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## Relationships of Early British Amenities with the Formation of Small Towns in Perak

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**Abstract.** The British was influential in shaping the early urban and town planning of Malaysia. In this regard, several types of amenities in the likes of police station, post-office, administrative building, religious building, educational institution and many more were built during the mid 19th Century until the post-independence era. This study objectively focuses on identifying early amenities built by the British, understanding their relationships with early towns' socioeconomic activities as well as seeking the factors which had cause the arising needs of such amenities. Data were acquired through the means of seminal documents and historical manuscripts as well as interviews, using case studies of 14 early small towns in Perak. The current study found that the British prioritised on providing security-based amenities for the early towns that they have economic interests on. On the other facet, the British also emphasised on communication and accessibility aspects for the early towns located in distance from the main cities in Perak, which socioeconomic activities were based on agricultural industry.

*Keywords; amenities, first British built, early small towns.*

### 1. Introduction

One of the factors in urban planning as affirmed theoretically is on the provision of amenities (Ibrahim 2009). Being considered as an important criteria for any township development, amenities are regarded essential be on the aspects of economic expansion, population increment or physical enhancement (Mitra 2015; MacLachlan, 2015; Garretsen, 2017). Their presence signifies a township's significance (Powe, 2012) and is indicative on the township's density level and future potential (Bantjes, 2011). Provision of public amenities nowadays is focused on creating a better and quality lifestyle- as seen through the creation of public parks, sports and recreational areas, cultural enclaves and events, as well as, shopping and entertainment centres (Perloff, 1966; Kloosterman 2014; Garretsen, 2017).

Studies on early amenities in Malaysia are necessary to promote a better understanding on the significance of the country's early townships. As proven historically, the British's arrival in Malaya (Malaysia) Has caused certain transformations in the local town planning system. This scenario is especially apparent in Perak, which was the very first state in the Malay Peninsula intervened by the British in 1874 (post-signing of the Pangkor Treaty). Hence, scrutinising the remaining amenities built during the British era may lead us to the revelation on the significance of the early townships, besides fostering our understanding on their early socioeconomic activities and scenarios.

This paper focuses on early amenities built by the British in 14 out of 22 small townships available in Perak, selected based on their varying economical backgrounds. Qualitative data were gathered through compiling and analysing old manuscripts and historical documents, which later were validated by interviews conducted with the locals.



## 2. Literature Review

Development of small townships in the past were catalysed by the expansion of early settlements (Wang, 2010). These early settlements were formerly based on agricultural industry (Choguill, 1989) and later transformed into local economic centres (Powe, 2012). Implying from that, public amenities were then equipped by former authorities to such places to cater their socioeconomic activities and needs (Choguill, 1989). Apart from supporting the agricultural industry, public amenities were also built to cater community needs through the provision of post office, day market, assembly hall etc. (Mayer, 2010). In turn, such places increased in significance and became the centre of attention for both locals and outsiders (Yamu, 2015).

Prior to the British era, the royal authorities were the influential parties in shaping the early townships and traditional settlements. During this period, they were in direct control of constructing public buildings which mostly concerned with the aspects of defence and security of the royal palaces. Mosque buildings were highly significant as a public amenity at that time. Apart from their primary function as a place to perform Islamic congregational prayers, mosques were multi-functioning as educational centre as well as for ceremonial and gathering place (Harun, 2012). Only after the British's arrival, public amenities were provided to commensurate their interests which further cater the local needs (Sanusi, 2009; Taylor, 2010; Harun, 2012). It can be understood that the British remained their urban development approach practised in England at Malaya, whereby provision of public amenities at a place was mainly to cater its economic activities (Powe, 2012; Harun, 2012).

Accordingly, Mohd Hairy (2014) theorised that increment of population, due to concentration of settlements into local economic centres, was also influential in the provision of public amenities by the British. The aspects of security, health and recreation were prioritised by the British during the initial stage of town or city formation to ensure the safety of its own citizen as well as other Europeans. Apart from that, the British applied the theory of racial segregation by building separating wall, gate and security hut for the sake of safety (Home, 1997; Ambe, 2008). These, then were extended to cater healthcare needs through building hospitals for areas affected with diseases such as Malaria for instance (Mizushima, 1997; Ambe, 2008).

