

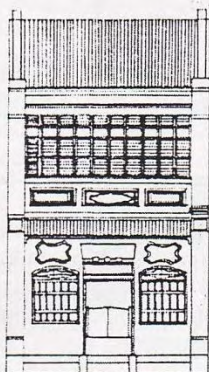
# PHT *newsletter*

PENANG HERITAGE TRUST \* PERSATUAN WARISAN PULAU PINANG

26A Stewart Lane, 10200 Penang, Malaysia \* Tel/Fax:604-264 2631 E-mail:phtrust@po.jaring.my

Number 67 www.pht.org.my

April - May 2000



PHT would like to thank :

- Gwyn Jenkins for rearranging the office furniture with Joseph and Tong.
  - Tong for donating 2 desks, notice boards and plants.
  - Loh-Lim for flower pots and plants.
  - Catherine for plants
- Not forgetting our volunteers Maidena, Marika, Jane, Mary, Roslin, etc

We would like to thank Mr Ooi Teik Chye for loaning his 16-inch National television.



## PHT VIP VISITORS

ON 22 APRIL, HER EXCELLENCY, JEAN McClosky, High Commissioner of Canada specially requested PHT to take her on a exclusive heritage tour of George Town. Ms Loh-Lim and Ms Khoo Salma brought Her Excellency and the newly appointed Hon. Consul for Canada, Mr Tan Ewe Tong around the inner city of George Town. We visited the Tan Kongsi and the home studio of Penang watercolourist Mr. Tan Lye Hoe in Sei Tan Court and also the home studio of Penang oils painter Mr. Chong Hon Fatt at Beach Street next to the endangered six houses of Roon San Tong Khoo Kongsi.

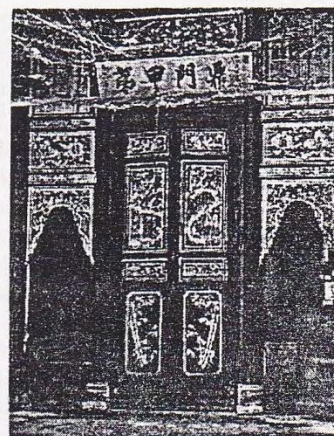
## EXCLUSIVE GUIDED HERITAGE SITE VISITS

SITE VISITS - IMPORTANT - PLEASE TAKE NOTE

THE MAY 2000 VISIT WILL NOW BE AT  
THE CHUNG KENG KWEE TEMPLE & MANSION,  
CHURCH STREET, SUNDAY 28 MAY, 3.30 P.M. ON SITE.

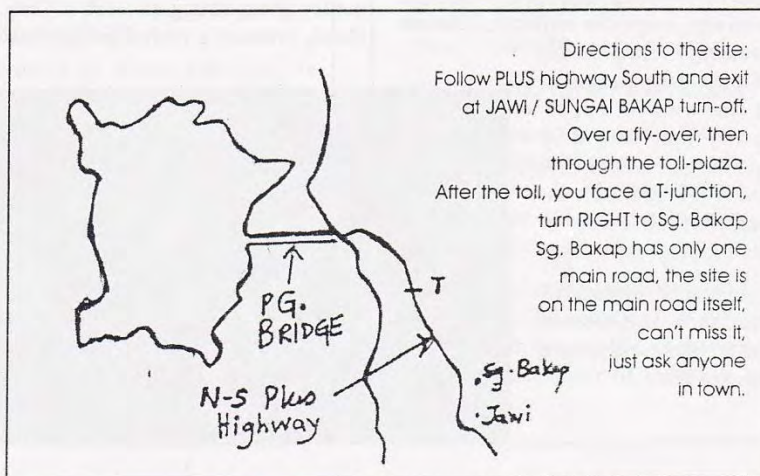
Site of the Penang headquarters of the Hakka Hai Sans during the Larut Tin Wars, which Chung headed. This fascinating site comes with a bloody past and unique architecture incorporating narrow passageways, walled courtyards, an infamous well, imposing facades, rock gardens, cast iron, ornate carvings, ceramic decorations and even, a life-sized bronze statue of Keng Kwee himself.

We will be joined during this tour by the participants of the Chinese Schools History Teachers' Camp, which PHT is co-sponsoring.



SUNDAY 25 JUNE 2000, KEE  
ESTATE, SUNGAI BAKAP, 3.30 P.M.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Kee Clan House Complex is the nucleus of a clan village founded by Kee Lye Huat, a sugar-cane planter and a leader of the Ghee Hin society. The complex incorporates an ancestral hall and 6 houses, some of which are still furnished. The large kitchens with the original utensils conjure images of the large extended households. The ancestral hall and one of the houses was used as a set for 'Indochine'. Dato' Kee Phaik Cheen, a member of the Kee clan will personally lead the tour.





## Rain or Shine, Heritage Beckons!

*by Loh-Lim Lin Lee*

### Homestead Sunday March 16

An oversubscribed visit, obviously everyone has been waiting to visit one of the most prominent, best maintained and elegant classical Palladian villas in Penang. We had to turn late registrations away and an eager crowd of 40 turned up on a drizzly afternoon, seeking shelter under the garage annex of the Mansion. The anticipation of viewing the Mansion built by Lim Mah Chye, designed by Stark & McNeil in 1919, and purchased later by the famed Yeap Chor Ee, quite gripped us all, despite the inclement weather.

A historical and architectural introduction was made by Laurence Loh and Khoo Salma under the grand colonnaded porch, large enough to accommodate all of us quite comfortably. Our very gracious hosts then guided us through the exquisite dwelling with its art deco furnishings, exquisite artifacts, Chinese collection and precious family paraphernalia. It was truly an opportunity that was very special and memorable and PHT is much indebted to the family for their kind gesture to us.

A special thanks for the laksa, the freshly baked banana cake and the hot tea.

### Penang Hill Sunday April 30

Once again, the enthusiasm of PHT members is truly amazing. The drizzle of the March site visit couldn't begin to compare to what poured from the skies on Sunday April 30<sup>th</sup>. (This is the same day, K.L. downtown became a lake)

An early start at 2 p.m. at the bottom hill station still resulted in a 2 hour wait for the train. Most of us were already damp by then, some members even attempted (in a most unsubtle fashion) persuading others non-PHT visitors to go home so that the queue could be shortened. (we saw you disappear, Professor Jon Lim of National University of Singapore)

Top station was swirling in mist, the rain was unrelenting, we had babies in strollers and grandmothers wrapped in plastic sheets. The motley group struggled down to Crag Hotel, crossed a timber bridge that

had seen safer days, viewed the original Crag as well as the abandoned sets from 'Indochine'. Visions of Catherine Deneuve dancing the tango, captured our imaginations and fortified us while we struggled back UP to the top, barely able to negotiate our way through the mist and rain and slippery steps.

The Man of the Hills, Ahmad Chik, bless him, had arranged hot 'teh tarik', apoms and fried mee hoon served on reserved tables with starched white tableclothes, at the food stalls. By this stage, some members felt duty-bound to go home, Priscilla's toddler's lips were blue and Catherine's baby was drenched. The Kelab Belia Warisan group who hiked up took the train down instead. Lubis, Salma (!) and Gwynn (!) also hiked up, Clara and Hillary had had their exercise for year 2000.

Bel Retiro was somewhat daunting and certainly ill-maintained. It has seen greater days of glory and now remains as a poor shadow of the past. The group (now much smaller) viewed Convalescent, as its name implies, a recuperating retreat for State Ex-co members, then trudged on to have a peek at Browhead further down the road. These few brave souls were then rewarded with a rest stop at 'Bukit Pinang', the wonderfully restored English country house and garden of Ahmad, before returning to catch the train down, arriving at 8.15 p.m. There were still 15 of us at this stage and it had not stopped raining the entire trip! We certainly can't complain that PHT members have no spirit - Loh-Lim



# Chinese Schools History Teachers' Camp

*Co-organisers: Penang Heritage Trust and United Chinese School Committees' Association of Malaysia*

Dates: May 28-30, 2000 (Sunday, Monday, Tuesday)

Venue: Hotel 1926, Jalan Burma, Penang

- Aim:
1. To upgrade the specialized knowledge of history teachers, especially on Penang history.
  2. To understand the historical background of Penang's heritage,
  3. to inspire and bring awareness about heritage conservation to history teachers, to enable them to communicate living history to their students.

Target group: Malaysian Chinese private school history teachers.

*The Penang Heritage Trust is proud to be a co-organiser of this important educational event. As the Chinese schools history curriculum contain a high local history content, we saw this as a chance to introduce Penang history and heritage into this part of the educational system. About 40 Chinese schools history teachers from all over Malaysia will be attending this camp. All credit to Goh Mai Loon, Penang Heritage Trust, and Ho Yoke Wan, UCSCAM, for their tireless efforts! The following are a list of the interesting events organised:*

Lecture 1: Francis Light in Penang, by Goh Mai Loon

Lecture 2: Chinese Community in Penang, by Peoh Shiaw Kuan and Chang Yong Nee

Lecture 3: Penang's Straits Settlements Economics Activities, by Khoo Salma

Lecture 4: The establishment and development of Political parties, by Lee Liang Shu

Lecture 5: Sun Yat Sen in Penang, by Ong Seng Huat

Heritage Tour of Chung Keng Kwee Temple, by Goh Mai Loon & Chang Yong Nee

Heritage Tour of Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, by Loh-Lim Lin Lee

Heritage Tour of Protestant Cemetery, by Goh Mai Loon

Heritage Tour of Armenian Street, Acheen Street, Little India, Cambell Street, Pitt Street and Chulia Street, with visits to Chinese Kongsis, Dr. Sun Yat Sen Base and Syed Alatas Mansion, by Khoo Salma and Joann Khaw

Heritage Tour of Fort Cornwallis, Penang Museum, Convent Light Street, Town Hall, High Court, St. George's Church, Penang Heritage Trust Office, Loo Pun Hong, Malaysian Philomathic Society, by Goh Mai Loon

## Penang's Heritage in the International News

With the Repeal of Rent Control at the turn of the millinimum, Penang's heritage has come onto the international limelight. The role of Penang Heritage Trust has been featured in newspapers, news magazines and even CNN and TV3 in the last few months:

*Saving the Future Past*, by Dorinda Elliott, NEWSWEEK, 17 January 2000

*Danke, Hollywood!* By Charlotte Wiedemann, DIEWOCHE, GERMANY, 28 January 2000

*Wo der Strandmasseur alles weiss*, by Von Patricia Engelhorn, DIE WELTWOCH, GERMANY, 10 February 2000

*A City At A Crossroad*, by Arjuna Rananawa, ASIAWEEK, 31 March 2000

*Shoeless in George Town*, by Simon Elegant, FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW, 6 April 2000

*Heritage threat: Penang's colonial capital faces developers*, by Frances Harrison, THE GUARDIAN, UNITED KINGDOM, 6 April 2000

*Penang History under threat*, by Francis Harrison, THE AGE, AUSTRALIA, 7 April 2000

*Losing Heart*, by Kim Gool, THE NATION, 10 April 2000

CNN News, 10 April 2000

## Penang - Its Life in Our Hands

PHT began to seriously study and promote the concept of social housing started after the UNESCO Conference in May 1998. Penang Heritage Trust, in our belief that the inner city would be a shell of its former self if it lost its trades and communities, began to look at the possibility of converting some of the larger prewar shophouses into smaller social housing units, suitable for letting.

