

With these buildings gone, have we lost part of our heritage?



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DESIGN

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An aerial view of the Pudu Prison, showing the X-shaped main block, taken in 2012. Photo: Filepic

UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) established April 18 as the International Day for Monuments and Sites in 1983 to raise awareness about the diversity and vulnerability of the world's built monuments and heritage sites, and efforts required to conserve them.

Commonly known as World Heritage Day, it emphasises that more than preserving World H

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Unfortunately, structures and buildings with rich cultural and architectural history are still being torn down today in the name of development and commercialisation, despite fervent efforts by heritage preservation bodies and enthusiasts.

We take a look at a few of such sites, lost entirely or partially, in Malaysia over the years:

Pudu Prison, Kuala Lumpur

Construction of Pudu Prison began in 1891 and the complex was completed in 1895. Designed by then state engineer and director of the Public Works Department, Charles Edwin Spooner, the Victorian-era prison's main block was X-shaped and three storeys high, with 1.8m thick walls of steel and brick and 240 cells.



In 2014, this was all that was left: The front gate flanked by domed towers reflecting Moorish architecture. Photo: Filepic

Spanning 8.8ha, the correctional facility's front gate portrayed Moorish architecture, evidenced by its double domed towers.



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The prison stopped operations in 1996 when it could no longer cater to the high number of prisoners. From 1997 to 1998, Pudu Prison was opened for public tours.

The 115-year-old building's 394m-long prison wall was brought down on June 21, 2010. The whole prison complex was then demolished in 2012 to make way for a mixed development project.

Runnymede Hotel, Penang

The Runnymede Hotel was first opened in 1921 by two Scotsmen, W. Foster and H. Parker. Located at No. 40, Northam Road, or Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah, its main building, constructed later in the 1930s, consisted of three storeys that faced the sea. The hotel was in operation until 1940.

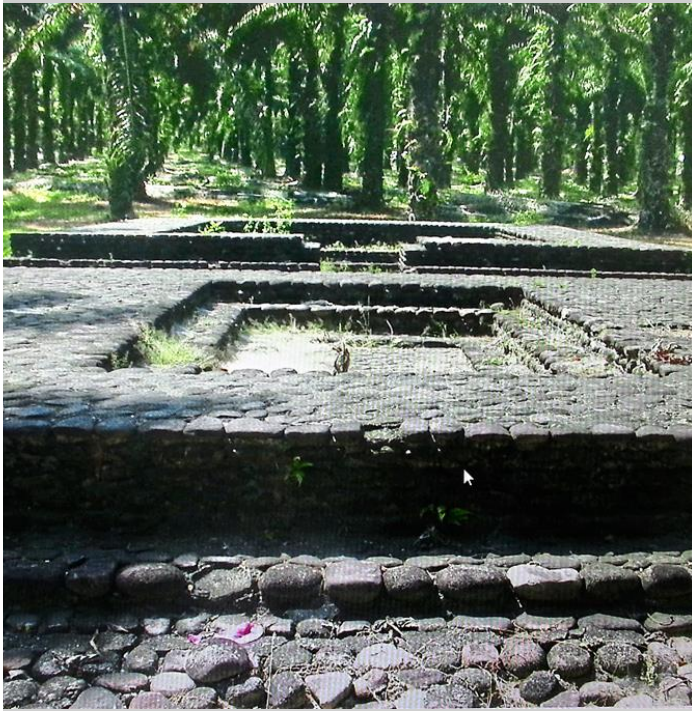


An aerial view of The Runnymede Hotel, which overlooks the sea, taken in 2011. Photo: Cultural Heritage Action Team George Town

The original single-storey brick building on the site was built in 1807 and was first occupied by Sir Stamford Raffles and his wife Olivia in 1809. Raffles was a junior administrator in Penang at that time, and the couple stayed there until 1810 when he was posted to Malacca. (*Source: Penang: 500 Early Postcards.*)

Runnymede was purportedly rebuilt in 1903 after a fire. On Feb 9 this year, the hotel's seven ancillary buildings were demolished, leaving only the main building.

Situated near Merbuk, Kedah, Lembah Bujang is Malaysia's oldest historical site, with relics excavated from the area dating back to the 1st century. It served as a key transit point for traders between India and China in those days. Officially an area spanning 224sq km, it contains at least 50 temple sites, estimated to have been built between the 4th and 12th centuries. (Source: www.arkib.gov.my.)



Candi 11 at Sungai Batu, Lembah Bujang, before it was demolished. Photo: Filepic



Residents looking at the now demolished site in a picture taken in December 2013. Photo: Filepic

Lembah Bujang is believed to contain more than 100 archaeological sites, and could in reality cover an area of over 1,000sq km. In August 2013, there was public uproar when one of 17 registered *candi*, or ancient Hindu temples, was torn down by a developer to make way for a housing project. Located at Sungai Batu, the temple, also known as Candi 11, was believed to have been built between the 8th and 9th century, making it over 1,000 years old.

While the state government issued a stop work order once the demolition was brought to its attention, it was already too late for Candi 11. Archeological experts have since said that the structure could be re-built elsewhere.

Bok House, Kuala Lumpur

Once resplendent with ornate wrought-iron gates, colonnades and statues on rotating pedestals, the 77-year-old Bok House on Jalan Ampang was lost on Dec 15, 2006. According to the book *Kuala Lumpur And Putrajaya: Negotiating Urban Space In Malaysia*, the mansion, completed in 1929, featured neoclassical architecture and was designed by colonial architects Swan and Maclaren for Cycle & Carriage founder Chua Cheng Bock.



Bok House, before and after photos taken in 2012.

Chua and his family lived in the house in the early years, until the Yokohama Specie Bank occupied it in 1942. The building was later used as a boarding house by the British Administration. In 1958, the main house was used as a fine dining restaurant called Le Coq D'Or until 2001. During this time, the Chuas lived in the rear quarters, which were eventually demolished in 1999.

Other hotels and mansions

Believed to have once belonged to a son of Kapitan Yap Ah Loy, the 80-year-old Eastern Hotel in Kuala Lumpur was torn down in February 1990.



The 80-year-old Eastern Hotel before it was torn down in February 1990. Photo: Badan Warisan Malaysia

In December 1993, the Penang's Metropole Hotel, built at the turn of the century, was demolished. Formerly known as Asdang House, it belonged to the Khaw (Na Ranong) clan and it was where receptions were held for the Thai royal family, who also stayed there.

Seven years later, the 19th-century Khaw Sim Bee mansion in Pykett Avenue, George Town, was taken down in July 2010.

In 2014, the 104-year-old mansion at No. 218, Macalister Road, in George Town was demolished, as was Johor Baru's 150-year-old Wong Ah Fook mansion.



The 150-year-old Wong Ah Fook mansion along Jalan Lumba Kuda in Johor Baru was in a rundown state when this photo was taken in April 2014, and has since been demolished.

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