



# PHT Newsletter

Issue 99 / March 2011



**PENANG  
HERITAGE  
TRUST**  
*Persatuan  
Warisan  
Pulau  
Pinang*  
**PHT**

**Support Conservation Efforts in Your Community!**

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## Editorial

*WE APPLAUD the forthright measures adopted by the Penang state and municipal authorities to deal with continuing threats to Penang's heritage. Clearly the time has come to take a stand if George Town's hard-won World Heritage status is to be preserved.*

*First, it was the threat of a few projected hotels exceeding the height guidelines for new buildings in the core and buffer zones of the George Town World Heritage Site. Now, we have been reminded that the World Heritage status of George Town is threatened by swiftlet breeding in the heritage city, whether licensed or unlicensed. Self-serving arguments that converting and using private dwellings and shophouses for breeding birds is somehow an example of the community's living heritage are patently absurd. Swiftlet breeding, like raising pigs and ducks, is an agricultural industry that has no place in an urban residential environment. Not only is it a public health hazard to have such activities side by side with living quarters and restaurants but as pointed out by UNESCO it is incompatible with the integrity of the heritage status of both George Town and Malacca. This is a matter of concern not just to the people of both cities and the two state governments but also significantly to the central government which cannot afford to see its joint UNESCO listing jeopardized. All sides should act with common purpose to ensure that the guidelines for the removal of swiftlet breeding are implemented regardless of the narrow interests affected. The writing has been on the wall for several years. Now is the time for action.*

*Serious steps to implement laws and regulations in other areas of local jurisdiction are also to be welcomed, be it in response to illegal demolition of buildings such as the historic house at 20 Pykett Avenue or inappropriate activities that have rendered Penang's beaches unsafe. Gone are the days when developers could snub their noses at petty fines and stick a ludicrous pastiche on their tower block façade in mockery of a reprimand for an illegal demolition.*

*The same holds true for the maintenance of old graves and cemeteries that form an integral part of Penang's historic fabric. Penangites have been shocked by the deliberate destruction of family graves by descendants of prominent members of Penang's nineteenth century Chinese community. It is interesting that one of the affected tombs is that of Koh Seang Tat, a descendant of Penang's first Kapitan China. During a controversy in 1887 between the Chinese community and the colonial authorities over the siting of Chinese burial grounds, Koh Seang Tat argued forcefully on the basis of Roman law that Chinese burial grounds should remain sacrosanct in perpetuity. It is a sad irony that the historic Koh family graves have been damaged under the stewardship of Koh Seang Tat's own descendants.*

Editor



**Former Asdang House** Photo Courtesy Loh-Lim Lin Lee

## DESTRUCTION OF THE KAPITAN KOH LAY HUAN FAMILY CEMETERY



Scattered across one of the scenic slopes at Batu Lancang are more than 70 tombs that bear the names of prominent descendants of Koh Lay Huan (a.k.a. Koh Chewan), the first Kapitan China of Penang. They now present an ugly scene of smashed stones, freshly dug-out holes and fragments of bone remains. The conservative local Chinese community was taken aback when the news and pictures of badly damaged tombs were splashed across a local Chinese newspaper and soon reached a wider audience in China and Taiwan. There was speculation that it was the work of vandals until one of the descendants cum trustees, interviewed by the press, admitted it was a deliberate exhumation. Only Koh Lay Huan's grand tomb was spared from the destruction. The MPPP later revealed that a development plan for 98 new houses had been submitted by the trustees for the same plot of land although the initial permit was for the exhumation of only 23 tombs. Although the MPPP considered that notice to the public for the exhumation was not necessary as it was a private family cemetery, several descendants who turned up at one of the meetings with the trustees appeared very upset over the destruction of their ancestors' tombs and lack of consultation.

Koh Lay Huan, who died in 1826, was the headman who brought in boatloads of Chinese and Malay men from Kedah to help Captain Francis

Light clear the jungles of George Town after Light's landing in 1786. Koh assisted Light greatly in transforming a wild frontier cape into a liveable townsite. For his efforts, Captain Light appointed him Penang's first Kapitan China. His descendants played a major role in the Penang-Kedah-Thailand Chinese community for generations. Some even exerted great political influence in China and Taiwan. Kapitan Koh had six sons and two daughters by Saw It Neoh, his wife in Penang, and two sons and a daughter by Guan Boey Neoh, his wife in Kedah. His

daughter Luan, wife of the headman/penghulu of Nakhon Si Thammarat province, later became the mother of the governors of Phang-Nga and Takuapa who financially supported Khaw Su Chiang's successful tax monopolies in those provinces. One with the support of this powerful lady became governor of Rating in 1844.

Koh Kok Chye, Koh Lay Huan's eldest son by his Penang wife, was promoted to be governor of Kuala Kedah (1821-1841). Another son accompanied Sir Stamford Raffles to Singapore at its establishment in 1819. Koh Lay Huan's son also served as Raja of Pungah in Ligor and Agent for the Chao Phya of Ligor. His famous descendants include the planter Koh Teng Choon whose son Koh Seang Tat (1833-1908) was another successful merchant and the first Chinese to be appointed a Justice of the Peace in Penang. Koh Seang Tat was one of the first elected members of the Penang Municipal Commission in 1887. His house, Edinburgh Lodge, which stood on the land currently occupied by Dewan Sri Pinang, hosted the then Duke of Edinburgh in 1869. A water fountain bearing his name sits in a charming garden beside the Town Hall. Another fountain at the roundabout in Balik Pulau commemorates Seang Tat's father and the visit of Sir Frederick

Weld, Governor of Malacca. Two descendants of Koh Seang Tat's younger brother Koh Seang Teik were Koh Lip Cheng and Koh Lip Teng, a Queen's scholar of Penang Free School. One of Koh Lip Cheng's descendants was Datuk Koh Sin Hock, DSPN, AMN, OBE, JP, who was active in Malayan politics during the British and Japanese periods and Chairman of the Poh Hock Seah.

Emeritus Prof. Wang Gungwu, in the Penang Story inaugural talk in November 2010 organised by ThinkCity and PHT, chose to feature Ku Hung Ming who was born in Penang and a great-grandson of Kapitan Koh Lay Huan. Ku Hung Ming began his illustrious career in the royal courts of the Manchu Dynasty and went down in the history of China as the one who translated and introduced the Chinese Confucius classics to the Western world. Fortunately his grave is not in this cemetery.

*By Clement Liang, PHT Council Member*

### **PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED BY PENANG HERITAGE TRUST 13th January, 2011**

#### **Preservation of Historical Burial Sites, Memorial Monuments, Cenotaphs & Tombs**

It is come to our attention that the about 70 graves of the descendants of Koh Lay Huan, the first Kapitan China in Penang, have been dug up from their present location. Therefore, we would like to appeal to the authorities and public for a more comprehensive approach to the conservation of all historic burial sites and memorials in Penang, a topic somewhat left outside of built and living heritage and conveniently neglected by the authorities and many others.

The continuing existence and preservation of these sites and memorials are vital to serve as a physical link to our past history.