PHT took seven adjacent houses as a hypothetical project and worked out the costs for renovation. The properties already had tenants, so part of the scheme was to work out how logistically to renovate without disturbing their lives or livelihoods too much. Unfortunately though the scheme itself was potentially viable if the landlord was a non-profit social housing association, the price of purchasing the properties was too high. We then had to rethink how to gain a stock of properties without purchase.

By January 2000 the papers were talking about a government RM 100 million loan and grant scheme with no details. PHT then brought up the issue of inner city social housing in the Repeal of Rent Control committee meeting with Dr. Toh in which SOS, Nanyang, CAP were present.

PHT presented the seven house scheme to the new director of housing to demonstrate how the state could gain housing stock to rent within the inner city and at the same time revitalise the buildings and the environment for every bodies benefit. We were then invited to join the on going discussions with HDA and owners on how to make the two ideas work which was relevant to the loan/grant fund.

There have been four meetings so far, to find a way of encouraging landlords to take up the scheme which require them to retain tenants at reasonable rents. There are several hurdles which need to be overcome to make this a success.

-- To find interested landlords to take up the loan and grant for repairs and retain their tenants at lower than 'market rentals'.

-- To find interested landlords with properties that have been vacant for many years to join the scheme provided that they then house needy tenants on the housing registry.

The intention is not just to provide housing for the hard core poor but generate many levels of social housing. As the income potential of the landlord increases then the amount of loan/ grant would reflect the difference.

PHT is very committed to trying to make this a possibility.

Tenants can also arrange their own "social housing". In one case known to PHT an elderly lady living on her own in a large house on Cintra street decided that living in an apartment with her daughter was not for her, she then got together with her neighbours and each have rented a room in what was her old house. They have less work to do in the house, have the companions they have always known and have negotiated an agreeable rent with the landlords.

This arrangement, if it can be repeated for other groups, could perhaps also be part of the revitalisation scheme where by the loan/grant can be offered for renovations.

### Commercial needs:

The need to supply commercial or mixed use buildings is currently throwing up other issues. In order to renovate for commercial space, building approval has to be sought and bomba consulted. As many of the long old houses do not have back lanes or if they do, they don't have second staircases they would not comply with building regulations and would require expensive additions in order to do so. These renovations too would require the applications to be submitted by a architect adding to the overall budget.

Although many existing outlets do not comply any new project has to especially where public money is invested.

This issue has not been dismissed by PHT but requires consultation with bomba and the building department which we have asked for.

The possible solutions to be gained from the RM100,000,000 fund, will not happen overnight, it may not be able to help the tenants from the early evictions where River Road is intended to supply to those who qualify. But it is potentially an ongoing solution for further revitalisation of the city.

With the Repeal of Rent Control, there are now many empty houses, an urgency to solve tenants' problems, and at the same time, to revitalize the city.

We ask PHT members to get in touch with PHT if you have any properties which you would like to have revitalized, or you know of anyone interested in the scheme, if you need advice from PHT about what to do with the properties, or would like to apply for the grant/loan scheme. We expect that conditions of social housing will be attached to the grant/loan which means that the property will have to be rented out to low-income tenants for a few years as a condition of receiving the incentive for physical upgrading.

Incremental revitalisation would allow more properties to be renovated in order to house needy tenants thus keeping neighbourhood alive. Second generation renovation with a further financial input would perhaps entice the wealthier members of Penang back into a heart that has been kept beating through the affordable housing project.

Please members - think about it and if you can, help it happen -  
*Gwyn Jenkins*



## Evaluation Workshop: Good Governance in Cultural Heritage Conservation

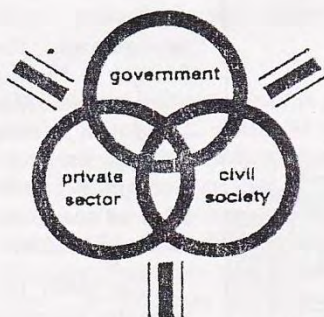
Date: Saturday, June 10, 2000

Time: 9.00-5.00pm

Place: Hotel 1926, Burma Road

### ISSUES

- What is sustainable human development?
- What is good governance?
- How do we measure good governance principles in cultural heritage conservation?
- How do we promote cooperation between state, business sector & civil society towards better governance in heritage conservation?



### German students on ASA Programme

Last year we had three students, David, Markus and Suzanne on the ASA programme sponsored by the prestigious Carl Duisberg Society conducting a survey for PHT on youth perceptions on living in the inner city.

This year ASA is sending two students, Peter who is studying anthropology and geography at Freiburg University, and Diane, student of architecture in Wiesbaden near Frankfurt.

They will be in Penang from 3 September to 12 December 2000. We will find a room or apartment in the inner city, but they would still need some local contacts, someone to show them around. Would any PHT members like to volunteer to be their "host" family?

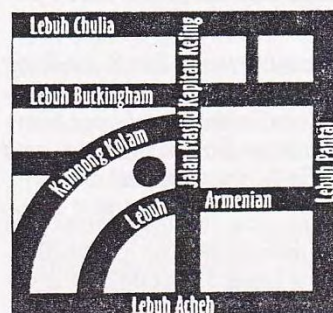
TUGI is a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project to help local governments make cities in the Asia Pacific more liveable, particularly for the urban poor, women and children, by promoting good governance principles. It aims to improve the quality of urban life by developing indicators, tools and methodologies for good governance, identifying positive references that can be developed, and enhancing the capacities of local authorities.

TUGI is introducing Good Governance Report Cards, tools for evaluating the level of good governance. The Asia Pacific Network for Urban Conservation (AWPNUC), a regional network for which Penang Heritage Trust is the secretariat, has been appointed the consultant to undertake the field-testing for the Good Governance Report Card on Cultural Heritage. This report card focuses on the performance of Local Government in cultural heritage conservation.

We are inviting various stakeholders, committed individuals from government, private sector and civil society, to participate in this programme.

For further inquiries, please contact Khoo Salma at 604-2620123 or Priscilla at 604-2642631.

## WELCOME — TO THE — HISTORIC CENTRE OF PENANG



## SOPOMULYA

### VISITOR INFORMATION BOOKS · CARDS HERITAGE GIFTS

156, Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling  
(Pitt Street), 10200 Penang,  
Malaysia

Tel (04) 264 5659  
Fax (04) 263 3970

Next time you are going to the Armenian Street area, please drop by Sopo Mulya, on the Pitt Street square just in front of Yap Kongs. Ahmad Chik's house at 156 Pitt Street has a new coat of indigo limewash, and his former rent control tenants are staying on. What used to be Sri Veera Bindery (apparently the owner died in India) is now a Lubis & Salma's heritage gift shop which carries:

- books by Penang authors
- T-shirts and bags from PHT and other Penang NGOs
- cards & prints by Penang artists.

Roslin, President of Kelab Belia Warisan is running the shop. Come and chat about what's happening in the inner city. One of the old tenants Muhammad makes teh tarik and teh halia.

Representatives from various groups/organisations met YAB Dr Teng Hock Nan and several local Councillors to discuss the return of the Town Hall to the public. Negotiations resulted in a compromise on the use of the spaces and the beginning of a promising working relationship between MPPP, PHT, performing arts and other groups.

*Open Letter to YAB Dr Teng Hock Nan, Penang State Executive Councillor Local Government, Environment and Traffic Management).*

Thank you for facilitating the above meeting held on 4 May 2000, 3 pm at Level 53, KOMTAR in the public interest.

Penang Heritage Trust welcomes your commitment to restore the Town Hall to its former glory. This should be an exemplary restoration in view of the fact that it is one of the only eight buildings in Penang gazetted under the Antiquities Act.

We hope that the appointed Consultant Architect will be experienced in restoration works and that there will be close cooperation with the Museum Negara authority in charge of such gazetted properties (of more than 100 years old). Penang Heritage Trust will be most happy to lend any assistance to assist you in achieving these objectives.

We also wish to highlight and reiterate the following points of agreement on matters raised at the above meeting, for further action to be taken and they are as follows :-

1. All supported the decision that the Auditorium of the Town Hall is to be allocated to public use - performing arts, exhibitions etc.

2. The MPPP agreed to the NGO's proposal to set up of a Consultative Committee appointed by

the MPPP with representation from the relevant groups so as to enhance the development, maintenance and usage of the Town Hall facilities.

3. All supported the MPPP's decision to Appoint a Consultant Architect to supervise the current works being conducted at the Town Hall so that it is in keeping with its status as a gazetted heritage building as well as its functions as a Civic Cultural Centre. The NGO's requested that the Consultant revert to the Consultative Committee for input in terms of technical requirements and functional needs of the building.

4. The MPPP agreed to re-examine the allocation of space on the

formation Counter for the Arts and Cultural events to be run by the State Cultural Council and the Penang Tourist Guides Association.

