



PHT Newsletter

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**PENANG
HERITAGE
TRUST**

*Persatuan
Warisan
Pulau
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PHT

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26 Church Street, City of George Town, 10200 Penang, Malaysia

Tel: 604-2642631 | Fax: 604-2628421

Email: info@pht.org.my | Website: www.pht.org.my

Editorial

Much time has passed since the last issue of the Newsletter, time that has allowed us to reflect on developments in Penang and George Town. Some developments have been positive but others have not. There has been a surge in the number of tourists. They are drawn by the unique historic and cultural attractions of this very special island and its World Heritage city. They come from elsewhere in Malaysia and from all over the world, increasingly from Asia. They wander the streets of George Town on foot -- the best way to explore any city. They are also availing themselves of the welcome availability of bicycles provided throughout the city by entrepreneurs whose rent-a-bike businesses have unexpectedly mushroomed over the past year. The appearance of novel and imaginative street art has also been a product of the tourist influx as well as an added attraction.

We applaud the apparent success of the local authorities in removing the scourge of swiftlet breeding from George Town, a practice threatening public health as well as the city's World Heritage listing. At the same time, a mixed blessing of Penang's growing attraction as a visitor and business destination includes the proliferation of boutique hotels, not all of which meet the standards of George Town World Heritage status, many touting "heritage" as an unwarranted trademark. The dramatic increase in the number of cars on the city's narrow streets poses a constant danger to pedestrians and bicycles alike and reduces some areas of the historic city to almost perpetual gridlock. The designation of pedestrian precincts in the core zone cannot be avoided much longer and would be a boon to local businesses and visitors alike.

Sadly, we continue to witness the construction of multi-storey tower blocks in areas of Penang that simply do not have the road infrastructure to support such unbridled development. Pulau Tikus is a case in point, a hitherto vibrant community that is rapidly losing its allure because residential streets as well as main roads have been turned into one-way thoroughfares with scant regard for the interests of pedestrians, residents and local shopkeepers. The new one-way system appears designed primarily for the convenience of a new

monster condo-cum-shopping complex. Even bus routes have had to be altered. Meanwhile, high-density tower-block construction continues apace in the already congested area around the Pulau Tikus market.

A side of Penang often overlooked or taken for granted is its historic identity as a seaport, the original reason it exists at all as a human settlement. People first came to Penang by sea, to fish and then to trade. An article in this issue by two travellers who regularly visit Penang aboard their yacht reminds us of Penang's maritime heritage. They come ashore at the Clan Jetties and they view Penang from the sea, their visits governed by monsoon and tide, recalling the era of Chinese junks, Arab dhows, East Indiamen and ocean liners. They remind us that the sea still plays a part in the life of Penang whether most people now arrive by bridge or by air. The harbour ferries continue to carry pedestrians, motorcyclists and cars as well as railway passengers. The navigation channel must still be dredged and kept open for freighters and cruise ships and the effects of ambitious land reclamation on tidal flows must be calculated and weighed carefully.

Indeed, plans to reclaim land from the sea confront Penang with one of its biggest public policy challenges ever. Few seem to be aware, however, that work may soon start on the reclamation of the seabed off the already reclaimed area now known as Seri Tanjung Pinang. That project obliterated Pantai Molek near Tanjung Tokong and turned the Gurney Drive shore into a huge mudflat at low tide. The new project aims to create a vast artificial island extending into Penang's remaining unbridged commercial shipping waterway. Is this project the subject of public scrutiny and debate? Far from it, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been available in three large volumes at the MPPP but has received scant publicity and little public reaction is expected by the March deadline for submissions. The mainstream media have been silent and discussion has been limited to a couple of online news commentators.

Editor

VISITING PENANG BY YACHT

We've lived and voyaged aboard our steel ketch **Labarque** since 1990. We left England in 1993. After 12 years messing about in the Pacific we first sailed to Penang in 2008.

For us the northeast monsoon is the best time to visit Penang. During the southwest monsoon, from May until November, we head for the drier East Coast of the Peninsula and on to Borneo. This year we plan to carry on east to the Celebes.

From the south, George Town is about 75 miles from Lumut and Pulau Pangkor. At our average cruising speed of 5 knots (5 nautical miles or about 10 km/hour) this is too far to sail in daylight. Fortunately there is an easy anchorage between Pulau Rimau and Penang Island that is safe to approach in the dark. Eccentrically lit (and occasionally unlit) fishing boats, however, make sailing at night a sometimes unnerving experience. It pays to keep a very good lookout. From the Pulau Rimau anchorage the route to George Town passes under both bridges, which have an authorised clearance of 25 metres from sea level.

When arriving from the north, it's usually better to split the voyage from Langkawi to Penang into two day-trips. Bamboo fish aggregation devices (known to yacht crews as "aggravation" devices) clutter the route. They barely show on radar and are often fouled with ropes and nets that can tangle a propeller. A favourite overnight stop is Pulau Bunting, 30 miles from George Town and 40 miles from Kuah, Langkawi's main town. Pulau Bunting is attached to the Kedah mainland just north of Kedah Peak (Gunung Jerai) with a mysterious mile-long bridge that ends in a gate on the small jungle-clad island. The local lads use it for drag racing. Does anyone know why it was built?

George Town is sometimes visible from Pulau Bunting. After a dawn start it's usual to arrive a little after mid day, or a bit earlier if the tide is favourable. The flood tide runs south. From the sea the newly extended Waterfall Hilltop temple is striking against the green hills, whereas the golden pagodas of the Thai and Burmese temples are almost lost amidst unsympathetic high-rise developments in Pulau Tikus. Near Swettenham Pier, a red port-hand buoy marks the resting place of the Russian cruiser **Zhemchug** sunk by the German raider **Emden** in 1914. We ignore the **Zhemchug's** buoy as both the mud and the wreck are too deep to bother us. But the wreck is still a threat to monster cruise ships like the 91,000 ton and 26 feet draught **Celebrity Millennium** that recently visited Penang.



*Russian cruiser 'Zhemchug'
sunk in Penang Harbour, 1914*

The most convenient place to 'park' used to be the Tanjong City Marina, just north of the George Town/ Butterworth ferry terminal. Alas, this marina was built without a protective seawall. After little more than five years of silting and steady disintegration it was closed in 2012. During a storm in April 2013, ferry traffic was held up by bits of broken marina that blocked the terminal. All the surviving marina docks and gangways were subsequently removed. A new marina was promised in 2012 but there's no sign of it yet. An earlier attempt to build a yacht marina without a seawall was equally unsuccessful.