Proposals:

1. Burial sites, memorial monuments, cenotaphs and any tombs over 50 years or of significant historical value should automatically come under the state's legal protection.
2. Any conversion of land use from burial to other purposes must include public hearings for other stake holders (neighbourhood residents within 1 km radius, descendants, public interest groups, historians, etc.) to raise concerns and objections.
3. Any illegal alteration, destruction, removal or intentional neglect of the site or structure should be viewed as an act of vandalism of public property and be dealt with by heavy penalties no less than those apply to the illegal demolition of buildings.
4. Obligations from the Municipal Council to protect the structure and upkeep the cleanliness of the sites for public interest. In the event the site or structure is in private ownership, the right to impose repair and maintenance fees on the owners if the latter fail to carry out their duties to do so.
5. Incorporate existing burial sites as part of town planning for open space and green lung in Penang
6. Explore the opportunities to develop cultural heritage tourism on these sites / structures with sensitivity. Improvement of interpretative signage, access paths, landscaping, night lighting and police patrolling



## COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES IN PENANG

The Commonwealth war graves at Taiping and at Cheras in Kuala Lumpur are reasonably well known. Few people are aware, however, that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) maintains several graves in Penang. In fact, there are eleven Commonwealth war graves in Penang – three from the First World War and seven from the Second World War in the Western Road Cemetery and one from the Second World War in the Jewish Cemetery on Jalan Zainal Abidin (formerly Jahudi Road). Following is a list of these graves and notes on some of them:

### First World War

(Western Road Cemetery)

- John Francis Durnin (24), Able Seaman, Royal Australian Navy, HMAS **Fantome**, 29/10/1915
- Albert Victor Townsend (17), Boy 1st Class, Royal Navy, HMS **Hawkins**, 17/10/1919
- W.C. Dunn (age unknown), Petty Officer Stoker, Royal Navy, HMS **Hawkins**, 16/3/1921

### Second World War

(Western Road Cemetery)

- Gilbert Charles Retz (27), Captain, Indian Medical Service, 5/8/1940
- Stanley De Cruz (32), Private, 1 Malayan Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps, 26/11/1942
- Frank Andrew Milliken (42), Major, Royal Marines, HMS **Nelson**, 7/9/1945
- John Sabine Prest (31), Major, 4 Field Regt., Royal Artillery, 23/3/1946
- T.G. Prior (age unknown), Lieutenant, General List, 1/7/1946
- Edgar Hulme Gatward (44), Lieutenant, Royal Naval Reserve, HMS **Sultan**, 19/7/1946
- Derrick Bernard Lumley (26), Captain, Royal Engineers, 8/8/1946

(Jewish Cemetery)

- Louis Victor Cohen (23), Second Lieutenant, 9th Jat Regiment, 9/10/1941

Perhaps appropriately reflecting Penang's position as a seaport, almost half of those buried in

Penang's Commonwealth war graves were naval personnel. According to the memorial inscription on his gravestone, Able Seaman Durnin of HMAS **Fantome** was accidentally drowned in Penang Harbour on 29th October 1915. The inscription includes the words, "Erected as a mark of esteem by the Captain, Officers and Ship's Company". **Fantome**, built in 1901 as a survey vessel for the Royal Navy, was transferred to the Royal Australian Navy after the outbreak of the First World War. In 1915 she was armed with two 4-inch and four 12-pounder guns and deployed at Singapore in September 1915 for blockade patrol service in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.(1) These operations would have brought her to Penang in October 1915.

The graves of Boy Seaman Townsend and Petty Officer Dunn of HMS **Hawkins** are of identical design and share the same inscription, "Erected by his shipmates". The cause of their deaths, Townsend in 1919 and Dunn in 1921 (not 1920 as erroneously engraved on his tombstone), is not recorded. **Hawkins** was a heavy cruiser launched in 1917. From 1919 she was flagship of the Royal Navy's 5th Light Cruiser Squadron on the China station. Her visit to Penang en route to Singapore in October 1919 was reported in **The Straits Times**, 17th October 1919. Her other visit in March 1921 was in connection with the Penang Naval Conference, a ten-day conference of British admirals commanding naval forces on the China station and in East Indies and Australian waters. The conference held aboard HMS **Hawkins** received extensive local press coverage. Other warships visiting Penang for the occasion were HMS **Caroline** of the East Indies Squadron and HMAS **Brisbane** of the Australian naval station. The purpose of the admirals' conference was not mentioned in the press reports which focused on related social and sports events.(2)

Major Frank Milliken who died at Penang on 7th September 1945 was serving with the Royal Marines aboard the battleship HMS **Nelson**, flagship of the British naval force that arrived off Penang at the end of August following the





*Commonwealth War Graves, Western Road Cemetery*



announcement of Japan's surrender. The surrender of Japanese forces in Penang took place aboard *Nelson* on 2nd September and the following day a force of Royal Marines landed on Weld Quay, ending the Japanese occupation of Penang.(3) The cause of Major Milliken's death four days later is not recorded on his gravestone.

HMS *Sultan*, to which Lieutenant Gatward was attached when he died in Penang in 1946, was not a warship at all but a naval shore establishment in Singapore.(4) The cause of his death is not recorded.

Capt. Retz and Lieut. Cohen of the Indian Army died during the Second World War, in 1940 and 1941 respectively, but before the Japanese invasion of Malaya. The 2nd Battalion 9th Jats formed part of the 15th Indian Infantry Brigade, 11th Indian Division, assigned to the defence of north-west Malaya. On 12th December 1941 the 2/9 Jats would face the Japanese onslaught at the Jitra Line a few miles south of the Thai border.

More research is required regarding the death and burial in Penang of Private Stanley De Cruz. His death in November 1942, that is, many months after the fall of Singapore in February, suggests he must have been a prisoner of war but how he came to be buried in Penang is unexplained. Although the CWGC records give no next of kin, he may have been related to Private Eddie De Cruz, also of 1 Malayan Ambulance, RAMC, who died on 1st January 1943 and whose name is inscribed on the CWGC Singapore Memorial. The CWGC record describes Eddie as son of Maria Rodrigues of Hilir, Malacca.

*Footnotes:*

(1) [http://www.navy.gov.au/HMAS\\_Fantome](http://www.navy.gov.au/HMAS_Fantome)

(2) *The Straits Times*, 8, 9 & 15 March 1921; *The Singapore Free Press*, 10 March 1921.

(3) Bryan C. Cooper, *Decade of Change: Malaya & the Straits Settlements 1936-1945*, Singapore, Graham Brash, 2001.

(4) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS\\_Sultan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Sultan)

*By Leslie A.K. James*

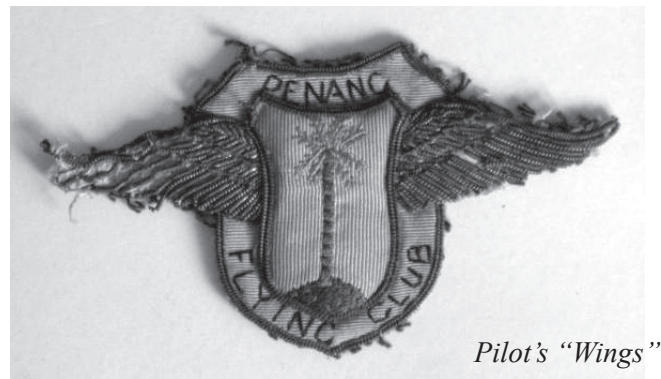
## PENANG FLYING CLUB



*Penang Flying Club hangar, 1936*

In her talk and presentation on the Malaysian Volunteer Air Force (MVAF) at the PHT on 23rd January, Rosemary Fell of the Malaysian Volunteers Group drew attention to the important role of flying clubs in training pilots for the pre-war MVAF. The Kuala Lumpur Flying Club was formed in 1930, four years after the Singapore Flying Club. The Penang Flying Club was formed in early 1934 and was based at the airfield at Bayan Lepas. The Straits Settlements government provided \$65,000 to the Club and three Moth Major biplanes were ordered from England at a cost of £775 each.(1) The same year, approval was received for improvements at the Penang airfield, including all-weather metalled runways, at a cost of \$250,000.(2)

The first Chinese member of the Club to fly solo was Dr. Lee Tiang Keng in July 1934.(3) In its report for July 1935 the Penang Flying Club recorded its first Chinese woman member, Mrs K.H. Yap, passing all tests for the Straits Settlements "A" Licence.(4) Mrs Yap, however, was not Malaya's first woman to qualify as a pilot. That honour went to twenty-year old Miss Wong Chiew Wan of the Kuala Lumpur Flying Club. She completed the tests for the "A" Licence in May 1934, joining Messrs Yoke Wan Yat and Ong Ee Lim who also qualified that month, the latter being the KLFC's first Chinese private owner. (5) Acclaimed in **The Straits Times** as



