

Archives



Federation of Malaya

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**REPORT**

on the

**PUBLIC RECORDS OFFICE**

and

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES**

(1958—1962)

by



**HAJI ABDUL MUBIN SHEPPARD**

**SCHEDATO**

P.P.T., C.M.G., M.B.E., E.D., M.C.S.

*First Keeper of Public Records.*

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND PUBLIC RECORDS OFFICE  
PEJABAT ARKIB NEGARA DAN PENYIMPAN REKOD KERAJAAN  
BANGUNAN PERSEKUTUAN  
JALAN SULTAN  
PETALING JAYA  
SELANGOR.

**Please do not forget to consult the Public Records Office  
before destroying old records, or disposing  
of them in some other way**

*(see Appendix III, page 38)*

TELEPHONE :

KEEPER OF PUBLIC RECORDS - - 52351

GENERAL OFFICE - - - - 52352

SCHEDATO



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**REPORT**  
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**Historical Background**

The conservation of Federal, State and Settlement Public Records was under consideration by the Government before the second World War, but no action was taken to formulate any systematic process. After the surrender of the Japanese in August 1945, the Government was obliged to concentrate its attention on many pressing problems connected with rehabilitation and later with the Emergency situation. The widespread destruction of official documents all over Malaya during the Japanese occupation helped to create an impression that the problem was of low priority.

However in March 1948 the Secretary of State, in a Circular Despatch, asked that a survey of the existing situation in regard to the preservation of Government Records should be undertaken and forwarded a questionnaire prepared by the Deputy Keeper of the Records, in the Public Record Office in London.

Pressure of Emergency and other problems delayed the completion of the questionnaire until August 1951, but after further official investigations, in which the Raffles Professor of History in the University of Malaya (Professor C. N. Parkinson) took an active part, a Committee on the Preservation and Destruction of Official Records was appointed by the Chief Secretary, under the Chairmanship of the Solicitor-General, the membership of which included the Deputy Chief Secretary, the Surveyor-General, the Accountant-General, the Organisation and Methods Adviser, the Director of Audit and the Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Committee's Report was submitted in January 1956 and recommended that Government should establish administrative machinery for the systematic preservation and destruction of public records under the guidance of an Archivist, that State or Settlement Governments should be invited to participate in the establishment of a Unified Scheme for the whole Federation, and that a senior officer from the Public Records Office in London should be lent to survey the state of the Archives in the Federation and to make recommendations for legislation for the control of public records and for the administrative machinery for the preservation and destruction of these records. It also advised that a central repository would be needed. As a result Mr. H. N. Blakiston O.B.E., Assistant Keeper in the Public Record Office London arrived in Kuala Lumpur on 29th May, 1957, for a visit of two months duration. During this time he visited 28 central Federal Departments in Kuala Lumpur and 80 Departments both Federal and State in other parts of the Federation.

His terms of reference included recommendations as to whether an Archival Service should be established by law, whether State Governments should be invited

to participate and what staff and accommodation would be required. Mr. Blakiston's report, dated 26th July, 1957, recommended that a Federal Records Service should be established by law, that State Governments should be invited to join in the service, that a Keeper of Public Records and two Assistant Keepers be appointed as an initial step and that the systematic review of Government Records should be instituted.

The Government accepted Mr. Blakiston's report and recommendations in principle on November 11th 1957 and authorised the creation of an appointment of a Keeper of Public Records with effect from December 1st, 1957. Haji Abdul Mubin Sheppard, Malayan Civil Service Superscale 'B', was appointed to fill the appointment from the same date.

### **The Public Records Office**

The Public Records Office was first situated in the office block of the Dewan Tunku Abdul Rahman at 109, Ampang Road, Kuala Lumpur. The arrangement was intended to be a temporary one and the accommodation for Records and for research students was very limited. Owing to lack of alternative accommodation however the position remained unchanged until September 1960 when the offices at Ampang Road were needed for an ECAFE Conference and the Archives and Office were temporarily transferred to a large empty building, 27 Jalan Raja, recently vacated by the Telecommunications Department.

