

[incl. statement on demolition of Old Prison, Kuching]

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

This year, the Sarawak Heritage Society (SHS) has continued to support the drive of the state government in preserving the heritage of Sarawak and putting in place the framework to position Kuching as a heritage city.

However, it has watched with some trepidation the rising political storm surrounding the proposed acquisition of old buildings in Jalan Sultan in Kuala Lumpur to make way for the extension to the MRT. Increasing public dissatisfaction is being voiced over the possible demolition of these heritage buildings to make way for this essential development.

Questions are being asked. Why, as in other countries, can the tunneling not be carried out without demolition? Does new development always need to begin with the destruction of the old? Are preservation of heritage and progress really mutually exclusive? Can they not coexist and complement each other? To put it simply, is preservation of heritage really so costly?

Heritage enhances value. This is the clear lesson to be learned from the experience of Penang and Malacca. There, heritage status has brought in a new wave of economic development as demand for cultural tourism grows. There, properties within the heritage core have seen their values soar.

Here in Sarawak, SHS applaud the positive moves of the state government in its creation of MinTH, its appointment of an Assistant Minister in charge of heritage concerns and its moves to formally gazette our heritage assets. It is a clear sign that attention is being paid to the lessons of Penang and Malacca.

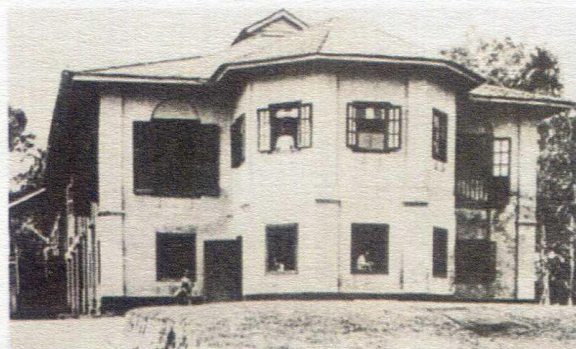
But worries remain over the lessons of Jalan Sultan. This is why SHS continues to urge and support the Ministry in setting out a clear direction for the future, beginning with a review of the existing ordinances and their implementation to ensure that they keep abreast of the principles of conservation.

To really benefit from the lessons of our other Malaysian cities, Sarawak needs a system of implementation of heritage management. We need knowledgeable

all interested parties to work together to keep the heritage of our great city intact. We need to continue to raise public awareness of the value of this goal.

Because public awareness is growing. Heritage issues are increasingly seen in the press, so much so that SHS have included a 'Heritage in the News' section in this newsletter for the first time. This is evidence that the news industry, at least, perceives the ordinary Sarawakian as wanting to inform himself on heritage issues. It seems important that the direction of heritage planning in Sarawak is determined not by debate in the media, but instead by clearly thought-out policies put in place by those with experience and understanding in the heritage arena.

Development in Sarawak has now outstripped the need to provide basic amenities. We can now look to greater goals—the goal of development in the context of heritage. By providing a clear direction in the management of heritage, we can reap the benefits of heritage and prevent it becoming a political issue.



The old prison which was not included in the list of Sarawak Historical Sites, Building and Monuments maintained by Jabatan Muzium Sarawak, despite being built in 1882. (Picture source : *Kuching in Pictures 1841-1991*, Ho Ah Chon)

*The Hospital, built with such pride in 1882, is now the Petron, and the compound includes many additional buildings as well as the obnoxious high walls and barbed wire.*



The site of the old prison (picture taken in May 2011) now reduced to rubble. A "business cen-