A History of
KUALA LUMPUR
1856-1939

J. M. GULLICK


PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

A HISTORY OF KUALA LUMPUR 1857–1939

By
J. M. Gullick

MBRAS
THE MALAYSIAN BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY
MBRAS Monograph No. 29

Published by:

The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
4-B (2nd floor) Jalan Kemuja, Bangsar
59000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Email: mbrasmsb@gmail.com
Website: mbras.org.my

ISBN 978-967-9948-63-9

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Gullick, J. M., (John Michael), 1916-2012
A HISTORY OF KUALA LUMPUR 1857-1939 / By J. M. Gullick.
(MBRAS Monograph ; No. 29)
Includes index
Bibliography: pages 246-257
ISBN 978-967-9948-63-9
1. Kuala Lumpur--History--1857-1939. 2. Kuala Lumpur--Economic conditions--1857-1939. I. Title. II. Series.
959.5116

Printed by:
Gerakbudaya
No. 2, Jalan Bukit 11/2
46200 Petaling Jaya
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

CONTENTS

List of Figures

List of Plates

(following p. 100)

16. Top: Lunch party at Thambusamy Pillai's house in late 1890s — 38 guests.
Bottom: Flooded Padang in 1902.

17. Top: The Padang and Government Offices c. 1902.
Bottom: The area of the Padang c. 1884.

18. Top: Petaling Street c. 1900.
Bottom: The second railway station in 1892.

19. Top: Shophouse occupied by the Selangor Chinese Chamber of Commerce.
Bottom: The third railway station (1911).

20. Top: The river junction (kuala) and the Jamek mosque (1909).
Bottom: Lake Gardens bridge.

21. Top: The Lake Gardens with Sydney Lake.
Bottom: Loke Hall, now the PAM (Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia) building.

22. Top: Offices of the Straits Trading Company c. 1900.
Bottom: Chow Kit building, 1905.

23. Top: Malay Mall offices in Java Street.
Bottom: The European (later Bungsar) hospital, 1904.

24. Top: Town house, in Pudu Road, of Yap Kwan Seng.
Bottom: Laying anti-malarial drains.

25. Top: The FMS Hotel, formerly Selangor Club members' chambers.
Bottom: Selangor Turf Club meeting.

26. Top: Lady in her carriage, early 1900s.
Bottom: Premises of Zacharias & Co. in Old Market Square.

27. Top: FMS rulers in Singapore in 1890.
Bottom: Rulers and officials at the 1903 Durbar.

28. Top: St John's Institution.
Bottom: Java Street during the 1926 floods.

29. Top: Bullock cart.
Bottom: FMS Railway omnibus.

30. Top: Football match on the Padang in July 1903.
Bottom: Tree-lined approach to the Lake Club c. 1920.

31. Top: Old Market Square in the 1920s.
Bottom: Street scene with rickshaws, 1925.

32. 20th century architectural styles — 30 Jalan Hang Kasturi, OCBC and Oriental buildings.

Historic photographs

The first recorded visit to Selangor of a professional photographer was in June 1884, and it is unlikely that any extant photographs (although some are described as of 1882) were taken before that. Singapore photographers made occasional visits to Kuala Lumpur in the later 1880s; the first permanent studios were established in the 1890s. With two exceptions (Nos. 19, Bottom, and 32) the photographs reproduced as plates were taken before 1930. General publication of photographs really began around the turn of the century with illustrated books such as Rathborne (1898), Swettenham (1906) and Wright and Cartwright (1908); the last of these is particularly lavishly illustrated, both with contemporary photographs and those taken in the previous twenty years. Reference libraries, such as that of the Colonial Office (now merged in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library at Milton Keynes), the Royal Empire (now Commonwealth) Society (now held at the University Library at Cambridge) and the Arkib Negara Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur have accumulated from various sources large collections. These sources of the Plates are gratefully acknowledged.

