

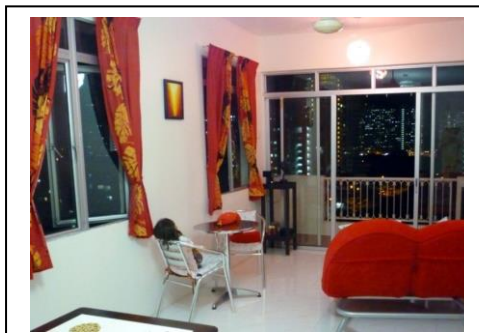
Chapter 17 – Penang

(2011)

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Our New Home



Relau Indah 11-01

We began our stay in Penang as MM2H'ers in late November 2010, although we regarded the apartment in Relau Indah as our first home really. Singapore and the UK seemed so far, far away. We both loved this little shelf in the sky as well as 11-03, the other apartment two doors away which we rented to use as a studio for our creative work. In the evening, we enjoyed having our supper or a drink on the balcony before we retired to bed, while 'kaypoh-ing' the happenings in our neighbourhood.

After we 'moved in', the first thing to do was to set up the studio and workshop space at 11-03 for Gek's art and my dollhouse modelling. We ordered a set of rattan furniture from a shop in Georgetown, a 2-seater TV chair, a Singapore chair, a coffee table and two stools so that the workshop could double as guest accommodation when required. As it turned out, over the next three years we would entertain ten groups of friends and relatives who came to stay with us. The next job that I did was to give the walls of the common corridor on our level a new coat of paint. We pooled together the potted plants of our neighbours to add a little green to the passageway.

We saw a few improvements to the condo over the first twelve months. We started the year with only one lift in operation, and sometimes we needed to walk up the twelve storeys to



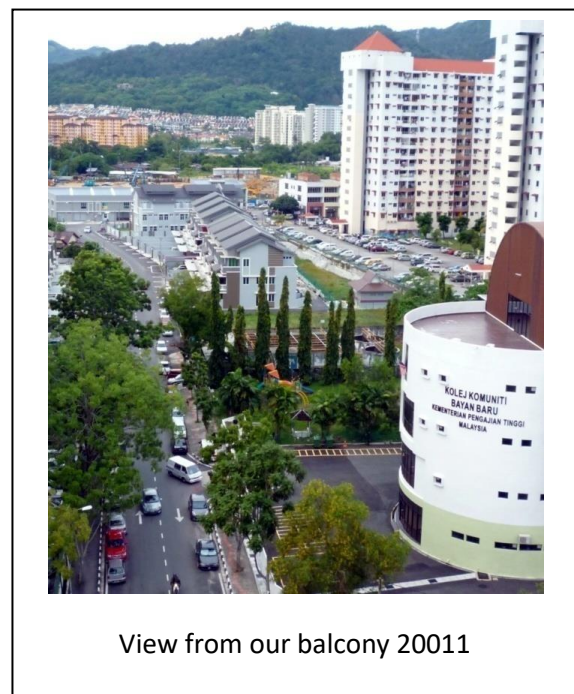
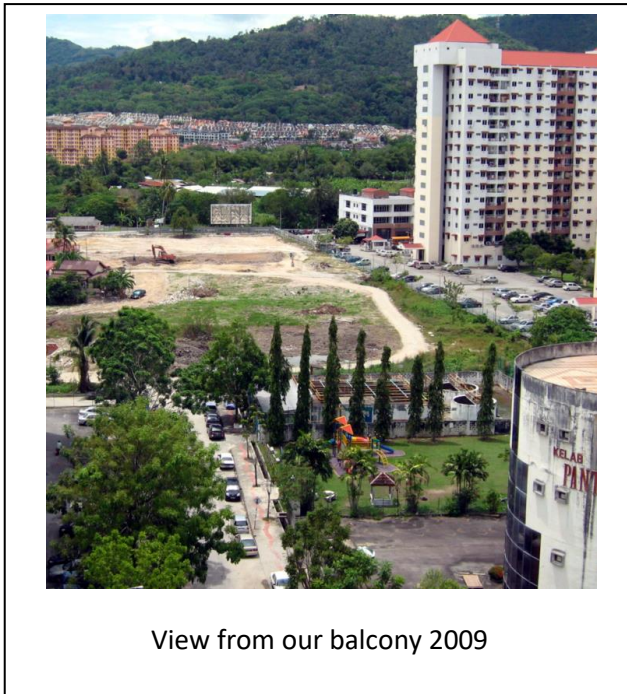
Gek a Painting



