



Annual Report 2019/2020¹

Presented to the 14th Annual General Assembly, 7 November 2020

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¹ This report covers the period starting 1 May 2019 (AGM 13) to the 2020 AGM (AGM 14). The financial report, on its part, covers the 2019 calendar year.

SARAWAK HERITAGE SOCIETY (SHS)

SHS was set up as a non-partisan, non-governmental and non-profit organization in 2007.

The mission of SHS is to promote and advocate for the conservation, permanent preservation and sustainable management of Sarawak's significant cultural heritage assets, both tangible (buildings, monuments, sites, cultural landscapes, objects) and intangible (traditional arts and crafts, customs and traditions, food).

The vision of SHS 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.



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Sarawak Heritage Society SHS

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (2019/2020)

President	Dato Sri Robert Jacob Ridu
Vice President	James Yong
Secretary	Audrey Dominic Neng
Treasurer	Rosemarie Wong
Committee Members	Arif Arabi Francis Frey Anna Wee Donna Yong

PAST SHS PRESIDENTS

2014—2016 Karen Shepherd
2012 – 2014 Hong Boon Kheng
2010 – 2012 Joseph Ingai Gasing
2008 – 2010 Mike Boon Chee Khian
2006 – 2008 Datu Aloysius Abg Dris

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



As with many civil society organisations, the restrictions necessitated by the **Covid-19 pandemic** have had a negative impact on our activities. This AGM, which would have been due by April this year, had to be postponed. Our Executive Committee team has however remained as active as possible during this challenging period.

Advocacy for a **strengthened cultural heritage governance** in Sarawak has remained one of our core thrusts. This has largely been a “behind the scenes” effort. The recommendations we presented to the Government over the last two years were a response to an invitation to do so from the Chief Minister and the Minister of Tourism Arts, Culture, Youth and Sports. Our analysis led us to a key conviction that a significant transformation of the Government’s **institutional set up for heritage management** was needed. We also proposed that upgraded legislation be developed with expert inputs on heritage law. Our suggestions however appeared not to be convincing enough. Although it addresses some needs that we had expressed, the **2019 Heritage Ordinance** that was voted by the State Legislative Assembly on 5 November is largely derived from the 1993 Ordinance. Responsibility for the management of out-of-museum cultural heritage remains entrusted to the Sarawak Museum Department. We persevered and highlighted to the Minister what we saw as shortcomings of the Bill before it was presented to the DUN. The onus now is on the implementation of the new ordinance with, in particular, the mobilisation of the required human and budgets resources, the crafting of subsidiary regulations and proactive enforcement.

However it remains SHS’s considered viewpoint that **out-of-museum heritage matters ought to be handled by a dedicated, competent and fully resourced body** to ensure effective and sustainable heritage management. There is therefore a rationale for the Society to continue advocating for the Sarawak Government to set up such purposeful and dedicated entity.

SHS also believes that for **Kuching**, there remains a need for a **baseline cultural mapping** exercise to lay a sound foundation for a heritage sensitive regeneration program to enhance the quality of life, the business environment and the tourism potential, beyond piecemeal ‘beautification’ projects. This is also something that we have advocated for repeatedly. We are glad to hear recently that a cultural mapping initiative has emerged for the Kuching Old Bazaar area.

On our internal management, it is to be noted that 2019/2020 saw a sizeable turnover in the our **Committee** members, reflecting the perennial challenges SHS faces in its quest of volunteers passionate about heritage protection work and by the time constraints faced by people with busy professional lives.

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At this juncture, it may be worthwhile to take a look back and reflect on SHS’ journey as an organisation. It has been an eventful 14 years, with many achievements and setbacks, peaks and troughs.

A broader view at what SHS has achieved since its creation, and at the patterns of membership over the years, suggest that there are **multiple perceptions** of what a society like ours is for. Motivations to join SHS appear to range from access to heritage-related **information** circulated on the niceties of our heritage and expressions of pride for them, to expectations of active **advocacy** for strengthened conservation of our heritage, capable of influencing the powers that be, notably the Government. Midway between these two understandings is a view that the main focus should be on **awareness building** at the grassroots level. This is not to say that any of these positions are wrong, but simply to highlight the spectrum of different expectations.

