

taiping

LIFE. AND. SOUL

a town planning perspective

JPBD 2005: Taiping Life and Soul

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Taiping
Life and Soul

Foreword by Menteri Besar Perak

“Perak the Blessed Soil” (Perak Bumi Bertuah) had once been the slogan for the state of Perak, portraying its image of the many offerings from every corner of the mukim. In many districts you will undoubtedly find various treasures, steeped in ancient history, with backdrop of nature and laden with cultural heritage.

The great awareness to portray this offerings had produced many reading materials and references, propagating views and generating interests for the perpetual benefit of all.

‘Taiping Life and Soul’ fulfils this goal. It is the oldest town in Perak in the district of Larut and Matang, well known for its many early historical development of the state; Taiping is thus a relevant point of focus.

The perspectives on development and planning within the covers of this book open up many tales both explicit and implicit. I hope this book will inculcate in the readers a love for the nation and its heritage—turning Taiping into a timeless relevant example.

YAB Dato' Seri Diraja Mohamad Tajol Rosli bin Ghazali
Menteri Besar Perak

Foreword by Yang Dipertua Majlis Perbandaran Taiping

The attempt at writing 'Taiping Life And Soul' is something to be proud of, not only for citizens of Taiping but to all individuals who knew of Taiping no matter where they are. Indeed this book succeeds in portraying a gamut of perspectives: from its historical heritage to the planning and development of the town, its illustrious early establishment to its present day.

This book is a valuable treasure on Taiping. The pulse of this town has been stimulated through innumerable interesting facts providing reference and evidence, particularly savoured from the town planning experience.

On behalf of the citizens of Taiping, I would like to thank The Federal Department of Town and Country Planning and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government for publishing this book. Not only highly informative, it also enhances the effort of Taiping Municipal Council in realising the State Government's intention of turning Taiping into a heritage town.

Dato' Muhammad Padzil bin Khalid
Yang Dipertua,
Majlis Perbandaran Taiping



Taiping

Life and Soul

Foreword

In order to achieve our planning objectives, planners sometimes have to be more than just conservationists, for their decisions today can only be judged as history by future generations. Town and Country Planning is not limited to just planning the buildings and urban structures, but, more importantly, as a discipline that strategically plans to create a harmonious and sustainable living environment, ecosystem and civilised human culture in a state of equilibrium that is dependent upon one another.

Understanding the organic and dynamic nature of a city therefore remains our greatest challenge. How do we project our cities into the future and remain relevant without losing the historical fabric built by previous generations? Taiping is one of those cities that is going through this dilemma. There is no doubt that the city's future lies in its history. Understanding the city's historic past will shed some light on its future direction. The history of a city represents our cultural ingenuity, the roots of our civilisation and the blueprint of our existence.

After all, as a nation, who are we without history?

THE DIRECTOR GENERAL
FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING
PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

Preface

It snowed of blooming Angsana, an explosion of vibrant flowers among the mossy greens, the oak-coloured trees and their trunks, brilliantly draping the earth in rich golden soft petals, leaving a breathtaking scenario. In a paradise such as this, blessed with a wet and cool climate, gardens formed bouquets of colours and with its lush greenery and hills offering nothing but peacefulness, it only seems fit for the city to be dubbed ‘tai-ping’ – Chinese for ‘everlasting peace’.

So, Taiping it is. A walk to remember.

One of Malaysia’s foremost historic cities, this once famous tin mining city of Perak, however has been given a facelift which it didn’t want because of lack of awareness and the absence of cohesive efforts towards the preservation of the city’s heritage. In fact, traces of its glorious historical past – over 150 historic buildings and shophouses dating back to the early 1870s – are struggling to survive the so-called ‘modern development’. It makes us wonder that no one seems to bother that the country’s first railway track is being hidden under layers of tarmac. But then, what worse could have happened other than seeing its street character and the city image as a whole, being destroyed as ‘modern development’ took over?

Taiping’s heritage is on the verge of disappearing. From the town planning perspective, Taiping retains a special place, not only as a historic city but also in being the first ‘garden city’ in the country. Taiping is remembered as the birthplace of new ideas, such as the rectangular ‘gridiron’ street pattern and for demonstrating the importance of landscaping and open spaces as major elements in city planning.

The Taiping Lake Gardens that we know today are only part of the surviving green network originally planned for the city. One can only imagine what Taiping would have looked like had the original trees been retained along its main streets and major roads, as a traveller’s account of the old city during the British colonial era described this garden city that matured almost 100 years ago as:

“...The streets are shaded by rows of the Angsena tree, which at irregular intervals bursts forth into a riot of blossoms, evenmore yellow than those of the laburnum. These it rains down in golden snow upon the streets, providing a carpet fit for a Sultan, for yellow is the royal colour in the East. With its golden snow, the Angsena spreads a broad almost over-powering scent, even more sweet than the smell of the Pinang blossom”.

Cuthbert Woodville Harrison,
An illustrated guide to the Federated Malay States, 1911

Much may have been written about Taiping, but none have portrayed the city as a soul. So, this book is an attempt to trace the life and soul of Taiping from the town planning perspective even when much of the city's history has been lost over the years, and the survival of its remaining buildings and natural heritage for future generations is far from guaranteed.

Our account – ‘The Life and Soul of Taiping’ – is a record of the elements that have made the city into a peaceful, green, oft-times wet but vibrant historic city in the past, present and hopefully, for the future. Just like the city’s first steam engine, Taiping probably needs just a bit of loving care and a little push to enable it to run again, as gloriously as it did in the past.





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TAIPEI - LIFE AND SOUL



Taiping

City of Everlasting Peace



“The name of the town, Taiping being the Chinese for ‘Everlasting Peace’, I regarded as a happy omen for the future.”



PEACEFUL

太平

‘Tai’

‘Peng’

Taiping derives its name from the Mandarin word ‘Tai-Peng’ which literally means ‘Everlasting Peace’. During its early years, Taiping was one of the tin mining capitals of the world. Unlike other conventional mining towns, the city is a nature’s paradise, where scenic beauty and urban charm blend harmoniously. Indeed, it is blessed with some of the best environmental settings in the land – lakes, forests, hills, waterfalls. Being the wettest area in Peninsular Malaysia, the city is relatively cool and refreshing. Taiping, with Bukit Larut (formerly known as Maxwell Hill) as its backdrop, offers some of the most awe-inspiring scenery unparalleled by other cities.



TAIPEI - LIFE AND SOUL



Taiping has always been the first. As the oldest city in the former Federated Malay States, it brings many historic firsts, including being the site of the first British intervention into the administration of the Malay States. Besides being the first tin mining centre, Taiping's impressive list includes the first railway which ran from the city to Port Weld, the first telegraph office, the first specifically designed museum building and the first fire brigade, to name but a few.

HISTORIC





BEAUTY

"I first saw it some years ago on a rainy, cool evening, when the air was laden with the scent of flowering angsana trees and golden light bathed the slopes of the Ijau range...Taiping has the heaviest rainfall of any town in Malaya, and while this is unfortunate for devotees of tennis, it makes walking exceedingly pleasant after the daily deluge has fallen... Apart from the temperature, the visitor finds much to tempt him to walk in the town of Taiping..."

"I know of no more lovely sight in this country than the Taiping Gardens when the rays of the early morning sun are shining obliquely through their clumps of bamboo, palms and isolated trees scattered on islands among the expanse of water. One receives in that glorious half hour an experience of light in foliage that is quite unobtainable in England."



TAIPING - LIFE AND SOUL



Taiping

The Rise and Fall of a Capital



Taiping became the city of 'everlasting peace' not without the stained image of a paradise. It was born out of the bloody struggle and strife of communal war over the tin mining area that led to its formation to commemorate the end of the Larut Wars in 1874 and as a neutral zone for the warring parties. Its history can be traced back to the beginning of tin mining in Larut around 1844.

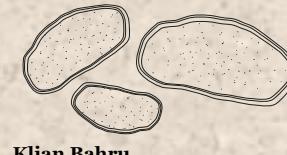


The Malay Sultanate Era

1840 - 1875

It was the early 1840s. Long Jaafar made a discovery – tin, and that marks the beginning of the history of Larut District, where the first tin mine was believed to have been located in Klian Pauh (where the Taiping Prison now stands). By 1844, he had brought in the first group of Chinese miners (Hakka Chinese members of the Hai San, a Penang-based Chinese secret society) to work in the mines. The further discovery of tin deposits at nearby areas led to a rush of new mines being opened in Klian Bahru. As the district prospered, he obtained grants from Sultan Shahabuddin – the then Sultan of Perak – in 1850 and 1856, confirming his hold over the Larut District. But, Long Jaafar passed away soon after and the administration of Larut was handed down to his son, Ngah Ibrahim, better known as 'Menteri of Larut'.

By 1863, Ngah Ibrahim was authorised to administer Larut and all its mining activities. He established a modern system of administration that included a police station, a police force, a judge, a magistrate, a treasurer and a clerk. A fort was built in Matang in 1856, but the centre of administration is believed to have been located in Kota, about 4 km from Klian Pauh. By 1865, there were about 100 shops in Klian Pauh and another 40 in Klian Bahru.

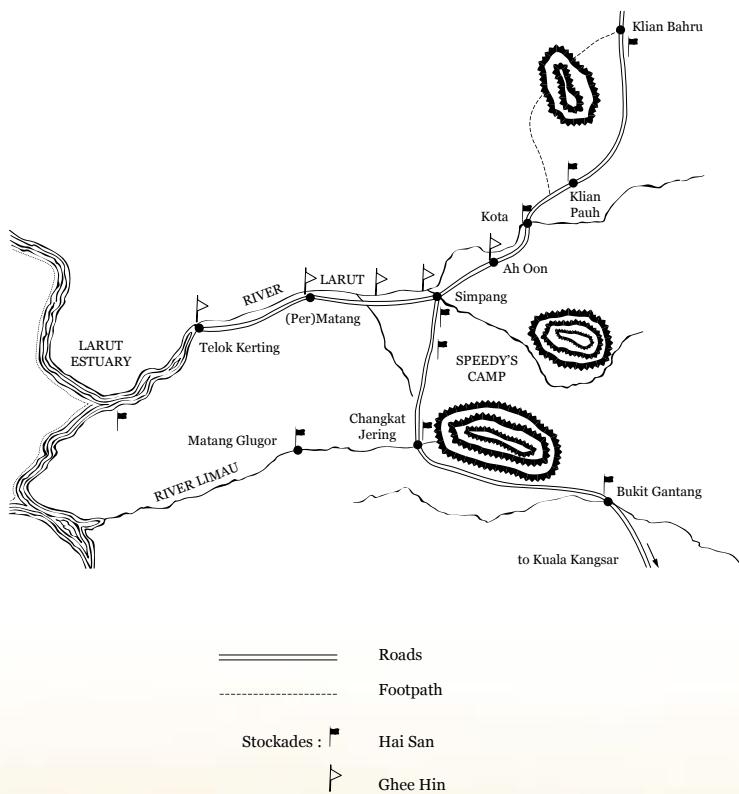


Klian Bahru



Klian Pauh

Kota



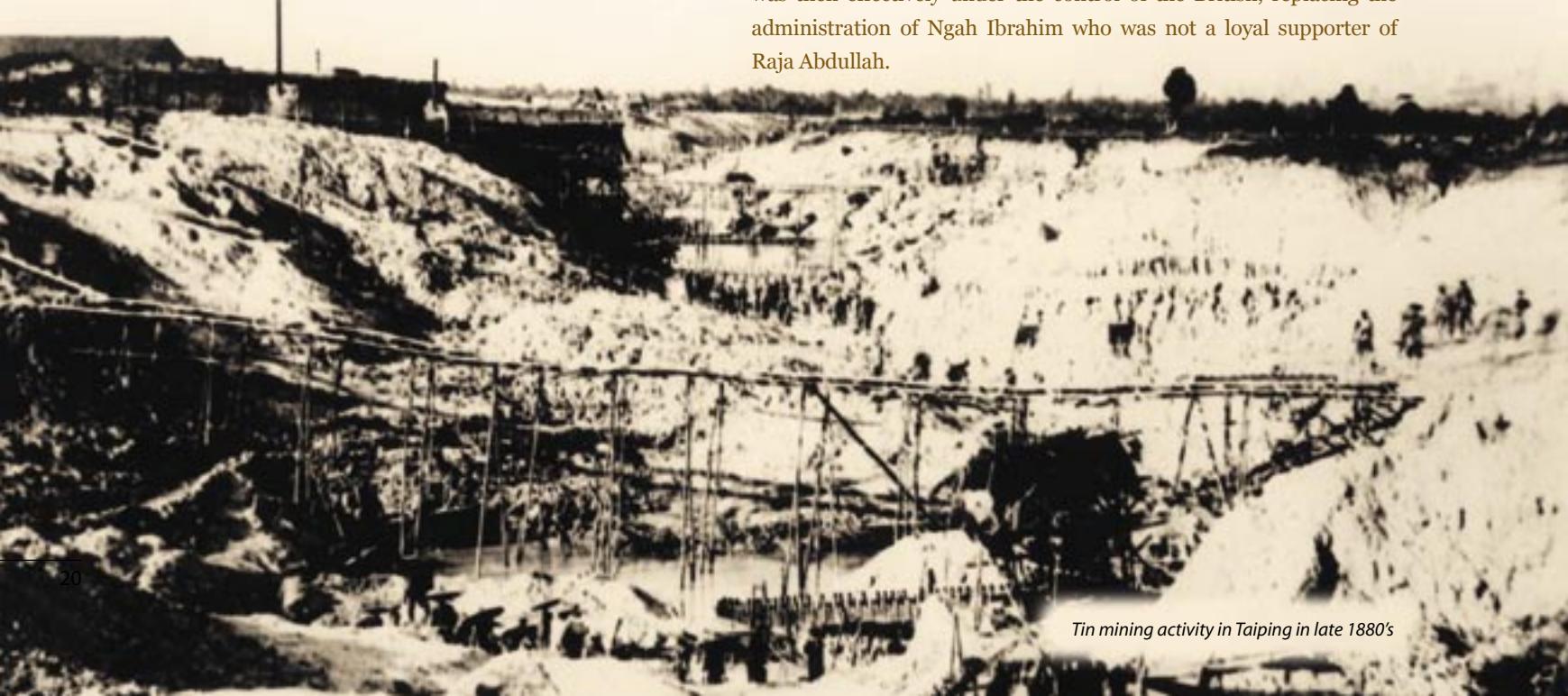
The Larut Wars

A series of wars broke out among the miners over the control of the waterway, which was crucial to tin mining activities. Known as the Larut Wars, it eventually led to the intervention of the British in the administration of the Malay States. It was an important factor in the formation and planning of Taiping as a city and demonstrated the importance of Taiping as a tin mining capital.

