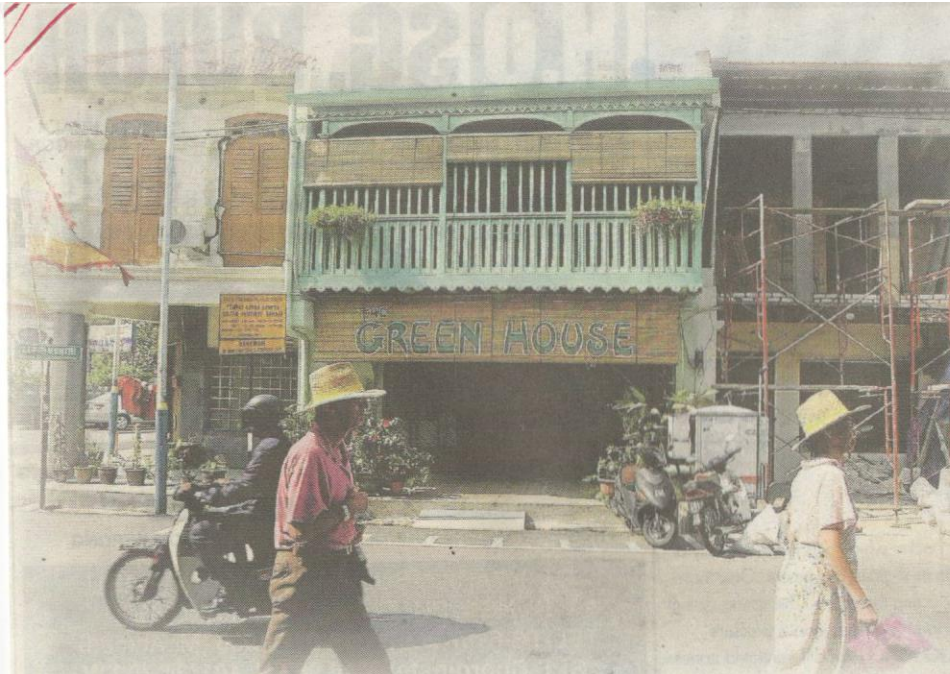




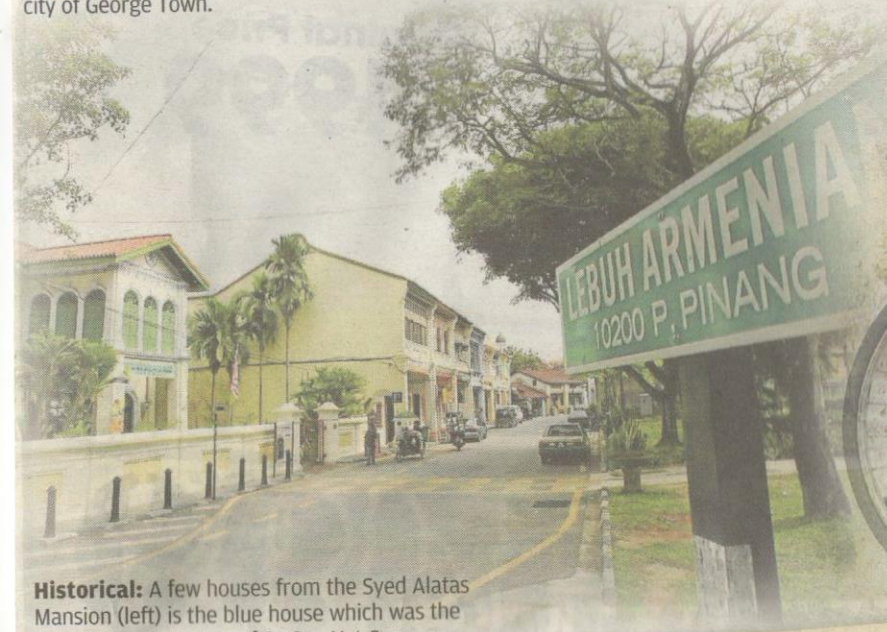
Still standing: The Eastern & Oriental Hotel in Penang in 1950. It is founded by the Sarkies Brothers.



Changing looks: A renovated shophouse called “Green House” at Muntri Street, Penang is one of the many examples of the restoration work being done in the old city of George Town.



Playful times: The Mirrors George Town street art project created by Zacharevic in Armenian Street.



Historical: A few houses from the Syed Alatas Mansion (left) is the blue house which was the Penang headquarters of Dr Sun Yat-Sen.



Funny sketches: At Love Lane, a “where’s my husband?” speech bubble is cleverly positioned outside the window with a panicky-looking man climbing down a rope dressed only in his shorts.