Black and White Model House

our apartment. Now both lifts were operating with a new sensor installed in their doors. The entrance to the condo had a fresh coat of paint and a new shelter erected on the ground floor in front of the lift lobby. A new touch-n-go system was installed to manage parking of the residents' cars and to encourage owners to pay their maintenance fees regularly. The lights in the lift lobby on every floor were tidied up and replaced with new fluorescent lamps. The place appeared to be on the up. The beginning of the year saw Gek

involved in the management committee of the Condo, helping in the drafting of the agenda for AGM and taking notes of the meeting. She was nominated as the secretary of the management committee at the AGM.



In our neighbourhood, as viewed from our windows, we saw the completion of rows of 3-storey terraced houses and shops. Also, Farmland cleared across the road making way for a new condo development, The Golden Triangle. Other developments were the transformation of a defunct club house opposite our condo into the smart looking Bayan Baru Community College. A bigger hawker centre, PISA Corner Kafe, also opened across the road from PISA, replacing an older, rather dilapidated one. Soon after our move to Penang, the RAPID bus service greatly improved as more new buses joined the fleet. In the past we used to hop onto any bus heading towards Georgetown to avoid standing in the heat, but now we became choosy and went for the express buses only. We were blessed with ten bus services that stopped at our bus stop. Penang was booming.

Phattaya

In March 2011 we visited Phattaya to stay with Raymond, my classmate and friend in the sixth form at Grammar School. We had not seen each other since 1965 although we had got back in touch with one another in 2001 via the 'Friends Reunite' website just as he was relocating to Thailand. Since we were last together, Ray got his Doctorate in Psychology from the Pacific Western University, California, USA and had been, amongst other things, an advisor to the United Nations on Thailand's sex workers. He was now teaching English at a disabled children's home in Phattaya which we visited with him to watch the youngsters perform short cameos plays they had written in English.

Fortunately for us, there was an early evening direct flight between Penang and Bangkok and with a taxi that Ray had arranged to meet us at the airport, we went directly to Phattaya without the need to spend a night in the city. The last time there was a guy at an airport waiting for me was back in my admissions tutor travelling days with Staffordshire University. On that occasion, I had flown into Thessaloniki in northern Greece and on exiting the arrivals gate, I expectantly scanned the name boards people were holding up. But no "Whitworth" could I see, although I did notice a "Woolworth". After all the passengers and the prearranged taxi drivers had left the gate area, it dawned on me that "Woolworth" was meant for me. But too late now, someone else got a free lift into town that day. This time, there was no cock-up and we duly followed our man to his parked taxi at a brisk pace, struggling to keep up with him towing our luggage behind us. I think his parking ticket must have been about to expire, the rate of knots he was travelling. Once we reached the outskirts of Phattaya our driver asked us which hotel we would like to be dropped at. When we told him we were going directly to an address somewhere in the town, he was a bit non-plused as he lived in Bangkok and didn't know Phattaya at all. After a couple of frantic language conflicted telephone calls to Ray, we did eventually manage to find his bungalow on the outskirts of the city.

You may remember from my grammar school days, that Ray was gay. For an evening's entertainment Ray took us to his favourite gay bar to watch a cabaret show there. The highlight for me was Annie Lenox's song, "No More "I Love You's"", mimed by a transgender man wearing a silver, ankle length dress, seated on a stool at the front of the stage whilst a chorus of gay men danced appropriate moves to the music behind him. I felt as though I was sitting in the Bird Cage club from the Robin William's film of the same name, an unforgettable experience.

Gay, transvestite and transgender are terms applied to people who have characteristics of their sex opposites which can range from simple mannerisms to surgical sex changes. Ray explained to us that in Thailand, young pre-pubescent boys are prepared for the lucrative sex trade by having their genitalia surgically removed in order that their voices do not break in their early teens. They subsequently would have the necessary surgery to complete the gender change. Sex tourism is big business in Thailand and has been since the American soldiers spent their R & R periods there back in the 1960s and 70s, away from the war fronts in Vietnam. I had been to Phattaya with Jenny and the girls at Christmas 1983. I must confess, I might well have not been as I didn't recognise a single place that Ray took us too, notwithstanding I didn't visit any gay bars back then.