6. The MPPP pledged that the very large space on the First Floor currently allocated to the Marketing, Sales and Management Office of the Sungai Pinang low-cost housing development of the MPPP has a limited time frame and the space would be reallocated in 2-3 years to support the Auditorium as a performing venue.

7. The MPPP pledged that the large space on the Ground Floor currently allocated to the usage of the Car Parking Unit, has a limited time-frame as MPPP intends to install meters in most of Georgetown. The Sungai Pinang Management office could then be relocated to the Ground Floor as soon as space becomes available.

8. The MPPP has currently allocated space on the First Floor to the MPPP Archives. It pledged to re-examine the possibility of sharing the space with Dr. G. H. L. M.

Sarwar's Asian Arts Collection, (being offered) as well as the Malaysiana/Penang collection owned by the State Museum. All present were fully supportive of the proposals as long as MPPP pledges that the contents will be available to the public for research and study. In fact, the space being allocated might be insufficient if the proposal is to be seriously carried out.

Once again, we thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

*Dr Choong Sim Poey - President of PHT*



*Illustration by Yeyen, Badan Warisan Sumatra*

First Floor in order to incorporate some essential needs of a functioning performing arts Auditorium e.g.

- a mandatory Technical Room facing the stage
- adequate Storage Areas for dismantled risers, music stands and chairs
- at least one Rehearsal Studio

5. The MPPP agreed to reexamine the allocation of space on the Ground Floor in order to incorporate a Public and Tourist In-

Teresa Capol, our Council member in charge of heritage tours and trails reports:

8 - 10 March 2000, with Mr Mikio Oshida from Ishikawa International Cooperation Research Centre (IICRC), Kanazawa Prefecture, Japan

11 March 2000, a walking heritage tour for 22 architect students from Lim Kok Wing Institute of Creative Technology.

31 March 2000, a walking and trishaw tour for 12 members of the American Women Association. The ladies and some spouses had coffee morning at the PHT office at 10.30 am before continuing their tour by trishaws.

On 13-19 April 2000, Joanne Khaw conducted a tour for a Japanese NHK video documentary entitled, "Cities of the World". Joanne and Roslin Mohd Hanifah, President of Kelab Belia Warisan also starred in this Penang episode.

### Penang Heritage Trust Museum Shop

in the compound of the  
State Museum, Farquhar  
Street  
is managed by Mr. Peter Foo

OPEN 11-5PM, 6 DAYS A  
WEEK, CLOSED ON FRIDAYS.

Heritage information,  
books, old photographs, T-  
shirts, antiques, related to  
Penang.

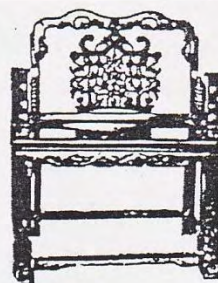
Postcards, journal *Past &  
Present* and calendar pub-  
lished by the Penang Mu-  
seum.

Handphone: 012 498 9617

## Campbell Street Night

In conjunction with SUKMA, the Campbell Street Business Association is organising a Campbell Street Night on

Tuesday 30 May 2000 at 6 pm - 11 pm. The Penang Heritage Trust will be setting up a booth on the street.



### FURNITURE RESTORATION WORKSHOP with DAVID YEO

David Yeo, an active member of PHT, is an antique collector and dealer with more than 20 years experience in furniture restoration. He will be conducting a furniture restoration workshop on:

Date : Saturday 17 June 2000

Time : 9.00 am - 5 pm

Venue : PHT office, 26-A Lorong Stewart, 10200 Penang

Fee : RM180 per participant

The objective of the workshop is

~ to train participants with the basic knowledge and practical hands-on experience to identify, restore and conserve old and antique furniture.

~ to develop appreciation and awareness of the beauty, durability, craftsmanship and the sense of history of each piece of furniture.



*manik slippers*

### NEW Bead Workshop

Michael Cheah, a specialist in Nyonya & Baba heritage, is organising another beaded slippers course at the PHT's office, by popular demand. Fees: RM140 for 4 sessions held weekly.

The courses will now start on: Tuesday 20 June 2000  
at 9.30 am - 12 noon or Saturday 1 July 2000  
at 3.00pm - 5.30 pm

Part of the proceeds will go to support PHT. Materials are not included, but Michael will be selling them at RM18. Nyonya kueh and Chinese tea will be provided. Those interested, please contact Priscilla at Tel : 04-264 2631

*HAWA – Jawatankuasa Pembangunan  
Wanita Pulau Pinang,*

*Penang Heritage Trust &*

*Unit Pengajian Wanita dan Sumber Manusia (KANITA)  
are organising :*

*Kenangan—Wanita & Gaya Hidup  
di Tanjung & Desa*

**Memories—Women & Lifestyles in  
George Town & the Villages Beyond**

Date : Friday 30 JUN 2000

Venue : HOTEL 1926, JALAN BURMAH, PENANG

The house is the sacred abode of woman where in the most primary human relationship based on birth. The home determines the character and formation of a family, shaping to a significant extent, its nucleation, expansion, segmentation or fragmentation. Shrinking spaces discourage expansion of size and expanding spaces encourage boundaries of inclusion. Yet houses are not built in isolation and are designed as living communities sharing common facilities, amenities relating to transportation, security, recreation, eateries, health care and schooling. A holistic community encourages social stability and a disintegrated community, a dysfunctional society.

This seminar and public forum has the overall objective of de-

termining and defining, through history, ethnicity and gender, the ideal type communities that have and should emerge in the city of Georgetown and the rural areas. It attempts to evaluate the extent to which women with their overall concern for community relations, health care, education and security are committed to defining the character of the city of the future.

Womens' inputs, views and ideas are seldom heard in local governance, not only because they are not encouraged to par-

ticipate in public discussions and debates but also because it is generally assumed that if anything goes wrong with the family, women will somehow always manage to put it right.

However, issues relating to urban governance transcend the capacity of the ordinary woman unless she is able to work collectively with the full support of her family, grass root organisations and local government agents. This seminar will also attempt to determine strengths and weaknesses in our institutional structures to ascertain how Penang can move forward into another era of fame by empowering women to develop new strengths from their earlier experiences of sustaining culturally vibrant communities.

**Objectives**

- Encourage women to reflect, define and formulate concepts of vibrant urban communities.

- Develop models of sustainable cultural neighbourhoods, to ascertain fundamental institutional structures which should be conserved.

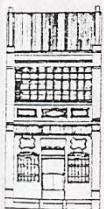
- Recognise the innovations of women to reconstruct and reinvent old communities along modern lines.

- Establish more sustainable linkages between social life styles, local cultures and heritage.

- Promote urban tourism through real life styles and not staged or exhibitive cultures.

***PHT Car Stickers  
for Sale***

*@RM2 per piece. Available at  
the end of May 2000*



# Save Historic George Town

**LISTED ON 100 MOST ENDANGERED SITES 2000, WORLD MONUMENTS WATCH**

website: [www.pht.org.my](http://www.pht.org.my) • email: [phtrust@po.jaring.my](mailto:phtrust@po.jaring.my)

Penang  
Heritage  
Trust  
Persatuan  
Warisan  
Pulau  
Pinang



## OLD WORLD CHARM a kopitiam conversation Tan Teong Kooi

A firm called Heritage Works did it and Dato Kee Phaik Cheen, the State Executive Councillor for Tourism and Culture, was full of praise for it, so naturally the three of us PHT stalwarts of the corner-coffeeshop chattering kind (let me call the other two CFT and KSB) went to check it out – this new wannabe happening place in the heart of the city.

Called The Garage, it is a spectacular collection of nearly full-scale models of our elderly inner-city buildings the 'art-décor-style' designers have stuffed into the spacious Art Deco building opposite the E&O Hotel. Originally the Wearne Brothers car showroom (I used to have my 1965 Austin Healey Sprite serviced there), then the Kaliniaga furniture showroom, the place is now become what you are forgiven for thinking is the Heritage Works restored shophouse showroom. I must say Dato Kee was not overstating it when she told *The Star*: 'Empty buildings and spaces can be revitalised to re-enact Penang's old-world charm.'

'To see this bizarre – sorry, I mean bazaar – is to think what a wonderful stage-set it'd make for the Nyonya-Baba comic drama *Emily of Emerald Hill*, perhaps also the more hilarious episodes of TV3's *Kopitiam*,' CFT, a struggling views-of-old-Penang artist, was amused to observe. 'It might even be good enough for the Armenian Street market scene in *Anna and the King*, the Hollywood movie.'

'Hey, that pastel yellow one is almost a portrait of our old Cintra Street house as a young shop,' said KSB, a self-appointed cultural tourism expert.

TTK: Tell me, what do you people think of the Leith Street place?

CFT: Oh, I must say I like it a whole lot better. There they're century-old shophouses, not turn-of-the-millennium century-old ones, nor are they confined within the walls of a mother building. You don't get the feeling they're putting on a false front and telling you only the phony is real – and that's the big difference.

KSB: I see your point FT, but I think you're wrong to say no one will bother with this new kid on the block. You, for one, have come to let it bother you. Maybe everyone will visit it simply because it's an encapsulated mock-up extravaganza, as you call it.

CFT: I don't understand – bringing the street where you live to ... err ... well, the street where you live. Like carrying coals to Batu Arang?

KSB: Listen, there are at least three groups of people who will make this place a huge success. First, the tourists – and I don't mean the Chulia Street backpacking types, those culture-vultures and writers of serious travel books who come here and stay in our no-star backstreet hotels. I'm talking about those who come here specially to enjoy, as the CM likes to say, our famous three asses – ass, as in ass for Singapore – our sun, sea, and sand.

CFT: Hey, you left out our most famous ass.

KSB: We're not supposed to be proud of it.

CFT: Have you seen *Return to Paradise*?

KSB: Yes, but as Tourism Malaysia says, that bit about Penang selling sex, your most famous ass, is nothing to get excited about because Malaysians are all bright enough to tell the difference between fact and fiction.

CFT: So it might be fiction then, our being a paradise for tourists looking for bad girls and good hashish?

KSB: Or it might be fact. Or maybe it's fact that's become fiction because it's been made the theme of a movie.