Plans were already well advanced for the occupation of 7,000 square feet of air-conditioned space in the Federal Government building in Petaling Jaya, but the renovations could not be completed until February 1961. The Public Records Office was moved to Petaling Jaya on February 1st. The new area was divided between the National Archives, a small Records Repository and the General Office.

The feeling of satisfaction and sense of spaciousness rapidly vanished when existing accessions of archives hitherto kept in packing cases were cleaned, stored and placed on shelves, and requests for storage space for non-current records accumulated, and in November 1961 funds were provided in the Development Estimates for the construction of a large Records Management Centre and Repository in Petaling Jaya, on a site only a short distance from the Government Offices. The site, when finally approved by the State Siting Committee, provided space for the future National Archives building on the adjoining land.

Plan for the Record Repository were in an advanced state of preparation in September 1962 in the P.W.D. Architect's office and the building was expected to be completed during the first half of 1963.

### **Public Records Staff**

The Staff consisted at first of the Keeper of Public Records, a Stenographer and an Office Boy, to which was added a Clerk in May 1958.

In April 1958 the Keeper of Public Records was appointed Director of Museums, Federation of Malaya in addition, and he continued to carry out the duties and responsibilities of both appointments for the succeeding four and a half years.

Expansion of the Records Office staff and activities resulted from Government approval of a memorandum on this subject first submitted in September 1958 and agreed to after substantial modifications on 20th July, 1960.

Two Division One posts of Assistant Keeper (Public Records) and Assistant Keeper (Archives) were created in the 1961 Estimates and were filled in May and August 1961 respectively. Two posts of Records Administration Officers were also created and were filled in May and July 1961, and three Records Filing and Indexing Clerks were appointed, one in 1960 and two in 1961. Two Records Attendants were recruited in 1961 and three more in 1962.

### **Staff Training**

The Keeper of Public Records visited the Public Record Office in London in July 1958 and spent two weeks observing the work of all the departments, under the guidance of Mr. H. N. Blakiston, on whose recommendation the Public Records Office was created. The Keeper also visited the Central African Archives in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia in August and was given every facility to study an institution whose work and problems were much more closely related to those of the Federation of Malaya than those to be observed in England. The first memorandum on the Preservation of Malayan Archives was submitted shortly after his return.

In April 1959 the Keeper visited the State Archives of Bombay and met the Deputy Director of the Indian National Archives.

Parallel with the recruitment of two Assistant Keepers in 1961 plans were initiated for their training, and arrangements were completed for the two newly appointed Assistant Keepers to fly to New Delhi and to take the Diploma Course on Archival Management organised by the Indian National Archives which began in September 1961 and was completed in August 1962. Before returning to take up their appointments in Malaya the Assistant Keepers were given the opportunity of visiting State Archives in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta.

### **Duties and Responsibilities of the Records Office**

The object of the Public Records Service is to introduce and maintain a continuous orderly process whereby the most important of Government Records are collected and preserved with special care for the purpose of reference and study, while all other public records which are no longer in current use are withdrawn from Government offices, where they are continually multiplying and accumulating, and are sorted with a view to indexing and storing if they are likely to be of further interest, or alternatively for destruction. Those records which are retained are divided into two categories, Archives and Public Records.

Archives are those which are considered to be of enduring administrative, legal, educational, historical, cultural or national interest or value. Public Records are all documents of any kind, including photographs, pictures, maps, films and tape-recordings officially made or received by any government officer in the course of his official duties.

The Keeper of Public Records is in addition the officer appointed under Section 6 (1) of the Preservation of Books Ordinance (Ordinance 51 of 1950, Federation of Malaya, see appendix II) to receive three printed copies of every book published in the Federation and to maintain a Catalogue of Books printed in the Federation of Malaya. This catalogue was maintained by an officer of the Museums Department until 28th February, 1961, when the responsibility was transferred by *Gazette* Notification L.N. 116, dated 13th April, 1961, to the Keeper of Public Records.

