



## POSITION PAPER

November 2017

### Overview

The Sarawak Heritage Society (SHS) was set up as a non-partisan, non-governmental and non-profit organization in 2007. Our mission is to promote the conservation, permanent preservation and sustainable management of Sarawak's unique cultural heritage assets, both tangible (buildings, monuments, sites, cultural landscapes, objects) and intangible (traditional arts and crafts, music, songs and dances, customs and traditions, food etc.)

Over the years SHS has organised talks, film screenings and visits to raise heritage awareness for its members, the public and schools. It has participated in the development of the Kuching Heritage Trail, piloted community engagement programmes, helped in training tourist guides, and raised the alarm on some threatened heritage assets. The upgraded SHS website ([sarawakheritagesociety.com](http://sarawakheritagesociety.com)) and Facebook pages provide an improved platform for knowledge sharing and exchange of views.

SHS believes that the delicate balance between short-term economic development and heritage protection can be achieved. Many studies have demonstrated the positive economic impact of agile heritage conservation and management. Indeed wise heritage preservation can provide a significant boost to property values, job creation, business earnings, household incomes and tourism. However, SHS is of the view that while the economic considerations are important, they should not be the main driver of our cultural heritage protection. Heritage conservation should be primarily an endeavour by Sarawakians because we are proud of what we have. It is "Tourism from Heritage" rather than "Heritage for Tourism".

SHS advocates the creation of clear and coordinated policy, strategy, regulatory, institutional and financial frameworks to support heritage conservation and management. The Sarawak Cultural Heritage Ordinance enacted in 1993 may need to be reviewed and updated, then enforced more consistently. We also need to incorporate cultural heritage management into the planning process, alongside economic, social and environmental considerations. Government should also proceed with the gazetting of heritage sites that have already been identified and Government Budget allocations should be set aside for key heritage management projects and incentivising heritage conservation.

Although limited by human and financial resources, SHS could mobilise a small technical team to conduct a rapid assessment of the public policy, regulatory, institutional, financing and enforcement framework. This would require information collection from the concerned Government stakeholders. SHS could also facilitate a baseline technical study by independent consultants on Kuching's heritage zone.

# Introducing Sarawak Heritage Society

The Sarawak Heritage Society (SHS) was set up as a non-partisan, non-governmental and non-profit organization in 2007. It just celebrated its 10th anniversary.

## MISSION

Our **mission or purpose** is to promote the conservation, permanent preservation and sustainable management of Sarawak's unique cultural heritage assets, both tangible and intangible.

## VISION

Our **vision** is a Sarawak where all stakeholders value the rich and unique cultural heritage and diligently contribute, directly or indirectly, to its ongoing sensitive and sustainable protection, conservation and management.

Over the years SHS has organised talks, film screenings and visits to raise heritage awareness for its members, the public and schools. It has been instrumental in the development of the Kuching Heritage Trail, which it hopes to continue to enhance. It has piloted community engagement programmes in Siniawan and the Fort Alice restoration project. It contributed to the training of tourist guides. It has raised the alarm on some threatened or disappearing heritage assets. The recently upgraded SHS website ([sarawakheritagesociety.com](http://sarawakheritagesociety.com)) and Facebook pages provide an improved platform for knowledge sharing and exchange of views.

SHS website



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HERITAGE NEWS/INFO

### MISC. HERITAGE NEWS – MARCH TO JULY 2017

SHS-WEB, AUGUST 11, 2017

download pdf version SARAWAK Land clearing observed early March just uphill from the Bongkissam archaeological site, Santubong, raised alarm in the heritage-sensitive community, because of ...



UNCATEGORIZED

### A CALL FOR A BOOST TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

SHS-WEB, JULY 31, 2017

In a recent public lecture on the development and challenges of archaeology in Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Global Archaeology Research Centre director Prof Datuk ...



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

## SHS View of the Heritage Situation in Sarawak

Sarawak has an extraordinary history with a diversity of peoples bringing about a real confluence over the years. This has created a unique fusion of architectures and monuments, customs and traditions, arts and crafts, song and dance, and generally lifestyle, sometimes called the “Sarawakian way”. It has made Sarawak a verdant place for good, secure, pleasant and quality living. Our wholesome, rich and unique heritage is a precious gift, not only for Sarawakians, but also for visitors and indeed for mankind. “*My heritage has been my grounding and it has brought me peace*”, the actress Maureen O’Hara once wrote.