CFT: I see. As they say, it's only a movie.

KSB: But this movie of course will be one hell of an advertisement for our tourist trade. *The Beach*, for example, has done wonders for that of the Thais, though they don't say it.

TTK: SB, would you like to go on with your story about the bizarre bazaar?

KSB: Where was I? Ah yes; since the Leonardo DiCaprios of the Ferringhi beach resorts type have all brought their Nikons along they'll want to take some pictures of the old city as well. Right? But why do it the hard way, why do the PHT Heritage Trail when you can do a one-stop tour of the streets of Georgetown at The Garage

CFT: And no worries about getting bad bowels because of eating at Kampung Malabar.

KSB: Second, you have the shop-till-you-drop parents. You can be sure they'll make this spanking-new emporium with a charming old-world difference a fun day out with the kids.

CFT: And no worries about getting yourself knocked down by a Proton.

KSB: And let's not forget our new breed of young professionals – the PR managers, marketing and advertising executives, your KLSE wizards and prophets. The young will always go where it's trendy, to see and to be seen. And heritage is trendy, whether you like it or not. It's trendy because we make it so.

TTK: We make it so? How do you mean?

KSB: Well, we make it such a big deal that it's caught the imagination of the entrepreneurs and all at once they get this bright idea to use it to dress up their shops to attract the yuppie dollar, heritage as decoration and accessory; and so you go and sit on a rubberwood copy of your grandfather's favourite chair and admire the plywood one of his stately home, and get this big thrill of being part of the scene you've made the in-thing; and so this encapsulated shop-house extravaganza is going to be very popular, at least until heritage is no longer the trend, which is not going to be any time soon, judging from the fascination it still has for even that ultra-modern society south of the border .... Oh, you know what I mean.

TTK: I'm not sure I do. Are you people saying the Heritage Works development is *not* a heritage development – that's to say *not* a development that works towards enhancing Penang's old-world charm or for that matter the PHT's image as protector of that charm?

KSB: I'm afraid I'm saying more than that. I'm saying it's a misunderstanding of the principles of preservation, a travesty of the heritage cause, a perversity of the heritage cult that will only deepen the jungle of our cultural confusion.

TTK: I should remind you two the Wearne Brothers is still there and still in all its Art Deco glory. Its exterior has not been touched, except by a new coat of paint. Don't you think the PHT, the Penang Municipal Council, Heritage Works, and the State Tourism Board are all to be congratulated for rescuing the building for the city – the Trust for agitating for it to be saved, the Council for listing it, Heritage Works for developing it, and the Tourism Board for promoting it as a Visit-Penang attraction?

KSB: And don't you think this project is a solid step in the right direction to upgrade downtown Penang?

CFT: And don't you think we should have more of such up-market commercial and tourist packages around?

KSB: And don't you agree they'll help bring about our economic recovery?

CFT: And don't you agree the economic recovery is all that matters?

KSB: And do I have to tell you again tourism is our biggest money-spinner after manufacturing?

CFT: And do I have to tell you again our old-world charm is our selling point?

TTK: And I'm sure you'd like very much to answer your own questions.

CFT: Well, let me say it again: You're spoiling your old-world charm by creating all these arty-crafty fool-the-eye versions of it everywhere in old Georgetown. You're corrupting it, degrading it, ruining it.

TTK: But of course the idea is to enhance it.

KSB: You're also saying the visitors might prefer the reproduction to the original. That's insult. That's undermining your selling point.

TTK: But of course the intention is to improve its competitive edge.

We went to Ah Pin's to continue the debate.

KSB: It may seem a good idea, even the logical thing, to do a tourism-heritage-culture tie-in, but as so often happens this sort of for-profit menage a trois will end up with tourism giving heritage a black eye and culture a bloody nose and, sad to say in this case, sending the both of them to jail as well at No.2 Penang Road.

CFT: Pretty soon we'll have no heritage or culture to argue about.

KSB: Now, if The Garage were the Penang Pavilion of a World Cultural Tourism Expo being held, say, at the Millennium Dome in London, it wouldn't be hard to imagine the searchers of old-world charm taking the next flight here to see the real thing. But it's not; it's right here in Penang, competing with the rest of the inner city for attention.

CFT: Is it any wonder so many of our heritage friends everywhere have come to think demolition is no bad thing.

TTK: Demolition? Are you off your nut? Are you suggesting we should all just stand by and let the Boon San Tong Khoo Kongsi people tear down their Beach Street property? For your information the Georgetown historic enclave has been listed by the World Monuments Fund as one of the world's hundred most endangered sites. And UNESCO has also named Penang as a possible World Heritage City.

CFT: Yes, I'm aware of that and I'm with you all the way the PHT is quite right to campaign to save these buildings. There's no question the Trust must do its job of defending what's left of our old-world charm. But look at this *Star* report on the project. If you're ready for a gag, I'll read it to you. Ready? Here is what it says:

Boon San Tong Khoo Kongsi secretary Khoo Kay Hock gave his assurance that the office block would not be an eyesore as its façade would incorporate historical values to blend with the surroundings. He also said that the developer, Sun Hin Marketing, was working with the ad-hoc conservation guidelines review committee on the architectural designs.

TTK: If there's a joke there, maybe you should tell it to *The Star*.

CFT: Okay, *The Star*, I'm sure, didn't mean it to be a joke, but let me try to make my point clearer by speaking heresy: Rather an old photograph of Metropole than Metropole rebuilt as the toy doorway, the little doorman, of a new 39-storey hotel.

KSB: Good evening Tan Sri, good evening Dato; err ... yes, I was originally Asdang House, a flamboyant mansion of Moorish design. I was illegally demolished one night some years ago. As you can see, I'm now merely a caricature of my former self, but thank you so very much for making it possible for me to be rehabilitated.

CFT: Our manager, Mr Pole, will introduce you to my towering five-star successor and master, The Grand MetroAsdang. I'm sure you'll like the Khaw Sim Bee presidential suites and the Khaw Joo Tock superior de luxe rooms.

KSB: Oh and you must also see the Prince Chulalongkorn concert hall and the Prince Damrong Rajanubhab banquet hall. I should mention I had the pleasure of entertaining the King and Queen of Siam in 1929.

CFT: PHT, I believe you have an AGM – sorry, EGM – and then a press conference at the Chakrabong Room?

KSB: Looks like it's rather a cruel joke the planners and developers have played on the PHT. If I'm not mistaken, it's the PHT who demanded that the building be reconstructed. Well, look at the result.

TTK: But surely the planners and developers were only trying to do their best to respect the demands, requests, and wishes of the PHT. Seen that way, it's a historic victory for the Trust, isn't it? Well, isn't it?

CFT: A victory perhaps for the Trust, but certainly a humiliation for heritage.

KSB: Certainly the story of the enterprising sons and daughters of Penang all speaking the UNESCO language of Stakeholder Cooperation in Tourism Development and Heritage Preservation while furthering their sectional interests and special agendas.

CFT: Not even dying is allowed the dignity of being permanent. The stakeholders cooperate to get Metropole resurrected and World Heritage List Penang gets an architectural curiosity to amuse the tourists. So what else is new?

TTK: Talking of jokes, have you two heard this one? How many preservationists does it take to change a light bulb? Four: one to change the bulb, one to document the event, and two to lament the passing of the old bulb.

KSB: And talking of heresy, have you heard this one? Don't save Suffolk House. Let it remain a romantic ruin: rather the ghost of Martina Rozells than the spirit of Old World Charm In The Midst Of Modern Living.

TTK: The spirit of what?

KSB: What, you don't know? That's the new Visit-Penang spin the hospitality industry authorities have put on our urban revitalisation programme, so those modern living projects like The Garage could be promoted together with, mind you, the Cheong Fatt Tze and the Syed Alatas, not to mention Little India, as part of Penang's old-world charm.

CFT: What's worrying about the Sun Hin Marketing building is that it's threatening to be part of the old-world charm of its surroundings.

TTK: Worrying? Threatening?

CFT: Just look at all those commercial blocks now springing up all over the city, like that Tye Sin Street one occupied by Yamaha and others for example. Do you think any visitor would be impressed by their borrowed charms? I mean the pediments, pilasters, arches, keystones and what have you they've stolen from their neighbours and thrown together as their own faces.

TTK: But as this town-planner friend of mine explains it, these buildings are only trying to communicate with the rest of the street, to have a polite conversation with their elders. They're buildings about historical memory, ornament, urban context, participation, the public realm ...

CFT: Yes and that's perfectly fine with me – but tell me, where's the creativity? Where's the one new historical memory building in this city that's not a mere collage, a so-what-if-it's-just-a *cari-makan* the-mixture-as-before collage, a *chin-chai* also-can *boleh-tahan atum-mudiyum* mishmash of a collage of our old buildings?

TTK: Looks like the warm beer is starting to do the talking. Ah Pin, do you have cold Tiger?

CFT: It'd be interesting to see how this ad-hoc conservation guidelines review committee deals with Sun Hin Marketing. If this office block gets to pretend to be a 19<sup>th</sup> century kongsi great house, it'll become, mark my words, the enclave's real eyesore, another unintended danger to the endangered site.

TTK: But as this architect friend of mine says, boring mimicry of our inherited building forms is what the developers think the powerful PHT would be happy to see. This guidelines review committee, let's hope they come down on the side of a more flexible heritage policy, so creativity is not stifled and we can all have some exciting buildings to see. Whatever happened to the idea of Penang as a City of Architecture?

KSB: Maybe, to remind us of the historical significance of the Beach Street Fire Brigade, Sun Hin Marketing will also give their building a weather-shield coat of British fire-engine red.

TTK: This is how our PHT friend VC puts it. The avant-garde Bangunan Asia Insurance, the RHB Bank, the Bumiputra Commerce building – aren't these arrogant look-at-me erections an even bigger threat to the old enclave?

CFT: Well, they're unashamedly avant-garde, aren't they? They're not trying to fool you into thinking they might be nonagenarian erections, are they? And isn't that end of Beach Street

from the very beginning about vigour and confidence, the progress and future of your money? And must you have a 1920s Standard Chartered Bank kind of face before you can be seen as strong and friendly, or trustworthy, or respectful of your elderly neighbours?

