

HERITAGE SITE VISIT TO CHAN FAMILY MANSION, KUCHING

SHS organizes visits for members and public to sites in Kuching which are considered to have local heritage values to raise awareness and an understanding of our past.



Group photo of participating members with the hosts, Mr Chan Choon Ann (top left) and Mr KS Chan (top right), on the staircase approaching the main entrance.

On **09th June 2012**, a site visit was arranged by Irene Shepherd to the Chan family mansion located at No.2 Jalan William Tan. This was a rare chance to visit one of the old private houses remaining in Kuching.

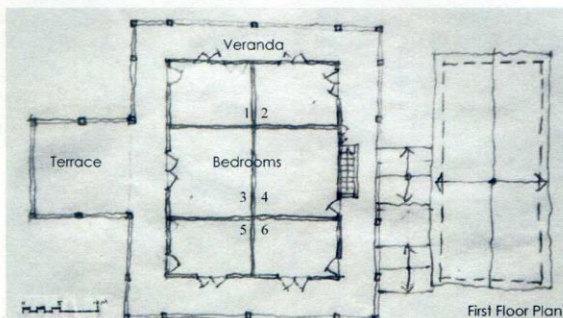
After gathering over breakfast at a coffee shop at Jalan Sekama, where the group could look clearly at the front porch of the Chan mansion, we made our way out to the main gate at Jalan William Tan.

The mansion is accessed by a narrow driveway which sweeps around the base of a small hill to reveal the house nestled behind it. From its vantage point on the hill slope, the front door overlooks the modern shophouses along Jalan Sekama with a view of Gunung Serapi in the far distance.

It is a double-storey building with a hip roof. Brick Doric columns encircle the ground floor creating a tranquil colonnade, supporting the timber veranda upstairs. The front of the house along the center axis has an extended rectangular terrace with a roof over it.

Being on high ground, the house is cool with trees planted around it. A gnarled and moss covered frangipani tree stands atop the original approaching staircase shading the traditional 'loveseat'. The main door of the house opens out onto a well-kept lawn spreading out across the front garden. With the hill behind it, the property is arranged according to classic feng-shui principles.

We were given a guided tour of the house by two of the Chan family members, Mr KS Chan who lives at the mansion, and his nephew Mr Chan Choon Ann. They directed us to view detailing of the structures old and new, and told stories about the house and their ancestors. According to Mr Chan, despite the weathered timber, the joineries remain original and intact.



Mr Chan Choon Ann mentioned that the Chan Villa was built in the early 20th century, though the building has been renovated many times, the timber cladding only dating back to the 1960s. Then we were led to tour the upstairs of the mansion by Mr Chan. It is fully timber with a wide veranda encircling the centre rooms (bedrooms). Interestingly, the bedrooms are positioned back-to-back with each other and each room has a window and a door opening out to the veranda.

The Chan Clan originated from Chan Kho, who as a boy sailed from Mainland China to Kuching and worked as a handy boy in Main Bazaar in early 1900s. He made his fortune in the Bau gold mine and came back to Kuching to start his trading business in a shop at Carpenter Street (now Universal Trading).

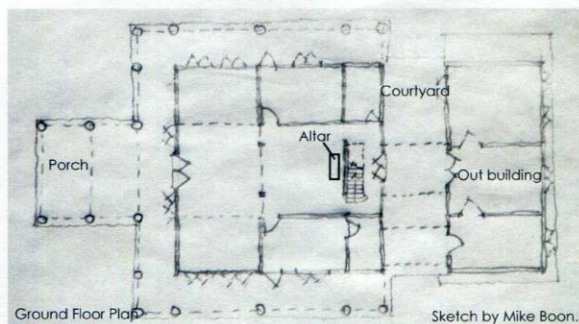
The family is well known for owning a total of five mansions in Kuching built by different family members since early 20th century. Currently only two of the buildings remain standing.

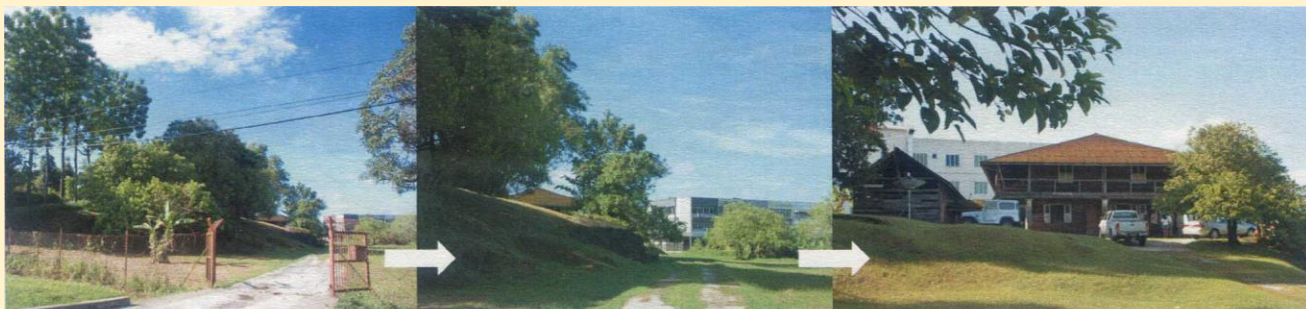
1. *Chin Siok Garden* at Jalan Mathies by second son Chan Kee Soon. This was later occupied by Kuching High School but burned down in 2008.
2. *Chan Chng Villa* at Jalan Tabuan built by his other son Chan Kee Ong. The building has since been demolished.
3. *House of Lau Leong Yew & Chan Choo Nio*, behind KMC flat, built by the daughter of Chan Kee Ong. This is the other remaining Chan mansion.
4. *Chan Villa* at Jalan William Tan, bought by Chan Boon Tho, son of Chan Kee Hock (eldest son of Chan Kho).
5. *Kong Ann Garden* at Jalan Pending, now demolished.