Abbreviations

ADO	Assistant District Officer
AR	Annual Report by the Resident (if followed by a state name) or by a departmental head (indicated by the name of the department), for the year shown
BWM	Badan Warisan Malaysia (Heritage of Malaysia Trust)
Cmd	Command Paper, i.e. official paper printed by command for submission to the House of Commons (or House of Lords) and assigned a sessional serial number for identification
CO	Colonial Office
DO	District Officer
FMS	Federated Malay States (Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang)
FMSGG	*FMS Gazette*
FMSVF	FMS Volunteer Force
IMR	Institute for Medical Research
JMBRAS	*Journal of the Malayan/Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JSEAS	*Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*
KL	Kuala Lumpur
KMT	Kuo Min Tang
LegCo	Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements
MBRAS	Malayan/Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (1878–1922, SBRAS (Straits Branch))
MSG	Malay States Guides
OAG	Officer Administering the Government (acting Governor)
PWD	Public Works Department
SB	Sanitary Board
SGG	*Selangor Government Gazette*
Sel. Sec.	Selangor [Government] Secretariat file, followed by the serial and annual identifying number and year, e.g. Sel. Sel. 1461/06 of 1906
SJ	*Selangor Journal*
SMO	State Medical [and Health] Officer, head of state department

SS	Straits Settlements (Crown Colony Singapore, Penang and Malacca)
SSD	Straits Settlements Despatch (official report by letter), from the Governor Straits Settlements to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, followed by the date. Now held at the Public Records Office; the main series for SS despatches is numbered CO273 [and volume number]

Preface

A paper entitled 'Kuala Lumpur 1880–1895' was published in the journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (*JMBRAS*, 28(4)) in 1955, and reprinted as a separate volume by Badan Warisan Malaysia (Heritage of Malaysia Trust) in 1988. It was a first attempt to recount the history of Kuala Lumpur over a short but formative period, in which the rough and ready conditions of mere survival in an inland mining centre changed to the more complex and comfortable environment of a state administrative capital under colonial protectorate rule. It drew mainly on Chinese and British colonial records, which had been used for the first time in completing Middlebrook's biography of Yap Ah Loy (*JMBRAS*, 24(2) and Reprint No. 9).

The 1955 paper is now out of print and the present monograph has been written to replace it, with coverage over a much longer period of time, including a detailed account of the period up to 1914, in which, as the federal capital, Kuala Lumpur continued to expand and develop. This study draws on sources whose existence was unknown in 1955, such as the journals of F. A. Swettenham and of Bloomfield Douglas, and takes account of a considerable amount of historical work on Kuala Lumpur which has been published since 1955. However, as with the 1955 paper, the main themes of the present study are the physical 'built environment' of an expanding town and the changing composition, livelihood and lifestyle of its ethnic communities. The records of the Selangor Government and the contemporary issues of the *Malay Mail*, founded in 1896, together with the memoirs of people who lived in Kuala Lumpur at the time, provide much of the source material for a history which extends to the outbreak of the Second World War, in 1939. The notes to the text and the bibliography indicate the exceptionally plentiful and varied sources available. The decision to end at 1939 is, in part, prompted by a realization that to do justice to the period from 1939 to some recent date would require a second volume. There is also something to be said for allowing the past within living memory to fade into perspective before trying to tell its story as considered history.

Another important factor in any new history of Kuala Lumpur in the first half of this century is the interest and expertise in its architecture and environmental history, which has grown in recent years, together with an objective of preserving, so far as may be, some of the best and most representative buildings erected in that period. Visitors to Kuala Lumpur are made welcome, and there is a great deal for them to see. In this movement, the Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia and the Badan Warisan Malaysia, together with the Bandaraya (City Hall), have played a leading part. The author of the present work acknowledges most gratefully the

generous help, especially in making available the results of local research in Kuala Lumpur, and the active support given to him by these bodies (and by the Society's officers). The notes to the text contain more specific acknowledgements of his indebtedness in this respect.

