

PHT *newsletter*

PENANG HERITAGE TRUST * PERSATUAN WARISAN PULAU PINANG

128 Armenian Street, 10200 Penang, Malaysia * Tel/Fax:

June 1998

PHT Moves into Armenian Street

It's official. The Penang Heritage Trust is moving office into the Heritage Centre, Penang (Pusat Warisan Pulau Pinang) at 128 Armenian Street. We vacated our 19 Jalan Kelawei premises on 28 May 1998.

We are very grateful to the Chief Minister and the Yang DiPertua of the Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang for giving their approval at the State Conservation Committee meeting in April. At the most recent meeting in May, they reiterated their approval. Now we are only waiting for bureaucratic clearance to move in. We are confident that this clearance will not take a fraction as long as the Suffolk House land transfer.

In exchange, the Penang Heritage Trust has committed itself to organising community dialogues between the Penang state government and the inner city stakeholders who are affected by the repeal of rent control. Being based at the Heritage Centre, in the middle of the Six Conservation Zones, will the people who live and work in the inner city and build up support for the proposed conservation guidelines.

We also felt that the Heritage Centre, Penang, should have a contact person whom the inner city occupants can approach for advice on heritage matters. For some time now, the Manager of the Heritage Centre, Mr. Chin, has been single-handedly manning the Heritage Centre. As Mr. Chin often has to run errands requiring him to be out of the office and visitors who wander into the Heritage Centre, often find that there is no one to entertain them except the security guard. Now Mr. Chin is on long leave and only a new recruit, Latifah, is there to hold the fort.

If and when the Penang Heritage Trust moves in, our Executive Secretary Priscilla will be able to help entertain the visitors and handle inquiries about heritage matters. If we can organise enough volunteers, we also hope to help the Heritage

PHT
MEMBERS DAY
Sunday 19 July 1998
Time : 11.00 am
Venue : Syed Alatas
Mansion
128 Armenian Street
Call Priscilla,
Tel: 016 410 9311

Centre set up and run its Souvenir Counter, which has been dormant since the Centre's opening in 1996. Any volunteers who wish to help with the new office and souvenir centre, please contact Priscilla at 016 410 9311 until we get our new phone line.

Dialogues with Communities Affected by Rent Control Repeal

The Penang Heritage Trust will now start to organise dialogues between the Penang State Government and the stakeholders in the six conservation zones who are affected by the repeal of rent control. The stakeholders include people who live and work in the inner city, the landowners and tenants, the associations and their members, and anyone who is interested in the human, social and economic development of the historic inner city.

The groundwork for the dialogues has begun. Initially, we have identified several groupings, namely the

Kapitan Kling Mosque's Indian Muslim community, the Muntri Street-Love Lane residents and associations, the Beach Street traders, the five Hokkien Kongsis and the Little India traders. We welcome others - PHT members or not - to help us mobilise other groups who are interested in having dialogues on the repeal of rent control.

The dialogues will cover urban rehabilitation issues, housing issues and physical upgrading of infrastructure and the public realm.

Shophouses - For Living and Working

Under the Rent Control Repeal Committee chaired by the State Executive Councillor, Dr. Toh Kin Woon, the three state assemblymen whose constituencies cover the inner city areas have started gathering detailed surveys. The surveys will show how many residents are affected by the Rent Control Repeal, whether they are able to afford low-cost housing elsewhere or whether they would prefer to stay in the inner city.

Noone is denying the fact that Rent Control is obsolete, has deprived property owners of a fair income and has led to the deterioration of the inner city housing conditions. The Rent Control Repeal is a *fait accompli* and there is no postponing the repeal. However, in other countries, rent control has always been phased out and not repealed overnight. The phasing out (which should have begun ten or twenty years ago) is usually accompanied with an urban rehabilitation scheme to make sure that the quality of the inner city housing is improved as a result. Now, we simply have to find the fastest and most cost-effective means of redressing the situation.

With the economic slowdown, there

is less likelihood of immediate redevelopment of the vacated heritage properties, at least for the moment, but with more properties coming on sale in the inner city every week, it is feared that the trend will lead to urban blight and the inner city will be overtaken by dereliction, decay and drug lords.

Someone asked the question - assuming that the government is successful in building all the low-cost housing required, and in relocating all the inner city residents out of the city, then what would happen to the inner city? It would be a dead city, catering only to offices by day, deserted by night.

In fact, there is a great deal of potential residential space within the inner city, and the rehabilitation of this space could prove a viable alternative to building low-cost housing in remote areas. Over the years, many shophouses' occupants have maintained shops on the ground floor but have left the upper floors in disrepair, with leaking roofs and creaky floorboards. This is because, due to the rent control situation, owners have neglected keeping their buildings in good condition. Another reason is that even for shophouses which are on market rent, the downstairs rental is usually three times more than the upstairs rental and therefore the upstairs is only used as storage space or left vacant because it was not considered worth renting out.

In addition, there are many fire sites - buildings which have been damaged by fire, which have been left vacant and sometimes have trees growing out of them. By right, these buildings could be served with a nuisance order because they pose a public hazard, serve as hide-outs for drug addicts and breeding places for mosquitoes. These buildings can be easily rehabilitated to provide more residential and commercial space.

Last but not least, many shophouses have already been illegally converted to warehousing. They pose a fire hazard to the neighbourhood and could be considered for conversion back to residential use.

What it takes to upgrade buildings for residential use is simply to repair the roofs and floorboards and put a toilet upstairs. This is a more economically viable and sustainable solution than considering wholesale redevelopment during these credit starved times.

Vision

The historic inner city of George Town is the spiritual and cultural heart of Penang, where most of our 19th century religious and cultural institutions are concentrated. If inner city George Town is going to survive this transition and become an economically vibrant multicultural living heritage city, we need to mobilise all the stakeholders and come up with a new vision and plan to ensure that people will continue to stay, though probably at higher rents, within the inner city.

As we approach the 21st century, we find that the model of commercial city centres where nobody lives is becoming obsolete. Most European capitals have revitalised their historic inner cities in order to conserve their cities' most important cultural areas and for improving quality of life for all. Even Singapore has made great strides in conserving some parts of the old city as a means of passing on to the younger generation a sense of identity and cultural values.

The old vision for the inner city of George Town was never debated, but was implicitly enshrined in the present "commercial zoning". This zoning destines that every property will be considered for redevelopment into a potential shopping mall or office space, and assumes that the streets should be accommodating as many cars as possible.

A new vision is needed, which involves some sort of mixed use zoning and promotes the 'traditional pattern of 'living above the shop' as a strategy for sustainable development. In addition to preserving the heritage buildings, the new vision would take into account the needs of small family business as the needs of inner city residents and families, the importance of our age-old cultural traditions and historic minorities and the whole social fabric of the city. The new vision should also be a city that is pedestrian friendly, child friendly, disable friendly, in short - a people-friendly heritage city.

Tan Teong Kooi bows out

Tan Teong Kooi, aged 60, who has served as the Executive Secretary of the Penang Heritage Trust since December 1993 recently retired from his position.

Teong Kooi joined us after teaching at the Penang Free School

where, as an Art and English teacher, he posed as an inspiring mentor to countless Penang Free School boys. Some of his gifted students have gone on to become Malaysia's most outstanding artists, musicians and literati.

