



MISC. HERITAGE NEWS –March to July 2017

What did we spot on the Sarawak and regional heritage scene in the last five months?

SARAWAK

Land clearing observed early March just **uphill from the Bongkissam archaeological site, Santubong**, raised alarm in the heritage-sensitive community because of the known archaeological potential of the area (for example, uphill from the shrine, partial excavations undertaken in the 1950s-60s at Bukit Maras revealed items related to the Indian Gupta tradition, tentatively dated 6 to 9th century). The land in question is earmarked for an extension of Santubong village. The bulldozing was later halted for a few days for Sarawak Museum archaeologists to undertake a rapid surface assessment, conclusion of which was that “there was no (...) artefact or any archaeological remains found on the SPK site” (Borneo Post). Greenlight was subsequently given by the Sarawak authorities to get on with the works. There were talks of relocating the shrine and, in the process, it appeared that the Bongkissam site had actually never been gazetted as a heritage site. In an e-statement, the Sarawak Heritage Society mentioned that it remained interrogative and called for due diligences rules in preventive archaeology on development sites for which there are presumptions of historical remains. Dr Charles Leh, Deputy Director of the Sarawak Museum Department mentioned an objective to make the Santubong Archaeological Park a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2020. ([our Nov.2016-Feb.2017 Newsletter](#) reported on this latter project

“[Extension project near Santubong shrine raises concerns](#)” – Borneo Post, 22 March 2017

“[Bongkissam shrine will be relocated](#)” – Borneo post, 23 March 2017

“[Gazette Bongkissam shrine as historical site](#)” - Borneo Post. 25 March 2017

“[Striking a balance](#)”- The Star, 25 March 2017

“[Village extension project halted to enable archaeological study](#)” Borneo Post, 26 March 2017

“[Village expansion scheme at Santubong to resume soon](#)” – Borneo Post, 1 April 2017

“[Village Expansion Scheme to be continued in Santubong — Dr Abdul Rahman](#)” – Borneo Post, 19 Apr. 2017

“[World Heritage Site status in 2020 for Santubong Archeological Park](#).” [New Sarawak Tribune, 19 Apr. 2017]

A **RM 1.6 million Federal Government funding** has been allocated for Brooke era heritage-related facilities at **Bung Muan** (a section of **Mount Serembu**, also known as Mount Peninjau, near Siniawan, Bau area) and for the **Siniawan bazaar**, reported the Borneo Post: The Mount Serembu component is to include a Tourist Information Centre, a reconstruction of the “**Wallace Trail**” and **Brooke Cottage**, and a look-out point, the projects being scheduled to start in 2018. The Mount Serembu project has been in the pipeline for several years.

Meanwhile, the Persatuan Asal Serumbu Bau (PASB) and Rajah Brooke Heritage (RBH) organised a “**Bung Muan Climbathon**” on May 6.

With the Jagoi, Singai and Barau ‘Bungs’, Bung Muan is one of the four Bidayu hills considered for gazetting as communal reserves.

“[Work to start on Bau District Office’s new complex in July](#)” – Borneo Post, 20 May 2017

“[RM1.6 million approved for restoration of three Bau sites](#)” – Borneo post, 30 June 2017

“[Brooke Heritage, PASB to hold Bung Muan Climbathon on May 6](#)” – Borneo Post, 15 Apr. 2017

“[A priceless heritage of Sarawak](#)” – Borneo Post, 30 Apr. 2017

A first segment of RM 10 million has been approved for the development of Kuching's **Unity Park** (Taman Budaya, **Reservoir park**), announced the Sarawak Government. End of February, the Master Plan for the project was announced to be in final draft form. The first phase will include upgrading works on the lake. *“We will also restore the buildings in the park to turn them into restaurants, cafeteria, craft sales centre, the people’s gym and more (facilities). We hope the first phase of this project could be completed before the ‘City Day’ celebration (on Aug 1) next year,”* said Abang Wahap, Kuching North mayor (Borneo Post). The renaming of the Park into “Unity Park” is related to the proclamation of Kuching as ‘City of Unity’ by the 1Malaysia Foundation in 2015.