The present study, in Part 2, encompasses the same subjects as the original 1955 study, in dealing with Kuala Lumpur history in the years 1880–95. It has, however, been decided to divide the entire monograph into four chronological sections, each divided into chapters dealing with themes such as commerce, society, buildings, etc. within the limits of the period. Not all the material which appeared in the 1955 paper has been retained, partly to make space for the history of the later periods. Since 1955, a number of books have been published on the tin and plantation industries of Selangor. The background account of these industries, which affected Kuala Lumpur indirectly but did not actually operate within town limits, has been reduced. There are no longer appendices containing lengthy extracts from books, some of which have been reprinted since 1955 and so have become more readily accessible. On the other hand, the new text is fully annotated, giving to the reader immediate details of sources to which he may turn, if he wishes, for the primary sources or relevant extensions of the text. It is hoped that it may, in this fashion, serve as an introduction and perhaps a guide to wider reading and study. There is a great deal more yet to be discovered and published on the history of Kuala Lumpur.

J. M. Gullick

Acknowledgements

Formal permission to reproduce material has been received, and is gratefully acknowledged as follows:—

(1) Plates 1 (bottom), 2 (bottom), 7 (top), 12 (top) and 16 (bottom) are reproduced, by permission of the Syndics of the Cambridge University Library, from photographs which are held in the RCS/BAM collection of the Library, and are numbered therein BAM 4/11, 4, 12, 15 and 25 respectively.

(2) Articles which were originally published in 1954 in a supplement to the *Malay Mail* entitled 'Fifty Years of Progress 1904–1954', and also short passages from daily and weekly issues of the *Malay Mail* newspaper of various dates are reproduced in Appendix A and the main text respectively of this monograph by permission of the proprietors and the editor of the *Malay Mail*.

The source of every quotation in this monograph, and of figures and plates reproduced by permission, is given in each case by footnote or caption as an acknowledgement of any subsisting rights therein.

On a less formal basis the author gratefully repeats the general acknowledgement in his preface of help and encouragement given to him by the bodies mentioned, adding that he is very much indebted personally to Mr H S Barlow, Mr Chen Voon Fee, Mrs Jennifer Harvey, Miss Ng Ai Wah and Datin Noor Azlina who have given him information and/or commented on his draft. Any errors which the text may contain are however the sole responsibility of the author.

Chapter 1

The Klang Valley

In 1806, Raja Jafar bin Raja Haji relinquished control of the Klang Valley which had been assigned to him by his cousin, Sultan Ibrahim of Selangor, a few years before, and returned to Riau-Lingga, capital of Johor. 'He took with him a box of money, which needed eight people to carry it.'[1] It had been a profitable interlude in Raja Jafar's career, which illustrates the recovery of Selangor from the economic doldrums of the 1790s, and the growing volume and value of its exports of tin.

Although Kuala Lumpur had its origin half a century later, in 1857, there had been Malay settlements in the Klang Valley from much earlier times. Klang town itself had been a political outpost of the Malacca Sultanate of the fifteenth century.[2] When Malacca fell to the Portuguese assault in AD 1511, we lose track of Klang and the Klang Valley until the eighteenth century, when the Bugis settled along the coast (of modern Selangor), but were content to leave Klang under the rule of a Malay chief, To' Engku Klang, with whom their relations were distant and at times strained.[3] However, the export of tin became the mainstay of the Selangor State economy after 1800, and it may be assumed that the Malay settlements along the Klang River in the 1820s had their origin in a recent search for tin in the upper reaches of the valley. There were, in the 1820s, twenty-three named villages along the river, with an estimated total population of 1,500. Eight of these settlements, furthest up the river, were producing tin, and the most important of these, one day's journey from Pahang, was 'Sungei Lumpoor'.[4]

---

1 Raja Ali Haji ibn Ahmad, *Tuhfa al-Nafis*, translated and annotated by V. Matheson [Hooker] and B. W. Andaya as *The Precious Gift*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 215. Jafar had come to Selangor at a time of intense rivalry betveen Bugis and Malay factions at the royal capital of Johor (Riau-Lingga) — 'like crockery in a ship's locker, broken by the tossing of the waves, becoming more jagged daily with the jarring and pounding' (Ibid., p. 201). On his return to Riau in 1806, Raja Jafar became Yam Tuan Muda (Underking) (1806–31). J. M. Gullick (A History of Selangor 1766–1939, MBRAS Monograph No. 28, 1988), deals with the broader context in which the events described in this study occurred.