KSB: Look, before we confuse ourselves any further let me put it this way: Do we want old Georgetown to be proliferated with such ersatz old-world-charm charmers as the Cititel, the Wisma MTT, or the Kwong Wah Yit Poh?

CFT: Or for that matter the sort of facade alteration done by K & K Pro-Kitchen Centre of Green Lane or the reverse kind done by Eng Tile of Anson Road. We have so many buildings of the colonial period disguised as modern ones and modern ones as colonial ones. You'd think all this face exchanging is because they're all getting ready to attend some all-year-round Visit-Penang masked ball.

TTK: You can talk till the *Return To Paradise* tourists come home, but Ah Pin says he's got no more beer, warm or cold.

KSB: We'll talk till we can come to some sort of agreement about what they're doing to the Penang Rose Chan, bless her, made so memorable a moment for some of us old-timers. Ta ta taaa ... Cherry Pink 'n Apple Blossom White ... da da da da da da daaa ... Remember?

CFT: Seriously TK, what do you think of the imprisoned shophouse aesthetic of The Garage?

KSB: Don't you think it's just the sort of kitsch thing that more than anything else could badly damage Penang's reputation as a heritage city? Perhaps even kill the charming old-world hen that lays the golden tourist egg, so to speak?

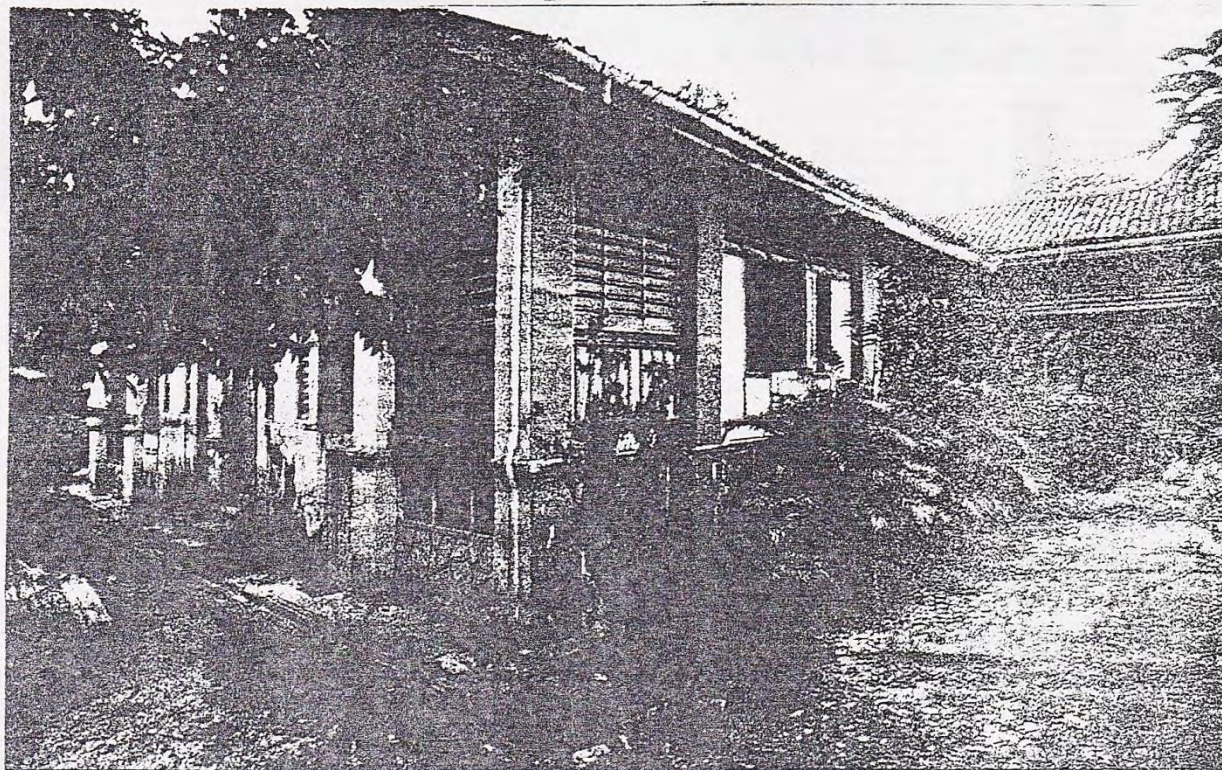
TTK: These of course are questions best answered by kopitiam singers and speakers, critics and opinion-makers like you two.

KSB: Well, this critic says: The Heritage Works development is a magnificent monument to boutique cultural tourism. But one is enough.

CFT: And this opinion-maker says: Old Penang re-enacted in old Penang is old Penang turned into Fantasy Island. The plane! The plane! But who's going to play Tattoo?

KSB: What do you, old friend, have to say?

TTK: Goodbye Old World Charm, Hello Garage.



HERITAGE GEM ... the house that Nathaniel Bacon built that was later given to Sheikh Omar.

## 'Gems' of Sheikh Omar

By CHEAH UI-HOON  
Pictures: LAWRENCE SEOW

**S**OMEBODY would do well to come up with a "treasure map" for Penang, especially of its architectural gems scattered throughout Penang Island.

The best of the lot are those tucked in nooks and corners disfigured by moss and other dark matter growing on the building, camouflaged by overgrown lalang, stray bushes and weeds and neglected because they are not in the

public eye.

That certainly holds true for the state's largest Muslim mausoleum (and possibly the country) - the Sheikh Omar Basheer mausoleum in Kampung Melayu, Air Itam, built in 1881.

It was a warm afternoon when Penang Heritage Trust (PHT) members went there to "kick off" their new programme which will take them on site visits to heritage homes once a month.

The mausoleum could be easily missed. If not for two Trust members standing by

the roadside, we could easily have zoomed past the place even with a map at hand.

More than 40 enthusiastic PHT members turned up for the visit of Sheikh Omar's mausoleum and his heritage house, generously hosted by his great grand-daughter Zakiah Basheer and her siblings Zakaria, Fatimah and Hashim Yahaya plus extended family members.

PHT members were seated in a modern extension next to the original house, to listen to the history of Sheikh Omar, a prominent religious leader in

Penang at his time, and the role he and his family played in Penang's development over a span of 100 years.

Trust members Khoo Salma Nasution and Dilys Yap presented the history of the house and mausoleum, with additional insights by the Basheer family, of whom several still live in the house.

From the talk it was clear that the history of the Basheers is one of religious leadership and community service in Penang, from the mid-19th century to the present. (Full

report on Page 3).

Knowledge of their history imbued a depth of appreciation for the house and mausoleum, making alive their architectural heritage.

For instance, the house, in Malay design, with a Chinese-style roof, has housed many generations of the Basheer family. It is said to have been erected in 1840 by Nathaniel Bacon, a writer who was secretary to Penang founder Captain Francis Light.

● TURN TO PAGE 2

## Exhibition on Penang's rich heritage in August

PENANG: Artists have been encouraged to draw from Penang's rich social, historical and cultural heritage for inspiration in the upcoming Penang Heritage Trust art exhibition.

"Artists can play a role in 'recording' Penang's heritage, which is seriously threatened with possible loss," said Trust council member Loh-Lim Lin Lee.

Loh-Lim said the exhibition would be a step towards "recognising" Penang's cultural vibrancy with the artists' interpretation and re-

STAR, SAKUDAY  
27 APRIL 2000  
cording.

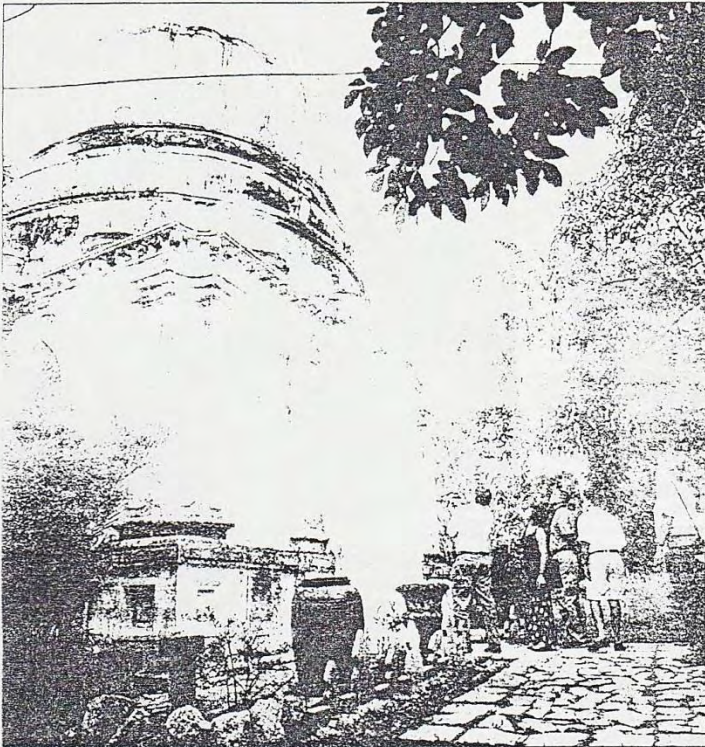
Themed "Old World Charm ... in Modern Living", the exhibition is meant to create awareness and encourage greater interest in the cultural heritage of Penang.

The deadline for submission of works, photographs and entry forms is June 30, while the exhibition will be held in August.

Each artist can only have a maximum of two paintings.

For further information, contact the Trust (☎ 04-2642631 or 04-2645487).

# Basheer imprint in Penang history



**SAD SIGHT . . .**  
the imposing  
mausoleum  
which is sadly  
badly affected  
by the fumes  
of nature and  
disrepair.

**S**HEIKH Omar Basheer was a Hadrami Arab who became the Imam of the Acheen Street Mosque in the mid-19th century. His family apparently came to Malaya in the early 1800s.

Sheikh Omar's role in history came to the fore after the infamous Penang Riots of 1867.

Ten days after the riots, the Malays of Penang were made to swear to Sheikh Omar that they did not belong to the *Tuan Chee People* of the White Flag Society or the *Che Long People* of the Red Flag society, the two Malay societies linked to the Chinese secret societies Ghee Hin and Hai San.

