

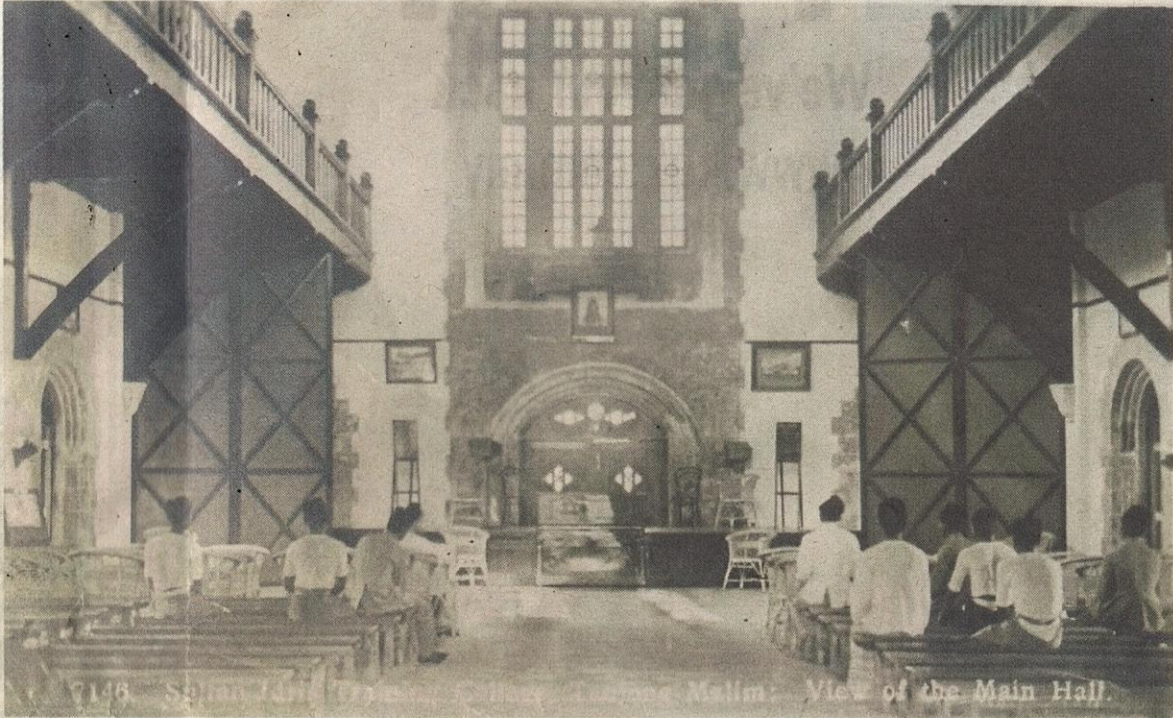
A CENTURY OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

A flea market discovery gives **ALAN TEH LEAM SENG** an opportunity to turn back the clock and relive the glory days of the Sultan Idris Training College, which celebrates its milestone centenary this year as Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.

DAWN has barely broken and the spacious compound fringing the Darul Aman Stadium is already a hive of activity.

Established as an alternative venue for vendors when space constraints and stringent Covid-19 regulations forced authorities to temporarily close the popular Kampung Berjaya Flea Market two years ago, this place has received nods of approval from bargain hunters who arrive by the droves come Saturday morning.

Although Kampung Berjaya has since regained much ground after roaring back to life several months ago, activity at the state



A view of the main hall at the Sultan Idris Training College. PIX BY ALAN TEH LEAM SENG

States High Commissioner Sir Arthur Henderson Young.

While SITC's name, honouring

Enjoying pride of place was Bangunan Suluh Budiman,

which was designed by renowned

Maxwell, in his capacity as Chief Secretary of Federated

Malay States, symbolically

stadium continues to be brisk.

Like the proverbial early bird, experienced antique collectors make it a point to visit both Alor Star venues without fail as elusive items often surface when least expected.

Case in point is the discovery of a sizeable stack of vintage books standing out conspicuously among Honda C70 signal lights and Vespa seats.

When quizzed, the used motorcycle parts vendor reveals them as giveaways from the previous owner who went on a generous streak after receiving a better than expected offer for his long abandoned 1976 Suzuki AP50.

HOME AT TANJUNG MALIM

Sheer elation surfaces upon close scrutiny as the literary works are related to the renowned Sultan Idris Training

Sultan Idris Training College alumnus Cikgu Abdul Hadi Haji Hasan's 'Sejarah Alam Melayu', published in 1929, was reprinted numerous times in the post-war years.