After four days of reminiscing and memory correction, Gek and I departed back to Penang to await our next excursion abroad, this time a two-month trip long to Australia.

(8th June 2015 – Singapore)

South Australia

[Blog Entry for Australia, June 2011](#). And [July 2011](#)

On our trip to visit Peck Kheng in Albany the previous year, she and her husband Graham had put into our heads the idea to circumnavigate the Australian continent on the Route 1 National Highway. People made of sterner stuff than us set off to do the 15,000 km journey in record time but for us, it would be a leisurely drive, planned over perhaps three separate visits to the country and taking several months to complete. The plan for this, our second visit to OZ and possibly Phase 1 of our circumnavigation, was to take Route 1 from Adelaide to Brisbane visiting friends and relatives on the way, taking the odd nights stop over with them if it was offered.

We first flew to Singapore from Penang in May to enjoy the hospitality of Linden, an ex-colleague of Gek's from her time at Ngee Ann Poly, in her condo near Holland Village. But we only stayed there long enough to keep our appointment at Singapore's National Skin Centre for Gek's routine cancer check-up. A few hours after the 'all clear' from the consultant at the Centre, we boarded a plane to Adelaide for our two-month long Australian drive. This was a carefully, dare I say, meticulously planned driving tour of Australia's east coast, taking in Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, a total of 5,000 km with twenty people, both relatives and friends, to visit on the way.

Named in honour of Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen, queen consort to King William IV, the city was founded in 1836 as the planned capital for a freely settled British province in Australia. Colonel William Light, the son of Francis Light, the founder of Georgetown in Penang, designed the city and chose its location close to the River Torrens. Light's design set out Adelaide in a grid layout, interspaced by wide boulevards and large public squares, and surrounded by parklands which are still there to this day.

In Adelaide we met up with seven friends in all. First were Gek's friends from her student days, Cecilia, her husband WS and Lay Lee. Cecilia and her family moved to the city from Singapore in the early 1970s. Next, we met our Mongolian friends Alimaa and Khishgee with whom I worked on the ADB/VSO project, both were now working towards their Ph.D.'s at Flinders University in Adelaide. We spent a couple of delightful evenings together with them, one of which was at their university campus accommodation to the south of the city. Our last visit was to see Pam and Rob, fellow MM2Her's, whom we had recently gotten to know in Penang when they bought the apartment opposite Chris and Ranu's in Times Square, Times Square, Georgetown that is. Their first home is an apartment down on the coast at Glenelg, a very pretty little town at the mouth of the Torrens River with fabulous empty golden sandy beaches to the north and south of it.

Granddad Stories.

Between the socialising, we visited the Adelaide sites, including yet another botanical garden set up by the British colonists which was opened in 1857. In most cities and towns we visit, it has become our habit to seek out, not only the gardens, but also the city's art



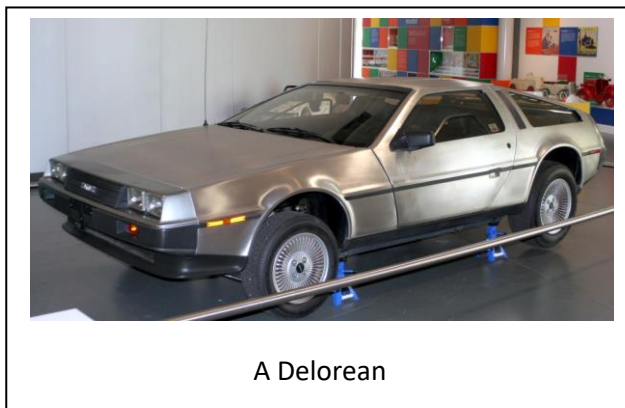
scene. In Perth the previous year, we dropped into the Indigenous Art show at the city's art gallery to discover that art for art's sake is relatively new to Australia's original inhabitants. Also, that the majority of today's indigenous artists are women. What the colonists mistook for art pieces were in fact maps used to instruct members of the hunter gather groups on the local terrain. The exhibition at Adelaide's Art Gallery we visited was anything but indigenous art and was quite disturbing, as I think you must agree looking at the photographs above. The exhibits were mostly imaginative sculptures which would not have looked out of place in a comic strip or science fiction film, the difference being that, in 3D, some of them were so incredibly lifelike. Twice I mistook a sculpture for a real person. One little boy stood for ages in front of, then to the side of, an exhibit just staring at its face, unsure of what he was actual seeing. Is it alive or is it not?

