Inside Hong Kong’s Ohel Leah Synagogue is a white marble plaque that bears the words “Roll of Honour: In Memory of those members of the Jewish Community who lost their lives in the defence of Hong Kong 1941–1915”. Those memorialised were all members of the permanent Jewish community of Hong Kong and they served along with many other members of the community. The years 1941–1945 makes reference to the time period beginning with Battle of Hong Kong, from 8–25 December 1941, through the end of Japanese occupation on 16 September 1945, the date of the formal acceptance of the Japanese surrender. The attack on Hong Kong was coordinated with the broad offensive across the Pacific and Southeast Asia on 7 December 1941 (Honolulu time), referred to as “A Date Which Will Live in Infamy” by US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

For those with an interest in the battle for the defence of Hong Kong, Tony Banham’s book Not the Slightest Chance - The Defence of Hong Kong 1941 is highly recommended. This meticulously researched book details the casualties hour by hour and reveals great insight into many unknown parts of Hong Kong history. Even with this account, details of the period have been lost and much of the history will likely remain obscure, namely biographical information about many of the brave man and women who lost their lives defending the Mainland and the outlying islands of Hong Kong. After a number of intense battles, the Governor of Hong Kong surrendered on 25 December 1941.

The work to fill in the gaps in the historical record is ongoing. The Jewish community of Hong Kong, in large part through the efforts of the Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong, has made efforts to record some of this lesser known history. The community has maintained its own Jewish cemetery, in Happy Valley, since 1857 and a number of those who died during this period were buried there. This cemetery, incidentally, is still in use by the Jewish community.

This however is by no means the whole story. There are a small number of identifiably Jewish graves elsewhere in the city, in particular in the Military...
Cemetery in Stanley as well as the Sai Wan War Cemetery. There is also a single known Jewish decedent listed on the memorial in Pok Fu Lam, Hong Kong commemorating civilian war deaths.

Both of the cemeteries, the Military Cemetery in Stanley and in Sai Wan, are located on Hong Kong Island. Most of the Jewish graves in these cemeteries are of British soldiers (or members of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Force) killed in the defense of Hong Kong; others died while interned in prisoner of war or civilian camps.

Also of note, Sallie Gubbay, mistakenly referred to as Sarah, Isaac L. Goldenberg and Leo Weill, all commemorated on the plaque in Ohel Leah Synagogue were buried in the Hong Kong Jewish community’s cemetery in Happy Valley.

**The Stanley Military Cemetery**

The Stanley Military Cemetery is located near St. Stephen’s Beach in Stanley, Hong Kong in the southern part of Hong Kong Island. The Village of Stanley itself played an important part in the history of this time period as one of the last battlefields of the defence. The cemetery, one of two military cemeteries of the early colonial era, was closed in the 1860s and then was re-opened during the Second World War. During the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, Stanley Prison, which sits next to the cemetery was used as a Prisoner of War and Civilian Internment Camp.

The cemetery was used during the war for those executed by the Japanese or those who died while being held as prisoners of war. After the war, the cemetery was extended for the re-burial of those who fell during the fighting in 1941 or who died during the occupation. The cemetery contains some 700 graves, and is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Five of the graves have been identified as being for Jewish persons; they are not together, as there is no “Jewish Quarter” in this cemetery. The headstones are generally very simple, and little is known about most of those they commemorate.

1. **Leontine Ellis**

Leontine Ellis was a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Force (“HKVDC”). She was working as a nurse. Her two sisters were also members of the Nursing Detachment (ND) of HKVDC. She died on 17 August 1942 at the age of 48. Her name is included on the Honour Roll in Ohel Leah Synagogue.
2. Samuel Gerzo

Samuel Daniel Gerzo was a gunner with the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (HKVDC). He died on 25 December 1941 at the age of 37, which incidentally was the day of the surrender to the Japanese. According to Not the Slightest Chance - The Defence of Hong Kong, he was killed along with Harry Millington and was originally buried at St Stephen’s College.

He was the son of Daniel and Riva Gerzo. Records indicated that Samuel Gerzo was Romanian by birth. His wife was Ida Gerzo and they lived in Kowloon. According to the Hong Kong Daily Press, his wife Ida completed the 96 hours of hospital training for qualification to work with the Auxiliary Nursing Service (ANS) on 30 October 1940.

