

## Honorary Fellow A Citation



### **Professor John Nelson Tarn, OBE, DL, HonDUniv, HonLLD, BArch, PhD, FRIBA, FRHistS, FSA, FRSA, registered architect**

In 1988, when the Government of Hong Kong wanted to expand architectural education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong announced its wish to have the second Architecture Programme in the Territory. The University enlisted the advice of a distinguished British academic and university administrator, John Nelson Tarn, Roscoe Professor of Architecture at the University of Liverpool. When a call for urgent assistance came from Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor S W Tam, Professor Tarn got on the next plane to Hong Kong without hesitation and with hardly enough time to pack his bags. He arrived in good time to help present our winning bid.

Thus began Professor Tarn's long association with this University. From the beginning he served on the University's Architecture Academic Advisory Committee (AAAC), of which he was Chairman from 1992 to 2002. Under his leadership, the Committee guided and supported the spectacular growth of the Department - appointing its inaugural and highly successful Chairman, Professor Tunney Lee. Through his work on the AAAC, Professor Tarn was able to assist the Department to define its distinctive cross-cultural role in Hong Kong and - vitally -- to win acceptance from the professional community. In a long career of service and advice to many professional bodies, Professor Tarn looks on the flourishing Department of Architecture at the Chinese University as one of the outcomes that has given him the greatest satisfaction.

As a boy growing up in the North of England, John Tarn was interested in churches and historic buildings. His dream was to read History at Oxford. With the Depression still fresh in their minds, his parents demanded a profession, so he studied Architecture instead at Newcastle upon Tyne and the University of Durham, where he took a First. His ambition to read history at an ancient university was fulfilled when he won a State Studentship that took him to Cambridge, where he did a PhD in architectural history. His thesis was on Housing in Urban Areas [of Britain] 1830 to 1914, under the supervision of Sir Leslie Martin, designer of Royal Festival Hall London.

Professor Tarn was one of the first to do architectural research on urban housing of this important period in British history, and his thesis provided the basis of two books he was to publish in the early 1970s: *Working Class Housing in Nineteenth Century Britain* (1971) and *Five Per Cent Philanthropy* (1973). Already his interests in the social and philanthropic dimensions of working class housing were beginning to emerge strongly.

At the end of his time at Cambridge Professor Tarn had been a student for eight years -- a long time in those days -- and he was eager to enter the world of work. He went into practice in Newcastle, where he mainly designed public buildings such as hospitals and schools. Here he discovered the great satisfaction an architect has in seeing the whole creative process in the development of a building, from the earliest drawings to its final physical realization.



He was soon back in the academy again, however, first at the University of Sheffield and then, at the ripe age of thirty-three, he was appointed Professor of Architecture at the University of Nottingham. Three years later he accepted the Roscoe Chair of Architecture at Liverpool, the great northern civic University where he has served in many exalted capacities - and continues to serve -- even beyond his retirement in 1999. For many years he was Pro-Vice-Chancellor and, for a period, Acting Vice-Chancellor. Not least among these highly important offices was that of Public Orator, which makes him a daunting subject for the present speaker!

As Professor at Liverpool, John Tarn built up the School of Architecture, stabilizing it and giving it significant presence in the University and beyond. He encouraged the academic development of younger colleagues and showed his grasp of the bigger academic picture when he presided over an imaginative merger with Building Engineering. As Pro-Vice-Chancellor, he played on the larger stage as part of a forward-looking team that brought independence and status to the associate colleges of the University and that forged vital links with the City and civic community. One of his major achievements was the incorporation into the University of the Old Infirmary, which houses new technology departments and up to date conference facilities. However, it is characteristic of John Tarn that the thing that has given him most satisfaction in his long career at Liverpool is seeing his students succeed, such as a young man who has just produced a major book.

Professor Tarn has been extremely active in the advancement of his profession, working on numerous committees in the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). It was in the service of the RIBA that he first came to Hong Kong. He has also held high office in the Architects' Registration Council of the United Kingdom, chairing both the Board of Education and the Council itself for long periods. He has been an External Examiner and an Advisor for the degree courses of many British universities, as well as an Advisor to the Chinese Society of Architects.

Outside his profession, he has been actively involved in the affairs of his beloved Peak District National Park, where he has lived for many years and become part of the local community. He has been Ministerial Nominee on the Peak Park Planning Board, as well as being for nearly twenty years Chairman of its Planning Control Committee. He has worked in defence of the environment more generally as a member of the [British] Council for National Parks and a member of a key Review Panel set up to examine the future of National Parks in Britain.

A practicing Anglican all his life, Professor Tarn has been, as in all things it seems, active in advancing the communities he cares for. He has been on more than one Diocesan Advisory Committee, but his special focus has been, as we should expect, on the care of churches and above all Liverpool's two great cathedrals. He has played a key organizing role, not only on the Fabric Advisory Committee of the Anglican Cathedral, but has also been Chairman for many years of the Art and Architecture Department of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool, as well as on other bodies committed to the well-being of Roman Catholic churches in England and Wales.



Somehow, in the midst of these commitments, Professor Tarn has found time to play the organ in his local church and, for good measure, to be an active Trustee of the National Museums Liverpool for which he continues to play important roles.

None of this, however, represents Professor John Tarn's major activity in retirement. That activity is the part he plays as Chair of the Riverside Group, a major Merseyside housing association with an annual turnover of a hundred million pounds. The Group has responsibility for a large housing stock, which it runs for rent but not for profit. In some ways we can see the two days a week he gives to this massive enterprise, purely on an honorary basis, as bringing together the major strands of Professor Tarn's life: -- the architect; the expert on philanthropy and density issues in working class housing; the environmentalist; and above all the man who works so tirelessly in the service of the various communities in which he lives.

Professor Tarn has been recognized for his contributions in many ways. He is a Fellow of several professional and learned bodies -- the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Royal Society of Arts, the Royal Historical Society and the Society of Antiquaries of London. For his services to architecture he received an OBE (Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) in 1992. He has received Honorary Doctorates from Hallam University, as well as the University of Liverpool. He is a Deputy Lieutenant of Merseyside.

The Chinese University's Department of Architecture, then, could not have been in more capable hands when it had John Nelson Tarn as Chairman of its Academic Advisory Committee during its formative years. He is, Mr Chairman, a greatly distinguished academic, professional and community leader, and it is my privilege to present him to you for the award of an Honorary Fellowship.

*This citation is written by Professor David Parker*