Other ambiguities complicate perceptions. The mandate that SHS has given itself is to promote the conservation and management of our heritage assets, tangible or intangible. Firstly, there is here the fragile **notion of value**. Some heritage items have unquestioned 'universal' value, as testimonies to extraordinary human achievements recognized by all, in the UNESCO sense. But, in many cases, the *value* of a given heritage item is strongly **culturally-based**: it may be precious for some and almost value-less (i.e. not in need for protection) for others, even if it is **significant** in a cultural context. This is an especially difficult issue to deal with in a multi-cultural society such as Sarawak. Second, there is the '**Heritage vs History**' debate. Some heritage societies may be perceived as history societies. Naturally, history is one of the determinants of heritage significance; it contributes to *explain* the value of heritage assets. But societies like ours need to keep in view that, beyond historical research, our core mandate is the **conservation** of "things", material things or immaterial practices - that are left to us by our forefathers, for the benefit of future generations.

We continue to see destruction of or damage to valuable heritage for the sake of economic development, or just "modernity". We even seem to see Government listed heritage suffering from inadequate conservation. A Society like ours cannot limit itself to just "feel good" activities highlighting the beauties of our heritage. Awareness building activities, the next level of pro-activeness, is key. But **changing perceptions is a long term effort**, perhaps even a generational process. Too slow to ensure timely heritage protection. Sarawak has seen some laudable independent efforts by the private sector players to protect heritage assets. But these tend to be piecemeal and will not, in themselves, create a wave of positive change. To achieve its goals, SHS needs therefore to look at ongoing engagement with the Government, through **advocacy for stronger heritage management, in all its dimensions: policy, strategy, institutional, regulatory, budgetary and enforcement.**

Over the years, SHS's successive management teams have approached their mandates in different ways but overall, it is safe to say that **SHS's impact**, as a stakeholder, has remained constrained by the above factors. Assessment of the Society's performance is mixed, but we can probably claim to have made a modest mark in the local heritage landscape. We need to continue to strive to be one of the vocal champions of heritage protection in Sarawak and to do that we need even stronger support from the public and for more individuals to step up and volunteer their time and energy for SHS.

We thank all members for their contributions and wish the next Executive Committee every success in strengthening the heritage cause.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Jacob Ridu', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dato Sri Robert Jacob Ridu

2019/2020 AT A GLANCE

21

Public/Member Events

330+

Participants at events



Multiple

engagements with the Sarawak Government on the modernisation of the cultural heritage policy, institutional and regulatory framework



105

SHS members by Oct. 2020
(of whom 14 remain in need of renewal)



1,890

followers of SHS Facebook page

61 participants to the 'SHS Community' WhatsApp chat group



MEMBERSHIP

In April 2019, the membership peaked at 100, of which 32 were due for renewal. 24 members whose subscriptions expired end of 2018 and to whom emails were sent inviting them to stay onboard, did not renew their membership in 2019. This was counter-balanced by 24 new memberships in the year.

From January to early October 2020 the Society SHS welcomed 15 new members.

As of early October 2020 membership stood at 105, of whom 14 remain due for renewal in 2020.²

SHS COMMITTEE

The SHS management Committee met 7 times in the 2019-2020 year under review. In the course of the year 5 new Committee members were co-opted to fill vacancies. The Committee has currently one vacancy.

ACTIVITIES and PROJECTS

Engagement with Government

- **Modernization of the Government framework for cultural heritage management**

At a meeting with the YB Datuk Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah, Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture, Youth and Sports on 17 April 2019, SHS presented a set of recommendations for the upgrading of Sarawak's institutional, regulatory and enforcement framework for heritage management, and for the drafting of a modernised Heritage Ordinance.