2 R. O. Winstedt, 'A History of Selangor', *JMBRAS*, 12(3), 1934, p. 1.

3 Ibid., pp. 112–13.

4 J. Anderson, *Political and Commercial Considerations Relative to the Malayan Peninsula, and the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, Penang: Government Press, 1824, p. 199. It has been reprinted in *JMBRAS*, 35(4), with an Introduction by J. S. Bastin,

However, until the mid-nineteenth century the main centres of tin production in Selangor were elsewhere, at Lukut near the coast and so readily accessible, and in Ulu Selangor, where the richest tin ore deposits workable at that time were to be found.

The situation changed, however, when new methods of production were introduced. In the rural Malay mixed economy, tin collecting — it was hardly 'mining' — was an intermittent activity for those seasons when the cultivator, temporarily relieved of work in the fields, could fit it in.[5] Hence, it could not be a continuous operation. Yet, in a country of heavy rainfall any excavation in low ground, where tin ore was covered by a non-productive top stratum of soil, would fill with water almost overnight. Malay methods of recovery of tin ore were mainly washing (*lampan* mining) i.e. sluicing in the bed of a stream, where the problem of flooded workings would not arise. These methods could only reach the uppermost tin strata, and yet the richest deposits were often at depths of up to 20 feet below the surface.

The importation of Chinese labourers, employed throughout the year, greatly increased the production of tin at important mining centres such as Larut (Perak) and Lukut. They dug large pits (*lombong*) and began each working day by baling out the water which had seeped in overnight. By the 1850s, the use of Chinese labour made it possible to reach ore deposits at much greater depths than before. Raja Abdullah bin Raja Jafar, who became ruling chief of the Klang Valley in about 1853, was essentially a businessman, whose brother, Raja Jumaat, was obtaining previously unheard of profits in his district of Lukut.[6]

Raja Abdullah saw the potential of mining by these methods, and decided to send in Chinese miners to work in the upper reaches of the Klang Valley; that initiative led to the establishment of Kuala Lumpur, as will be related in the

---

which explains the context in which it was written. Anderson was an official of the Penang Government, who in 1818 had visited Selangor (and Perak) on missions to negotiate long-term contracts for the purchase of local tin. See p. 6, for the origin of the name 'Kuala Lumpur'; the perplexing feature is that later on, when the town had been founded, there was no identified 'Sungei Lumpoor'.

5 The dry season after the paddy harvest was the preferred time for primitive washing for tin. H. C. Clifford, *Studies in Brown Humanity: Being Scrawls and Smudges in Sepia, White and Yellow*, London: Grant Richards, 1898, p. 4. Apart from small-scale family outings to wash for tin, there were more intensive and large-scale Malay operations in which surface material likely to contain tin ore was pulled down into a channel of fast-flowing water (from a river or reservoir). But that method of washing for tin did not make it possible to mine at a depth below the surface.

6 So too was Long Jafar, the chief of Larut in Perak, but these entrepreneurs' efforts are too remote for retelling here.

next chapter. Before going on to that momentous event, some other geographical features of the Klang Valley and adjacent areas require mention, since they affected the history of Kuala Lumpur.[7] First, the Klang River was by no means an ideal route for boats carrying men and goods between Klang town and the interior. Like many other Malayan rivers, its channel had many twists and turns. The distance by river greatly exceeded that in a direct line, so that progress along it was slow. The bends also tended to obstruct the flow of water in times of heavy rain, causing floods, to which Kuala Lumpur was vulnerable until the channel was satisfactorily straightened in the late 1920s. Moreover, between Damansara village, a few miles upstream from Klang town, and Petaling, a similar distance downstream from Kuala Lumpur, the course of the river was a wide detour to the south. Although the direct distance was not much more than 20 miles, Frank Swettenham and Davidson had to make a three-day boat journey to reach Kuala Lumpur in 1872.[8] After an unsuccessful experiment in road building in the late 1870s, communications with the coast were much improved by building a railway line.

