

PHT *newsletter*

PENANG HERITAGE TRUST * PERSATUAN WARISAN PULAU PINANG

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Message from the Vice-Chairman

We seem to be all waiting patiently for things to happen, depending on political commitment and bureaucratic delays, we shall in due course have (among other things),

- a) Federal Conservation Act
- b) Local Plans for the old city
- c) Formal Listing of Protected Buildings
- d) Heritage Conservation Guidelines set up and implemented by the Local Council
- e) Action Plans implemented by the State Govt
- f) a heritage city Management Corporation
- g) Tax incentives, etc., etc.

Meanwhile, we are all aware that some of our very, very important heritage buildings are being endangered by neglect, abandonment, ravages of weather, pilferage, demolition and development.

We anticipate that by the time the Govt decides that Conservation has become a safe and non controversial issue and is ready to implement all these measures, there may very little that is worthwhile conserving.

Whole precincts which were the pride of Penang, known for their beauty and dignity such as Pesiaran Gurney and Jln Sultan Ahmad Shah are now already destroyed beyond recognition.

The previous YDP Dato Tan Gim Hwa, made some very brave statements during his tenure "declaring that the MPPP recognized the special character of Jln Sultan Ahmad Shah" which would be respected in the approvals of future development plans. We were also informed that the MPPP had classified 17 "listed buildings" under various degrees of protection. We now have a chance to see the realization of his "vision"!

We must also note how some of the

"listed buildings" classified under his authority have been developed; "Hardwicke", which was listed as a "grade one" heritage building and approved under the guidelines formulated by Dato Tan, gives us an idea his concept "protection" for such heritage buildings.

PHT
MEMBERS DAY
(coinciding with the International
Day of the World's Indigenous
People)
Sunday 9 August 1998
Time : 5.00 pm
Venue : 1 Pitt Lane cafe
Call Priscilla,
Tel: 016 410 9311

Now that the MPPP under Dr Teng has expressed greater concern for conservation, it is necessary to get further clarification from the MPPP as to the existing guidelines pertaining to buildings already listed and graded by previous councils.

We are now appealing to the public to help us identify these endangered buildings and precincts and also help us canvass for some action from concerned parties: esp the owners and the Authorities.

PHT as the public watchdog and advocate has to take on this role and will undertake the publishing of a list of such buildings so that public attention will make the authorities realize the urgency of this issue.

Among the important Heritage Buildings in the endangered list:

- Suffolk House,
- Chung Keng Kwee Temple
- Hai Kee Chan,
- former Shih Chung School,
- former Runnymede Hotel,
- Leong Yin Khean Mansion.

Would the public write to the PHT with additions and the background to the building to the area?

The PHT also needs to submit our list of buildings and comments to the Structure Plan Review by September. - DR CHOONG SIMPOEY

Sustainable Penang Indicators : Number of Heritage Buildings

The inventory entitled 'George Town: Heritage Buildings of Penang Island' which was compiled for MPPP in 1993 lists 650 buildings or ensembles, and over 1400 individual buildings in the historic city centre. The area surveyed is bounded by Lebuhr Light, Lebuhr Pantai, Lebuhr Acheen and Jalan Masjid Kapitan Kling.

We would like to survey how many of these buildings are still standing, how many have been demolished, how many badly renovated and how many restored. This is for Khoo Salma's indicators project under the Sustainable Penang Initiative. 8

Salma: 'I think it's worth doing. It would only take one Sunday. I will lead the group but I don't want to do it alone.....! . Can I get volunteers to help me the buildings'

George Town on South Australian TV

Michael Sexton, producer of the documentary "Postcards" for Channel 9 Adelaide South Australia, is coming to film George Town in July. Sexton and his team will be in George Town from 16-26 July.

The presenter for "Postcards" is Keith Conlon, a well known figure in Australian radio and TV. According to Penny Ramsay, our correspondent from Adelaide, Keith is also a good jazz musician and one of Adelaide's heritage champions!

visitors, which include tourists, schoolchildren & historians and is clearly an invaluable source of information and insight into past times. The Church of England Christians interred include Armenians, French, Dutch, Americans, Chinese, besides of course the English, the Scots and Welsh. It is also the resting place of names familiar to us all and souls responsible for early history of our island, from Governors to surgeons and lawyers - Light and Scott, the Browns, A.A. Anthony, McNair, Macalister, Leith, Farquhar, Gottlieb, Dundas, Arratoon and a host of others. The site belongs to and is maintained by the MPPP who cut the grass and sweep the grounds.