It is evident that economic factor was influential in the formation of early towns by the British in Malaya (Lockard, 1974; Suriati, 2013; William, 2014). Types of amenities provided at early towns were basically dependent on economic activities held at that time (Ambe, 2008; William, 2014). Stability and security aspects then were considered to ensure the smoothness of economic agenda, as apparent in the planning of early settlements whereby racial segregation concept was enabled through the setting-up of gated community with security huts (Sanusi, 2009; Yuen, 2011). Upgrading of transportation roads and communication system, which is considered as the next phase of town formation (William, 2014), then follow suit as the British intended to enhance inter-towns accessibility and reachability.

Implying from the literature, the two main factors influencing the British to build public infrastructures and amenities are safety and communication, which vary respectively to correspond with the socioeconomic needs of a town or city. Table 1 details out such relationship for the 14 small towns in Perak.

**Table 1;** Early Amenities Built by the British in Small Towns of Perak.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Town/Year</b>	<b>Early British amenities</b>	<b>Sosioeconomic activities</b>
1	Gopeng (1870s)	Police Station (1879) Court House (1880s) Hospital (1884) Post Office (1891) Sanitary Building Office (1890s)	Tin mining
2	Papan (1880s)	Police Station (1887) Post Office (1895) Railway Station (1908)	Tin mining
3	Tanjung Rambutan (1893)	Railway Station (1896) Police Station (1896) Post Office (1896) Court House (1897) Psyciatric Hospital (1911)	Tin mining
4	Pusing (1890s)	Market (1897) Police Station(1890s) Railway Station (1908) Post Office (1924)	Tin mining
5	Sungkai (1900)	Railway Station (1894) Post Office (1905) Police Station (1936)	Agriculture
6	Kuala Kurau (1900s)	Post Office (1908) Fishery Department (1922) Police Station (1920s) Fire Fighting & Rescue (1920s) Jetty (1934) Customs Office (1934)	Fishery & agriculture
7	Padang Rengas (1900s)	Post Office (1894) Police Station (1937) Railway Station (1950s)	Agriculture
8	Karai (1900s)	Post Office (1898) Police Station (1905)	Coal mining
9	Klian Intan (1909)	Police Station (1909) Post Office (1910) Hospital (1910s)	Tin mining
10	Beruas (1910)	Post Office (1913) Police Station (1920s) Court House (1930s)	Agriculture
11	Lenggong (1915)	Post Office (1904) Police Station (1930s) Public Work (late 1930s)	Agriculture
12	Lumut (1920s)	Jetty/Port (1920) Post Office (1933) Police Station (1930s) Hospital (1930s)	Trading, fishery & agriculture
13	Parit (1928)	Post Office (1911) Public Work (1920s) Police Station (1940)	Agriculture
14	Bagan Datuk (1931)	Police Station (1890) Jetty/port (1890s) Post Office (1908)	Trading, fishery, agriculture

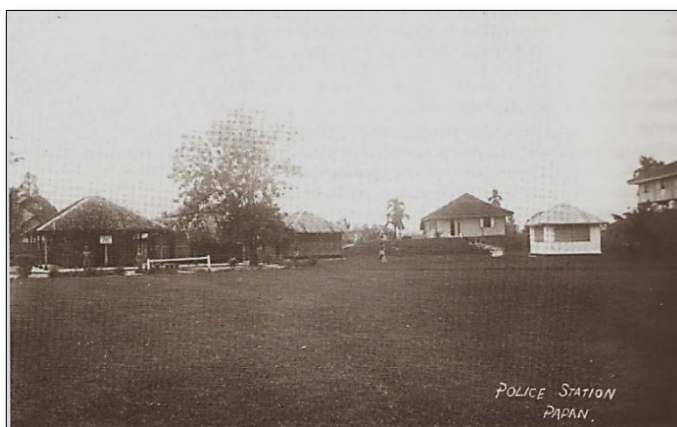
### 3. Analysis and Findings

Interpretively from Table 1, the built years of the first shop houses row can be highly associated with the existential years of their respective towns. Although it can be understood that those towns had emerged from the development of traditional settlements, it is imperative to note that shop houses, nevertheless, were either built in separate areas or close to the original settlements. As a result, the first row of shop houses had transformed to a new place of central attention and later developed into townships which remains until today.

