello,' he said: 'you'd better have a bath.'"

"I was mortified — it had been a long flight — until he explained it was bath day."

"There was severe water rationing, you see and the taps were only on for four hours every fourth day."

She was Carolyn Band then: a tall, brown-eyed girl with a curious background.

Her father's people had come from Cheshire, but with the outbreak of war, Geoffrey Band found himself serving in the Army in Northern Ire-

land and that's where his first-born, Carolyn Susan, arrived.

She was six when he decided to grow bananas on the island of Dominica in the West Indies.

It wasn't that bizarre; fruit was the family business. The five years she lived in Dominica with her parents and two brothers, Nick and Simon, still seem magical, says Carolyn.

The old plantation house where they lived; the joys of

running barefoot along beaches and riding horses into the sea; the spine-tingling mysteries of obeah.

"That's what the islanders called voodoo and there was a lot of it on Dominica."

"A young groom who worked for us was a victim. One day, he found he couldn't lift his cutlass to cut the grass and no matter how hard he tried, he just couldn't get his arm up."

"I remember we tried to help by sending him to a doctor, but it was hopeless."

"He'd had an obeah spell put on him and that was that."

"In the end, we had to let him go."

Even school was out of the ordinary in those days. Barbados had the only suitable one and a six-seater seaplane was used to get her there, recalls Carolyn.

"When we returned to England in 1953, I went to a boarding school in Shrop-

shire, but even that was a little different.

"About the only thing they excelled in was Greek dancing."

A career with Vogue magazine was Carolyn's dream, but though she was offered a chance, it came at the wrong time.

"I often wonder if my life would have turned out quite differently if I'd gone to Vogue, but I ended up looking after PR accounts like Chessington Zoo and a brand of corsets, then came to Hongkong."

And as it turned out, met a young Jardines executive called David Newbigging, soon after.

"I didn't know him at all when I arrived, though strangely enough, one of my flatmates had a friend who was sharing a place with his sister."

"I met David on a junk in the middle of Clearwater Bay. He had nice eyes, I thought."

They were married at St John's Cathedral in May 1968 — the bride was given away by the then chairman of Jardines, Mr M.A.R. Herries, and a reception followed in the Jardines penthouse — and settled into the house with the stunning view that was to be home for the next 15 years — Bangour in Mount Kellett Road.

Built in the early 1950s, it's a solid, comfortable bungalow, ideally suited for a young family.

Even stripped of most of its furnishings and its garden strewn with crates and boxes, as it was last week, you could sense it was a happy, unpretentious home.

No gold faucets in the bathrooms or other excesses of the super-rich; the mistress of the house preferred it that way.

She never even called it by its fancy name, confesses Carolyn.

"Bangour is a place in Scotland, but I never used the name; hideous, I always



Mrs Carolyn Newbigging and family.

thought."

Anonymous or not, the house has had its share of drama.

The Newbiggings had only been married a couple of months when a burglar broke in while they were asleep and relieved them of a collection of valuable paintings and artefacts as well as some of their wedding presents.

"I think my worst moment was the next day when I discovered the bracelet and watch David had given me when we were married were missing."

"That's when we realised the burglar must have been in our bedroom."

"It was the most awful feeling."

Another major trauma — far from the Peak this time — came in 1973 when David Newbigging was in transit at Athens Airport during a terrorist attack in which three people died and more than 50 were injured.

"I was in Cyprus at the time and was on tenterhooks after I heard the report on the radio."

"Everyone said it was highly unlikely David was at the airport when the bomb and grenades went off, but I worked out it was highly likely he was there."

"As it turned out, he had been and dived to the floor behind the reservations desk when the first explosion happened."

"I only relaxed when I got his cable the next day, saying he was safe."

"Later, I even managed to laugh when David told me that a chap who'd dived down to the ground with him said: 'Oh God, I was hijacked last week!'"

Carolyn Newbigging might easily have been at Athens that day.

Over the years, she's frequently accompanied her husband on business trips and their mutual love of mountains has allowed plenty of other opportunities to enjoy their travels together.

The birth of their third child, Susie, in 1977, started it all.

"I couldn't ski for a while after she was born, but then David organised a trek in Nepal with some friends, so we went on that instead."

"It was fantastic."