The first of the Larut Wars broke out in 1861 between the Chen Sang and the Fui Chew miners, which led to the first British intervention. Ngah Ibrahim was forced to pay a heavy compensation to the Ghee Hin (another Chinese secret society) leaders in Penang who financed part of the tin mining operation in Larut.

In 1865, trouble broke out again. Following the Second Larut War, most of the Fui Chew miners left Klian Bahru who were then replaced by the Nan Seng Cantonese (offshoot of the Ghee Hin) miners.

The Third Larut War occurred between 1871-1874 among the Hai San and Ghee Hin miners. Having lost control of his territory, Ngah Ibrahim employed Captain T. C. S. Speedy in 1873 to remedy the situation. However, the British only became directly involved in Taiping after the Pangkor Treaty in 1874. It was agreed that the British would help Raja Abdullah to ascend to the Perak throne and he in turn agreed to accept a British officer as his adviser. Taiping was then effectively under the control of the British, replacing the administration of Ngah Ibrahim who was not a loyal supporter of Raja Abdullah.





Kota Ngah Ibrahim (1)

1856

When it was built in 1856, this was the biggest fort ever constructed by the Malays, being spread over two acres of land. Situated in Matang, it was the formal residence of Ngah Ibrahim. Over the years, it served many functions - as the Larut Administration Centre, as the court for the prosecution of Dato' Maharaja Lela and Dato' Sagor for the killing of J. W. W. Birch, as the residence for Captain Speedy (then the Assistant Resident), the first Teachers' Training College, the first National School, the Matang Primary School and the headquarters for the occupying Japanese forces in World War II. It was recently restored as the Kota Ngah Ibrahim Historical Complex.

The Tengku Menteri Mosque (2)

1870

During the Ngah Ibrahim administration of Larut, public facilities such as the 'Balai Penghulu', a police station and a mosque were constructed. The Tengku Menteri mosque, built in 1870 in Matang is the oldest mosque in the state and still functions as a place of worship and meeting place of the Malay community.

House of Captain Speedy (3)

1873

Captain Speedy, who was employed by Ngah Ibrahim as his adviser and business partner in 1873, lived here during his service. Located near Kota Ngah Ibrahim in Matang, it was built in traditional Malay architecture style - raised on stilts and used timber for its construction.





The British Era 1875 - 1937

After the Pangkor Treaty in 1874, J. W. W. Birch was appointed as the first Resident of Perak while Captain T. C. S. Speedy was the Assistant Resident. He was stationed in Larut and was responsible for the formation of Taiping, where he drew up plans for the establishment of two towns. 'Kamunting' was to be located where Klian Bahru was, while the other about 4 km from Kota near the old mining village of Klian Pauh. He named the latter 'Taiping'.

Under the administration of Captain Speedy, a new 6.5 km-long road was built, joining Taiping with Kamunting. This road would eventually lead all the way to Penang. The importance of tin mining in Taiping saw the almost immediate establishment of Government Offices - Judicial, Mining, Road, and Revenue. By 1877, although Sir Hugh Low, the then British Resident still resided in Lower Perak, Taiping had already become the state's administrative capital for the British. By 1879, Taiping was a thriving city laid in 'gridiron' pattern with a main street about a mile long and new buildings completed – the treasury, army barracks, a hospital, a powder magazine, a parade ground (esplanade), a government storehouse, a large jail and bungalows for officers, and the British Residency.



View of Taiping circa early 1890 showing the house of the Secretary to Resident on Jelutong Hill, the army barracks and tin working activity in the foreground.

Above : the statue of Col. Robert S.F. Walker, the Commandant of Police and Military Force

TAIPEING 1928



TAIPING TIMELINE

1875	The Secretary to Resident's House
1878	Kamunting English School (Central School)
1879	Taiping Gaol (Perak Prison) Resident's Residency Public Office & Town Hall
1880	General Hospital
1881	Clock Tower (Central Police Station & Fire Station) Fort Carnarvon Perak Club
1882	Taiping Public Library
1883	King Edward VII School Perak Museum District Office Building
1884	Central Market Post and Telegraph Office Maxwell Hill Taiping Lake Gardens
1885	Taiping Race Course Perak Golf Club Taiping-Port Weld Railway
1886	All Saints' Anglican Church
1889	Treacher Girls' School Freemason Lodge
1890	The Esplanades
1892	New Club
1894	Town Rest House Perak Pioneer Newspaper (4th July)
1895	Government Offices Building
1896	Malay State Guides
1898	Taiping Teachers' College
1899	Taiping Convent School
1913	St. George's Institution
1914	Taiping Swimming Club
1920	Coronation Park

It is worth noting that the development of Taiping ran in parallel with the development of town planning in Britain. The need to regulate urban growth and to improve water supply and sanitation in Britain, led to the British Public Health Act of 1875 (many see this Act as the beginning of town and country planning in Britain and the beginning of 'by-law housing' or 'gridiron'). This era marks the beginning of the 'English Landscape Movement' which saw the birth of romantic Royal parks such as the Hyde Park, Green Park and St. James Park in London. It also began the 'Garden City Movement', the construction of ideal villages such as Saltaire in 1853, Port Sunlight (1888) and the publication of 'Garden City of Tomorrow' by Ebenezer Howard in 1898. By comparison, the Taiping Sanitary Board was formed in 1874 to deal with the pressing problems of fresh water and sanitation. After the great fire of 1880, a rectangular 'gridiron' planning layout with two-storey brick shophouses was laid with proper drainage and sanitation, replacing the original single-storey wooden shacks. Taiping's streets were planted with trees too, leading to the Taiping Lake Gardens.

The importance of Taiping as the mining capital is best illustrated by the completion of the first railway track from Taiping to Port Weld in 1885. Sir Frederick Weld, who became the Governor in 1880, was an important figure who contributed towards the development of Taiping's railway and other infrastructure projects, including water supply and the first Post and Telegraph Office (1884). The first Public Office was constructed in the 1880s to better administer the growth of Taiping, a model city for other British-administered towns in the Malay States.

Due to its status, new facilities were introduced first in Taiping. In 1878, Sir Hugh Low established an English school in Kamunting, the first in the Malay States. The Perak Club, the Central Police Station and Fire Station were founded in 1881. The Perak Museum, the first of its kind in the country, was built in 1883 to house the British collection before the development of a health resort in Maxwell Hill (now Bukit Larut) the following year. The country's golf course was first introduced in 1885 within the Lake Gardens, exclusively for high-ranking British officers and Europeans. Taiping Turf Club followed suit, created in an area about 4.5 km from the town centre. The Rotary Club and the Taiping Swimming Club were also established by 1914. The cosmopolitan nature of Taiping saw the development of many religious institutions and associations too, as well as some of the earliest newspapers ever published in the Malay States.

Taiping's status as a capital declined as Kinta Valley emerged as the new tin mining hub. It however regained its importance during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, becoming the centre for the Japanese military administration of Malaya and Sumatra. This was largely due to the existing military infrastructures, which were easily turned into Japanese army bases. But soon after the war, Taiping went into decline again with Ipoh taking centre stage as the new capital of Perak.

6



7



8



9

10

10

TAIPING'S LOST HERITAGE

Resident's Residency

Built in 1877, it was demolished in the name of development.



1



2

Taiping Aerodrome

The first airstrip was established in 1939 and later fully developed by the Japanese, with the help of the locals during World War II. Indian pro-independence leader Subash Chandra Bose flew into Taiping in 1944 in a Japanese plane, and met a local Tamil leader to discuss the formation of the Indian National Army. President Sukarno and his Vice President Dr. Mohamad Hatta also flew into this aerodrome in 1945.



3

Taiping's First Railway Track

This track was an important link for the export of tin to Europe and the United States. Construction began in 1882 but was hampered by labour shortage. Two divisions of Pioneer Corps from Ceylon were called in to complete the job, and on 12th February 1885, the first railway was officially opened. The track eventually turned into a road for motor vehicles after tin production ceased in Taiping.



4

Taiping Public Office

The first Public Office and Town Hall was constructed in 1880, but sadly, it was demolished in the early 1980s in order to make way for new development.

Taiping After Merdeka 1957-Today

After independence in 1957, the new administration brought about changes that altered the city skyline drastically. In the search for a national identity and vision for an independent Malaysia, new buildings were erected to replace the existing city fabric. The change in building height was apparent as the race for the sky began in the 1960s. Many supposedly international architecturally styled buildings sprang up in between Taiping's old shophouses. Moreover, the increased number of cars made Taiping's gridiron planning system a nightmare. The raintrees along the main roads were eventually removed to create more room for modern traffic. After the Emergency in the 1960s, new settlement areas were created around the city centre including Pokok Assam, Aulong and Taiping New Village.

The Taiping Financially Autonomous Local Authority was established in 1956 to replace the City Board formed by the British in 1930. It was the city's governing council until the formation of the Taiping Municipal Council in 1976. New developments such as the Taiping Zoo and the Kamunting Detention Camp were some of the important landmarks of the era after Merdeka.



TAIPING - LIFE AND SOUL

Taman
Lake View

City Centre

Lake Gardens

Kampung Jambu

Pokok Assam

Taman Istana



The ongoing battle between the old and the new

Modern shops of the 60's



The Mandarin Cinema



Kamunting Detention Camp

This camp is home for detainees of the Internal Security Act (ISA) which was enacted in the 1960s. This is part of the infrastructure originally designed to combat communist rebellion half a decade ago, and was instrumental in creating a modern Malaysia free from the threat of communism.

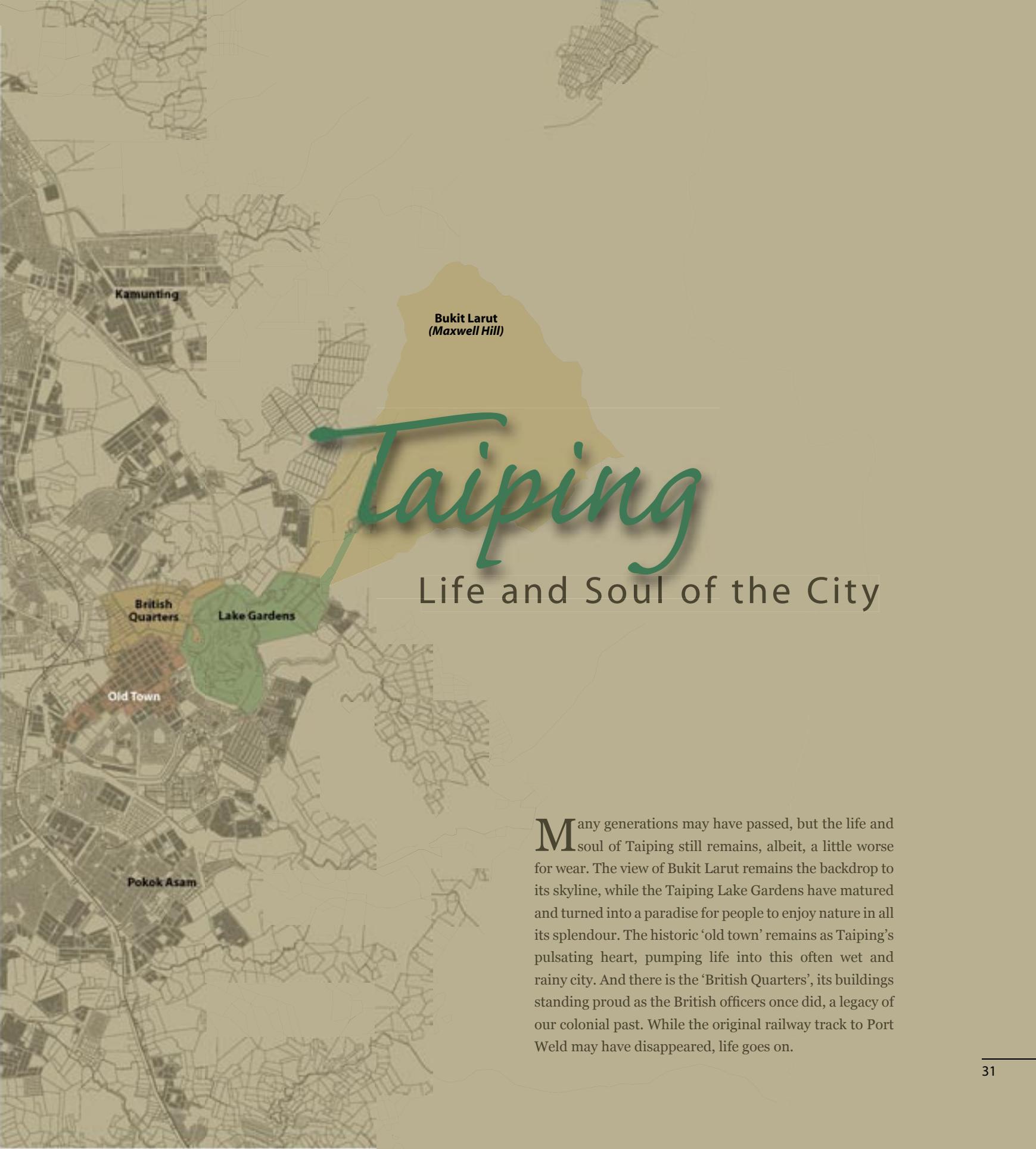


Kuala Sepetang
(Port Weld)