The sad remains of the Penang Yacht Club opposite Fort Cornwallis can still be seen just north of Swettenham Pier. The large travel-lift (mobile crane) that was to lift yachts ashore for repairs is now doing sterling service at a boatyard in Kudat, near the northwest corner of Sabah.



*Derelict Penang Yacht Club, 2014
Photograph by L.A.K. James*

There are two other marinas in Penang. The privately owned Straits Quay has a proper seawall, is professionally managed and is very popular. But it's also small and visitors need to book well in advance. This marina was designed as a glamorous centrepiece for an upscale property development. Shiny fibreglass is very welcome, but external repairs (which usually create noise and dust) are firmly discouraged. This marina is therefore of little use for those of us with old boats that need constant maintenance.

Penang's other marina is managed by the Jabatan Laut (the government's 'Marine Department') and is just south of the original Penang Bridge. It is small and invariably full with long-stay yachts. There used to be a primitive privately owned marina near the boatyard at Batu Maung, but that has long since disappeared.



*Hauling Out at Batu Maung
Photograph by P. Southall*

Fortunately it is possible to anchor off Penang's east coast. Pulau Jerejak provides very good shelter in waters that were once used by Imperial Airways flying boats. Shore access by dinghy is adequate, and Queensbay Mall is nearby. But it's a long bus-ride to George Town.

Our favourite is the quaintly named Junk Anchorage off the Chew Jetty, south of the ferry terminal. We try to anchor as close to shore as possible, where there is just enough water to stay afloat during the lowest spring tides. The mud is soft in places and there are centuries of detritus and wreckage to foul an anchor. But it's usually possible to find adequate holding. There's always something going on. For example, in 2009 we were moored in the Tanjong City Marina when an old wooden ship in the Junk Anchorage caught fire. It burned through its cable and drifted on the ebb tide to the ferry terminal where it ignited the tyres used as fenders and then headed for the marina. The heat was so intense that it wobbled our view of the

yellow container cranes at Butterworth. To our relief, brave men on the fireboat towed the blazing hulk away and then sank it. Within a day the highly efficient Jabatan Laut had marked the wreck. Have you noticed that red and black buoy just east of the ferry terminal, with two black balls as a topmark? That's an isolated danger mark. No prizes for guessing what lurks underneath.



*Fireship in Penang Harbour, 2009.
Photograph by Kari Hallidorsen, Yacht 'Lady Ann'*

In early 2013 we could use the one remaining dock at Tanjong City Marina to get ashore. Now we are very kindly permitted to use the Chew Jetty via concrete steps maintained by a water-taxi operation. Our dinghies need stern anchors to keep them off the Jetty, not least because there are razor-sharp oysters that could easily puncture an inflatable. There is also access ashore via the other Clan Jetties, but only when the tide is high.

Today, in early February 2014, seven yachts from Australia, Belgium, France, the UK and the USA share the Junk Anchorage. Just to the south, twelve small wooden Indonesian freighters are tied to a single mooring. In the distance, tankers, tugs and barges are anchored and full-size bulkers are discharging onto lighters, just as they did in Conrad's day. Offshore from the yachts, wooden ships from Burma are unloading charcoal and cheroots. Later they'll be loading ex-hotel mattresses, old-fashioned vacuum-tube TVs, VCRs, battered wheelchairs and children's bicycles. The shuttling workboats are sometimes piled so high with mattresses that the helmsman can't see forward and has to be guided by a colleague in the bow. In 2013 there was a sudden run on onions, garlic and chilies. Fragrant white and purple bags were piled high on the Chew Jetty. The BBC reported that the Indonesian government was trying to protect farmers by banning selected imports. The result was a sudden spike in prices and for Penang a thriving export business in smuggled vegetables.

Just north, the ferries reliably shuttle back and forth. They are often teeming with foot passengers and little motorbikes. On most voyages there's at least one car alarm blaring, presumably upset by unauthorised movement. In 2012, the southern terminal had some kind of rupture and only the northern terminal was open for business. It took over a year to repair, but both terminals are now operating normally. The clocks on the beautiful Wisma Kastam (former Malayan Railways building) and the green art-deco Wisma MTT are ticking and chiming, and, as an innovation, have recently approximately agreed with each other. In the distance, the intermittently rotating restaurant on the Bayview Hotel peeks over the Lee Jetty. Away to the south, a corner of the town landfill is just visible over a small and scruffy shipyard. At night the low-cost housing blocks south of the jetties are ablaze with light. Further afield, glamorous apartment blocks seem mostly unoccupied with only stairwells and the occasional room illuminated. Close by the empty apartments, lights on busy tower-cranes look like steep highways up Penang Hill. And the out-of-scale Komtar looms over all, its upper floors lit gold for the Chinese New Year.

There is always something to see for the constant stream of tourists visiting the Chew Jetty. Where else could one expect to find 75 private houses, two temples, a water taxi terminal, moored workboats, busy shops selling snacks and tourist fripperies, a freight-handing wharf and a yacht dinghy dock - all cheerfully sharing the same creaking wooden structure built on piles over the mud?

It's a short walk from the Chew Jetty to the familiar sights and sounds of George Town. After breakfast at Kassim Mustafa's on Chulia Street or Vellu Villas on Penang Street we'll set off to the morning market on Carnarvon Street and on to the shops and businesses that have kept **Labarque** going over the years. The Yee Loong Foundry on Kimberly Street has antique machine tools but does excellent work. Jainool Abdeen used to run a wire-rope splicing business across the road from Tanjong City Marina, but sold his land to the new Rice Miller Hotel. S.M. Badjenid & Son make our canvas hatch covers and we're hoping to persuade them one day to try repairing our sails. Ong Liang Ching, the 'Chemical Man' at 352 Chulia Street, is the source of a wide range of unguents of various toxicities. Ban Woh Lee Foundry on Armenian Street Ghaut* makes steel anchors for the fishing fleet. Thye Huat is our first call for electrical bits and pieces, while Lai Saik Kum, also on Rope Walk (Jalan Pintal Tali), fixes starter motors and alternators on an equipment-strewn oil-stained pavement. Pen Marine is a yacht chandler on Weld Quay, run by the same company that owns

the Limbongan Batu Maung (LBM) boatyard. We've successfully hauled out twice at LBM, although the facilities are not as glamorous as some of those on Langkawi. We buy teak for our decks from Mr. Sun Swee Lin on Jalan CY Choy and our epoxy glue from HLF Fishing Supplies on Beach Street. Ms Chew in Bayan Lepas does our stainless steel fabrication and we frequent 'hardware alley' (just across Chulia Street from Love Lane) for tools and the methanol (locally called 'spirit') that we burn in our gimbaled stove. Then, on our way home laden with supplies, we'll stop for block ice at a little shop on the Chew Jetty, run, unsurprisingly, by a Mr. Chew. George Town is our favourite port city. It would benefit greatly from a new properly designed public marina for visiting yachts, or at the very least an all-tide floating dock for the Junk Anchorage. But the lack won't stop us planning to try and return every season, for years to come.

