

# PHT *newsletter*

PENANG HERITAGE TRUST • PERSATUAN WARISAN PULAU PINANG

c/o 19 Kelawei Road, 10250 Penang, Malaysia • Tel/Fax: 04 - 226 1358

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## Antiques Fair

### *Christmas Antiques & Collectibles Fair '96*

in aid of  
Penang Heritage Trust

20 & 21 December

Friday 20  
12.00noon - 10.00pm  
Saturday 21  
10.00am - 3.00pm

Rasa Sayang Resorts  
(Bintang Room)

## Talk & Slide Show

### **Yogyakarta**

The Heart of Javanese Culture

by Loh-Lim Lin Lee  
& Gwyn Jenkins

Friday 27 December  
8.00pm  
19 Kelawei Road

## Architectural Exhibition

Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia  
(Northern Chapter)  
presents

### **Hijjas Kasturi**

16 December '96  
to 16 January '97

Daily  
(except Sundays)  
9.30am - 6.00pm

PAM Centre  
19 Kelawei Road

All PHT members  
are welcome

## Special Announcement

We are pleased that PHT  
member and well-known  
conservation architect  
Laurence Loh  
has been invited to sit  
on the Council of the  
Badan Warisan Malaysia

The Star 11 December 1996

# ***CM: Planned growth to preserve heritage***

By HWA MEI SHEN and  
CHOONG KWEE KIM

PENANG: Heritage conservation in urban areas does not mean the absence of development, said Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon.

He said development was necessary but must be carefully planned to ensure its compatibility with existing buildings.

"It must be a combination of urban revitalisation and heritage conservation in a very artistic way that is also economically viable," he told a press conference yesterday.

day.

He was responding to a question on how the state government planned to preserve George Town as a heritage city following the forthcoming repeal of the Rent Control Act 1966.

Dr Koh reiterated that the state government was holding a series of dialogues, starting next week, with developers, chambers of commerce and others concerned to formulate a set of "pragmatic and realistic" guidelines together with proper incentives.

"The objective is to revitalise the economy of

the inner city by promoting tourism and trade through the attractive aspects of heritage buildings while doing away with dilapidated conditions," he said.

On the current freeze on approval of buildings over five storeys in height, Dr Koh said it was temporary.

The limit, he noted, might not be "just five storeys in a rigid way" but governed by architectural principles and guidelines.

"We will present our strategies to the federal authorities in January

and also ask for some assistance to help us cope with this massive problem," he said.

Dr Koh, who described the Act as very restrictive and archaic, said he was not against the repeal but felt its implementation must be coordinated given the magnitude of the implications.

Meanwhile Penang Heritage Centre chairman Tengku Datuk Idaura Askandar said the repeal would encourage landlords to maintain their buildings.

"It will encourage the active participation of



Dr Koh ... 'not against repeal of Act'

landlords in the conservation of their buildings," she said, noting that this would have special significance on heritage conservation.

She added that the repeal would enable landlords to get equitable returns from their properties.

"It is timely as the controlled rental rate under the Act was unrealistically low," she added.

Not to be Taken

# CM: Resolve matter in stages

By ANG SU CHING

**PENANG:** Penang wants the Rent Control Act 1966 to be repealed over a period of five years as it affects more than 60,000 people in the state.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said yesterday it was more pragmatic to resolve the matter in stages due to the nature, magnitude and complexity of the exercise.

He said the Komtar redevelopment project, for instance, took more than 20 years to implement although it affected only 3,900 people from 629 families.

Dr Koh said a 1994 census showed that Penang had 12,543 premises with 60,273 people under the Rent Control Act.

Of the premises, 8,259 are in the heart of George Town, 2,395 outside George Town and 1,889 in

Seberang Prai.

"We will need at least five years to implement the policy but some projects may take even longer," he told newsmen outside the State Assembly Building.

He was commenting on the Cabinet's decision that chief tenants would be compensated 24 times their last monthly rental after the repeal.

A Bill for the repeal, which involves 36,499 premises built before Jan 1, 1948, is to be tabled in Parliament in March.

Dr Koh said the repeal should take into account housing, heritage conservation, re-development, infrastructure provision and traffic management. It should be implemented according to different conditions of each state, he said.