Matang

Simpang

Aulohg



Taiping

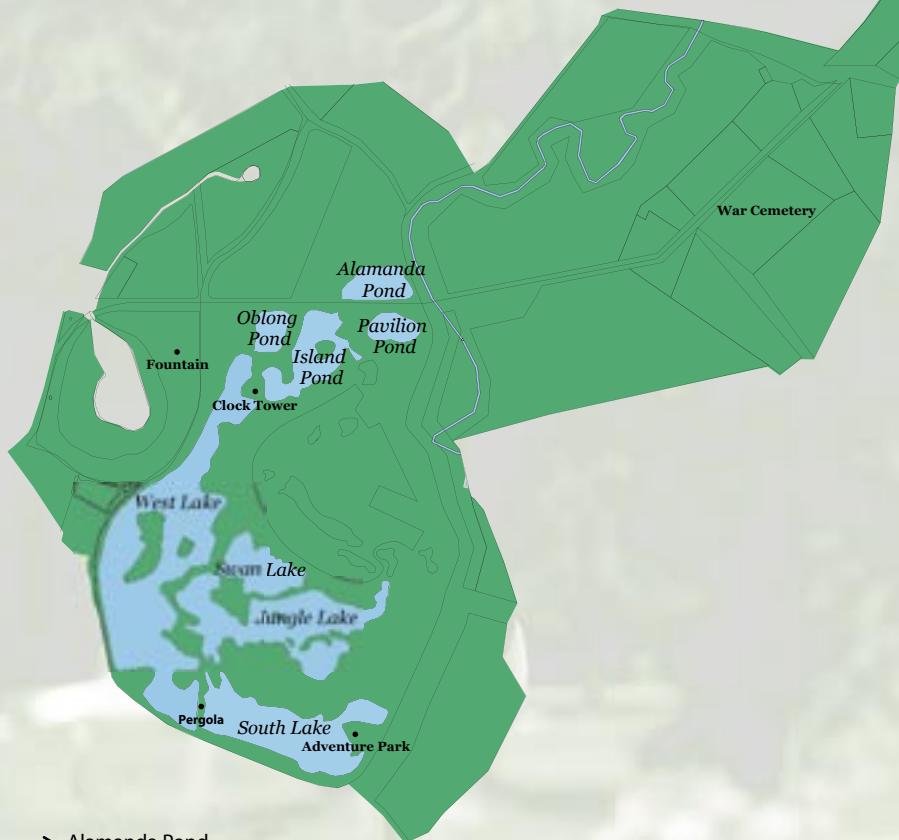
Life and Soul of the City

Many generations may have passed, but the life and soul of Taiping still remains, albeit, a little worse for wear. The view of Bukit Larut remains the backdrop to its skyline, while the Taiping Lake Gardens have matured and turned into a paradise for people to enjoy nature in all its splendour. The historic 'old town' remains as Taiping's pulsating heart, pumping life into this often wet and rainy city. And there is the 'British Quarters', its buildings standing proud as the British officers once did, a legacy of our colonial past. While the original railway track to Port Weld may have disappeared, life goes on.



Taiping Lake Gardens

This is where it all began. The heart of tin mining, the battles and the battlefield, the reason for British intervention – all consolidated into one peaceful entity known as the Taiping Lake Gardens. The evolution of the Lake Gardens has been a long process going back over a century, with the arrival of plants paralleling the arrivals of Taiping's varied population. But it was the love and vision of one man, Col. R. S. F. Walker, who worked on what would have been abandoned tin mines, turning them into a lush tropical garden. The story goes that he was assisted by his police force during his free time. The Lake Gardens were created as the recreational centre for British officers and the increasing number of expatriates in Taiping. It is the oldest public park in Malaysia, has been in use since 1884 and is located within the vicinity of Bukit Larut, magnificently sculptured out of the natural environment.



> Alamanda Pond

▼ The South Lake

↳ Swan Lake & Jungle Lake

Lakes & Ponds

Since tin mining ceased in Taiping, many of its mines were turned into lakes, namely the South Lake, the West Lake and the Jungle Lake. In between these lakes are small islands and ponds with distinct characteristics, creating a serene and tranquil panoramic landscape. These lakes and ponds play a pivotal role in sustaining the city and act as water retention zones that prevent flash floods in Taiping, having one of the world's highest rainfall, averaging over 4,000 mm annually. The Lake Gardens were modelled after the royal parks in Britain (it bears some resemblance to the Kensington Park in London) with its informal picturesque garden characterised by meandering paths, water bodies, expansive manicured lawns and undulating topography.









▲ View of an evening activity within the majestic South Lake
◀ The Pavilion Pond



Flora and Fauna

The Taiping Lake Gardens sprawled over an area of about 64 hectares, covered with 2,300 trees and act as a green lung for the city, filtering air and creating a buffer between the commercial and residential areas around the park. Rainfall provides for lush growth, over 75 species of trees including the exotic *Nymphaea*, *Fragrae Fragrans*, Brazil Nut and *Jacaranda Filicifolia* along with many local species. However, the undisputed star is the unique sight of the drooping branches of the 100-year-old raintrees that seem to defy the law of Nature and can only be found in this garden city.

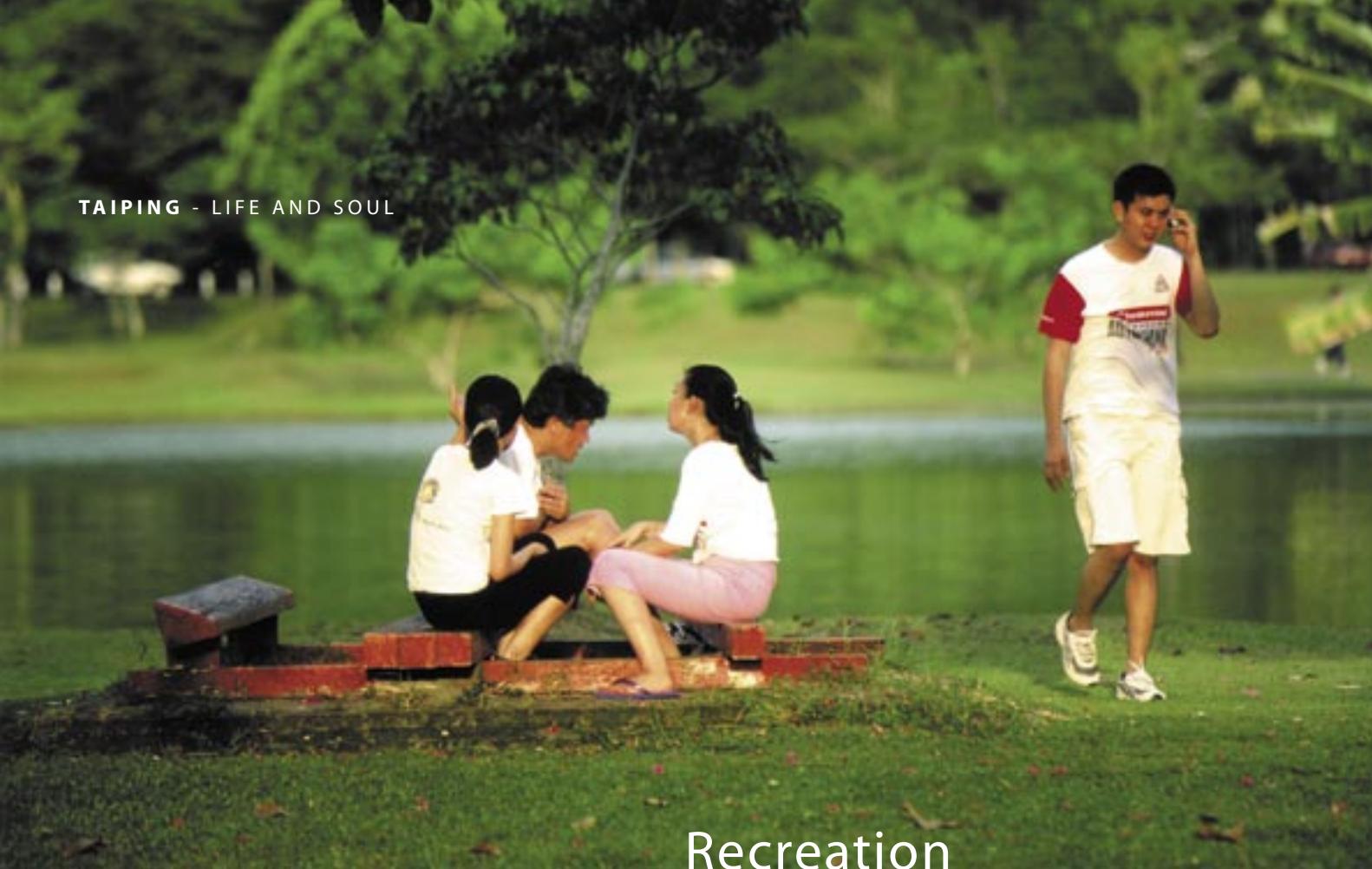


TAIPEI - LIFE AND SOUL



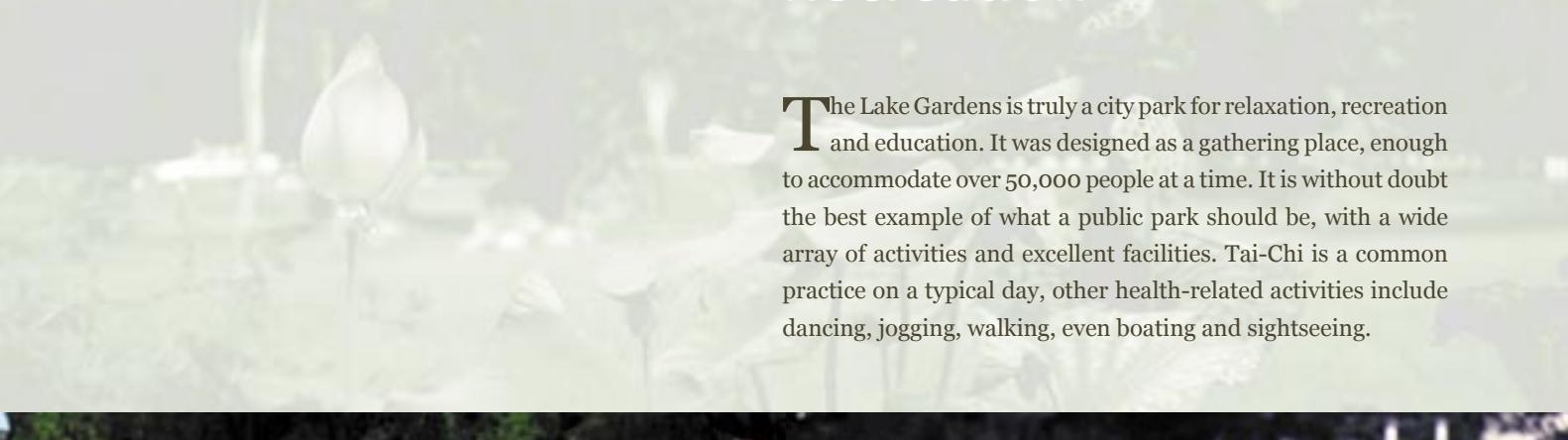


< *Entorolobium Saman*
↗ *Jacaranda Filicifolia*
➢ *Peltophorum Pterocarpum*



Recreation

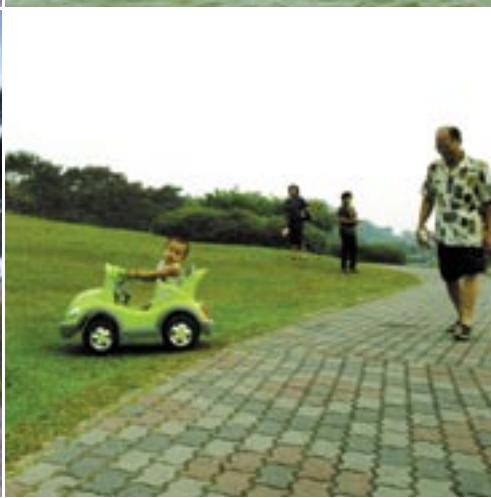
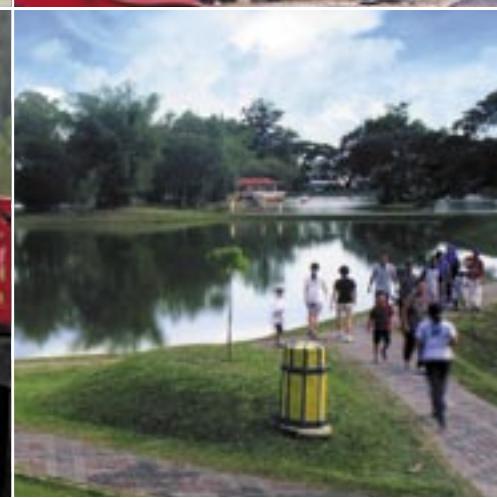
The Lake Gardens is truly a city park for relaxation, recreation and education. It was designed as a gathering place, enough to accommodate over 50,000 people at a time. It is without doubt the best example of what a public park should be, with a wide array of activities and excellent facilities. Tai-Chi is a common practice on a typical day, other health-related activities include dancing, jogging, walking, even boating and sightseeing.







To help cater for the increasing numbers of visitors and boating activities, this new jetty and boathouse was built in 1990. The existing historic jetty built by the British in 1910 remained operational but with less traffic volume.



The occasional sports event exudes excitement and liveliness to this normally tranquil setting. Swimming, tennis and golf were among the favourite sports in the past. Unfortunately, the original nine-hole golf course which was opened in 1885, was eventually closed in 1993 as the flying golf balls were deemed to pose a public hazard! Only the 1930 swimming pool (pictured below) survived and still serves Taiping's swimmers.



Historical Landmarks

The Lake Gardens houses some of the city's heritage such as the Jetty, built in 1935 (an icon from the British era), the Ng Boo Bee Fountain (originally located at the market square) and the Flower Garden that was opened in 1880. The recent addition includes the Sundial that was constructed in 1985.



