His Highness Sultan Muhammad IV., Raja of Kelantan.
The Birth of the Duff Development Company in Kelantan
1900 — 1912

A Note prepared from documents kindly made available

by

HUNTER A. CRAWHILL,
Plantation Agencies, Penang.

When Robert William Duff entered the service of the Pahang Government as acting Superintendent of Police in 1892, no one can have anticipated his meteoric rise to fame in an entirely different sphere. But within the space of fifteen years his name was familiar to high officials in Singapore, Bangkok, and London, and he had won the confidence and cooperation of the Raja of Kelantan, Sultan Muhammad IV.

Duff proved to be an intrepid and resourceful Police Officer during the early days of the British administration in Pahang, and he was the only European, apart from the Residency Surgeon, whom Hugh Clifford chose to accompany him on the gruelling expedition through the remote inland areas of Trengganu and Kelantan in March and April 1895. Duff had already entered Ulu Kelantan in 1894, and these two visits must have made an indelible impression on his mind. His services were highly praised by Hugh Clifford in his official report of the expedition, and when the Pahang Police were re-organised in 1896 Duff was appointed Chief Police Officer of Pahang, and moved the Police contingent headquarters from Pekan to Kuala Lipis.

But while he devoted his energies to the improvement of his widely scattered contingent, his thoughts must have been occupied with visions of the broad Lebir River, a rich source of gold in ancient days, and with plans for the development of a vast region of agricultural land. And at some date prior to 1890 he resigned his appointment as Chief Police Officer Pahang and returned to Kelantan.

His Highness Sultan Muhammad IV, Raja of Kelantan, had succeeded his uncle, Sultan Mansur in 1889, and fortunately for Duff, was a ruler with exceptionally progressive and enterprising ideas.

On October 10th, 1890 the Raja of Kelantan affixed his decorative Seal to an Agreement which granted to Robert William Duff personally, in partnership with His Highness, the right to develop two very large areas in the North and East of the State, based on the Lebir river. This first agreement was for a period of forty years, but in 1903 the Duff Development Company was formed and in 1905 a new Agreement was prepared and approved, similar to that of 1900, but incorporating more details, and providing for the payment of a percentage Royalty to the Sultan on gold, tin, agricultural and jungle products which were extracted from the land within the concession. This agreement was ratified by His Majesty the King of Thailand, and witnessed by W.A. Graham, who was then Adviser to the Kelantan Government, appointed by the King of Thailand.

The Duff company engaged Mining Engineers to prospect for minerals, and £50,000. was spent on this work. Four Dredges were installed on the Galas river and recovered a considerable quantity of gold.
Letter from H.H. the Raja of Kelantan to R.W. Duff. 1900 A.D.
of gold. The company’s headquarters was established on an attractive site, overlooking the junction of the Lebir and Galas rivers, and communications with the outside world were maintained by river transport. In 1906 Rubber was planted extensively on the Western bank of the Lebir, and 15,000 acres of agricultural land were subleased, and were subsequently transferred to state ownership.

In 1909 the State of Kelantan was transferred by Treaty to the Protection of the British Government, and in 1912 a Deed of Cancellation was signed under which the Duff Company surrendered its concession, granted under the 1905 Agreement, and received more limited rights, a smaller area and a cash grant.

Letters from His Highness the Raja of Kelantan to R.W.Duff, written during this early period are reproduced here. The illustrations are taken from a volume containing 75 pages of photographic reproductions which were published in 1910 by the Directors of the Duff Development Company for the information of the Share Holders.

At the time when these photographs were taken the Duff Company’s Concession covered two thousand five hundred square miles of Kelantan territory. By the new Agreement, signed on 15th July 1912, the area was reduced to thirty two thousand acres.

H.H. the Raja of Kelantan with his State Council: 1909 A.D.

Left to Right: Tuan Soh bin Sultan Ahmad (Tengku Besar Indera Raja); Tengku Mahmud bin Sultan Ahmad (Tengku Srimah Raja Tua); DYMM. Sultan Muhammad IV inbi Sultan Bongsu; Tengku Zainal Abidin bin Sultan Bongsu (Raja Dewa); Tengku Mohd. Salleh bin Sultan Ahmad (Tengku Temenggong); Tengku Ahmad bin Sultan Bongsu, (Tengku Badar).

(The names have been provided by Nik Salleh (‘Nik ‘Leh Kechil) of Kota Bharu.)
Letter from H.H. the Raja of Kelantan to R.W. Duff. 1901. A.D.
H.H. the Raja of Kelantan and his State Council with Sir John Anderson, the Governor, and his party, on the occasion of his first visit to Kelantan in July 1909.

One of four dredges employed to dredge for Gold on the river Galas.
Document of Ratification, by the Thai Government, of the

Agreement between the Raja of Kelantan and the

Duff Development Company, in May 1905.

WHENAS there has been presented to His Majesty the King of Siam an agreement dated 24th Rabialawal 1323 (corresponding to 29th April 1905) between the Government of His Highness the Raja of Kelantan of the one part and the Duff Development Company Limited, a corporation of 15 George Street, London, E.C., of the other part, which said agreement is expressed as intended to be substituted in the manner and to the extent therein stated for a certain other agreement between His Highness the Raja of Kelantan and one Robert William Duff, dated the 15th day of Jemadilachir, 1318 (corresponding to the 10th day of October, 1900 of the Christian era); and

Whereas said agreement dated April 29th 1905, is expressly stated to be subject to the ratification of His Majesty the King of Siam; and

Whereas there has been presented to His Majesty the King of Siam a letter dated April 5th 1905, from W.A. Graham, Esq., H.S.M. Resident and Adviser, Kelantan, to Robert William Duff, Esq., which letter concerns the interpretation to be placed upon Article 6 of said agreement of April 29th, 1905, as regards the royalty to be paid on tin property which could not be worked at a profit of ten per cent; and

Whereas said Duff Development Company Limited, and said Robert William Duff have represented to His Majesty the King of Siam that said Duff Development Company Limited has authorised and adopted the signature, sealing and delivery of said agreement of April 29th, 1905, on its behalf; and

Whereas the Government of the Raja of Kelantan has informed His Majesty the King of Siam that it has authorized and adopted the signature, sealing and delivery of said agreement of April 29th, 1905, and the signature and delivery of said letter of April 5th 1905 on its behalf; and

Whereas said Government and said Company having presented said Agreement of April 29th, 1905, and said letter of April 5th, 1905, to His Majesty the King of Siam, have prayed that he will ratify the same;

Now, therefore, His Majesty having taken into consideration the facts and premises above mentioned, has authorised His Royal Highness Prince Damrong Rajanubabh, Minister of the Interior, to express His Majesty’s gracious ratification of said agreement of April 29th, 1905 together with said letter of April 5th, 1905.

And His Royal Highness Prince Damrong Rajanubabh, acting under command of His Majesty, has hereunto set his hand and seal in witness of His Majesty’s ratification of said documents.

Done at Bangkok on this the 6th day of February, 124.

(sd) DAMRONG.
General Manager’s house, Kuala Lebir, 1909.

One of the Company’s Steam Launches at Kuala Lebir, 1909.