This act shows the respect and trust the British administrators had for Sheikh Omar, who was the foremost religious teacher in Penang, and noted for his teaching of a special form of meditation known as *Suluk* at the Ayer Itam mosque.

Sheikh Omar was a Sufi teacher of the *Naqshabandiyyah tarekat* and was also known as Sheikh Omar Al-Khaladi. According to the Penang Heritage Trust, this signified that he was a disciple of one Khalid Al-Nakshabandi, a Meccan leader of the *tarekat*.

Locally, the *tarekat* was known as *suluk* or spiritual retreat or seclusion. When Sheikh Omar became a religious teacher at the Ayer Itam mosque in 1870, the mosque became known as "Misjid Sulok" in the area.

His fame was such that he was invited by the people of Demak in Java to become their *Kathil*. He returned to Penang after the death of his wife and two sons.

Sheikh Omar died in 1881 and one of his sons, Sheikh Zachariah, built a mausoleum for him, next to the Basheer house. Builders from India were commissioned to do the job.

The mausoleum, regarded as a *Kramat* by the people in the area, is about 10.7m high, with a typical Indian mughal-type dome crowning a square concrete base of Anglo design.

**THE Basheer family is well known in Penang, especially in the Kampung Melayu area, because of the key roles played in history by the three generations of community leaders, spanning more than 100 years.**

**They are the late Sheikh Omar Basheer, his son the late Sheikh Haji Zachariah, and grandson the late Datuk Haji Fathil.**

It was built from donations which came primarily from members of the royal families of Kedah, Selangor and the then Sultan of Langkat, Sumatra.

In 1988, the mausoleum was noted for its heritage value by the government which spent RM12,000 to "restore" the structure but has since left it to the forces of nature.

Sheikh Zachariah, also a religious leader, purportedly issued a *fatwa* against the Penang-based *boria* in 1923, considering it non-religious.

On an interesting note, PIIT's Khoo Salma Nasution cites that the *boria* groups consequently became Malay football clubs.

Sheikh Zachariah ran a ticketing agency for pilgrims going to Jeddah. During his time, Acheen Street became the hub for pilgrims from Sumatra and South Thailand because there were two departure points, Singapore and Penang.

His son, Haji Fathil, was born in 1899 in Lumut Lane, off Acheen Street.

He studied at a vernacular school in Carnarvon Street, learned English at the Anglo Chinese School in Maxwell Road and attended the Arabic School in Acheen Street.

Fathil married a granddaughter of Hashim Yahya Merican, the donor of the *Waqf* land and mosque in Perak Road, in 1926. He was appointed to the management committee of the

Penang Malay Settlement in Kampung Melayu formed in 1931.

Member of the State Muslim Advisory Board, Fathil had been headman of the Acheen Street Mosque, and had chaired committees to build a mosque in Zoo Road, and renovate mosques in Langkawi Road and Rope Walk.

Active in sports when young, he was a founder of the Persatuan Melayu Penang, the Darul Ahsan Football Club and the Young United Sports Club.

In 1950, during the Emergency, he was appointed to the War Advisory Committee and Supervisor Home-guard for Ayer Itam and Matang Kuching.

He was a nominated member of the Rural Board from 1951 until Merdeka, and in 1954, was chairman of the Kampung Baru branch of Umno when appointed a member of the Local Government.

During the communal riots of 1957, Fathil, who was on the Merdeka celebrations committee, was elected to sit in an executive committee to restore peace and order.

He had served on the board of governors of the Ayer Itam Malay and English schools, the Muslim Orphanage and several goodwill committees.

In 1971, he was made a Justice of Peace, but poor health caused him resign as chairman of the state Rural Development Board which he had served since 1963.

Among the artefacts he donated to the Penang Museum, of which he was a founder member when it was set up in 1964, were antique weaponry such as *kris*, *pedang*, *badek*, *jembia* and *tambak*, old silver dollars, two old volumes of Quran, handwritten in gold and brought from Istanbul.

One was brought by his grandfather Sheikh Omar, the other was given by Tuan Syed Mohamed Noordin Merican, one of the oldest and richest Malay families in Penang. — CHEAH UI-HOON.

# Mausoleum 'museum'

● FROM PAGE 1

Bacon had bequeathed the spacious house to his adopted son, trusted friend and bodyguard, Syed Hassan Baharom, who in turn presented it to Sheikh Omar. Syed Hassan was a disciple of Sheikh Omar.

Rebuilt once or twice, the house with its creaky but cool wooden floorboards is still a trove of antique treasures. Most obviously however it is a much-loved family

home wherein numerous pictures of family members decorate the walls of the rooms.

After PHT members took turns to visit the house, some proceeded to the mausoleum which now looks derelict since it was last "spruced up" 12 years ago.

PHT council member Laurence Loh was however critical of the mausoleum's supposed restoration, pointing out how wrong paint was used for the walls, and additional

structures were unsympathetically added on to the mausoleum.

"The openings or orifices in the dome which allowed for light to come in were also sealed, which is not sympathetic to the original design and probably causes more dampness within the mausoleum," he said.

The floors and bottom half of the walls inside the mausoleum were also re-tiled with green rectangular tiles fashionable in the 1980s.

The mausoleum not only preserves the past, but has played an important role in saving antiques for the present and future generations of Malaysians.

In an interview with *The Star* in 1985, the late Fathil related how the mausoleum was the saving grace of the antique weaponry and his coin collection which he later donated to the Penang Museum.

During the Japanese occupation, the Japanese had ordered the surrender of all weapons. The consequence of disobedience was getting your head chopped off.

Fathil had then greased all the weapons and put them in a gunny sack with a box of his silver and copper coins and buried them near the mausoleum.

"Holding torchlights, members of the family accompanied me to the but, old man, where we dug six holes and I buried a treasure!" he said in the interview.

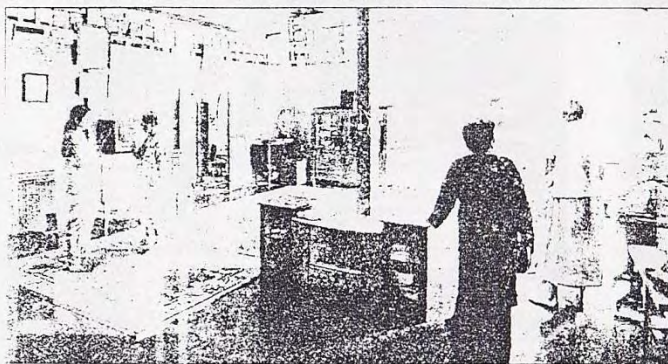
A tombstone was erected to "mark" the spot, and later, true enough, the Japanese had come to search both the house and mausoleum, but left the "grave" alone!

The Penang Heritage Trust is organising consequent visits to Homestead (March 26), Crag Hotel (April 30), Sungai Bakap Kee Estate (May 28), Chung Keng Kwee Temple (June 25), Convent Light Street with Government



A TREASURE ... the Sheikh Omer Basheer mausoleum in Jalan Kampung Melayu. (Note the Anglo-Indian influence).

House (July 23), Rinnymede Hotel (August 27) and The Straits Eclectic Loh Lean San quartet (Sept 24). Visits are however only open to PHT members so those who would like to join the organisation can call the office at 2642631.



ANTIQUE TROVE ... PHT members admiring the interior of the Basheer family home built in the mid-19th century.

## NATION

17

# Rubbish dumped at old cemetery

## Site has become a drug haunt, too

By JESSINTA TAN

PENANG: A 19th century Muslim cemetery in the heart of George Town has been turned into an illegal dumpsite, according to Penang Heritage Trust (PHT) secretary Khoo Salma Nasution.

She was appalled that the graves behind the Indah Water Konsortium building in Chulia Street were "buried" under tonnes of garbage.

Khoo said the cemetery located on a plot of land endowed by a merchant named Shaik Nathersah in the 1880s had also become a drug haunt.

"It is a pity that the cemetery has been left in a dilapidated state after years of neglect," she said after PHT Youth Club members and Penang Municipal Council workers jointly held a *gotong royong* at the cemetery in conjunction with *Maal Hijrah* on Thursday.

Khoo said Shaik Nathersah, who died in 1845, also owned a building called "Hasharah

Khana" in Jalan Masjid nearby.

She said the historical building was previously used to hold religious plays and *Awal Muharram* celebrations as well as military-style boria performances by the 21st regiment from Madras, India.

"The local Malays and Indians later modified the boria performances and formed local groups representing different areas such as Hutton Lane, Jelutong and Sungai Pinang."

A conservation manager, Abdur-Razzaq Lubis, suggested the alley linking Chulia Street and Muntri Street near the cemetery be turned into a pedestrian walkway lined with street lamps.

"We are considering an adoption system where mosques or relevant parties can come in to maintain the cemetery."

PHT Youth Club president Roslin Mohd Hanifah said the cemetery and the Hasharah Khana building should be preserved as heritage assets.



OPERATION CLEAN-UP ... Abdur-Razzaq (squatting) and PHT members clearing up the rubbish from the cemetery grounds recently. The cemetery is located behind the Indah Water Konsortium building in Chulia Street.



VON CHARLOTTE WIEDEMANN

In der Altstadt riecht es nach Asien, nach dem untergeordneten alten Asien. Dünnebeinige Chinesen in kurzen Hosen brüteln auf rollenden Garküchen, vor buddhistischen Tempeln qualmen Räucherstäbe. In dämmerigen Cafés hängen Zigarettenwerbung der 30er Jahre, und Straßennamen erzählen von den Immigrantenströmen vergangener Zeiten: Armenian Street.

Als Jodie Foster für den Film „Anna and the King“ in einer Rikscha durch die Armenian Street rollte, erblickte sie mit der nervösen Verwunderung einer englischen Gouvernante das quirlige Südostasien des 19. Jahrhunderts. Nun gut, die Straße war von halb nackten Statisten bevölkert und von Elefanten aus dem Zoo, doch sonst sind die historischen Kulissen auf der malaysischen Insel Penang echt, und manche Leute hoffen, der Film könnte helfen, sie zu bewahren. Denn hinter den Kulissen schreibt die Realität an einem anderen Drehbuch: Es handelt von Bodenpreisen und Business-Interessen, von Wachstumseuphorie und vom schwierigen Kampf um Denkmalschutz.