Teong Kooi himself, a writer and artist, used his creative energies and personal influence to help build up the Penang Heritage Trust. He organised many talks on his own initiative, and stayed through them all, stepping out only for an occasional smoke. He also used his old faithful MG to get him to more meetings in those three years than he had attended in his entire life.

Teong Kooi's wife Joyce was the uncomplaining and unpaid secretary who actually took care of all the accounts and tidied up all those administrative matters which tend to escape an artist's attention.

Teong Kooi was the exclusive editor for the Penang Heritage Trust newsletter, in which he managed to raise the standards of heritage commentary to that of literary criticism. Writing without fear or favour, his sharp wit and sarcasm made the detractors of heritage more than a little uncomfortable. He could not resist reminding the public authorities - who are the custodians of our built heritage - that the public interest of heritage must never be sacrificed for the private interest of profits.

Teong Kooi began his second career protesting against the widely publicised illegal demolition of Metropole Hotel at Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah in 1993, and bowed out fuming against the demolition of "nine colonial buildings" along Lebuhraya Farquhar in April 1998. It's been an eventful four and half year for heritage.

Retired but not withdrawn, Teong Kooi will doubtless continue to surprise us with his unwaning talents. Perhaps we might expect a semi-fictional novel set among the smoky jazz joints, the sunset beaches, the beckoning ruins of Suffolk House, and the midnight nasi kandar of old Penang which Teong Kooi so dearly loves.

Priscilla steps in

Priscilla Charles-Chee is our new Executive Secretary. She is well known to many of us, having worked for thirteen years as the secretary of the Alliance Francaise

before she left to have her third child last year. A skilled and experienced organiser and administrator, Priscilla will be coordinating all of Penang Heritage Trust's meetings and events. As soon as Penang Heritage Trust moves into its new office at 128 Armenian Street, please drop by and meet her.

Previous Members' Day

Our first member's day in a long-time turned out well. There was a small but very enthusiastic group. Informal chat, lots of brainstorming and some volunteers. On May 17, Khoo Salma, Lee Laine, Gw Jenkins, Joseph, Swee Lin, Ambigay Dewi and friend, Kevin Loh from Intel, Goh Mai Loon, Peter Zabelski, Priscilla, Peter Foo - twelve in all, attended. Swee Lin brought delicious curry chicken and bread and we all had a feast. Some members renewed their subscription.

The following are some of the topics we discussed: Museum shop. Some improvements and signboard are needed. Peter Foo will work with Priscilla on a list of recommendations and costings and present them to the Penang Heritage Trust.

Suffolk House. At the next member's day, we should recruit volunteers to stalk the corridors of power and make sure the papers get pushed from one department to the next. We should also plan for a heritage-riverwatch walk for our members to envision the urban park along the banks of the Air Itam River.

Intel wants us to put up an exhibition. We counter proposed that we could give them whatever flyers we have, let them choose a project (Carpenter's guild, Suffolk House, Acheen St etc.) and then we give them a tour and they take photos and put up the exhibition themselves.

Heritage Library. Swee Lin has volunteered to help catalogue Heritage Centre Library books.

Heritage properties for sale or rent. Some information was exchanged.

The PHT office. We looked around the place for where we could possibly put the PHT office. Some useful suggestions were made.

Next member's day. 11.00am, 19 July 1998 at the Heritage Centre, Penang.

Come and try the food at Green Rhythms run by the Penang Organic Farm, or bring some munchies if you like.

Letters

The PHT received a letter from Robertson E. Collins, conservation consultant based in Singapore.

In urban situations, property values become the key to conservation. There must be some device to make conservation profitable. And in the historic districts, this means modifying the tax and assessment systems. If you don't readjust the tax system, restored buildings simply compound the problem by creating new value for the assessor.

It is impossible to think of successful conservation unless conservation can be made profitable. No amount of pleas or fighting can overcome the realities of the owners/investors/developers.

Oregon has a system of "freezing" the tax assessment level for 15 years on a qualified building. The City of Portland worried about lost revenue but their own analysis finally showed it would not be significant and in fact would build future value. The Federal Government in the US had a tax incentive for conservation of commercial buildings.

Incentive systems are not easily transferable but in Malaysia, with the currency troubles, there will be pressure to "use what you have" to avoid spending money on materials for new construction. This will be a short window but should be seen as an opportunity for Penang.

I hope you all will try to develop some incentives that fit your laws and your community ethic. Your interesting districts are quite large... you will have to be clever and quick.

In this time of austerity, there is the opportunity to make heroes out of the developers. They will hire workers, they will mainly be using local materials, they will be creating future urban "value" but they must also make a profit. I would get some developers to show you their financial processes, and from them, find out what it would take to make fixing up an old building in an historic district profitable for them. (I am not talking about a subsidy, I am talking about tilting

the tax rules).

You can never fix up that district yourselves and the fact is, if you can't devise a way to attract and involve the developers, it will never get done. Government will no have even less cash.

Your society and the government can work to define the district, establish the standards for design and workmanship. The city can issue the permits and approve the completed work. It could be a splendid "working together" community rejuvenation.

A letter (here abridged) from Gerald Hagan, London, United Kingdom:

I recently visited Penang for the first time and loved it. During my visit I became especially interested in Francis Light and tried without success to find a biography of him.

However, I have discovered in the London Library one by H.P. Clodd, called "Malaya's First British Pioneer - the Life of Francis Light" (London, Luzac & Co. Ltd., 1948) and also a biography of his son by M.P. Mayo called "the Life and Letters of Col. William Light" (Adelaide, 1937).

I wondered if you could tell me of any more, if indeed there are any more, later books. It seems to me shameful for my country that neither the Encyclopaedia Britannica nor the Dictionary of National Biography include Francis Light. Has Sue Gross's monograph on Martina Rozells, which you mention, been published yet by the Penang Heritage Trust and, if so, how do I obtain a copy?

Gerald Hagan wrote again to add: "I misled you slightly in my last letter. Francis Light has been included in a 1992 volume of The Dictionary of National Biography called "MISSING PERSONS", which I have only recently discovered. Oxford University Press is to publish a new Dictionary of National Biography, and I have been in touch with the editors that Captain Light is included."

Editor - Due to constant and incessant interest in the question of Francis Light and Martina Rozells, would someone like to form a Club (technically a PHT subcommittee) which could put all these researchers in touch with each other? This Club could also look into the publication of Sue Gross's monograph.

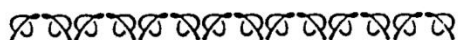
Admission is free. All are welcome.

8pm Thursday, 25 June 1998

at the Caring Society Complex (Pusat Masyarakat Penyayang Pulau Pinang),
Jalan Utama, Penang (next to the Governor's Residency).

Conserving Botanic Gardens & Cultural Landscapes

by Professor Ken Taylor, University of Canberra



Distinctive cultural landscapes such as Penang Hill and the Penang Botanic Gardens are among the most loved places in Penang. The threat of inappropriate development to these places has awakened a groundswell of protest which clearly demonstrates a strong public attachment to places where people can partake of nature. This attachment needs to be developed into a willingness to protect our natural heritage and recreational spaces, and to conserve them for future generations.

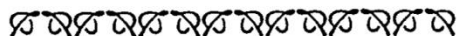
Ken Taylor, Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Canberra, Australia, is co-director of the Cultural Heritage Research Centre, past president of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects and a member of Australia ICOMOS. He was chief editor of *Canberra The Guide: A fresh perspective on Australia's Capital City* (1997), and numerous recent papers such as "Valuing the Ordinary: An Australian Perspective" and "It is ourselves we are making out there". His research project "Aesthetic Values and Coastal Resources" was funded by the Australian Heritage Commission.