[“RM15 mln grant pledged for parks, wedding hall in DBKU area – CM”](#) – Borneo Post, 5 Feb. 2017

[“RM20m Unity Park master plan almost ready – DBKU”](#) Borneo Post, 7 Feb. 2017

[“Park plan waiting for green light”](#) – Borneo Post, 19 Feb. 2017

The Sarawak Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture, Youth and Sports, Datuk Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah announced that the **walkway on the North bank of the Sarawak river, in Kuching, will be extended to connect Fort Margherita** (which houses the Brooke Gallery), **the State Legislative Assembly (Dun) complex and the ‘Golden Anniversary Bridge’**. A **staircase will be built from the riverbank walkway up to the Fort**. Works progressed on the **Golden Anniversary Bridge** steel walkway, with the North and South segments being recently joined. The bridge and was announced to be now due for **completion before the end of the year**. The debate on to extent to which the ‘penambang’ **traditional boatmen** will lose business resurfaced. *“It will affect them, but not much. The ‘penambang’ is an attraction just like the gondola in Venice. People who come to Sarawak will want to use the ‘penambang’ to experience it. In a way, the livelihood of the ‘penambang’ will still be there.”*, said the Minister. A prevailing opinion seems to be that the bridge will mostly affect negatively the traffic to the Astana jetty.

[“Walkway for Fort Margherita”](#) – The Star, 6 July 2017

[“Pedestrian bridge almost completed”](#) - The Star, 19 June 2017

[“New Golden S Bridge to improve connectivity”](#) – Borneo Post, 7 June 2017

[“Golden Anniversary Bridge to be completed on schedule”](#) – Borneo Post, 17 June 2017



In **Miri** town, a fire which razed several old shoplots in June drew attention to the **fragility and compromised safety of old buildings as a result of poor maintenance or substandard (or illegal) renovations or extensions**, and to the **need to preserve the shrinking number of buildings with heritage value** left in the city. “*Colonial-style buildings, constructed decades ago during the Brooke Rajah and British eras, should be gazetted as heritage buildings and thoroughly checked to prevent fires (...) These buildings have unique designs and architecture that reminds us of the old days.*”, said a businessman, noting that there did not seem to exist specific guidelines for building preservation. “*I agree there is more that needs to be done since these structures are a part of the history of Miri,*” said the Miri mayor Adam Yii. He proposed to consult with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry on the matter.

“Yii acknowledged that **heritage buildings in Miri must not be allowed to be drowned out by commercialism and business concerns to the extent they are neglected and left to deteriorate**” reported The Star.

Meanwhile, the Miri City Council has been allocated RM 450,000 towards the **conversion of Miri’s old ‘Rando’ (Resident Office) into a cultural and heritage community-based museum** (see our previous newsletter on this project); a committee is to be formed for the acquisitions of contributions from the community. “*We hope to open part of the museum by early next year*” said the Sarawak Assistant Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Lee Kim Shin. (September 2017 had been mentioned in an earlier announcement by the Sarawak Museum Department).

“[Colonial-style shoplots must be preserved, says businessman](#)” – The Star, 28 June 2017

“[Opening of new museum set for this Sept](#)” – Borneo post, 21 Apr. 2017

“[New heritage and cultural spot in Miri](#)” – The Star, 19 July 2017

“[Miri Cultural and Heritage Museum to open early 2018](#)” – Borneo Post, 24 Jul. 2017



The **Rajah Charles Brooke Memorial (RCBM) Hospital**, which has for many years been Sarawak’s main leprosanarium, is “**in the midst of being gazetted as a heritage site**”, and a collaboration between **Heritage Society of RCBM** and the **Brooke Trust** is envisaged for the conservation of the heritage grounds and their related history, reported the Borneo Post further to a visit by Jason Brooke, Director of the Brooke Trust.