College (SITC).

Within minutes, their contents begin weaving a compelling tale that traces SITC's early history all the way back to the successful Matang Teacher Training College established in 1913 at the home of Taiping Malay nobleman Ngah Ibrahim.

A keen desire for education among the locals soon caught the attention of the authorities. A proposal to set up a Malay teachers' college, put forward during the 1917 Conference of Residents, received immediate approvals from then Perak ruler Sultan Abdul Jalil and Federated Malay

Sultan Idris Murshidul Azzam Shah who died just a year earlier, was unanimously adopted, the same could not be said about its site location. Although Tapah Road managed to give Tanjung Malim a run for its money, the latter eventually prevailed thanks to a more centralised location within the Federated Malay States that consisted of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang.

Furthermore, Tanjung Malim received the backing of Richard Olaf Winstedt and William George Maxwell, two key colonial administrators who were strong proponents of Malay education.

Tanjung Malim had a special place in their hearts as both once served as its assistant district officer. A 25.5 hectare site was eventually bought for US\$50,000 and construction began in August 1919.

Federated Malay States architect Leofric Kesteven. The main building's stunning design featured striking medieval Dutch Gothic architectural elements.

It took the concerted efforts of skilled Javanese craftsmen, as well as countless Chinese labourers, to realise this monumental structure within three short years.

LESSONS COMMENCE

The arrival of the first 115 students from all over the Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements marked the beginning of SITC at Tanjung Malim on Nov 19, 1922. After the arrival of four more students a day later, lessons began in earnest under the tutelage of three European educators, seven Malay teachers and one Filipino weaving instructor on Nov 23, 1922.

opened the gates with a silver key during SITC's official opening six days later.

During those early days, students arriving at this all-male residential learning institution were each given a thick red blanket, a pair of shorts and a complete set of Baju Teluk Belanga, as well as a generous US\$2.50 in monthly pocket money. Apart from six hostels and well-equipped classrooms, the students had access to the gymnasium, football field, tuckshop, sick bay and surau.

Under the able leadership of first headmaster Oman Theodore Dussek, who formerly headed the Malay Teachers Training College in then Malacca which merged with its Matang counterpart to form SITC, the students studied mathematics, geography, history, general health, literature and botany entirely in the Malay medium, as well as participated actively in handicraft workshops, especially those that involved weaving.

Apart from football and court games like badminton, the students made full use of an improvised pool at nearby Sungai Bernam for swimming and water polo sessions.

Islamic studies began in 1924 with the arrival of Tuan Haji Yunus and his assistant Lebai Jaafar from Penang.

A year later, the inclusion of two Javanese teachers into the teaching force gave rise to SITC's own craft school, where students honed their skills on the finer as-



Students posing proudly with their woven products.



Students suffering from minor ailments were treated at the sick bay.



Students began using the main building of the Sultan Idris Training College after it was declared open in 1922.



Federated Malay States Volunteer Force Sultan Idris Company leader Captain Yazid Ahmad died where he stood, at the head of his men, after being overwhelmed by Japanese artillery and tank fire.



The dining hall and kitchen building at the Sultan Idris Training College.



Students posing for a picture at one of the six residential hostels at the Sultan Idris Training College.

turned in September 1945, those present realised that things were no longer the same.

The near four-year conflict-induced hiatus had taken a significant toll, with a handful of students and teachers throwing in the towel after suffering great hardships during the Japanese Occupation.

Those who steeled their resolve and continued to soldier on in

pects of batik printing and metal work.

Dussek, known for his mathematical prowess, also roped in his wife to provide piano lessons to those who were musically inclined. Tanjong Malim native Cikgu Yub Rawan helmed the music teacher's post after she returned to England in 1926.

Yub, whose son Datuk Shahrum Yub later went on to be Muzium Negara Director-General from 1968 to 1991, was credited with setting up SITC's first orchestra which comprised a mix of talented students and teachers.

The orchestra proved its worth during SITC's Bangsawan theatre performances headed by Cikgu Said Haji Husain. While this traditional Malay opera regularly featured dramas with local flavour, Dussek often challenged the ensemble to work on plays by his favourite English playwright, William Shakespeare.

