



MISC. HERITAGE NEWS – Aug-Sept-Oct 2016

SARAWAK

The **Brooke Gallery**, Fort Margherita and the new “**Urang Sarawak**” exhibition at the **Sarawak Museum** opened in September, just 4 days apart. Both are valuable additions to the Sarawak history and heritage scene. We reproduce below our web articles of 29 and 31 Oct. 2016 on these exhibits.

The **Brooke Gallery** is a joint effort of the Brooke Heritage Trust, Sarawak’s Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, and its Museum Department. It “*showcases the history of Sarawak under its White Rajahs with a focus on the many community leaders who worked together with (the Brooke) family to build the foundations of the state*” writes Jason Brooke, who heads the Brooke Trust. An interesting part of the exhibition illustrates the -not so well known by the younger generations- anti-cession movement that developed when Sarawak was ceded by the Brooke to the British Crown as a colony at the end of WW2 – in a global context where the decolonization movement had already developed across the British Empire.

The Gallery’s clean and lean presentation, and Fort Margherita itself, which was built by the Brookes and which benefitted from quality conservation works a few years ago, form now a key heritage landmark.

The project has mobilized a group of enthusiastic volunteers, known as the “Fort Rangers”. And colonial style “tea party” was organized by the Friends of Sarawak Museum on the day of the Gallery’s inauguration.

Naturally, historical legacies such the century of Brooke rule will always remain subject to discussion, as was recalled by a demonstration, on the day Gallery inauguration by a local group –which made Sarawak’s Deputy Chief Minister and Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture point out that the gallery did not seek to glorify the Brookes, adding: “*History is still history and we cannot erase them from us. Whether it is valid or not, I leave it to experts and historians to decide.*” [“[Brooke Gallery opens at Fort Margherita](#)”, and “[Group protests opening of Brooke Gallery](#)”, Borneo Post online, 25 Sept. 2016; “[Brooke Gallery vital for Sarawak history](#)” Sarawak Tribune online, 25 Sept 2016.]

The Gallery has a [Facebook page](#)

(SHS web article “*The New Brooke Gallery, Fort Margherita- a Gem*” 29 Oct. 2016)

The new “**Urang Sarawak**” exhibition, which opened on Sept. 28, – 4 days after the opening of the Brooke Gallery at Fort Margherita -is a journey into Sarawak’s history and culture(s). Set up in the Art Museum wing of the Sarawak Museum, it replaces the gallery on Sarawak’s history and culture that was housed until 2 years ago in the now demolished ex-‘new wing’, presumably until the new museum campus, under construction, is operational in a few years.

The content has been refreshed with contributions from international experts (*) and is more synthesised -perhaps too compact on some aspects, probably as a result of space constraints. It ranges from Sarawak’s palaeolithic ages and early history, with sections on the Niah Caves and on the Sarawak River delta highlighting Tom Harrisson’s work, to recent history, with for example a section on the Japanese occupation and the post WW2 turmoil associated to Sarawak’s cession to the British Crown. It also portrays a sample of significant cultural features of some of Sarawak’s ethnic groups including cosmology, ‘adat’ and traditional healing.

On show are priceless pieces drawn from the Museum's stores, or on loan, that had so far not been exhibited. The modernised, lean presentation includes videos, soundtracks and interactive screens.

A commendable and recommendable exhibit, first of all for locals, but of equal interest to visitors.

* At the opening of the exhibition, Sarawak's Chief Minister said that that Sarawak welcomes the inputs of experts from other countries to help in annotating the collections of the State Museum.

[“[‘Urang Sarawak’ exhibition to highlight state’s heritage](#)” Borneo Post online, 27 Sept. 2016; “[Cultural heritage is priceless as it reflects a nation’s civilisation, says Abg Jo](#)”, Borneo Post online, 29 Sept. 2016; “[New exhibition offers fresh look at Sarawak’s rich ethnic and cultural heritage](#)”; “[Locals are most encouraged to visit historical and cultural exhibitions on Sarawak](#)”, The Star online, 1 Oct. 2016]

(SHS web article “*Kudos to the Sarawak Museum for its New ‘Urang Sarawak’ Exhibition*” 31 Oct. 2016)

The Sarawak Government intends to **gazette the historic Siniawan old Chinese settlement and neighbouring Buso bazaar**, near Bau town, as ‘**heritage areas**’: “*The Museum Department would gazette the shophouses in Buso as heritage buildings, which means any repairs or upgrading works must have approval from the department*” and the Museum Department has been instructed to look at a specific old Buso wooden house, reported the press.

The project, which has been in the pipeline for several years, to develop a visitor heritage destination on the site of the ex-Rajah Brooke bungalow, where the naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace stayed, atop Bukit Serumbu (also known as Bung Muam, in Bidayu language, and as Bukit Peninjau), at an altitude of some 420m, was also recalled.

