



## MISC. HERITAGE NEWS –November 2016 – February 2017

### SARAWAK

What did we hear, see and learn on the Sarawak heritage scene in the last four months?

Statements by the now Chief Minister and Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Datuk Amar Abang Johari Tun Openg, on several occasions provided an updated picture of the Government pipeline of projects touching on heritage conservation. He recalled that several heritage-related assets are to benefit from increased Government allocation to the tourism sector under the 11th Malaysia Plan (2016-2020).

Beyond the major **new Sarawak Museum** project in Kuching, scheduled to open in 2020, the following projects involving tangible/built heritage were mentioned:

- The **old Buso bazaar** (located just upstream from Siniawan) is to be made a **heritage site**: *“As a heritage neighbourhood, it will be preserved and become a visitor attraction showcasing the history, culture and lifestyle of its local community”* he said. The Sarawak Museum Department has been instructed to look specifically into an old wooden house there which could qualify for heritage listing. (See also our previous newsletter on this initiative).

- On the **Brooke era forts conservation and upgrading**, *“five forts will be conserved and upgraded into regional museums. Work on three of the forts will start in early 2017 and the remaining two will commence in 2018”*. In a January statement, the Director of the Sarawak Museum Department (SMD) mentioned **Fort Lily (Betong), Fort Emma (Kanowit) and Fort Hose (Marudi)** as constituting the **2017 batch**. A previous announcement, in June 2016, had mentioned allocations of respectively RM 5mil, RM 5mil, and RM 3.5mil for them. The two other targeted forts appear to be Fort Brooke in Julan and Fort Sylvia in Kapit.

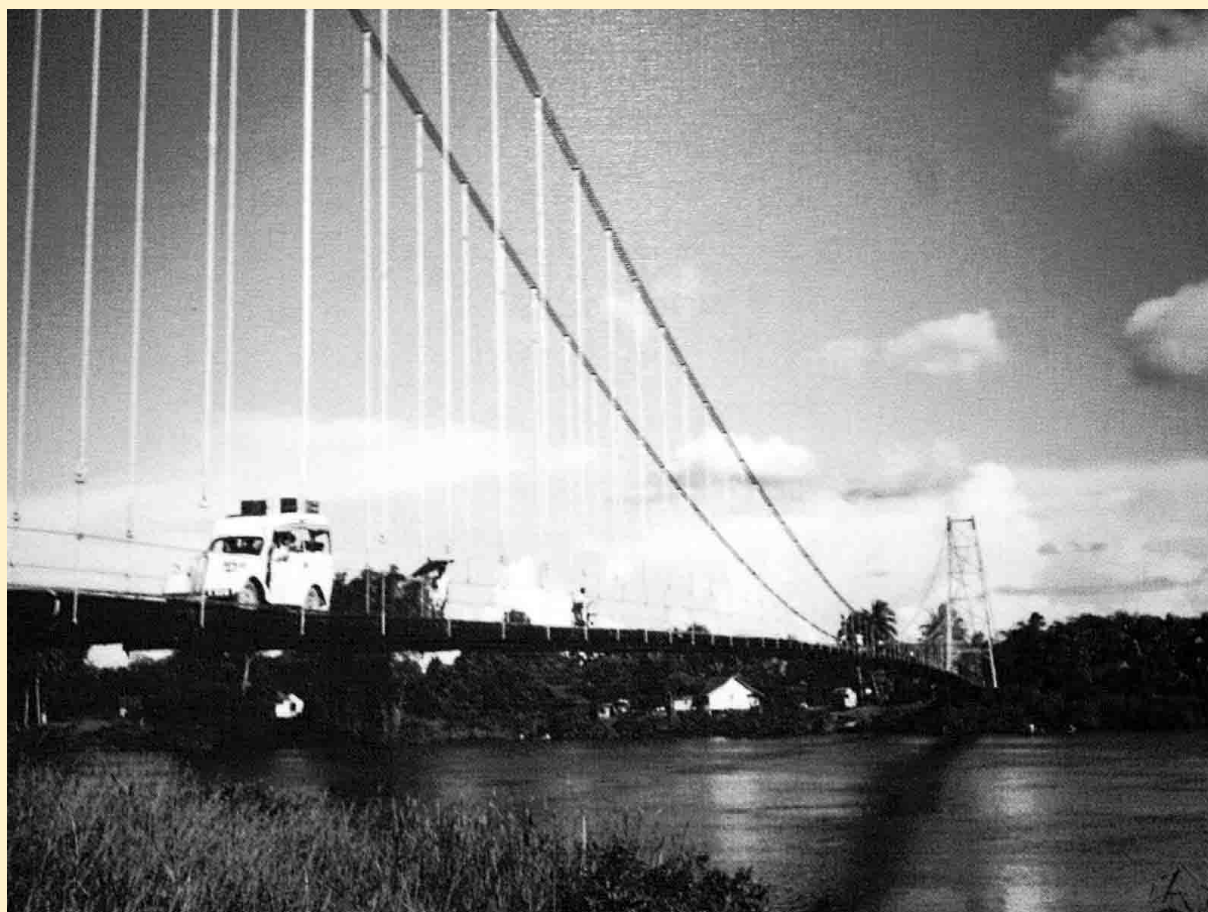
- A **Santubong archaeological park** project was announced. It would include:

(i) an **improvement of the facilities at the several archaeological sites of the Santubong area**, some of which date as far back as the 7th century (rock art and remains of constructions and iron industries at Sungai Jaong, Bongkissam and other sites).

(ii) construction of an **Alfred Russell Wallace Centre/ Wallace Discovery Centre**: *“We will rebuild the bungalow where Wallace did his research that had led to the creation of the Sarawak Law which talks about the origins of species after Darwin, and later coming up with the theory of evolution together with Darwin”*. The bungalow, which was built for the Rajah James Brooke, is known to have been located in the compound of the (now dilapidated) Government rest house at Santubong Point. The Centre would be “interfaced” with the Darwin Centre of the London Natural History Museum in London.

- The **Satok suspension bridge is to be reconstructed**. In early February, the Sarawak Chief Minister said that he had reactivated the rebuilding project (first announced in 2012) and hoped construction would start this year. It will facilitate access to the major Medan Niaga Satok market, opened a few years ago, on the North bank of the Sarawak River. The media reported that the design of the replacement bridge had been approved and the location identified but no specifics were provided. The original bridge dated from 1926. It was 130m long, 2.3m wide bridge, and suspended some 18 meters over the Sarawak River. It carried water supply pipes

from the Matang waterworks to Kuching town and served as the main road link across the Sarawak River until the new Satok Bridge came into operation in [1975](#). Given its strong heritage value for Kuching people, it was gazetted as a heritage site in 1985 under the Sarawak Antiquities Ordinance but collapsed in 2004.



The Old Satok Bridge – undated picture

- The **old State Legislature building (DUN)** is to be turned into a **performance arts centre**”, to start with initial consultancy work in 2017.

- *“The **Kuching Waterfront area** will be transformed into a vibrant weekend pedestrian zone where youth, sports, musical and dance activities alongside food and handicraft sales and hawkers will be allowed to operate. With the completion of the walkway from Kpg Boyan to Fort Margherita which houses the Brooke Gallery and the Pedestrian Bridge by end of 2017, the Kuching Waterfront landscape on both sides will be more attractive and pedestrian-friendly.”*, recalled the Minister.

He also draw attention to Sarawak’s existing framework for the conservation of built heritage: *“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” (...)* *“In order to develop, we need to look at our background and use our strong cultural heritage as a source for us to move forward”*.

For his part, the Sarawak Assistant Minister of Tourism **“urged local councils to maintain the authenticity of historical buildings within their respective jurisdictions and maintain their historical value to be showcased to the public. “We must ensure that historical buildings in the centre of the city such as in Carpenter Street and Ewe Hai Street, especially the facade**

*of the buildings will not be altered to maintain the heritage of the buildings.” He noted (that) some of the buildings’ facades have been changed in the process of buildings being upgraded. He hoped that in future, these matters could be discussed before work is implemented to preserve the city’s heritage”,* reported the Borneo Post.

