

SHS PRESS STATEMENT

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Sarawak Heritage Society (SHS) notes the current Kuching city drainage works around Jalan Masjid, Jalan Market and Jalan Lebu Jawa have unearthed tracks from the old railway line that used to serve Kuching in the early part of the 20th Century.

This 're-discovery' acts as a reminder that the area is charged with history.

The Second Rajah Sir Charles Brooke was fascinated with railways and set up the Sarawak Government Railway line, which officially opened on 9th April 1916. The first phase of the railway track was completed in early 1915 and connected the Kuching Railway Terminus to the 3rd Mile Bazaar. It crossed Green Road and went along the road once called Jalan Keretapi (now part of Jalan Tun Ahmad Zaidi Aduce). By end 1915, it had been extended to the 7th Mile Bazaar (now Kota Sentosa) and by mid 1916, it had been further extended to the 10th Mile Bazaar (now Kota Padawan). It took 35 minutes to travel from Kuching to the 10th Mile and the train made the trip five times a day. There were three steam engines, named Bulan, Bintang and Jean, powered by coal from the Sadong colliery. The rail service carried passengers, goods and livestock. The passenger fare was 20 cents from central Kuching to the 10th Mile Bazaar.

The Sarawak Government Railway line played a short but significant role in Sarawak's early history. When the road to the 7th Mile was completed, bus services began to operate and over time, public usage of the railway line dwindled. By January 1931, it ceased full-fledged service. During the Japanese Occupation (1941-45), the railway was used on and off for the transportation of stone from the 7th Mile Quarries as well as carriage of passengers and POWs compelled to work in the quarries.

The unearthing of the old railway tracks is not really a surprise as many are aware that the remnants of the tracks are still in place. But of greater significance should be the old Kuching Railway Terminus building and Maintenance Depot, which today lie largely unused and dilapidated on Jalan Masjid, across from the Brooke Dockyard.

The Sarawak Heritage Society believes that this is an important heritage area and all stakeholders should come together, put on their thinking caps and explore how the historic sites can be meaningfully and sensitively repurposed, in line with a state-wide heritage assessment and management plan.

According to SHS President, Dato Sri Robert Jacob Ridu, "The fascinating story of Sarawak's first romance with railways should be remembered and shared with locals as well as visitors to Sarawak." He added "Our heritage represents the SOUL OF SARAWAK and its diverse people. We need to treasure our heritage. "

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