It is worthwhile here to recall that the emergence of Siniawan as a heritage site was greatly leveraged by a 2009-2011 community engagement programme led by Sarawak Heritage Society former President, architect Mike Boon. (see our article “[‘Heritage revival’ done right’: the Siniawan story](#)”, 15 Nov 2014).

[“Old Siniawan to be gazetted as “Heritage Area”- Borneo Post, 17 Sept 2016 (no weblink available); “[Preserving our heritage](#)” The Star, 8 Oct. 2016; “[Ministry making Siniawan tourism attraction – Abg Jo](#)” Borneo Post online, 1 Nov. 2016; “[Buso to be a heritage town](#)” Borneo Post online, 31 Oct. 2016]



Siniawan old bazaar, 2009

Sarawak's Deputy Chief Minister, in charge of Tourism, Arts and Culture also pushed for **more heritage buildings to be listed**: "*When we find that a building is rich in historical value, we will declare it a heritage building and it will be managed together by the owner and the museum*", he said at a function. [["More historical buildings to be preserved"](#) The Star online, 1 Nov. 2016]

The Borneo Post relayed a **renewed call for action** by the divers community **to protect the threatened WW2 Japanese shipwrecks off Santubong**. As mentioned in our previous edition of this bulletin, our understanding is that the shortcomings of the existing Sarawak Cultural Heritage Ordinance 1993 in dealing with underwater heritage have led to a proposal to intervene through the regulations on natural heritage by extending the perimeter of Talang/Satang and/or Santubong National Parks to include the maritime area which houses the shipwrecks. It was however mentioned later, in this regard, that, as the sites are further than 3 nautical miles away from the shoreline, the question comes under the purview of the Federal Government rather than the Sarawak regulations on the protected natural areas. [["Save Japanese WW2 shipwrecks, govt urged"](#), *malaysian.lol* website showing Borneo Post article 31 Aug 2016]

The **Sarawak Museum** launched a call for applications to one year post-PhD **fellowships to help annotate collections and assist in capacity building**. This is part of the New Museum Campus project. 12 fellowships are available and applications are to be submitted by end of November 2016. Earl of Cranbrook Gathorne Gathorne-Hardy, honorary curator of mammals at the Museum, pledged RM100,000 for a zoo-archaeology fellowship - one of the areas where local skills are missing; his pledge was matched by the McDonald Institute of Archaeology and St John's College, Cambridge. [["Sarawak welcomes foreign help to annotate state museum exhibits"](#) New Straits Times online, 28 Sept. 2016; ["Sarawak Museum Campus receives RM200,000 in pledges"](#) Borneo Post online, 15 Oct. 2016; ["Sarawak Museum eyes 12 fellowships"](#), The Star online, 15 Oct. 2016]

Interestingly, the [publication of the request for applications for the fellowships on the Asia-Europe Museums website](#) showed **the design of the new Sarawak Museum Campus under construction**. That image is probably the first publicly available of the building. We let readers make their opinion on the coherence of the architecture with the historic museum building, across the road, and with Sarawak's culture. "Like"?

Also noted:

The **"Teripun" a new Kelabit community museum and cultural centre** was inaugurated in **Bario** at the occasion of the Bario Food and Cultural Festival (Pesta Nukenan Bario) end of July 2016. It is a two-storey wooden building, situated on the main square of Bario town. For the opening it housed two exhibitions, one on the Cultured Rainforest project and one on Tom Harrison (who parachuted into Bario in WW2 and directed "Operation Smut"). The Harrison exhibit was designed and donated by Malaysia Architect Association (PAM) Sarawak Chapter. The Teripun is a *Rurum Kelabit Sarawak* (RKS) and Bario Youth project. [["Teripun a reminder of Kelabits' roots"](#), Borneo Post online, 14 Aug 2016]

Media reported that the **The Bung Bratak heritage centre** project is due for completion on May 2017. “*This RM8 million Bidayuh historical cum tourism centre at 1,000 feet of Bung Bratak (Mt Bratak) in Bau is financed by the federal Ministry of Tourism and Culture and is being built by Sarawak JKR,*” recalled the Bung Bratak Heritage Association. (see our [Nov. 2015](#) and [March 2016 Misc. Heritage News](#) for our previous mentions of this ambitious project) [[“Bung Bratak Heritage Centre for completion by May 2017”](#), Borneo Post, 6 Oct. 2016]

The second edition of the **Kuching Heritage race** has been announced for 14 Jan. 2017. The event is organised by a group of individuals with support of tourism and heritage entities.

Treasure trove? Some **old Sibü photos** from the collection gathered by the **Photographic Society of Sibü** were published in the Borneo Post in its Malaysia Day 2016 supplement. [[“Old Sibü - History and heritage through snapshots”](#), Borneo Post online, 16 Sept. 2016]

A Heritage Workshop for some 40 tourist guides took place in Sibü, focusing on the town’s heritage. The workshop was a collaboration between Sarawak Tourist Guides Association (STGA) and Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Sarawak. [[“40 tourist guides take to heritage trail in Sibü”](#) Borneo Post online, 7 Oct. 2016]

COLUMNS, REPORTS, OPINIONS

[“No sex please, he’s...”](#), The Star online, 21 Sept. 2016: on the misfortunes of past **film projects on the Brooke Rajahs**.