Prof. Taylor will talk on open space links and cultural landscapes, their meaning, heritage values and cultural contexts. Using slides of botanic gardens around the world, he will illustrate the principles of cultural landscape conservation. He will present a typical approach to establishing the significance and integrity of materials, design, setting and association, showing successful examples of the conservation and reconstruction of various gardens around the world.

Prof. Ken Taylor is brought to Penang as the international speaker for the Sustainable Penang Initiative roundtable on Cultural Vibrancy (27-28 June 1998) organised by SERI Penang.

Further inquiries, contact:

Selvi, Socio-Economic & Environmental Research Institute (SERI Penang).
Tel (604) 645 1710, Fax (604) 645 1807, Email seripg@tm.net.my
Sustainable Penang Initiative homepage: <http://www.seri.com.my/spi/>



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Stories begin
page 2



Picture: LIM HONG LEONG

Twilight of the clans

Star
SECTION

MONDAY
May 4 1998

Acting Editor:
LIM CHENG HOE

Born
as
Champs



CHAMPS
for
Life

ANOTHER QUALITY PRODUCT FROM



Standing on shaky ground

THE aged caretaker removes a pair of old wooden signboards from a dank corner of a pre-war building and gingerly wipes the dust and cobwebs off the brittle wood.

After a while, two columns of crafted Chinese verses based on the characters *heng* and *woh* (in Cantonese, prosperity and harmony), which used to adorn the main doors of the Penang Chinese Heng Woh Goldsmith Employees Union early this century, are revealed.

By the end of this century, Chan Ah Loon will no longer need to dust them or the antique chairs which are the most valuable assets in the sparsely-furnished rented premises.

These items will have to be removed or sold off if the union cannot afford to pay higher rentals once the repeal of the Rent Control Act 1966 comes into effect by the year 2000.

Sitting under an old whirring fan in another part of the room to chat over Chinese tea, play mahjong or read newspapers, are other union members who once worked as jewellery craftsmen, like Chan.

Time seems to stand still in this Jalan Sungai Ujong corner of George Town. But lurking beneath this veneer of tranquillity is a sense of foreboding and uncertainty for Chan and, to a lesser extent, union members who often visit the place to relax and socialise.

If the union falls apart after losing its tenancy in this prime commercial area to another higher-paying tenant, a 63-year-old bachelor like Chan will have more to fear.

"I will lose a place to stay, lose my caretaker's allowance and become *mou kah hor kwai* (in Cantonese, homeless).

"At my age, a poor and lonely man will also worry about having a decent burial when the time comes," he sighs.

In the past, the union, like many other such associations, normally saw to the funeral arrangements of immigrant members from China who worked here, remained bachelors and died poor.

Such organisations, whether for people of the same trade or clan, are often a source of financial and social support for members and their children's education.

But now, the impending repeal has not only shaken the tenancy security of the union, which is now paying about RM260 rental monthly, but also its very existence.

Chan dreads the thought of losing his only security — the union, which is both his employer and surrogate family.

To the union's 540 members on the island and in Butterworth, it would mean the loss of an organisation to unite and represent them.

Another old member, Hor Wai Mun, 76, says the social environment will never be the same if the union shifts from innercity

Last September, the repeal of the Rent Control Act 1966 took effect. However, until Dec 31, 1999, tenants of property under this Act still pay a low rental rate based on a formula worked out by the Government.



Phoon Kwai Chor serving a client at his barber shop where his son also operates a unisex salon upstairs. Though he belongs to a fast-disappearing breed, Phoon sees the new wave of unisex hairdressers as a vibrant lot.

Right: The Penang Hairdressing And Waving Association, which has a more affirmative vision of its future, has started to raise funds to relocate its present headquarters in Jalan Dr Lim Chwee Leong.

George Town where the trade first thrived.

"If the union is gone, I may have to stay at home and read books instead," says Hor, who takes a half-hour bus ride from his Pulau Tikus home almost every day to

meet up with old buddies.

Heng Woh's chairman Tan Teow Hong says the union doubts its ability to afford market-rate rental in two years' time.

"If the landlord is willing to sell now at a reasonable price, we can

try applying for a bank loan and organise fund-raising among members.

"But with property prices expected to shoot up after the repeal in two years, it is unlikely that the landlord will want to sell, let alone sell it cheap to a poor union," he says.

This general sense of indecision is shared by several other organisations which, like Heng Woh, believe in secured tenancy before the onset of the first phase of the repeal last Sept 1.

In the same boat are organisations like Sam Sooi Wooi Koon (association for descendants of immigrants from Sam Sooi district in Guangdong, China), the Penang Hairdressing And Waving Association, Penang Motor Drivers Association, Thoe Yip Koon Sor (association for pork butchers), Penang Tailors Association and Yip Yue Musical Association.

They are located within George Town in Love Lane, Jalan Dr Lim Chwee Leong, Noordin Street, Kimberley Street, Muntri Street and Transfer Road, respectively.

Most, especially those which take pride in their rich history, do not wish to see their associations fade into oblivion because of the repeal. They might resort to increasing membership fees in order to save their associations.

"At worst, we may have to hold meetings at coffeeshops just like in the old days," says Tan.

Incidentally, Heng Woh is believed to be one of the earliest trade unions in Penang and is an offshoot of the Penang Ta Kam Hong (Goldsmiths Guild) set up in 1832.

Members of the guild comprised a majority *tong kah* (in Cantonese, bosses) and minority *sai kah* (workers) who were predominantly Cantonese during that time.

As the workers were outnumbered in the guild, they felt compelled to set up their own club in 1907. From an early membership

of about 50, the club has grown into a union with 540 members.

In 1922, the workers went on strike in protest against low wages after negotiations ended in a stalemate. Their counterparts from other states sent financial support during the several months of stop-work protest, which ended favourably for the workers.

Tan says the union now owns a terrace house that acts as its Butterworth branch office, but space constraints and the location make it unsuitable to hold activities and big gatherings.

"We do not wish to lose our headquarters on the island and *sau tong* (in Cantonese, wind up) because our founders had fought hard to establish the union and improve our lot," says Tan.

Echoing his sentiments is Sam Sooi Wooi Koon secretary Ho Siev Wai: "Getting the association registered was not easy in the past. It will be an unforgivable sin if our forefathers if we surrender our registration certificate now."

The association is believed to have been set up earlier than 1885 by immigrant workers from China's Sam Sooi district. A majority worked in Penang in the foundry and construction industries.

The Sam Sooi women, who worked at construction sites carrying bricks, were popularly known as *ang thau kin* (in Hokkien, red headscarf) because they wore a trademark red scarf on their heads.

One of the better known leaders of the association was Lye Kean Hong, a China-born calligrapher and classical poet whose works can be seen on many Penang association signboards.