*Pilot's "Wings"*

Malaya's "Amy Johnson" (6), Miss Wong Chiew Wan was feted wherever she went. On 15th January 1935 she was hailed as the first woman pilot to fly the length of the Malay Peninsula when she flew into Penang to be greeted by the Resident Councillor and a huge crowd of well-wishers. (7) The Club's report for October 1935 stated that a valuable addition to the Club's fleet was acquired with the purchase of Mr Loke Wan Yat's Leopard Moth (registration VR-RAE) which was equipped to provide advance dual instruction in blind flying and cross country training. The same report noted Mr L.K. James among three first soloists during the month.(8)

The first president of the Penang Flying Club was Eric Newbold, general manager of the Eastern Smelting Company and a member of the Legislative Council. He was the private owner of a BA Swallow (registration VR-SAL). The Swallow was a two-seater monoplane, a British version of the German Klemm L.25. Built under licence by the British Aircraft Manufacturing Company, it was popular with flying schools and private owners in Britain. Its arrival at the Penang Flying Club in December 1935 was reported in **The Singapore Free Press & Mercantile Advertiser** on 20th January 1936. **The Singapore Free Press** article also reported the first soloist in the Leopard Moth as Mr Tye Poh Sun and mentioned Mr L.K. James as among six Club members having passed all tests for the Straits Settlements "A" Licence.

Flying was not without danger in the early days of the Penang Flying Club. Killed when the Leopard Moth he was flying crashed into the sea between Penang and Pulau Rimau on 13th



January 1936 was Mr. R.C. Stiven, manager of the Penang branch of Harper, Gilfillan & Co.(9) A worse incident, however, occurred on 31st January 1938 when Eric Newbold, flying low over the Esplanade in his Swallow, hit a car and signpost and fatally injured three spectators before crashing into the sea. Newbold survived and upon learning that one of the victims had died he went to his office at Eastern Smelting and committed suicide. Although as a Legislative Council member and former commanding officer of the Eurasian Company of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force he was given a funeral with full military honours the next day (10), a coroner's jury ruled on 27th February that the three victims, Soo Hoo Kok Yean, Foo Chiang Choong and Koo Keng Hoo, had died as result of a negligent act by Newbold. The jury also urged the Penang Flying Club to tighten its rules and regulations with regard to flying by members, especially with regard to low flying, in order to prevent a similar tragedy in the future. (11)



*Newbold's Swallow, 1936*



*L.K. James off for flight in Moth Major VR-SAB, 27 January 1936*

#### *Notes:*

*(a) The names of the two Malayan women pilots are variously spelled in press reports as Yap or Yeap and Wong or Wang.*

*(b) The Penang Flying Club member L.K. James mentioned in this article was the author's father from whom he first learnt of the 1938 air crash at the Esplanade. From 1935 L.K. James worked at the Chartered Bank on Beach Street and during his time in Penang served as a Private in the Penang & Province Wellesley Volunteer Corps. The photographs accompanying this article are from his personal photograph album.*

#### *References:*

- (1) The Singapore Free Press & Mercantile Advertiser, 12 March 1934.*
- (2) The Straits Times, 6 December 1934.*
- (3) The Straits Times, 10 September 1934.*
- (4) The Straits Times, 11 August 1935.*
- (5) The Singapore Free Press & Mercantile Advertiser, 6 June 1934*
- (6) The Straits Times, 6 January 1935*
- (7) The Singapore Free Press & Mercantile Advertiser, 16 January 1935*
- (8) The Straits Times, 11 November 1935.*
- (9) The Straits Times, 15 January 1936.*
- (10) The Singapore Free Press & Mercantile Advertiser, 2 February 1938.*
- (11) The Straits Times, 27 February 1938.*

*By Leslie A.K. James*



# Scent of an Island

*Pix by Ismail Hashim / Poem by Cecil Rajendra*

## Another Morning

The amplified voice  
of a muezzin  
cracks electric  
from the majestic

m  
i  
n  
a  
r  
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t

of the State mosque;  
snapping the city  
from its thicket of sleep.

A circle of fireflies -  
the luminous dial  
of my bedside clock -  
semaphore an eerie 5.30.

What can I devise  
to pass this purgatorial  
hour before sunrise:  
too early for a rehearsal  
of morning ablutions  
too late for a retrieval  
of that broken tendril of dreams.

Outside, the estate air is still  
grey with remnants of night;  
another dawn awaits release  
from the scrag throat of a cockerel.



## Wisps @ Hwa Pin

And our twilight years  
are played out  
in coffee shops  
over packs of fags  
and endless cans of stout...

where mid the heady mix  
of our island's cuisine...  
gingerly, as if with chop-  
sticks, we pick at bowls  
not of noodles, but memories;

while the pre-war tables  
with caffeine-stained  
marble tops, creak  
and groan under the weight  
of our years and history...

Tell me Ismail, did all  
our dreams of yesteryear  
just rise and disappear  
as these wisps  
of steam - here at Hwa Pin?

Scent of an Island is an ongoing attempt to capture the sights, sounds and smells of Penang in words, image and music.  
The real Penang as experienced by Penangites - the good, the bad and the ugly; the experience not censored, sanitised,  
varnished or packaged for the tourist.

Hwa Pin is a popular and famous coffee shop in Church Street dating from the 30s.

Many notable and legendary Penang artists, past and present, have had a cup of coffee or a Tiger here; including the likes of Penang's first mayor, lawyer Goh Guan Ho, musician Edwin Rajamoney, artists Tan Choon Ghee and Chuah Thean Teng while discussing the printing of a brochure or programme with the proprietors of Georgetown Printers/Phoenix Press - patrons and supporters of Penang's cultural heritage for over 5 decades.

The late Goh Guan Ho's law offices were directly in front of Hwa Pin. They have recently been converted into an art gallery - Galeri Seni Mutiara (II).



*View from Kelawai Lane*

## **“St Joseph’s Novitiate Engulfed by Concrete Tsunami”**



*View from Gurney Drive*



***Photographs by Ruth Foster, Vancouver***



## Respect and celebrate differing histories

As civil society organisations, we are extremely disturbed by the increasing racism and communal politics in the country with the recent harassment of a community based organisation, the Penang Arts Education Society (Arts-Ed).

The systematic intimidation and attack on Arts-Ed, whose sole purpose is to promote arts education, especially among Penang children and youths, have alarmed Penangites in particular as well as fellow Malaysians.

A number of us and our children have attended the arts and crafts exhibitions; enjoyed music, dance and dramatic performances; and appreciated the workshops and showcases that Arts-Ed has conducted over the past decade to make Penangites more aware of its cultural heritage and local history.

It is disturbing to note how Arts-Ed's recently published newsletter **myBalikpulau** has been politicised and used for racial-mongering by unscrupulous politicians and irresponsible NGOs.

**MyBalikpulau** is an oral history project that showcases the collective efforts of children and Arts-Ed facilitators who interviewed the elders in Balik Pulau, Penang and presented their version of the history of Balik Pulau and its residents in a most interesting manner.

Anyone who has read **myBalikpulau** would be impressed by the achievements of the team who must have worked hard to unearth such important historical facts about the local community. For us, this newsletter makes history come alive unlike most text books.

We are therefore appalled that some politicians have stooped so low as to racialise a children's project into a political tool so as to cause divisions in our community.

Pulau Betong assemblyman Muhammad Farid Saad had accused Arts Ed of deliberately twisting history and insulting the Malays in Penang.

Worse, the issue was quickly politicised resulting in acrimonious exchanges, unnecessarily heightening ethnic tensions for many who had not even seen or read **myBalikpulau**.