### 1. Managing and protecting our cultural heritage

Management of cultural heritage is important to strengthen Sarawak’s identity in a fast-moving world, swept along by market-driven forces of globalisation. This applies both to ‘tangible’ heritage (buildings, monuments, sites, cultural landscapes, objects) and ‘intangible’ heritage (traditional arts and crafts, song and dance, cultural practices). It is the blend of the two that gives Sarawak its unique ‘sense of place’. It is in everyone’s interest that Sarawak’s heritage be robustly protected and further enhanced by all Sarawak residents and by the State Government.

Protecting our heritage does not mean freezing our development. Rather, well managed heritage contributes to sustainable development. SHS acknowledges that the trade-off between short term economic development and heritage protection requires a delicate and expert balance. We strive to contribute resolutely and constructively to achieving this balance.

### 2. Heritage and Economy

Many studies have shown the positive economic impact of agile heritage conservation and management. Indeed heritage conservation can be a substantial revenue earner for the state. Considering only built-heritage, experience shows that conservation initiatives can have sizeable impact on jobs, business earnings, household incomes, property values (with city revitalisation programmes), and on tourism. Well-managed cultural heritage brings in tourists/visitors. One might say that Sarawak’s rich cultural heritage and natural heritage (including biodiversity) are the two main pillars of the “Sarawak brand” which is a major draw of tourists. Wisely managed cultural heritage can decisively enhance the perception of Sarawak by outsiders.

However cultural heritage protection initiatives should not be driven merely by tourism promotion considerations. The SHS view is that heritage conservation should primarily be an endeavour by the Sarawak people anchored on our feeling of pride in wanting to showcase what we have. In other words, we believe in “Tourism from Heritage” rather than “Heritage for Tourism”.

### 3. Heritage and Public Policy

Heritage conservation and management require clearly articulated and coordinated policy, strategy, regulatory, institutional and financial frameworks. It appears that up to now, these have not been affirmed priorities of Sarawak’s public policies. One reason could be that they embody long term objectives,

which may have diffuse short term benefits. Another reason may be that sound, productive heritage management is a delicate, complex and demanding task involving a multiplicity of skillsets (planners, economists, sociologists, architects, engineers, etc.) and stakeholders (various Government or Government-related authorities, professional bodies, community organisations, etc.). Some of the required skills may not be readily available, and integrated approaches often face challenges.

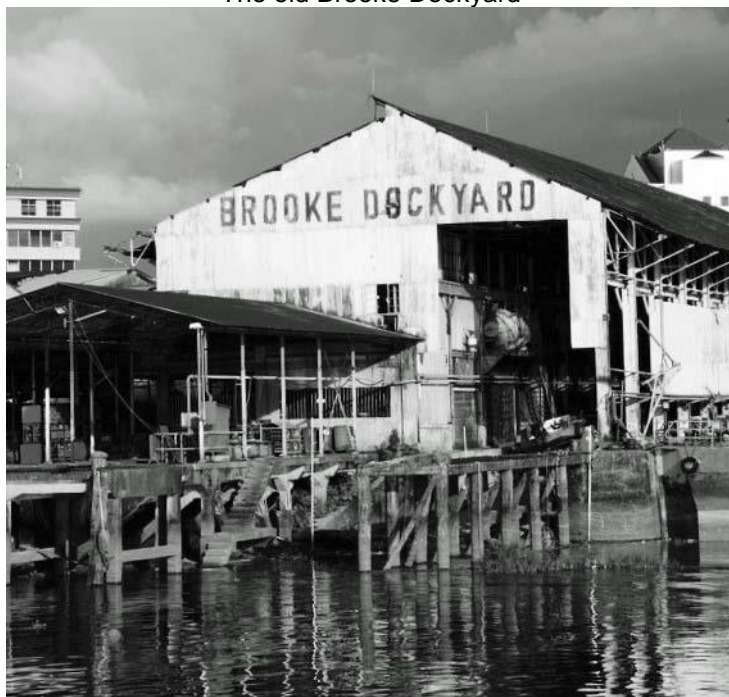
#### 4. Heritage Legislation and Planning

Although the Sarawak Cultural Heritage Ordinance was enacted in 1993, it seems to have been sparsely applied. To our knowledge, few heritage sites (if any) have been actually gazetted since 1986. Also the Ordinance is silent on some topics such as underwater cultural heritage (e.g. shipwrecks), and there may be legal overlaps with the Malaysia National Heritage Act 2005. In view of this, and also to include latest global 'best practices' on heritage management, SHS views that the Ordinance and subsidiary regulations should be reviewed and updated.

