A HISTORY OF PENANG 1805-1819

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APPENDICES

VERANDELINGEN VAN HET KONINKLIJK INSTITUUT VOOR DE TAAL-, LAND- EN VOLKENKUNDE VAN NEDERLANDSCH-INDIË.
ABBREVIATIONS USED

BKI  •  Buchen... Bijdragen tot de Taal-, land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië.

IOL  •  India Office Library, Commonwealth Relations Office, London.

JIA  •  Journal of the Indian Archipelago.

JMBRAS  •  Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

JSBRAS  •  Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

JSS  •  Journal of the Siam Society.

Penang  •  Used through the text instead of the official name "Prince of Wales Island."

Sa. Rs.  •  Denotes Sicca Rupees, which were equivalent to about half a Spanish Dollar.

SNL  •  Singapore National Library.

SSR  •  Straits Settlements Records.

$  •  Denotes Spanish Dollars, which were equivalent to about 2 sicca rupees, and worth at the beginning of the nineteenth century about five shillings sterling.

VKI  •  Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië.

1. See Bibliography: Unpublished theses and academic exercises.
Much has already been written about the early history of Penang. This work attempts to examine the principal trends within a fifteen-year period, rather than one particular theme in a longer period. This approach does not imply that an exhaustive account of the period has been attempted. Instead, some of the main trends have been developed in detail such as the machinery of government and the civil servants who worked it, the judicial and police organisation, the gross problems of revenue and of land, the agricultural experiments, trade and shipping during the period, and finally the effect on Penang of the founding of Singapore, while other aspects such as relations with Aceh, the problems of slavery and piracy, the building of a church and the establishment of the Free School have been omitted in favour of those subjects more closely related with internal administrative policy. This work is here presented in the hope that in its small way it may contribute something to the already existing knowledge of the early history of the first British settlement on the Malay Peninsula.


See Bibliography: Unpublished theses and academic exercises.
CHAPTER I

Penang Before 1805

Penang was occupied by Captain Francis Light in the name of the East India Company and His Britannic Majesty on 11 August 1786 and was formally named by him Prince of Wales Island. Much has been written about the motives of the Company in wanting to establish a settlement in that area. Different writers have tended to emphasise one or other of these motives, but it is evident that all of them played at varying times and to varying degrees some part in influencing the Directors' decision. These were, firstly, the strategic motive: the need to have a secure harbour on the east side of the Bay of Bengal for the protection of the Coramandel Coast. Second, there was the commercial motive: the desire to establish a trading centre for the collection of produce of the archipelago for distribution in China, and the wish to secure a reliable port of call for ships engaged in the China trade. Finally, there was the need to check the growth of Dutch power in the Straits of Malacca as it might threaten the China route.

The conditions which prompted the Company's search for a strategically suitable harbour on the east side of the Bay of Bengal have frequently been explained at length. During the north east monsoon, lasting from October to March, it was dangerous for ships to remain on the east coast of India, so that in October the Fleet was forced to retire to a safe port. The nearest British port was Bombay, but during that period, before the British fleet could return from Bombay, the British possessions on the east coast were at the mercy of any enemy fleet which might choose to enter the Bay of Bengal. The strategic motive, however, was present only in times of crisis. After the Anglo-French wars of 1744-48 and 1756-63 (which led to the unsuccessful settlement of Negrais 1753-6) the strategic problem rose to importance again only after the naval battles of Suffren and Hughes in 1782-3. Renewed interest in acquiring a settlement on the east coast was shown by the voyages of Thomas Forrest in 1782-4.

During the period between these wars, particularly in the 1870s, it is evident from the correspondence of the Bengal

authorities that the commercial motive was predominant. One of the main problems faced by the Company at this time was to obtain goods to pay for its tea exports from China, and it was thought that the establishment of a British entrepôt for the collection of produce of the archipelago suitable for the market in China would help solve the problem.\(^6\) Monckton's mission to Kedah in 1772, and those of Holloway and Desvoeux (1772) and Botham (1782) to Aceh were prompted by commercial considerations. Similarly, Francis Light's reports on Kedah (1771) and Junk Ceylon (1772) were concerned with the commercial rather than the strategic advantage which was likely to be gained by the Company if it expanded its interests there.\(^7\) Commercial interests were still foremost in the minds of the Directors of the Company in 1786. "We wish", they wrote to the Governor General in that year, "that without embroiling ourselves with the Dutch.... that every practicable method should be tried for extending our commerce amongst the Eastern Islands, and indirectly by their means to China". They went on to refer to the "great importance of the China trade", and to the necessity of extending the commercial resources for their investment from that country.\(^8\)

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6. Earlier unsuccessful attempts to form such an entrepôt were made at Cochin China (1778-9) and Balambangan (1773-5). See V.T. Marlow, The Founding of the Second British Empire (1763-1793), Chapter III.

7. Ibid., passim.

8. Court of Directors to Lord Cornwallis, relating to the Straits of Malacca 1786, see V. Harlow and F. Madden, British Colonial Developments 1774-1834 (Oxford, 1953), 53-4.
time. Connected with the commercial motive, and the concern over the China trade, was the need for a suitable port of call somewhere in the Straits. There was no British port between Calcutta and Canton, and ships requiring repairs had to seek shelter in the non-too-friendly Dutch ports. The importance of this motive in the founding of Penang was revealed in a letter from the acting Governor General to Francis Light shortly after the island had been settled. "At present" he stated, "our great object in settling Prince of Wales Island is to secure a Port of Refreshment and repair for the King's, the Company's and the Country ships, and we must leave it to time and to your good management to establish it as a Port of Commerce if the Situation is favorable..."9 Connected also with the China trade was the Company's concern over the apparent extension of Dutch power, which was felt to constitute a possible threat to the sea-route to China. The unexpected display of Dutch naval power as witnessed by the victories of J.P. van Braam at Riau, Malacca and Selangor in 1784, aroused fears of the Dutch. 10 It was at this point that Francis Light informed the Company of the Sultan of Kedah's offer of Penang and, partly because of concern over the Dutch, it was decided to accept the offer. It was certainly one of the aims of the Directors at this

time to stop the extension of Dutch power in the Malay Peninsula. As they wrote to Lord Cornwallis in 1786: "It is unnecessary to dwell upon the bad consequences, which may in case of any future war result from the Dutch being suffered to have the sole and exclusive possession of such important passes as the Straits of Malacca and Sunda; every means short of declared and open hostility on the part of your Government should be used to encourage and support the natives in resistance to any attempts to enslave them, and to encourage them trading with us". 11

The choice of Penang, then, rather than any other port was not determined on the grounds that it had any particular advantage over other areas, but because of the failure of previous projects in other quarters, and because of the sudden fears of the Dutch. Of particular importance was the influence which the British private trader, Francis Light, exercised over the Sultan of Kedah, whose offer to cede the island to the Company came at an opportune moment.

For the first few years of its settlement, it was by no means certain whether or not Penang would even be retained. This indecision between 1786 and 1800 arose from conflicts of professional opinion as to Penang's strategic superiority 12 over the alternative sites and as a naval base. For some time it was thought that Trincomalee, the Nicobars or the Andamans

11. Court of Directors to Lord Cornwallis, relating to the Straits of Malacca 1786, Harlow and Madden (1953), 53-4.