By Patrick Southall & Elizabeth Fowler



Patrick Southall heads to **Labarque** from Chew Jetty. Photograph by L.A.K. James

*Editor's Note: George Town may be alone among Malaysian cities and towns using the word *ghaut* (or *ghat*) for some streets. Recalling Penang's origins as an East India Company port settlement, *ghaut* is a Hindi word meaning landing place or quay. (H. Yule & A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: The Anglo-Indian Dictionary*, Ware, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Classics, 1996 – first published 1886) Singapore, of course, has its *Dhoby Ghaut*.



Dawn at former Tanjong City Marina Photograph by P. Southall

ACTION AT LAST

Penang Heritage Trust has been campaigning to ban swiftlet-breeding in the George Town World Heritage Site for the past six years for reasons that include threat to public health, illegal works to heritage buildings and endangering our UNESCO World Heritage status. We have written hundreds of letters, attended dozens of meetings and kept up the pressure on UNESCO, the Penang State Government, the MPPP and other authorities.

At the beginning of 2014 the State Government announced the successful removal of swiftlet farms from the UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Penang Heritage Trust has congratulated the State Government on its action in the last months of 2013 and has called on the State Government to ensure that George Town World Heritage Inc. (GTWHI), the WHS area manager, not only commits to the continued monitoring of the situation but also assigns specific officers to this task in order that all this hard work does not go to waste. Penang Heritage Trust has also been encouraged by the State Government's statement emphasising the importance of maintaining the heritage status of George Town.

Penang Heritage Trust is concerned that if strict monitoring is not continued, swiftlet farms will just carry on after the fuss has died down. Closing down a swiftlet house is not simply about knocking out the blocked windows. The birds have to be kept out and have to be barred from entering the property. This can only be done if the unblocked windows and old entrances are then netted off. Swiftlets have an inbuilt homing system that keeps them going back to the place where they have hatched, very much like sea turtles.

Penang Heritage Trust will continue to assess the swiftlet house situation and will record any changes of use in the buildings that were previously used for swiftlet farming. PHT is of the view, however, that the onus is on the State authorities to follow through in order to maintain the UNESCO World Heritage Site. PHT will continue to forward input and findings to the authorities in support of their work.

Rebecca Duckett-Wilkinson
PHT Council Member

STAFF RESIGNATION

It is with great regret that PHT received the resignation of Ho Sheau Fung as Office Manager effective 31st December 2013. Active for several years in Penang's arts and cultural life, Sheau Fung joined PHT in 2004 and soon became the backbone of the organisation, supporting Council members, mentoring interns, maintaining links with state and local government departments and agencies, and managing a wide and complex range of projects. Her breadth and depth of knowledge, her dependability and her good humour will be missed. We wish her well in all her future endeavours.

CORRECTION

The article on the Chung Thye Phin Villa in **Newsletter** No. 103, May 2013 contained some errors for which we apologise. We misspelt the name of our gracious guide Ong Ching-Yin in the photograph credits. We also misspelt the name of Yin's brother-in-law, the writer Boyd Anderson, mistakenly referring to him as her cousin-in-law. Boyd Anderson regularly visits Penang and was in George Town in May 2013 to promote his new book **Amber Road** (Monsoon Books, Singapore, 2013) which is set in Singapore during the Second World War.

We should like to thank Yin for clarifying a few points about Chung Thye Phin. Not only was he the last Kapitan China in Perak but he was also the last Kapitan China anywhere in the country. Moreover, he was unique in following his father Chung Keng Kwee as Kapitan China as this was not a hereditary position.

PULAU TIKUS CROSS-CURRENTS



High-rise looms over Pulau Tikus market

Saturday morning walks to Pulau Tikus Market along Bangkok Lane remain at the heart of our weekly life in Pulau Tikus. With its two rows of elegant semi-detached houses the street is a stunning testament to its founder Cheah Leong Kah who built the houses for his family in 1928. While

some are still occupied by Cheah's descendants, most are rented to commercial establishments (why the demand for so many beauty parlours, spas or fashion shops in Penang?) or serve as up-market B-and-B hostleries. Fortunately, the Cheah trust managing the properties keeps a tight rein on the display of garish or unsightly advertising signs, preventing them for marring the street's heritage appeal. Fewer tenants, however, exhibit the pride in their gardens of shrubs that was common with previous residential tenants such as the botanist couple Simon Gardner and Pindar Sidisunthorn who once lived on the street and collaborated with Lai Ee May in producing the beautiful book **Heritage Trees of Penang**.



Bangkok Lane

Behind the row of houses on the eastern side of Bangkok Lane is a block of land occupied by the Thai Buddhist temple Wat Chaiya Mangkalaram with its

gleaming golden stupa as well as a Thai cemetery and a Thai kampong. While the land was a grant to the temple trustees by Queen Victoria in 1845, there is concern that the future of the kampong may be under threat from developers.

At the corner of Bangkok Lane and Burmah Road is our favourite *kopitiam* where award-winning hawkers vie for the best *Mamak mee* or *Hokkien mee* or you can order *satay babi* from a trishaw-hawker ("two-four-six" every week as he says, meaning Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings). *Roti bakar kaya* toasted on a charcoal brazier at the Malay stall across the street is also something special. At the nearby corner of Moulmein Road another *kopitiam* has stalls boasting the best *Sabah pan mee* and *wonton mee*. Our daughters come all the way from London and Cardiff especially for these treats.



Lorong Kelawei- public or private road?

Despite these constants life in Pulau Tikus continues to be marked by change. Although some change is gradual and noticed mainly in retrospect, the biggest change in 2013 was sudden and happened overnight. This was the change of the area's streets from two-way to one-way. The change not only affected the

main roads, Gurney Drive, Kelawei Road and Burmah Road, but also many of the formerly quiet residential cross-streets, forcing the use of awkward and inconvenient roundabout routes for residents and visitors. Speed bumps are needed to make these small residential streets safer for pedestrians.

What has been the overall effect of this change? Commuting is probably easier for drivers passing through Pulau Tikus. It is odd, however, that of the three main roads the new system provides for two, namely Gurney Drive and Burmah Road, to be one-way eastbound while only one, Kelawei Road, is one-way westbound. This results in inordinately heavy traffic on Kelawei Road during evening peak hours as commuters head home-ward to Tanjung Tokong and beyond.

