



Annual Report 2020/2021¹

Presented to the 15th Annual General Assembly, 17th July 2021

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¹ This report covers the period starting 7th Nov 2020 (AGM 14) to the 2021 (AGM 15).

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 (2020/2021)

President	James S L Yong
Vice President	Donna Yong
Hon. Secretary	Deborah Dris
Hon. Treasurer	Rosemarie Wong
Committee Members	Ar William Khoo Arif Arabi Dr Atta Idrawani bin Zaini Angelina Jong Eden Bong

PAST SHS PRESIDENTS

2016 - 2020	Dato Sri Robert Jacob Ridu
2014 - 2016	Karen Shepherd
2012 - 2014	Hong Boon Kheng
2010 - 2012	Joseph Ingai Gasing
2008 - 2010	Mike Boon Chee Khian

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This AGM takes place only 8 months after our 14th AGM held in November 2020, to abide by rules set by the Government for societies such as ours. You may recall that our 14th AGM, covering our 2019/2020 activities, had also been delayed six months due to the movement controls of mid 2020.

In the period under review, our activities have continued to be hindered by the pandemic restrictions to movement, which have affected both ourselves and our interlocutors. Some deeper "Covid fatigue" symptoms seems to have also become apparent, dampening energies. The inventory of what we have done and achieved in this short timeframe (see our report of activities) is therefore more limited than what we would have liked to achieve.

We have identified three focus areas for our current mandate: *Intangible Cultural Heritage*, *Conservation of Built Heritage*, and *Heritage Outreach to the Youth*. In our Jan - Mar 2021 SPOTLIGHT newsletter, we launched an appeal to the membership to come forward to help in these areas, by joining sub-committees on these topics. We received a good response on Intangible Cultural Heritage, but the responses so far have been relatively muted on Built Heritage and on Outreach to the Youth, which is somewhat puzzling. Nonetheless we will press on.

On the overall scene, we note that the recovery from the pandemic will, for understandable reasons, focus on short term economic revival. This is critical in order to save businesses, jobs and livelihoods. We fully support this. However at the same time, we need to continue to advocate that this does not happen at the expense of heritage conservation considerations; there is a growing consensus on the need to take heritage conservation on board to achieve sustainable development.

Another observation. The pandemic lockdowns and almost complete disruption to the global tourism industry has forced us to look objectively at the drivers for safeguarding of our heritage. I have always been uncomfortable when some cite tourism revenues as the reason for our heritage conservation. For me, heritage is about our identity, our legacy, our story and we should safeguard it purely on that basis. If what we do becomes interesting to tourists and other visitors to Sarawak, then it is a spinoff bonus which we can and should monetise. But the core reason we do heritage conservation should be for ourselves and our future generations. Think about it.

On a personal note, the lockdowns have been an opportunity for capacity development. Although I've always been interested in history and heritage, and read my fair share on the subject matter, I've never been formally trained on it. So for six months from November 2020, I was a student on the inaugural "Sustainable Heritage Management" course developed by UNESCO and Think City, and delivered online through five leading Asian and Australian universities with strong faculties in architecture and heritage management. I'm happy to have graduated from this knowledge-packed experience in April 2021 and I thoroughly recommend the course to any SHS members who wish to gain a more in-depth appreciation of the subject. The next run will be in November 2021.

Finally my thanks to the members of the ExCo and everybody else who has helped SHS in one way or another during this challenging period.



James S L Yong

2020/2021 AT A GLANCE

2,500 +
Facebook Likes



3,300 visitors & **6,800**
page views to SHS Website

2
Public/Member Events



42+
Participants at Events

2
Key Govt Engagements
(Minister of Tourism, Arts,
Culture + Perm Sec)



3
Sub-committees
Formed (ICH, CBH, YHO)



3
Issues of SPOTLIGHT
e-e-newsletter



108
SHS Members

MEMBERSHIP

As at end of June 2021, SHS had 108 members, of which 20 were paid up until end of 2020 and are due for renewal².

The total of 108 breaks down as follows: 97 ordinary members, 7 affiliate members (members who do not reside in Sarawak) and 4 student members.

