



# **Kuching 1950-1959** **Sir Anthony Foster** **Abell's Era**

— Compiled By HO AH CHON —

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# **KUCHING 1950-1959**

## **SIR ANTHONY ABELL'S ERA**

### **Preface**

Mr. Ho Ah Chon had produced three books before publishing the present one. His three previous books, "Kuching in Pictures 1840-1960", "Sarawak in Pictures 1940-1970" and "Sarawak Historical Events 1963-1973" were pictorial books containing photographs most of which were taken by Mr. Ho over a period of years. These books are useful records of the appearance of Kuching and Sarawak which give people some idea of what the State was like in those days gone by.

In this book Mr. Ho has compiled photographs taken during the period of administration of Sir Anthony Abell, who was Governor of Sarawak from 1950-1959. This book is however different from the others in that beside photographs Mr. Ho Ah Chon has also included articles, descriptions and statements made by Sir Anthony Abell on various occasions taken from newspapers and other sources. These materials are useful for those interested in Sarawak history in so far as they reflect the policies of the colonial administration.

Sir Anthony Abell took over the administration after the tragic death of the second Governor of Sarawak, Sir Duncan Stewart, who was assassinated in Sibü barely a month after his arrival in Sarawak, succeeding Sir Charles Arden Clarke the First Governor, who left to become Governor of Ghana. The cession by Sir Charles Vyner Brooke in 1946 of Sarawak to the British to become a crown colony was opposed by a majority of the Malay community leaders and also many Malays in the Civil service. A hard line taken by the first colonial governor caused a lot of hardship as many had to leave government service when given the option of pledging their loyalty to the Government or resign from the service. A group of young Malays in Sibü plotted to assassinate the Governor. It was tragic that someone new and not responsible for their suffering should die. It was therefore Sir Anthony Abell's formidable task to deal with this critical situation. However due largely to his friendliness more conciliatory approach and personal touch he was able to calm the people and gradually overcome the opposition to the colonial regime and stabilise the situation in the country.

Sir Anthony Abell's tenure of office from 1950-1959 was an unusually long one for a British Colonial Governor. He travelled extensively and got to know the people well and gained their confidence and even the friendship of many. The book portrays the progress made over the nine years of his administration. Improvement in communication, which had always been an obstacle to socio-economic development was amply illustrated by the many photographs of air and sea transportation. Political advancement was evident from the constitutional changes made providing for election to local council and indirect elections through the five divisional councils to the legislature (Council Negeri) and executive (Supreme) Councils. Although Sir Anthony Abell expressed his personal reservation on the wisdom of introduction of party politics when he addressed the 4th Division Advisory Council in Miri in May 1959, he approved the application for registration of the Sarawak United People's Party in June 1959. He did not allow his personal conviction to frustrate the political aspiration of the people. On the contrary he was thinking of the future of the territory under his charge (at that time Sarawak and Brunei of which he was British High Commissioner) and advocating an association of the Borneo territories of Sarawak, Brunei, and British North Borneo (Sabah). That his proposal did not materialise was due to Brunei's reluctance to share her wealth with her poorer neighbours and the vested British commercial interests in Sabah, which are suspicious and afraid of political developments in Sarawak. The proposal for a Borneo Federation was after Sir Anthony's

retirement overshadowed by Tunku Abdul Rahman's proposal for the Federation of Malaysia.

Apart from the many photographs of events and places in Sarawak, the book contains information of great interest historically. In this respect, I would like to refer to two articles (on page 85-89) on Mr. J.C.H. Bacsoft, who is known to very few people today, and yet his death was a great loss to Sarawak. John Bacsoft was one of the few officers of the Rajah Brooke regime who rose after many years' service in the outstation to become Financial Secretary and eventually Chief Secretary in May 1958. He knew the people of Sarawak well and was a friendly, generous man, ready to accept criticism and advice. His appointment as Chief Secretary held for us, members in the Supreme Council promises of further constitutional progress. He was keen to give further participation by the people in the administration of the State by the introduction of a membership system in the Supreme or Executive Council, whereby a member would be allotted to portfolio in the Executive Council. His death, so soon after taking office before the scheme could be pursued further was a set back because the matter was never raised again due to changes in the top ranks of the colonial administration. I am glad that Mr. Ho Ah Chon has included the article on John Bacsoft in this book. There is a small scholarship Fund raised by public donations named after him to provide financial assistance for short courses not available from other sources or agencies. This is a tribute to John Bacsoft's service to Sarawak.