Another effect of creating these one-way arteries has been to turn them into virtual three-lane speed-ways at other times of the day. While pedestrian crossings with traffic lights have been set up at a couple of points on Kelawei Road and on Burmah Road, pedestrian lights are necessary at the Cantonment Road intersections of these two roads.

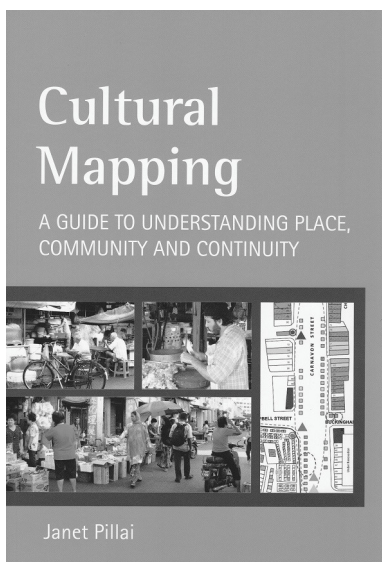


Gurney Drive - new building astride old bungalow

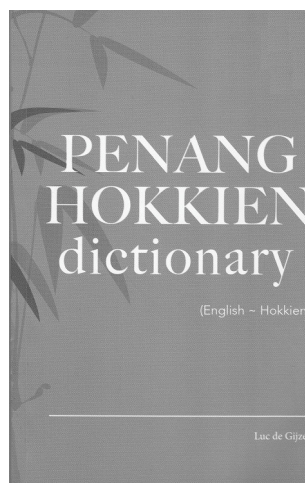
Finally, the proliferation of multi-storey tower blocks in residential neighbourhoods without the infrastructure to support such high-density housing is a continuing concern. The Pulau Tikus market area is a case in point. Elsewhere the opening of a monster shopping and condominium complex on Gurney Drive almost next door to an already existing shopping centre has created massive traffic jams in all directions on weekends. The apparent appropriation of a section of a local side street (Lorong Kelawei off Kelawei Road) as a private laneway adjacent to the new shopping complex is puzzling. Moreover, pedestrians on the Gurney Drive sidewalk in front of this complex face an obstacle course of obstructions built for the convenience of vehicle access. No place for wheelchairs or parents pushing baby-strollers!

Text and photographs by Leslie A.K. James

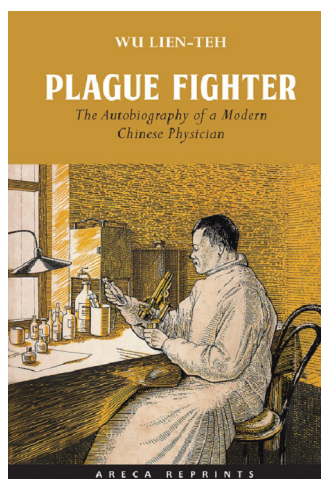
MERCHANDISE



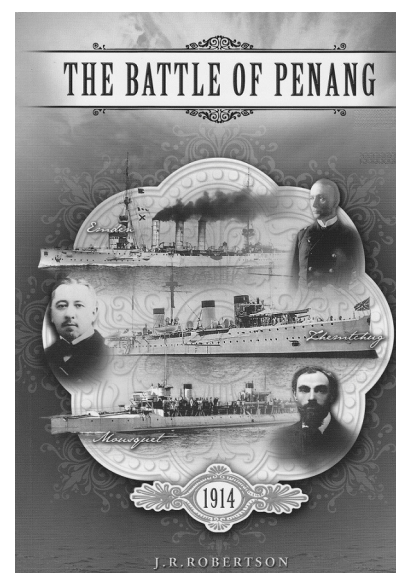
Cultural Mapping by Janet Pillai - RM38



Penang Hokkien dictionary by Luc de Gijzel - RM20



Plague Fighter by Areca, reprints - RM80



The Battle Of Penang by J. R. Robertson - RM35

A VISIT TO LAOS IN SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2013

VIENTIANE

On our arrival at Vientiane airport, the prearranged taxi was waiting for us and we were allowed to check into our guesthouse midway through the morning. We weren't expecting much from our accommodation as it was only rated three-star but to our surprise we found it delightful. Vayakorn Inn was in a quiet back street but well located for walking to most of the highlights in the city centre. The lobby was outstanding, spacious and tastefully decorated and well furnished with traditional Lao-tian furniture using local wood.

Although several of our friends have been unenthusiastic about Vientiane, as are some of the travel guidebooks, we found lots of interesting things to see and do. There is an excellent river walk along the side of the mighty Mekong, a fascinating rehabilitation centre called COPE that looks after the victims of unexploded cluster bombs dropped during the second Indo China War. Laos is the most heavily bombed country per capita in the world; the US Air Force dropped a planeload of bombs every eight minutes for nine years. The number of people still killed and injured annually in Laos by UXO (unexploded ordnance) is 300.

We also walked along the Flood canal, although the pathway was a little overgrown. This took us past the magnificent Presidential Palace and Guest House, the latter still being built. The town is a fascinating mixture of upmarket property and renovated historic property next door to very basic dilapidated shops and living accommodation.

There are many excellent bakeries and restaurants in the city. We patronised two bakeries, Joma and The Scandinavian, which are close to each other and where one can obtain excellent local coffee and pain au *chocolat* amongst other delicacies.

LUANG PRABANG

The flight from Vientiane to Luang Prabang was exceptionally short, only 35 minutes, and we went up in one of the two Airbus 320s that Lao Airlines owns which was only quarter full. The new airport terminal at Luang Prabang was opened only three months before and is outstanding. Our early morning flight booked and paid for three months in advance was cancelled two days before our departure, something that is not, we gather, unusual

for Lao Airlines. It is advisable, therefore, to reconfirm flights shortly before departure. We were put on the next available flight, mid-morning. As in Vientiane, our prearranged taxi was on hand at Luang Prabang airport to take us to our guesthouse, Villa Meuanglao, Ban Pakham.

Once again we had a pleasant surprise with the general appearance of this guesthouse and the quality of furnishings. It was in a quiet backstreet but very close to the morning food market and the evening night market for souvenirs and gifts. Although built in a modern adaption of traditional French colonial /Laotian style, it was only completed two years ago and is family owned and very well run. There are numerous guesthouses in Luang Prabang, which is the major form of accommodation.