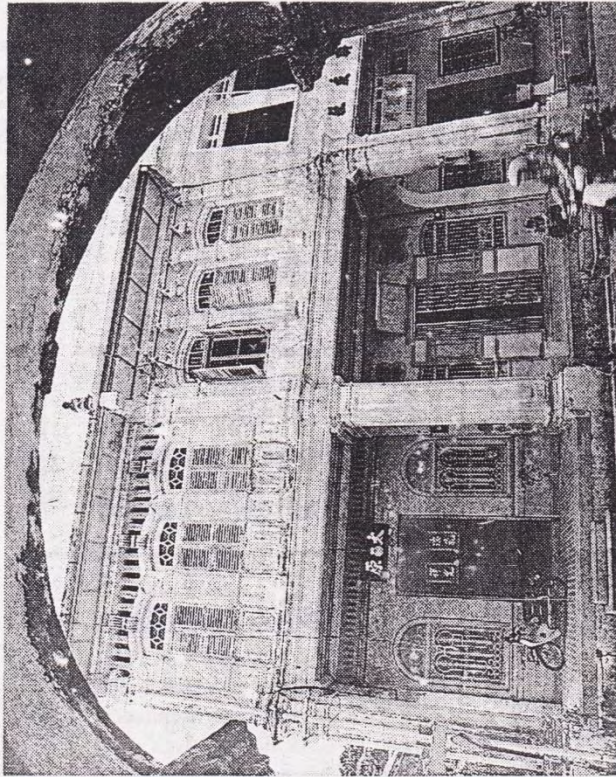
"We will present our strategies for re-development to the federal gov-

ernment in January," he said, adding re-development would ensure George Town remained attractive as a residential, commercial and tourist area.

Dr Koh also said the state would seek assistance from the federal government to ensure that the interest of landowners and other parties were protected.

He said a series of dialogues between the authorities, tenants, sub-tenants, housing developers, association and other organisations would be held and the feedback presented to the federal government.

He said the state had implemented over the past three years several guidelines, including the low medium cost policy, in preparation for the repeal of the Rent Control Act.



PRE-WAR HOUSES ... Two typical pre-war houses in Muntri Street, an elite Chinese residential area at the turn of the century — Starpic by NG AH BAK

At the Penang State Assembly yesterday

# State to hold survey on pre-war homes



Dr Koh ... unsafe houses will be identified

THE Penang Government will conduct a survey on 12,543 pre-war houses in the state to determine their condition and propose development strategies for them.

Replying to a written question by backbencher Tan Cheng Liang (BN-Jawi), Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said the state had approved an allocation for the survey.

"Houses which are unsafe will be identified while proposals and strategies to develop them will be drawn up. We will take into consideration the physical, economical and social aspects of these buildings," he said, adding that strategies would include ways to relocate residents.

Dr Koh said the state was sensitive towards the fate of historical

buildings and architecture which were currently threatened by rapid development.

In the state planning committee meeting recently, he added, the state had adopted a heritage conservation policy to protect and conserve the buildings.

"We plan to use historical buildings for economic activities and promote them as tourist attractions," he said.

Of the 12,543 pre-war commercial and residential buildings in the state, Dr Koh said, 8,259 were located within George Town, 2,395 outside George Town and 1,889 in Seberang Perai.

However, he added, the statistics provided did not include government pre-war buildings such as the State Assembly Hall, court house and the City Hall building at Esplanade.

The Star 26 October 1996

# Chamber blasts high-rise freeze

By LIM AI LEE

PENANG: The freeze on the construction of high-rise buildings in inner George Town is against the state's urban modernisation plan, the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce (PCCC) claimed yesterday.

A spokesman for the chamber's property committee said the recent Penang Municipal Council (MPPC) decision on height control could seriously dampen the state's economic development.

The property committee met two days ago following numerous complaints from members against the decision to freeze plan applications for buildings exceeding

five storeys.

"The council should seek public opinion before simply changing and implementing any policies. We are confused why the new ruling is implemented when there is already a policy stipulating the control of building density in the city," said the spokesman.

The decision to freeze city development was an important move and the council should act according to procedures and within legal jurisdiction.

"The council should not just hear opinions of heritage groups but also give consideration to developers, house owners and the public."

He said the Prime Minister had during a visit to

Penang last year, noted that Penang should have more high-rise buildings to overcome land scarcity on the island.

The council's move to limit high-rise development, he said, would only escalate house prices and lead to higher inflation.

The spokesman said that traffic congestion, sewerage problems, infrastructure bottlenecks, floods and other problems would not be solved if existing old buildings in inner George Town were not developed.

As a result, the standard of living of city dwellers would further deteriorate and this was against the nation's Vision 2020 to become a developed nation.