Kulturerbe und Boomtown – Penang, multiethnisch und mehrheitlich von Chinesen bewohnt, verkörpert einen zweifachen Superlativ, einen exemplarischen Schnittpunkt von Zeiten und Mentalitäten. Andert-halb Jahrzehnte lang, bis zum Beginn der Krise 1997, war Penang eine Wirtschaftswunder-Region Asiens. Zweistellige Wachstumsraten; Hochhäuser schossen aus dem Boden, Apartment-Burgen, Hotels, Banken. 600.000 Menschen leben heute auf der Insel; die Straßen sind verstopft von Autos, dem Symbol gesteigerten Wohlstands.

Gefährdet, eingekesselt und teils auch schon zerstört ist folglich jenes Erbe, das die kosmopolitische Blüte einer vergangenen Epoche dokumentiert: eine Kollektion von Architektur des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts, die in ihrer Größe und Vielfalt eine der bedeutendsten in Südostasien ist. Tempel aller Religionen, prächtige viktorianische Villen und in der Altstadt, Georgetown genannt, komplette Straßenzüge im traditionellen zweistöckigen Shophouse-Stil: der Grundriss wie ein schmales Handtuch, vorn Arkaden, der ganze Bau eine tropentaugliche Melange angloindischer, chinesischer und portugiesischer Einflüsse.

Denkmalschutz ist ein solides deutsches Wort; es riecht nach Behörde und Plakette, es passt nicht auf asiatische Verhältnisse. In Penang, wo Englisch die Verkehrssprache ist, sagt man „Heritage“ – und oh das Erbe erhalten wird oder nicht, ist Gegenstand eines ständigen Kampfs der Meinungen, der Interessen, des Geldes. Der größte Feind des Heritage-Gedankens war der Bodenpreis. Er schraubte sich im Boom immer höher, jeder Grundbesitzer träumte von einem Hochhaus, und mancher Chinese bekannte mit Tränen in den Augen, nun müsse er die alte Familienvilla leider abreißen, weil der Boden so viel wert sei.

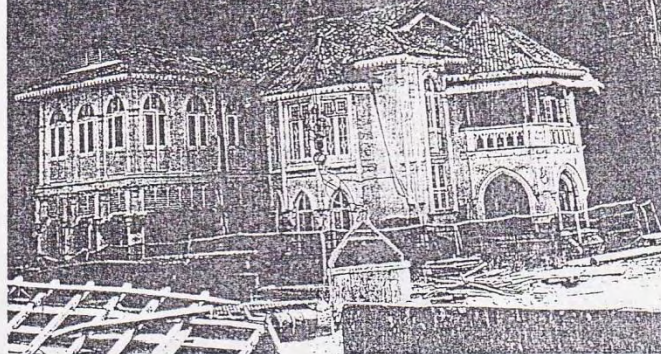
„Unsere Gesellschaft ist sehr profitorientiert; das ist typisch für ein sich entwickelndes Land“, sagt der Kaufmann Tan. Er gehört zu der kleinen Schar von Heritage-Enthusiasten und pflegt ein seltsames Hobby: Er rettet altes Holz. Wenn ein Gebäude abgerissen wird, kommt Mr. Tan und schafft Türen, Rahmen und Fensterläden hinaus, sogar Stützbalken. Er begann damit vor zehn Jahren; die Fundstücke füllten seine Lagerhalle, ein heimlicher Friedhof des Zerstörten. Das Alte wird hier nicht geschätzt, sagt Mr. Tan, für die Leute hat nur Neues Wert.

Die wohlhabenden Nachfahren jener Immigranten, die einst mittellos auf die Insel kamen, sehen in den Shophouses der Altstadt oft nur schäbige Bruchstücke: Relikte einer Vergangenheit, der sie durch Glück und harte Arbeit entronnen sind.

Salma Lulus kam zurück in die Altstadt; die 37-jährige Autorin ist die prominenteste Aktivistin im loka-

# Danke, Hollywood!

Der Film „Anna and the King“ wurde in PENANG gedreht. Dort beflügelten die Dreharbeiten den Kampf um das historische Erbe



HEU FRIST ALT

Jahrelang schossen in Boomtown Penang die Wolkenkratzer aus dem Boden, architektonische Kostbarkeiten der Vergangenheit wurden gering geachtet – das ändert sich nun

len Heritage Trust, einer Bürgerinitiative, und sie machte aus dem heruntergekommenen Shophouse der Familie ein Schmuckstück. Kühler Steinfußboden, Perlmutt-Intarsien auf einer geschnitzten Trennwand, vom kleinen Innenhof wachsenden Palmen ein Stockwerk hoch zur Sonne hin, Salma wuchs auf in einem Vorort-Bungalow, der amerikanische Traum, sagt sie spöttisch. Im Bewusstsein ihrer Eltern war schon geteilt, dass in dem Shophouse einst Geschichte gemacht wurde: Hier trafen sich 1911 konspirativ die bürgerlichen Revolutionäre Chinas, an der Spitze Sun Yat Sen; er war ein Jahr später der erste Präsident der chinesischen Republik. Die prominente Adresse ist jetzt Station eines ausgeschilderten Heritage-Plades – gesponsert von American Express.

Anfang der 90er Jahre war es noch eine völlig verrückte Idee, ein altes Haus zu restaurieren statt ein neues zu bauen, sagt Salma. „Uns wurde immer gesagt: Ihr könnt euch der Entwicklung, dem Fortschritt nicht in den Weg stellen.“ Heute hat sich die öffentliche Meinung etwas gewandelt; der Traum von Entwicklung ist angeknackst. Heritage ist ein Medienthema geworden, die lokalen Zeitungen konkurrieren um Storys. Und in den Verlautbarungen der Stadt-oberen ist der Erhalt des Kulturerbes nun ein Synonym für touristische Attraktivität. Aber es dauerte acht Jahre, bis der bekannte Architekt Jimmy Lee die Genehmigung bekam, das abgebrannte Altstadt-Haus seines Großvaters aus recyceltem Material im traditionellen Stil nachzubauen – die Stadtverwaltung, sagt er, wollte lieber einen modernen Bau. Heute gilt Jimmys Werk als Vorzeigebau für Touristen, beherbergt Lädchen von Kunsthandwerkern, doch ist für den Architekten die Vorsehrung von Alt und Neu auch eine Philosophie: „Wir wollen die Ver-

gangenheit nicht ausstellen wie in einem Museum; das ist die europäische Art von Denkmalschutz. In unserer Gesellschaft verbinden sich so viele Kulturen und Zeiten, die Vergangenheit ist Teil unserer Gegenwart.“

Wenn man in den Tropen ein altes Haus mit moderner Farbe anstreicht, dann schwitzt es darunter wie ein Wanderer unter Plastik-Cape und verfault in Nu. Das Blaue Herrenhaus in Penang leuchtet heute wieder in frischem Indigo: Der Originalverputz wurde in der Universität analysiert, dann nach altem Rezept neu angerührt. Das Herrenhaus ist ein Meisterwerk chinesischer Architektur mit 38 Zimmern, fünf Höfen, 220 Lamellenfenstern, Muschireliefs bis zum Dachfirst – und die drei Neubesitzer waren reich und idealistisch genug, die viereinhalb Jahre dauernde Restauration aus eigener Tasche zu bezahlen. Die Kosten? Man munkelt: Millionen. Unsummen, sagt Mrs. Lee knapp, sie ist Architektin und Miteigentümerin. Nur ein Detail: Der Lack der Türen wurde aus China besorgt, aufgekocht und in sieben Schichten aufgetragen.

Für vorbildliche Restaurierung bekam das Blaue Herrenhaus den malaysischen Nationalpreis für Architektur – aber die Auszeichnung war kaum verliehen, da wurden auf dem Nachbargrundstück die Stahlträger für einen neuen Hotelkaten in den Boden gerammt. Die Augen von Mrs. Lee weichen sich vor Entsetzen, wenn sie sich erinnert, wie die Risse über die Wände des Herrenhauses krochen. Sie ging in Gericht, Entschädigung gab es nicht.

Aus der geduckten Altstadt ragt wie ein Speer ein 60-geschossiger schlanker Büromurm auf. Der Kontrast ist nicht ohne Reiz, doch erinnert der Speer auch an eine verlorene Vision: Penang könnte ein Hongkong werden. Im 16. Stock sitzt die städtische Planungsabteilung; Kritiker sagen, die Angestellten sähen jeden Tag von oben, was sie anrichteten. Der Chefplaner erweckt hinter Bergen von Papier den Eindruck, zwischen allen Stühlen zu sitzen. Neue Richtlinien sind in Arbeit: Begrenzung der Bauwut, Höhenbegrenzung, keine Straßenverbreiterungen mehr; aber die Richtlinien sind schon lange in Arbeit. „Durch die Kräfte des Marktes werden alle Altbauten hinweggefegt“, sagt der Planer, „man kann nur Kompromisse machen.“

Beispiel für einen bizarren Kompromiss: Wie eine Schildkröte duckt sich eine verfallene Villa an ein Hochhaus, das gerade gebaut wird. Die Villa stand unter Schutz, dass sie Platz zum Atmen brauche, schrieb die Richtlinie nicht vor.

Über E-Mail wird Stadthalen-Alarm gegeben; eine Bürgerinitiative versammelt sich auf Klappstühlen. Die Stadthalle, ein riesiger weißer Kolonialbau, steht seit langem leer. Die Filmcrew von „Anna and the King“ hatte den Holzboden im großen Saal poliert, drehte dort eine Gerichtsszene. 26 lokale Gruppen, vom Heritage Trust bis zur Vereinigung der Wasserfarben-Maler, nutzen die Gunst der Stunde, fordern die Öffnung der Halle als ein Kulturzentrum für alle. Die Stadtoberen stellen sich taub, die Initiativen schreiten zur Tat: An einem Sonntagnachmittag wird die Halle mit einer Banderole eingewickelt: „Return the townhall to the people“, in vier Sprachen.