Luang Prabang is a very small town with only three major streets and several quaint interconnecting streets. As the whole area is basically flat, it is easy to walk everywhere. If rain intervenes, *tuk tuks* are readily available although it is advisable to ascertain prices from the hotel staff so any bargaining can be on well-informed basis. Luang Prabang consists of 33 villages. As each village from the old days has its own *wat*, there are plenty to visit. The downtown area has UNESCO World Heritage status with many old low-rise buildings, either of French colonial architecture or Lao design, many having lovely wooden verandas and intricate wooden carving near the roofline. The pace of life is slow and traffic minimal. It is possible, therefore, to walk in the middle of the road without getting run over. Apparently the French, when they controlled Indo-China had the saying that "the Vietnamese planted the rice, the Cambodians watched it grow and the Laotians listened to it grow"!

If relaxation is what you are looking for, Luang Prabang is the place. That said, however, it is also a great centre of cuisine. There are dozens of restaurants, majoring in either Lao or French food, and the local beer, Beer Lao, is readily available at low cost (around £1 for a large bottle 640 ml at most Lao restaurants, or almost double that price in some of the French restaurants). There are also several excellent French bakeries. Most of the restaurants and cafes have pleasant outdoor/patio dining areas with plenty of greenery as well as air-conditioned rooms. Apart from viewing the

historic architecture, the Royal Museum (not overly exciting or informative) and eating out every day there were three things that came to the top of our list. 'Big Brother Mouse' on the street between Wat Nong Sikhounmuang and Vat Sensoukharam is a facility for local people to learn English. The idea is that a cross section of the Lao community comes to the centre each day between 9 and 11 a.m. and in the afternoon between 5 and 7 p.m. and visitors or expat residents are encouraged to drop by and converse with the local inhabitants. Lorna and I did this, John conversing with two Buddhist monks and Lorna chatting with two girls, one of whom was from the Hmong tribe who could understand the Lao language but Laotians couldn't understand her.

Our second crowning moment was meeting again one of the former royal princes whom we last met at the George Town Festival in July and who has an interesting background. He lived in one of the three palaces until the 1975 revolution when he moved to France and remained there twenty odd years during which time he studied at the Sorbonne. He returned recently to Luang Prabang to try and keep alive the traditional royal art of gold thread embroidery. To that end he is trying to train young Laotians in this creative endeavour. The oldest wat in Luang Prabang dating from the 15th century was patronised by the royal family for centuries but has fallen more recently into disrepair. The former prince is undertaking the interior decoration of this temple by making stencils of the original gold leaf designs on the internal pillars and repainting them with acrylic gold, a painstaking, difficult and time consuming process. Although Wat Pak Khan, at the end of the peninsula, is currently closed to visitors, we were able to spend an hour with him inside the Wat talking about his art work and current life.

Our third memorable encounter occurred by chance. On one of our walks we came across the Departement Patrimoine Mondial (World Heritage Department). Whilst exploring the grounds of this government department we saw a large schematic map of the protected areas in Luang Prabang and the buffer zone agreed in conjunction with UNESCO officials. Whilst trying to obtain a copy of this map from a junior employee, he asked if we wanted to meet the Director and we said we would be delighted to do this. We then spent 30-45 minutes chatting with the Director about the difficulty of enforcing UNESCO regulations when members

of that organisation do not fully understand or relate to or have little knowledge of Lao culture which is totally different from anything in Western society. The Director himself had an interesting background. He was sent to Moscow to study civil engineering, spending six years there before becoming head of the Public Works Department for Vientiane. Then in his semi-retirement years he has been appointed top man of the Department looking after heritage property in LP.

The week in Laos turned out to be one of the best holidays we have had in recent times. We can thoroughly recommend the country to all our friends and suggest that they be as adventurous as possible when experiencing Lao food while avoiding hawker centres even for fruit juices as hygiene standards are much lower than in Malaysia and Singapore. Bottled water is also advised at all times.

Before organising any trip to Laos, check carefully the seasons because the rains can be very heavy and in the dry season temperatures can be very high (over 40°). Luang Prabang can be very busy at certain times of the year. We chose late September/early October because it is towards the end of the wet season and well ahead of the peak tourist season. For the entire week we had sunny weather every day apart from an hour's rain one day in Luang Prabang. We recommend the Hobo maps of Vientiane and Luang Prabang which name most streets and restaurants and other attractions.

Text and photographs by John and Lorna Taylor



Luang Prabang



Vientiane

FIGHTING TO PRESERVE OUR HERITAGE

The Star, 22 January 2014

Sabahans need to be made aware of the state's historical origins and its architectural legacy.

If you were to ask me what my career ambition was 14 years ago, I would honestly tell you that becoming a heritage advocate was not at all what I had planned for myself the day I graduated with a degree in architecture from Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

Like any bright-eyed fresh university graduate, I aspired to be Somebody Important – maybe even the next top Malaysian architect, designing award-winning buildings and carving out a lucrative career for myself in my chosen profession.

So how did I end up as a heritage advocate in Sabah instead?

Leaving Kota Kinabalu 18 years ago and coming to KL to study, I experienced culture shock at the racial divide and being treated with disdain by some ignorant groups in peninsular Malaysia. It paved the way for my early efforts to learn more about my own Sabahan cultural heritage.

I tried to assert my social identity as a Sabah-born Malaysian in my university and introduce my peninsular Malaysian peers to the history of my people and culture, but my final year dissertation on Sabah traditional houses flopped spectacularly (by my own assessment) due to the lack of known records, precedent studies or references that would have allowed me to showcase the unique qualities of the traditional dwellings from my homestate.

Shockingly, there was little or no material on the subject of architecture in Sabah. Neither the archives nor libraries in both Sabah and peninsular Malaysia had kept much information on Sabah's traditional houses or pre-war buildings.

The lack of available documentation of Sabah's architectural legacy bothered me so much that after returning to Sabah, I decided to take up writing to share my concerns with the general public about the loss of Sabah's historical architecture.

I felt that a dedicated effort to research and compile information on Sabah's traditional houses and historical buildings in particular, was pre-eminent as I did not wish for other Sabahan architectural graduates to be subject to the same mockery that I had experienced at the hands of some peers as a result of a lack of knowledge and available resources on Sabah's history and architecture.

Many Malaysians today are not aware that Sabah – formerly known as North Borneo – was once an equal if not superior counterpart to Malaya as a former colony of the British empire.

Blessed with abundant timber resources, rubber, tobacco, bird's nests and other natural resources coveted by the rest of the world, North Borneo was governed since 1881 by a British chartered company that took the initiative to bring in foreign labour, particularly the Chinese community, into their territories to help them open up the land.