FURTHER EXPANSION

The sight of several Malay Home Library and School Series books produced by SITC teachers in the pile immediately brings to mind Winstedt's monumental contribution to Malay education development. Inspired by visits to Java, he tasked SITC's first graduating batch of 58 teachers, many of whom had opted to remain and contribute expertise, to set up Pejabat Karang-Mengarang.

This newly established Translation Bureau, assigned with the production of much-needed translated, as well as original books for the growing number of Malay schools throughout Malaya, was helmed by Zainal Abidin Ahmad, who is more famously known as Za'aba.

The diligent former Malay College Kuala Kangsar teacher gave his prolific bureau team intensive lessons twice weekly to boost overall proficiency.

Following closely in Za'aba's footsteps was L.R. Wheeler, whose arrival in 1926 saw the establishment of SITC's own Federated Malay States Volunteer Force branch unit.

Known as Platoon VII Perak, the solitary outfit initially comprised a small number of students and teachers including Cikgu Abdul Hadi Haji Hasan, Cikgu Said Haji Husain, Cikgu Abdul Jalal Taha, Yazid Ahmad and Buyong Adil.

Growing interest in serving the nation, however, saw enrolment leap to company size within four short years.

Renamed as the FMSVF Sultan Idris Company, this personalised acknowledgement brought great pride to SITC Volunteers and boosted morale tremendously.

As the winds of war intensified in late 1941, students and teachers reluctantly left SITC after it was requisitioned by the British military.

Sultan Idris Company Volunteers, under the leadership of Yazid who had attained rank of captain, headed off to Port Dickson to help defend their beloved nation while the rest received the blessings of then Perak monarch Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah to resume studies at three Bukit Chandan palaces in Kuala Kangsar.

HEROIC LAST STAND

Life at the Perak royal town was an eye-opening experience. Apart from lessons, the students indulged in leisure activities like football, hockey and volleyball at the Kuala Kangsar polo grounds while Istana Kuning, Istana Hulu and Istana Hilir's compounds became venues for badminton and *sepak raga*.

Those hailing from Melaka, Johor and Singapore had a whale of a time entertaining peers with weekly *dondang sayang* ballads which were accompanied by hauntingly beautiful melodies provided by Cikgu Yub on violin.

At the same time, younger students honed their vegetable planting skills around Istana Kuning while their older compatriots headed out to nearby forests in search of bamboo needed for weaving classes.

Fridays were extra special as the students, dressed in their best Baju Melayu with spotless *samping* and shoes, marched in unison to tunes played by the orchestra

to the nearby Masjid Ubudiah for prayers.

Those halcyon days at Kuala Kangsar were, however, short-lived. Students and teachers returned to their respective hometowns on Dec 18, 1941 after reports revealed that the Japanese Imperial Army, after having crushed Allied defences in Kedah and Penang, was on the verge of reaching Perak's northern border.

Some two months later, many SITC students and teachers were saddened by news of Captain Yazid's untimely demise.

According to reports, Captain Yazid together with several other Sultan Idris Company Volunteers had retreated south with the Malay Regiment soldiers while harbouring hopes of turning the tide against the Japanese in Singapore.

Unfortunately, that was not to be. The group gallantly took on the Japanese along Pasir Panjang Ridge and across Ayer Rajah Road on Feb 13, 1942.

Coming under overwhelming fire from enemy artillery and tanks, Captain Yazid, in a heroic and glorious last stand, died where he stood at the head of his men.

BRIGHT AND PROMISING FUTURE

Although boisterous student chatter once again began swirling through SITC's hallowed corridors not long after the British re-

and returned to academic excellence saw their cherished home away from home undergo a series of significant changes in the post-war landscape.

SITC's era came to an end in 1957 after its name was changed to Maktab Perguruan Sultan Idris (Sultan Idris Teachers' College). Some 18 years later, a long-held tradition ended at the once all-male institution when the first batch of 140 female students arrived on Jan 13, 1975.

Further expansion and increased intake in the years that followed led to additional upgrades in terms of recognition and available facilities.

Just a decade after it became known as Institut Perguruan Sultan Idris (Sultan Idris Teachers' Institute) in February 1987, the former SITC made history by achieving university status.

Today, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (Sultan Idris Education University) continues to hold dear its long and illustrious history while making great strides into a future full of promise.

As for the flea market books, they were purchased collectively at a near give-away price quoted by the seller who was visibly more than happy to get rid of them.

These priceless items will definitely make great additions to my growing collection of artefacts highlighting our nation's interesting heritage and rich history.