We have welcomed 9 new members since the 2020 AGM.

To enhance communication with the membership we launched 'SPOTLIGHT', a concise newsletter, with 3 issues circulated so far.

One of the things we have had to keep on the back burner is our plan to have regular informal "Connect" sessions with the membership as we believe that fruitful exchange of the sort require physical interactions. Covid restrictions have made this impossible for the foreseeable future.

ACTIVITIES and PROJECTS

We started our mandate by looking back and taking stock of fifteen years of SHS in a series of three articles on our website (["Happy Anniversary, SHS!"](#)) and FB pages in early 2021.

Engagement with Government

On 28th January 2021, our ExCo met with Datuk Hj Abdul Karim Hamzah, Minister of Tourism, Arts & Culture and Mr Hii Chang Kee, Permanent Secretary. This meeting was preceded by a meeting with the Permanent Secretary on 14th January, which was also attended by En Tazudin Mokhtar, Director of the Sarawak Museum Department, and some members of his team.



L to R : Mr James Yong, YB Datuk Hj Abdul Karim Hamzah and Mr Hii Chang Kee at meeting on the 28th January 2021.

We introduced the new ExCo members, provided updates on our strategy and activities and discussed ways whereby SHS could synergise with MTAC and relevant agencies. The Ministry updated us on the implementation of the 2019 Heritage Ordinance.

Further to these meetings, we submitted to the Ministry three applications for financial support:

- (i) Application to occupy a Padungan shoplot for SHS Hub & Heritage Gallery,
- (ii) Support for "Story of Padungan" project development, and
- (iii) Proposal for Air Raid Shelter project.

² Membership goes on 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)

Partnering and Networking

- Collaboration with UNIMAS:
 - o Briefing on “*Glimpses of the Past: Petanak and Blacksmith Road*” to UNIMAS students prior to a heritage stroll (29th Mar 2021);
 - o Briefing to UNIMAS architectural students on SHS membership (30th Mar 2021);
 - o A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is under finalization with UNIMAS to collaborate on various heritage related areas.

Images below: 29th March 2021, UNIMAS heritage briefing and stroll at Petanak and Blacksmith Road area

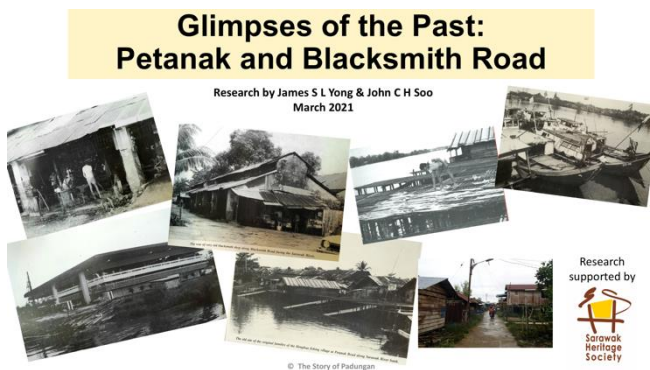


Image above: 29th March 2021, SHS and UNIMAS Blacksmith Road Heritage Stroll Printout



Image above: 31st March 2021, SHS and UNIMAS MOU meeting at Faculty of Built Environment

- Through JY's attendance of the inaugural “Sustainable Heritage Management” course developed by UNESCO and Think City, and delivered online by five leading universities (Nov 2020 – Apr 2021), SHS has managed to develop a rich network with UNESCO heritage representatives, university academics and practitioners from different countries.
-
- We had discussions with Urban Sketchers Kuching on leveraging on their artwork or commissioning new ones to include in marketing collateral and souvenirs on Sarawak cultural heritage.
- We are also exploring linkups with Pertubuhan Aitek Malaysia, Sarawak Chapter (PAMSC) on areas of common interest.