Fuelled by their hopes for a better life – and shackled by their addiction to opium distributed solely by the Chartered Company to control their imported workforce on the North Borneo railway – the Chinese coolies persevered and eventually some became prosperous, setting up businesses within the town area provided by the colonial administrators.

Thrown into the mix were the antics of feuding inland native tribes and the seafaring clans of Borneo deemed pirates by the colonial administrators – and one can imagine an interesting mix of British colonial, Chinese and native architecture in and around the main towns that may have prevailed, had North Borneo not been invaded by the Japanese and completely destroyed by Allied bombings during WWII.

The obliteration of North Borneo's townships has been recorded as the most devastating in the history of the British Empire during WWII. As a result, Sabah today does not have many architectural remnants left from this period of history that accurately portray its past glory as a former colony of the British empire.

Coupled with the fact that our one-sided Malaysian History syllabus does not give equal emphasis to the historical origins of Sabah and Sarawak that later

became partners with Malaya and Singapore to form the foundations of this country, for the past 50 years the people of Borneo have been misunderstood, sidelined and made insignificant – their futures compromised because their true histories were never told or shared on a national level with other Malaysians.

What was more frustrating, however, was at the time, none of the prominent leaders in Sabah seemed to grasp the urgency of documenting Sabah's architectural legacy.

So I decided to take matters into my own hands – I quit architectural practice in 2004, and travelled to remote places in Sabah like Pulau Banggi located off the Tip of Borneo to document rare traditional native dwellings.

A modest study grant from the Tun Fuad Foundation gave me further incentive to pursue this field of research, and a column in a local paper allowed me to share my adventures and thoughts about heritage and architecture with the local masses.

A major turning point for heritage awareness in Sabah was the controversy in 2010 surrounding the Atkinson Clock Tower, the oldest and last surviving colonial structure in Kota Kinabalu – threatened by a commercial shopping mall project that would have severely compromised its status as an iconic heritage landmark of the city.

Thanks to the efforts of heritage supporters (many of whom were Sabah's young adults and youths), the shopping mall project has since been suspended indefinitely.

However, it was also evident that heritage advocacy in Sabah needed a stronger platform for dialogue with the state government – and thus in 2012, the Architectural and Cultural Heritage Society of Sabah, known commonly as Heritage Sabah was formed.

Indeed, Sabah does have laws and policies under the Antiquities and Treasure Trove Enactment 1977 and the Cultural Heritage (Conservation) Enactment 1997 that give an umbrella of protection to cultural and historical sites deemed significant to the state of Sabah.

However, there are no clear guidelines or standard policies yet developed and adopted by the local authorities for the continued preservation and appreciation of these heritage places or how to educate the local community about their importance.

Through the efforts of Heritage Sabah, we hope not only to continue spreading knowledge and a sense of appreciation for heritage buildings and sites in Sabah but to also work with the state government to protect whatever remaining vestiges of local history we have left.

As I see it, the future of Sabah and Sarawak depends primarily on the people's ability to know themselves – and protect their own culture and history that is now under threat of being stamped out to fulfil a certain political agenda. For peninsular Malaysians, should they choose to bridge the decades of discrimination and misunderstanding towards the people of Borneo, the first step is to seek and understand our people's actual history and most importantly accept our cultural differences instead of trying to change us!

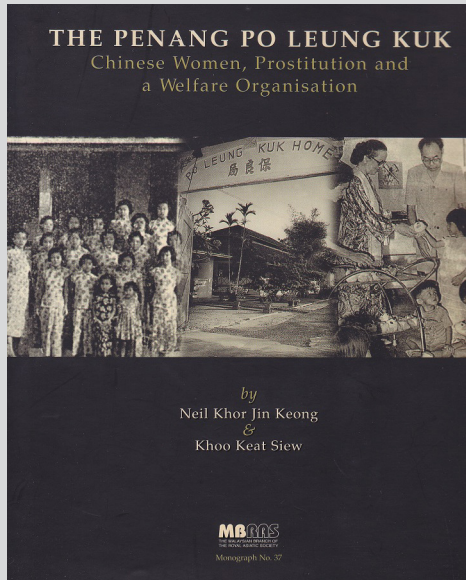
For Sabahans, this is why we must protect our heritage buildings and sites, as they are tangible proof and constant reminders of our cultural identity, our peaceful way of life, our rightful place in our country's history and a promise to a better future that no person, group or government should be allowed to take from us.

By Richard Nelson Sokial

> Richard Nelson Sokial is founder and president of Heritage Sabah, a Kota Kinabalu-based NGO advocating for the protection of historical and cultural buildings and sites in Sabah. The views expressed here are entirely his own.

The Penang Po Leung Kuk: Chinese Women, Prostitution and a Welfare Organisation

By Neil Khor Jin Keong & Khoo Keat Siew. Kuala Lumpur, MBRAS, 2004.



A Society for the Protection of the Innocents

When I was a teenager in the early 1950s my mother used to take me with her to the Po Leung Kuk Home in Babington Avenue. It had a gate with tall wooden doors that would not open until you pulled the rope turning the bell hanging above you to announce your arrival. You were admitted only after someone on the other side looking at you through a hole in the door was satisfied you were bona fide visitors. My mother paid regular visits to the Home even though she was not an official of the Board running the establishment. Her reason was to visit a friend, the Matron, a Chinese woman who had probably been a nurse before.

As a result of these visits, my mother volunteered to teach the young girls swimming. On Sundays, a bus would bring the girls to the old Chinese Swimming Club in Tanjong Bungah. They learned the breast stroke by lying on the sand next to the water's edge and moving their arms and legs like young turtle hatchlings heading into the sea. Over the years the girls became quite proficient, and this gave them

additional confidence in life. I remember one of the girls who was quite good in her studies and was encouraged to enrol in the Nursing School at the General Hospital. She passed and became a full-time nurse. She was called 'Ah Cheng'.

The Home was quite self sufficient; the grounds were turned into vegetable plots and there were rabbits and chickens running about. This must have been a leftover from the Japanese Occupation when everyone resorted to growing food. The need to survive kept stomachs full and minds occupied, if not the souls of these poor exploited girls, who were the inmates of the Home as far back as 1888.

This slim volume is long overdue. The authors must be commended for their collaborative efforts to re-search the Po Leung Kuk's history from the beginning to its ending after Independence. Their purview spans the early history of the Chinese community in Penang and even Perak, starting with the founding of Penang in 1786 right through the Riots of 1857 and 1867 to the mid-twentieth century. The period encompasses early colonial immigration policy, triad society activities, racial and social conflicts, and the laissez-faire trading climate in which women became the pawns of unscrupulous men, ending up as prostitutes or domestic slaves - the *mui tsais* and *cha bokans* of extended Chinese families.

