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SPOTLIGHT

connecting with SHS members

Sarawak Heritage Society

Exco (2020-2022)

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SHS is Fifteen Years Old !

SHS was officially registered on 14th February 2006. The suggestion to set up a heritage society in Sarawak was made by then President of Badan Warisan Malaysia during a heritage award ceremony in Kuching in 2004 which recognized the conservation work done on the Old Courthouse. A Sarawak government grant was pledged towards its formation. The official launch ceremony was held on 28th Feb 2007. SHS has so far had seven Presidents and committees, who have carried out a variety of activities. In a recent 3-article series posted on the [SHS website](#) and [FB pages](#) we have looked back at these 15 years in more detail.

We hope you enjoy this second issue of "SPOTLIGHT". Give us your feedback on what you want to read about in future. Give us also your views on activities, projects and priorities for our society. And do share with us information that you may come across on heritage conservation activities or issues, to feed our 'heritage watch' endeavour.

Our plan to hold regular "Connect" informal sessions with the SHS membership had unfortunately to be put on hold due to current restrictions on gatherings. We hope that we can launch invites for such physical sessions before too long.

Also in this issue we announce the creation of 3 sub-committees focusing on different aspects of heritage management, and we invite you to join one (or more) of them so as to participate directly in the cause of protecting our unique Sarawak heritage.

POINT OF VIEW

Can Old Kuching qualify as a UNESCO recognized heritage location? We think so.

First a qualifier ... we are not talking about becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site. That may be a long-term goal but for the foreseeable future, we are talking about one of the regional (Asia-Pacific) awards that UNESCO gives out annually. To do this, we need to understand what they are looking for. We need to apply fundamental conservation principles. We need to study our sites and understand and document their heritage values – whether evidential, historical, aesthetic, communal etc. We may need to do some remedial work where our heritage assets have been damaged. Ultimately we need to be able to include in our submission a clear Statement of Significance for our site. Will it be easy? No, nothing worthwhile ever is. But the first hurdle we need to overcome is our own mindset. We have to believe it is possible. Once we believe, we (government, private sector, NGOs and civil society) can organize ourselves and work towards it. Are you game?

Join these SHS

Sub-Committees?

Conservation of Built Heritage

Youth Heritage Outreach

Intangible Cultural Heritage

< For more info, see Page 2 >

HERITAGE WATCH

Kuching Old Bazaar - Cultural Mapping and Tourism Promotion Programme

The Kuching Old Market Community Association (KOMCA) recently carried out a cultural mapping and tourism promotion programme of the "Lao Pa Sa" (Old Bazaar) area of Kuching, which includes Carpenter Street, Ewe Hai Street, Main Bazaar, China Street, Bishopsgate Street, Temple Street, Wayang Street and Green Hill with support of the Sarawak Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture. The team surveyed the Old Bazaar and interviewed residents and business owners to collect stories, memories, traditions and trades, and information on the evolution of the area in Kuching's history. They installed plaques with QR codes at certain spots to provide visitors with historical information

and, in March, they launched a book, tourist map, brochures, a documentary video and some mural art about the Kuching Old Bazaar. Congratulations to KOMCA for their great work.

Round Tower Matters

The gazetted heritage building, the Round Tower, has attracted an unfair share of insensitive physical interventions. First there was the large concrete Waterfront Hotel signage planted in front of the building five years ago, marring the appearance of the historic structure. SHS had raised this to the hotel management as early as five years ago. We revisited the issue recently with the management who then promised to move the signage, only to reverse their decision a few months later citing financial constraints. Then, also recently, the use of the Round Tower - which had been sitting idle for several years - was granted by the Sarawak Government to a private enterprise for re-purposing as a restaurant/café. We observed insensitive alteration and renovation works (that included construction of a metal pergola extension and fitting of gutters) and learnt that these did not go through the approval processes required under the Sarawak Cultural Heritage Ordinance (1993)¹ - which was designed precisely to prevent damage to gazetted heritage buildings. We strongly and formally raised our concerns to the tenant, the Sarawak Museum Department and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture but the implementation of the project appears to have been completed unchanged.



Fort Emma restoration completed



We note the completion of the restoration of Fort Emma in Kanowit under the Conservation and Upgrading of Forts in Sarawak project² under the Sarawak Museum Department and the Sarawak Public Works Department (JKR). The fort is gazetted as a Sarawak state heritage. The existing structure dates from 1860 and replaced forts that had burnt down twice but had since gone through several physical changes.

Fort Emma is the first of the forts to undergo conservation works under the above mentioned programme. They started in June 2018 and took 18 months to complete. A recent article in the Borneo Talk magazine³ states that *“proper planning and stage by stage approach based on conservation guidelines ensured that the restoration of Fort Emma was done to the highest standards”* with vetting by an appointed conservator. Plans are to open the Fort as a gallery or museum to display historical artefacts.

SHS NEWS

SHS ExCo Meetings with Minister & Perm Sec, MoTAC

In January, the ExCo had two meetings with Mr Hii Chang Kee, Perm Sec of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture and then with Datuk Abdul Karim Hamzah, Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture. We introduced the members of the new ExCo, gave an update of our plans, shared some observations of the local heritage environment and submitted several proposals for funding support.



Petanak & Blacksmith Road Heritage Briefing & Stroll and Collaboration Meeting with UNIMAS



On 29th March, several SHS members gave a briefing on the history and heritage of the Petanak and Blacksmith Road area of Kuching to Architecture undergraduates and lecturers from the UNIMAS Faculty of Built Environment, led by Dean Prof Ar NurAkmal. This was followed by a short observation stroll in the area, which was part of the students' assignment. The area was once home to a Henghua fishing village as well as dozens of Hakka blacksmith shops.

On 31st March, some members of the ExCo visited the UNIMAS campus for a meeting with the Dean and some members of the Faculty of Built Environment. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss collaboration opportunities between SHS and UNIMAS on heritage-related matters. More details forthcoming.

Call to join these SHS Sub-Committees

We are setting up three SHS sub-committees:

(i) Conservation of Built Heritage (ii) Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (iii) Heritage Outreach to the Youth. These sub-committees will be led by members of our Executive Committee and will be open to SHS members who are specifically interested in these topics and who wish to contribute time and skills to our heritage watch and conservation work. If you are keen, please let us know via our mobile no. or email address (see top left of page 1 of SPOTLIGHT).

¹ The 2019 Sarawak Heritage Ordinance not being in force yet

² other forts under this project include Fort Hose (Marudi), Fort Lily (Betong) and Fort Brooke (Sarikei).

³ 'Fort Emma: A piece of history, reborn' - Borneo Talk vol. 59, Jan-March 2021, pp. 68-69