Activities on thematic focus areas

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), Conservation of Built Heritage (CBH), and Heritage Outreach to the Youth (YHO)

ICH: A first sub-committee meeting led by Donna Yong took place to define the project scope. Will be categorizing ICH according to UNESCO defined 'domains', plus two additional categories

- Oral traditions and expressions
- Performing arts
- Social practices, rituals and festive events
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- Traditional craftsmanship
- Food Heritage
- Heritage Trades

Underway is another project to develop a second booklet in our “*Vanishing Trades*” series, tentatively titled “*The Blacksmiths of Kuching*”. A photoshoot has been carried out at one of the remaining blacksmiths, originally from Blacksmith Road, now in Bintawa. Research and writing is in progress.



ICH 1st roundtable discussion via Zoom - 3rd June 2021



Vanishing Trades - The Blacksmiths of Kuching

CBH: The team, led by Ar William Khoo, has recently engaged with the Kuching Hokkien Association on the Old Hokkien School, one of Sarawak's iconic built heritage assets. The Association is the owner of the building. Dato Richard Wee, its President, has assured SHS that the Association will conserve the building. SHS is in the process of drawing up a MoU that will provide for a photographic and measured drawings documentation exercise, with involvement of architectural students from UNIMAS Faculty of Built Environment.



SHS meeting Dato Richard Wee, Hokkien Association



The Old Hokkien School

YHO: We have in-principle approved a proposal for a brief engagement exercise with students of a sample of three schools to better understand their perceptions of heritage, to provide us with better insights on how to increase awareness of heritage among young people. The implementation of this exercise is subject to the reopening of the schools.

Miscellaneous

Advocacy relating to Kuching's Round Tower conservation

Upon observing works being carried out on Kuching's Round Tower, a gazetted heritage building, we learnt that the Government had granted the use of the building to a private entity for a repurposing as a café/restaurant. SHS formally expressed concerns to the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, to the Sarawak Museum Department and to the tenant company, not on the repurposing in itself, but on the heritage insensitiveness of some of the renovation works. It appeared that no permit had been granted by the Sarawak Museum Department for the renovation works as is required by the Sarawak Heritage Ordinance for listed buildings. The works nevertheless proceeded.

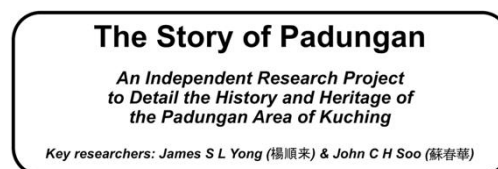


Waterfront Hotel signage in front of Round Tower building

In late 2019, we had had discussions with the management of the Waterfront Hotel about removing their signage which currently blocks part of Round Tower. After having expressed some goodwill to relocate the signage, the management appears since to have backtracked. The signage was at some stage removed from the concrete slab, only to be put back shortly after. There has been some community reaction over the matter.

“Story of Padungan” book project

Progress on our 'Story of Padungan' project (led by James Yong and John Soo) was hampered due to MCO restrictions and inability to carry out planned interviews and photoshoots. The research is ongoing.



“The Story of Padungan” documentation

ACCOUNTS

The accounts presented at this AGM cover the period Jan-Dec 2020, and have been audited by Richard Kiew & Company.

The Statement of Comprehensive Income shows a total accounting income of RM 3,098.31 of which a net 2020 income of RM 3,055 from membership fees and RM 43.31 from fixed deposit interest income. Cash expenditure stood at RM 1,087.58, leading to a surplus of RM2,010.73.

As of end of December 2020, the bank account balance stood at RM 8397.56.

In the course of the year, the Society acquired a microphone set with audio connection cable for the current PA system it owns.

[for details, see the audited Financial Statements report]



SHS meeting auditor Richard Kiew & Co.

SOCIAL MEDIA

SHS **website** (www.sarawakheritagesociety.com) and **Facebook** presence continued to contribute to the visibility of the Society. The Facebook page currently has around 2,682 followers and 2,552 'Likes'. The website, which functions mainly as a resource base, attracted some 6,800 views by 3,300 visitors (Nov 2020 – Jun 2021) and has 58 followers.

Our early efforts in setting up an SHS **Instagram** page garnered 681 followers.

The '**SHS Community**' **whatsapp chatgroup** currently has 74 members.