If anything, the establishment of the Home reflects the 'entrepreneurship', if one may call it such, of the very men who came to exploit not only the trading opportunities but also the women that they could not live without. It is also, however, a record of the magnanimity of the well-to-do men of Penang society who had the moral decency to found and support a home for the weaker gender and in the process helped elevate the social status of their community and themselves.

For the post-Merdeka generation, this volume will help introduce some of the leading figures that appear in our local history books from the founding of Penang to 1977 when the Home was closed, having outlived its purpose.

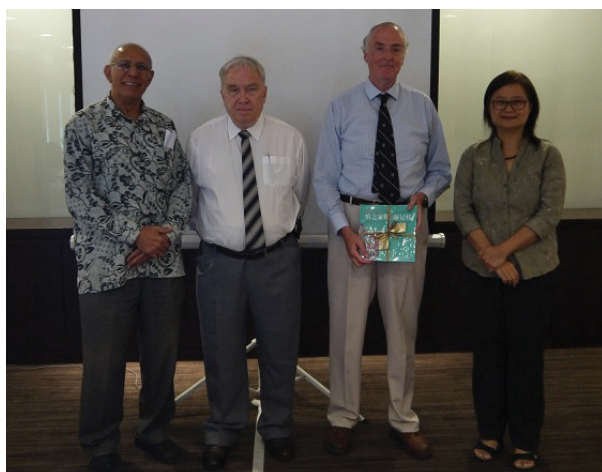
For the more curious social worker of the present generation, the information on the brothels and races of the prostitutes in George Town, Bukit Mertajam, Sungei Bakap, Nibong Tebal and the Dindings for the year 1905 will be quite a revelation as to how our forefathers spent their free time when not slaving after the allure of the Golden Chersonese. The chronicle could have included more personal reminiscences of people connected with the Home, such as former staff, Board members or even former inmates. Archival data gives 'flesh' to the chronicle, but oral commentary or recollection would give the book some 'soul'.

This study adds to our knowledge of Penang's heritage. There is a need for more such writing on Penang's historical institutions and landmarks to help our younger generation understand the values of our cultural heritage in the confusion of today's world. The role of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society and the support of other concerned individuals in the publication of this book is to be commended and appreciated by civil society in Penang and the country as a whole.

By Khoo Soo Hay

PHT EVENTS AND TALKS

TALK ON DR. ALBERT S. McKERN -- A PENANG DOCTOR IN MYTH & REALITY



from left: Dato' Anwar, Michael Rawlinson, Leslie James & Khoo Salma

On Saturday afternoon, 30th November 2013, at the Lone Pine Hotel in Batu Ferringhi, Leslie A.K. James and Michael C. Rawlinson presented the results of their research into the life and legend of Australian physician Dr. Albert Stanley McKern (1885-1945). Dr. McKern spent the inter-war years in a prominent practice in Penang and died in a Japanese internment camp in Sumatra in June 1945, just two months before the end of the war. It was the popular belief among many local people in Penang, supported by several writers, that Dr. McKern remained hidden in his Tanjung Bungah house during the Occupation until he was betrayed and killed by the Japanese.

The truth about Dr. McKern's fate came to light in 2008 when it was announced by Sydney, Yale and Edinburgh Universities that Dr. McKern, an alumnus of the three universities, had left them US\$11 million for research into the problems of childbirth. While in captivity in Sumatra he had made a will in favour of his wife and three sons; ten years after the death of the last member of his family the remainder of his estate was to go to the universities.

Leslie James and Michael Rawlinson were researching Dr. McKern's life when the news of his bequest became public. In their talk they presented information based on archival records and internment diaries of other prisoners relating to Dr. McKern's escape from Singapore in February 1942 and his subsequent captivity and death in Sumatra. Their talk also revealed details of some of the properties in Penang that formed the basis of Dr. McKern's estate, one of which was the site of the Lone Pine Hotel that Dr. McKern had planned as a maternity hospital.

The talk was attended by an audience of about fifty-five and was one of The Penang Story Lectures organised by ThinkCity. The venue sponsor was the Lone Pine Hotel which provided refreshments afterwards.

HERITAGE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The development of George Town has inseparable historical links to the Old Northam Road Protestant Cemetery (ONRPC) with its burial records of early Christian settlers dating from the late 18th century through to the end of the 19th century. Graves of prominent pioneers, e.g., Captain Francis Light, James Scott, David Brown, and Protestant missionaries such as Rev. Hutchings and Rev. Bausum, as well as members of the Armenian, Chinese and German communities and numerous other nationalities who were interred here, speak volumes about their contributions to Penang and the island's links to the greater world.

The inclusion of the Old Northam Road Protestant Cemetery in the buffer zone of George Town's UNESCO World Heritage Site presents an opportunity to conserve and enhance the cultural value and historical significance of the oldest Christian cemetery in the island. In 2013, under the direction of George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) with funding from ThinkCity, Penang Heritage Trust was tasked to research and prepare a Heritage Management Plan (HMP) to evaluate the opportunities and constraints of the site and to determine strategies for the proper protection of the cemetery site and its management by the nominated authorities.

PHT assembled a team consisting of historians, a conservator, a botanist, a volunteer guide and others to take on the important task of drafting the HMP and establishing a benchmark for raising public awareness of this historic cemetery, perhaps the first such attempt in Southeast Asia. The general history of the ONRPC was outlined and the significance of the site identified. Historic Christian cemeteries elsewhere in the region were examined with a view to drawing parallels in their current condition.

Old maps and past records of the cemetery were referred to and previous restoration and conservation works were also noted. Visual records to illustrate the possible environmental impacts and documentation of the types of plants found in the cemetery offer a more comprehensive view to any undertaking of preservation works in future. In support of the HMP a team led by Professor Dr. Stephen Chia Ming Soon of the Centre for Archaeology Research Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, carried out an extensive archaeological survey of the cemetery at the same time. The archaeo-

-logical survey provides a complete overall plan of the cemetery as well as a valuable record of the structure and condition of each and every tomb. About 400 graves were identified and plotted in the survey. With further funding from ThinkCity Dr. Chia's team has also completed restoration of some 50 graves.

The members of the study team were Khoo Salma, Gwyn Jenkins, Marcus Langdon, Leslie James, Clement Liang, Ben Wisman and Ho Sheau Fung. The HMP report of more than 300 pages has been submitted to GTWHI. A copy can be viewed at the Penang Heritage Trust office.