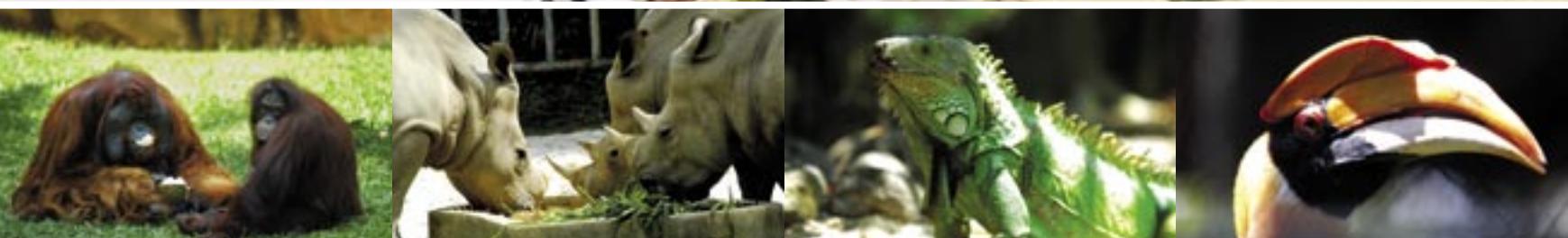
THEIR NAME LIVETH
FOR EVERMORE

Commonwealth War Cemetery

Hidden in a tranquil setting within the Lake Gardens is the Commonwealth War Cemetery, the resting place for the 826 Commonwealth soldiers killed during the advance of invading Japanese forces during the latter's Malayan campaign (December 1941-February 1942). It was constructed and is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. At the time of the Japanese invasion of Malaya, Taiping was on the British line of retreat down the west coast.

The cemetery was created after the defeat of Japan for the relocation of graves from battlefields, numerous temporary burial grounds and from villages and other civil cemeteries where permanent maintenance was not possible. There are 12 unidentified soldiers' tombs from the 1914-1918 period and over 850 war casualties from the 1939-1945 period, of which more than 500 are unidentified.







Taiping Zoo

Camouflaged by trees, the jewel in the Lake Gardens' crown is the Taiping Zoo - the oldest in the country, covering an area of 34 acres. Opened in 1961, it was formerly known as Taman Mergastua Sultan Idris Shah. It is home to more than 1,300 animals and over 180 species of birds, reptiles and mammals, making it one of the most popular leisure facilities and tourist attractions with over 700,000 visitors annually. The preservation of its existing trees, streams and lakes at the site, makes the Taiping Zoo the finest zoo in the country where animals are kept in their natural environment and in some cases, even without the presence of physical fencing. Its special features include Zoo Central - a public plaza with café and playgrounds at the heart of the zoo.





Recreational facilities at the Zoo Central



Night Safari

The Night Safari was first introduced here and is an added attraction for the zoo where visitors may view or observe the night activity of nocturnal animals in a simulated natural environment, in contrast to the nightlife that can be found in Taiping's city centre – the historic Old Town.





“...this important Chinese town, with a street about a mile long, with large bazaars and shops making a fine appearance, being much decorated in Chinese style; halls of meeting for the different tribes, gambling house, workshops, the Treasury, a substantial dark wooden building, large detached barracks for the Sikh police, a hospital, a powder magazine,...”.

Isabella Birds,
The Golden Chersonese And The Way Thither, 1879



A sepia-toned historical photograph showing a wide, paved street in Taiping. The street is lined with large, mature trees on both sides. In the background, there are several traditional-style buildings. On the right side of the street, there is a building with a prominent arched entrance and a sign that reads "WHITE HORSE". The overall atmosphere is that of a quiet town street from the late 19th century.

Main road in Taiping town, 1890s

Taiping Historic Old Town

This historic area of Taiping is one of the earliest settlements that existed during the early mining era around 1840s. The earliest settlers were the Malays, believed to be centred in Kota (near the Taiping old mosque) while the Chinese miners concentrated in Klian Pauh. After the establishment of Taiping in 1874, a new settlement was laid along Jalan Taming Sari and the expansion of the town was directly related to the intensity of mining activity and later by rubber plantations. The completion of the first railway in 1885 saw a mass influx of Indian and Ceylonese migrant labourers into Taiping, to work in the rubber plantations and the new railway line. The early town was a collection of single-storey buildings built of wood with attap roofs, crammed along narrow corduroy roads, devoid of proper water supply and sanitation. During its mining era, the town was home to 5,000 people, about 100 shops, gambling houses, meeting halls of various associations and a market (built by the British in 1870) mainly catering for the miners' needs.

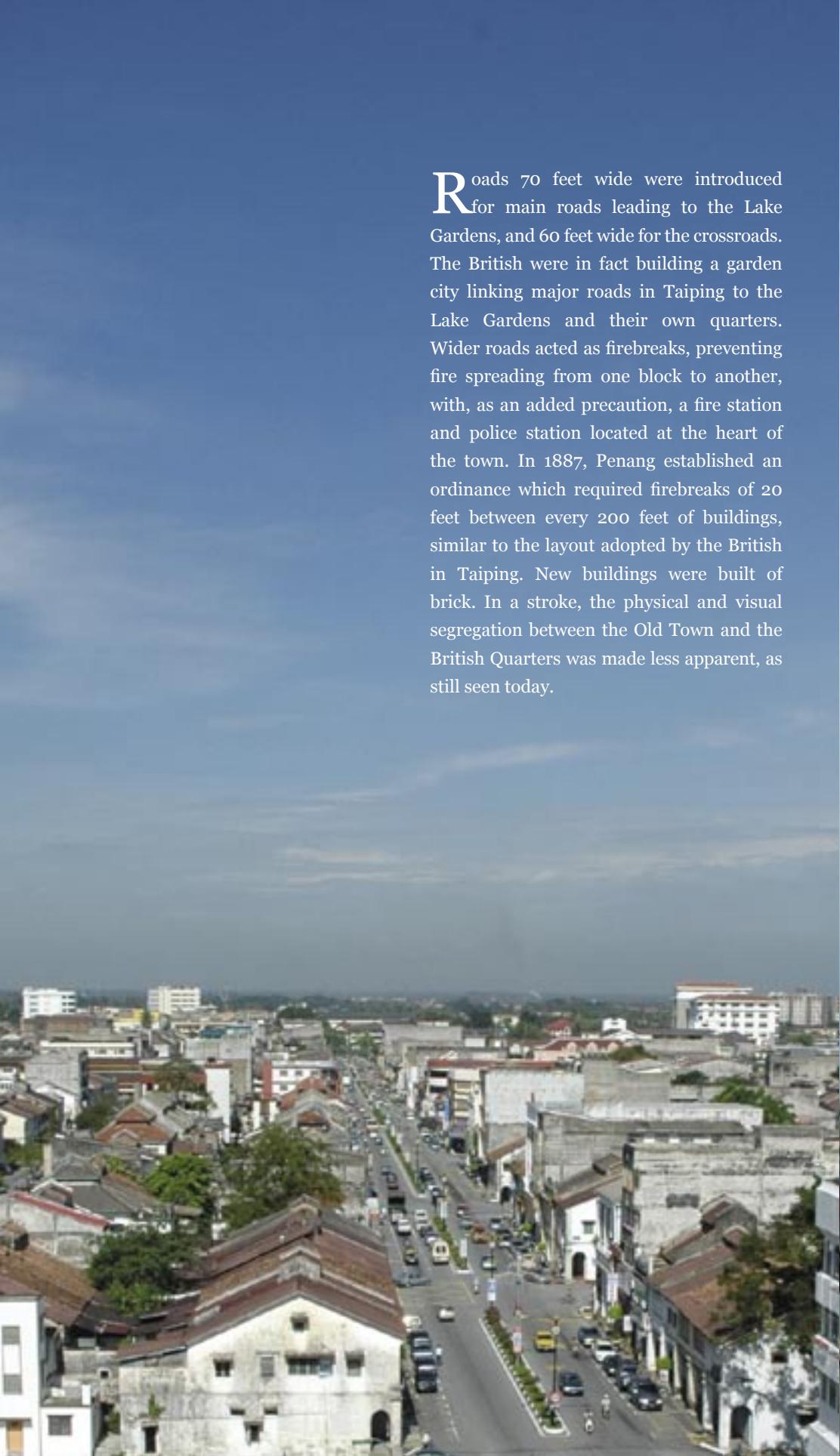




Gridiron

During the early British era, the Old Town was left undisturbed until the great fire of 1880 that caused it to be rebuilt. After the fire, the need for better housing and shops for a town growing in importance led to the implementation of a planned rectangular gridiron layout based on ten shophouse-sized blocks with roads wide enough for the planting of raintrees along its main roads and major crossroads.

Roads 70 feet wide were introduced for main roads leading to the Lake Gardens, and 60 feet wide for the crossroads. The British were in fact building a garden city linking major roads in Taiping to the Lake Gardens and their own quarters. Wider roads acted as firebreaks, preventing fire spreading from one block to another, with, as an added precaution, a fire station and police station located at the heart of the town. In 1887, Penang established an ordinance which required firebreaks of 20 feet between every 200 feet of buildings, similar to the layout adopted by the British in Taiping. New buildings were built of brick. In a stroke, the physical and visual segregation between the Old Town and the British Quarters was made less apparent, as still seen today.



“The architectural pretensions of all the buildings at the advice of Mr Swettenham shows a very great improvement in taste on those which were erected in the preceding years, and... are equal in beauty of design and excellence of workmanship to anything to be found in any older Colony.”

Sir Hugh Low, Resident of Perak 1884-1899

Clock Tower

Over a 100 years old, it is the first clock tower in the Federated Malay States. It was initially built of timber in 1881 at a point equidistant from the Chinese theatre, the market and other much frequented places. The building was built purposely to serve as the police and fire stations for Taiping until 1908. The fire brigade, the first in the Federated Malay States, was made up of members of the Perak Armed Police and later the Malay States Guides.





The Shophouses

Two-storey shophouses were the major components of the city blocks with the exception of the Taiping Market, association buildings and religious buildings that made up a small percentage of the overall composition. Built between 1880 to 1940, the two-storey shophouses, mainly adopted from early shophouses of the Straits Settlements, bear a resemblance to their Singaporean cousins with their five-foot verandahs which first appeared there in 1882. Other common features were timber shutters, air vents and jack roofs. Constructed of brick, many were built in 'Straits Eclectic style' – Art Deco, Neo-Classical and Utilitarian style, reflecting the different background and status of the owner or 'towkey' who usually owned the whole block. Corner units facing major street crossings were given special treatment reminiscent to street corners often found in England and most parts of Europe. Like most shophouses in the Straits Settlement, the shophouses were designed as shops on the ground level and houses on the upper level, common for merchants of that period.





1

< Tailor Shop - Nawab Din

Nawab Din (an ex-police personnel under Col. Walker) started a new business after his retirement from the army in 1892. Also known as the Master Tailor, he used this building as the factory producing military uniforms for army and police personnel. His business made him a textile tycoon. Today, it is one of the many abandoned buildings in the city centre.



2

< Kapitan Chung Keng Kooi's Townhouse, Barrack Road

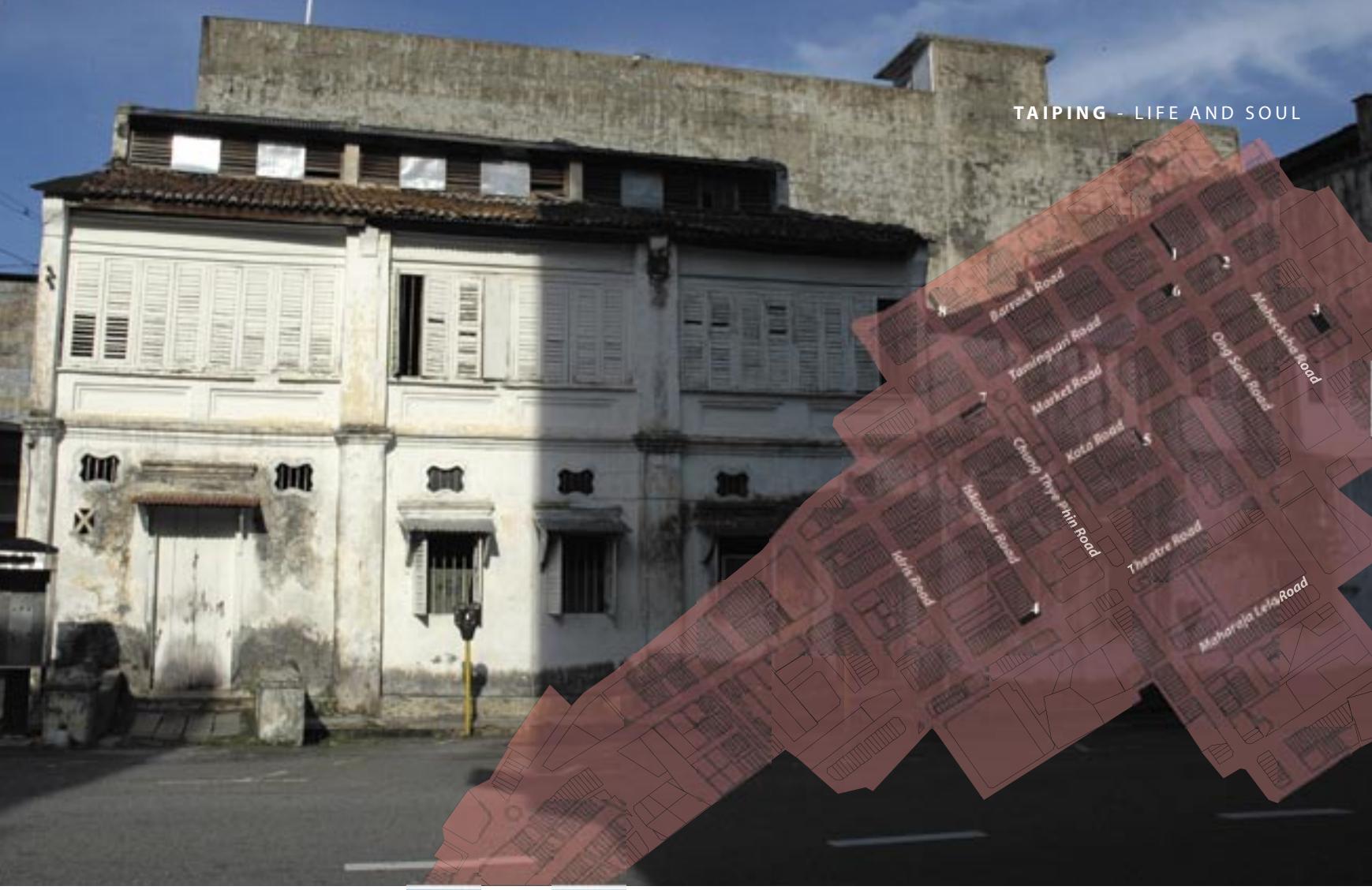
Located at Jalan Berek, this house was owned by the most prominent tin miner and leader of Taiping's Hakka community, Chung Keng Kooi (1829-1901) who was also a Chinese Kapitan of Perak and sat on the Perak State Council. His eldest son, Chung Ah Yong, who resided here, was a member of the Taiping Sanitary Board and all the important racing clubs. He employed a European trainer for his prize-winning race horses and maintained his stables at a cost of 12,000 dollars a year.