New use: Muntri Mews Hotel in Jalan Muntri used to be a stable for horses.

Penang’s rich h

Wong Chun Wai may have left Penang more than two decades ago, but his heart remains in his hometown. Now, in this column aptly titled *Penang’s History: My Story*, George Town come alive by taking a walk into the past to uncover what it is today. It is history, and also his story, as the writer juxtaposes the heart of George Town. The weekly column begins today in St

MORE than ever, the stories behind all the street names lining George Town need to be told. Unlike most major towns in other states, the names of roads bearing the original names of colonial administrators, Malay leaders, Chinese tycoons and Indian traders have remained unchanged.

Yet, it would not be wrong to assume that the lovers, strolling along Gurney Drive, hand in hand, are unlikely to have any idea who is Henry Gurney. Or care.

Henry Gurney was a British High Commissioner who was ambushed and killed by the communists on his way to Fraser’s Hill, but that’s another story.

The motorists passing by Farquhar Street daily probably do not see the need to find out about Robert Townsend Farquhar, who was a Lieutenant Governor — a senior colonial officer, who was a representative of the Queen.

But there is also romance, err sex, in history. There is Love Lane. Some said Love Lane, or *ai cheng hang* as the Hokkiens called it, was so named because sailors used to meet their local lovers there, with its large Eurasian community around the church while others claimed the name originated from its association with the local Chinese rich who kept their mistresses by the adjacent road, Muntri Street.

In fact, at least one house there had a horse

Penang’s History My Story

By WONG CHUN WAI



stable. For a while, the stable was converted into rented homes but now, it has become a boutique hotel, appropriately named The Mews.

And who is the Muntri or Mentri that was so important and powerful until a name was referred to this man?

This is a weekly column to share my passion for the history of Penang, my hometown, and where my heart is still is although I have lived and worked in the federal capital for the last two decades.

I have made it a point to return home at least once a month to see my parents, who are already in their 80s, and they remained an important reminder of my roots.

The history of Penang has always been fascinating, not just to Penangites, but Malaysians in general. That is why, this column, will not

Rich in culture: Armenian Street was once home to prominent Armenians whose touch in architecture and business can still be felt in Penang today.



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History unfolds

es ago to settle down in the Klang Valley. But his heart
ang's History, My story, Chun Wai makes the streets of
ravel the personalities and events that made Penang what
poses the stories with those of his growing-up years in the
arMetro.

only be published in Penang but also in the
Metro section of the central edition.

History, as the name suggests, is about His
Story. Unfortunately, most of us can only recall
nightmares about how our history teachers
forced us to take down long notes and memo-
rise useless dates, which has no bearing to our
lives!

Bad history teachers and bad teaching meth-
ods killed all our enthusiasm because our
teachers forgot that history is about telling
interesting stories to keep our attention, so that
we learn how people used to live their lives and
how we should learn from the past, so we
would not make the same mistakes as they
did.

This column seeks to talk about the person-
alities behind the names of the streets in
Penang and it is also about my story — of how
growing up in Penang, during the 1960s and
until my adulthood of the 1980s, were like.

Thanks to people such as Khoo Salma
Nasution, who remained a source of inspiration
for me and for wanting to share our love of
Penang history.

Her book, *Streets of George Town, Penang*, has
gone to the fourth edition, and will be a major
source of my work.

Then there is Dr Neil Khor, a former col-
league, who is now instrumental in helping to

make the heritage of Penang alive.

But much of the researched work for this
column is based on the work of my colleague,
Ronald Byrne, who ran a weekly column, called
The Old and The New for *The Star*, in its northern
edition in the 1980s.

He took the trouble to produce old pictures
of the streets and ran them along the scenes of
the streets, as they are today.

The postcards were contributed by Chan
Guan Fook, who has a huge collection of these
vintage post cards.

Thanks to the Internet, there are many ama-
teur historians who have blogged about the
history of these personalities who made Penang
what it is today.

Ex-Bernamea journalist, Syed Imran Syed
Ahmad, has painstakingly written much about
the streets of Penang via his *kudaranggi.blogs-
pot.com* site, which I like to credit as another
source.

This fresh attempt hopes to rekindle interest
among young Penangites and the state's lead-
ers — on both sides of the political divide — who
have made Penang their home.

