

# CHAPTER 1 | MEN OF VISION

“A Principal object of the proposed Dairy Company will be to reduce the price so as to bring milk within the reach of the poor, at ten cents a bottle or less. A second object will be to secure its purity and remove it from the category of typhoid fever and other disease causes; and a third object will be to place the concern on a sound financial basis and make it a source of profit for the shareholders,” PATRICK MANSON’S PROSPECTUS FOR POTENTIAL INVESTORS.

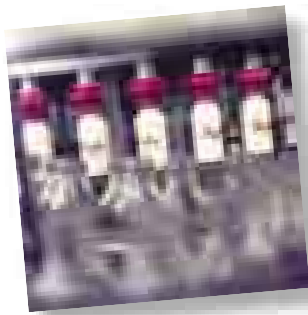
**D**airy Farm dates back to 1886 when a distinguished Scottish doctor, Patrick Manson, persuaded a group of Hong Kong’s most eminent businessmen to invest in an unusual proposition: a farm to produce a safe supply of pure cows’ milk at an affordable price.

Manson, who had arrived in Hong Kong less than three years earlier, was a skilled medical practitioner and researcher, and a philanthropist in the most practical sense. He also possessed a shrewd business mind and was determined from the start that the venture had both to serve the people and yield a reasonable profit.

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to the local populace, it was a scarce and exotic commodity, costly enough to remain out of the reach of all but Hong Kong’s wealthiest expatriate inhabitants – those who could afford to keep a cow themselves or pay the 20 to 25 cents charged for a 24-fluid-ounce (a little more than a half-litre) bottle. The cheaper alternatives were goats’ milk, regarded as unpleasantly rich and pungent, or the milk of the water buffalo, fatty and indigestible even when watered down. Whatever the source of the milk, standards of hygiene left much to be desired.

The limited supply of over-priced cows’ milk available to Hong Kong’s richer foreign residents came from dubious sources. It was derived mostly from poorly husbanded animals kept belly-to-muzzle alongside pigs, chickens, ducks, pigeons, goats and people, old and young, sheltering in ramshackle dwellings in the overcrowded shanty towns of Tai Ping Shan – a blowzy hillside neighbourhood that





SIR PATRICK MANSON

sprawled across what is now the western fringes of the modern-day bar, club and restaurant district nicknamed Soho.

“Imagine houses whose upper floors are constructed on thin boards, with wide interstices between them, and whose lower floors are inhabited, and the state they would be in under these circumstances, with pigs’ urine etc. dropping through from floor to floor,” wrote Colonial Surgeon Dr Phineas Ayers shortly after his appointment in 1873.

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Many of these slum dwellings housed five to ten – or more – extended families in addition to the attendant livestock. In one building, Ayers stumbled across a small herd of milk cows incarcerated in a series of tiny, filthy and gloomy basement cubicles. The animals arrived as calves and departed as sides of beef – the doorways were too small to permit a full-grown cow to exit and nothing went to waste.

The tenement, like its neighbours, was served and surrounded by a series of nullahs or open drains choked with stinking detritus, a noxious cocktail of human and animal waste, household rubbish, dead and dying animals and the occasional human



corpse, as well as run-off from the hills above. The cattle kept there supplied the dairy requirements of much of the western population in and around Caine and Robinson Roads, then the most fashionable areas of Hong Kong for wealthy foreigners. In an adjacent building, Ayers came across a haunch of beef hanging above a pallet where a man lay dying of smallpox.

Hong Kong may have been an unsanitary place when Manson arrived in December 1883, but it was enjoying a new-found degree of prosperity and self-

confidence. The colony had bounced back from the recession of the 1860s which claimed many an individual fortune, ruined a number of powerful hongts (trading houses), including the illustrious Dent and Company, and resulted in half the colony's 12 banks shutting their doors.

Patrick Manson was in the prime of life and approaching the height of his profession when he set foot in Hong Kong aged 39. He brought with him a burgeoning reputation for his pioneering research into the new science of tropical medicine, forged during more than a decade as a medical officer in the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs in Takao (now Kaohsiung) and later Amoy (present day Xiamen).

young man. The requirements of the Chinese customs service may not have been particularly onerous but Manson nevertheless packed an astonishing amount into his day. In addition to his official ship inspection duties, he ran a private medical practice and served as medical officer to the British consulates in both Takao and Amoy. It was clearly lucrative.

After just three years in China he was able to repay his father £750 advanced to fund his medical education. He also found time to volunteer his services to charity hospitals and devoted long hours to researching tropical diseases little known back in northern Europe, including exotic fungal infestations of the skin, tropical sprue (an intestinal disorder), leprosy and filaria, better known as elephantiasis.

He developed new surgical techniques to correct the worst of the disfigurements caused by elephantiasis and his discovery that mosquitoes

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Born in the Scottish town of Oldmeldrum, Aberdeenshire, on October 3, 1844, the second in a middle class family of nine children, Manson passed his final examinations at the University of Aberdeen's Medical School at the age of just 20, confounding his prestigious high school's opinion of him as "not particularly brilliant".

He was, however, an extremely hard-working

spread the filaria worm larvae was later regarded as a revolutionary breakthrough in tropical medical circles. It led to him formulating the equally far-sighted theory that malaria was also propagated by mosquitoes. Manson's proposition was later proven by Sir Ronald Ross (1857-1932), who received the 1902 Nobel Prize for Medicine for his groundbreaking research into the disease.