On 13 June 2019, the Sarawak Museum Department invited two representatives of SHS to a second 'lab' (on 24-25 June 2019) to discuss proposed amendments to the Heritage Ordinance. Due to the short notice and as that meeting took place in Miri, SHS was not in a position to attend. (Two SHS Committee members had participated in the first Lab that took place on 1 Nov 2018, at which a first draft of amendments to the Heritage Ordinance 1993 had been presented).

A copy of the Sarawak Heritage Bill was obtained by SHS in late September and was subsequently analysed by some members of the SHS Committee. Although presented as a new Ordinance, it appeared largely based on the framework of the 1993 ordinance, with some welcome additions (such as the setting up of a Heritage Council (advisory only?), a Heritage Fund, and protection of underwater heritage, but also several weaknesses which may continue to hamper the effectiveness and sustainability of heritage management in Sarawak.

The Bill was scheduled to be tabled for discussion at the Sarawak State Legislative Assembly on 4 and 5 November 2019. Prior to that, SHS met with YB Datuk Sebastian Ting, Assistant Minister for Tourism, Arts and Culture on 1 Nov. 2019. They presented SHS's analysis of the Bill and forwarded to the Assistant Minister a letter and a memorandum for the Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture³.

² Membership goes by calendar year. "*In the event of a member failing to pay his subscription for six months, his membership shall be deemed to have lapsed.*" (SHS Constitution, clause 4.5.

³ The memorandum submitted to the Government ahead of the discussion of the Heritage Bill is posted on the SHS website (<http://sarawakheritagesociety.com/about/activities/>).

The Bill was approved without amendments by the State Assembly on 5 November 2019.

We have produced a summary note of the provisions of the ordinance and an article presenting SHS's point of view on this new legislation. Both documents can be accessed on our website.

- **Courtesy Call on MBKS (Kuching South) Mayor**

On 9 January 2020, five members of the SHS Committee paid a courtesy visit to the new Mayor of MBKS (Kuching South municipality) Dato Wee Hong Seng. Potential areas of collaboration emerged from the meeting, notably on an urban renewal project for the Padungan area, under preparation by MBKS, and SHS involvement in history / heritage discussions within MBKS.



- **Meeting with Director of the Sarawak Museum Department**

On Aug. 3 2020 the SHS Committee introduced itself to En. Tazudin Mohtar, the Acting Director of the Sarawak Museum Department. We exchanged views on the revised set-up provided by the new Heritage Ordinance 2019 and on prospects for collaboration, and presented outputs of the 2018-19 'Heritage Quest' campaign.

- **Participation in Government-led forums**

- Two SHS representatives participated in a Government 'Lab' and provided comments on the ongoing project to transform **Brooke Dockyard** into a Maritime Museum (20/06/2019)⁴.
- SHS President and Vice President participated in the **International Digital Economy Conference Sarawak** (IDECS) 2019 on 8-9 July and gave suggestions on applying IT and innovations to heritage management, historical information sharing and support for tourism.
- Two SHS Committee members participated in a 'Lab', facilitated by UNESCO, to identify "Outstanding Universal Values" (OUVs) that could be forwarded for a nomination of **Niah Caves** to the World Heritage List (15 Aug 2019).

⁴ See a SHS comment note further to this event on following webpage:
<http://sarawakheritagesociety.com/about/activities/>.

- SHS was actively represented in a Pustaka Negeri Sarawak workshop, also facilitated by UNESCO, which introduced **UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme** (16-17 Nov. 2019)



- SHS President and some Committee members attended the "BMP-EAGA Budayaw Festival Colloquium" which took place 20-22 Nov. 2019.
- Three SHS Committee members attended the Sarawak Museum organized "Seminar on the Return of Niah Skeletal Collections" on 5 Mar 2020.
- On 18 and 19 August 2020, a Committee member participated to a Government workshop on the **planning and exhibition content of the Government's proposed conversion of the Astana into a museum.**



- The **Sarawak Economic Action Council (SEAC)**, tasked with the design of an economic recovery plan for the State under which there are heritage concerns, has included SHS in its consultations with stakeholders. SHS is also involved in discussions on the design of a new long term **Tourism Master Plan 2020-2035**, where we further advocated for a boost in the management of the State's cultural heritage. This effort involved the participation in several Zoom meetings and included in particular the preparation and circulation of a comments note on cultural / heritage tourism⁵ and active participation of the SHS Vice President and Treasurer in a 5 day workshop in August 2020.