GOVT QUARTERS ... to be converted into 96 hotel rooms — Starpic by LEONG HON HYEAN

## 24 houses to become hotel

By CHEAH UI-HOON

PENANG: Twenty-four units of government quarters along Burmah Road and Irrawaddy Road will be converted into a boutique hotel in line with the state's effort to "rehabilitate" old buildings.

The terraced buildings, built in 1926, will be converted into 96 hotel rooms, including suites, conference and meeting rooms, a coffee-house and theme restaurant.

Project manager Datuk Tengku Idaura Askandar said the boutique hotel project would be the state's first urban "rehabilitation" project which adapts the existing government quarters to new uses.

"The state is extremely forward looking by allowing the Penang Development

Corporation to develop the buildings for adaptive reuse," she told *The Star* yesterday.

Tengku Idaura said the cost of the project had been estimated at RM5 to RM6 million, "a lot less than it takes to demolish and redevelop the area."

"It is understood that the cost to renovate an existing building can sometimes be 10 times less than demolishing and redeveloping it," she said.

Tengku Idaura, who is the managing director of PDC subsidiary PDC-AR&T Total Project Management Sdn Bhd, said tenders for the refurbishment project would be called by end of this month.

She said the project would be undertaken by local companies, and the hotel would

be managed by a local company when operational in late 1997.

She added that the six government quarters near Pykett Avenue would also be refurbished and converted into commercial units.

"We hope to lease the buildings out for businesses as they will be ideal for restaurants, boutiques, home decor shops and so on," she said.

Tengku Idaura said the government quarters which were vacated last year were still intact and in good condition, adding that the row of Anglo-Malay styled buildings have Georgian features with a little of art-deco on the facade.

It is understood that the government quarters had been leased to PDC for 60 years.

## Enclave in Georgetown truly fascinating

WE were in Malaysia for three weeks and spent much of our time in Penang. The cultural diversity in Penang, especially Georgetown, is fascinating with its varied choices of food, entertainment and shopping.

However, the most interesting and truly fascinating aspects of Penang is its history.

It was purely by chance that we found the Acheen-Armenian street enclave in Georgetown. This enclave is a fountain of cultural history with its astounding architecture. By learning its history, visitors will be able to understand how and why Georgetown and Penang is what it is today. After visiting this area, we felt like we had walked through a century of history. It is indeed a showcase that Malaysians should be very proud to display.

We were disappointed that information on this was not available in Penang hotels. Most tourists would be curious to know the history of Georgetown.

The Heritage Centre at 128 Armenian Street must do more to market the enclave. We hope to see this centre featured prominently in travel brochures, travel guides and documentaries, and made readily available in all hotels.

All resorts and hotels in Penang should advertise this historic site with the strong support of the State and Federal Governments.

The 1998 Commonwealth Games will provide an opportunity for Malaysia to promote the Heritage Centre. We look forward to future visits to Penang and to see this area again. We will certainly recommend this enclave to our friends.

Frank Tirendi and  
Jane Whyte  
Australia

## Books by PHT members

### PENANG VIEWS 1770-1860

by **Lim Chong Keat**

*Summer Times Publishing 1986, RM80.00*

ON AUGUST 12TH 1786, CAPT. FRANCIS LIGHT FORMALLY established a British Settlement on behalf of the East India Company on the island of Penang which was then renamed Prince of Wales's Island. Prior to this date, however, European trading and political activities in the region were significant preludes, and indeed their presence goes back over 200 years earlier. Captain Light himself was involved in trading enterprises in Aceh and South Thailand for more than 15 years before the founding of the Settlement. It is therefore relevant to uncover more topographical evidence of Penang's earlier history. With respect to British historical views of Penang, we are fortunate to have available illustrations from the 1770s, maps of earlier vintage, and also major topographic masterpieces over several decades.

The period covered in this book of historical views is taken to the 1860s when, with the work of John Thomson and others, visual information in the form of photographs became available. Within this book, over 160 paintings, drawings, and prints have been reproduced, most of them in full colour, together with introductory notes and topographical commentaries. The illustrations have been drawn from the collections of the Penang Museum, Singapore National Museum, Muzium Seni Asia at the University of Malaya, the India Office Library in London and other collections, and also from private owners who have given permission for their reproduction.

The oil paintings include important artistic works by Robert Smith, William Huggins, and William Havell, and the watercolours, aquatints or prints include works by William Daniell, James Wathen, James George, Thomas Prinsep, William Westall, and also the French artists on the "Bonite". Also featured are hitherto relatively unknown works by Charles Dyce, Edward Cree, Walford Thomas Bellairs, and many others.