Der Kampf um das Kulturerbe verändert sein Gesicht, v. politischer, verbindet sich mit Forderungen nach kommunikativer Demokratie, Bürgerbeteiligung, auch mit sozialen Fragen. Vor anderthalb Jahrzehnten sorgten sich nur ein paar Elite-Familien von Penang um den Erhalt des Stolz, Repräsentation. Für die Aktivisten von heute ist Heritage auch die Alltagsarchitektur, der Barbiershop an der Ecke – und das Überleben gewachsener Nachbarschaften, eingessener Communities.

In der Altstadt hängen jetzt Protest-Transparente: Zum Jahresanfang ist die Mietpreisbindung für Vorkriegshäuser abgeschafft worden. Die Miete für Shophouses war bisher lächerlich gering, mit zwiegesichtigen Folgen: Die Eigentümer ließen die Häuser verkommen, aber viele Kleingewerbe konnten nur wegen der Mini-Mieten überleben. Nun fordern manche Besitzer eine 1000-prozentige Erhöhung. Durch die historischen Kulissen weht der kalte Wind des Marktes.



Der Film ANNA AND THE KING (siehe auch Seite 44) spielt im Thailand des Jahres 1862. Jodie Foster kommt als britische Gouvernante an den Königshof von Siam und hat eine Romanze mit dem König. Wegen des saloppen Umgangs mit historischen Fakten verweigerte die thailändische Zensurbehörde der 20th Century Fox die Drehgenehmigung; schon frühere Filmversionen des Themas hatten Thailand empört. Folglich wurde im Nachbarland MALAYSIA gedreht. Was im Film als Bangkok

erscheint, ist in Wirklichkeit die Altstadt GEORGETOWN auf der westmalaysischen Insel PENANG: einst britischer Handelsstützpunkt, heute eine multinationale Wirtschaftszone. Wegen seiner großen Kollektion ALTER ARCHITEKTUR bewirbt sich Penang jetzt um Eintrag in die UN-LISTE GEFAHRDETER WELTKULTURERBES. In Thailand wurde sogar die Vorführung des Films verboten; zahlreiche Kopien kursieren illegal.

# Penang history under threat

Georgetown's historic shophouses face the bulldozers.

By FRANCES HARRISON  
PENANG

Up to 2000 families on the Malaysian island of Penang may be forced to move out of one of the region's largest collections of historic buildings, opening the way for the bulldozers and concrete mixers.

"There's going to be a very quick spate of demolitions and evictions," warned Khoo Salma Nasution of the Penang Heritage Trust, which has been fighting to preserve the original character of Georgetown's 12,000 pre-war buildings.

Founded in 1786 by Sir Francis Light, Penang's capital, Georgetown, pre-dates Singapore as the first straits settlement of the East India Company; a British trading post for spices and a refuge from pirates.

Today it is a haven for more than three million tourists who come every year to walk around its white stucco colonial mansions, rows of tiled Chinese shophouses, ornate clan houses guarded by stone dragons and its jumble of old temples, churches and mosques.

Already included on a United Nations list of the world's 100 most endangered sites, Georgetown's old buildings



Preservation battle: Historic buildings line a Georgetown street.

have been protected for the past three decades by legislation that kept rents artificially low. Elderly tenants, descended from the artisans, sailors and traders who flocked to Penang in the 18th and 19th centuries, continued to live in the dilapidated buildings undisturbed by the frenzy of construction else-

where that fuelled Malaysia's impressive economic growth.

In January the Rent Control Act was lifted and rents shot up for 16,000 households. "We want the Government to know we have had enough. We are fed up," said local resident Lee Pay Long at a night of protest. About 100 frail, elderly tenants facing

imminent eviction braved the uniformed police and special branch.

"The psyche is still that they are scared of the Government," said Mr Lee who described this sort of protest as "a new thing in Malaysian society".

Led by a long-haired, vegetarian restaurateur known as

Organic Ong, who had already been detained for five days without charge, the timid crowd watched as red-and-white banners were painted saying: "Save Georgetown from becoming a Ghost Town."

Penang's state Government sees its role as mediating between the conservationists and the developers. "It's not realistic to say Georgetown should not change at all," said the Chief Minister, Koh Tsu Koon, who believes in "adaptive re-use" of old buildings.

"Basically we've run out of time," said Khoo Salma of the Penang Heritage Trust. "Once the tenants move out, the next step is the bulldozers come in."

Already in Beach Street, six Chinese shophouses dating back to the 1780s are being demolished to make way for a modern commercial building in what is supposed to be a conservation area.

Tan Kee Chai runs a wholesale business importing religious artefacts from China in a building scheduled for demolition. "My heart is troubled because I have always lived here," he said.

"Can you help us," pleaded his 70-year-old father, Tan Ching Eng, who breaks down in tears at the thought of moving away from his friends and neighbors into low-cost housing in the suburbs.

GUARDIAN

# Rental units for 100 poor tenants by end of May

By K.SUTHAKAR

STAR

FRIDAY  
21 April 2000

PENANG: The first batch of about 100 poor tenants of former rent-controlled premises, including the handicapped, is expected to be allocated rental units in River Road by the end of next month.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said yesterday that successful applicants under the "Housing for Poor" programme would also be included in the list.

He said the state would get the names of tenants from state assemblymen, SOS (Save Ourselves) committee, Consumers Association of Penang and the Yang di-Pertuan Besar's Heritage Trust.

"We want them to suggest 10 names each and a survey will be conducted to ensure they are genuine cases," he told reporters after the third meeting with the SOS committee in his office.

Dr Koh said the state would form 10 teams comprising five to six people each to conduct surveys on tenants who needed help.



Dr Koh ... 'we will form 10 teams to conduct surveys.'

He said each team would have representatives from the state, the Chief Minister's office, non-government organisations and assemblymen.

"The teams, which will begin work in two weeks, will ensure only the poor are given alternative housing," he said.

Dr Koh said state Housing and Local Government director Tan Lee Lee and Penang Municipal Council Val-

uation head Tan Cheng Chui would prepare the questionnaires.

He said another meeting would be held with the SOS on May 4 to discuss ways to help small businesses and the use of funds from the RM100mil soft loan to help tenants and landlords.

In an immediate response, Ong deemed the allocation of houses to the 100 poor people as a "public relations gimmick."

"What is the state government doing for the 612 tenants who have received notices to vacate their premises and another 612 tenants who have yet to settle rental disputes with their landlords?" he asked.

Ong said he had provided 100 names of tenants facing eviction to Dr Koh on April 1 and 6 meetings, but nothing had been done so far.

On the RM100mil soft loan, he said if it was attractive for landlords, it could induce them to evict more tenants.

He proposed that the state government hold a public hearing on how best to utilise the fund.

## Gazetting of historical buildings and areas

By LIM AI LEE

STAR

Saturday  
22 April 2000

PENANG: The Penang Municipal Council (MPPP) will propose the gazetting of "appropriate" buildings and areas on the island as historical monuments and sites under the Antiquities Act 1976.

According to the review of the Penang Island Structure Plan, inner George Town has been identified as a heritage action area in view of its historical features, unique cul-

ture and architecture.

The draft plan, which will be exhibited in June, added that conservation measures must be taken to ensure the island's heritage assets were preserved or upgraded.

Potential buildings and sites, it noted, would be identified from "time to time" in the more detailed local plans which were now being drawn up.

To protect heritage areas, the draft plan proposed that

the local authority impose tight development control under the Town and Country Planning Act 1995.

Planning guidelines would include height control, building design and facade, density and plot ratio and the location of the new buildings.

"Heritage buildings will not be allowed to be demolished.

"And any changes or renovations made to the structure must follow certain pro-

cedures and guidelines," it said.

The draft plan however proposed that the council provide incentives to owners of heritage buildings where the development value had been affected by the heritage policy.

It listed out several incentives which could be given by the council to private property owners.

This, it stated, is to encourage restoration or conserva-

tion of heritage buildings.

These incentives include speeding up the planning permission process, approving adaptive re-use of the heritage buildings, providing financial or tax incentives to building owners and offering maintenance grants.

It also proposed that the relevant authorities seek listing for George Town to be included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

NATION

SATURDAY April 22 2000 THE STAR

10

## Penang fort may be excavated

By CHEAH UI-HOON

PENANG: Excavation works may be carried out at Fort Cornwallis for the first time in its 214-year history to dig up more clues on the fort's original development.

Department of Museum and Antiquities acting director (antiquities) Paiman Keromo said the department was currently studying the possibility of archaeological excavation at the site.

"From our previous experience in this type of conservation, we found structures underneath the existing buildings," he said in a telephone interview from Kuala Lumpur.

Paiman said that with excavation, the department would be able to "complete the history of the fort" with new information and findings.

The most likely site for excavation is at the present amphitheatre.

The department started conservation works a month ago, a million-ringgit project

which would be completed by November.

The conservation works included cleaning the walls of dirt and plant growth, said Paiman.

The priority was to strengthen some walls, such as those near the carpark, which were in danger of collapsing, he said.

"We are trying out a few techniques of conservation, but we are following strictly to international procedures and standards as this site may be submitted for world heritage listing," he

said.

Fort Cornwallis, named after the governor-general of Bengal at the time of Penang's founding in 1786, has had a colourful if not a military history.

According to historical records, the founder of the British settlement of Penang Francis Light built a *nibong* (palm trunk) stockade soon after he came. No permanent structure was built until about seven years later and even then without the permission of the British government in

India.

After a failed reconstruction in the early 1800s, the fort's present brick structure was built by convict labour in 1810 during Norman Macalister's term as governor.

The star-shaped fort used to house Francis Light's bungalow (since demolished), a chapel, a signal station for the port and its barracks used to house the Royal artillery troops and later European and Sikh police.

The fort lost much of

its importance in 1898 when Penang changed from a military to civil administration. It was gazetted as a national monument by the National Museum in 1977 and its management was privatised in 1991.

One of its star attractions is the 1603 Sri Rambai cannon which was in royal hands in Johor, Sumatra and Selangor and even submerged for a decade in the Esplanade sea before finding a permanent home at the northwest battlement facing the North Channel.



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