By Clement Liang

PHT SITE VISIT REPORT

OCTOBER 2013 - BATIK PAINTING MUSEUM, ARMENIAN STREET

On Sunday afternoon, 6th October 2013, 28 members and friends of PHT visited the first Batik Painting Museum in the country. The founder of the Batik Painting Museum, former PHT council member Dr Tan Chong Guan, gave us a warm welcome and introduced the works in the museum's collection.

There are about 70 batik paintings on display, beginning with early works done in the 1950's by Teng – Chua Thean Teng, the father of Malaysian batik painting -- until the present. Over 25 artists are represented. A small number of artists in other countries have also taken up batik painting and the museum includes a small section devoted to works by artists from China, Indonesia and Thailand.



JANUARY 2014 - KELAWAI ROAD CATHOLIC CEMETERY

Our site visit to the Kelawei Road Roman Catholic Cemetery at 3.30 p.m. on Sunday, 12th January 2014 was a tremendous success. We received a good response from PHT members and also visitors who were eager to know more about the cemetery. The first site visit for 2014, it was conducted by Datuk Dr Anthony E. Sibert, a historian of the Penang Eurasian community.

Half of the cemetery is occupied by graves with most located close to the residential neighbourhood of Taman Midlands. The other half of the cemetery, closer to Kelawei Road, is covered by lush green grass and beautiful flowering plants tended by the cemetery caretaker. The cemetery is the burial place of about a thousand Roman Catholics. In addition to the graves, there are another one thousand niches for placement of urns on the wall facing Kelawei Road. The first grave was as early as 1811. Some of the early graves are those of Eurasians who were the parishioners of the Church of the Immaculate Conception. The Eurasians lived nearby at the Eurasian settlement in Pulau Tikus famously known as Kampung Serani (where Bellisa Row and Bellisa Court condominium now stand).

It was on this land in Pulau Tikus set aside for burials by the Catholic Thai-Portuguese that Father John Baptist Pasqual first set up his church in a tent with the dead buried around it. The first tent church of the Immaculate Conception was on the spot marked by the cenotaph. Father Paqual built a wooden chapel covered with atap leaves in 1819 on the site of the current church. This chapel served as the Church of the Immaculate Conception until 1835. Father Pasqual returned to Thailand in 1823 after he buried his father, Ambrose Pasqual, at the Kelawei Road Catholic Cemetery. It was also the year when the French Catholic Mission (MEP) took official governance of the Roman Catholic Church in Malaya.

The cemetery is maintained through generous financial contributions from parishioners of the Church of the Immaculate Conception. There is a management committee at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, under the leadership of the parish priest Father Michael Cheah to handle matters related to the cemetery.

Dr Sibert stressed the importance for the Kelawei Road Catholic Cemetery to be protected as a heritage site. The Kelawei Road Catholic Cemetery has significant heritage value not only because of the Church of the Immaculate Conception Pulau Tikus but also because of the pioneering evangelization efforts of the Catholic Church in general. Dr Sibert expressed appreciation for the efforts of PHT in protecting heritage sites such as this that are endangered by rapid development in Penang. Surrounded by intense urban development and on prime land in Penang, the Kelawei Road Catholic Cemetery certainly deserves the attention to be honored and preserved as part the history of early Penang.

By Trevor Sibert

Note: Datuk Dr. Anthony E. Sibert, D.S.P.N., P.J.K., a retired senior lecturer of the School of Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia, is Dean of Continuing Education and Training for the Olympia/Raffles Education Group of Colleges in Malaysia. He has been involved with matters concerning the Eurasian Malaysian community at state and national levels. Of special interest to him is the historical development of his community.



FEBRUARY 2014 - BERTAM ESTATE BUNGALOW

On Sunday afternoon, 16th February 2014, 56 members and friends of PHT left Church Street by chartered coach for the Bertam Estate at Kepala Batas in order to visit the beautiful and historic manager's bungalow. The manager of Bertam Estate, Mr Ding Toy Huah, welcomed us and outlined the history of the estate and the bungalow in which he and his wife, Chan Kam Yoong, and their family have resided since October 1990. They are agriculturalists and graduates from Universiti Pertanian.

The estate was begun in 1883 by a British company originally named Straits Settlements (Bertam) Rubber Company Limited and at its peak in the early 20th century covered 16,000 acres. Early plantation crops included coconut before rubber and then oil palm took over. In 1979 the company changed its name to Bertam Consolidated Rubber Company Limited. The history of Bertam Estate mirrors that of the Malaysian rubber plantation industry. Due to the shortage of labour and the profitability of oil palm, the rubber was slowly replaced and was all gone by 2001; other parts of the estate were compulsorily purchased by government bodies. The production of rubber has passed to Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam and, as Mr Ding said, Bertam Estate now grows houses!

This classic two-storey "black and white" bungalow was built in 1913 and is the second bungalow on the site, the first having been built in 1885 with an atap roof. Built of teak with a bow-shaped or "butterfly" floor plan, the current bungalow comprises two wings joined by a central foyer. The foyer is entered by broad steps from a magnificent arched porte-cochere and leads in turn to a teak staircase with drawing rooms in the wings on either side. The staircase divides in two at a small landing and these two staircases lead to an enclosed upper landing that serves as a private sitting room above the foyer below. From the upper landing there is access to the four bedrooms on the upper floor of the two wings via open verandahs sheltered by black and white chick blinds. Other striking features of the bungalow include exterior louvres downstairs matching the upstairs chick blinds and sheltering the ground floor frontage. This gives the bungalow its distinctive "black and white" appearance. It was noted that Peter and Waveney Jenkins visited and photographed the bungalow during the preparation of their beautiful book **The Planter's Bungalow: A Journey Down the Malay Peninsula** (Kuala Lumpur, EDM, 2008), which surveys some 200 estate bungalows in the country.

Present for our visit were two young women officers from the Sebarang Prai Municipal Council (MPSP), Zam-zamah Zainuddin, Assistant Director of Town Planning, and Nurhazwani Mohd Ramle, Architect, who explained that they were compiling an inventory of heritage sites and buildings in Sebarang Prai with a view to gazetting and protecting significant buildings such as the Bertam Estate Bungalow. We congratulated them on their work and were heartened by remarks by Mr Ding and Mr David Wilkinson of Bertam Consolidated, who was also present, that although the company was answerable to its shareholders it acknowledged the importance of conserving the historic estate bungalow. On our departure we thanked Mr & Mrs Ding for their hospitality and for opening up their home to us.

By Leslie A. K. James



Newsletter Editor~Leslie A.K. James

Production~ Vanessa Lim

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