

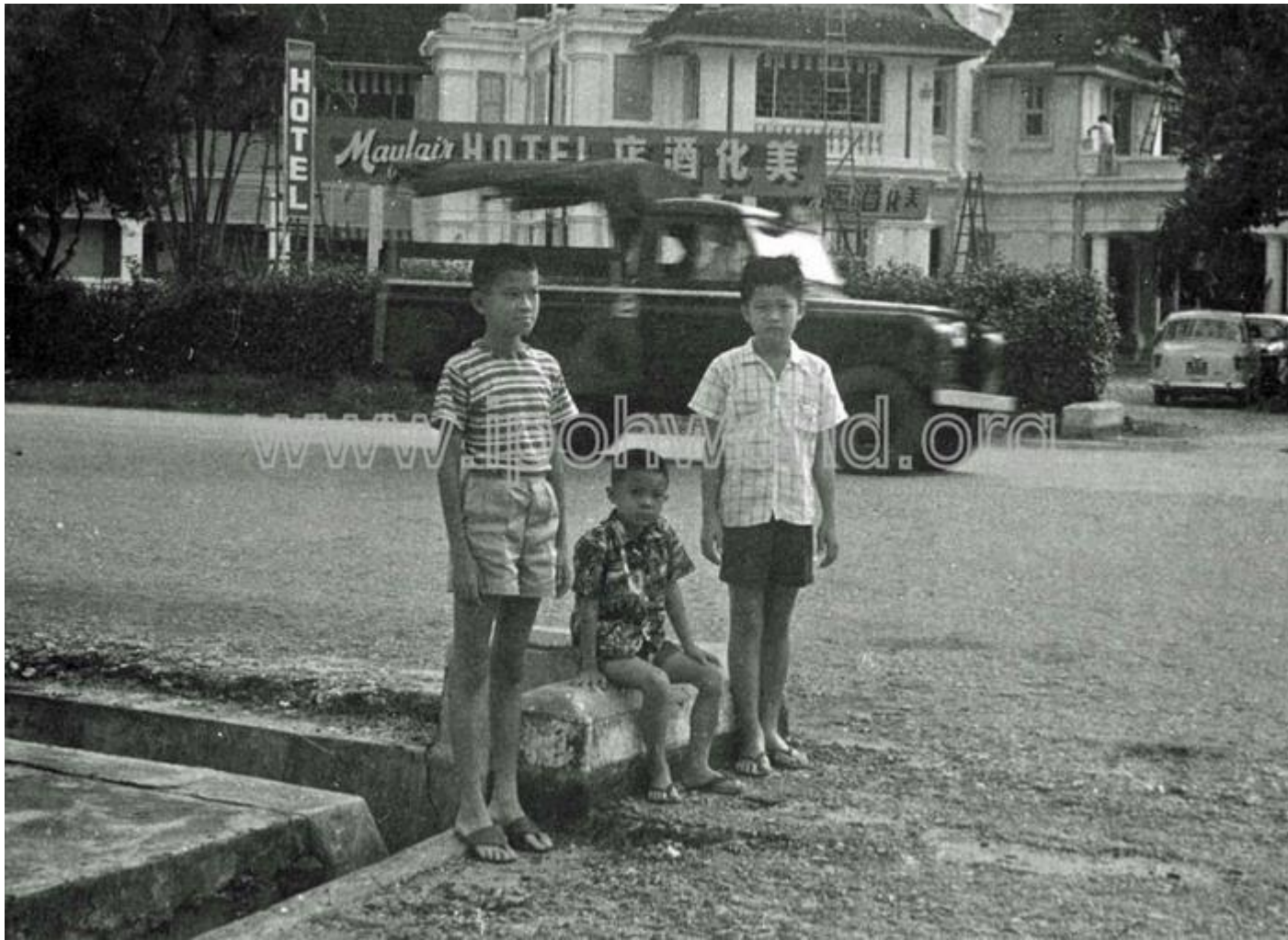
Heritage - What! No Heritage Hotels

With this issue of the Echo's cover page featuring boutique hotels, I turned my mind to Ipoh's heritage hotels. What heritage hotels? I do not think we have any! Sure, there is one that carries the name but it is nothing like a heritage building. It is just too young! There was a time when the FMS, founded in 1906, could have qualified. The building is there, it is no longer a hotel and bar having been transformed into something very modern. The 1917 Station Hotel could also have qualified until the hostelry finally closed, after staggering along as second-rate accommodation for some years. Having said that, successive Governments have promised that the hotel will be reinstated. Empty promises it seems! Consequently, I have to turn my thoughts to what we used to have and what is there now. Does anyone remember the Mayfair Hotel!

The Mayfair once stood along Cowan Street near the intersection with Leong Sin Nam Street, which was half the length it is today; the Eastern end from Leong Sin Nam Street to Greenhill did not exist. To put the photograph in perspective, the three boys in the picture were by the curbside just in front of Wah Nam Coffee Shop.

The hotel in its previous guise had once been a generously sized bungalow, possibly the home of a British expatriate before Merdeka. As a hotel, it was a popular place with out-of-town visitors, whose only alternative at the same sort of price and facilities was the Station Hotel in Old Town. Like its KTM competitor, the Mayfair sported large comfortable rooms and a good restaurant that served quality food at the right price. The restaurant was particularly popular with local people for family get-togethers and festive celebrations.

Having been a private house with gardens bordered by hedgerows formed from hibiscus bushes, providing a picturesque border to the establishment when in bloom; a border of bright crimson blooms. Behind the hedge, there were fruit trees, some of which may be seen in the top left of the photograph. These trees were a target for small boys who would simply wander into the hotel grounds and help themselves to whatever fruit they could reach. Star fruit was a popular choice as they were easier to reach than most.



Katherine Wong, who kindly donated the photograph in this article, has great memories of the hotel. She remembers:

“We went to Mayfair Park to play and also for the starfruits, hibiscus flower, catching spiders among the bushes. It was gruesome indeed. The two boys in the photograph (left and centre) are my brothers. The other boy was a friend from Brewster Road.”

But like several old buildings in Ipoh, the hotel had a downside. It was said to be haunted. Two deaths occurred there. In 1951, two terrorists threw a bomb into the kitchen and killed Foo Chee Eng who was making tea for some Europeans in the dining room. On another occasion, it is said that a man hanged himself in the hotel.

The Mayfair Hotel was demolished in the name of development at the latter end of the 1960s to make way for the extension to Leong Sin Nam Street, today Foh San, Ming Court and

Yoke Fook Moon, the three hugely popular dim sum restaurants are located. But what about hotels, is there anything in that area that we can call old? Sadly, no! The best we have is the Hotel Excelsior, built in the 1970s, and we really cannot call that heritage, can we?

We thank Ken Chan for much of the detail of the Mayfair Hotel.