Indeed, there is room for more teeth in regulations for and enforcement of built heritage-conservation.

[“[More historical buildings to be preserved](#)” - The Star online, 1 Nov. 2016

“[State expected to triple allocation for tourism](#)” - Borneo Post online, 20 Nov. 2016]

“[State’s rich history, culture a tourism draw](#)” Borneo Post, 30 Nov. 2016

“[Abang Johari: Sarawak in need of a brand to attract more visitors](#)” - Borneo Post online, 30 Nov. 2016

“[Making Santubong an archaeological site](#)” - Borneo Post online, 8 Dec. 2016

“[Contractors told to work mindfully in city heritage area](#)” - Borneo Post online, 13 Jan. 2017

“[Satok Suspension Bridge to be rebuilt soonest — Abg Johari](#)” - Borneo Post online, 12 Feb. 2017

“[New crossing over Sarawak River](#)” – The Star online, 13 Feb. 2017]

**Miri town’s ‘Rando’ building will be converted into a cultural and heritage museum,** announced the Sarawak Museum Department. Its current occupants - the Resident and District Office and the Islamic Religious Department (Jais) - are expected to move to new premises and “*once the complex is vacated we will work on some restoration works and once completed we will put up temporary exhibition for the museum, while we work on the artefacts that could be permanently displayed to showcase the rich cultural heritage of Miri*” said Charles Leh, Curator of Sarawak Museum’s Natural History and Zoology. The building dates from 1912, soon after the first oil well in the country was sunk atop Canada Hill in 1910.

[“[Proposed cultural, heritage museum to be ready soon](#)” - Borneo Post online, 19 Jan. 2017].

Note: In June 2016 the Sarawak Assistant Minister of Tourism called for the building to be listed as a heritage site – see our [May-July 2016 Misc. Heritage News](#) bulletin.

On Saturday 25 February, some 240 participants took part in the **second edition of the Kuching Heritage Race**, braving the rain. This year’s race took the participants to the eastern parts of the old Kuching town around Padungan and across the river to Fort Margherita and its Brooke Gallery. Diverse exciting challenges and brainy quotes awaited the participants, from deciphering Iban tattoos on a live model to being (not very severely) rated by Uncle Di (hiding under an umbrella) in performing a traditional Dayak dance. One of the stations was the not-so-well-known, “Dato Lagenda” tree shrine in the Padungan area, a priceless heritage site illustrating Sarawak’s peaceful blend of cultures. The Kuching Heritage Race is a charity cum heritage awareness raising initiative by an independent committee from the tourism industry and from local heritage related organisations. The Sarawak Heritage Society sponsored a team of 6 from a Kuching Salvation Army Children’s Home.

[“[Heritage Race hits target on streets of Kuching](#)” - Borneo Post online, 25 Feb. 2017]

The **stripping of more WW2 Borneo shipwrecks, this time in Sabah**, is worth mentioning here: as was the case in the plundering of the Japanese shipwrecks off Santubong (Sarawak) last year, it involved the mobilisation of heavy equipment such as barges and cranes. See [our 27 Feb. 2017 web article](#).

**In picture: changing Kuching...**



It's not a crane: the rising Golden Bridge. Can you spot the Square Tower and the Clock Tower of the Old Court House? (03/2017)



India Street. Colored. (03/2017)

**Also noted:**

Success: the **Brooke Gallery**, at Fort Margherita, Kuching, attracted **over 10,000 visitors** from 51 countries **in its first 4 months of operation**, announced the director of the Brooke Trust, Jason Brooke on a visit to Sarawak. The Gallery, a collaboration between the Brooke Trust (a non-profit entity based in England), the Sarawak Museum Department and Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture was opened in September 2016.