## **The situation in 1957**

Large quantities of official documents, printed reports and other records were destroyed during the Japanese occupation. The loss was particularly heavy in Penang, Ipoh and Kuala Lipis where the State Secretariat files were almost all destroyed. All the files of the Colonial Secretary in Singapore, many of which referred to the affairs of the Malay States, were destroyed in 1942.

In Negri Sembilan a Kempitai (Gestapo) Sergeant who had been instructed to destroy Kempitai records in 1945 included a large number of State Secretariat files in his bonfire.

The most complete and best preserved State Records are to be found in Kedah where the files complete with card, subject, index and register books cover the period from 1909 to 1942.

In Johore the State Secretary's files from 1915 to 1937 and the General Adviser's files from 1910 to 1942 have survived.

Mr. Blakiston found during his hurried tour in 1957 that Government files, which form the bulk of the records of most departments, were only rarely kept in a satisfactory condition, that many were damaged by damp, insects and rats, and that old files were often relegated to the floor of store-rooms in company with old tyres and scrap iron. He also found that there were no general rules for the disposal of valueless documents, apart from Financial General Orders. Many departments held no records earlier in date than late 1945, but where older files existed the majority were deteriorating, some more rapidly than others.

Mr. Blakiston has observed that 'since the period of Japanese rule, history has been moving and continues to move so fast in Malaya that the documentation of these extremely interesting times should be larger than the mere number of years might seem to warrant. As to the period before the war,' he added, 'in a country where there is so little written material (records) that is as much as fifty years old, I would advise extreme caution in destroying anything.' He continued 'It will be abundantly clear that the States hold some of the most valuable archives in the country. It is equally clear that the majority of these records are in sad need of better care if they are to survive..... It is not only the records of the State Secretariats that are involved. Those of other State Departments, whether central or local, are also to be considered, and particularly those of District Offices.'

## **First steps in the Establishment of the National Archives**

The approval of the Government in July 1960 to begin the expansion of the Public Records Service applied only to Federal Government Departments but limitations of space has made it impossible to assemble even a small proportion of the Federal Archives into a central office.

The problem was aggravated by the necessity of rescuing substantial quantities of early State Records in order to ensure their preservation.

The result during the first two years of active accumulation of archives has been to assemble a varied assortment which includes Selangor State Secretariat Files dating back to 1875, Trengganu State Secretariat Files (many written in Jawi script) dating from 1915 (1334), Negri Sembilan Secretariat Files dating from 1887, Kuantan Land Office Files dating from 1889 and Dindings District Office Files dating from 1885.



Many of the Selangor Secretariat Files had been lent by the Selangor Government to the University in Singapore in 1955, and when they were returned early in 1961, at the request of the Public Records Office, they were stored in the basement of the Faculty of Agriculture in the University of Malaya, Pantai Valley, owing to the absence of storage space in the Public Records Office. An experimental indexing exercise was undertaken while these files were in the University Store in Pantai Valley.

In addition to 94 crates of Selangor files returned from Singapore and another disorderly accumulation in two large Store-rooms in Kuala Lumpur, an unexpected cache of the same series was discovered by the Records Administration Officer, in one of the towers of the State Secretariat in August 1962. These Selangor Secretariat files represent the most complete collection of State Secretariat records in the peninsula.

The accession of early files from the Dindings in Perak is only a small fraction of the total awaiting collection : 10,000 more files covering the pre-war period when the Dindings were part of the Straits Settlements and later after it was restored to Perak have been offered to the National Archives. Valuable assistance in bringing to the notice of the Public Records Office the existence of accumulations of old records which urgently needed better accommodation was given by Mr. W. Roff, an Australian Archivist who undertook a research project throughout the Federation in 1960-1961.

The existence of other important hoards of potentially historic State records were already mentioned by Mr. Blakiston's report.