On the other three sides, north, east and south, of the town, higher ground made watersheds, so that there were no through routes by river in those directions. The low hills which divided Kuala Lumpur from Ulu Selangor and Ulu Langat were not a serious barrier to movement on foot, though it was still cheaper for those inland areas to use their rivers running towards the coast as their outlet. In the ebb and flow of the civil war (1867–73), invasion and counter-attack, albeit by small forces, moved north and south without difficulty. Later on, footpaths became 'bridle paths' and cart roads, and then railway lines were built in the 1890s. That final stage in improving communications made Kuala Lumpur, with its railway to Klang, the natural centre of movement between inland Selangor, as an entity, and the ports; this produced important effects on the growth of the rubber industry early in the twentieth century.

The central range, which divides the west and east coast zones of the entire peninsula, separated the upper part of the Klang Valley from the basin of the much larger Pahang River, to the east of the hills. There were passes across the range; in the final stages of the civil war, troops from Pahang came into Selangor

7 In normal Malay linguistic usage, the upstream end of a river valley is called by the river name preceded by Ulu, for example, 'Ulu Selangor'. However, in the Klang Valley, 'Ulu Klang' had a more limited meaning as the name of a small but important village, a centre of Sumatran tin mining. 'Ulu Klang' is therefore reserved for that application, and is not here extended to the larger surrounding area of the Klang Valley.

8 F. A. Swettenham, *Footprints in Malaya*, London: Hutchinson, 1942, p, 20. The boat, presumably not heavily laden on this trip, was propelled by 'rowing and poling'.

and recaptured Kuala Lumpur, and in the 1890s police and troops were sent into Pahang from Selangor to combat the rising in Pahang. By that time, there were winding roads over which a short-lived steam bus service plied. When, however, the time came to extend the railways to the east coast zone, a branch line into Pahang was built, over easier gradients, from a starting point well south of Selangor.

The distribution of the population was another significant factor. Until the turn of the century, the indigenous population, aborigine and Malay, was sparse, and Malay villages were mainly riverine settlements. The Chinese came to mine for tin, and so they tended to congregate where there were workable deposits, or at nodal points, such as Kuala Lumpur, in the communications system. Economic development radically changed the situation. The coastal zone, with its flat lands, attracted Javanese agriculturalists; inland, the Sumatran immigrants followed the lines of the new roads to take up land which had thus become accessible. The rubber estates imported Indian labourers in large numbers. Within the 'Malay' community in the broad sense, there was a variety of cultural traditions, marked by a disposition in each group to live in their own villages, rather than mingle.[9]

The terrain, however, was comparatively uniform. Between the mangrove swamps of the coast and the foothills of the central range lay an expanse of undulating forest land, through which ran a network of rivers and their tributary streams. Much of it was empty country — the expanse of virgin rain forest punctured, here and there, by small clearings created by human settlement.[10]

9 P. J. Wilson, *A Malay Village and Malaysia*, New Haven: HRAF Press, 1967, p. 17f.

10 The modern traveller, arriving by air, sees — as his aircraft makes its final descent — a very different landscape, with buildings, plantations and industrial sites. It is necessary to remind ourselves that these changes — for better or worse — are the cumulative result of little more than a century of human activity.