This book, published under the auspices of the Penang Museum, is probably the most comprehensive visual documentation of the historical environment of early Penang.

**LIM CHONG KEAT**, Founder Chairman of the Penang Heritage Trust, is an architect by profession, with degrees from the University of Manchester and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has been President of the Singapore Institute of Architects, Chairman of the Commonwealth Association of Architects' Board of Architectural Education, and Honorary Project Coordinator for Habitat, Southeast Asian Cultural Programme (SEACUP) at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore concerned with the documentation of indigenous habitat in the region, and involved himself in many major building and planning projects in Malaysia and Singapore. He has also served on the board of the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur and the Penang Museum Board. For his civic activities, he was awarded the Public Service Star by the Singapore Government in 1966, and the D.S.P.N., which carries the title of *Datuk*, by the State Government of Penang in 1979.

### FRANK SWETTENHAM & GEORGE GILES

*Watercolours & Sketches of Malaya 1880-1894*

Text by **Lim Chong Keat & Henry Barlow**

*Summer Times Publishing 1988, RM60.00*

SIR FRANK SWETTENHAM, GOVERNOR OF THE STRAITS Settlements from 1901 to 1904, was earlier active in extending British influence in the States of Perak, Selangor, and Pahang.

His extensive journals and diaries have provided important textual records of the social and political history of that period. In "Footprints in Malaya" which he wrote during retirement, he made use of drawings by George Giles; it has not been generally known that he himself was a considerable documentary artist.

The drawings made by Swettenham & Giles from 1880-1894 include illustrations of the historical journey across the Main Range from S. Bernam to Pekan via the Pahang River. The collection was acquired by *Datuk Lim* in 1972. It consists of 55 watercolours and sketches by Swettenham and 36 by Giles. In addition to full-colour reproductions of the works by Swettenham and Giles, the book presents relevant notes on the main characters, written by Henry Barlow who has completed an authoritative biography of Swettenham. The collector *Datuk Lim* has contributed commentaries and information on the artists and their work and illuminating topographical notes to accompany the pictures which provide useful and fascinating visual insights into that period of Malaysian history. By kind permission of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Swettenham's historical journal of the Pahang journey has been reprinted in the Appendix.

The book was sponsored by the Malaysia-British Society as its principal cultural activity for 1988.

**LIM CHONG KEAT** (see notes to *Penang Views* above)

**HENRY S. BARLOW**, now a permanent resident of Malaysia, was born in Britain in 1944 and read languages at Trinity College, Cambridge as a *Trevelyan Scholar*. He has lived and worked in Malaysia since 1970, specialising in the economics of plantation and estate management. However, his personal passion for natural wilderness manifested itself early on, when he led a three-man entomological expedition to Mount Kinabalu in Sabah, eastern Malaysia (Borneo), in 1965. Subsequently, in 1982, he published his seminal work, *An Introduction to the Moths of Southeast Asia*, under the auspices of the Malayan Nature Society.

### PHT LIBRARY

Dear PHT members,

One of the objectives of the PHT is to publish books, papers, and articles on Malaysian history, culture and heritage for the information and education of the Penang public. Do keep us informed about your publications. The PHT would like to collect them.

## STREETS OF GEORGE TOWN, PENANG

by **Khoo Su Nin**

Janus Print & Resources 1993

RM50.00 (hardcover), RM35.00 (softcover)

### WHAT MAKES MALAYSIA'S NORTHERN CITY SO DIFFERENT?

Historic city of terra-cotta roofs, effusive stucco ornamentation and friendly five-foot ways, where diverse local cultures survive and multiply and traditional festivals are celebrated all the year round.

Streets of George Town, Penang is a serious guide to things visible and invisible. The traditional neighbourhoods and urban villages which make up the cosmopolitan city are carefully explored.

In the wealth of surviving built heritage — the monuments and memorials, associations and places of worship, historic residences and commercial buildings, shops and coffeeshops, wet markets, cultural and festival venues — are the stories of those who have contributed to the prosperity of the trading settlement, from Penang's founding settlers and early builders to its latter-day personalities. In these streets is the living history of a uniquely complex multi-cultural society.

Richly illustrated with over 280 photos, this guide is meant for every visitor who has ever enjoyed George Town's charming streetscapes, and every Penangite who wishes to rediscover his or her own home town.