3

4





6





No. 2A, Jalan Chong Thye Phin

One of the well preserved shophouses in Taiping, retaining its original utilitarian charm. It was built around 1880-1889, facing the original market square. Although the original shop is no longer in business, its classic features such as door, windows and air blocks, the trademark of the early shophouses remain intact.



31, Jalan Stesen

This is one of the most decorated shop houses in Taiping. Doors and windows are lavishly ornate with wood carving, painted in red and gold. Decorative tiles that were commonly used by generations of Baba and Nyonya filled the floor and some part of the walls. The 93-year-old uncle Chong is one of the many decorated war heroes in Taiping, an officer during the British Administration who played a vital role during the Emergency. He is happy to spend the rest of his retirement life in the house built by his grandfather, one of the wealthy merchants that built Taiping.



Business Centre

Since the beginning of the tin mining era, the Old Town has always been the centre for business and entertainment for Taiping. The Taiping Central Market, with its market square, remains as the informal centre for friendly meetings and morning shopping. Traditional bazaars, arcades and night markets, the equivalent of modern shopping malls and hypermarkets of the post-Merdeka era, are still important shopping destinations in today's modern Taiping.



Taiping - where time stood still





Central Market

This was the biggest and oldest shopping centre in the Malay States, catering to the various communities in Taiping. Located in the heart of the Old Town, it consisted of two buildings – the old market built in 1884 and the new market built in 1885. Each had similar timber post and truss structures, was 220 feet long by 60 feet wide, had concrete floors and iron roofs with a middle clerestory. The market square that was created was among the earliest public squares in the country and was part of the open space network created for the city.



Central Market in 1885





The Old Town is still the centre for kopitiam, cendol, roti canai and many of the traditional local delights, with a vibrant nightlife comparable to any big city in the country. The absence of clubs and pubs do not damper the huge night crowd from enjoying Taiping. Despite the frequency of rain, eating out has remained the favourite pastime among locals and visitors alike.



Bismillah Restaurant at Jalan Taming Sari, since 1932

Taiping today is more business orientated than ever with banks, hotels, shopping complexes and modern offices slowly replacing the traditional shophouses architecture. Chain stores and franchises are taking over the more traditional and fragile small family-owned businesses that were once the pride and joy of Taiping. Nevertheless, some of the coffee shops, small hotels and traditional food outlets still retain the character of the old Taiping, intimate and friendly with good racial integration.





1



2



3 4

Peking Hotel, 2 Jalan Idris

(1)

It was built in 1929 and originally housed the rubber dealers' association. Now the building functions as a hotel while still retaining its original design. It is one of the historical landmarks of the Old Town.

Peace Hotel (2)

Built in 1928, the Straits Eclectic architectural style building was originally the headquarters of Lee Rubbers. Located along Jalan Iskandar (at the heart of the Old Town), it is one of the architectural jewels of Taiping with elaborate facades, relatively unchanged for generations.

Guan Hin Chan Cigar Factory (3)

This building was once the premises for a cigar factory started by Burmese Chinese in the 1930s. During its early days, it employed Burmese women to roll cigars from Moulmein tobacco. Throughout the Japanese Occupation, it was used by the Japanese to store tin ore. Its generous space makes it an ideal furniture shop, its latest incarnation.

Lido Cinema (4)

This building was once one of the six cinemas in the city. All of them were either demolished or converted for other functions, in this case the envelope for the Catalog Shop.

2





Cosmopolitan Populace

Taiping is made up of various racial groups that were originally involved in activities generated by tin mining in Klian Pauh. The Malay community, among the earliest settlers in the city are well represented in modern day Taiping. However, very little trace of the Malay settlements and houses is left standing with the exception of the Kota Mosque.

The Chinese, who were directly involved in tin mining operations, have formed the majority until today. The various associations and temples located within the old town area bear testimony to the different groups in the Chinese community that made up Taiping Old Town's population. The Ceylonese and Indians were brought to Taiping in great numbers to work on the railway lines from Taiping to Port Weld although some Indian traders had already settled down in Taiping during the late mining era by providing support services such as laundry and transport. The arrival of Indian labour for the rubber estates during the rubber boom in 1910 significantly increased the Indian population in Taiping.

There are also Sikhs, known as Sepoys, whose arrival in Perak dates back to the period when J.W.W. Birch became the first British Resident. They served the police force, then known as the Perak State Guides. Their contribution to the enforcement of law and order was greatly appreciated by the British.

Old Kota Mosque – 1897

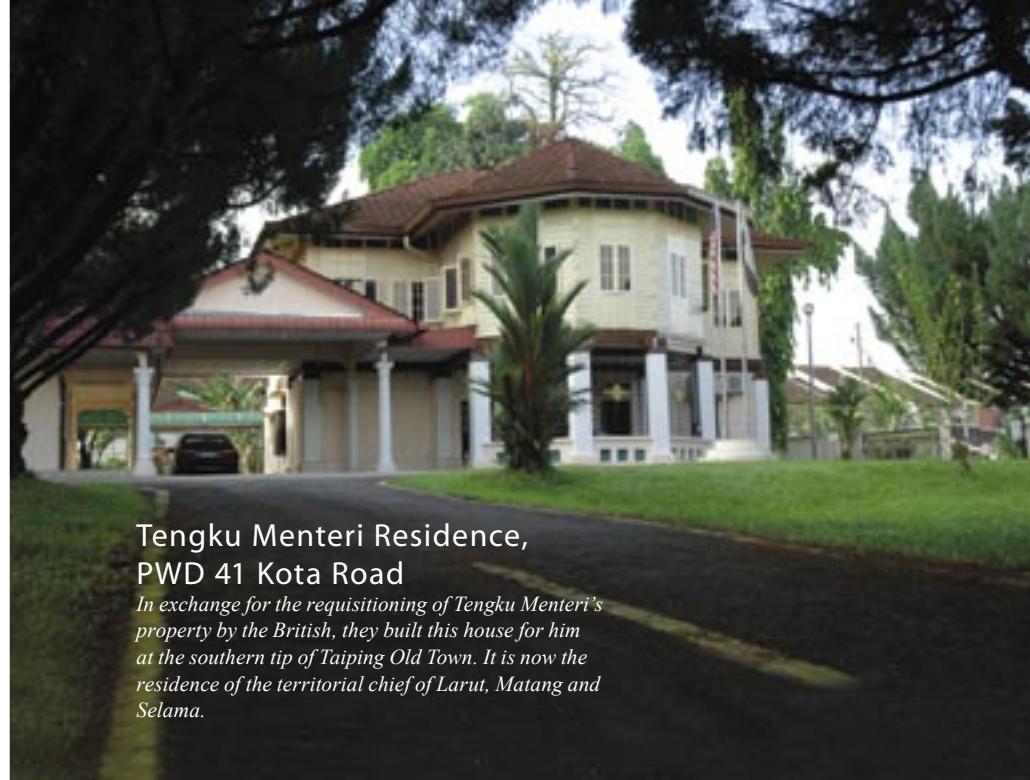
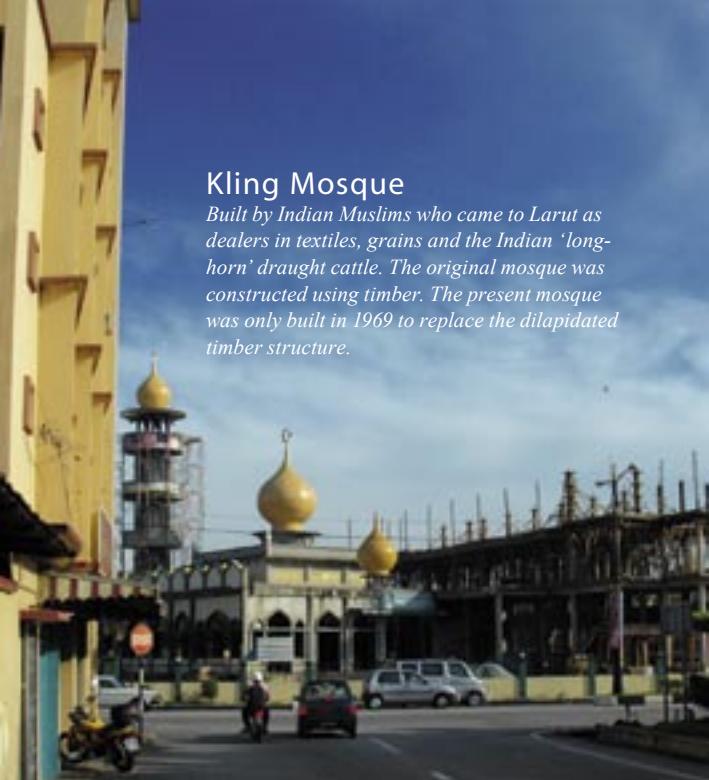
The oldest mosque in Taiping, with an intriguing six-sided facade built of brick. It was built by the family of the Tengku Menteri in 1897 as the main mosque. The mosque with its graveyards bears testimony to the Malay involvement in the early development of Taiping.





Kling Mosque

Built by Indian Muslims who came to Larut as dealers in textiles, grains and the Indian 'long-horn' draught cattle. The original mosque was constructed using timber. The present mosque was only built in 1969 to replace the dilapidated timber structure.



Tengku Menteri Residence, PWD 41 Kota Road

In exchange for the requisitioning of Tengku Menteri's property by the British, they built this house for him at the southern tip of Taiping Old Town. It is now the residence of the territorial chief of Larut, Matang and Selama.







▲ Shun-Te Hui-Kuan, 36 Kota Road

This building functions as the association hall of the people from Shun-Te county, Kuang-chow prefecture and most probably founded in 1895.

➢ Tseng Lung Hakka Association, Market Road

Founded around 1887, the Tseng Lung Hui-Kuan is the association of people from the Tseng Ch'eng and Lung-Men counties of Kuang-Chou prefecture in Southern China. Resembling a temple, the building has stood proudly since its construction until today.

▼ Hokkien Association, Kota Road

Founded in the late Ch'ing dynasty, the association comprised of the early settlers who migrated from the Fujian Province in Southern China. The building, which served as the clan house was completed in 1931 on the site that was acquired in 1918.





For the older generation like uncle Chong, Taiping's future remains uncertain.



Spice of India - Thaipusam celebration in Taiping



◀ Lord Subramaniam Hindu temple - 1895

It was originally built at the foot of Bukit Larut before being removed to its present site at Kota Road junction in 1928. It is owned by the Chettiar community.

▼ FMS Indian Association, Main Road

It was first established in 1894 and was officially opened in 1906. Shaik Nunammer Shah was a founder member who donated the building. He was an Apothecary and also a planter from South India. The early presidents were Dr. Mohamad Ghows, Louis Thivy, Kher Singh, Seenivasagam Pillai, Muthukaruppan Chettiar and R. Manacksha. During the Japanese Occupation, Indian freedom fighter Subash Chandra Bose was invited by the local Tamil leader Muthu Ramalingam Pillai to address Indians at the association. The Indian Association was accorded the privilege and honour of being opened by the Sultan of Perak, Sultan Iskandar Shah, in 1925. In March 1946, India's first Prime Minister Jawarhalal Nehru, visited the association.

▼ Sikh Temple

One of the oldest Sikh temples (gurdhvara) in Taiping and the Federated Malay States, it is located along Upper Station Road. It was last renovated in 1971.

Ceylon Association, Station Road

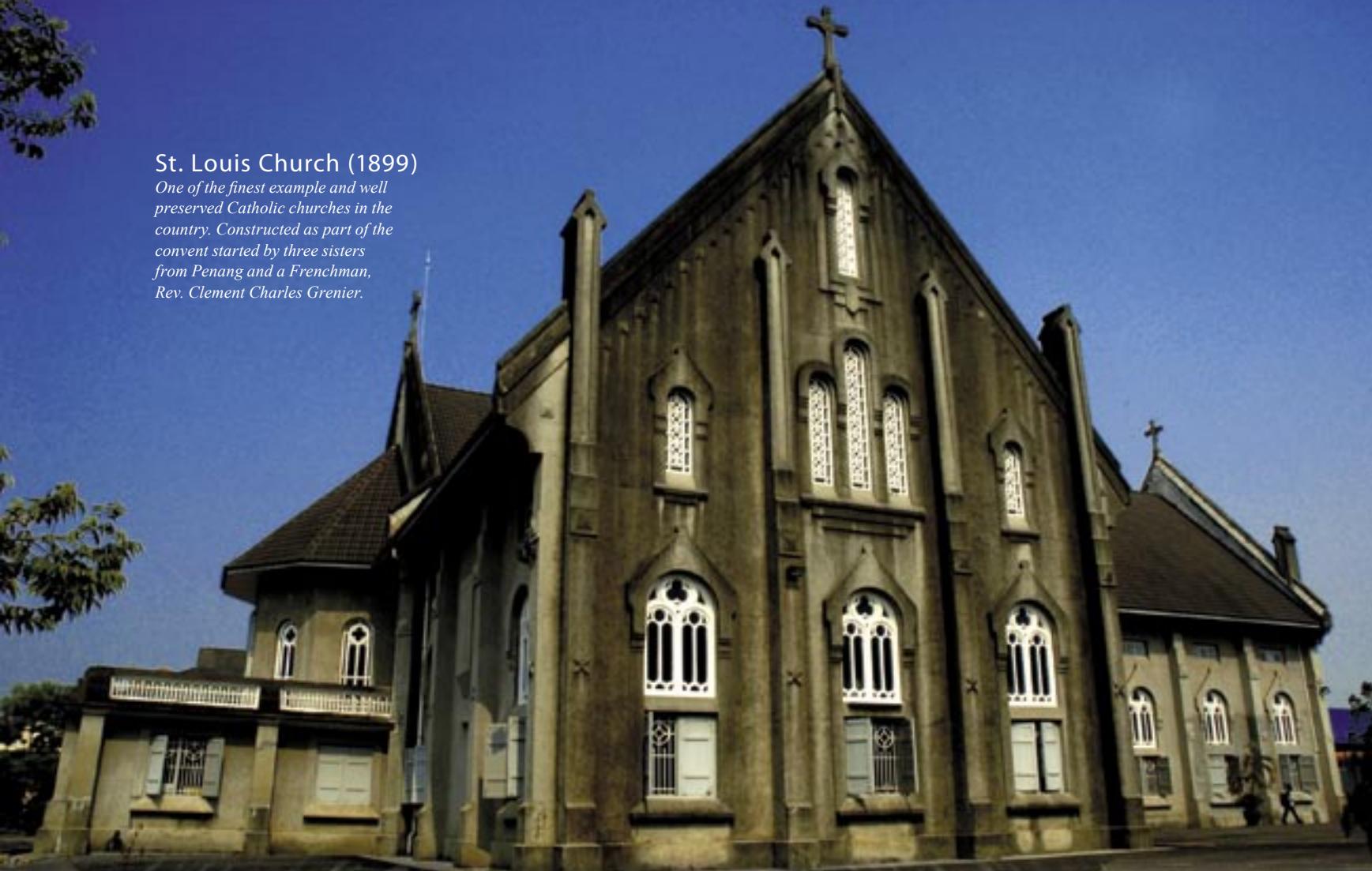
First situated at Barrack Road, it was later moved to its present site at Station Road. The building was built in 1901, two years after 200 people from Ceylon formed the association. They worked in the rail and government departments. The association's first president was A. Wyramuttoo who did much to promote social activities among their community.