- On 6 Oct 2020, SHS Vice President and several members met with Kapitan Lim, Mr JC Chua and other leaders of the Kuching Old Market Community Association, who are heading a government-funded project to revive the area. As part of this initiative, they plan to carry out a cultural mapping exercise. We shared thoughts on how this could be successfully achieved and means to source relevant historical and heritage information. They will keep SHS in the loop for this project.



⁵ See <http://sarawakheritagesociety.com/about/activities/>.

Heritage Speakers Series / Sharing Sessions

- On 16 July 2019, **Dr John Ting** gave a public talk entitled “**Sarawak’s Unique Tradition of Timber Shophouses**”. Dr Ting is an architect and architecture historian, teaching at University of Canberra, Australia. He is one of the foremost experts on South East Asia traditional architecture. He authored the book *The History of Architecture in Sarawak Before Malaysia* (2018). The talk was co-hosted with FoSM. Attendance was 64.



- On 25 Sept 2019, SHS organized a talk on Sarawak’s natural heritage, entitled “**The Sarawak Forest Supermarket**” by **Dr. Katharine (Kit) Pearce**. Dr Pearce is a well-known expert of Sarawak’s flora, with a particular interest in the useful wild plants of Sarawak. Attendance was 58.



- On 14 Nov 2019, SHS members Audrey Neng and Donna Yong led an animated **SHS Public Sharing Session on UNESCO's Memory of the World programme**, further to the participation of SHS in a Pustaka Negeri Sarawak workshop on this programme on 16-17 Oct 2019. 24 persons attended.



Heritage Strolls

Between Oct and Nov 2019, SHS volunteer heritage guide Paul Gerarts conducted 5 newly-designed heritage strolls under the WAK 2019 (What About Kuching 2019) Festival. This stroll was called "*Kuching's Law and Order under the Brooke Rajahs*". A total of 89 participants joined these walks.

In the course of the year Paul ran, additionally, 13 thematic heritage strolls (Old Chinese Kuching stroll, Brooke Gallery/Fort Margherita stroll, and Law and Order under the Brooke Rajahs stroll), on an ad-hoc basis, with a total of 98 participants, of which 58 students. RM 2,492 was raised from donations collected at these strolls.

A Stroll Through Kuching's Law and Order under the Brooke Rajahs.

Understand how the Brooke Rajahs brought law and order in their reign, *discover* rare pictures of vanished buildings where they once stood and *appreciate* the architecture of buildings relating to law and order.

When: Saturdays 12, 19 and 26 October 2019 - Sundays 13, 20 and 27 October 2019

Time: 08:00 till 10:00 AM

Where: Start at entrance to Square Tower – end at Fort Margherita.

Who: Public – local and foreign – Stroll is in English – **Cost:** free during WAK 2019

REGISTRATION REQUIRED – STRICTLY LIMITED TO 20 PEOPLE

Whatsapp or SMS to 014 907 4406 (no calls please)



Ever wondered how James Brooke managed law and order in his new sovereign state? What about judges, lawyers and police? During the Stroll, we will **briefly** touch on which laws were used, show the buildings that housed courts, prisons and police force, either on pictures (for those which vanished) or on the spot for those still there. You will learn **how unique both Sarawak's law and the architecture of the buildings were.**

The Stroll covers quite a distance: 2 km - we start at the Square Tower, visit the Old Court House and pass by the Chinese History Museum. We take the sampan for an idyllic trip across Sarawak River and visit Fort Margherita. Bring some small change for the sampan (RM 1 per person/crossing).

