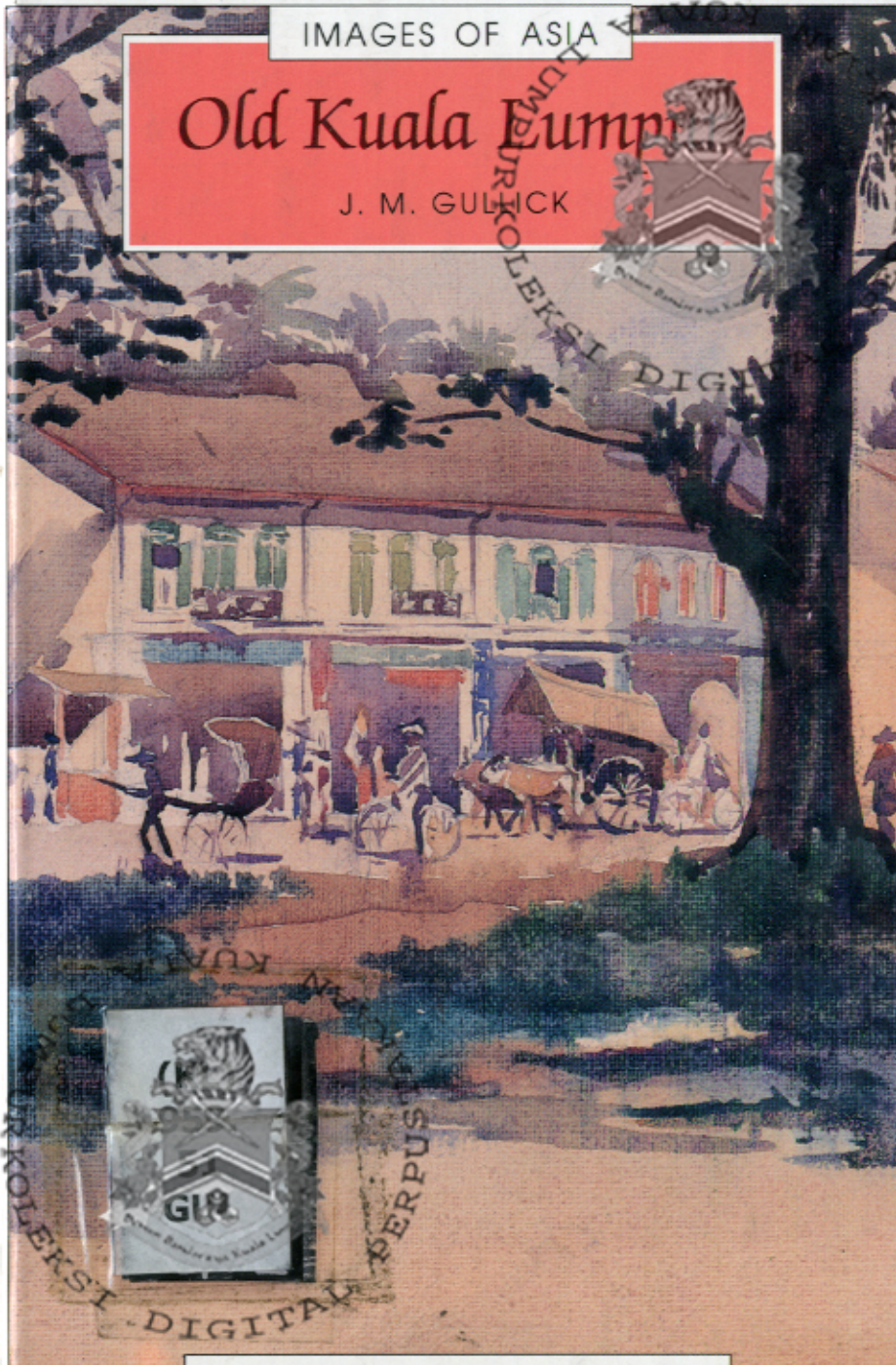


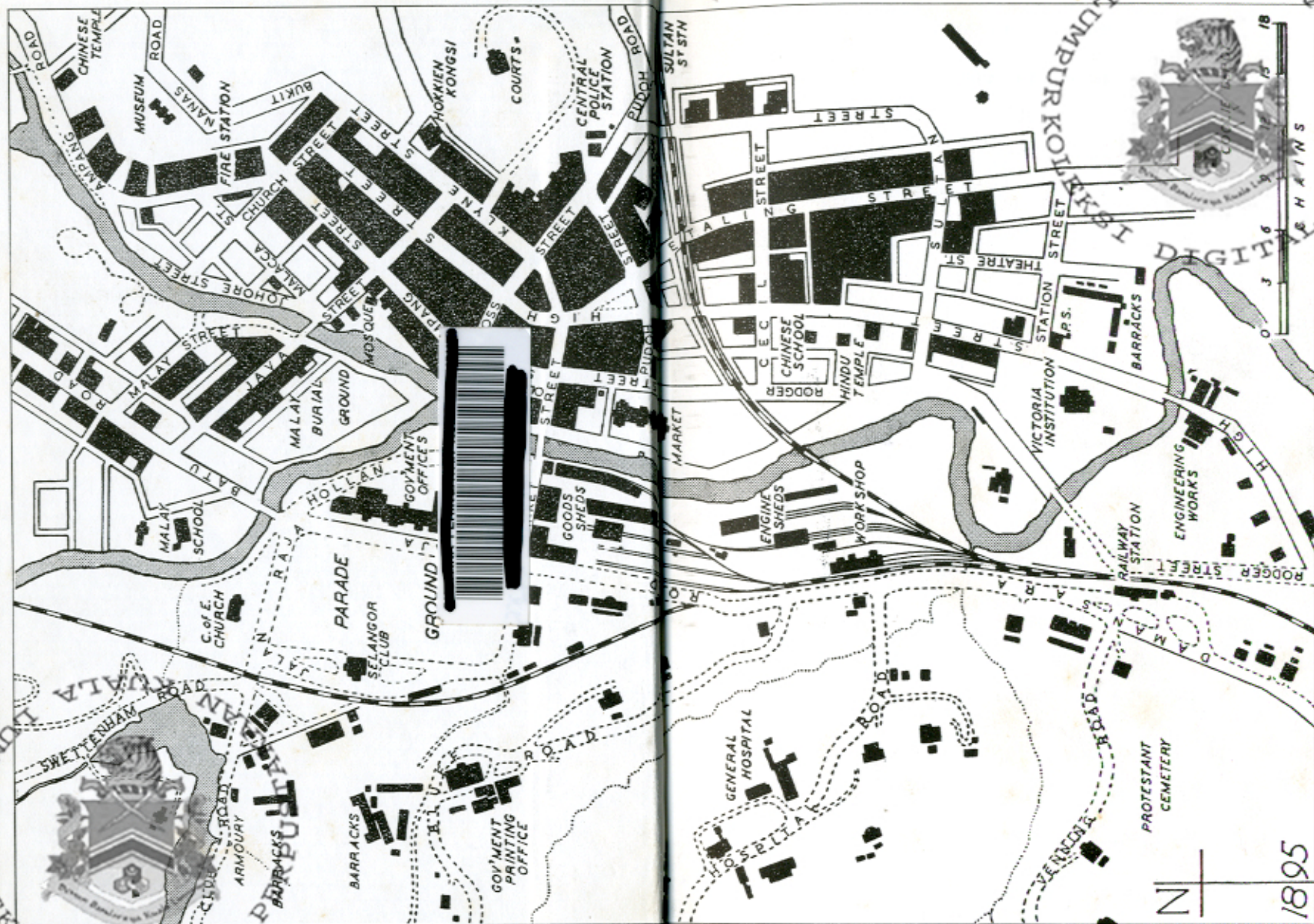
IMAGES OF ASIA

Old Kuala Lumpur

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Kuala Lumpur in 1895. Redrawn by K. M. Foong from a map prepared by the Federal Town Planning Department (1950). (Reproduced by permission of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society)

Preface

KUALA LUMPUR only emerges into the full daylight of recorded history in 1880, when it became the State capital of Selangor. Until the early 1870s officials and businessmen in the towns of the Straits Settlements referred vaguely to 'Klang', meaning the entire Klang Valley, as an important centre of tin mining. The name 'Kuala Lumpur' was by then in local use but did not appear generally in contemporary records until after the civil war (1867-73) was over. Thus, it was as recently as 1934 that the eminent scholar, Sir Richard Winstedt, writing a history of Selangor before colonial rule, only referred in passing to Kuala Lumpur as the scene of fighting during the civil war, and did not once mention Yap Ah Loy, of whose existence he was apparently unaware.

In 1936, however, S. M. Middlebrook, a Chinese-speaking administrator, chanced on an account of Yap Ah Loy in an old Chinese periodical. He found it so interesting that he set about gathering scraps of information from what other sources he could find with a view to writing a short biography of Yap Ah Loy for the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (JMBRAS). When Middlebrook, with many other Europeans, was interned in Changi Gaol in Singapore in 1942, he took his unfinished work with him. Unfortunately, his Chinese language documents aroused the suspicions of the Japanese, who believed—quite wrongly—that internees were passing information through Singapore Chinese to assist allied commando raids. Middlebrook was one of the internees who were rounded up in the savage 'Double Ten' raid in 1943, and he died of the ill-treatment which he suffered. His papers were confiscated and some were lost, but the actual manuscript of his biography was returned to his cell and preserved until 1945 by his friends. It was, however, much altered in Middlebrook's difficult handwriting and no one but his widow could have, as she did, decipher it to produce a