I commend this book to all those interested in the history of the socio-economic and political development of Sarawak.



**TAN SRI DATUK ONG KEE HUI**

# *Acknowledgement*

*The compilation of my Fourth Pictorial Book is purely for historical interest and record purposes during the Third Governor of Sarawak, Sir Foster Anthony Abells as from 1950-1959.*

*The illustrations and descriptions of the various events had been reported through the Sarawak Gazettes, Sarawak Annual Report by the Sarawak Government. Sarawak By The Week issued by the Sarawak Information Service and the Sarawak Tribune issued by the Sarawak Press Sdn. Bhd.*

*I wish to put on record my grateful and heartfelt thanks to Tan Sri Ong Kee Hui for his Preface and the Sarawak Museum Archives for their kind assistance in the publication of this Pictorial Book.*



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# CONTENTS

1. — Kuching The Capital of Sarawak
2. — History
5. — Communications
7. — Kuching Port Scheme Gets Underway: \$3,300,000 Wharf Contract Awarded 1958
10. — A New Shipping Service Begins — Vessel Steams Up Sarawak River In Dark In 1958
11. — Phosphates Unloaded At Kuching — Captain Bruce Drops In To Visit Old Friends (November 13, 1958)
12. — 'Benveg' In Kuching (September 13, 1958)
13. — Air
14. — Communcations — Air
16. — The Opening Of The 7th Mile Kuching Airport By His Excellency The Governor Of Sarawak Sir Anthony Abell In 1950
20. — Great Air Display Watched By Mammoth Crowd 1954
22. — Sibu's New Airstrip Is Now Ready — Regular Service Begins July 1 (28th June, 1952)
23. — Bintulu Airstrip
25. — Lutong Airstrip
26. — Simanggang Airfield Ready Soon (18th December, 1956)
27. — Internal Air Services For Borneo's Demonstration Next Month (19th January, 1957)
28. — Sequel To Twin Pioneer Demonstration — Service Before Year-End Possible (2nd March, 1957)  
— Malayan Airways' 10-Year Anniversary
30. — New Agreement On Malayan Airways (13th August, 1957)  
— Operation 3 Months' Time — Twin Pioneers For Internal Feeder Service (7th June, 1957)
31. — Sixteen Airfields Ready By 1960 — Communications Problem Nears Solution (5th October, 1957)
32. — Expansion Of Malayan Airline (January 9, 1958)
33. — Borneo Airways — Better Prospects For Internal Air Services (March 4, 1958)
34. — Twin Pioneers Arriving — New Routes In Feeder Service To Begin Soon (March 24, 1958)
35. — Twin Pioneers Have Come — First Landing At Kuching — Smooth Flight All The Way (April 30, 1958)
36. — Twin Pioneer Surprise — Feeder Service Begins Now (May 14, 1958)
37. — Sarawak Thrilled — Talk Of The Country Today (May 15, 1958)