The artist, Patricia Piccinini, is an Australian who works in a variety of media, including painting, video, sound, installation, digital prints, and sculpture. In 2014 she was awarded the Artist Award by the Melbourne Art Foundation's Awards for the Visual Arts. She was born in 1965, Freetown, Sierra Leone arriving in Australia in 1972 with her family and now lives Melbourne. As can be guessed by the exhibition, the concepts that underpin modern science, such as genetic engineering and other forms of biotechnology, appear to fascinate her. The 'We are all Family' exhibits attempt to make us confront our stereotypes when we come to judge others; someone we think looks shifty is not to be trusted or someone whose eyes are closer together than the norm must be a criminal, for instance. I am afraid I left wondering how the heck she had made such realistic human faces never mind the naturally poses they were all striking, always the engineer in me overriding the aesthetic experience.

After five days pottering around Adelaide City, we took ourselves off to the hills in a hired car, the Adelaide Hills

(9th June 2015 – Singapore)

In the Hills we stayed at the delightfully named Rainbow's End, a bed and breakfast place on the outskirts of Littlehampton. It was more than your average B&B with our accommodation including its own bathroom and private lounge complete with television and mini library. As we were the only guests during our stay, we felt very much at home there. The rural setting was much appreciated by us too, a welcome change from the urban living we were used to. The countryside around us was very reminiscent of England's green, irregular shaped, hedge lined fields with the odd white sheep ambling around in them. No kangaroos to break the illusion did we see.



A DeLorean

Using Rainbow's End as a base, we visited amongst other places, the National Car Museum in Birdwood. Regrettably they did not have a Morgan in the collection but a large proportion of the cars on display were of UK origin, even a DeLorean, the ill-fated stainless-steel sports car built in Northern Ireland. The DeLorean is an American sports car manufactured by John

DeLorean's DeLorean Motor Company for the American market from 1981–83. The car features gull-wing doors and an innovative fiberglass chassis and under body structure, along with a brushed stainless-steel body. The car became widely known and iconic for its appearance as a modified time machine in the Back to the Future film trilogy.



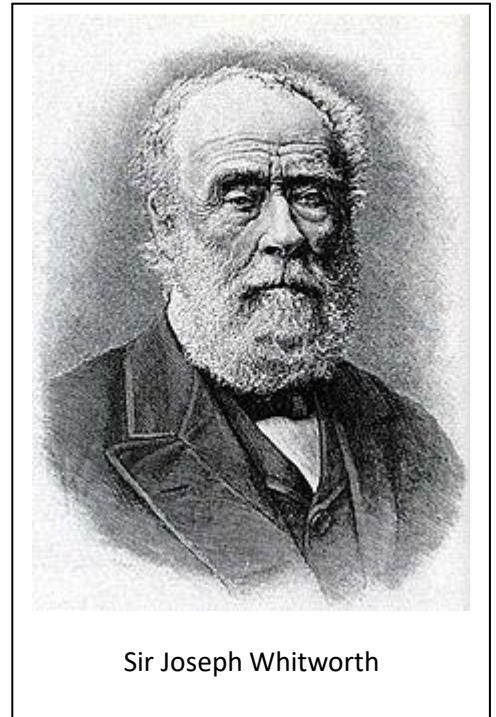
A Car Badge I Own and a name Sake

Amongst the car badges on display, I noticed two mounted in the cabinet next to one another which I could identify with, a Malaysian and Singapore Vintage Car Register (MSVCR) badge next to a badge with my name on it, a Rudge-Whitworth Enthusiasts Club badge. I still have a MSVCR badge, a reminder of my 1980s stay in Singapore when I was a club member. The club is still going strong

today. We visited a display of club members' cars at the old Ford Factory in Bukit Timah during Richard's stay with us in 2010. And that display did include a Morgan, a very shiny new brown +8.

Apart from Whitworth, a town in east Lancashire not far from Bolton where I was born, there have been a couple of notable individuals born with the name including a Royal Navy Admiral. But I guess the most famous of the lineage, not ours though, is Sir Joseph.

