The Malay College
1905–1963

by
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In 1905 the idea of a boarding school for Malay boys was a revolutionary one. There were of course many schools already established in the Federated Malay States and Straits Settlements which gave an English Secondary education but few Malay boys attended them. Many parents equated Western education with Christianity and were not enthusiastic.

But both Sultan Idris of Perak and R. J. Wilkinson, who was then Federal Inspector of Schools, were anxious to see more Malays obtaining a modern education so that they could take part in the administration of the country. It was thought that if members of the ruling families would send their sons to school, others would follow this example. It was largely for these reasons that the College was opened in 1905 in the royal town of Kuala Kangsar, the home of the Sultan of Perak.

W. Hargraves was sent from the Penang Free School to begin the new College and he was to remain headmaster until 1918. It is perhaps significant that in the fifty seven years of the history of the College there have been only nine headmasters, and there is no doubt that this continuity has materially helped successful development.

At the outset there were naturally many difficulties—shortage of buildings, shortage of teachers and reluctant pupils. The first classrooms were located in a long attap shed, but the boys lived in three different houses in Kuala Kangsar and there were only three teachers.

Many of the first pupils are still alive to-day, while others who have died but recently include the first Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the late Sultan of Perak and the late Raja Haji Kamaralzaman of Perak. The latter was renowned as a footballer, being captain of a very strong and unbeaten College team (1906–11). The routine of a boarding school must have seemed very strange to the first pupils and the activities of many of the pupils (for whom there was at first no age limit) must have been equally strange to Mr. Hargreaves. Then as now, it appears, there was a

H.H. Sultan Idris.
water shortage in Kuala Kangsar and some of the senior boys were in the habit of sneaking off to the railway station where they bathed in the water tank—until the ladder was removed by the station master. Another story is told of a boy who, being given some lines as a punishment decided that this was not for him and ran away to sea. Eventually realising that his actions had been rather hasty he returned to the College where the headmaster greeted him by inquiring whether he had finished the lines!

Under the able guidance of Mr. Hargreaves the College continued to grow. The main buildings were completed in 1909, and the total enrolment reached 139 in 1920. By the time he retired in 1918 the essential pattern had been set and the College was beginning to fulfill its primary function of providing Malay Officers for the Administrative Service. A special course had been started at the College in 1910 for Administrative Service probationers and later in 1920 this was extended so that many young men who had received their earlier education at other schools came to the College for this one year course. By this time also the boys came from many more of the Malay States—Kedah, Perlis, Johore and Kelantan as well as the original entry from the Federated Malay States. The College was now fairly well known in Malaya and applications for admission were increasing.

After the departure of Mr. Hargreaves there were two headmasters in a short space of time, J. O'May and L. E. S. Jermyn, neither of whom was probably at the College long enough to leave a definite mark. However one member of staff had been at the College throughout this period. R. C. W. Rowlands from Penang, was perhaps the most well known member of the staff and from 1905 to 1926 he came into contact with many boys who remember him as a "fine teacher". The number of pupils continued to increase slowly and the period (1918–23) may be considered one of transition. A story told of this time by one who is now a leading territorial chief, but who had better remain anonymous, concerns a boy who was very poor at dictation; for his spelling was very bad. One morning he knew that such a test was on the programme and was naturally rather fearful of the results. The test was due at 10.30 after the mid-morning break—before the break the class was writing an essay. Finishing this early, our hero saw the teacher looking through a book, saw him mark a passage with a book mark and saw him leave the book with others on his desk when the bell went. Realising that only by a gamble would he avoid trouble he stayed behind during break and spent the time reading and rereading the marked passage in the hope that it was the (me for dictation. Before the test began the teacher by way of encouragement said that he would give a dollar for the best result. He began to read the passage and Ariffin (as we will call the boy) had gambled correctly. The next day, rather surprised at the unexpected result the teacher added to his previous offer by saying that he would give a further dollar to the boy who could
names of the ‘scholars’ were put forward without result until Ariffin, tell him who had done best. The realising that such opportunities do not often occur stood up and suggested himself. To the astonishment of the rest of the class he was not only right but the richer by two dollars, most of which he admits went to treating the other boys at the tuck shop. There is obviously more to education than book learning!

The next headmaster who was to have a great influence on the College was C. Bazell (1923 – 1938) who is happily still alive to-day in England. A bachelor and rather a martinet, he was something of a ‘law unto himself’. The present writer met him when in England last year and he has a fund of stories about the College in the 1930s and photographs which are of great interest. He can still remember individual boys and many of those whom he taught make a point of visiting him if they are in England. Perhaps one who remembers him somewhat wryly is the boy who was reported to Mr. Bazell for smoking. Unfortunately after he had been caned, the information was given to the headmaster that a mistake had been made and the boy was innocent of the crime. Bazell sent for the boy, told him that there had been a mistake and added “the fact that you have been wrongly punished will show you that in this world much that is unjust will happen to you”.