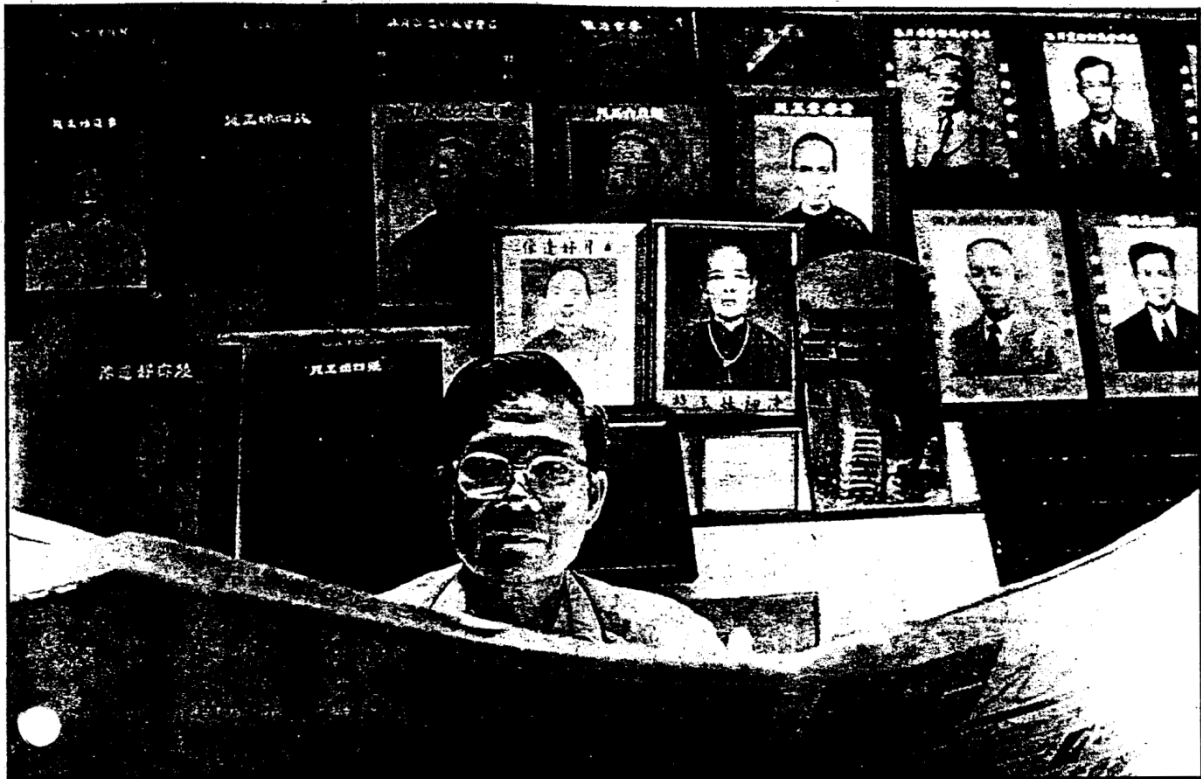
Ho says the association applied for cheap housing during last year's rent-control tenants registration exercise, but doubts the application will be approved.

"But we won't give up," he adds with determination.

The association has about 90 members, most of whom are elder-



Chan Ah Loon dusting the wooden signboards which used to adorn the main doors of the Penang Chinese Heng Woh Goldsmith Employees Union early in the century.



FACES FROM THE PAST:
On the wall behind Ho Siew Wal are old portraits of Sam Sui Wool Koon's past members - almost half of them were 'ang tau kin' women who worked as construction labourers.

ly. There are an estimated 20,000 Sam Sui descendants in Penang.

Unlike Sam Sui Wool Koon, the Penang Hairdressing And Waving Association, which has over 1,000 members, has younger hairdressers outnumbering the older generation barbers.

Its chairman Rachmat Hassan, who operates a unisex hair salon at Komtar, says the association is raising funds to buy a new building.

"We have embarked on a campaign to improve the image of the industry. To do so, we need to have a better office to serve, like an academy to train new students," he says.

Association secretary Phoon Kwai Chor, a barber, says the new generation of unisex hairdressers has injected more life into the association.

Unlike others that lack specific plans and direction, the hairdressers' association has started raising funds and is looking for a suitable place to relocate in view of the repeal.

The association last year even attempted to make it into the *Malaysia Book Of Records* by organising the longest line of hairdressers giving haircuts at the Esplanade. Part of the proceeds went to its new building fund.

The number of associations affected by the repeal is small compared with the more affluent associations that already have their own buildings.

Some rich associations even own hundreds of rent-controlled properties and are the ones to determine the fate of tenants - individuals and associations alike - should they decide to redevelop their properties.

As for floundering associations that already suffer problems like poor membership or lack of support from their richer members, the Act's repeal may very well drive the proverbial final nail into their coffins.

Chinese associations fighting to stay afloat
- P4

Changing landscape of George Town

MOST of Penang's rent-controlled premises are centred in George Town, a big Chinatown of sorts where a good number of people live in abodes untouched by modernisation.

The repeal of the Rent Control Act 1966 threatens to bring changes, as landlords will be tempted to repossess their properties for more lucrative ventures.

Malaysia Historical Relic Survey deputy research director Ong Seng Huat says the repeal would have a great impact on the socio-economic climate of the city.

Old habits, trade and religious practices will be greatly affected, he says. "Many small-time traders will be displaced when higher rentals force them to move elsewhere, thus changing the socio-economic pattern of the city."

With higher cost of living, they may also no longer be able to sustain the trades passed down by their forefathers.

Ong says a preliminary survey by the northern region committee shows that Penang will see more rapid changes after the year 2000 when the repeal takes full effect, compared with other states. The survey was jointly organised by the MCA, Federation Of Chinese Assembly Halls Malaysia and the Malaysia Chinese Cultural Society.

"Penang has many commercial communities that are more centralised compared with other states. The community living along one street would most probably speak the same dialect, conduct the same trade and belong to the same association," Ong points out.

For instance, he adds, many shops around the old Beach Street used to belong to the *hio sua kow* (a Hokkien reference to the business of importing goods from Hong Kong and Swatow in China) businessmen who were mostly



An old lady entering the house she shares with other old folk in Hutton Lane. Scenes reminiscent of old Chinatown are still prevalent in George Town.

Teochew. They imported all sorts of goods, including religious paraphernalia, porcelain, onions and preserved food.

Ong says the business has gradually declined in that area, since the destruction of many shops during World War II.

"Some of the original inhabitants there changed their business when Penang lost its free port status in 1969. But what little is left of the *hio sua kow* people there is further threatened by the repeal of the Rent Control Act because most of them are renting pre-war premises."

Ong adds that the repeal would tear apart the last vestiges of the remaining Chinese communities, and the areas concerned would lose their original identity. Religious organisations that have not been formally registered have even more to fear.

"The religious practices of the people would be affected as many worship houses are set up on rent-controlled premises," says Ong, who is also vice-chairman of the Federation Of Malaysian Taoist Organisations.

Some places, he says, have practices and beliefs that date back to the early settlers' era. The unique characteristics of such places may be lost following the anticipated change in demographics after the repeal.

"Even if historical buildings are conserved, the human activities that used to support the environment may be lost."

Penang, with 12,577 pre-war buildings, has the largest number of rent-controlled premises in the country.

A 1993 Universiti Sains Malaysia census found 53,829 tenants renting 9,787 premises while the remaining 2,790 premises were owner-occupied.

During a state-wide tenants registration exercise last year, 6,352 affected families registered for government assistance to get housing.

A total of 127 families opted to continue renting because they could not afford to buy houses, while another 2,281 people applied for commercial units.

With thousands of people poised to be uprooted, George Town may not look the same again by the turn of the century.