In the heat of these exchanges, several NGOs have accused Arts-Ed of insulting Malays, and have since lodged 15 police reports against the organisation. The accusations range from the use of particular words to the appropriateness of the drawings in the newsletter.





From our viewpoint, these are minute details in a newsletter which is very inclusive and multiethnic in its overall content and presentation. **myBalikpulau**, should be regarded as a praiseworthy effort on the part of young people in Penang to recover Balik Pulau's historical and cultural heritage.

In this regard, it is disappointing that the Penang State government was more concerned about clarifying that it was the previous State government and even the federal Ministry of Tourism that had sponsored the project.



*NGO representatives showing their support to ARTS-ED*

It should have taken the time to read **myBalikpulau** and discover what a commendable and inclusive product it is and come to the defense of Penang's children and youths.

We regret that **myBalikpulau** has been politicised and appeal for the immediate halt of harassment of Arts-Ed. Leaders and politicians must be working towards promoting harmony and multi-ethnicity for all Malaysians instead of inciting racialised politics.

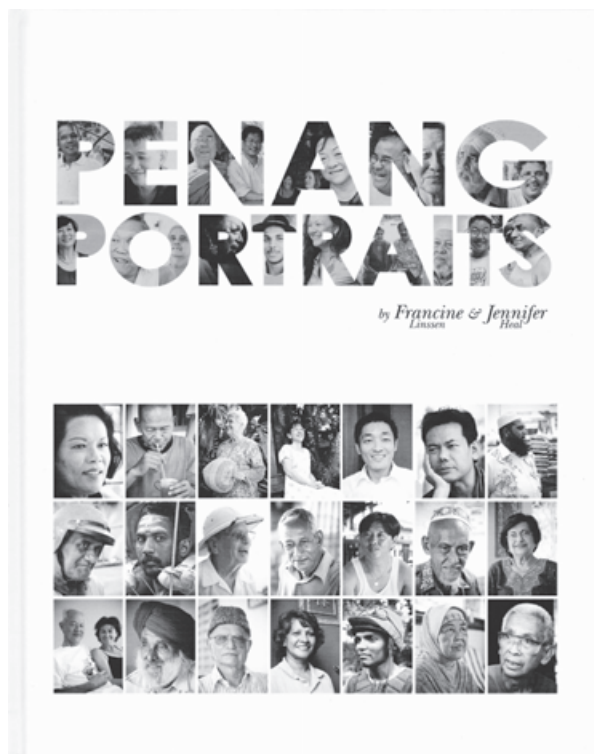
There must be respect for the civil society organisations who are doing their best to celebrate the diversity of our history and heritage through varying artistic expressions of histories.

*by Loh Cheng Kooi*

*The writer represents Women's Centre for Change, Penang, and the letter is on behalf of the following 32 NGOs:*

1. 528 Media Action Group
2. Aliran
3. All Women's Action Society (AWAM)
4. Badan Warisan Malaysia
5. Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) Malaysia
6. Centre for Policy Initiatives (CPI)
7. Civil Rights Committee of KL & Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (CRC-KLSCAH)
8. Coalition of Good Governance, Penang
9. Community Action Network (CAN)
10. Diskopi Penang
11. Friends of Penang Botanic Gardens Society
12. JERIT
13. Kumpulan Daya Tindakan Wanita Sabah (SAWO)
14. LLG Cultural Development Centre, Penang
15. Lost Generation Gallery
16. Ombak Ombak ARTStudio
17. Penang Chinese Independent Schools' Education Society
18. Penang Heritage Trust
19. Persatuan Penduduk Taman Desa Baru
20. Persatuan Bahasa Tionghua USM
21. Persatuan Belia Graduan Pulau Pinang
22. Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (PSWS)
23. Pertubuhan Wartawan dan Jurugambar Akhbar Cina Pulau Pinang (Pewaju)
24. Project Connect
25. Reka Art Space
26. Sembang-Sembang
27. Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia (SABM)
28. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
29. Tanjong Bunga Residents' Association
30. Tenaganita
31. Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
32. Women's Centre for Change (WCC), Penang

## Penang Portraits. By Francine Linssen & Jennifer Heal. Hekty Publishing, Penang, 2010.



When does an immigrant become a Penangite and who is a Penangite anyway? This newly published profiles of Penang residents by two recent Penang residents provides a fascinating insight into many aspects of Penang life and Penang's varied population with some remarkable photographs by Canadian Jennifer Heal and pen portraits by Dutch writer Francine Linssen.

To the great credit of Francine and Jennifer they cast their net far and wide to entrap not only such well known Penangites as Lin Lee Loh-Lim, a fourth generation Straits Chinese woman and a feisty conservationist, Penang Heritage Trust activist and a key figure in the award of UNESCO World Heritage Site status, but also street dweller and former trishaw rider Megat.

Of course, the careful capitalists of Penang, long a key to the development of the state, and particularly of the island of Penang following its acquisition by the British in 1786, remain a tradition carried on by such entrepreneurs as Yeoh Kah Hock, the restaurateur behind 32 The Mansion, Bagan and more recently, the new restaurant at Suffolk House – the restored

mansion of Francis Light who founded George Town in 1786 in the name of the London-based East India Company.

Food, as anyone who knows Malaysia knows only too well, is not merely central to Malaysian life but reaches such heights of obsession in Penang that I was even asked on one occasion by first-time visitors from the U.K., “Do Malaysians ever stop eating?” This preoccupation with food and its ingredients is particularly well covered in **Penang Portraits**. Indian Muslim Thajudeen is a third generation spice man who imports such essential curry ingredients as coriander and chillies from India, but also peppers from Sarawak and from such distant countries as Australia, Iran, Syria and Pakistan. Of course, in Penang much food consumption takes place in the open air, particularly in the evenings, and in the ubiquitous “coffee shops”, not usually air-conditioned, and open for all to see – and enter. All Penangites have their favourite food haunts, such as Tai Tong restaurant in Cintra Street where James Lee, a former cruise ship chef, now presides over a wide range of *dim sum*, Cantonese delicacies traditionally consumed in the morning for breakfast, prawn dumplings, *pau* and such delights as steamed chicken feet and spare ribs.

Another figure on the Penang food scene is the interestingly named Ocean Teh, the proprietor of the newly opened “Sri Malaya” restaurant on Rope Walk. Teh Chee Wah (his real and full name) is a passionate conservationist who furnished his restaurant from shophouses “under renovation” in George Town and still continues his regular work with a construction company.

In Penang, if you can't come to the food, then the food can come to you. Apart from the ubiquitous custom of *tah pow* – careful Penangites taking home food not all consumed at meals in restaurants – mobile vendors such as Rahuman tour the streets on motorbikes selling such items as eggs, fresh greens and fish in addition to his core business of bread, *roti*, particularly *roti Bengali* eaten as a sweet snack with butter and *kaya* made from

coconut milk, sugar and eggs.

Penang has very many heritage sites such as the Dhammikarama Burmese Buddhist Temple built in 1805 in Burmah Lane which is personified in the book by the Venerable U Pannya Vamsa, who happily now has residence under the Malaysia My Second Home programme, after a lifetime of establishing temples in North America, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore and Taiwan.

The MM2H programme, as it is now usually known, has also attracted to Penang such diverse figures in **Penang Portraits** as Captain Teddy, a former Dutch sea captain with Holland America Line, and Betty Cotton, an 82 year old citizen of the world born in Hankou, China in 1923 who has decided to spend “her latter years here.”

Penang’s living heritage is also very well covered in the book. There are two portraits of Penangites who in Japan could well have been classed as “living treasures”. Lee Beng Chuan, Penang’s last joss stick maker, whose products are used for special Chinese prayers and whose workshop is located close to the Kuan Yin (Goddess of Mercy) Temple, and Mak Lia, a noted creator of her Boyan, North Sumatran style, *nasi lemak* – back

to food again – which until recently she sold at a roadside stall near the Penang Turf Club.