“[Society pursues public awareness of ‘stigma’ of Hansen’s disease](#)” – Borneo Post, 11 Jul. 2017

[SHS ran a visit of the RCMB and its mini museum in 2015]

At the occasion of the Bario Nuneken Festival 2017 (Bario Food Festival, 27-29 July) it was announced that the **Kelabit Community Museum, Bario, is to go digital**. “*At the moment, it is not viable to relocate the artefacts, photos and other items related to the Kelabits from Sarawak Museum to Bario. So, the solution is to have a digital or virtual museum instead – where the artefacts are available for online viewing. The plan is also for the digital museum to be the repository for all research works carried out in the highlands*” said Lilla Raja, the organising chairperson of the festival. The museum, which opened in 2015, is an initiative of the Rurum Kelabit Sarawak (RKS) in partnership with the Sarawak Museum Department, and University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS).

“[Kelabit Community Museum in Bario to go digital soon says RKS](#)” - Borneo Post, 16 Jul. 2017]

The annual trip of Australian WW2 veterans to Sarawak, managed by the Australian Borneo Exhibition Group took place in April. The Group, called for support in a **proposal to bring back its itinerant exhibition which was exhibited at the Sarawak Museum some 7 years ago**, and for a deepening of the cultural exchange dimensions of its remembrance programme. For his part, Datuk Lim Kian Hock, Chairman of the Tourism Federation (STF) Heritage Development Committee, announced a **project to erect a war memorial in Pending**, at the spot where the Australian troops accepted the surrender of the Japanese troops in Pending.

[‘Know country’s history, heritage sites’](#) - Borneo Post, 22 Apr. 2017

[“A peek into our history”](#) – The Star, 26 Apr. 2017

Street Art: Ban Hock lane, Kuching, has new murals painted by students from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Sarawak’s Art and Design Faculty. The initiative is part of the Community Arts Project, which gathers Kuching North City Commission DBKU, UiTM and Electra House, as a contribution to DBKU’s ‘Kuching Clean, Beautiful and Safe 2013-2017’ (CBS) enhancement plan.

[“Ban Hock Lane to be revitalised with murals”](#) – Borneo Post, 3 March 2017

Events:

On 5 May, SHS hosted a **talk** entitled **“Ethos, Heritage Conservation and Advancement”** by Datuk Seri Lim Chong Keat, a respected Malaysian architect and conservationist who was among the founders of the Penang heritage Trust. DS Lim’s approach to heritage conservation is broad, encompassing cultural heritage (tangible, such as buildings or objects and intangible i.e. cultural practises, such as traditional trades, food, music, dance, festivals...) and natural heritage. (flora, fauna, rivers...). He advocated for an endogenous, educated, empathy charged approach to heritage for its own sake, as opposed, for example, to heritage conservation ‘for tourists’.

On built heritage conservation, he recalled the need for a rapprochement between heritage advocates and planners to stop “rapacious development”.

[."Conservationist: Start valuing heritage for its own sake"](#) The Star, 09 May 2017

["An insightful talk on heritage conservation"](#) - The Star, 13 May 2017

In an **interview** at the above talk, the **President of the Sarawak Heritage Society**, Dato Seri Robert Jacob Ridu called for **more efforts and incentives to boost heritage conservation in Sarawak** and offered a **collaboration between the Society and the State Government**.

[“NGO offers helping hand to protect state’s heritage”](#) – The Star, 11 May 2017



At the first Borneo Rainforest Fringe Festival, which took place in Kuching ahead of the Rainforest World Music Festival in July, the **Friends of the Sarawak Museum (FoSM)** curated an **exhibition on the painted ethnic panels that once ornated the old Court House ceilings**. The FoSM also hosted several cultural talks at the Rainforest World Music Festival, in Damai, The Fringe hosted also an exhibition of historic art photos by K.F. Wong and an exhibition on Ikat textile weaving, with precious silk pieces from the [Rumah Gareh](#) Pua Kumbu Community Project (Kapit).