Chinese associations fighting to stay afloat

THE façade of Kuala Lumpur's Chinatown is changing, with old buildings making way for new and old businesses uprooted for new commercial enterprises.

Tucked along these rows of pre-war shop-houses are various Chinese associations, some as old as 70 years.

While the more financially-stable associations have their own buildings, the poorer ones are struggling to stay afloat, especially in these times of high rentals.

Since the repeal of the Rent Control Act 1966 last Sept 1, the associations have had to pay higher rent for their premises.

The increasing rentals is cause for concern among the poorer associations. Their fate hangs in the balance — either they fork out the new rentals or move out. At worst, the associations may have to close down.

And so the on-going struggle to make ends meet. Some associations try to cough up the monthly rental from membership fees while others sub-let their premises.

The 71-year-old Selangor and Kuala Lumpur Laundry Association is a case in point. The only association of its kind for those in the trade, it is housed in a pre-war double-storey building in Jalan Balai Polis, Kuala Lumpur. Now it is in peril of losing its historic premises.

"We're not financially strong and don't have any property. The increasing rental is a burden to us," says association president Cheong Tuck Meng, 41. The association recently sub-let its shophouse to boost its coffers; now there's a cafe downstairs and a gallery of antiques upstairs.

With this "rescue package", associations members can still hold their meetings at the cafe. Despite the *kopitiam*-style furniture and pendant lights which give the cafe its ambience, the presence of the association could still be felt. Its walls "speak", one may say.

The association's memorabilia take pride of place, and fill up two sides of the walls. Dozens of pictures of founding and active members are placed up to almost ceiling level. There are also plaques and mirrors among the antique items on display.

Founded by Lum Cheok Lam, the association's early premises was across the road from where the present one stands. However, the building which was occupied for three years has since been torn down.

In the early days, the first floor of the present association housed a hostel which provided lodging for 30 bachelors at three dollars (then) a month, with a guest room for outstation members.

The association now has 200 members. Regular meetings are held every two months, but emergency meetings are called when urgent matters arise, for example to discuss any increase in laundry charges.

The association, like most other Chinese associations, was formed to meet the social needs of *sin khek* (in Hokkien, "new arrivals") from China who came to work in Malaya.

"With no kin in this foreign land, they met at the association for activities such as Chinese chess or ping pong. Some would chit-chat over *yum char* (in Cantonese, "tea-drinking") sessions or read newspapers. Of course, there were those who couldn't leave the mahjong table," says committee member Sam Yoke Chee, 58.

Occasionally, long-time member Loh Weng Lok, 86, comes to the association — his "second home" — for old times' sake. Loh, whose picture is on the wall (an honour accorded for his contributions to the associ-



The Selangor and Kuala Lumpur Laundry Association, which has about 200 members, would have to move out of its prewar premises if they can't keep up with escalating rentals. — Picture by Oon Kien Yee



The two-storey Selangor and Kuala Lumpur Laundry Association in Jalan Balai Polis.

ation) was 20 when he first arrived from Guangdong.

"In the old days, an apprentice in the laundry shop earned 12 dollars a month while an expert worker got 16. Membership fee was one dollar, and monthly subscription, 40 cents," says Loh.

In the 30s, the laundry charge for a shirt was six cents, and trousers, seven cents.

"Clothes were difficult to wash as they were mostly khaki and thick cotton. They had to be boiled with soda in a huge cauldron. Some materials needed to be starched," Loh recalls.

Adds Sam: "The building which is steeped



Left: Cheong Tuck Meng ... 'Increasing rental is a burden.'



Right: Sam Yoke Chee ... 'With no kin in this foreign land, new arrivals from China met at the association for activities.'

in history is symbolic of our profession. It's not a lowly profession but a service industry. We've to respect our profession in order to continue in this business."

But he doesn't deny the stark reality that one day the association would have to vacate its premises.

"When the rental shoots up to RM10,000, we'll definitely have to shift. Until then, we've a few years' grace to find an alternative site and hopefully buy our own building," says Sam.

The association started raising funds for its own building as early as three years back.

"There is RM100,000 in fixed deposit. We hope to raise another RM100,000 from the sale of an apartment the association bought in 1975," says its president Cheong.

Selangor Khlew Onn Club

Like other Chinese associations, this 65-year-old organisation in Petaling Street, Kuala Lumpur, has resorted to sub-letting portions of its shophouse to offset the rental.

Over the past 20 years, the association

has relied partly on its lion dance troupe fees to subsidise its expenses, apart from the subscription money. But the amount raised from lion dances during festive seasons and special occasions is insufficient to cover the rental.

The association's general clerk, Cheng Kok Shoon, 75, says that with the repeal of the Rent Control Act 1966, rental shot up to RM1,772 from RM929. And in January this year, the association was asked to pay a new rate of RM2,600.

"We wrote to the landlord in January to appeal for a delay in this second rental hike in view of the

economic slowdown," says Cheng. The building is in a pathetic state of disrepair. The dingy rooms are stuffed with old furniture and rusty cultural relics such as spears and swords.

"Sometimes the roof leaks when it rains. But we can't afford to repair it; that costs a whopping RM30,000!" says Cheng.

The association has about 200 members, most of whom come in the evenings to chit-chat or play mahjong.

Association treasurer Chang Kock Chong, 52, says the association bought an apartment in Kuala Lumpur but sold it off 10 years ago.

The association members have applied to lease a piece of land in Hulu Klang, Selangor, in view of the gloomy possibility that it will have to give up its rented premises in the near future.

"We hope to build our own premises with funds from the sale of the apartment, and monies that we're hoping to raise," says Chang.

For now, the members will make the most of the situation until such time as when they can afford their own building.

TRISHAWMAN Lee Ewe Chuan of 3, Cannon Square in Penang, is not the least worried about the millennium bug that is threatening the computerised corporate world.

However, what bugs the 60-year-old tenant of one of the state's numerous rent-control buildings is the possibility that he might be homeless by the turn of the century.

"I have been living here for more than 50 years. Where can I go if they evict me before my low-cost house is ready?" he wondered.

Lee - who lives with his elder brother, son and niece - pedals his trishaw to Swettenham Pier on Tuesdays and Thursdays to await tourists disembarking from cruise liners.

His passengers nowadays are mainly tourists from Japan, Britain, Europe and the United States. He takes them to various tourist spots in George Town, and swells with pride each time he shows them Cannon Square's picturesque courtyard and relates to them in his best English the unique features of the temple called the Dragon Mountain Hall.

Lee was born in the house he lives in. Known as *ko san* (in Hokkien, "row sampan") house because his father used to row a boat carrying wares to and from ships docked off the quay, the building belongs to the Leong San Tong Khoo Kongsi.

His present housing predicament is shared by his neighbours, the Tan and Ong families, of which several widows' late husbands were members of the Khoo Kongsi.

Among them is 93-year-old grandmother Khoo Chai Huat, whose father and grandfather were members of the kongsi, and she has lived there since young. All she knows is that the rent has gone up thrice since last year, and will increase again next year.

"It was at first an increase of RM5, then another RM5, and then RM32," she laments.

Chai Huat, who raised her nine children in this house and whose sixth son and his family have remained with her there, remembers a time when the houses in Cannon Square were rented out mainly to Khoo clan members.

Earlier Khoos have died, and most of the tenants now are either their daughters, grandchildren or of other *seh* (in Hokkien, "surname").