No photography of shown pictures allowed. Thanks



Organised by Sarawak Heritage Society, Kuching



In total, the heritage strolls were attended by 187 persons.

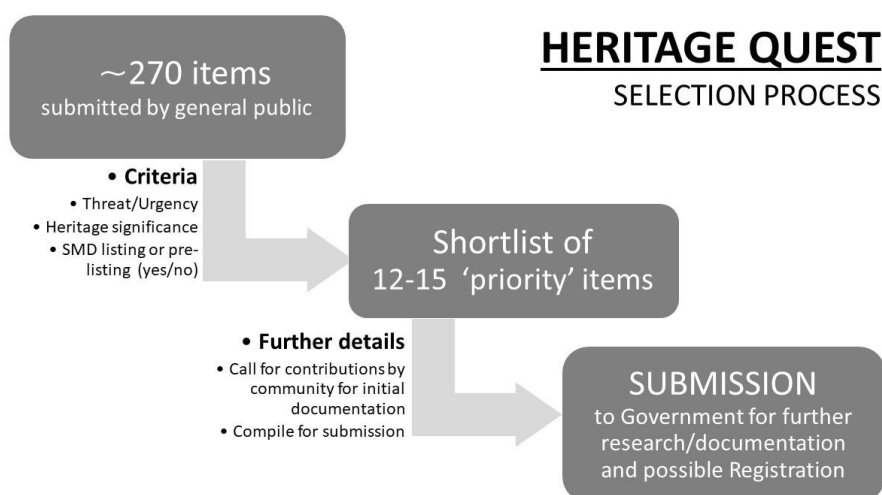
Heritage Quest campaign

SHS's Heritage Quest campaign was launched in Nov 2018 with a full page advertisement in various local newspapers, a double page article KINO (Kuching In and Out) magazine, and a media conference.

From November 2018 to January 2019, members of the public submitted more than 260 items of heritage assets for protection.

An initial screening process was applied to the list of submissions to put aside (i) items for which information provided was too scanty (ii) items already gazetted as Sarawak heritage or known to be approved or proposed to be gazetted by the Sarawak Museum Department.

Eventually a list of 14 priority items was extracted based on perceived levels of heritage significance, rarity and threats. A provisional list was shared with the Acting Director of Sarawak Museum Department during our courtesy call.



Heritage Quest Shortlist (Draft)



1. Aqueduct / Waterworks @ Reservoir Park
2. Batu Lintang former POW Camp / Punjabi Regiment Barracks
3. Bomba Tower @ Open Air Market
4. Brooke era Graveyard @ St Thomas' Anglican Ground
5. Chan Mansion, off Sekama
6. Ha Mansion, off Ban Hock Road
7. Hokkien School
8. Indian Mosque @ Lorong Sempit
9. Lidah Tanah
10. Padungan War Memorial clock tower
11. Rumah Batu (Datu Bandar Abg Hj Kassim's house)
12. Siniawan Old Town Bazaar
13. Chinese Summer House @ Museum Grounds
14. Rumah Jana Julau



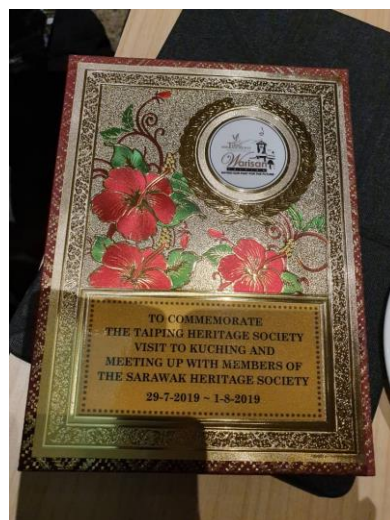
July 2020

Baseline information on these items is being brought together in view of a formal submission of the list to the Sarawak Government.