N. Eliathamby was the president for several years during the 1930s and was instrumental in completing the present building. He was honoured by the Sultan of Perak for his services during the floods of Kuala Kangsar in 1926.



St. Louis Church (1899)

One of the finest example and well preserved Catholic churches in the country. Constructed as part of the convent started by three sisters from Penang and a Frenchman, Rev. Clement Charles Grenier.





“The town itself is one of the most picturesque in Malaya. Its public offices are handsome and contain a fine State Council Chamber. The road from the railway station, a quarter of a mile down which is the rest house, is the boundary between the native and the English parts of the town. To the north lies the English quarter”.

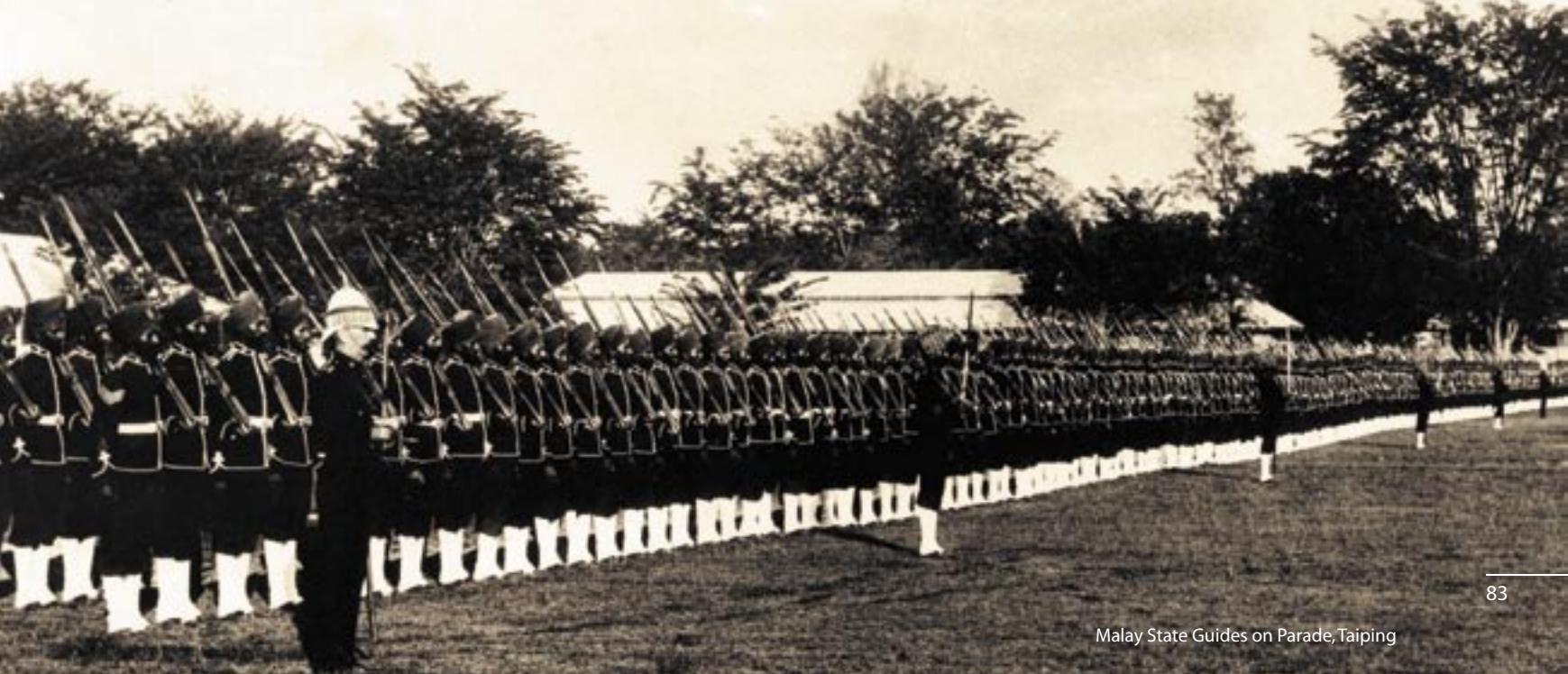
Cuthbert Woodville Harrison,
An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States, 1911

Taiping British Quarters

It must be said that the British was instrumental for the development of Taiping as a city. Although tin mines and the Old Town were the economic generators for the city, it was the British who laid down a solid foundation for Taiping's infrastructure and administration, bringing order to an otherwise chaotic and haphazardly laid city. Road, water supply, sanitation, open spaces and transportation systems were planned as well as ensuring peace and security to make Taiping a safe city. Once a town ravaged by clan wars, Taiping was transformed into a city of 'everlasting peace'.

Separated from the hustle and bustle of the Old Town, the British built their own enclave, the nerve centre of the city and the centre of administration for Taiping. Historically, they adopted this enclave as their centre because of its strategic location in relation to the tin mines and the historic Old Town occupied by the miners. Controlling the two highest vantage points, Bukit Jelutong (where the District Officer's residence now stands) and Fort Carnarvon, they could easily monitor the situation of the warring Gee Hin and Hai San clans.

In the early 1880s, this enclave functioned more as the military headquarters for the British with army camps and barracks dotting the open plain. Later, as peace returned to Taiping and the city grew in importance as Perak's state capital, it became the main administrative and civic centre with a museum, clubhouse and public open spaces. Social facilities included churches, post and telegraph offices together with a guest house along Station Road where the first railway station was located.





Administration

The opening of Taiping's first Public Office in the 1880s marked the development of this area as the administrative centre, not just for Taiping but for the state. Prior to that, a Sanitary Board for Taiping had already been formed in 1874. The increasing crime rate and infighting among miners led to the establishment of the Magistrate Court and Taiping Prison in 1879. The residencies for the British Resident and Assistant British Resident were also built during this period, further underlining the importance of Taiping as the nerve centre for British administration.

◀ Cenotaph

World War 1 memorial written in four languages: Malay, English, Chinese and Sanskrit.



The Esplanade

The Esplanade was originally initiated by Col. Robert S. F. Walker in 1890, who was commandant of the police and Military Force. The first Perak Armed Forces, consisting of Sikhs, Hindus and Pathans, numbered about 110 men who would parade at the Esplanade field under the watchful eyes of his statue that stood above the porch of the Regimental Quarter-Guard House facing the field. After peace returned to Taiping, football and other games were played here. Personalities such as Frank Swettenham and Col. Walker played cricket regularly at the Esplanade field.



Malay States Guides Barracks

The development started with the first Malay States Guides Barracks in 1880s and its Officers' Mess. It was the headquarters of the Perak Armed Police Force. Today, it is the most intact, historically important military complex of its kind in Malaysia. Under Col. Walker, the predominantly Sikh regiment was styled the 1st Perak Sikhs and, with the formation of the Federation of the Malay States in 1896, they served as the Malay States Guides.



Taiping Government Offices

This imposing Victorian-styled block of offices was opened in 1898. The utilization of the Government Offices building, which were well-designed and constructed, commenced in 1895 and provided accommodation for the Council Chamber and Offices for the Secretariat, Treasury, Audit, Education and Forestry Departments. Today, it is the premises of the Larut Matang District Office.







Taiping Prison

Built in 1879, the Taiping prison was the first modern prison in Malaysia and is still being used to this day. The need for such an establishment arose due to the rising rate of crime. Fights between Chinese gangs at the mines was one of the main reasons for the need of a prison. It has remained virtually unchanged except for some slight alterations to suit the needs of today's modern security systems.

The Taiping Prison played an important role in the development of Taiping, as convict labour enabled the public works department to carry out ambitious construction and landscaping projects. The prisoners also printed the annual Perak Government Gazette at the Government Printing Office in the jail. Today, it is the country's best example of a 19th century gaol complex.

> Magistrate Court

Captain Speedy set up the Taiping's Magistrate Court in 1874 and acted as its magistrate. Originally a timber building with an attap roof, the building was later replaced exactly where the current court stands.

> Taiping Public Library

Housed in a whitewashed building with a pillared porch that was constructed in 1882, it was the former premises of the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China, which later became the Standard Chartered Bank. This building was later converted into the public library and is located on Kota Road.





The Secretary to Resident's House, Esplanade

The house was built in the 1875, atop a hill called Jelutong Hill, from which many of the early photographic views of Taiping town were taken. It is presently the District Officer's residence. The rounded porte cochere is a typical feature of many grand Perak houses.



TAIPING - LIFE AND SOUL

The Resident's Residency

The Resident's Residency was established in 1879 as the official residence of the second British resident, Sir Hugh Low. The building made Taiping one of the first towns that had its own official residency for the British resident. The residency was demolished and only the house posts are left to mark the site of the residence in front of a new rest house erected after Merdeka.

Civic Centre

As Taiping flourished, a civic centre (mostly for the British) took shape. This included the first museum, church, hospital, and post and telegraph office. Social facilities such as the Perak Club which was formed in 1881 became the leading social institution. It was the focal point for the residents from all walks of life in Taiping, affording club life and sporting activities like tennis, badminton, swimming, squash, billiards, darts and later, golf. When the club was first formed, its members consisted of government officials, planters and miners but it was an unwritten law that the club was exclusively for the British. Even Australian officers could not enter the club premises! Locals were excluded until 1948 when the "Charcoal King" of Taiping, Lim Huan Lye, was admitted as member of the club.





Perak Museum

The Perak Museum, the first in the country, was officially opened in 1883 at the former government offices. The building was later developed in stages from 1886 to 1903. The idea for a museum originated from Sir Hugh Low. Its first curator built up the much admired natural history and ethnological collections, including a section on aboriginal people. Assembled in the grounds is a stone marking the site of Maharaja Lela's Fort and the statue of Col. Walker. The Taiping Museum contains over 8,000 accumulated artefacts consisting of cultural, natural and archaeological exhibits. The Nature Gallery, Culture Gallery, and Clay and Indigenous People Gallery are among the galleries here.





▼ Post and Telegraph Office

Situated at the far end of Barrack Road, this was the first post office in the Federated Malay States. Built in 1884, it features buttresses on its walls. In 1900 it was converted into a concrete building. Mail from Taiping was carried by a relay of runners (dak) and ponies.



► Town Rest House, Station Road

Built in 1894, ideally situated near the First Railway, which was then on the grounds of the King Edward VII School at Station Road for the use of English officers. It retains its original design, and is still a rest house today, known as Lagenda Hotel but with updated modern facilities. It is maintained by the Majlis Perbandaran Taiping.

► All Saints' Church

Founded in 1886, this was the first Anglican Church in the Federated Malay States. The timber building was designed by G. A. Lefroy on a site donated by W. V. Drummond, a planter from Shanghai. The churchyard contains the graves of early British settlers, most of whom succumbed to malaria. By 1898, according to one description, the graveyard was already "much besprinkled with the tombstones of many a young man stricken down in the heyday of youth, or British official who, after spending the best years of his life in the service of the State, has failed to gain his pension, and now lies buried here".

▼ The New Club

Founded in 1881, it was originally known as the Perak Club. When it was introduced, a large proportion of its membership comprised military personnel and Eurasians until the civil servants decided to establish a more accessible club called the New Club in 1894.