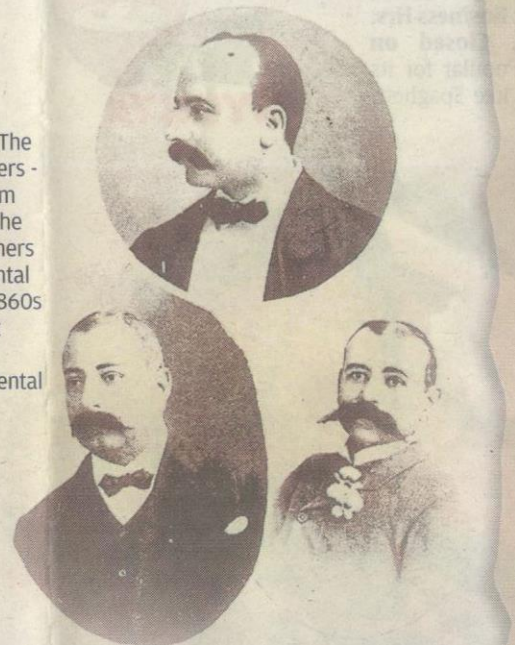
In this journey, join me in the walk through
the heritage trail where this writer hopes to
learn more about our past from you as well so
that the present and future can be more mean-
ingful and interesting!



Multi-cultural: Visitors flock to the Poh Hock Seah Temple in Armenian Street to pay homage to the Tua Peh Kong deity.

Popular

Armenians: The Sarkies Brothers - Martin, Togram and Arshak. The first two brothers built the Oriental Hotel in the 1860s and in 1884 it became the Eastern & Oriental Hotel.



Of Kim Kardashian and Armenian Street

WHAT has celebrity Kim Kardashian got to do with Armenian Street? Well, for a start, she's surely the most famous Armenian and the only one that young people can identify with although she lives in the United States.

She is a fourth generation Armenian and while her mother is English, she speaks strongly of her ethnic origins although she was born and raised in Los Angeles. Kardashian is a massive reality TV show star and more recently made global news for being pregnant with rapper Kanye West's child.

- Armenia is a landlocked country surrounded by Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, Georgia, but the Armenian diaspora are now spread all over Europe, Australia and the US.

During the early days of Penang, there was a significant number of Armenian businessmen and traders who made Penang their home.

Most of these Armenians were brought in from India and many settled in Penang, Malacca, Yangon, Singapore and Batavia, the old Jakarta.

But more importantly, they helped to make Penang grand. High on the list has to be the Sarkies Brothers — Martin, Togram and Arshak — who set up the E & O Hotel and the Raffles in Singapore. Certainly, these hotels remain among the grandest in the region.

The brothers also ran the Sea View Hotel in Tanjung Bungah and for a while the Crag Hotel in Penang Hill, according to reports.

The other famous Armenian included trader and planter Arathoon Anthony — in which Aratoon Road, off Burmah Road, is named after. He later founded the stock broking firm of A.A. Anthony and Co.

The Anthonys, according to reports, were among the Armenian diaspora that settled in Shiraz in Persia, now modern Iran, and then in Mumbai and in Kolkata before coming to Penang.

The well-known George Town Dispensary, opposite Komtar in Penang Road, was set up by Dr Thaddeus Avetoom, who is said to have set up practice in Beach Street.

Those keen to find out more about these respected Armenians can read the work by Nadia Wright who has researched the communities in Malaysia and Singapore.

Ilsa Sharp wrote: "The Sarkies of the E & O shared with their fellow Armenians a cultural trait: the sort of flamboyance and open extravagant often associated with Russians, or even Italians. The Armenians love entertaining, good company, song and dance, the arts, food and wine – even in hostile climes, they always try to plant their beloved grapevines, as they also did in Penang, at the church rectory."

The local Hokkiens calls Armenian Street *pun thau kong hang* as there was a Tua Peh Kong kongsi-house in the street and is said to be also known as the Kian Tek Tong secret society where they kept their gods. Some older Penangites call the street *phah tang keh* or striking copper street as there was once Malay braziers' shops there.

In fact, Armenian Street was once known as Malay Lane because it was an early Malay settlement.

According to Khoo Salma, there were powerful Malay chiefs at Armenian Street such as Syed Mohamed Alatas and Che Long – who forged an alliance with the Red Flag secret society.

Khoo Tian Poh, the Red Flag head, even gave his daughter to Syed Mohamed to be his second wife.

Today, Armenian Street has regained its shine – thanks to the work of Lithuanian artist Ernest Zacharevic with his beautiful murals there and in Muntri Street, Weld Quay, Penang Road, Ah Quee Street and Cannon Street.

Armenian Street is part of the heritage trail and has now become a must-stop for visitors, who want to catch a glimpse of the state's history and the wall paintings.

Armenians going places: Kardashian is a fourth generation Armenian and she speaks strongly of her ethnic origins although she was born and raised in Los Angeles.