He is included on the Honour Roll in Ohel Leah Synagogue.

3. Herbert Alexander Samuel

He was a Gunner with the HKVDC. He died on 25 December 1941 at the age of 29. He was the son of Abraham and Ottilie Samuel. His death is also commemorated on the Roll of Honour in Ohel Leah.

4. Samuel Liborwich

He was a Private with the 1st Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment. He died on 18 December 1941 at the age of 25.

5. Hymie Greenberg

He was a Signalman with the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. He was killed in battle in Wan Chai during the siege of Hong Kong and died on Friday, 19 December 1941. Hymie was from Spedden in Alberta, Canada and was the son of Sonia Jamplesky and was the adopted son of step-father Moses Jampolsky.

6. Essie Greenberg

Listed on one grave is the name Essie Jean Greenburg and a date of death on 12 March 1942, aged 46. She was the wife of Walter William Greenburg. There is no definitive proof that she was Jewish. The claim remains unfounded. The marker itself is a simple boundary marker without a Magen David.

There are two discrepancies with the information on her grave. The first is the spelling of her name. The grave reads Greenberg while the War Commission lists her name as Greenburg. There is slightly more information available on Essie Greenburg as there are records for Liquor Licence applications for the Chardhaven Hotel, on Nathan Road, in which Essie is listed as the Hotel Keeper. Based on adverts in newspapers in 1939 and 1940, she also attempted to sell the premise pre-war and cited ill-health as her reason for doing so.

There is a further discrepancy with respect to the date of her death and her age at the time of death. Again, the grave marker indicates that she was 48 years old at her death on 12 March 1942. The CWGC records list her as 51 years old at her death on 12 March 1943.

Until her death, she was, like other civilians from allied nations, imprisoned at Stanley Internment Camp.

The Sai Wan War Cemetery and Memorial

In addition to those buried Stanley, there are also Jewish graves in the Sai Wan War Cemetery which is in the northeast of Hong Kong Island. It is on Cape Collinson Road, between Tai Tam Road and Lin Shing Road; the nearest
MTR station is Chai Wan.

The Sai Wan War cemetery is the largest in Hong Kong maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), and contains 1517 graves. Originally, all the graves were said to have been marked by crosses; only after the CWGC took over responsibility in 1953 were they replaced by tombstones, which included the Star of David for the Jewish graves.

The remains of prisoners of war that had been deported from Hong Kong to Taiwan during the war, and who died in Taiwan, are also buried here. None of these were Jewish as far as we know, but the search for information is ongoing.

At the entrance to the cemetery stands the Sai Wan Memorial, bearing the names of 2,074 Hong Kong casualties of the Second World War whose places of burial are unknown. The cemetery was built in 1946, when most of the remains were reburied there. The names of 228 Canadians who died in the defence of Hong Kong are also listed on the Sai Wan Bay Memorial.

The cemetery and memorial were designed by Colin St. Clair Oakes, who also designed the Stanley Military Cemetery, and several military cemeteries in Southeast Asia, including those in Singapore and Thailand. Four of the graves have been identified as being for Jewish persons; they are not together, as with the Stanley Military Cemetery. The headstones are generally very simple, and again, little is known about most of those they commemorate. There are additional Jewish fallen soldiers identified on the Memorial whose bodies weren’t recovered.

A stained glass window in Garnethill Synagogue, in Glasgow, commemorates his life and the lives of the others who died in World War II. In the early 1940s, his parents ran a hotel in Glasgow called Ginsburg’s.

Etched in his tombstone are the words: “In memory of our beloved son Leonard. Never to be forgotten.”

3. Robert Macklin

He was a Sergeant with the Army Educational Corps. He died on 22 December 1942, at the age of 33.

He was born in 1909 in Winnipeg, Canada, the son of Morris and Sarah Macklin, and raised in Montreal. In 1930 he was a bank clerk in New York City, but soon thereafter left for England and joined the British Army; he was stationed in Hong Kong from 1935.
He married Ursula Carroll (known as “Girlie”) of Knaphill in Surrey, in 1937, and they had a red-headed daughter Bonita (“Bonnie”) who was born in Hong Kong on 6 July 1941. He initially joined a Scottish regiment, but later became an instructor with the Army Education Corps, working in the Office of the Hong Kong Chief Censor - perhaps because his parents were both Russian born, and so he had useful language skills.