"My father was a member of the kongsi, and when my uncle could not find work, he came to the kongsi and was given the job of looking after death matters relating to members," she says, alluding to a time when the association helped new immigrants with lodging and loans until they were financially stable.

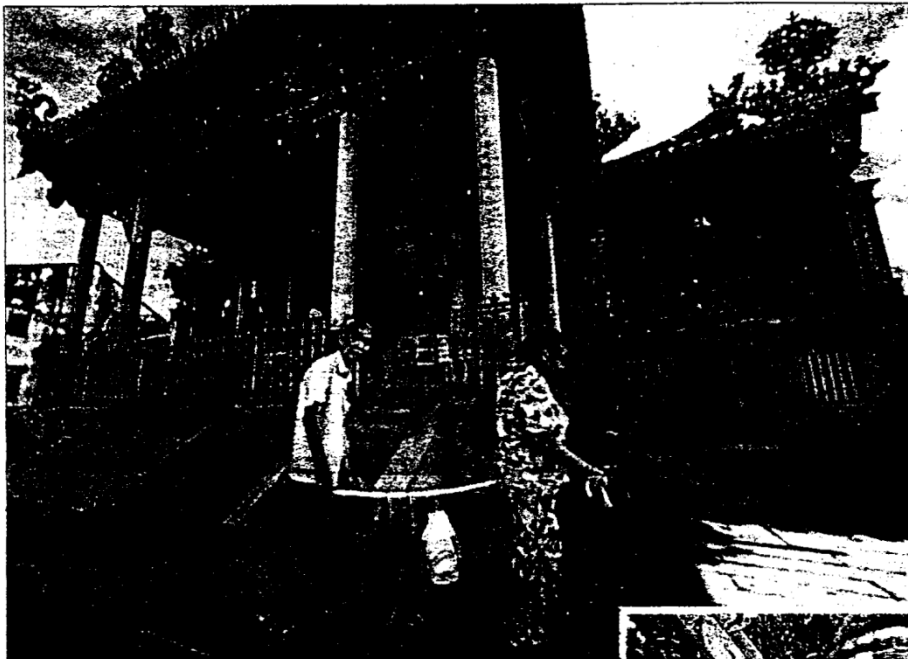
That Lee and Chai Huat should fear being evicted by their associations today is certainly ironic. Clan associations in the late 18th and early 19th centuries played major roles in charity and welfare work. However, as landowners today, these associations could very well jeopardise the welfare of their tenants, including their own clansmen, if they were to pursue higher rentals or lucrative development projects.

The Khoo Kongsi, for instance, owns a total of 144 rent-control premises in town, including about 80 houses in Cannon Square where their temple is located.

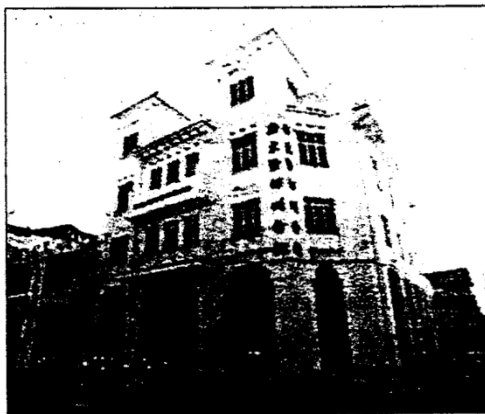
Kongsi chairman Datuk Khoo Keat Siew gave his assurance that "mass eviction" would be highly unlikely. "The kongsi would not evict tenants unnecessarily, unless there

During the 19th and 20th centuries, various Chinese guilds and clans were established in Malaya and the property-rich among them have rented out their premises to kinsmen. Through the years these buildings have become home to generations. Now, with the repeal of the Rent Control Act 1966, tenants fear that these associations which once catered to the welfare of immigrants from China may soon deal a cruel blow to their clansmen by upping rentals and evicting those who can't pay.

At their mercy once more



ABOVE: The majestic square of the Khoo Kongsi temple; RIGHT: Inside the temple, ornate carvings and lanterns adorn the ceilings.



Home to Penang Kwangtung and Tengchow association, the oldest provincial association in Malaysia and Singapore.

are definite plans to develop the buildings."

He says the kongsi's board of 22 trustees (there should be 28, but six seats are vacant owing to technicalities) had not brought up development plans for the houses in town although preliminary talks have been held on the rehabilitation of Cannon Square.

The kongsi has received a joint-venture proposal for the heritage development of the Square, comprising mid-price hotels, crafts shops and restaurants surrounding the

resplendent Dragon Mountain Hall, or *Leong San Tong* in Hokkien, which draws an average of 300 tourists daily. This project, if implemented, would affect the tenants of some 80 houses in the courtyard.

"The trustees have only started discussing the proposal, so no decision has been made about the tenants yet," says Keat Siew.

With the state's undertaking to preserve heritage enclaves in inner George Town, it is

understood that the Acheh-Armenian street enclave, in which the Khoo Kongsi is situated, will be a catalyst for the development of other enclaves because of its historical and cultural significance.

The Khoo Kongsi, one of the richest in Penang today, was established in 1835 and has about 5,000 Khoo clansmen registered. Its membership is not open to just any male with the surname Khoo, but exclusively the descendants of Khoo Chian Eng who lived in Sin Kang village in Hai Teng district, Fujian Province, in the 1400s.

Over the years, the kongsi has given out more study grants to students for primary up to university education. Keat Siew says the kongsi has also given a 5% discount to members buying property for the first time in Bandar Baru Air Itam, where the kongsi had a joint venture with the Farlim group for a 140ha mixed township development.

"We have provided over RM2mil in discounts since the development started in 1983," says kongsi secretary Khoo Kah Seng.

Khoo is one of the *Goh Tua Seh* (in Hokkien, "five prominent clans") in Penang, which includes Sek Tong Cheah Si Kongsi, Eng Chuan Tong Tan Kongsi, Kew Leong Tong Lim Kongsi and Har Yang Sit Teik Tong Yeoh Kongsi.

The Cheah Kongsi in Armenian Street is regarded as the second richest clan in Penang; it owns tracts of land in Mount Erskine and 104 prime properties in George Town.

Like the Khoos, the Cheah Kongsi has its own clan cemetery. Similarly, membership to the kongsi is restricted to male members from the Shi Tang She village in San Du town, of Hai Cheng district, Zhang Zhou county in Fujian.

Asked about the kongsi's plans for developing its property around town, board of trustees chairman Cheah Jin Teong says the matter has not been "seriously discussed."

"We are adhering to the Government formula of raising rent each year following the repeal of the Rent Control Act

1966 last Sept 1, and if the tenants can't pay, they will have to move out," he says.

But without better incentives from the State, the Cheah Kongsi would not be able to carry out heritage development owing to the lack of funds.

"We will see what happens in the year 2000 after the repeal is in full effect," he adds.

Similarly, the Lim Kongsi - the umbrella association for all Lims irrespective of dialect and origin - also does not have plans to develop its rent-control property. The 135-year-old association owns about 20 houses

in town, and development talks have not been initiated, says its chairman Lim Eng Soon.

Likewise, the Yeoh Kongsi and the Tan Kongsi, which have about 88 properties between them, have no development plans as yet.

While the *Goh Tua Seh* represents the

THOUGH a small state with 1.2 million people, Penang has no less than 100 clan associations — each distinctive by surname, dialect and place of origin.

