

Heritage: A Mansion, Motherhood And A Murder

By **Ian Anderson**

Most local people are aware of the Kinta Medical Centre (KMC) and its supporting role in the community. With its up-to-date hospital facilities, 24-hour Accident and Emergency Service and modern ambulance service it is an important limb of Perak's healthcare facilities. But there are few who know the fascinating history of the main building which was one of the family homes of a very important Chinese millionaire.

His name was Chung Thye Phin, the last Kapitan China of Perak, whose father, Chung Ah Kwee (Chung Keng Kwee) led the Hakka, 'Hai San' Secret Society against Cantonese 'Ghee Hin,' in the fourth Larut War. This was the war that brought the British to Perak and changed the face of Malaysian history.

Chung Thye Phin was born on 28 September 1879 in Kota, Taiping. He received his education at the St Xavier's, Penang and on leaving school, he was initiated into his father's tin mining business. Having a Malayan birth certificate from the Federated Malay States, he was granted a certificate of naturalisation by the Straits Government, in 1902, making him a British citizen.



A Tseng Lung Hakka, son of a very powerful father, Chung Thye Phin soon became a Justice of the Peace, Federal Councillor, Perak State Councillor, Member of the Perak Chinese Advisory Board, and then, on his father's passing, took over the title of Kapitan Cina. In 1925, he co-founded the first Chinese limited liability company, the Toh Allang Chinese Tin Company in Perak and, with Government approval, printed his own money for use in his mines. For relaxation, he was a keen motorist and owner of prize-winning racehorses.

Shortly after his death, the mansion was turned into military Married Quarters for British officers during the Communist Emergency. At that time it remained unchanged and one of the most striking things was a portrait of the original owner, in mosaic tiles, in the entrance hall. Lennie Brookes, who lived there in 1955, remembers the eyes – they followed you as you passed by them!



In 1961 a miner named Foo Yet Kai bought the mansion. He had been born in Batu Gajah in 1907 but left for China when his father died, returning to Malaya and his Uncle's mines in 1924. Soon, as miners did in those heady days of the Great Tin Rush, Foo had money and could diversify his interests into finance, property and agriculture. He also became a generous philanthropist.

Having bought the Chung Thye Phin Mansion, Foo Yet Kai arranged its conversion to a private hospital, Our Lady's Hospital and leased it without charge to the Sisters of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood. The hospital operated from April 1964 to January 1983 when it became known as the Kinta Medical Centre providing free healthcare for patients recommended by the Foo Yet Kai Foundation.

But there is a sad end to this story for Foo Yet Kai was murdered during a robbery at his house on August 6, 1961. In his memory, the family donated a significant amount of his fortune to charity and set up the Foo Yet Kai Foundation to help the sick and needy. He had six sons and 13 daughters.

Despite renovation and development, the original building stands as a memorial to two great Chinamen.