[“Heritage at risk: our traditional foods”](#), Borneo Post online, 25 Sept. 2016 – a column raising **alarm over the impact of globalisation on Sarawak’s traditional foods**. But, are these really threatened?

Traditional languages need to be preserved: “*We need to see our cultural heritage, including our languages, as the foundation of our identity to be developed, nurtured and preserved,*” said Sarawak’s Chief Minister at a Malaysian Indigenous Peoples’ Conference on Education [[“Adenan: Preserve indigenous languages”](#) The Star online, 21 Sept. 2016; [“Dr Sim: Preserve Chawan dialect to safeguard heritage”](#) Borneo Post online, 10 Oct. 2016]

The report, in The Star, of an excursion to **Mount Jagoi** by a group of students is a reminder of this valuable natural and cultural heritage site located close to Kuching and looked after by the Jagoi Area Development Committee. [[“A brisk climb up Mount Jagoi”](#) - The Star online, 14 Jul. 2016]

LOOKING BACK AT LOCAL HERITAGE- RELATED TALKS AND GATHERINGS OF THE LAST THREE MONTHS

3 Aug. 2016: FORMADAT (Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Highlands of Borneo, a grassroots organisation) and WWF held a story telling event in Kuching to promote the book “Highland Tales in the Heart of Borneo” documenting cultural heritage. The book was published

in 2015. [[“Story-telling event held to promote book on Borneo native communities”](#) - The Star online, 26 Jul. 2016; [“Keeping old tales alive”](#) The Star online, 6 Aug. 2016; [“Highland tales from the heart of Borneo”](#) Borneo Post Seeds, 3 Sept. 2016].

13 Aug. 2016: Sarawak Heritage Society public talk on the **ancient pagan rites of the Bisingai (Mount Singai)** people by Prof. Andrew Alec Tuen (professor at the UNIMAS Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation) and Boniface Dowell (former RTM broadcaster).

17 Aug. 2016: *“Of forgotten Forts, Facebook and Newfound Friends”*: A community engagement project using **digital media to document heritage in the Bario highlands** was presented at a “Sharing my Passion” session of Museum Shop and Café. Swinburne University’s *“Digital Media and Indigenous Heritage”* project mobilises students of the Business and Design Faculty, Sarawak campus and Swinburne Melbourne. The project *“aims to empower the local communities to share their histories, songs, traditions, beliefs, objects, stories, folklore and individual perspectives to the rest of the world through digital media”*, presented Dr Christine Horn from Swinburne Melbourne. Aurelia Liu, Master degree student at Swinburne, works on a **similar pilot initiative on quarters of old Kuching**: develop a tailor-made ‘app’ to facilitate and structure information flows on history and intangible heritage on social networks. [[“Unlikely partners – heritage and digital media”](#)], Borneo Post online, 7 Aug 2016]

20 Aug. 2016: Friends of Sarawak Museum (FoSM) and Sarawak Museum Dept “Afternoon@Museum” session on **postage and revenue stamps** and other documents, 1869-1949, by Dr Ong Liap Teck, President of the Philatelic Society Kuching Sarawak.

3 Sept. 2016: **“Japanese Occupation of Sarawak: before, during and after the Second World War”**, a *Persatuan Pegawai Akademik Universiti Malaysia Sarawak* (UNIMAS Academic Staff Association) talk by Edward Lakin Mansel, who has done an extensive private research on the Sarawak history pertaining to the Japanese Occupation.

5 Sept.-2 Oct. 2016: The **Urban Sketchers Kuching**, who love drawing heritage buildings and scenes, held their 4th **anniversary exhibition** at the Old Court House, Kuching.

7 Sept. 2016: Malaysia Nature Society Kuching (MNSK) and FoSM public talk by Jayl Langub (Associate Research Fellow at the Institute of Borneo Studies, UNIMAS and WWF- Malaysia Trustee) on the **traditional salt making industry** of the Bario highlands.

29 Sept. 2016: “Capturing Traditional knowledge”, a FoSM talk by Margarita Naming, from the Sarawak Biodiversity Centre, on their **methodology to record traditional knowledge associated to biodiversity resources**.

18 Oct. 2016: “I am Ali Wallace”, another FoSM event: Honorary curator of the Sarawak Museum Earl of Cranbrook Gathorne Gathorne-Hardy, presented a short documentary film showing behind the scenes shots of the making of an Indonesian documentary on Ali, who was naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace’s assistant. The presentation was filled with hilarious English sense of humour. Reliable historical documentation on Ali being scarce, reconstructing his identity and life remains subject to several, not always converging assumptions. [[“Film features Alfred Russel Wallace’s field assistant”](#)] Borneo Post online, 21 Oct. 2016]