[[“Brooke Gallery sheds light on watershed of White Rajahs”](#) - Borneo Post online, 16 Jan. 2017]

In early January, works for the construction drainage infrastructure on **Jalan Khoo Hun Yeang** (near Kuching’s historic police station) **unearthed**, at some 1.5m depth, close to **300 artefacts**, mostly pottery and ceramics and glass sherds. They were sent to the Sarawak Museum Department for analysis. Most of them were broken, partly by the excavation machinery and seemed to date from Qing dynasty and more recent times. The Government took this opportunity to **remind all contractors or members of the public to be mindful, stop digging and signal to the Sarawak Museum Department whenever they unearth historical relics**, in line with the provisions of the Sarawak Cultural Heritage Ordinance.

[[“286 European, Indo-China and Qing influenced artefacts found in Kuching”](#)

[“Contractors told to work mindfully in city heritage area”](#)

[“Museum director: Khoo Hun Yeang Street artefacts being analysed”](#) - Borneo Post online, 10, 13 and 15 Jan. 2017

[“Contractors told to inform authorities when ancient items are unearthed”](#) - The Star online, 16 Jan. 2017]

**An ode to Kuching heritage buildings:** “Kuching’s wonderful architecture” is the title of an article published by The Star further to a visit of the **Kuching Heritage Trail** by the Sarawak Assistant Minister in charge of tourism. [[The Star online, 17 Jan. 2017](#)] It is worthwhile recalling here that the Sarawak Heritage Society was instrumental in the development of the Kuching Heritage Trail in 2007.



More colours: India Street, Kuching. (03/2017)

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## AT NATIONAL LEVEL AND ELSEWHERE IN MALAYSIA

The National Heritage Department is to start implementation of its Conservation Management Plan for national heritage assets in 2017. *“Two plans would be implemented, the ‘Conservation Management Plan’ for tangible heritage and the ‘Rules and procedures for Conservation’ for intangible heritage assets” (...). After [a heritage item is] gazetted, it requires a set of procedures, such as to determine the features that follow, to what is defined as a national heritage ‘Baju Melayu’.”*

[[“Heritage Dept To Initiate Heritage Conservation Plan”](#) - Borneo Post, 10 Dec.2016, relayed from Bernama, 9 Dec. 2016.]

At a media conference, the Minister of Tourism and Culture recalled that (Federal budget) **allocations for heritage buildings conservation projects** are granted “according to priority and taking into account budget constraints”, reported the media. He mentioned that the heritage Department has implemented some 200 conservation projects since it started operating in 2006 and stressed that **heritage buildings were often viewed as a nuisance and obstacle to new development but were actually vital in giving added value to a particular area**, and that conservation of heritage buildings could indirectly contribute to the country’s economic returns as the ministry’s statistics showed that **over 50 per cent of revenue from the tourism sector and tourist arrivals were via heritage tourism**. Local authorities and related agencies must play a more efficient role and work more closely to ensure a balance between development and conservation of heritage buildings, he said.

[[“Heritage building projects based on priority, budget”](#) - Bernama article, Borneo Post online, 24 Aug. 2016]

### Kuala Lumpur

In December 2016, the National Heritage Department issued a notice **revoking the heritage listing of part of Kuala Lumpur’s “MaTIC” complex**. The MaTIC is centered on a 1935 colonial architecture mansion and the “Dewan Tunku Abdul Rahman”, the hall where Tunku Abdul Rahman of Negri Sembilan was installed as Malaysia’s first Agong in 1957 and where Parliament held its first meeting in 1959. The revocation created a stir in the heritage loving community. A real estate development project, including the construction of a hotel seemed to be behind the de-listing. This makes one think of other Malaysian projects which aimed at encasing heritage buildings under massive concrete construction. NGOs called for the preservation of the historic buildings and of a proper buffer zone, in line with global heritage conservation guidelines.

[see [our 19 Feb. 2017 web article](#)].