Over the years, this situation has led to the loss or deterioration of a number of valuable buildings or sites, or damage to their environment. From the perspective of the public and SHS, many heritage sites still remain under threat, especially from "spotty", not clearly prioritized or uncoordinated initiatives. Even Government-owned built heritage assets, which are supposedly protected, have suffered from poor enforcement or maintenance.

To be effective, cultural heritage management needs to be fully incorporated in the planning process in addition to economic, social and environmental considerations. In the area of built heritage, in order to counterbalance the constraints imposed by heritage regulations on the owners of heritage assets, there is a need for tangible incentives to encourage conservation, with funds provided for in the Government budget.

The old Brooke Dockyard



## What SHS Would Like to See Happen

### A. From the Government

#### (1) Strengthened public policy, regulatory, financing and enforcement framework:

There should be stronger enforcement of the existing building and heritage regulations. For example, the historical centre of Kuching is a landscape of rampant illegal, often unsightly building extensions, signages and loud colours



#### (2) Strengthened cultural heritage management framework.

The framework would have diverse facets, e.g. policy, strategy, regulatory, and financial. Our view is that the first step should be to commission a candid, independent review of the current status of Sarawak's heritage conservation and management.

The actual gazettement of heritage sites that have long been in the pipeline for listing, as well as additional sites and areas, e.g. the old Hokkien School, Siniawan Bazaar, the old Brooke Dockyard, and creation of a gazetted heritage zone (with specific conservation requirements) for the historical centre of Kuching, based on an heritage asset inventory.

#### (3) Government Budget Allocations.

The State may need to consider providing Government budgets or measures (i) commensurate to the maintenance requirements of the gazetted government-owned heritage sites, (ii) providing financial support to selected heritage conservation projects and (iii) providing financial incentives to private owners of built heritage to conserve and maintain their assets.

## **B. From all Stakeholders**

- (1) Increased public awareness of heritage protection and conservation issues
- (2) Grassroot willingness to highlight to SHS and relevant agencies those areas where heritage assets are being damaged or improvement to heritage management is required.
- (3) Active participation by holders of heritage assets in their conservation and management.

### **How SHS can Play a Key Role**

SHS is a small organisation with limited human and financial resources. One of our key strengths is that our members are passionate about heritage conservation and management and have spent time thinking and discussing the subject. SHS has also delivered a variety of programmes to enhance heritage awareness among civil society.

SHS is confident that we can contribute and value-add to the heritage scene. Here are several concrete ways:

1. Conduct a rapid assessment of the public policy, regulatory, financing and enforcement framework with a small SHS-led technical team. This team would need relevant information from the stakeholders involved, primarily the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture; the Sarawak Museum Dept.; the State Planning Authority; Lands and Surveys; the two Kuching municipalities; and LCDA. For such an exercise to be fruitful, the concerned institutions should be mandated to share their information and discuss issues openly. This assessment could be followed by a workshop to discuss findings and chart the way forward.
2. Facilitate a baseline technical study by independent consultants on Kuching's heritage zone. The content of such a study could be the following:
  - (a) Provide an expert assessment of the built and intangible heritage conservation potential of the Kuching heritage core, taking into account current and proposed programmes and projects (e.g. Heritage Square, Heritage Trail, Keep Kuching Clean, Beautiful and Safe initiative, etc)
  - (b) Outline proposals for a mid-term strategy and planning itinerary for the heritage core
  - (c) Draft a Concept Paper / Terms of Reference for the preparation of an Inventory of Heritage Assets and a Special Area Plan for the heritage core
  - (d) Present a technical opinion and suggestions on conservation itineraries that could be envisaged for specific assets such as the old Brooke Dockyard and the old Hokkien school building at Jalan Tabuan.

*ThinkCity Sdn Bhd, which has done valuable work in these areas in Penang and other parts of Malaysia, could be a good candidate to undertake such assignment.*

3. SHS will continue its efforts to raise public awareness through

- site visits, field trips, study tours, outings, large and small conferences, forums, talks;
- communication (website, Facebook, publications);
- better structuring of information on various aspects of Sarawak cultural heritage,
  - leverage on our website or FB community,
  - set up a structured photo bank of heritage assets,
  - development of a mobile app to support the Heritage Trail, etc.
- collaboration with other stakeholders involved in heritage conservation: beyond Government agencies, partnerships with Friends of Sarawak Museum, PAM (Malaysian Institute of Architects), Badan Warisan Malaysia, other heritage trusts and societies, and ThinkCity.
- sourcing sponsorship for project financing, building on the tax incentives that the private sector can call for when sponsoring heritage conservation activities.

The old Hokkien School