[“Painted ceiling panels back on display at Old Courthouse”](#) – Borneo Post, 12 Jul. 2017

Books

A **New book** has been published on **Niah archaeology**: “Archaeological Investigations in the Niah Caves, Sarawak, Vol. 2” - March 2017, by Graeme Barker, David Gilbertson, Tim Reynolds and Lucy Farr - McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.

“**A Taste of Sibü**”, a book showcasing the variety of Sibü cuisines (Chinese, local, Malay-Melanau and Dayak) was launched at Sibü’s Borneo Cultural Festival. In 3 languages (English, Malay and Chinese). Available at Tradex Information Centre at Town Square Tower 1 and Sibü UTC.

“[A Taste of Sibü’ book launched in conjunction with VSY](#)” – Borneo Post, 22 Jul. 2017

AT NATIONAL LEVEL AND IN THE REGION (... as food for thought’ for Sarawak)

Nationwide

The Malaysia Government has made initial **approaches to UNESCO for the listing** of three sites as World Heritage: The **Royal Belum State Park** (Gerik, Perak), **Quartz Ridge** (Gombak, Selangor), and the **Forest Research Institute of Malaysia**. Malaysia has so far 5 UNESCO-listed World Heritage sites: Lenggong Valley (Perak) Mulu National Park (Sarawak), Kinabalu National Park (Sabah) and the historic cities of Melaka and George Town.

“[Malaysia seeks world heritage status for three more sites](#)” – Borneo Post (Bernama), 10 Jul. 2017

Passion for the traditional Malay house: beyond studying the architecture and socio-cultural values of the traditional Malay house, the director of the Malay Heritage Centre, UPM (University Putra Malaysia) rescues houses.

“[Saving the kampung house](#)” - New Straits Times, 30 Apr. 2017

There are initiatives to safeguard the “**Joget Gamelan**”, traditional Malay gamelan dance and music of the Royal Malay Courts.

“[Keeping alive a royal art form](#)” – The Star, 7 May 2017

For more on the Joget Gamelan, see : “[The allure of Joget Gamelan](#)” – New Mandala, 23 May 2017

Sabah

The **project to relocate the historic 1905 Kota Kinabalu wooden Clock Tower** has been revived in the face of a 18-storey hotel and shopping mall project.

“[Clock ticking on fate of historic tower](#)” – The Star, 4 May 2017

Sabah railway heritage: A **North Borneo Railway Gallery** was launched at the **Sabah State Museum**, Kota Kinabalu. It was also announced that the old **Melalap Railway Station** (which closed in 1971) **will be gazetted by the State as a heritage site**. It is also proposed to **make Bukau**, Sabah’s first railway station, in Beaufort town, a **heritage site**. There are no signs of rail tracks anymore there but a small gallery could be erected on the site where the railway was built, said the Sabah Assistant Minister for Tourism, Culture and Environment Datuk Kamarlin Ombi. (The North Borneo Railway started to operate in 1914).

“[Sabah’s first railway station proposed as historical heritage site](#)” – Borneo Post, 10 March 2017

[“Heritage status for Bukau station in Sabah”](#) – The Star, 11 march 2017

[“Melalap railway station building to be preserved as National Heritage – Pairin”](#) – Borneo Post, 22 March 2017

Two new Museums are being planned in Sabah: **Tun Mustapha** (1st governor of Sabah and CM from 1967-75) **Museum**, in **Kudat** and a **Dusun Civilisation and Ethnic Heritage Museum** in **Ranau**. They will complement Sabah’s current 11 museums and galleries. (The Dusun are an ethnic group of Sabah).

