

Location	Fort Alice, Sri Aman	Ref No.	SA/WS/AR012
Subject	Site Visit with Local Teachers and Schoolchildren on the 17 th November 2014	Date	17 th November 2014
		Time	2.30-4.30pm
Attended by	Ref attached attendance list	Conducted by	Mike Boon
Recorded by	Dennyse Boon (13 years old) & Daryl Boon (11years old), edited by Teo Hui Kun (mother)	Coordinated by	Goh Kaw Sze

Follow-up site visit to Fort Alice before completion

On the 17th of November 2014, we joined a group of schoolchildren for a visit to Fort Alice in Sri Aman. The visit was conducted by Mike Boon and coordinated by Mr. Goh Kaw Sze. We were going to view the nearly completed fort, before it was fitted out with display objects and artefacts.

The new pathway

We gathered at the foot of the hill at 2.30pm where we were treated to a complete view of the Fort with newly installed pathway and fencing. The new pathway started at the landing between the entrance gate and the fort on top of the hill. This pathway was built to enable disabled persons to have an easier way to reach the fort. It was built with cement floor finish with wooden handrail, about 12-metres long and spiralling up the slope. The turning point has a beautiful panoramic view of the river complemented by the big tree on the slope. We could imagine seeing the *benak* (tidal bore) coming from the river mouth, which will surely conjure a lovely image. As one walked further, the fort came in view. At the end of the pathway is the entrance to the fort with cement pavements. The pavements also served as external drains with gaps in between to channel rainwater runoff.

Fences

There was a new metal fence being built about five-meters away from the fort. Mr Mike told us that according to the historical photos of the fort taken in 1875, there were short, pointy wooden fences surrounding the fort. They were built short so the sentry guards would be able to see any incoming enemies. To replicate this, a 6-foot tall fence was built with pointed-end steel rods. Steel was chosen to differentiate it being a new addition to the heritage building. Building the new fence near the building also allow visitors to see the conserved fort up-close, when the heritage museum (inside the fort) is shut or after opening hours.



View of the nearly completed fort from the landing leading to the fort through a new pathway.



Newly installed steel fence around the fort.

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Courtyard inside the fort

After that, we were brought inside to the courtyard of the fort. The courtyard was unique to this fort as no other Brookes' forts were built with a courtyard. The courtyard created a tunnel effect where hot air from ground floor was drawn away. It was indeed very cooling standing in front of the courtyard.

Staircases

We then proceeded to look at staircases in the courtyard. They were amazingly built without modern nails and were movable without the steps falling apart. Mr Mike said that ideally, the staircases are able to be drawn up, but they are too heavy to be lifted because of the weight of belian wood used to construct them. This design was also seen in old photo of Fort Sylvia in Kapit, which has similar drawn-up staircase.

The three ground floor rooms

Three rooms came to view as we explored around the ground floor. The biggest room was the security room with wall panels built to make the room looked like a lock-up cell. In the 60's, the ground floor was used as a jail. The other rooms were the toilets and a pantry. The pantry cabinet was made of left-over timber from construction.



Courtyard functioning as ventilator to keep the fort cool.



Side view of the drawn-up staircases.



The staircase can be lifted when the 'shaft' rotates.



Steps are held together with wooden pegs.



Ground floor rooms under construction. Toilets (L); pantry (M) & interior of the security room (R).

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Exhibits on ground floor

There was a wooden boat being built at ground floor besides the courtyard. It was a replica of an Iban war boat, 34ft long and could fit in many warriors. It would have a thatched roof when completed. According to the carpenter, the whole boat is detachable and could be re-built like ‘Lego’ blocks. There will also be a Malay sampan and a Chinese trading boat to be built for display here. These signified the three communities who helped to build the original Fort Alice.

Old flag pole

Three components of an old belian flagpole were seen lying on the ground during our visit. The Master Carpenter showed us the process of re-assembling the flag pole which when erected would be 42ft high. The square (bottom) and round (top) poles were held together by a metal ring made to suit the shapes of the posts. It appeared to look like the mast of a sailing boat.



A 34ft long Iban warboat being constructed. Imagine it when it was carrying many warriors!



Flagpole re-assembling process. **a.** Upper pole was laid to the side of the lower pole. **b.** Fixing with timber and steel brackets. **c.** Upper pole was capped with a belian capping with a “built-in” pulley.

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The courtroom and rooms on upper floor

We then proceeded to the courtroom in the centre of the upper floor. It had timber balustrades installed to mark the court area, with a raised platform for the judge’s dais and two witness boxes. Behind both sides of the court were rooms, the Rajah’s bedroom and two smaller rooms to be used for storage and AV room.

The hatch doors in front of canons

There were ten openings on first floor walls below the timber lattices to mark the placement of canons. The master carpenter explained the traditional technique used to make the timber door with ship nails; metal straps and hinges and showed us the way to fix the cannon doors onto the wall.

The site visit ended at 4.30pm. It was an interesting visit for me as I could already see the almost-completed fort, especially the interior. I hoped that I could see the last touches being added during the next site visit.



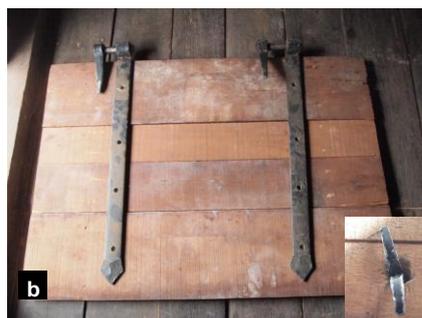
Entrance to the centre courtroom from the staircase in the courtyard.



Timber balustrades installed in the courtroom, with a raised platform for the judge’s dais and two witness boxes.



a. Pre-drilled holes on the timber door.



b. Metal strap laid onto cannon door with pre-drilled holes. Custom-made ship nails with split-ends were nailed through metal strap.



c. Metal hinges were slotted into fixed components on the door’s timber frame on the wall.