Sir Joseph Whitworth, 1st Baronet (1803 – 1887) was an English engineer, entrepreneur, inventor, and philanthropist. In 1841, he devised the British Standard System, which created an accepted standard for screw threads. This sometimes led to me being referred to as 'Half Whit' as in a Whitworth half inch screw thread. Whitworth also created the Whitworth Rifle often called the 'sharpshooter' because of its accuracy and considered one of the earliest examples of a sniper's rifle.



Sir Joseph Whitworth

At his death in 1887, he bequeathed much of his fortune for the people of Manchester's benefit, with the Whitworth Art Gallery and the Christie Hospital partly funded by Whitworth's money. For these contributions to the wellbeing of Mancunians, Whitworth Street and Whitworth Hall in Manchester are named in his honour.

Sir W G Armstrong Whitworth & Co Ltd was another famous Whitworth. Sir W G owned a major British manufacturing company in the early years of the 20th century. With headquarters in the north east of England, Armstrong Whitworth engaged in the construction of armaments, ships, locomotives, automobiles, and aircraft. Seems I was bound by my name and the past to be a mechanical engineer.

(11th June 2015 – Singapore)

During our stay in Littlehampton, one of Gek's tooth fillings fell out. Gek feels the same as I do when it comes The Dentist, very fearful of them she is. Pam, our lovely hostess at the B & B, recommended a dentist in Mount Barker the nearest town to where we were staying, and we duly took ourselves off there to have him replace Gek's missing filling. Here again I had to stop and remind myself where I was, in a place 15,000 miles from my country of birth and yet surrounded by all things familiarly English. Sitting in the waiting room browsing through the usual coffee table magazines, waiting for what seemed like an age for Gek, I felt again the disconnect between where I was and where I thought I was. Everywhere in South East Asia is different to the UK, climate, flora and fauna, culture and no way could you think you were somewhere else. Even when travelling around Europe, you know that you are in a foreign land. But here in South Australia, sitting in dentist's waiting room, you could be in Shropshire.

After a farewell dinner on our last evening at Rainbow's End with our hostess Pam and her husband David, we departed for the Great Ocean Road. The Great Ocean Road starts at Anglesea (see, another transplanted name from the UK) and travels 244 kilometres westward to finish at Allansford near Warrnambool. Our first night's resting place, at a hotel in Robe, couldn't have been more different from our cosy home-from-home at Pam's Rainbow's End. Very cold bedroom, dubious plumbing and not so good restaurant, by far and away the worst place we have stayed ever. As we were to find on the rest of our Route 1 drive to Brisbane, this was Australia's closed holiday season, with most towns we visited hunkered down for the winter. Not that that was a bad thing in the main because we had places to ourselves, roads, hotels and attractions. But here in Robe, we had to go to bed early just to keep warm. Good job we had only one night to suffer there.

Victoria

I liked Warrnambool, our next port of call. Again, we were practically the only guests staying in the hotel and they very kindly 'bumped us up' from the en-suite room we had pre-booked to an apartment at no extra cost. We also discovered here that the libraries in this part of the world offered free wireless internet connection to all comers, not just for local library members. The internet services offered by the hotels was prohibitively expensive meaning that I would not have been able to write up my blog on the go and would have to wait till we got home to record our Australian adventures. Over the next couple of days, Gek took the opportunity to continue the painting she started at Pam's. The type of holiday we planned was on a leisurely style, no rushing around to must-see sights as you do on a break from your daily grind of work-bed-work, feeling like you have to get the most out of your few days' holiday entitlement. No, this was to be a do it when you want to do it and only if you want to do it approach to travel. From this and subsequent long driving trips we have undertaken together, I can thoroughly recommend this approach to touring. Free and easy, that's the way to do it. The joy you get from owning your own time cannot be overestimated, particularly if you, like me, balk at control by others, be it a company or an individual.