[“Sabah to get two new museums, says state assistant minister”](#)- New Straits Times, 12 Apr. 2017

Pahang

The National Heritage Department is working with Pahang State authorities for the **gazetting of 32 historical buildings** in the State at national level. The list includes some sites in the mining town Sungai Lembing (known to be once Malaysia’s largest, longest and deepest underground tin mine and 7 buildings in Lipis town. The gazetting will act as a **tourism “crowd puller”**, said Pahang Tourism and Culture committee chairman Datuk Seri Mohd Sharkar Shamsudin.

[“Pahang to add 32 heritage sites”](#) – The Star, 14 Apr. 2017

[“32 historical sites in Pahang to be gazetted as National Heritage Sites”](#)- New Straits Times, 18 Apr. 2017

Perak

The **Panglima Kinta Mosque** in **Ipoh** (capital of Perak) is in need of substantial restoration work.

[“Heritage building needs upgrading”](#)- The Star, 21 July 2017

Taiping: A New Straits Times article goes through Taiping’s heritage buildings. Taiping is the former capital of Perak State.

[“GO: Heritage town”](#)- New Straits Times, 6 Apr. 2017

Kedah

Universiti Sains Malaysia's (USM) Global Archaeology Research Centre (GARC) has prepared documentation to support an application to UNESCO listing of the over 2000 year old **Sungai Batu archaeological site**, for the National Heritage Department to initiate the process. USM has previously contributed to the submission to UNESCO of the Lenggong Valley site, which was approved in 2012.

[“Kedah's Sg Batu archaeological complex ready for World Heritage Site listing: USM”](#) – New Straits Times, 25 July 2017

Kuala Lumpur

Carcosa and Seri Negara, K.L.: after rumours surfaced that a Chinese company had bid to lease the national heritage listed premises as an office, the (Federal) Minister of Natural Resources and Environment DS Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar said that the buildings have been rented out to **Asian Heritage Museum Sdn Bhd**, a Malaysian **social enterprise** for an **Artefacts Trading and Performing Arts (ATP) Centre**. AHM is *“a genuine pro-heritage Malaysian group promoting heritage activities with the fullest respect to the heritage status of*

the buildings” said the Minister. In response to comments on the degraded condition of the buildings, the Minister said that the new tenants will have to comply with the requirements that the National Heritage Act imposes on listed heritage in terms of conservation.

“[New bid for Carcosa Seri Negara](#)” – The Star, 30 March 2017

“[Colonial buildings’ ownership puzzle](#)” – The Star, 1 Apr. 2017

“[No change in Carcosa Seri Negara's heritage status: Wan Junaidi](#)”- New Straits Times, 2 Apr. 2017

See also [our January 2016 Newsletter](#) for more on the context.

Selangor

Tourism Selangor will **train staff of the State’s local councils to become licensed tour guides** as a response to a need for more guides, currently provided by the private sector.

“[Plan to train local authority staff to become tour guides](#)” – The Star, 13 June 2017

Lost battle for a 1920 heritage building? A 1920 Rawang house located on a mining concession is reported due for demolition. Its long time tenants are fighting to stay in it.

“[Last ditch to save home](#)”- The Star, 20 July 2017; “[Rawang family’s appeal to save bungalow rejected](#)” - The Star, 29 Jul. 2017

Penang

More precious archaeological finds from the neolithic age have been **uncovered at Guar Kepah** (Kepala Batas, North of Butterworth, Penang State) by the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Global Archaeological Research Centre (GARC) teams. “Guar Kepah, a historic site older than the likes of the Bujang Valley and Sungai Batu in Kedah, is the only location in Peninsular Malaysia which shows evidence of ancient human settlements close to the sea” (Bernama). A submission to UNESCO will be prepared to get the site listed as World Heritage, announced the Penang Chief Minister.