Penang’s diverse religions are also well represented by such figures as Tok Ayah, Imam of the famous floating mosque in Tanjung Bungah, north of George Town; Nicholas Muniandy Fletcher, a Eurasian Hindu, noted creator and carrier of *kavadis* at the annual Thaipusam procession in George Town; and Chris Baptist, a prominent member of Penang’s Serani (Eurasian) community, a devout Roman Catholic who with his Hakka Chinese wife Eleanor, helps to prepare young Catholics for marriage.

Of course, there is much more to this fascinating book which gives such a colourful insight into the great melting pot which is Penang society today. Finishing reading it, I am still left with the opening question: When does an immigrant become a resident and a resident become a Penangite? A question probably best answered after dinner – or any other *makan* for that matter!

By Tony Hughes

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## PHT AGM at Suffolk House, 28 November 2010



The Annual General Meeting was held successfully at Suffolk House with more than 40 members present. Special thanks to Badan Warisan Malaysia for the logistical arrangements and to Lin Lee and Laurence for offering the in-house tours of Suffolk House for members.



## CINTRA STREET AND THE PRE-WAR JAPANESE COMMUNITY



On Sunday afternoon 9th January, 72 members and friends of PHT gathered at the corner of Cintra Street and Kampung Malabar to follow a trail to the former Japanese quarter of Penang led by Clement Liang. Very little physical evidence remains today to remind us that any Japanese community ever existed there and only the names of the streets in Chinese and the interpretative signboards on the old wall bear witness to their presence once upon a time. During the visit, several century-old reprints showing the shops and hotels run by Japanese in the vicinity raised questions and curiosity as to why these people came all the way to Penang.

In the late 19th century, both Cintra Street and Campbell Street were the thriving red light districts of Penang. The Karayuki-san who went into prostitution overseas began when Penang as an entrepot had its first influx of Japanese people and cultural contact. Sailors and migrant workers thronging the streets in search of pleasures often found the petite Japanese girls clad in kimonos cute and accommodating. But behind the smiling faces, these girls endured a life of hardship starting with the long arduous journey out of impoverished villages. Innocently believing in misleading offers of waitress job offers in restaurants and hotels overseas and trapped in money lending schemes that enslaved them for years, their situation was not very different from what we read in the newspapers about foreign prostitutes caught nowadays.

The arrival of hundreds of Karayuki-san later led to the formation of 'Little Japan' quarter around Cintra Street and Kampung Malabar in George Town which the local Chinese still fondly call *Jipun Huey Kay* and *Jipun Sinlor*. In 1910, the

official census by the Japanese Consul-General counted 207 Japanese residents in Penang with over half of them involved in some sort of flesh trade. In fact, the majority of the tombs in the Penang Japanese Cemetery at Jalan P. Ramlee belonging to the young Karayuki-san who died from various sicknesses.

The success of the Meiji Restoration and the humiliating defeat of the Russian fleet in the Tsushima Straits in 1905 saw Japan emerge as a military power on the world stage. The presence of large numbers of Japanese prostitutes overseas could not longer be tolerated. Working together with the British authorities, open prostitution in the Straits Settlements was finally banned in 1920's and the fate of the Karayuki-san was sealed with most of them either returning to Japan, cohabiting with local men or simply going underground to continue the trade.

At the same time, the Japanese government was actively promoting foreign trade with Southeast Asian countries and encouraging its citizens to migrate overseas. Penang received a fair share of these people in the form of photographers, pharmacists, hotel operators, barbers, dentists and traders in imported Japanese goods. Two of the well-known Japanese establishments in town were a sundry shop named Osakaya in Penang Road and Asahi Hotel in Transfer Road.

By the late 1930's, Japan's invasion of China heightened the conflicts between the Japanese and Chinese communities in Malaya and a series of boycott campaigns and attacks on Japanese shops and civilians drove the Japanese population of Penang down to around 50 just before war broke

out. Eventually they were all rounded up and interned by the police as enemy aliens when war was declared in 1941. After the war, all the Japanese were repatriated and their property confiscated and it was not until 1960's that another wave of Japanese arrived, this time as investors and industrialists.

After enjoying a cool break in an old fashioned coffee shop while listening to the stories shared by Clement and many others, the group went on to stroll along Cintra Street when the afternoon heat had subsided. Judging from the stream of questions asked, the site visit generated considerable much interest in this bygone community.

*Text and images by Clement Liang*

*Dear members and friends,*

***Wanted: Social History Project  
Coordinator for Penang Story***

*The Penang Heritage Trust [www.pht.org.my](http://www.pht.org.my) is a non-profit NGO with charitable status.*

*It is looking for a qualified volunteer (or semi-volunteer) to run a one-year social history project in Penang as part of the long-term documentation of the George Town World Heritage Site. The task is to organise community history workshops and coordinate an oral history programme. Proficiency in English essential and proficiency in one or more other local languages (Malay, Tamil, Mandarin or a southern Chinese dialect) is desirable.*

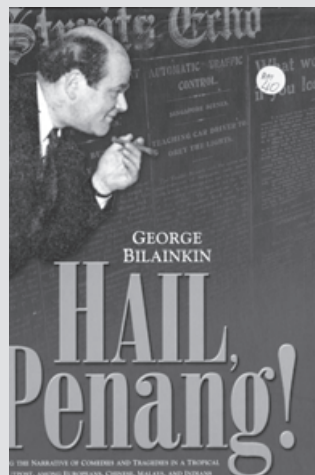
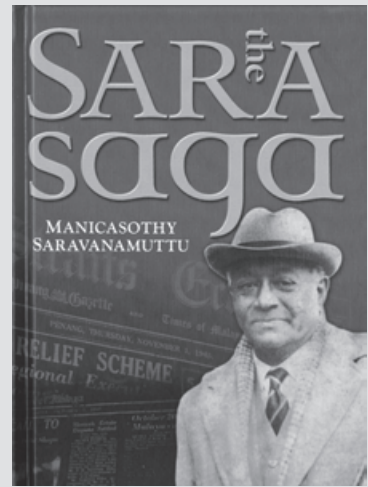
*Those interested, please write to [info@pht.org.my](mailto:info@pht.org.my)*

## Merchandise



**Penang Story in Pictures**  
by Nanyang Folk Culture  
RM40.00

**The Sara Saga** by  
Manicasothy Saravanamuttu  
RM40.00



**Hail Penang!**  
by George Bilainkin  
RM40.00

**Note Cards (Penang Series)**  
by StudioHoward RM10.00



**Penang Potraits**  
by Francine Lissen &  
Jennifer Heal RM80.00

Authenticated Facsimile  
Reproductions of the  
**Original Historical 1821  
Aquatints of Penang  
Views in Price of Wale's  
Island by William  
Daniell**, RM1600 per set.



## PULAU TIKUS -- WHAT'S IN A NAME?



Pulau Tikus is the name of a suburb, the Pulau Tikus district, on the northern coast of George Town. It is also the name of the small outcrop in the sea off Tanjong Bungah. Pulau Tikus means “rat island”, not the most flattering of names, and yet it is the name for one of the most affluent neighbourhoods in Penang. According to Dr Anthony Sibert, a Eurasian member of the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Pulau Tikus, the district got its name from the early Thai Eurasians who settled there around 1810-11. When their boat arrived, it anchored off Pulau Tikus the island which was so named because at low tide the sand dunes take the appearance of running rodents. The early settlers then moved on to the site where they settled, which they named after the little islet.

Pulau Tikus the island is one of those places which are “so near and yet so far”. I have explored much of Penang and the surrounding islands. But there’s one place I had not fully explored. I call it the mystery island. Historically, it was called Pulo Kechil, but today it is simply known as Pulau Tikus. The strange thing however, is that Pulau Tikus the district is not at all near Pulau Tikus the island!