After the surrender to the Japanese forces in 1941, he was interned at Sham Shui Po Prisoner of War Camp. He died there of dysentery. His tomb bears the inscription: “Memories of you will ever be green. Girlie”

His widow and daughter were repatriated in September 1943.

4. Sidney Freeman

Sidney Freeman was a Sergeant with the Royal Artillery 80th Anti-tank Regiment. He died on 26 December 1943 at the age of 39. He was the son of Max and Katie Eliza Freeman of Swansea.

**Sai Wan Bay Memorial**

Those identified as Jewish and listed on the Sai Wan Memorial are:

1. Max Berger

Private Max Berger of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps died on 19 December 1941 during the defence of Hong Kong. He was the son of Morris and Regina Berger, of Sarnia in Ontario, Canada. He was active in Canadian Young Judea.

2. David Morris Schrage

Rifleman David Morris Schrage is one of 30 members of the Royal Rifles of Canada, Royal Canadian Infantry Corps who are commemorated on a panel of the Sai Wan Memorial. He was one of 1,975 Canadian soldiers who left Vancouver on 27 October 1941 aboard the TSS Awatea, a passenger liner from New Zealand that had been converted into a troop transport. The soldiers were bound for Hong Kong to defend the British Colony in the event of an invasion by the Japanese. Rifleman Schrage died of a heart attack on 31 October 1941 and was buried at sea. His name is included on the Memorial.

3. Vivian Benjamin

Vivian Benjamin was the daughter of Silas and Rachel Benjamin. She was a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps. She died at Bowen Road Hospital on Friday, 21 September 1945 at the age of 52.

Her parents lived in Wembley Park, London.

Her name appears on Column 34 of the Sai Wan memorial. She is also listed on the plaque in Hong Kong’s Ohel Leah Synagogue.

4. Bernard Cohen

Bernard Cohen died on Wednesday, 24 December 1941 at the age of 27. He was the son of Morres and Ennie Cohen. He was a member of the Middlesex Regiment, 1st Battalion. His parents lived in Willesden, London though according to the 1941 Hong Kong jurors’ list, a Maurice Cohen was resident at the Hong Kong Hotel. This could possibly have been his father, but this is speculative at best.
5. Frank Elliot

Frank Elliot died on Monday, 22 December 1941 at the age of 28. He was the son of Julian S. and Katie Abraham. He was a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, R.A.S.C. His parents lived in Notting Hill, London. According to the 1941 jurors’ list, he was a clerk at S. J. David & Co.

6. Reginald Goldman

Reginald Goldman died on Thursday, 18 December 1941. He was a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps. His mother lived in Greenhithe, Kent.

7. Rudolph Hoselitz

Rudolph Hoselitz died on Sunday, 21 December 1941. He was a doctor and a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence

8. Harry Bernard Joseph

Harry Bernard Joseph was in the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, R.A.S.C. He died on Monday, 22 December 1941. According to the 1941 Hong Kong jurors’ list, he was a broker with Joseph & Co., living at 43A Conduit Road. His mother lived in San Francisco.

9. Borris Lipkovosky

Borris Lipkovosky was a gunner with the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, 1st Ballalion. He was previously a member of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps. His parents lived in Shanghai. He died on Thursday, 25 December 1941.

Pok Fu Lam Memorial

David Kossick

David Kossick was a civilian casualty. He died on 19 December 1942 at the age of 46 as a result of enemy action. He was an engineer and ship surveyor in the Government Marine Surveyor’s Office. He was listed as a member of Hong Kong’s Ohel Leah Synagogue in 1936.

The quest for new information is ongoing and the effort is collaborative. For many of these servicemen and women we have but a scintilla of information. This list is by no means exhaustive. There is also an ongoing effort to expand this list in order to ensure that it is as thorough and as inclusive as possible. If you have any names or biographical information to add please contact us through info@asianjewishlife.org. All of the cemetery photos were supplied by Elido.