“[Guar Kepah Archaeological Site to be made Unesco heritage site — Lim](#)” – Borneo Post, 26 Apr. 2017

“[Penang to seek Unesco heritage status for Guar Kepah neolithic site](#)” – The Star, 26 Apr. 2017

“[Archaeologists strike gold with new find](#)” – Borneo Post (Bernama), 20 May 2017

George Town: “*The state government has finally bowed to public pressure. It **agreed to relocate the proposed transport hub away from the Sia Boey (old Prangin market) archaeology site after several months of standoff with the heritage conservationists***”, reported The Star. Historical remains (a canal and foundations of a building) had been uncovered on the site. Investigations have been commissioned to Universiti Sains Malaysia.

[Sia Boey heritage site ‘saved’](#) ” – The Star, 11 March 2017

Win-win: **Penang City Council has leased out a dilapidated heritage-listed building** on Jalan Dato Koyah to Pinang Peranakan Mansion Sdn Bhd, which will restore the building and develop it into a **Malay museum**. The company already runs the Baba Nyonya museum at the Pinang Peranakan Mansion, Church Street.

“[Heritage building on Church Street to be turned into Malay Museum](#)” – The Star, 17 Apr. 20-17

“Pedestrian is King”: Penang Island City Council is getting serious in its **programme to remove obstructions from the city’s “5 foot ways”**... with initial gentle enforcement

measures...: “*The structure on premises owned by the Khoo Kongsi was **demolished as a gesture of co-operation with the City Council (MBPP)***”. Around 600 such permanent (illegal) obstructions have been recorded in George Town.

“[Tear down the walls – pedestrian is king](#)” – The Star, 20 Apr. 2017

Restoration of the six City Council-owned old shophouses earmarked for leasing to traditional trades started in February and is scheduled to be completed mid 2018.

“[Six heritage buildings in Penang undergo RM3mil facelift](#)” – The Star, 5 May 2017

For more background, see [our Nov.2016-Feb.2017 Newsletter](#).

An application to demolish a double story old bungalow in Pulau Tikus to give way to a private hospital facility raised concerns by Citizen Chant Group, an NGO.

“[Concerns for heritage conservation](#)” and “[NGO asks Penang govt to preserve heritage buildings for the creation of 'medical city'](#)” – The Star, 20 May 2017

George Town Heritage Anniversary Celebrations 2017 took place 7 to 9 July. The annual event, organised by George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI), commemorates George Town’s UNESCO listing as World Heritage in 2008. Since 2014, it has focused on George Town’s living intangible cultural heritage: oral traditions, crafts, games, food and the highlighting of core values to which George Town’s diverse cultural communities identify themselves.

“[Beyond the historical façade](#)” – The Star, 2 July 2017

“[A nostalgic journey through time](#)” – The Star, 3 July 2017

“[An excursion to George Town's historical sites](#)” – The Star, 6 July 2017

“[Heritage Day events to feature exciting oral traditions](#)” – The Star, 6 July 2017

“[Penang heritage event takes off](#)” and “[George Town fest draws crowds](#)” – The Star, 8 July 2017

SINGAPORE

The **Singapore Heritage Festival**, led by Singapore’s National Heritage Board, took place from 28 April to 14 May.

“[Singapore Heritage Festival 2017: Spotlight on Caldecott, Little India, Bukit Pasoh and the Singapore River](#)” – Straits Times, 19 Apr. 2017

The **National Heritage Board** also held its **11th Patron of Heritage Awards** ceremony, which honours heritage philanthropists. Some S\$ 8 million of contributions were recorded in 2016 in cash or in kind. One of the award recipients was a watercolourist, Harry Chin Chun Wah, 76, who donated 19 of his sketches of old Singapore to the National University of Singapore Museum.

“[Heritage patrons recognised at NHB awards ceremony](#)” – Straits Times, 23 May 2017

“[Veteran artist among 74 donors honoured at Patron of Heritage awards](#)” – Straits Times, 24 May 2017

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