*Khoo Su Nin, born and bred in Penang, is a graduate of Duke University, the former editor of Pulau Pinang Magazine, and principal of the publication design firm Janus Print & Resources. As Honorary Secretary of the Penang Heritage Trust, she was involved in the formation of the Asia & West Pacific Network for Urban Conservation (AWPNUC), as well as the project to restore the Syed Alatas Mansion on Armenian Street and to establish the Heritage Centre Penang.*

## RESTORING & RECONSTRUCTING THE MALAY TIMBER HOUSE

by **Wulf Killman, Tom Sickinger  
& Hong Lay Thong**

Forest Research Institute Malaysia 1994

RM35.00 (softcover)

THE MALAY TIMBER HOUSE IS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES IN today's changing landscape. Its habitat, the traditional kampong, is steadily being wiped out. As wood technologists with first-hand experience in the conservation of the timber house, the authors have written an invaluable manual on repairing, restoring and translocating the traditional Malay house.

*WULF KILLMAN has been the Project Manager of the Malaysian-German Forestry Research Project at FRIM since 1984 under the German government agency for technological cooperation Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit. He had previously worked in various countries in South America and Africa as well as in Pakistan and the Philippines.*

*TOM SICKINGER was, from 1989-1993, a trainer in furniture design at FRIM under the CIM Integrated exports programme. During this time, he was also design consultant for the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (MIDA) and Bausyma, Malaysia.*

*HONG LAY THONG, a graduate of the University of Malaya and Oxford University, is the Director of Forest Products at FRIM, where he has been since 1972. He has worked as a forest pathologist, done research on biodeterioration, and published more than 50 papers on wood decay and the protection and utilization of timbers, including rubberwood.*

## BLOOD AND THE SOIL

A Portrait of Dr Ong Chong Keng

by **Pamela Ong**

Times Editions 1995, RM59.50

DR ONG CHONG KENG WAS FORTY-FOUR AND AT THE height of his political career when he was assassinated in 1948. An influential voice in Penang politics, he was also chairman delegate to UNESCO as well as the unofficial ambassador to China.

A second generation immigrant and a first generation Straits Chinese, Dr Ong Chong Keng was very much a product of his time: He was a Western educated man of ideas, yet also a Chinese who observed the religion, culture, and tradition of his ancestors.

Pamela Ong's sensitive portrait of Dr Ong Chong Keng captures both the private and public faces of the man: the boy who, armed with determination and a keen intellect, overcame the limitations of his humble beginnings to establish himself as an eminent doctor in the Penang community; the forthright politician whose witty and eloquent speeches demonstrate his mastery of public speaking and his belief in the power of reason and moderation; the man who enjoyed the company of women and the pleasures of life; the tender and affectionate father.

*PAMELA ONG SIEW IM is the fifth daughter of the late Dr Ong Chong Keng, and the third by his second marriage. A lawyer by profession, she is a senior partner of a legal firm in Penang.*

## THE STRAITS CHINESE: A CULTURAL HISTORY

by **Dr Khoo Joo Ee**

Pepin Press 1996, RM165.00

SINCE ANCIENT TIMES, SOUTHEAST ASIA HAS BEEN AN important link in the trade routes connecting China with India, Arabia and Europe. Contacts between China and the states of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago were reported as early as the fifth century AD, and Chinese tradespeople began to settle in this region in the 15th century. Chinese communities emerged in the port cities of Java, Sumatra and other islands of the archipelago, and especially along the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, in what would become known as the Straits Settlements: Penang, Malacca, and Singapore.

These 'Straits Chinese' adapted to a wide variety of local conditions, and — subjected to Malay, European, and Indian cultural influences — eventually developed a unique identity. The main characteristics of Straits Chinese arts and architecture are their highly ornate nature, intricate detail and especially their idiosyncratic style, which reflects the above mentioned blend of influences.

This book provides a detailed account of the development of the Straits Chinese social and material culture. The text is illustrated with many historical photographs, and a very large selection of high quality colour plates of architecture, furniture, costumes, headwork, textiles, embroidery, gold and silver jewellery, domestic objects and ceramics.

*DR KHOO JOO EE, a Straits Chinese from Penang, is the curator of the Asian Art Museum in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She studied fine art and history of art in Malaysia, the Netherlands, England and the USA, and obtained her Doctorate from the University of London in 1976. She has focused more than twenty years of scholarly research on the cultures of Southeast Asia, particularly the Straits Chinese, culminating in this first comprehensive publication on this subject.*