The Administrative framework before 1941 deprived Kuala Lumpur of most of the important official correspondence at Federal level, since the office of the High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States and for the Unfederated Malay States as well as the office of the Governor, and the Colonial Secretary, who was responsible for the three Straits Settlements, were concentrated in Singapore. Only the Chief Secretary officiated in Kuala Lumpur and very few pre-war Chief Secretary's files have survived the Japanese occupation. However a large consignment of bound volumes of Despatches exchanged between the High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States and the Secretary of State for the Colonies were located in an unventilated and windowless store room on the ground floor of the Federal Secretariat in 1959 and transferred to the care of the Public Records Office. These despatches had been sent to New Zealand for safety in December 1941 shortly before the fall of Singapore, and had been returned in 1945. They cover the period from 1897 to 1941 with relatively few gaps and are in a remarkably good state of repair.

Important accessions were collected gradually from many different sources. A unique set of Annual Reports on the four Federated Malay States from 1895 to 1940 were transferred from the former Chief Secretary's Library.

The Museum Library provided a continuous sequence of Civil Lists, containing details of all officers serving on the permanent establishment in the Federated Malay States from 1904 to 1941. From the same source a number of early Unfederated Malay State Government Annual Reports were obtained. A large collection of volumes of pre-war Government *Gazette* Notifications were presented by the Penang Police Headquarters, see Appendix IV. The Manager of the Malay Mail deposited an almost complete set of bound volumes of the Malay Mail dating back to 1896 and many pre-war volumes of the Malaya Tribune and Straits Times were transferred to the Archives from the Museum Library.

## **Personal Papers**

Two groups of Personal Papers of outstanding interest were received. One of these is a collection called the Swettenham Papers. Six boxes of letters, reports and notes formerly the property of the late Sir Frank Swettenham, who retired as Governor and High Commissioner in 1904, had been acquired by the Federal Government in 1948 and were in the Museum Library prior to their transfer to the Archives. The other is a collection of 55 letters in manuscript exchanged between Baginda Omar of Trengganu and other Malay Rulers on the East Coast between 1847 and 1858. The originals were borrowed in 1960 from Engku Pangiran Anum of Kuala Trengganu, whose grandfather was the Chief Minister to the Sultan of Trengganu, and photostat copies were made of each.

## **Maps**

A small collection of old maps were obtained from the Survey Department and the Selangor Secretariat Store. The oldest of these are the maps of the Malacca Territory 1885 and of the town of Kuala Lumpur and environs, State of Selangor 1895.

## **Photographs**

An extensive Photograph Library totalling over 700 prints has been assembled partly with the assistance of Mr. Donald Davies of Kuala Lumpur and of Mr. H. P. Bryson, M.C.S., Secretary to the British Association of Malaya. Many photographs of events dating back to the late 19th and early 20th century in the Federated Malay States are included.

## **Dutch Registers**

Fifteen bound volumes of Dutch Records from Malacca, including Baptism registers and Resolution books dated between 1642 and 1825 which have been lent by the Malacca Historical Society are also kept in the Archives.

## **Research Workers**

Research Workers have made use of the limited facilities offered by the National Archives almost from its inception. They have come mainly from Australia, America, Great Britain, and the University of Malaya and Singapore and include Messrs. W. Roff (Australia), L. Goslin, G. Ness and R. Tillman (U.S.A.), Miss E. Sadka and Miss J. Stoodly (Australia), Miss Latiffa Khan (Hongkong) and Mr. de V. Allen (Oxford).

Research subjects to which the Archives have contributed include the Constitutional History of Malaya, English Education in Malaya 1896-1941, the Development of the Federal Council, District and State Administration in the early 20th century and Indian Labour in Malaya 1900-1945.

Since the Public Records Office was moved on air-conditioned premises in Petaling Jaya research has been able to be carried out in considerable comfort and a separate research room has been provided.

## **Records Management**

The removal of non-current files and other official records from Government Offices to a Central Records Management Centre, resulting in the freeing of valuable space for other administrative purposes, is an advantage which has been recognised by many who attach little importance to the preservation of Archives.