Pulau Tikus the island is the kind of place that would conjure up the same type of excitement found in the pages of Enid Blyton’s “Famous Five” or Tintin’s “Black Island”, to borrow some images from childhood. To reach it, you have to take a sampan. Or, if you have the necessary “manpower”, you can go by kayak, as I did.

I estimated that Pulau Tikus is perhaps 500m or at most one kilometre from shore. (When I checked the map later, I learned that it is actually two kilometres from shore, so the return journey meant I rowed for 4kms -- no wonder it felt so far!) Although I had landed on Pulau Tikus once before last year, I had not fully explored the island. So this time I came prepared.

I started at 9:40am. The view of Penang Hill from the sea was simply dazzling. There were low-hanging clouds over the hills. It took me 40 minutes to reach within 20 metres of Pulau Tikus, at a leisurely pace. Rather than kayaking straight towards the island, I decided to circumnavigate it, so as to explore it from all sides. I discovered that the sea on the northeast side of the island was full of rubbish. Most likely the rubbish was carried there by the current and was trapped within that area. However, that’s the direction with the best view of the island. Circling the island, I looked for the sandy stretch to land and rowed my kayak forcefully towards it.

And there I was on Pulau Tikus. I pointed my camera to the water tower (according to a fellow historian, Dr John Robertson, it’s not a water tower, but rather a solar-powered light house). But there’s not much to see on the sandy stretch. Just some rocks. The view of Penang island was great. I peered at the light house, on the main part of the island, but there were big rocks blocking the way. The only way was to go out to sea again, and row there. After a bit, I saw a cove where I could land. The waves were big and mighty on this side as they crashed on the rocks. Suddenly it brought my kayak straight to the rocks and we hit it on the side. Using my oar, I negotiated away from the rocks. If I were to hit like this a few times, there will be a crack the kayak, and then I would be stranded on Pulau Tikus! I was very near shore, so I climbed out of the kayak and pulled the kayak to land. My shoes were wet anyway, so it didn’t bother me to get out into the water. I made sure the kayak was pulled high up, so that it couldn’t decide to leave without me.



The place was very rundown. One of the structures was covered with graffiti, some dating back to the seventies, and yet they are still as clear as written yesterday. There was a stone staircase leading up to the light house. I saw a shrine beside the tower, and I predicted that if there's a shrine, there has to be a grave somewhere. I was right. There was a grave of one Seyad Mohamed Kuddoos Oliyullah. I do not know who he was, and why he was buried on this island. Apparently, the shrine was renovated as recently as 1997, by one Dr. Jameel Ahamed, B.Sc. Phd. (Hon). I need to research who that was.



It took me about as long to get back from Pulau Tikus, but I have a sense of accomplishment and conquest behind me.

#### *Editor's Note:*

*The above is a condensed version of two articles by PHT council member Timothy Tye. Tim's one-man expedition to Pulau Tikus the island took place in September 2010 and is described more fully, and illustrated with his own photographs, on his website at [http://www.asiaexplorers.com/malaysia/pulau\\_tikus.htm](http://www.asiaexplorers.com/malaysia/pulau_tikus.htm) which also has a link to the following website relating his conversation with Dr. Anthony Sibert: <http://www.penang-traveltips.com/how-pulau-tikus-got-its-name.htm>*

## BAROSSA VALLEY AND PENANG – AN INTERESTING CONNECTION

The Club's Wine Dinner on 30 September featured an Australian Barossa Valley red wine. Club members may be interested to read about a little-known historical connection between the Barossa Valley in South Australia and Penang in Malaysia. The world famous Barossa Valley wine region in fact owes its name to a Penangite.

Over two centuries ago, some 80 years before the Penang Club was founded, Francis Light the colonial administrator and founder of Georgetown had a second child with his wife Martina Rozells. This son, William Light, was born on 27 April 1786 just up the coast at Francis Light's trading post in Kuala Kedah near today's Alor Setar. This was four months before Francis Light first landed in Penang and launched Britain's trading and colonial presence here.

Francis Light brought his wife and two children over from Kuala Kedah to Penang and so this is where William grew up. At the age of six, however, William Light was shipped off to England to be educated. He opted early on for a military career, joining the Navy there at age 13 and subsequently entering the Army, rising to the rank of Colonel. During his career he took part in Europe in the Wars against Napoleon of France, including the Peninsular War in Spain.



*Face of the Penangite to whom Barossa Valley owes its name*



*Barossa Ranges today – reminding Light in 1837 of Barrosa Hill and the 1811 battle in Spain.*

In 1835 aged 49 William was appointed as the first Surveyor General of the newly founded British colony of South Australia. In 1836 he selected a site and laid out the beginnings of the colony's capital city, Adelaide, being widely recognised as the city's founder. What is little recognised, however, is his connection with the nearby Barossa Valley.

In 1837 William surveyed a range of hills some 50 km to the north east of Adelaide. He was struck by some similarities to a rocky ridge near the port of Cadiz in southern Spain which had been the site of a fierce and bloody Peninsular War battle, in which he had fought personally in 1811. That battle, in which Spanish and British forces were victorious over French forces, took place around a rocky ridge which the British referred to as Barrosa Hill, from the name of the local area. The battle, in which many thousand soldiers of several nationalities died, became known as the Battle of Barrosa. It took place on 5 March 1811 when William Light was 24. The name Barrosa in Spanish probably derives from the muddy-red colour of the low cliffs between the nearby beach and the summit of the ridge (barrosa in Spanish meaning muddy or muddy-red in colour).

The memory of that battle remained vividly in William's mind some 26 years later and he was motivated to name these hills in South Australia the Barrosa Ranges in honour of the Battle of Barrosa and the British and Spanish victory over the French in 1811. However, the name was subsequently registered incorrectly as "Barossa", apparently due to a clerical error in transcribing the correct name "Barrosa". The adjacent valley which runs along the south west flank of these hills and where the wine is now produced subsequently adopted the already misspelt version of the name: Barossa.

William Light died in Adelaide in 1839, two years after naming the hills. His face can be seen today on the statue inside Fort Cornwallis in Penang – statue of his father Francis Light, which the sculptor modelled on the face of William, for lack of an image of the father.

*This article contributed by Brian Walling was first published in the Penang Club magazine November/December 2010.*

## PROGRESSING WITH HERITAGE

With George Town's listing as a World Heritage Site, heritage now plays an important role in the future of Penang. It is timely for Penang to accelerate its learning curve in the field of heritage management and equip itself for the conservation and sustainable development of its heritage resources.

In collaboration between AusHeritage and Penang Heritage Trust, eight Australian heritage specialists will be brought in as resource persons for four public forums and workshops related to different aspects of heritage management. These will take place in Penang from March to May 2011. The forums and workshop are organized by the World Heritage Incorporated and Penang Heritage Trust, in cooperation with the Penang State Government, Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang, Penang Global Tourism (PGT), Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia (PAM) and Think City Sdn Bhd.

### Public Forums & Workshops

The public forums are a one-day affair (on Saturdays), consisting of public lectures on a specific topic in the morning, presenting international and Australian heritage practices and issues. Complementing the morning lecture, a lively forum will be held in the afternoon, with panel representatives from different sectors who will identify current practice and challenges in George Town related to the forum topic.

Following the forum are two days of closed-door focus group workshops (on Sunday and Monday) open to stakeholders and experts (closed-door) who wish to discuss case studies and challenges and develop realistic frameworks and ways forward for the George Town Heritage Site.

While the public forums aim to raise the general level of interest and awareness in conservation issues, the follow-up workshops are designed as a platform for brainstorming and sharing between stakeholders and specialists. It is anticipated that the series will contribute towards skills development and institutional strengthening for the care and management of the unique George Town WHS as well as wider heritage places across Malaysia.