legible typescript. His story of Yap Ah Loy ended in 1873, since the Chinese sources he used recorded that the gallant hero had emerged on the winning side in the war; they believed he had then lived happily on until his death in 1885.

The editor of *JMBRAS* asked the author of this book, who knew nothing whatever of the subject, whether a concluding chapter on the period 1873-85 could be compiled to complete the biography. In response to a casual enquiry made to the State Secretary, Selangor, the latter said that he did not know whether the extant Selangor Government files went back as far as 1885 but he would make enquiries. It took three office messengers a long, hot afternoon to bring down from an attic (in the Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad), where they had long since been forgotten, some 10,000-20,000 files of the period 1875-85 (a file of that period contained a single letter and the reply; a new file was opened if the matter was continued).

These archives yielded much information on Yap Ah Loy and Kuala Lumpur, since the town was the powerhouse of the Selangor economy, even in hard times, and Yap Ah Loy, until 1880, had virtually sole charge; administrators from Klang merely came to visit him now and again. By the time the research was done, the Selangor Government had plans to use the vacant storage room for other purposes and proposed to destroy the 'old files'. However, Professor Northcote Parkinson (later world famous for 'Parkinson's Law') was then head of the History Department of the University of Malaya in Singapore. On learning what was intended, he intervened (his indignation reverberated from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur like the Krakatoa volcanic eruption of 1883). The records are now carefully preserved (and have been indexed) at the Arkib Negara.

That was not the end of the discovery of sources of information on pre-1880 Kuala Lumpur. In 1942 Frank Swettenham had published his memoirs, with a brief passage on his first visit to Kuala Lumpur in 1872. He had returned to work in Selangor in 1874 and his Selangor journal, in which he described his second visit to Kuala Lumpur in March 1875, was found a century later in the small reference library at Malaysia House (the former Malay