The Government included in its expansion programme in July 1960 specific reference to the orderly withdrawal and preservation of non-current records and the

establishment of a Records Management Centre at Petaling Java but funds for this project were not provided until January 1962 and plans were still in the course of preparation in September of that year. Meanwhile a site sufficient to accommodate both the Records Management Centre and the future National Archives was selected and officially allocated for this purpose by the State Government, close to the existing Federal Government Offices, where the Archives are at present housed. When the new Records Centre is completed in about April or May 1963 the Keeper of Public Records will have no difficulty in supervising it, from his nearby office.

The new Records Management Centre contains 6,100 sq. feet of storage space on two levels, and office accommodation for the Assistant Keeper (Public Records) and a Staff of Filing and Indexing Clerks and Records Attendants.

The best method of extending Records Management to the Eleven States has not yet been explored, though the subject was specifically included in the Government expansion programme. Mr. Blakiston advised that the States should join in the establishment and use of a Central Records Office both on grounds of economy and in order to share the advantages of trained personnel. He pointed out that there should be no danger of any State losing proprietorship in her records, which can be deposited on indefinite loan and processed on her behalf. He emphasised that States would always be free to recall any records for reference, and could decide which of the State Records should be available for public inspection and which should not.

The Central African Archives, sited in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia but including Public Records from Northern Rhodesia and Tanganyika provides an example of what has been successfully introduced elsewhere.

### **Destruction and Preservation**

In the meantime a Circular instruction has been sent out to all Federal Departments by the Prime Minister's Department prohibiting the destruction of any files or other public records without prior consultation with and without the approval of the Keeper of Public Records. This important instruction No. 12 was issued on 29th September, 1961, (see appendix III).

In a few cases short lists of files which were recommended for destruction have been forwarded by Federal Governments departments, and after scrutiny of the files by a Records Administration officer it has been possible to authorise some destruction of routine papers.

A small Stationery Store in Brockman Road belonging to the Selangor Government, where a large collection of prewar Selangor Secretariat files had been deposited, has been adapted to serve as a temporary repository, where first the Selangor files and later other accessions from certain Ministries, have been rearranged, cleaned and in some cases listed. It has proved a valuable stop gap. But it has not been possible to make a start on the major task of transferring and processing the bulk accumulation of non-current files in Federal Offices in Kuala Lumpur, owing to the lack of storage space, and increasingly insistent appeals from hard-pressed heads of departments have had to be met with requests for continued patience.

### **Reproduction of Records**

Requests have been received from time to time for copies of records, both printed matter and historical photographs. A Verifax copying machine has been purchased by the Record Office and exact photographic reproductions of documents

can be made within a couple of minutes. Romanised transliterations of Jawi documents have also been made by a member of the Records staff and supplied to Research Workers.

Photostat copies of rare administration reports which are not now available in Malaya have been obtained with the assistance of the Malayan Ambassador in Thailand.

### **Archives in Singapore**

Many important Archives relating to the administration of the different divisions of the Malay Peninsula before the second World War are deposited in the Archives of the Singapore National Library. These include a collection of 280 loose letters and three bound volumes of letters written by the Governors of the Straits Settlements between 1867 and 1894.

The only surviving copies of the Minutes of the Residents' Conference (the British Residents of the 4 Federated Malay States) from 1897 to 1931 are also in the Archives in Singapore. Secret and Confidential Despatches exchanged between the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Governor of the Straits Settlements between 1867 and 1942 are also in the Archives in Singapore, while the open despatches and correspondence relating to the Federated Malay States from 1897 to 1942 are in the Archives in Petaling Jaya.

### **Royal Archives**

The Records in the offices of Their Highnesses the Rulers have not yet been explored. Mr. Blakiston did not visit any of the Sultan's offices and the questionnaire issued by the 1957 Records Committee omitted them from their enquiries. It is believed that all the papers in the office of the Sultan of Selangor were destroyed at the beginning of the War (1942), but there is an extensive and well ordered collection of papers at Pekan in the office of the Sultan of Pahang and there is a collection of letter books dating back to the last quarter of the 19th century in the office of the Sultan of Kedah.