Liaison with related organisations

9 July 2019 - the SHS Committee had a **sharing session with Ms Khoo Salma**, Vice-President of the **Penang Heritage Trust**. Salma, a long-time respected heritage advocate, was in Kuching on a technical assistance mission for the Sarawak Government. The exchange with SHS focused on issues faced by heritage societies.

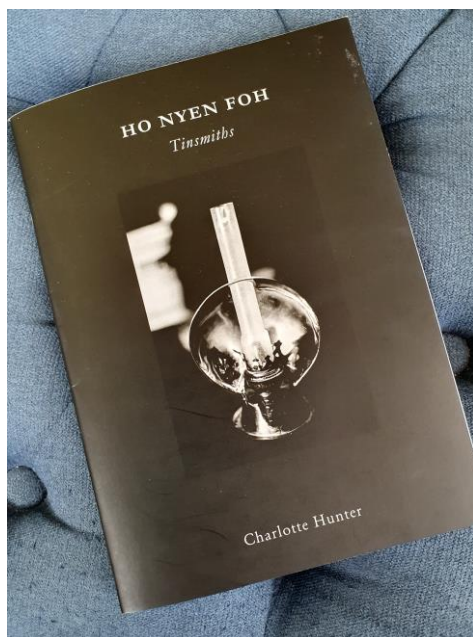
29 July 2019 - SHS hosted a social gathering with a group from the **Taiping Heritage Society** on excursion to Kuching. A memento was presented to SHS and we reciprocated with small souvenirs. The following day SHS hosted a discussion meeting on our respective activities. The SHS Committee arranged for a private tour of the Brooke Gallery at Fort Margherita for the group.



In early October 2020, contact was initiated with the management team of **Badan Warisan Malaysia**. Among the topics we wish to bring up with BWM is the concept of a network of Malaysian heritage societies to discuss common issues they face.

Support for Publications

In October 2019, SHS supported the publication of “**Ho Nyen Foh, Tinsmiths**“, a booklet by SHS member Charlotte Hunter by providing a Foreword by the SHS President and helping in its distribution. The booklet focused on the dying craft of tinsmithing in Kuching, with focus on one specific family who have been in the trade for three generations.



“Still In the pipeline”

- In August 2020 we reapproached the management of Kuching’s Waterfront Hotel in relation to the hotel signage erected just in front of the Round Tower, an issue that SHS rose several years ago and on which the management of the hotel had indicated willingness to act. We remain hopeful that this signage will be removed.⁶
- A project team was set up within the Committee to craft a “Kuching - Then and Now” photo exhibition, as a collaboration with the “Kuching - Then and Now” social media group. The project has been put on hold as it was intended to be held as part of Kuching’s Rainforest World Music Fringe Festival 2020 edition or the ‘What About Kuching’ Festival, both cancelled due to COVID-19.
- We also had to postpone a site visit, and a proposed talk by the author of a recent book that looks at facets of heritage conservation in George Town in relation to the UNESCO listing.

⁶ [‘Society cries foul over building of new Waterfront Hotel’, Borneo Post, 2 Dec. 2015’](#)

ACCOUNTS AND ASSETS (Jan. – Dec. 2019)

The Statement of Comprehensive Income shows a total accounting income of RM 6,101 of which a net 2019 income of RM 2,690 from membership fees⁷ and RM 3,411 from other income, mainly from donations collected at events and heritage strolls. Cash expenditure stood at RM 12,630, leading to a cash flow deficit of RM 6,529 and RM 8,732 after inclusion of depreciation of plant & equipment.

Main lines of operation expenditure were allowances to an administrative assistant (January to May 2019) and to an intern to work on the Heritage Quests project (total of RM 6,559), expenses related to events and to the Heritage Strolls (RM 3,193), and the financial audit (RM 1,300).

As of end of September 2020 the bank account balance stood at RM 48,002 of which part are in fixed term deposits.

In the course of the year the Society acquired a portable public address unit.