Based on the trend yielded, the British apparently favoured in providing amenities in the forms of police station and post office to the small towns. Although school buildings existed at that time, they were however built by the locals and Chinese immigrants in order to carry their vernacular educational system respectively.

Meanwhile, religious buildings (churches) were initially built for the Europeans and not to cater for the locals. Other socioeconomic-based amenities such as market, hospital and shipping port were not being considered as these amenities merely involve the townships partially. They were not significant in relative to police station and post office which functionally cater the entire townships. Police stations were crucial for the sake of stability and protection of the small towns, especially when military bases at that time were only placed at main cities of Perak. Post offices meanwhile were such an important and effective communicational needs following the past limitations in public transportation and traffic system.

The British basically prioritised on stability and security aspects for towns that they had economic interests on. This scenario is apparent at Gopeng, Pusing, Papan and Tanjung Rambutan which were the chains of Lembah Kinta's mining spot, formerly renowned as the world's largest tin producer during its peak era in the late 19th and 20th Centuries. The feud between the Siamese (Thailand) and the State of Perak in acquiring Klian Intan, known as the largest tin mining spot at Perak's northern side meanwhile has led in the intervention of the British. As a resolution, the Bangkok Treaty 1909 was met by both of the British and Siamese, causing the latter to release Hulu Perak District back to the State of Perak. Subsequently, police station was built as a security measure to ensure the place's stability.



Papan Police Station (1887).

Source; National Archives of Malaysia



Lenggong Police Station (1930s).

Source; Lenggong Police Station.



On the other facet, Bagan Datuk was significant as the largest coconut producer in South East Asia. There were 13 large-scale farms owned by the British and other Europeans over there, which products were marketed to all over Europe and the United States. Security aspect was also emphasised in Lumut which is a part of the Straits Settlements comprising Penang, Malacca and Singapore. Before Lumut was returned to the State of Perak in 1934, the town became an international trading port despite its smaller size in relative to other places of the Straits Settlements. Conclusively, the British prioritised on the aspects of political stability and security for the towns that benefiting them economically.

The British also emphasised on communication and reachability aspects for emerging towns in Perak, particularly to providing post office. In total, seven towns were first equipped with post office instead of other types of amenities namely Sungkai, Kuala Kurau, Padang Rengas, Karai, Beruas, Lenggong and Parit. These agricultural and fishery-based towns basically share a common similarity in terms of their remote locations, in which they were situated away from the main cities of Perak such as Ipoh, Kuala Kangsar, Teluk Intan and Taiping for instances. In this regard, communication system was emphasised to ensure the smoothness of British administration at these places. In addition, railway network provided across Karai has enabled the British to manage and supervise the coal industry activities at the town from a more developed city which is in close proximity namely Kuala Kangsar.

The current study also found that police station and post office were built on the very same year for three towns namely Tanjung Rambutan, Klian Intan dan Lumut. The underlying reason for such case can be associated with the construction of railway station in Tanjung Rambutan which necessitated an efficient communication system. In this manner, Tanjung Rambutan can be linked appropriately via railway transportation with Butterworth (Penang) and Singapore. Simultaneous development of Klian Intan and Lumut meanwhile can be linked with the political events occurred at those towns, based on the Bangkok Treaty 1909 and the Pangkor Treaty 1874 respectively.



Existing conditions of the abandoned Bagan Datuk Post Office (left) and Tanjung Rambutan Post Office (right).

#### 4. Conclusion

In a nutshell, a town's significance in the past has a direct relationship with its economic contributions. The British administration had prioritise mainly on stability and security aspects to protect their interests, particularly for small towns of mining-industry and port-based. The former aspect was essential for the British in ensuring those small towns to remain economically contributive and stable. The latter aspect meanwhile was inevitable mainly for political needs and reasoning, especially when

the British and other Europeans were trading businesses during the formation of those early towns. Communication aspect meanwhile was prioritised by the British to ease their administrative agendas at small towns in distance from the main cities. Since these small towns were mainly agricultural-based, communication aspect was prioritised instead of stability and security aspects considering that they were less profitable in relative to the small towns of mining-industry and port-based. The existence of post offices per se has also enabled the British to be vigilant on the updates and development of those remote areas.

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