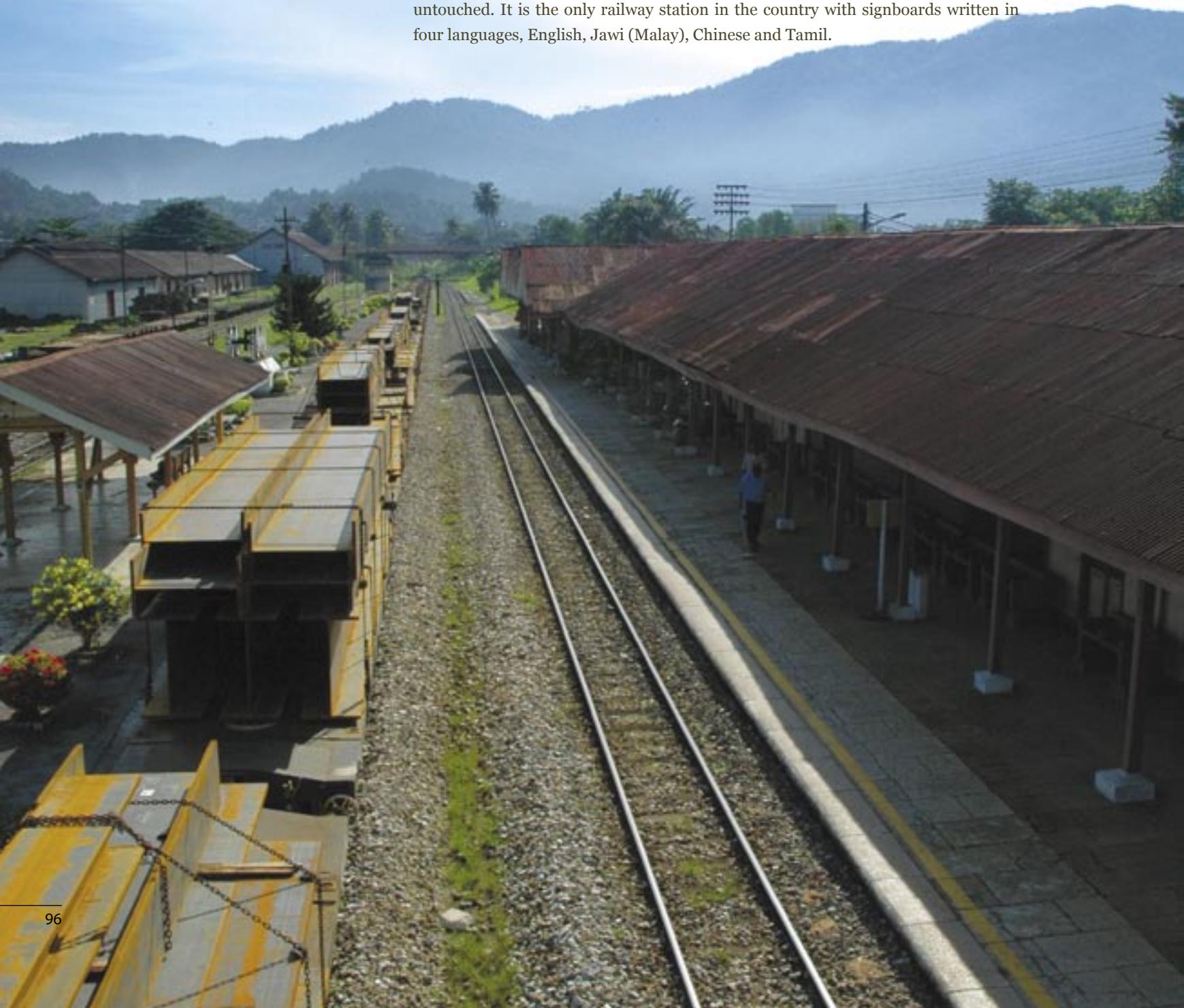


New Club, 1890s





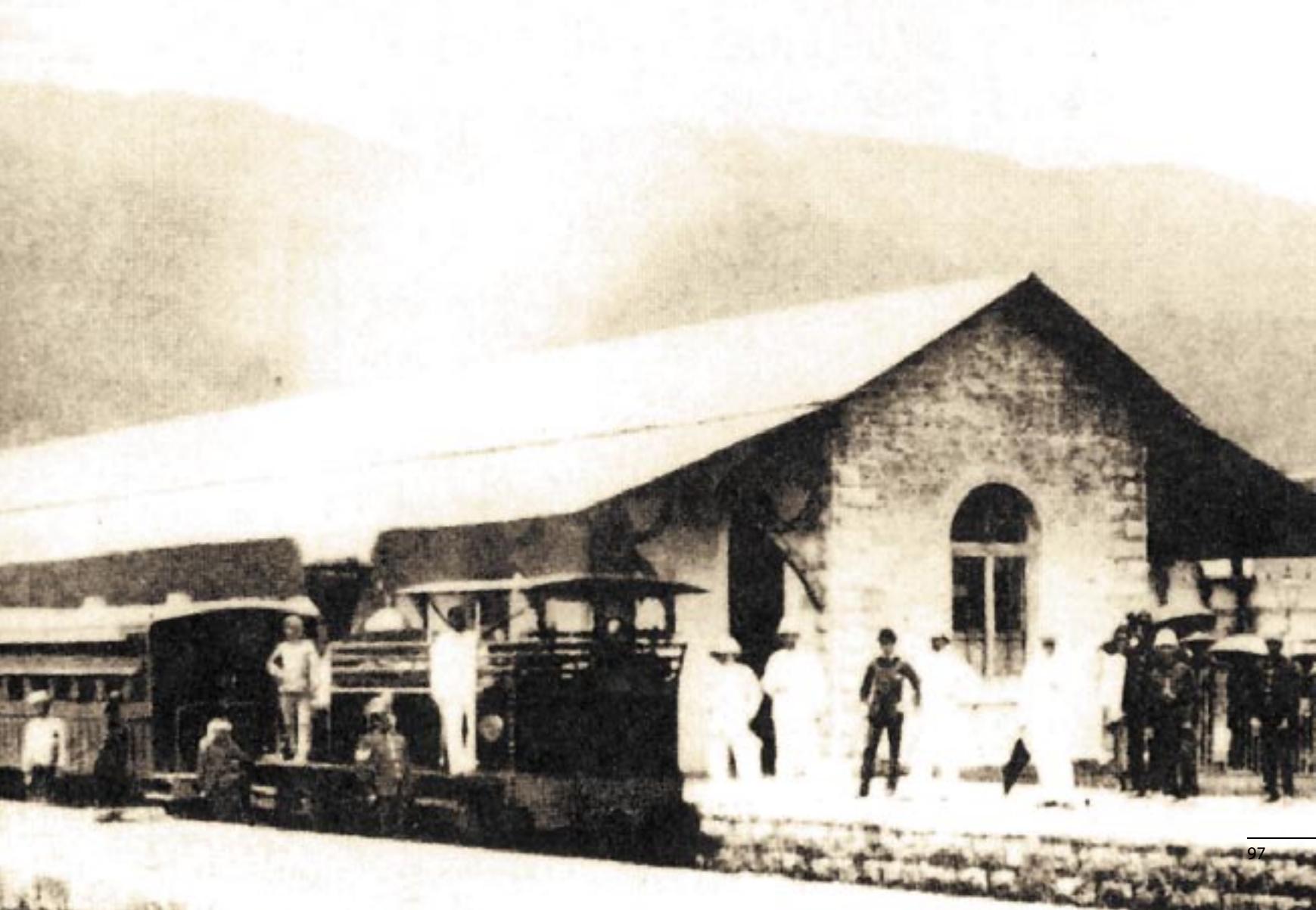
The development of the railway track changed Taiping drastically, in terms of its economy and accessibility, as well as the ethnic composition of its population. But, as road transport improved and tin mining around Taiping diminished, the Taiping-Port Weld line was eventually closed and was later removed in the mid 1980s. The Taiping Railway Station is now a Chinese coffee shop while the platforms have been converted to roads. Only a small board that reads 'PORT WELD' is left untouched. It is the only railway station in the country with signboards written in four languages, English, Jawi (Malay), Chinese and Tamil.

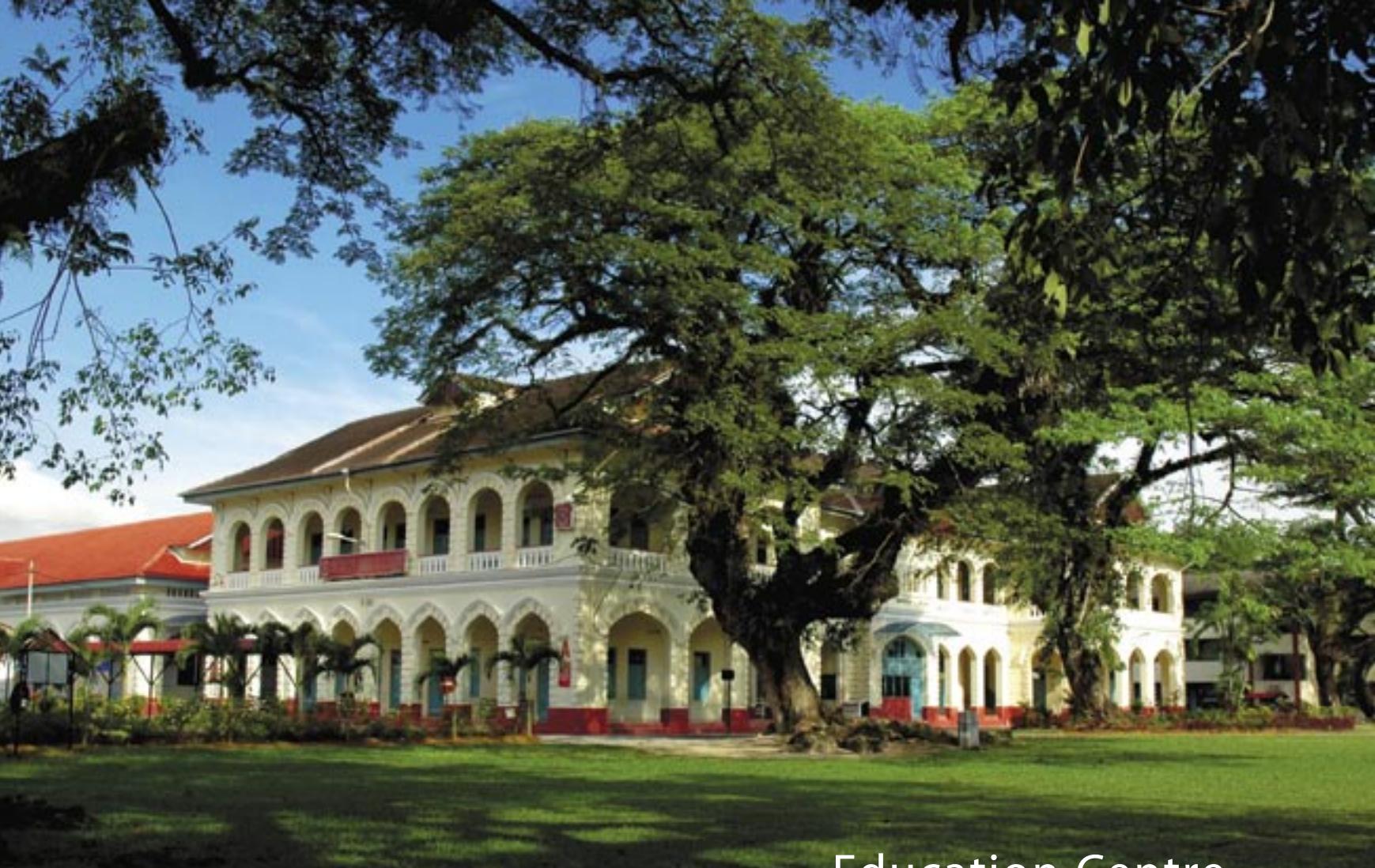




The Railway Station (Taiping-Port Weld)

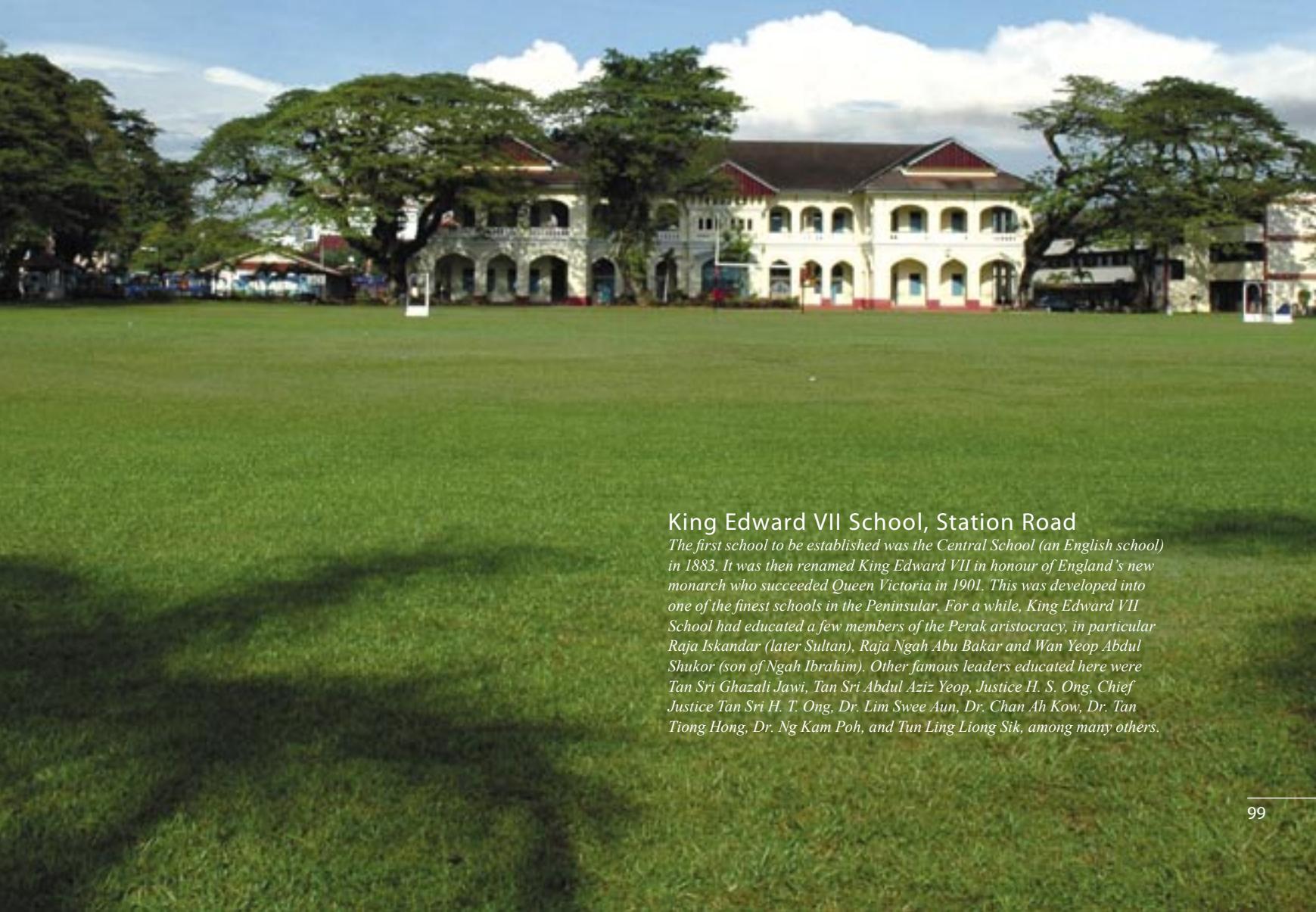
Before 1885, elephants were used to transport tin to Penang on a two to three days' journey through jungle paths. It changed soon after the completion of the Taiping-Port Weld railway track which was opened on 1st June that year, 60 years after the opening of the Stockton-Darlington line, England's first track. The first station was located in the heart of the British Quarters, where the King Edward VII School now stands. A steam locomotive, made by Ransome and Rapier England in 1881, which bore the plate "No. 1" officiated the journey, running in an almost straight line from the port to the Taiping terminus, with two intermediate stations at Matang and Simpang. In the 1890s or early 1900s, Taiping's station was relocated when the line was extended to Ipoh and Butterworth. The station still stands to this day.