Chan Villa is the main ancestral house as one can see the display of photographs and plaques of the Chan ancestors on the altar in the living room downstairs. A few pieces of antique furniture remain where they probably originally were. Mr Chan mentioned that the house has gone through several renovations as could be seen from the oddly positioned beams.

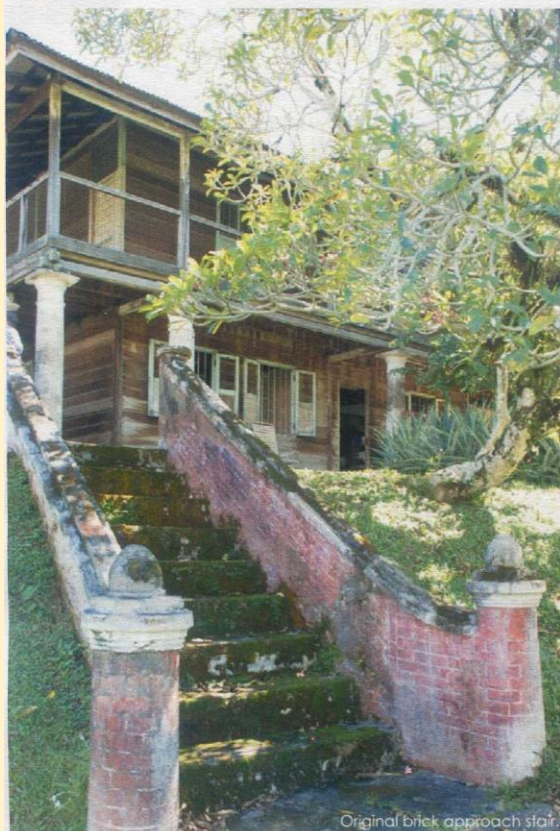
The house has held many occasions of merriment and funerals, as told by Mr Chan. There is an extended building to the back of the main building which housed the old kitchen and store - the size of the kitchen utilities testify the amount of cooking done in those days!

The group enjoyed both Mr Chan's company and explanation, and the society wishes to thank them for showing to us how the inhabitants of the mansion had lived and their personal and social lives back then.





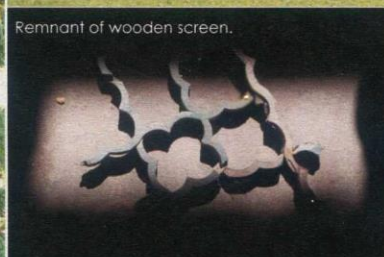
Approach to Chan Villa from Jalan William Tan.



Original brick approach stair.



View from Jalan Sekama - the original main approach to the mansion.



Remnant of wooden screen.



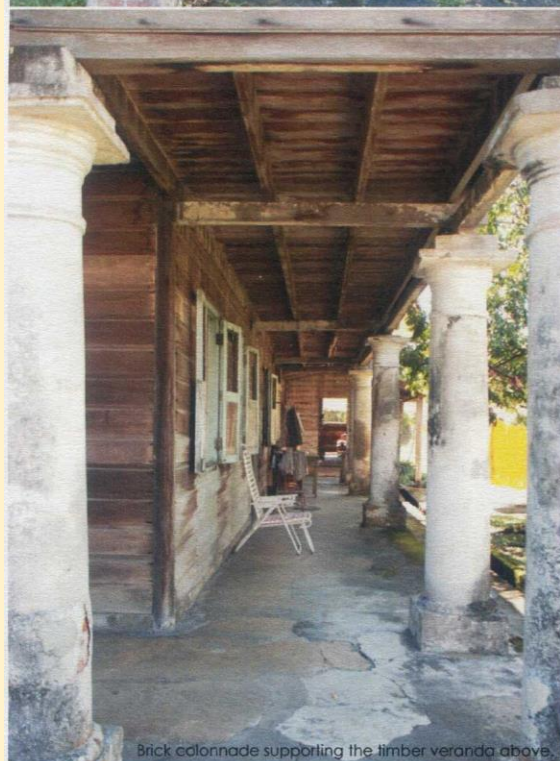
Column beam details.



Hall with altar.



A single flight staircase provides access to the veranda encircling the bedrooms.



Brick colonnade supporting the timber veranda above.