According to amateur historian Chang Yong Mee, the majority of Hokkiens in Penang originate from the Zang Zhou and Quan Zhou counties/prefectures in China's Fujian province.

There are seven districts in Zang Zhou and five in Quan Zhou, and Penang Hokkiens still refer to them as the *Chit Kuai* (in Hokkien, "seven districts") or *Goh Kuai* ("five districts") respectively.

As most Penang Hokkiens come from Quan Zhou, all five districts have their own associations — namely, the Chin Kang Association, Tong Aun Kim Har Association, Hui Aun Association, Um Khuay Association and Lam Aun Association.

The Cheang Chew Association, on the other hand, represents all seven districts of Zang Zhou as a county association. It was set up in 1928 and can still be found in Sun-gui Ujong Road.

The majority of Hokkiens from Zang Zhou come from the Hai Teng district, says Chang.

Penang Hokkien Association executive secretary Tan Thean Whye says that although the Zang Zhou Hokkiens arrived in Penang first, there are more Quan Zhou Hokkiens in the state today.

Ironically, although the state has more Hokkien Chinese today, the Penang Hokkien Association, comprising 14 affiliates, was only set up in 1967.

The oldest clan/provincial association in Malaysia is the Kwangtung And Tengchow Association, set up in 1795. It comprises 18 members from the Kwangtung association and one from the Tengchow association.

The Hokkiens attached much importance to lineage, and organised

Age-old call of the clans



Har Yang Sit Teik Tong Yeh Kongsì on Victoria Street.

still maintain their traditional practices, especially ancestral worship. With this comes the elementary practice of admitting only male members through whom the clan name will be passed on from generation to generation.

The association's properties and general administration are taken care of by a board of trustees, who are usually either appointed or elected for life, while members of the executive committee (consisting of board trustees) are elected once every one or two years.

Clan members and their wives can have their memorial tablets placed at the association premises after death.

Today, these associations also grant scholarships to their members' daughters, and the names of female graduates are included on an honour list displayed in their premises. — *By Cheah Ui-Hoon*



Khoo Kongsì in Cannon Square.

their clan associations by giving priority to surname or place of origin.

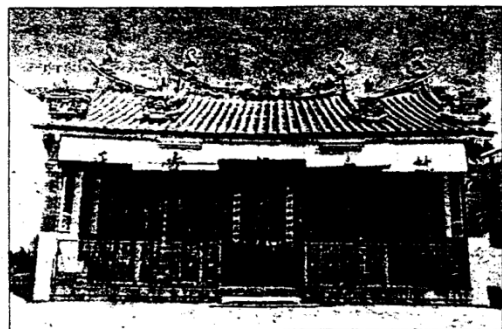
The Cantonese, however, set up their association because there was a need for a body to administer burial matters.

Chang says the first known tomb at the Cantonese cemetery in Mount Erskine dates back to 1795.

Most of the 100 clan associations



Eng Chuan Tong Tan Kongsì on Beach Street.



Kew Leong Tong Lim Kongsì temple on Ah Quee Street.

Slumbering dragons in the city

● FROM PAGE 5

major Hokkien clans in Penang, the Cantonese clan associations come under the umbrella of the Kwangtung And Tengchow Association.

This 203-year-old association, which holds the distinction of being the oldest in Malaysia and Singapore, has plans to build a budget hotel in Sri Bahari Road, having applied for the decontrolling of eight premises before the Rent Control Act 1966 was repealed.

Except for two cases of preliminary development involving not more than 100 rent-control premises owned by the Khoo Kongsì and the Kwangtung And Tengchow Association, the clans are maintaining a "caretaker" role for the properties acquired by their ancestors since the mid-1800s. Hence, commercial and residential tenants of buildings owned by the various clans need not worry about eviction for at least the next four to five years.

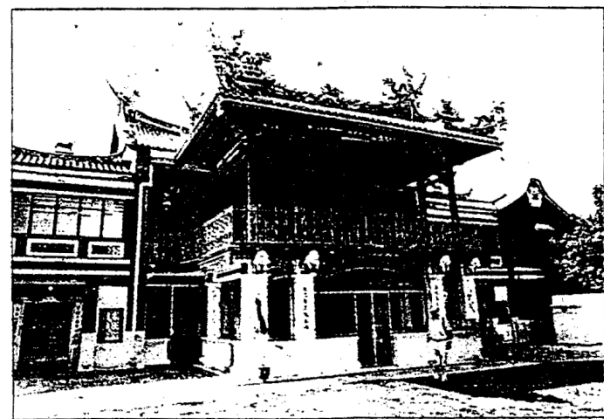
Coming up with new direction and plans for the rent-control properties is not that simple as there is a fair amount of bickering and politicking when trustees do not see eye-to-eye. Because trustees are appointed for life, more than half of them are now aged above 60.

Younger Chinese are not getting involved with the associations, seeing that time and events have overtaken the primary role of the associations, that is to render assistance and financial security to new arrivals from China.

With the decline of the clans' glorious era of expansion and acquisition over the past 150 years, what we are left with today are slumbering dragons in George Town city.

Nevertheless, with rising interest in local history, and Penang's push toward cultural and historical tourism, the new millennium might yet redefine their roles and functions.

Still, the question remains: how long can the tenants hold out?



Sek Tong Cheah Si Kongsì on Armenian Street.

Convent needs more funds for repairs

PENANG: Convent Light Street, the oldest girls' school in the country, has appealed for more funds — this time to replace its corroded water and sewerage pipes and the old electrical wiring at its blocks.

Save the Convent Light Street Fund Committee chairman Wong Kam Fuat said yesterday that RM2.1mil had been raised and used to repair and restore the school buildings.

However, he said that the amount collected was still short of the targeted RM2.95mil.

"More than RM2.95mil might be needed due to rising construction cost."

"The school is so old, many

buildings are now in a dilapidated condition and extensive repairs and maintenance are required to make them safe for students.

"We also have to change the old pipes and wiring system for which we need about RM1mil," he said after the opening of *Appreciate the Convent Day* by Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon.

Wong said about 14,000 stainless steel bookmarks engraved with the school motto were sold out six weeks ago to raise money for the school.

Thousands of people came for the *Appreciate the Convent Day* which was held to appreciate the staunch support of sponsors.

The public also had a chance to view how their contributions had helped to repair and restore the school.

The committee thanked all donors which included multi-national companies and construction firms, hotels, community service clubs, associations and former students.

The 146-year-old school took on a carnival atmosphere yesterday with 110 food and games stalls set up in the school blocks and compound.

Interested visitors were also given guided heritage tours of the convent which included the residence of Captain Francis Light, the Navy House.

Koh: Community can save heritage

By ANG SU CHING and JESSINTA TAN

PENANG: Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said the Save the Convent Light Street Campaign was testimony that community effort could contribute tremendously to towards heritage conservation.

The campaign had helped to preserve a very important educational institution of historical significance to Penang, he said yesterday.

"We should also pay tribute to the generations of sisters as their sacrifices and services have contributed greatly," he said.

Dr Koh said steps should be taken now to ensure the school remained as a heritage institution.

"After the restoration exercise, we should enhance Convent Light Street and ensure it stays as a heritage institution," he said at the *Appreciate the Convent Day* at the school grounds.