### **Non-Governmental Records**

No attempt has yet been made to include non-Government Records in the National Archives, but enquiries have been addressed to Planters Associations asking if any early records of rubber planting in Malaya have survived. Similar enquiries, might soon be made to leading long established Mining Companies, Business Houses both European and Indian and to Chinese Guilds. Their early growth and development is sometimes referred to in some detail in official files, but the picture to be obtained from this source has certain limitations which could be supplemented with great advantage from business records.

Over one thousand volumes of the Straits Trading Company records which are in the Company's possession have been examined by the Raffles Professor of History in Singapore. They date back to 1900.

Personal papers of deceased individual Malaysians of note are another valuable type of Archive which are even less likely to survive for much longer. A painstaking drive to locate and preserve such documents needs to be made by the Federation Archivist.

### **Malayan Archives in Portugal**

There is a Director-General of Overseas Archives in Portugal. The present holder, Dr. Alberto Iria, has made a special study of historical documents relating to Malaya and has written a detailed report which has been published (in about 1960) in which he records that there are 400 documents in which references to

Malaya occur. The report, the title of which (when translated into English) is 'Study Elements on the Possible Portuguese Contribution for the Malacca Historical Museum' contains short notes on the contents of each document, but it is published in the Portuguese language.

Dr. Silva Rego, a Portuguese historian, visited Kuala Lumpur early in 1961, after attending the South East Asia Historical Congress in Singapore and confirmed the existence of large numbers of Portuguese documents in Lisbon which relate to Malacca during the period when the Portuguese were in control. The problem of selecting from this large collection those which are of particular interest to Malaya has not so far been solved, owing mainly to the fact that no Malayan can read Portuguese. If a selection can be made, and photostat copies taken of those documents which will repay detailed study, they will be an important addition to the Malayan Archives.

There are, in addition, a large number of records in Goa referring to Portuguese—Malacca relations during the period 1560–1641. These include 28 volumes of 'Moncoes do Reino'. The contents of many of these have not been the subject of any published report even in Portuguese, although some material from 'Moncoes do Reino' has appeared in 'Archivo Portuguez Oriental' (8 Volumes) which was published in Goa between 1857 and 1876. Here again valuable Archives of importance to Malaya may be found.

A proposal was made to send the Malayan Assistant Keeper (Archives) to Goa on the completion of her diploma course in New Delhi in September 1962, but the Assistant Director of Archives stated that there were no documents in the Malay language in the Goa Archives, and that all the records were in Portuguese, the visit was therefor cancelled.

The late Mr. Ian MacGregor, former lecturer in History at the University of Malaya in Singapore devoted five years to a special research project on the Portuguese in South East Asia, but owing to his untimely death in 1959 the results of his research have remained for the most part unpublished. (See however Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society Vol. 28 Pt. 2 1955. 'Johore Lama in the 16th. century' and 'The Portuguese in Malaya 1571–1641'). His extensive notes and microfilms are now deposited in the University Library Singapore. Mr. MacGregor does not appear to have visited the Goa Archives but spent a considerable period in Lisbon.

### **Malayan Archives in India**

The National Archives of India in New Delhi contains a quantity of records relating to Malaya between the years 1774 and 1867. There are also some earlier records referring to the activities of the East India Company and its connections with the Malay Peninsula, in the Madras Record office.

The records in the National Archives of India include letters from Malay Sultans of Riau-Johor, Selangor, Kedah and Trengganu addressed to the Governor General at Fort William, Bengal, between 1784 and 1786 and a quantity of reports on the early administration of Penang.

A note on these archives was supplied by the National Archives of India in 1961 and the Malayan Assistant Keeper (Archives) has had an opportunity of examining them during her diploma course 1961–1962.

There may be certain other documents relating to Malaya in some other Indian repository which have not yet been discovered. For example it is believed that a young British Army officer—Lieut. T. J. Newbold A.D.C.—presented certain Malay manuscripts to the Madras Literary and Scientific Society in 1836.