Bazell’s years as headmaster were the years of consolidation when the College took its place as one of the major schools in the country. Two able members of Staff at this time were Inche Ahmad Jalaudin (1919 – 1938) and Inche Mahmud Jantan (1927 – 1937). The former was largely responsible for beginning the Scout movement in the College and also for reviving the Cadet Corps at very short notice to provide a Guard of Honour for Sir Lawrence Guillemard in 1920. Inche Mahmud is now working for Longmans of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. The annual soccer match with Penang Free School for the Cup presented by H.H. Sultan Iskandar Shah is still the main fixture of the season and has been played since 1925. The other important soccer fixture is against Victoria Institution for a Cup presented in 1949 by the Tengku Laxamanan now the present Sultan of Selangor. In the 1920s and 30s it was largely through the efforts of Mr. Bazell, who was himself very interested in court games, that the College obtained its two fives courts and two squash courts and it is still the only school in Malaya to play these games. Bazell was also a very keen walker and in the years before the last war many expeditions were made by bicycle and on foot, to the ‘menggelunchor’ near Padang Rengas and the river at Ulu Kena.

This period also saw the two great floods of 1926 and 1931 when the town of Kuala Kangsar was virtually underwater. The present President of the Old Boys Association, Dato Abdullah of Pahang tells of how in 1926 as a senior boy he was responsible for taking the smaller boys home to Pekan for the holidays. By bus, hired car and boat (and mainly the latter) the boys were eventually delivered but it had been such a long
journey that the boys had no time at home before they had to set out again to return to Kuala Kangsar.

In 1931 the College was used for storing the possessions of shopkeepers in Kuala Kangsar who had been flooded out, while the boys were evacuated to King’s Pavilion on the other side of the town. It seems that a change of clothes was necessary every so often and the boys would take a boat across to the main building. They soon found where the biscuit shop had its goods stored and they returned to King’s Pavilion well re-equipped both externally and internally!

In attempting to trace the history of the Malay College before the war, one is handicapped by the fact that apart from one year in 1927, the College unlike other schools produced no magazines. However a start was made in 1938 with Vol: 1 No. 1 and looking through this issue is interesting to-day.

The magazine records the retirement of Mr. Bazell and the appointment of H. R. Carey as headmaster. There were 160 boys in the College, the headboy in 1939 was Tengku Jaafar, now the Malaysian Ambassador in Cairo, and a report on the soccer team included the following:

“Abdul Razak, Vice Captain. Centre half. The backbone of the College defence. Very difficult to pass. Heads well and has a good left foot kick”.

The reference is to Tun Abdul Razak, the Deputy Prime Minister.

The President of the Old Boys Association in 1938 was Tuan Sheikh Ahmad bin Sheikh Mustapha of Seremban who still comes to the annual Old Boy’s Dinners in Kuala Lumpur, as does the President for 1939 Raja Haji Tun Uda bin Raja Mohammad who has always taken a great interest in the College and whose sons have all been educated there. Finally the magazine for 1939 has an article by the late Raja Musa bin Raja Mahadi, then in the Cooperative Department and until recently Chairman of the Malay College Board of Governors. There has always been evidence of this continuity and to-day, the College Board of Governors has a majority of members who are themselves Old Boys; while one Old Boy from Johore at present has four sons in the College.
The College did not expand any further before the outbreak of war in 1941. The war came with startling suddenness and the boys were hastily sent home when the Japanese were in the vicinity of Grik. Many were in the midst of sitting for their School Certificate Examinations and these were rudely interrupted.

When the College re-opened in 1947 Mr. Carey was still headmaster and he remained in that position until 1949. During this period the College had to re-establish itself after the war—much had been destroyed but some of the Sports trophies were saved by the College clerk, Inche Hashim, who hid them in a well during the occupation. Thus the College still has the Sultan Iskandar Cup for soccer and the Sir Lawrence Guillemard Cup for shooting. The College was fortunate too that three of its pre-war teacher were able to return and continue their work in Kuala Kangsar. All were to stay at the College for long periods—Inche Mohd. Lazim from 1934 to 1959, Inche Ariffin Mohd. Nam from 1938–1957, Inche Salleh bin Hussain from 1940 to 1954 and Tuan Haji Ghazalli who began at the College in 1932 and is still on the staff, as interested as ever in all College activities.

The total number of pupils still remained in the region of two hundred and the great expansion to the present enrolment of 650 did not begin until the middle 1950s when the first phase of the expansion programme was completed to coincide with the College’s Golden Jubilee in 1955. The Jubilee was a grand occasion attended by almost all the Rulers of the Malay States and the High Commissioner Sir Donald MacGillivray. This expansion brought the numbers to about 500 and the final phase, which is being implemented at present, should bring the enrolment to the maximum of 650.

It was now fairly certain that the new buildings will be completed in time for the College’s Sixtieth Anniversary 1965.