Dr Koh said many ex-



GLORY DAYS ... Dr Koh looking at photographs from the convent school's past with school board chairman Sister Francis de Sales and fund committee chairman Wong Kam Fuat.

students, who had emulated the spirit of dedication of the missionary sisters, now held important positions in society.

"It is this spirit of dedication, displayed by the

sisters when they cared for the poor and needy, which has made the lives of many ex-students meaningful and outstanding," he added.

Dr Koh noted that the

earlier target of RM2.95mil would not be enough to save the school due to rising costs.

"The public, especially ex-students, should top up the figure," he added.

檳古跡信託租借

吁當局處理入遷古

(檳城十九日蔡昌偉報導) 檳城古跡信託須要一個家!創立於約1986年的檳城古跡信託(Penang Heritage Trust)將在本月尾須遷出其任加拉至律的租借會所,而暫可能面對無栖身地處境。

檳城古跡信託執行秘書邱思尼今日向本報指出,檳州首長丹斯里許子根博士及檳島市政局主席丁福南醫生皆在上個月首肯,以讓檳城古跡信託遷入打銅仔街檳城古跡中心(即 Syed Alatas Mansion)作為栖身之處,不過至今仍未獲當局的正面回應,所以遷入無期。

他表示,他們在準備遷入檳城古跡中心面對一些當局行政上的要求,導致遷入受阻,一些指示也與市長的指示相違。他表示加拉至律的會所在租期屆滿後,業主終止新租約,針對此事他們曾在上個月與首長及市長在接觸中披露上述處境,首長及市長皆首肯讓檳城古跡信託遷入檳城古跡中心,且免繳租金,這無疑對愛好古跡者一大佳訊。

他表示其實遷入現檳城古跡中心將方便檳城古跡信託的工作,而且也將充分利用古



會若一切順利,將遷入古跡中心。

跡中心的空間,這里查詢檳城古跡訊息。

邱氏指出,目前他們中心的工作,讓他們在本

Lecturer: Study impact of rent control repeal

By SIRA HABIBU and BONG SOO BEE

PENANG: There is an urgent need to visualise the impact of rent control repeal on Penang's "shophouse culture" and the people's livelihood, according to a German lecturer.

Darmstadt University of Technology's Mai-Lin Tjoa-Bonatz said yesterday the authorities should compile the socio-economic data on the occupants of pre-war houses who would be affected by the impending repeal.

She said it was pertinent that such studies were done to help visualise the adverse impact of repeal on people's livelihood.

A Historical Geographical Information System computer tool developed by the university could be used to visualise the impact of rent control repeal on the socio-demographic structure.

Mai-Lin who had conducted a socio-demographic microanalyses of central neighbourhoods in

George Town since 1992, said sociological fieldwork analyses had been neglected in the past years.

"A comprehensive urban history of Penang is yet to be written," she said after giving a talk on *Inner City Area of George Town since 1900* organised by the Pusat Warisan Pulau Pinang.

Mai-Lin, who is working on her PhD thesis on the same topic, said the local authorities could set up an archive to compile data on Penang's urban history and to facilitate map collection.

"The state can make use of the existing data based on my PhD study, and use the specialised computer tool to update the data regularly," she said, adding thematic maps could be drawn based on the data collection.

She also urged the local council to establish regulations to protect the inner city neighbourhood from being eroded by the market force following the repeal.

880.38-16



古蹟將從拉登律遷入現址城古

城古蹟...資訊中心，以方便公眾

關方面加快處理讓他們遷入橫城古蹟
前可遷入新會所。#

Heritage Trust 'satisfied with PDC's apology'

New
Straits
Times
Sat 6 June

PENANG, Fri. — The Penang Heritage Trust said today it was happy that the Penang Development Corporation had admitted its mistake and apologised for the demolition of seven waterfront pre-war buildings belonging to the E & O Hotel in Le

Koon yesterday that PDC had admitted its take and apologised for demolition of the buildi

Koh, who is also the chairman, said appropriate action would be taken against any official found to have flouted the regulations.

The Penang Island Municipal Council had issued a notice on April 8 to PDC-appointed contractor for the illegal demolition of the buildings.

Koh said the corporation would act firmly against anybody, including PDC, if they had violated the laws.

The pre-war building comprises four units of vernacular staff quarters, former Public Works Department district engineering office, a watchman's quarters and a garage which stood on State land.

It was reported last month that the demolition of the buildings was made way for a five-storey, a joint venture between PDC and YTL Group.

He added the Heritage Trust was concerned about the procedures adopted by those involved in the demolition of pre-war buildings.

He was commenting on a statement by Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu



ORNATE DOORWAY ... Chin Ho's residence, built in 1908, later came to be known as Birch House

Closure of smelter marks end of era

By Shukor Rahman

AFTER operating for 90 years, the Escoy Smelting Sdn Bhd tin ore smelting factory in Penang closed down at the end of March.

The 7.7ha plant in Jalan Datuk Keramat shut down its furnaces and will spend the next two months clearing up. It will open a plant in Phuket, South Thailand, to take advantage of the cheaper labour there.

Escoy managing director Datuk Nazir Ariff said the decision to move to Phuket was made a few years ago.

Among the reasons were that the Penang plant was located right in the city centre, and also the fact that there was a shortage of tin ore resulting in very little smelting being carried out.

Nazir said the services of the 500 workers had been terminated. The company, he said, has yet to decide on development plans for the former smelting site.

Escoy, whose parent company is Amalgamated Metal Corporation Private Ltd, London, was formerly known as Datuk Keramat Smelting and prior to that as Eastern Smelting when it was established in 1908.

This international tin smelting concern began as Seng Kee Tin Smelting Works in 1897, and its founder was Lee Chin Ho, the first Chinese smelter to adopt the use of European reverberatory furnaces.

Tin was transferred from the company's mines at Copeng, Perak, and also from the mines of South Thailand and smelted into ingots for re-export.



WORKING TOUGH ... Two workers strapping tin ingots at Eastern Smelting in the 1960s

In 1907, the company was floated as Eastern Smelting, a limited liability company with a capital of \$500,000, attracting North Malaya's largest tin magnates to its board, including the renowned Khaw family.

Chin Ho lived in a building built in 1908 which

later came to be known as Birch House, while his relatives and workers lived in the surrounding row of houses in Chin Ho Square.

It is believed that the house was named after Sir Ernest Woodford Birch who was the British Resident of Perak from

1904 until he retired in 1911.

Birch was the eldest son of J.W.W. Birch, the Straits Settlement colonial secretary and British Resident of Perak who was assassinated in Pasir Salak in November 1875.

Chin Ho gave up his stake in the firm in 1910 but continued to live at Birch House until it was taken over as the company offices in the 1930s.

It was given a modern facade after the war. The back door conveniently leads to the smelting-works proper.

Birch House was renovated in 1963 with the front porch demolished and a new roof laid on. The Chinese architecture of the house was also preserved.

In 1983, the company spent RM30,000 to repair a gold leaf inlaid arch in the hallway. Chin Ho had imported the arch from China and it was made without the use of screws or nails, and just fits together.

The tin works, located in the vicinity of the old Kampung Jawa village, conveniently employed Javanese labour.

When the factory expanded, more workers were brought in from Java, and these later arrivals extended the neighbourhood, establishing Kampung Jawa Baru next to Kampung Jawa Lama.

The company was renamed Datuk Keramat Smelting Sdn Bhd in 1974.