### Venue for Forum & Workshops: Bayview Hotel, Georgetown, Penang

Time: 9:00am– 5:00pm

#### Management of Heritage Assets

1. Preparing Heritage Management Plans and Conservation Management Plans for buildings, sites and living streets

Forum : Sat, 5 March 2011

Workshop: Sun & Mon, 6 & 7 March 2011

#### Design in the Context of Heritage

1. Compatible adaptation / new design
2. Heritage Cultural Assessment

Forum: Sat, 26 March 2011

Workshop: Sun & Mon, 27 & 28 March 2011

#### Cultural Tourism and Presentation of Heritage

1. Heritage Interpretation
2. Cultural tourism -merits and impacts

Forum: Sat, 23 April 2011

Workshop: Sun & Mon, 24 & 25 April 2011

#### Capacity Building in Heritage Asset Management

1. Managing your heritage building
2. Skills development

Forum: Sat, 28 May 2011

Workshop: Sun & Mon, 29 & 30 May 2011

### Organizer:

George Town World Heritage Incorporated

### In Collaboration with

AusHeritage & Penang Heritage Trust

This collaboration is supported by the Australia-Malaysia Institute

### Supporting Organizers:

Penang State Government

Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang

Penang Global Tourism

Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia

Think City Sdn Bhd

Australia-Malaysia Institute



## A WARNING AND A DECISION ON SWIFTLET BREEDING IN GEORGE TOWN



In a letter dated 14th January 2011, UNESCO asked the Malaysian Government for an explanation of the swiftlet farming situation in George Town. The letter went on to say that commercial breeding of swiftlets would compromise the tangible and intangible heritage within George Town. Receipt of the UNESCO letter has increased pressure on the custodians of the World Heritage Site to take action to meet UNESCO's concerns.

PHT has long urged the State Government and Municipal Council to act on the removal of farms. The decision to act was accelerated by Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin bin Mohd. Yassin's statement last September on behalf of the Federal Government that swiftlet farms would be prohibited in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of George Town and Malacca.

Local government committee chairman YB Chow Kon Yeow announced in December that the State and Municipal Council would implement a plan for the complete removal of swiftlet houses within three years beginning 1st January 2011. This clear statement was welcomed by PHT.

### ***Actual number of swiftlet farms?***

To its credit MPPP has started implementing some action, including undertaking a survey to confirm actual numbers of swiftlet houses in George Town. Figures are very hard to verify as the farms are camouflaged to blend into the streetscape. New officers under Mr Yew Tung Seang of the MPPP Building Department have been deployed to carry out the survey. With

MPPP officers, they have been on the streets, delivering notices to swiftlet houses to remove the loud 'tweeters', asking for entry to investigate premises, and gathering information on the condition of the swiftlet farms.

The number of swiftlet houses in George Town has always been in contention. The PHT estimate of about 300 is based on a statement by Ms Carole Loh, president of the Association for Swiftlet Nests Industry (ASNI), reported in **The Star** on 13th January 2010, that "at least 8.3% of an estimated 3,500 pre-war buildings in George Town UNESCO historical site" are swiftlet farms.

USM has previously provided a count of swiftlet houses, as has MPPP. USM, MPPP and PHT are cooperating to compile a new survey of the actual numbers of houses. (Despite the Federal Government announcement, ASNI and the swiftlet associations have not provided any information to help with the implementation plan.)

The latest meeting on swiftlet issues was held on 24th March, chaired by Mr Yew and attended by members of MPPP and the Veterinary Department. The first figures gathered by MPPP were presented.

One or two swiftlet farm operators are understood to have notified MPPP of their desire to close voluntarily although they have apparently asked for an extension in order to prepare for their closure. If so, this is welcome news. There have also been confirmed sales of swiftlet house properties to buyers, some foreign, who intend to restore and live in the properties, another welcome development.

Unfortunately, there has not yet been a single swiftlet house closure as a result of State or Council action. Mr Yew stated at the latest meeting that he would act first on abandoned farms or those that have ceased operations. They would have the window openings unblocked and the buildings cleared. PHT reminded the meeting that allowing populations of active swiftlet houses to continue breeding in active houses would make

the job of clearing them harder at each stage. PHT also strongly suggested that Council had to act against an active house in order to fully understand the process and the behaviour of the swiftlets after a farm is disassembled. Until the removal process is started, understood and experienced, limiting action to giving notice or removing tweeters is useless. Press photos of officers removing panes of glass from an empty swiftlet house do not amount to much of an achievement.

### *Where is the contingency plan?*

It must be understood that the current explosion of the swiftlet population in Malaysia is unprecedented in the country's history. What was a protected and endangered bird is now a pest and nuisance. What are the consequences? The Department of Agriculture does not want them near designated padi growing areas, they cannot be encouraged near water catchment areas, near schools, clinics, hospitals and playgrounds, or near designated forest reserve.

George Town is full of thousands and thousands of these birds. It is time to ask, especially with growing numbers of tourists and visitors, why the Health Department has not examined the health and safety risks to the public in George Town. Not only are studies required on the potential danger of the sheer numbers, but information must be correlated, for example, to the local environment and to outbreaks of dengue, to establish whether there are links. It is no longer acceptable just to treat symptoms when so much is at stake in the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

It is time for the State and MPPP to realize that it desperately needs a contingency plan if there is any incident of disease such as bird flu, or a chest infection or if suddenly many residents and tourists come down with dengue in a swiftlet house area. The impact of just one incident could be very serious.

PHT members and volunteers, while carrying out their own survey on swiftlet house numbers have found that 'tweeters' are still on, some running 24 hours a day. Swarms of swiftlets are taking over

the skies of George Town, especially this being the end of the first breeding season of the year, and fledglings are flying. Even in Pulau Tikus they have invaded residential areas to feed.

Around my own house, numbers are crazy, the noise has increased and the swiftlet house backing onto Lorong Chee Em continues to add compressors and do work within the property at the weekends. All this despite MPPP action. Although the name has changed the intent has not and it will continue to be a 'retail outlet' (on the Market Street side) for birdnest products.

Please see the PHT website for more information [www.pht.org.my](http://www.pht.org.my)

### *The Future?*

I want to leave you with two images -- photographs taken outside the small village of Terong in Perak. Perak is overrun by swiftlet farming with no thought about the consequences. We have to ask ourselves what is to become of Malaysian heritage when there is so little respect for it? Lat's "Kampung Boy" may soon be all we will have left to remind us of our beautiful but fragile rural heritage.

*by Rebecca Duckett-Wilkinson*



*Kampung house cum birdhouse in Perak, before and after*



## Background notes on Swiftlet Issue in George Town

- 2000- Lifting of rent control in George Town. Tenants forced to leave because of rental increase. Houses left empty. Swiftlet farmers took advantage of this and rented empty historic buildings turning them into farms.
- At least 8.3% of the estimated 3,500 pre-war buildings in George Town UNESCO historical site” (Carole Loh President ASNI, **The Star** January 13th 2010.)
- 2004- Apparently an increase in migration of swiftlets from Sumatra to west coast of Malaysia especially around Lumut, Setiawan and Manjung, after tsunami.
- End 2005- No more licenses to be issued in George Town. No more new farms to be set up in George Town. Removal of all swiftlet farms set for end 2008.
- End 2008- No removals take place. Moratorium on existing farms extended until end 2009
- End 2009- No removals take place. Delayed until confirmation of 1GP (guideline).
- September 2nd 2010- Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Bin mod Yassin stated that all swiftlet breeding farms would be prohibited in the UNESCO World heritage sites of George Town and Malacca and all would have to be removed within 3 years.
- January 1st 2011- YB Chow and State Government give notice that implementation for removal of swiftlet farms to take place immediately. All swiftlet farms to be removed within 3 years.

For more information, kindly visit PHT website at [www.pht.org.my](http://www.pht.org.my).