### George Town, Penang (... as ‘food for thought’ for Sarawak)

Media releases of the last four months were dominated by issues highlighted in previous issues of this newsletter:

- The **extent of foreign buying of heritage properties by foreign investors**, in particular from Hong Kong and Singapore and local proxies was confirmed as more information surfaced on bulk purchases. The rise of property prices, linked to a high level of demand seem to explain the cases of skyrocketing **rental fees** and the **evictions** that have affected small, traditional businesses in recent times. The national level introduction of the minimum of RM 2 million for property purchase by foreign parties was said to have mitigated the trend. GTWHI (George Town World Heritage Inc) launched a study on the Penang Government proposal to regulate

rents, and the Government highlighted a project to renovate a row of 6 shophouses, owned by the Local Government, that will be rented to traditional trades as part of Penang's intangible heritage. The project involves Think City Sdn Bhd (Penang based subsidiary of the Malaysian National investment fund Kazanah Nasional Bhd, specialised in urban regeneration) and the Penang Heritage Trust.

[[“ ‘Raid’ by foreigners continues”](#) - The Star online, 3 Nov. 2016

[[“Penang group looks into quitting of heritage properties”](#)]- The Star online, 9 Nov. 2016

[[“Can't limit foreign ownership of heritage buildings, Penang exco says”](#) - malaymail online, 15 Nov. 2016

[[“Heritage building owners selling due to delay in restoration approvals, Penang NGO says”](#) - malaymail online, 16 Nov. 2016

[[“Penang heritage zone manager starts pilot study on proposed rent controls”](#) – malaymail online, 16 Nov. 2016

[[“DAP assemblyman questions Penang heritage policy”](#) - FMT News, 19 Nov. 2016

[[“Kimberley St. shops to be restored soon”](#) - The Star online, 8 & 9 Dec. 2016

[[“Chow clears air on heritage property ownership issue”](#) - FMT News, 16 Dec. 2016

[[“Family-run coffee shop forced to close after 67 years”](#) - The Star online, 1 March 2017]

- The Property Development, Construction and Management Committee (PDCMC) of the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce voiced for its part, **concerns on the complexity of the regulations, procedures and approval delays relating to the renovation of heritage buildings**. It said that it is carrying out a study “aimed at finding out why many local heritage building owners find it difficult to use their own buildings for their businesses like cafes and restaurants”

[[“Strict laws forcing Penangites to give up heritage properties”](#) - FMT News, 16 Nov. 2016

[[“Simplify renovation requirements on heritage buildings, suggests consultant”](#) - The Star online, 17 Nov. 2016]

- The Penang Island City Council is working with Think City on a pilot project to beautify and upgrade ‘unkempt and inaccessible back lanes’ of George Town. The project will make the town more pedestrian and bicycle friendly.

[[“Making George Town pedestrian-friendly, one back lane at a time”](#) – malaymail online, 20 Feb. 2017]

- The **“Penang Story 3 - The Spirit of Penang: Informing, Inspiring and igniting Change”** initiative was launched in December 2016. This new series of events and contributions is a collaboration the Penang Heritage Trust, Think City and Wawasan Open University to collate and document the stories related to Penang. *“The main theme of this initiative is the “Spirit of Community” that encourages the participation of the wider community through the creation of various platforms of opportunities. Those can be in the form of shared stories, memories and the protection of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) through documentation and public space activation.”* ([PHT website](#)). The first event was a talk by Dr Datuk Dr Anwar Fazal, chairman of Think City, in which he addressed the issues and dynamics of public interest activism and social change.

[[“Dr Anwar: Penangites are never afraid to speak up on pressing issues”](#) - The Star online, 2 Jan. 2017]

- **Strengthened enforcement of regulations on licensing hospitality businesses** led to the closure of a number of guesthouses and small lodges in the heritage zone.

[[“Many Penang guesthouses to close for good”](#)]- The Star online, 1 Nov. 2016]

- Mrs **Khoo Salma**, a prominent and respected figure of the Penang Heritage Trust, has been appointed as **Penang councillor**.

[[“Heritage activist Khoo Salma among five new faces in Penang councillor line-up”](#)]- The Star online, 4 Jan. 2017

[[“Heritage activist Khoo Salma made Penang city councillor”](#) – malaymail online, 4 Jan. 2017]

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