40. — Successful Proving Flights In July 1958 — Long Akah And Bario Airstrips Take Twin. No Immediate Plan To Begin Regular Service 11/7/58)
  - Airstrip At Lawas (May 5, 1958)
41. — It's Borneo's Own — Into The International Field
42. — Sematan Airfield Opens (15 September, 1958)
  - Proving Flights Made To Lawas And Simanggang Airfields
43. — Scheduled Flight To Lawas Begins
44. — Viscount On Proving Flight — Supplement Services Begin Next Month (November 24, 1959)
  - CPA DC-6 On Regular Service (December 16, 1959)
  - C.P.A.'s D.C. 6 At Kuching Airport
45. — Viscount's Proving Flight — Service Begins December 14, 1959 (November 26, 1959)
46. — The First Two Years (Monday, March 31st, 1952)
47. — Awang, George Cross
48. — Ceremony Begins At Nine Today, Tuesday, 22nd January, 1952 — Governor Will Pin Medal On Awang — Man Of The Day
49. — Sarawak Remembers
52. — King George Passes Away Peacefully — Death Of King George The Sixth
56. — Sustained By Sincerity Of His Faith: Bishop — Memorial Service At Cathedral February 1952 (Kuching, Saturday, 16th February, 1952)
57. — Queen Mary (March 26, 1953)
60. — Queen Mary Dies In Sleep On 25th March 1953.
  - Coronation Will Go On As Planned (Kuching, Thursday, 26th March 1953)
61. — Message Of Condolence
62. — One Hundred Years Of Progress 1854—1953. Kwong Wai Siew Association Celebrates Centenary
65. — Centenary Anniversary. Lion Dance Then Crackers Follow
66. — Official Celebration Of The Birthday Of Queen Elizabeth II In 1952 — O.A.G. Takes The Salute At The March Post
69. — Pelawat Deraja Dan Sambutan Pendudok Kampong
72. — Decoration In The Malay Kampongs Kuching
73. — You Have Put Up A Great Show: I Am Proud Of You: Governor Says — Malay Community Receive Prizes
75. — The Tour Of The Arches
77. — Teach Your Children The Pride And Love Of Your Town. See That You Stick To This High Standard: Governor
79. — The Queen's Birthday Parade, 1953
82. — The Centenary Festival — The Procession Of Solemn Witness
83. — A Morning Of Traditional Pomp And Splendour — Governor Takes Salute At Queen's Birthday Parade (June 14, 1958)

- 84. — Queen's Birthday Parade
- 85. — Barcroft's Funeral Today — Death In Course Of Duty — Body Flown Over From Lawas
- 87. — Sarawak Pays Last Respects To Barcroft (Monday June 9, 1958)
- 89. — Election Day Message
- 91. — Governor's Address At The First Ordinary Meeting Of The Newly-Elected Kuching Municipal Council
- 94. — Governor Stresses Importance Of Peace And Unity
- 95. — 'Govt. To Strengthen Economy, Tighten Security' Says Governor
- 97. — Governor Tells The People Of Plan To Bring Borneo Territories Into Closer Partnership 1958
- 100. — Strong Warning Against Racial Separatism — Governor's Hari Raya Message 1958 — Call For Future That Must Be Shared By All
- 101. — Unity Plan: 'Don't Be Suspicious To Others', — Sir Anthony Tells Malays
- 103. — Maintain Family Discipline — Governor Urges Chinese 1958
- 105. — Sir Anthony Speaks Up For The Native People Of Sarawak 1958
- 107. — 'Give Helping Hand To Weak And Backward' — Governor Urges Chinese. 'No Harmony In Sarawak If There Is Wide Disparity Of Wealth And Learning' — In 1959
- 109. — Hari Raya Puasa Message. O.A.G Stresses The Importance Of Racial Harmony
- 110. — Political Parties In Sarawak — The Governor's Speech In Miri (From May 24 to May 30)
- 112. — The Borneo Co. Ltd.
- 116. — New Premises Opened — Climax To Celebration
- 117. — Mammoth Centenary Dinner — Proud History And Tradition (18th October, 1956)
- 119. — Centenary Celebrations In Sibul (19th October, 1956)
- 122. — Chung Shin Union Association Inauguration Chairman Appeals For Advice, Goodwill And Co-operation, 1952
- 123. — The Coffee Shop Trade And The Public, 1952
- 124. — The Public Service Corps
- 127. — The First Official Launching Of Two Chinese Dragon Boats 1952
- 128. — The Second Official Launching Of Two New Dragon Boats 1953
- 130. — Harmonious Team Work
- 131. — Thousands Attend The Regatta
- 135. — Greatest Of Crowds At Regatta 1953
- 137. — St Thomas's School Sports 1952.  
— Noel House Carries Championship Cup
- 141. — Four Records Broken In Thomians Sports

- 142. — Lee Yun Siew Best Athlete— Finest Records Set In St Joseph's School Sport  
1954**
- 146. — Judging Today At Sarawak Union  
— Pan Borneo Photographic Exhibition**
- 147. — Kuching Photographer Gets Gold Medal  
— First Pan Borneo Photographic Competition**
- 151. — Photographic Exhibition Governor To Open Show**
- 152. — Governor Open First British Borneo Territories Photographic Exhibition**
- 154. — Wong Describes Exhibition As Incentive**
- 155. — Photographic Exhibition**