Although run to a large extent on the lines of an English public school, the Malay College has nevertheless always had significant differences. In the first place admission to the College has never depended on the ability of a boy’s parents to pay high fees. Even before the Second World War when the numbers at the College were small and it did have a majority of boys from the Malay upper class, there were still a substantial number of places awarded to boys who obtained scholarships. To-day the College has no limitation at all on entry, apart from academic ability. The greater part of the boys are in receipt of some form of financial assistance and socially they provide a complete cross section of the Malay community.

The great expansion of the Malay College which took place after the Second War was made with the desire to provide more secondary education for the mainly rural community who could not attend schools in towns which only had limited hostel facilities. To-day each State is allotted a quota of places every year. This quota is filled by the State Government from boys who have reached the required academic standards. Ironically enough, raising the academic standards for admission has resulted in larger numbers of applicants. Recently one State had 120 applicants for a quota of eleven places and another State had 34 applicants for four places. Considerable emphasis at the College is now placed upon the teaching of science and from 1963 fifty percent of the boys in the upper school will be specialising in science subjects. This may be called ‘keeping up to date’ and it is hoped that the
College, which before the war produced a large proportion of Malay administrators will now be able to educate a similar number of scientists. The achievements of any school are always difficult to assess. There are some who judge success by examination results, others by what the pupils achieve in later life. It is always possible to make lists of distinguished Old Boys and there is no doubt that such a list from the College illustrates its great influence on the Malay community especially in the period between the wars. Five of the present Malay Rulers are Old Boys, as are the Governors of Malacca and Penang. In politics there is Tun Abdul Razak, the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Mentri Besar of Pahang and Negri Sembilan. Incidentally the last named, Dato Dr. Mohd. Said, with Dr. Haji Megat Khas (later State Physician, Perak) were two of the first Malay doctors. In diplomacy and administration there are many others, Dato Mahmud bin Mat formerly Speaker of the Legislative Council, Dato Hamzah now Chairman of the Public Service Commission, Dato Nik Kamil formerly Ambassador to the United States and Dato Haji Kamaruddin until recently the Ambassador to Indonesia. It is interesting also that in London the High Commissioner, and the first Secretary are Old Boys, Raja Zainal; the Deputy General Manager of the C.E.B. was probably the College’s first engineer, while the Commander of the first contingent of Malayan troops in the Congo, Col. Ungku Nasaruddin had, like his father, been at the College.

To-day the College has one of the largest groups at the University of Malaya and overseas there are about five Old Boys at Universities in Canada and the same number in New Zealand. In Australia there are over twenty five and in Britain nearly fifty—studying in various places from Aberdeen to the Camborne School of Mines.

Such progress could not have been foreseen by the founders of the College, but there can be little doubt that those far sighted pioneers Sultan Idris and R. J. Wilkinson, who both contributed so much to the advancement of the country during their life time, would probably consider this—the adult and mature outcome of their earlier and inspired planning—to be their proudest achievement.
The Bombing of the Selangor Museum

An Account prepared from Notes and Information supplied by

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Saturday, March 10th 1945 was a public holiday in Kuala Lumpur, to celebrate Japan’s Navy Day, and the Selangor Museum was closed in company with all Government Offices. Those who had attended a ceremonial parade on the playing field in front of the Selangor Club had dispersed and half of an uneventful morning had passed when the wail of sirens warned the long suffering population that enemy planes were approaching.

Though the planes circled high above the town several times the Japanese anti-aircraft guns did not open fire nor did any Japanese fighter planes go up to attack the raiders. There is consequently little excuse for what followed.

After locating their target, which was the Railway marshalling yard and locomotive shed,—standing on the opposite side of Damansara Road from the museum and nearly 100 yards away from the old Museum building,—the ‘planes—B.29’s—dropped a succession of high explosive bombs. Some of these hit the empty locomotive sheds but one of the later salvos dropped directly on the East Wing of the Museum and destroyed almost everything which was on display in that part of the building. The planes then left for their base. The Japanese had transferred their railway engines and coaches six miles outside Kuala Lumpur some months before this air raid. The fruits of this long distance flight thus scarcely justified the effort and expense.

The West Wing of the Museum, although not directly hit by the bombing, lost many tiles from the roof, exposing the exhibits below to sun and rain. Salvage operations were quickly started by the small Museum staff, led by Enche Bachik bin Mohd. Tahir, the Clerk-Caretaker, and in response to his appeal for help to Dr. Takahasi, the Japanese Official in Charge, fifty clerks from other Government Offices came daily to remove all exhibits to a place of safety. The place chosen was the Convent at Bukit Nanas, not far from the site of the first Temporary Museum in Kuala Lumpur sixty years earlier, and the entire contents of the Museum were locked up in a number of the Convent’s empty class rooms, where they remained until the end of 1945.

The East Wing of the Museum which was hit and largely destroyed