

Nostalgia: Clubs And Clubbing - The Early Days

By Ian Anderson

As the saying goes, “Wherever there are British, there’s a club”. Sure enough, when the Brits came to Perak, there were clubs. The first of these was at Changkat Batu Gajah the home of the British Administration. It was formed in 1890 as the Kinta Gymkhana Club. F.D. Osborne was the first honorary secretary and the first race days took place on February 17 and 18, 1893. There were seven races each day.

But 1893 was also a good clubbing year for Ipoh. The Ipoh Club was officially formed that year as was the Hakka Miners’ Club. Both had exclusive memberships. But one could argue that the Ipoh Club (White Men



and their Memsahibs only) was actually formed in 1892 when a group of Europeans got into the habit of dropping into Oldfield’s Chemist for a lunchtime ‘Stengah’, the whisky secreted at the back of the medicine cabinet. Oldfield was Ipoh’s first European chemist and provided the soda water. This small group built their first premises on land now occupied by the State Mosque. The Hakka Miners’ Club had a different beginning as membership was by invitation of Towkay Leong Fee and you had to be a rich, really rich, Hakka Miner to even be considered. No wives were admitted!

In those far off days, sport played a major part of clubbing and it was not long before two more ‘Whites Only’ clubs arrived, namely, the Ipoh Golf Club and The Ipoh Gymkhana Club (both founded in 1903), with the golf course in the middle of the race track.

The first multiracial sports club was the Birch Club, opened in 1907 by the Resident, E.W. Birch. He was the son of the ill-fated JWW who was murdered by the Malays, at Pasir Salak, in 1875. The Birch Club was sited on Connolly Road, adjacent to the first railway station and



the Government Rest House. It was only for civil servants, one of the earliest civil service clubs.

The Kinta Malay Club was another early entry to the Ipoh sporting scene. It was from this early beginning that a gifted sportsman emerged. Dato' Muda Che Wan, who later became the Dato' Panglima Kinta. He was a brilliant football and hockey player, representing the state in both sports, who was also talented at billiards.

The Chinese were also literally, in the game. They formed the very exclusive Lok Lum Club, which operated something like a Chinese version of the Ipoh Club,

with very selective rules about membership. The Perak Chinese Recreation Club (PCRC), supported by some very rich Chinese also came into being in 1912. In the early days, the club was particularly strong on the cricket field.

During the Japanese Occupation, most club premises were taken over and used for the entertainment of the Japanese. Sadly, many of the old clubs did not survive that unwanted intrusion. Those that do are still with us today, although there have been many changes in membership and premises.