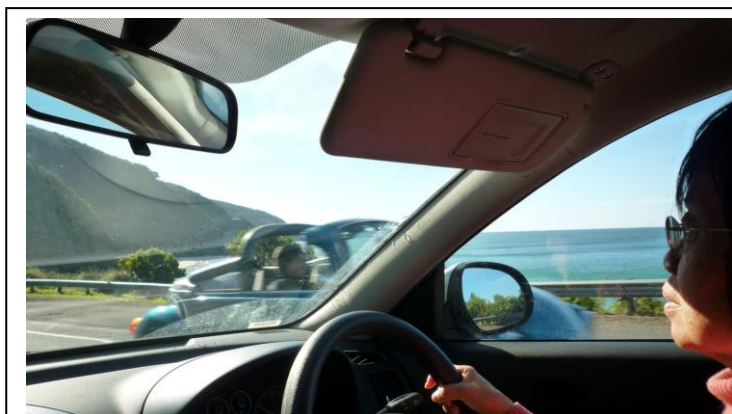
The Apostles Waves

The Great Ocean Road runs behind limestone sea cliffs, some as high as fifty metres. They are being constantly eroded by waves from the Southern Ocean, a wave hitting the soft rocks every fourteen seconds on average, none stop, day and night. I noticed that the limestone, a rock formed from compacted sea-life skeletons deposited on ancient sea floors, has not been folded by seismic activity. It seems to

rest on a granite base. There are no volcanoes on the Australian continent and with earthquakes being extremely rare, there has been no forces of nature, save the waves, to change the geology of the coast. You can contrast this by looking at England sea cliffs where sandstone and limestone layers have been up ended by the earth's movements. The waves hit the cliffs at a level where the two different types of rocks meet. As a result, the constant battering of the waves washes away the soft limestone, but they have next to no effect on the very hard granite. This effect is particularly noticeable at The Apostles where the waves start breaking on the granite shelf at least a half kilometre out to sea. The Apostles were formed by this erosion, the waves hitting the coast generated from the harsh and extreme weather conditions out in the Southern Ocean. Gradually eroded, caves form in the soft limestone cliffs, these then became arches, which in turn collapsed, leaving rock stacks up to fifty metres high. The site was known as the Sow and Piglets until 1922 after which it was renamed to The Apostles for tourism purposes. The formation eventually became known as the Twelve Apostles, despite only ever having nine stacks and as I write this there is one less since we visited them with one toppling over in 2013. I guess with sea levels rising, this erosion process will accelerate and over the millennium to come, Australia will be no more. Strange thought.

(12th June 2015 – Singapore)

After a couple of nights in Apollo Bay where we were pulled over by a highway policeman and breathalysed, we completed our ocean road drive to spend the next week with Peter and Kathy Creamer in their Melbourne home. The breathalysing incident I found quite amusing. Gek and I had been out for dinner at an Italian restaurant in the town and we were on our way 'home' at around ten o'clock. The main road through the town runs just behind the beach and is dead straight for at least two miles. At that time of night in the out of season holiday resort, we were the only vehicle in sight on the road, save for the policeman's combi parked in the middle of it that is. Thing is, Gek was driving at the time. She gotten a little flustered by the incident and couldn't operate the breath-test devise properly. After a couple of failed attempts to simply blow into the testing devise the



Gek Driving the Ocean Road

policeman surprisingly decided to let us drive on without a sample being taken, much to Gek's relief. The thought of Gek driving under the 'influence', I am afraid I found comic, being as how Gek n'er touches the demon drink.

We had left it a little late to arrive in Melbourne, having really enjoyed the coast

scenery on the drive up from Apollo Bay, stopping to take photograph after photograph of the waves crashing onto the beaches and the dramatic cliffs around every bend in the road. It was already dark as we were trying to find the Creamer's bungalow in one of the cities southern suburbs. As a rule, we always try to ensure that we arrive at a new town before dusk as it becomes very difficult to orientate yourself with a map once it gets dark. GPS, no problem but with a map you need to be able to physically see the features shown on the map to be able work out which way to take to get to where you want to be. The initially difficult we had in tracking down Peter's home is a classic example of orientation confusion. We were trying to pinpoint where we were on the map by using a MacDonald's eater we could see. Little did we know that there were two MacD's outlets within a couple of miles of each other and we were parked outside the other one. Confused? So were we. The fact that in the dark the suburban streets all looked the same didn't help either. Even when we had gotten to know the place a little better in subsequent days, we still had to triple check the map to see if we were in the right area. That first night, I think we found the Peter's street by stumbling upon it accidentally, rather than by using super navigation skills. Arriving at Peter's place, not a little relieved to have eventually found it, five yapping hairless Chinese crested dogs greeted us. Fortunately, they were all smaller than your average cat and Gek, who is always a little afraid of canines, soon got used to them being around the place.