[for details see the audited Financial Statements report]

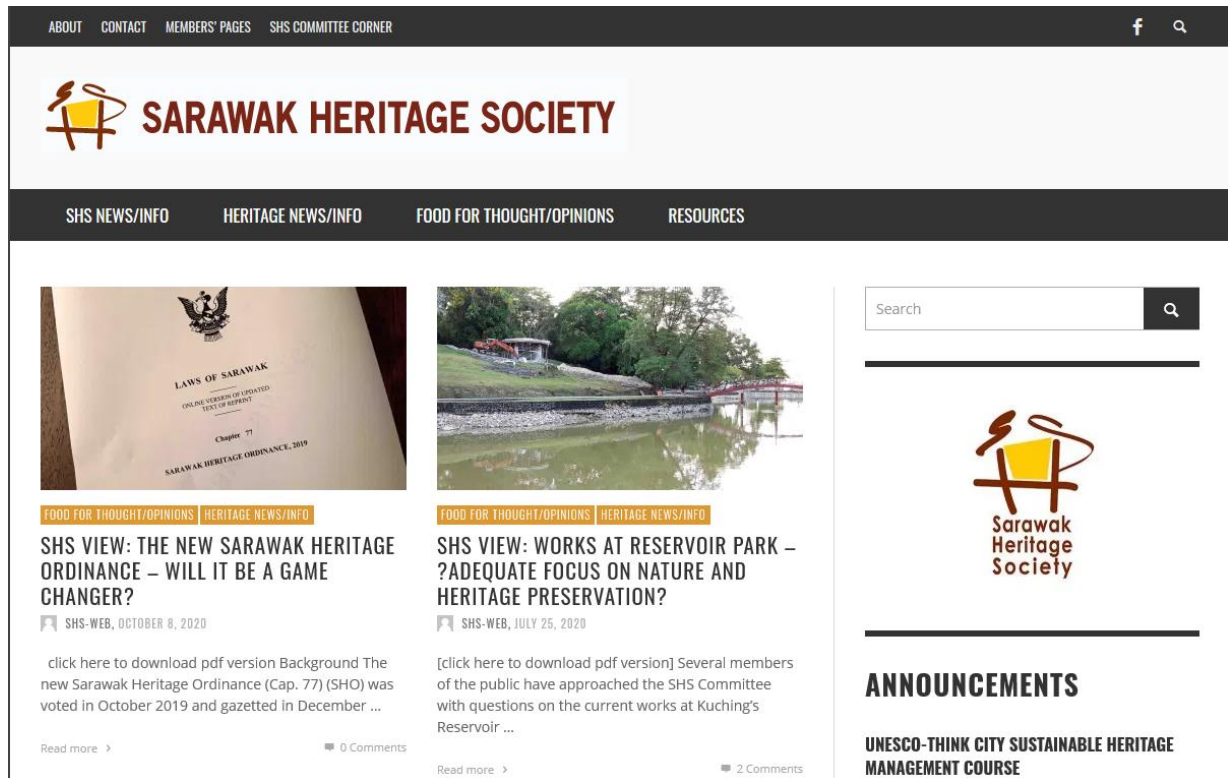
⁷ RM 4,610 membership fees were collected, of which RM 2,560 in advance of future years (three year membership payments). There was also a total of RM 640 of 2019 membership fees that had been collected in advance of 2019. The net 2019 membership income was therefore $RM\ 4,610 - 2,560 + 640 = 2,690$.

SOCIAL MEDIA

SHS **website** (www.sarawakheritagesociety.com) and enhanced **Facebook** presence continued to contribute to the visibility of the Society.

The Facebook page currently has almost 2,000 followers.

The website, which functions mainly as a resource base, attracts some 300 visitors and 550 views per month and has 57 subscribed followers.



The **‘SHS Community’** WhatsApp **chat group** currently has 62 participants (participation to this chat group is not limited to SHS members).

These digital tools contribute to circulate information on the heritage management scene but we see them also, even more so, as channels for expression of ideas and positions, a dimension that we continue to enhance.