Education Centre

Many of Malaysia's leaders were groomed here as Taiping was also the education centre for the Malay States. Here, British education became famous where the King Edward VII School (1883), Treacher Girls' School (1889) and St. George's Institution (1915) were among the first schools that formed the foundation of our education system. The British also supported other schools such as the Matang Malay School (1900) and the Young Men Hindu Association Tamil School (1903).



King Edward VII School, Station Road

The first school to be established was the Central School (an English school) in 1883. It was then renamed King Edward VII in honour of England's new monarch who succeeded Queen Victoria in 1901. This was developed into one of the finest schools in the Peninsular. For a while, King Edward VII School had educated a few members of the Perak aristocracy, in particular Raja Iskandar (later Sultan), Raja Ngah Abu Bakar and Wan Yeop Abdul Shukor (son of Ngah Ibrahim). Other famous leaders educated here were Tan Sri Ghazali Jawi, Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Yeop, Justice H. S. Ong, Chief Justice Tan Sri H. T. Ong, Dr. Lim Swee Aun, Dr. Chan Ah Kow, Dr. Tan Tiong Hong, Dr. Ng Kam Poh, and Tun Ling Liong Sik, among many others.



< St. George's Institution

A Catholic boys' school established in 1915, the original building was extended with a wing on each side 13 years later.

▼ Treacher Girls' School

The second school to be opened in Taiping, founded by three sisters from a convent in Penang. The government gave substantial support to this school and one of the many persons who took a deep interest in the school was Mrs. William Hood Treacher, wife of the then British Resident in Perak. To perpetuate her memory, the school was named in her honour in 1901.





The Post-Merdeka development in the British Quarters seems to be centred towards providing better administration and good governance for the city. Many new Government offices were erected including the Taiping Municipal Council, the Police Headquarters, JKR, Telekom, Lembaga Air Perak and many others continuing the pattern set by the British.







The Nest

The private bungalow was originally built for a Singaporean family, but was taken over by the American Mission. It is situated on a ridge just below 'The Box' and was always fully utilised by numerous members of the mission.

Taiping Maxwell Hill (Bukit Larut)

The lush greenery of Bukit Larut serves as a backdrop to Taiping, and is a holiday resort and natural forest reserve for the Larut District. As early as 1884, the British had already established a hill retreat at the peak of the hill, building bungalows for their officers, most of which are still preserved until today. Rising 1,035 m above sea level, the hill is still richly covered with tropical rainforest. It is also one of the oldest and smallest hill resorts in the country. It was important to the development of Taiping as it drew visitors from other British colonies.

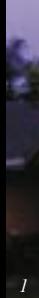
Not accessible in those days by any form of vehicle, ladies were normally carried up in chairs through its six-foot pathway. Along the way to the top of the hill to the Gunung Hijau Rest House, hill stations were built.





Its cool temperature made vegetable planting possible, and also as a grazing ground for the government's herd of cattle that was bred for the production of dairy products. Experiments were carried out during the British era to introduce tea planting at 656 m above sea level but it was abandoned after the successful planting of tea in the Cameron Highlands. Since Merdeka, little has changed at the hill stations. Although the bungalows have been poorly maintained over the years, they, nonetheless remain as a nostalgic reminder of Taiping's golden era.





1

< The Box

The private residence of the British Resident of Perak, it stood on a hilltop 1,242 m above sea level linked by a path that stretched eight miles long from the foot of the hill. The Resident was officially stationed at Taiping between 1876 and 1941.



2



3

< The Cottage

The Resident-General's private residence, situated on Caulfield's Hill, is at an elevation of 1,376 m above sea level. It was built of stone and rubble quarried from the site in 1884, before the completion of the Port Weld railway.



4



5

< The Federal Bungalow

It was built after 1905 on a site just below 'The Hut', consists of two discrete sets of quarters which were connected by a covered way. As per its name, it was used by the officers of the federal establishment.



6

The Speedy Resthouse >

Built at an elevation of 1,113 m from the sea level, this bungalow was used as the private resthouse for Captain Speedy, the First Assistant British Resident for Perak.





The Burmese Pool

A natural swimming pool at the foot of Maxwell Hill with clear streams and waterfalls. In 1870, it became the first recreation area in Malaya. A picnic spot for the city folks, located in the natural forest thus offering close contact with nature at only minutes away from the city centre. It remains one of the most popular recreational destinations in Taiping.





Driving along this straight eight-mile-long road from Kuala Sepetang to Taiping, one can only imagine the excitement of the passengers on board the first passenger train on

12th February 1885. This is the route that has drastically changed Malaysian landscape, the same route taken by thousands of Indian and Ceylonese that migrated to Taiping.





Taiping Port Weld (Kuala Sepetang)

Once a busy port, Port Weld served steamers and vessels from Penang, and even played an important link in the export of tin to Europe and the United States. Opened in 1877 as the gateway for cargo ships following the development of the Taiping-Port Weld railway track during the British era, it was also the port of entry for Chinese miners from Penang and also Indians who worked in the rubber sector in 1900.

Before Port Weld, Teluk Kertang was an important port for the Larut District, exporting tin, coffee and sugarcane mainly to the Straits Settlement in Penang. Ngah Ibrahim who resided in Matang, monitored the transportation of tin, using elephants, from Klian Pauh and Teluk Kertang until the 1870s.

As tin mining ceased in the Larut District, Port Weld became neglected. In 1902, it received a further setback when the Taiping-Prai line opened. By 1920, Port Weld was no longer a tin-exporting port. Instead, rubber replaced tin as the main export commodity. Port Weld, now known as Kuala Sepetang is just a small township where fishing and charcoal manufacturing struggle to keep it alive.





The railway station has long since been replaced by fishing godowns, while the port serves mainly fishing boats and is occasionally visited by passing tourists. A signboard which reads 'PORT WELD' is the only reminder of its historic past. The town grew in an ad hoc fashion, meeting the requirements of a simple lifestyle of the Chinese community that forms 90 per cent of the population.

Kuala Sepetang Mangrove Forest

Sanctuary for 150 species of birds, the Kuala Sepetang mangrove forest is a paradise for wildlife from monkeys, otters, wild boars, snakes, and crabs, to the occasional crocodile, where several species of mangrove trees such as Aricenia and Rhizophora grow naturally along the coastal area as well as Bakau Minyak and Bakau Karap trees, used in the local charcoal industry.

Part of the Matang mangrove swamp forest, it is the largest in Peninsular Malaysia. In fact, the whole of this forest reserve is internationally renowned as the best managed sustainable mangrove forest in Malaysia and among the best worldwide. It is also recognised as an outstanding conservation management programme for the rich diversity of its wildlife that thrives throughout the mangrove and mudflat ecosystems.

Mangrove swamp forests are essential for sustaining the coastal ecosystem because of their role in protecting the environment by preventing soil erosion while providing sanctuary for animals and even breeding ground for marine aquatic fauna and a renewable source of timber production.

The forest is also an ideal recreational area for the public to enjoy the beauty of the mangrove forest. Since the forest floor is too muddy to walk on, walkways are constructed 1.5 m above the wetlands allowing visitors to fully experience the environment in a swamp. Chalets are available for tourists to spend the night in the Kuala Sepetang forest mangrove.





TAIPING - LIFE AND SOUL





Taiping's 'life and soul' makes the city unique, when compared to other cities of Malaysia. The harmonious blend of its scenic beauty and historic buildings are the backbone to Taiping's future. As reflected in the Development Plan of Taiping (Structure Plan and the Local Plan of Taiping), the city is expected to grow as a tourist attraction, carrying the title of 'historic city'. Irrespective of the future development of Taiping, conservation, preservation, reconstruction, upgrading and new development should be aimed at enhancing the city's strength and character, without losing its historical past.

The essence of Taiping as a sustainable city lies in the quality of the environment, building, traffic and the level of pollution. It is vital to identify the elements and management strategy to strike a balance between physical development and conservation of its environment. Town planning in Taiping needs to be reinvented and to be more holistic so that the image of a 'garden city' can be strengthened and its fragile heritage protected.



Bring back the trees!

Spouting Angsana trees once sheltered Taiping town, creating a consistent, high quality foreground from the motorist's perspective and established a sense of separation between the street's traffic lanes and pedestrian zone. Shades from trees enhanced pedestrian comfort without obscuring the visibility of storefronts. Thus, the planting of more trees will do the city no harm but will only strengthen its character as a well planned garden city. The reintroduction of trees will probably resolve the problems of building heights (that have already destroyed most of its street character) as a unifying element along its major roads.





Conserving Taiping's Character

Taiping's town centre should remain a competitive location for private investment. Only with a proper mechanism in place can the city's old character be conserved. The streets, buildings, natural elements, and the people are part of the life and soul of Taiping. A more comprehensive approach is needed, one that involves the public and private sectors, NGOs and the general public so that the value of Taiping's heritage is well understood. **Education is the key issue here.**



Taiping's treasure chest

➤ A History Lesson.....

Students at Klian Pauh Secondary School, pulling the carriage that once 'Romed' the streets of Taiping



Urban design plays an important part in maintaining creature comforts and enhancing the city's fabric. Pedestrian linkages, green networks and attention to detail will help create an urban connection and continuity if Taiping is to succeed as a tourist destination. Urban design and regeneration should be tackled at the macro and micro levels and not on an ad hoc or piecemeal approach. The overall street character should be viewed as more important than that of individual buildings, the community's interest above that of the individual's.



Conservation & Preservation of Built Heritage

The Taiping Municipal Council (MPT) has identified 86 private buildings and 34 public buildings that are considered historical buildings that need to be preserved. Guidelines for heritage conservation for the city are already in place. Taiping's future growth is zoned under conservation, intermediate, and development zones. An incentive scheme was introduced to encourage private owners of the heritage buildings to value, conserve and preserve the buildings. This includes:

a) *Planning Application*

- i. *One Stop Approval - layout approval will be given within a month.*
- ii. *Exclusion of planning fee.*
- iii. *Priority in infrastructure development - pedestrian walk, shaded trees, street lamps, signboards, etc.*
- iv. *Allowing the building to be used to create income - from housing to business.*
- v. *Free transfer of development rights to his or her other property under Taiping's municipality.*

b) *Financial*

- i. *Exclusion of maintenance fees, e.g. maintenance progress, drains, roads, etc.*
- ii. *Paint and signage subsidy to ensure colour and design uniformity.*





ARCHITECTURE



Conservation of Natural Heritage

A photograph looking up into a dense forest canopy. The scene is dominated by the dark, silhouetted branches of large trees, with bright green fern fronds and broad leaves visible where the canopy is more open. The sky is a clear, pale blue with a few wispy white clouds. The overall atmosphere is one of a lush, undisturbed natural environment.





Taiping was planned as a city in an idyllic environmental setting – lakes, hills and waterfalls all joined to the sea by the Taiping-Port Weld railway line. The Taiping Lake Gardens, Bukit Larut Hill Station and matured trees within the city should be regarded as the city's natural heritage, to be preserved and protected. These are important elements of the city that create a balanced ecosystem and better living environment for the city's inhabitants. The mangrove swamp in Kuala Sepetang as such is significant not just for Taiping but also in the greater national context of conserving Malaysia's diverse flora and fauna.

Which way do we turn?



Many questions have been raised about the future development of Taiping. Only a handful of developers will agree that Taiping is a gold mine for economic investment. Taiping is dubbed as a 'city for pensioners' along with other less than complimentary connotations. On a more positive note, Taiping is attractive and appealing to older generations and families looking for quiet settings and a low pollution index to settle down in. Any future development should take this into account, its historical values as well as the environmental aspects.

Taiping needs a framework for guiding development that will match what its people expect of a truly historic city. The future of Taiping depends on a new relationship being created among all parties involved in its development and conservation. There is much common ground which in the past has often been ignored. Recognising that fact is a prelude to identifying achievable goals and avoiding the prodigious waste of time and effort on all sides in resolving development issues. Everyone has their own particular role to play in this matter - be it politicians, local authorities, planners, architects, conservationists, businessmen or the general public. There are plenty of initiatives at different levels but making the most of them depends on translating history and abstract concepts like land use, transportation, economic development and preservation into a visual language which is readily conceivable and provides a vehicle for imagining the future. This is where civic design comes in.

Perhaps the Local Plans that are the blueprint for the future of our cities should be the reflection of this cooperative approach. The Local Plan should be more 'site specific' in recommending areas of development and should be based on the city's true character. A city like Taiping cannot be simplified into a mere spatial and physical analysis without understanding the spiritual essence of the city's history and its unique and varied influences. Surely its 'cendol' stalls, old barber shops, graveyards and the old shopping arcades are just as important as its other historical buildings. Preservation and conservation is meaningless if it is only aimed at maintaining structures but fails in sustaining the character and essence of a community.

Zoning the British Quarters for a general development zone would spell the self-destruction of the city. Though it makes sense spatially, it will surely destroy the country-like setting and the intimacy created by the British, the backbone of Taiping's character. A more specific development such as for tourism and cultural development and a more sensitive strategy can help preserve and restore the British Quarters into its original state. Perhaps a new development area should be established outside the city's historic zone so that its built heritage, its street character can be fully conserved and protected. Landscaping and urban designs proposed in the Local Plan should respect Taiping's history and should take an all-embracing approach and a sense of 'good taste', something once understood and mastered by the British in creating the city. Plastic trees and old lorry tyres are definitely not what the British had in mind.

Selective and sustainable tourism is probably the best answer to Taiping's dilemma. The city can move proudly into the future and at the same time preserve its history and heritage as an intrinsic part of a city's 'life and soul'!! Taiping has already found a label as a 'historic city', but the repackaging of the city's tourism products has to be done to benefit the masses, and not a select few. The proposal of a gigantic hill resort on Bukit Larut, for example, will only deprive the old town from the tourists that are badly needed. Better roads and cable cars will not only mark the end of Bukit Larut that we know today but also the end of small hotel operators and traditional small businesses in the city.

Does Taiping need another dose of those so called 'progressive development'?

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