Chapter 2

A Mining Centre under Attack

In 1857, Raja Abdullah of Klang, with the support of his brother, Raja Jumaat of Lukut, sent eighty-seven Chinese miners from Lukut up the Klang River to open new mines. It would be necessary to supply food and other goods to the miners over a period of, say, six months while they excavated large pits to uncover the ore deposits. To meet these and other initial expenses, the brothers secured an advance of $30,000 from two Malacca Chinese towkays, Chee Yam Chuan and Lim Say Hoe. When the expedition reached the confluence *(kuala* in Malay) of the Gombak and Klang rivers, where the Jamek Mosque now stands in the centre of Kuala Lumpur, the men disembarked from their boats, and after some preliminary prospecting, they began to mine at Ampang, two or three miles from the point of disembarkation. Newly cleared jungle is a fertile breeding ground for malaria-bearing mosquitoes, and within a month only eighteen of the original party of eighty-seven survived. The Malay entrepreneurs, however, were undaunted; export of tin via Klang began two years later, in 1859.[1]

The modest success of the new venture induced two Lukut traders, Hiu Siew and Ah Sze, to move from Lukut and found a small business to supply the miners, in association with a Mandiling trader, Sutan Puasa, who was already trading near Ampang. Their shop consisted of a group of huts sited on the track between the river junction (and point of embarkation) and the mines at Ampang. In time,

---

1 S. M. Middlebrook, 'Yap Ah Loy 1837–1885', *JMBRAS*, 24(2), 1951; reprinted in MBRAS Reprint No. 9, 1989, p. 18. Middlebrook, a Chinese-speaking member of the Malayan Civil Service, for the first time drew on Chinese documents and traditions in writing his biography of Yap Ah Loy. See pp. 104–8 on his sources. This work has become the main source of information on events in the interior of Selangor in the mid-nineteenth century. See also S. A. Carstens, 'From Myth to History: Yap Ah Loy and the Heroic Past of Chinese Malaysians', *JSEAS*, 19(2), 1988. Bloomfield Douglas, in his unpublished diary (1876–82), cited below, and the Selangor Secretariat files now held in the Arkib Negara, are sources not available to Middlebrook which contain much information on Yap Ah Loy during the early colonial period (1876–85).

On Chee Yam Chuan, a prominent Hokkien and a long-term backer of Raja Jumaat, see Khoo Kay Kim, *The Western Malay States: The Effects of Commercial Development on Malay Politics*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972, under index entries 'Chee Yam Chuan'; and Lee Kam Hing and Chow Mun Seong, *Biographical Dictionary of the Chinese in Malaysia*, Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1997, p. 21.

MBRAS
THE MALAYSIAN BRANCH OF
THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Malay ruler controlling the upper Klang Valley began bringing Chinese labourers to mine for tin, and in 1857 Kuala Lumpur took shape as a settlement providing services to the tin miners. In 1895, when Britain's colonial government formed a federation embracing the states of Perak, Pahang, Negri Sembilan and Selangor, it made Kuala Lumpur the federal capital. J. M. Gullick's history of the city is set against this backdrop, but it is far more than an account of colonial administration. The book describes Kuala Lumpur's changing physical, cultural and social setting, and the emergence of new business undertakings, health regulations, and recreational facilities. Drawing on personal memoirs, archival sources and published accounts, it also shows how local residents responded to these changes, showing them to be variously caustic, cynical and blunt in their verdicts, but also deeply engaged. The result is an exceptionally lively book that offers candid assessments of private individuals and of government policies alike.

Dato' John M. Gullick (1916-2012) came to Malaya in September 1945 as a member of the post-war British Military Administration. Following restoration of civilian rule in April 1946, he joined the Malayan Civil Service and remained in the country until 1956. He subsequently worked for the Guthrie group of plantation companies, as a solicitor, and as a university lecturer. He also immersed himself in the study of Malaysian history and wrote numerous books and articles on the subject, many of them published by the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. *A History of Kuala Lumpur, 1856-1939* was first published in 2000, and is reprinted here without editorial changes.

ISBN 978-967-9948-63-9
9 789679 948639

PERDANA LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION
YAYASAN KEPIMPINAN PERDANA