It is a sad and shocking turn of events that the tombstones have recently been vandalised for their marble. It is hoped that the MPPP will take measures to protect this irreplaceable heritage of ours. The gates should be secured at night, a couple of street lights could be extended from Farquhar Street into the cemetery or a caretaker/gardener could take up residence at the rear, as was previously done.

It is hoped that we will not lose yet another important piece of our history due to lack of caring.

LOH-LIM, Chairman, Francis Light Cemetery Restoration Project, Penang Heritage Trust

- n.b. It is to be noted that the historic cemetery is under the guardianship of the Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang

The Sacrifice of Trees for the Viewing Pleasure of V.I.P's

On the night of 25th June 98 at the Caring Society Complex, more than 100 members of the Penang public that had come with great enthusiasm for his lecture, hung their heads when Ken Taylor, Professor of Landscape Architecture of the University of Canberra, co-Director of the Cultural Heritage Centre and past President of the Australians Institute of Landscape Architects, spoke of his shock and sadness at reading of the intended fate of 20 twelve-year old trees facing removal in order to enable V.I.P.'s to have better viewing of a parade.

An overwhelming segment of the populace is equally shocked. At the turn of the millennium, to be told of this short-sighted bureaucratic decision, has left the public with an incredulous sense of outrage. To chop down trees for road widening or because they are diseased, already leaves the Penangite saddened but resigned. The State Government won accolades for responding to public concern and taking the trouble to curve the Scotland Road/Free School Road upgrading, in order to preserve the trees in the central divider. It is certainly one of the most pleasant highways in the country because of this.

When presented with a problem, such as blocked views, surely an innovative planner would look for a solution that carries with it an inherent respect for his environment. He shouldn't take the easiest solution which is to remove everything that stands in the way of his inflexible plan. If the Polo grounds become a place for illicit couples, do we then fence it all up so no-one has access? If the Botanical Gardens experiences cases of burglary, do we then decide to close up the Gardens? If a set of heritage buildings, cleared of tenants, becomes a drug haunt, does it justify demolishing the buildings in order to clear the addicts? The facile style with which the bureaucracy meets constructive criticism offends the 1998 thinking and caring public.

One day, it was the Green Book Policy, plant more trees, improve our environment the next day, chop down 20 mature trees in order for some V.I.P.'s to view a parade, then the day after, 'it was don't worry, we'll dig them up and put them somewhere else' (please note, not only would that utilise a great deal of funds sorely needed elsewhere, the survival rate of transplanting fully mature 12 years old trees, is very low) now we're told 'they're not very good trees and we were actually going to do away with them anyway'.

Please don't continue to insult the caring public. Someone, somewhere made a foolish hasty decision, please be magnanimous enough to admit it in the face of this public outrage. The people who feel strongly about this run into the thousands (as demonstrated in the petition) and there are many more who have not had

the opportunity to sign the petition but are in full moral support. The best laid plans can be altered or adapted. Trees can be drastically trimmed to remove foliage and improve viewing, without any long-term damage, particularly in this wet season. Government transparency and its willingness to respond to public sentiments, has always been the avowed hallmark of this administration.

To Professor Taylor thank you for your diplomacy when showing slides of the recent additions to our Botanic Gardens. These stood in sharp contrast to original sections of our world famous historic Gardens where an inherent respect and understanding for the flow of the land and a regard for the basic tenets of a botanic garden, had guided the 19th Century approach. Your illustrations of the significance and integrity of materials and respect for the heritage values of landscapes, with examples from conservation and reconstruction efforts of botanic gardens throughout the world, left us all impressed and somewhat saddened.

The threat of inappropriate moves in our city has awakened a groundswell of protest which clearly demonstrates a strong public attachment to places where people partake of nature or of surroundings which evoke associations of past settings. It is an inevitable corollary development that this attachment is evolving into a willingness to protect our natural and built heritage and recreational spaces and to conserve them for future generations.

Professor Taylor said that the way we treat nature in a city is a reflection of the way we treat ourselves, it is a reflection of our attitudes towards life itself. It wouldn't hurt to reflect on this as we battle with alternating water shortage and floods in our cities. Penang is outstanding for its magnificent tree-lined roads and avenues, found throughout the island. No other city in Malaysia can rival us, let us continue in our general respect for the landscape around us.

LOH-LIM Lin Lee
Council Member
Penang Heritage Trust