*by Rebecca Duckett-Wilkinson*

## BATU MAUNG GUN EMPLACEMENT

### The Folly of Fortress Penang

In 1937, the British Malaya Command decided to designate the whole of Penang Island as a military fortress for North Malaya. Fortress Penang was to be one point of a triangular Malayan defence network, the other two points being Fortress Singapore and Kota Bharu. (1) The fortress was to consist of two gun emplacement complexes with a full complement of fixed naval guns similar to that in Singapore albeit on a much smaller scale, and an independent harbour battery just by Fort Cornwallis. One emplacement was to cover the North Channel and the other to cover the South Channel with a new RAF station close by with facilities for flying-boats. (2) The island's garrison was also to be upgraded to a full regular infantry battalion to supplement the Penang and Province Wellesley Volunteer Corps, otherwise known as the 3rd Battalion of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (3/SSVF). (3) 3/SSVF was a locally recruited battalion made up of Volunteer or part-time reservist soldiers drawn from British and Malayan civilians who had some military training and in some cases, previous war experience, and liable to be called up as regular soldiers in the event of war.

Originally a 120-acre site in Tanjung Bungah in the north of the island was chosen for the first gun emplacement envisaged under the Fortress Penang plan. However, due to difficulties in acquiring the site, it was decided to build the first gun emplacement in a larger 259-acre site on Punjab Hill in Batu Maung on the east coast of the island and close to the aerodrome at Bayan Lepas. A flying-boat base was also planned for this new site. Construction was slated to begin at the end of 1937 and to be completed within 18 months. The plan was to station an initial garrison of 250 men by the end of 1939 to be fleshed out to a full battalion of 800 men later. (4) The Batu Maung gun emplacement was designed to protect the South Channel.

In January 1939, Malaya Command issued a press release stating that coastal guns, anti-aircraft guns and powerful searchlights would be installed at the Batu Maung gun emplacement. The installation was to be

carried out by a force of 100 sappers. At the same time it seemed that any plans for the 800-man garrison on the site had been deferred indefinitely. (5) As it turned out, the much vaunted anti-aircraft guns never arrived. The promised 28 anti-aircraft guns were diverted to other fronts.

The 8th (Singapore) Heavy Battery of the Hong Kong-Singapore Royal Artillery was transferred from Singapore to Penang on 1st and 15th March 1939 and stationed at the Batu Maung gun emplacement. The 8th Heavy Battery had a strength of 5 officers and 130 British and Indian other ranks. (6) The Batu Maung gun emplacement was directly under Malaya Command Headquarters in Singapore. (7) The gun emplacement had two naval 6-inch counter bombardment guns and four 4-inch guns. The emplacement was a bomb-hardened reinforced concrete structure built into Punjab Hill, camouflaged by dense foliage and surrounded by a network of trenches, hidden observations posts, anti-tank traps and outlying pill boxes (8).

With the sudden British withdrawal decided upon by the Penang Fortress Commander, Brigadier C. A. Lyon, and the Resident Councillor, Leslie Forbes, on 13th December 1941, (9) the Batu Maung gun emplacement was not used in the end. The guns were blown up but not all the ammunition was destroyed and some was later re-used by the Japanese. Unexploded shells were still being found within the emplacement as recently as 1973. (10) The emplacement proper and its buildings were also not demolished and survive to this day, resurrected as the Penang War Museum.

The second gun emplacement for Fortress Penang was at Fort Auchry in the north of Penang Island, near Batu Ferringhi. It was designed for two 9.2-inch naval guns but construction work on this emplacement started much too late and it was hardly completed when the Japanese invasion began on 8th December 1941. The rapid collapse of the British and Indian forces in North Malaya and subsequent abandonment of Penang meant that the Fort Auchry gun emplacement was never armed. The ruins of the gun emplacement are still believed to exist within the present-day Fort Auchry Army Camp which is a restricted area. There are real concerns that the ruins are being threatened by encroaching development in the area.

The two-gun 6-inch close defence battery at Fort Cornwallis was never fired in anger as its crew retreated south with the British forces and European population. The guns commanded the entrance to George Town's harbour. Both guns were disabled through the removal of detachable parts and by damaging the engines. However, the damage was superficial and the two 6-inch Cornwallis guns were later repaired by the Japanese and one gun was moved to the Fort Auchry gun emplacement. There are no visible remains of the site of the Cornwallis battery today.

The whole concept of Fortress Penang was one expensive folly. Fortress Penang was insufficiently equipped and manned, lacked proper air defences, and ultimately it was easily bypassed by the Japanese. By adopting German-style "Blitzkrieg" tactics, the Japanese rendered such static defences obsolete.

#### Footnotes:

(1) "Penang Fortress construction to begin this year," *The Straits Times*, 17 July 1937, p.12

(2) "New site for coastal guns," *The Straits Times*, 8 July 1937, p.12

(3) "Proud men of Penang who did their duty," *The Straits Times*, 19 December 1955, p.4

(4) "Penang Fortress construction to begin this year," *ibid*

(5) "Installation of guns," *The Straits Times*, 8 January 1939, p.15

(6) "Garrisoning of Penang," *The Straits Times*, 26 February 1939, p.17

(7) "Inspection of Penang garrison," *The Straits Times*, 30 March 1939, p.12

(8) "Description of Batu Maung emplacements," *The Straits Times*, 2 September 1941, p.10

(9) Louis Allen, *Singapore 1941-1942* (MPH, 1977), p.257

(10) "Bombs found on campsite," *The Straits Times*, 16 April 1973, p.18

By Andrew Hwang



Batu Maung Gun Emplacement. Photo courtesy Malayan Volunteers Group member Zafrani Arifin.

**Talk by Rosemary Fell:****“Unarmed Unescorted Unwanted – The Malayan Volunteer Air Force”****3.00 p.m., Sunday, 23rd January 2011, Penang Heritage Trust**

Rosemary Fell, Secretary of the Malayan Volunteers Group (MVG) in Britain, who gave a talk at PHT in January last year on the Straits Settlements & Malayan Volunteer Forces, returned to Penang this year and gave a talk on the Malayan Volunteer Air Force (MVAF) to PHT members and friends on Sunday afternoon, 23rd January.

Rosemary's talk was supported by an interesting power point presentation with contemporary photographs of MVAF pilots and their aircraft. Of particular interest in the development of the MVAF was the role of the early flying clubs in Penang, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur which not only trained pilots and popularised flying but also formed the basis of the fledgling pre-war Malayan air force. Rosemary drew special attention to the fact that the MVAF attracted volunteers from the local community as well as Europeans, two of the most famous local volunteer pilots being the Talalla brothers Henry and Cyril from the Kuala Lumpur Flying Club who joined the Malayan Volunteer Air Force and after advanced flying training under the Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Canada flew with the RAF in Europe. Cyril was awarded the DFC and bar. Henry was killed when his Typhoon was shot down over Normandy in July 1944.

(See the Victoria Institution website <http://viweb.freehosting.net/talalla-bros.htm>)

**Book Launch and Talk by Andrew Barber****5 p.m., Saturday, 6th November, 2010****Gallery 29, China Street**

With proceeds going to the PHT and the Lighthouse Children's Home, a gala book launch and tea was held at Gallery 29 on Saturday afternoon, 6th November when the latest book by Andrew Barber, **Penang at War: A History of Penang during and between the First and Second World Wars 1914-1945**, was launched. Andrew Barber, a former British diplomat and author of **Penang under the East India Company 1786-1858**, introduced his new book with an illustrated talk highlighting the main features of his research. **Penang at War** documents a pivotal period in the history of Penang and pre-war Malaya. Interest in this period was demonstrated by the large attendance (about 50) at the event and the lively discussion that followed Andrew Barber's presentation.

**NOTICE****MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL**

Reminder for membership renewal with increase in subscription for 2011:

Admission: RM50 | Annual subscription: RM60

Overseas postal surcharge:

RM14 annually for Asia, Australia, New Zealand

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*Unless specifically stated, the views and opinions expressed in the articles are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of PHT*