So much so, that the following year, the Newbiggings repeated the exercise on Annapurna and then in 1981 made it to the big time when they joined the trekking party for the historic ascent of Mount Kongur, led by Chris Bonington.

"I was the only woman in that trekking party — not too intimidating for the men, though they did clean their teeth and brush their hair in the morning, which they probably wouldn't have bothered to do otherwise."

"It was an amazing trip, not least because it was the first British expedition allowed in China since liberation."

Again, the following year, the Newbiggings were among the trekkers when Chris Bonington and his team attempted their ill-fated ascent of Everest.

"I'll never forget the morning we woke at base camp to howling winds and a temperature of 26 degrees below zero — that was when the laryngitis struck — or the two friends we made who died on that expedition."

"Joe Tasker and Peter Boardman were marvellous people."

There are many in Hongkong who will never forget Carolyn Newbigging either.

Though she's shunned personal publicity, few have worked so tirelessly for so many groups and organisations.

The Save the Children Fund, the Arts Festival, the Hongkong Academy of Ballet, the Hongkong Phil. St James Settlement, the Community Chest — the list goes on and on to all she's given support and enormous amounts of time and energy.

Closest to her heart, perhaps, is the Hongkong Spastics Association, whose centre for disabled children at Wong Tai Sin was her special "baby."

Typically, Carolyn Newbigging refuses to take credit.

"My title was just supervisor."

"The real power at the centre is an incredible lady called Helen Chen."

"She performs miracles."

At Bangour last week, Carolyn Newbigging somehow managed to preserve order among the chaos — no mean feat with children Annabelle (12), Alexander (11) and Susie (6) all home from school, two dogs still awaiting new homes and packers milling around everywhere.

Luckily, nanny Sandra Lumson ("I couldn't cope without her") was there to help.

"I'll miss all the young faces most I think," said Carolyn Newbigging.

"You don't realise what a youthful population Hongkong has until you go to England."

One memento will ensure she doesn't forget: a beautifully-bound scrap book made by the children and staff of the Wong Tai Sin centre.

Carolyn Newbigging packed that one herself.

South China Morning Post  
Wednesday, January 11, 1984



New Year's Eve after Mrs Carolyn Newbigging had fired Jardine's gun in Causeway Bay at midnight.

*afw*

26 January 1984

The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you very much for your letter of 12 January about Mr. David Newbigging.

The Prime Minister was most grateful to you for writing to her. She knows that the Governor has much appreciated Mr. Newbigging's contribution to the work of the Executive Council, and the life of Hong Kong in general; and she will certainly bear in mind the experience he has to offer. The Prime Minister hopes that Mr. Newbigging will maintain his interest in Hong Kong and China when he returns to this country.

David Barclay

Mrs. E. Ling.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

26 January 1984

*Dear John,*

Hong Kong: Mr David Newbigging

Thank you for your letter of 18 January enclosing a letter from Mrs Eleanor Ling suggesting that we should find some way of using the experience of Mr David Newbigging, by implication on matters concerning Hong Kong and Sino-British relations.

Should we ever wish to, Mr Newbigging's knowledge and experience, both with Jardine Matheson and with the Executive Council, would make him an obvious person to approach if we wished to take soundings outside government. We would see no immediate reason to do so, however. In replying to Mrs Ling you may therefore wish to say that you know how much the Governor has appreciated Mr Newbigging's contribution to the work of the Executive Council and the life of Hong Kong, and that we shall certainly bear in mind the experience that he has to offer. You might wish to add the hope that he will maintain his interest in Hong Kong and China on his return to Britain.

*Yours ever,*

*Peter Ricketts*

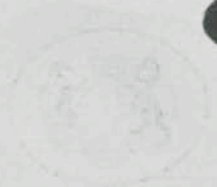
(P F Ricketts)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing Street

RESTRICTED

1000th Anniversary of the GDR

1990





Mrs. Eleanor LING



to ✓

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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

18 January 1984

Hong Kong: Mr. David Newbigging

I enclose a copy of a letter which the Prime Minister has received from Mrs Eleanor Ling. This suggests that we should find some way of using the experience of Mr. Newbigging, who is leaving Hong Kong, in the future. I should be grateful if you could let me know whether you see any possibility of doing so. I shall then reply to Mrs Ling.

A. J. COLES

P.F. Ricketts, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

So.