

SITE VISIT TO OLD ST. JAMES' CHURCH, KUAP

(Old photographs of the churches were sourced from "150 Years of the Anglican Church In Borneo 1848-1998" by Bishop of Kuching.)



An undated old photograph currently hanging in the church itself.

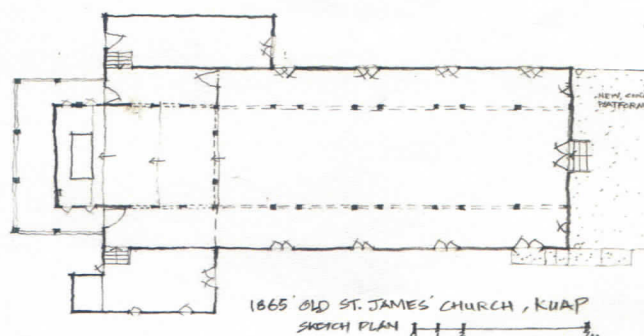


Photograph of the church, before the addition of any porches.

Standing on a hill at the edge of Kampung Kuap, 10 miles from Kuching, St James' Church is virtually unchanged since its construction 145 years ago. It is believed to be one of the oldest out-station churches in Sarawak and, though in need of restoration, still serves the Bidayuh community there to this day.

Consecrated in 1865, the old church was the brainchild of the second resident priest at the kampung, Father Frederic Abe. It followed on the heels of the belian church at Banting, which serviced the first Iban community to become Anglican.

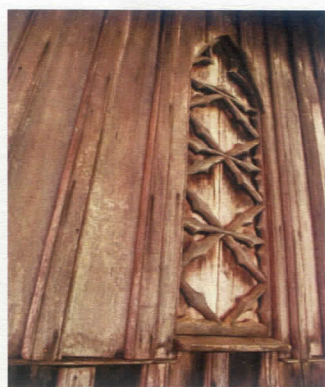
In fact, St James' was a pre-fabricated church, in common with the numerous out-station belian forts of the same period, built by the Rajah. The walls, roof and truss were made in Kuching under master carpenter T A Stahl's supervision. The pieces were then shipped on the Sarawak and the Kuap rivers, and assembled on its current site on a small hill at the edge of the kampung.



The roof of the new church is clearly visible behind the belian shingles of the original structure, perched on a slight hill overlooking the new graveyard and the valley beyond. The old graveyard, as old as the church itself, lies hidden behind the slope. The new porch and concrete platform over the entrance is a later addition.



Side view of the church.



Close up of the belian mouldings.

But, it is the style and the materials that are of greatest interest. The church itself is built in the Gothic style so common in ecclesiastical architecture across Europe from Notre Dame to Salisbury Cathedral. It is a style to inspire awe and wonder with its flying buttresses and pointed arches, resting on slender columns, punctuated with enormous stained glass windows. Yet it is a style almost exclusively associated with stone.

However, in Kuap, St James' Church is made entirely of belian — the local substitute for stone worked using the expertise of local craftsmen. So, the building is a blending of two cultures, one European and one Asian. In essence, the style is imported, an image of the cultural roots of the religion that it represents, but the material is home-grown.

Testament to the enduring nature of belian, the structure remains much the same as it was. Even the stained glass window, reminiscent of the great gothic cathedrals, is still intact, along with the belian mouldings. Though, the interior is most striking; a step back in time.

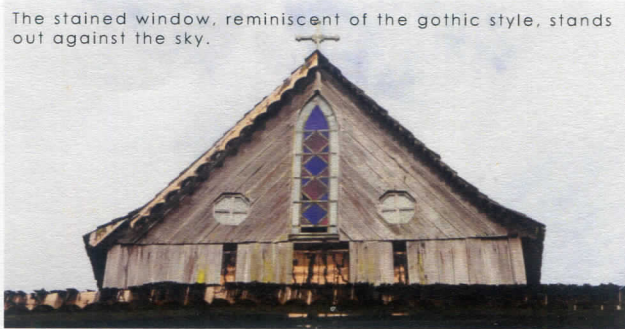


Above : Interior of the church in the olden days.

Below : The interior of the church captured during the site visit in September 2010. It remains remarkably unchanged.



The stained window, reminiscent of the gothic style, stands out against the sky.



View of the church from the old graveyard.



SHS volunteers conduct measured drawings of the church.

Over the years, the kampung has grown up around it. As the population ebbed and flowed, a graveyard was established at its feet and, in 1987, a second, bigger church at its side. This new structure houses the bulk of the kampung's day to day worship.

The original church, understandably given its venerable age, is in need of some restoration and a program of continued maintenance.

At the end of the site visit, SHS members entered a dialogue session with the local church community members during which they sought out opinion on the technicalities and the process of conserving the historical structure.

Following this, a group of volunteers conducted a preliminary measured drawing of the building and took a photographic record of the site.

Image of the Anglican church at Banting. It was consecrated in 1858 to service the first Anglican Iban community. The original belian pillars were replaced with concrete in 1934.

