

Heritage - An Idea Over Lunch

In 1933 a group of prominent local tin miners met for lunch. There was probably nothing unusual about that, but out of this lunch came an Olympic size swimming pool for local people. That very day, the Kinta Swimming Club was born, with Foo Wah Cheng as President, supported by Wong Peng Sum (President 1938 to 1975) and Yeoh Khuan Joo. It is relevant that the Ipoh Swimming Club, for Whites only, had opened that same year.

A 60-year lease from the government provided three acres of land for the club. The project started in 1934 and on April 11, 1936, Malaya's first Olympic-size swimming pool was opened by the Sultan of Perak, Sultan Iskandar Shah. The homegrown project cost about \$25,000, raised by donations and the sale of debenture bonds. A tremendous achievement by anyone's standards. The consulting engineer was the well-known Thomas Steele.



Going swimming 1938

This was no normal pool. With no filtration plant, the water had to be changed every day. Water was piped from Leong Sin Nam's mine near Kledang Hill at a cost of \$100 per month. With crystal clear water the club went from strength to strength with competitions between the swimming clubs of Singapore and Penang and inter-school competitions competing for the Wong Peng Sum trophy.

As the Japanese invaded, the club closed, to be transformed by the invaders into a camp for Indian Prisoners-of-War. The empty pool

became a garbage dump.

In 1947, the club reopened with water fed from a local waterfall. This not only brought in water but also contamination, which required intensive cleaning every two months. This resulted in closure in 1951. A filtration plant was desperately needed!

Five years later the club reopened again, this time with filtration, and the future looked secure; but the euphoria did not last. The Police closed the club citing illegal late-night activities. It was reopened for the third time in 1957 by Ipoh Council Chairman G.S. Walker. Again it became the venue for many national and state competitions. With full height diving boards, this was a very popular club.



From 1957 things went well under the guidance of Datuk Yeoh Kian Teck the third President (1975 to 1983) and his successor Hong Weng Keong. But in 1992 disaster struck again. The original lease ran out and was not immediately renewed. The club had to close again.

After a long and difficult period, thanks to the determination of the President and his committee, a new lease allowed a brand new clubhouse and pool to be built, to the highest standards. It opened in 2012.

No doubt this is a nostalgic story for those who swam in the old pool in the 50s and 60s, but this is not only nostalgia but a lesson in tenacity and dedication. A tale of how a handful of men had an idea and despite all difficulties drove it forward. They did this for all the people of Ipoh and we should not forget that.



Nostalgia apart, thanks to the efforts of those long-suffering presidents and their committees who never gave up. The people of Ipoh have an Olympic pool of their own and like many other home-grown ideas, it is now their heritage.