It was great to meet up with the Creamers again. Peter and I had first met back in 1982 at the Singapore High Commission on a cold, rainy day in London where we had interviews for lecturing posts at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, which we both were subsequently offered. You may remember that we became good friends in Singapore, having a regular mid-morning char kway teow breakfast together in the Poly's canteen and taking the odd visit to the Raffles Hotel for a Singapore Sling or two. I also attended Kathy and Peter's wedding in 1988, driving over to Lincoln from Stone in my newly acquired two tone Morgan. After the ceremony I took Kathy, still in her wedding dress, for a drive around the area in the car. Not easy to get into a Morgan at the best of times, never mind in a fulsome white wedding dress.

Melbourne is the capital the state of Victoria, and the second most populous city in Australia. It is sits by a large natural bay, Port Phillip, with its City Centre situated at the northernmost point of the bay, near to the estuary of the Yarra River. Founded in 1835 in what was then the British Colony of New South Wales and named "Melbourne" in honour of the British Prime Minister of the day, William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne. It was declared a city by Queen Victoria in 1847. The Victorian gold rush of the 1850s, transformed it into one of the world's largest and wealthiest cities. After the Federation of Australia was set up in 1901, Melbourne served as the interim seat of government for the newly created nation. Today, as an international centre for the performing and visual arts, Melbourne is often referred to as Australia's cultural capital. It has been recognised as a UNESCO City of

Literature and a major centre for street art. I particularly enjoyed The National Art Gallery, as much for the design of the building as for the art it housed.

We took a day's drive out of the city to visit Ballarat. The town is located by the Yarrowee River on the lower western plains of the Great Dividing Range, approximately 105 km west-north-west of Melbourne. It was named by Scottish squatter Archibald Yuille who established the first settlement in 1837 with the name derived from local Wathaurong Aboriginal words for the area, 'balla arat', thought to mean "resting place". It is one of the most significant Victorian era boomtowns in Australia. Victorian gold rush transformed Ballarat from a small sheep station to a major settlement. Gold was discovered at Poverty Point in August 1851 and news quickly spread of rich alluvial fields where gold could easily be extracted. Within months, approximately 20,000 migrants had rushed to the district. Unlike many other gold rush boom towns, the Ballarat fields experienced sustained high gold yields for decades.

Ballarat is home to the officially recognised site for a National Prisoner of War Memorial, the memorial honours more than 35,000 Australians who were held prisoner during the Boer War, World War I, World War II and the Korean War. It is an unusual memorial garden in that it remembers not the dead of wars past but the other combatants who suffered but survived the conflict. It is a place of national honour, remembrance, and healing for all Australians. As with the Britain, all these men and women suffered in 'foreign fields' thousands of miles away from their homeland, bring back terrible memories that they could not share with the loved ones. Here at least is a place that says, "Yes it did happen to you and your nation recognises what you suffered and is grateful for your contribution to our security". Most of the names recorded on the marble slabs were of British origin with a couple of Whitworths amongst them.

As we were driving over a mountain ridge on our way back to Melbourne from Ballarat, surprise, surprise, it started to snow. The day had been very wet but now the cars outside temperature gauge was reading 3^o C. Such an unusual event this must have been that cars were stopping along the highway for children to get out and make snowballs.

Before we left Melbourne and headed inland to the hills, we made a brief visit to see David, my cousin, who I hadn't seen since he emigrated to Australia with his parents in 1965. David, my namesake, was about to take early retirement from the health care business. We didn't, unfortunately get to meet his wife Antoinette but we did meet their two younger children.

(13th June 2015 – Singapore)

New South Wales

From the research that Gek had done for this trip, it seemed best for us to use four relatively brief stopovers on our way from Melbourne to Sydney, a journey of over a 1,000

km. The first of these was in Olinda, up in the Dandenong Mountain Range and what an exotic apartment we had there. Pink bedding, Jacuzzi in the bedroom and a large TV screen on which to play Queen videos. Heading east from Olinda, once we hit the coast again at the aptly named Lakes Entrance where we stayed a night, we drove the coast road on the longest single day's drive of the trip, 450 km, to Batesman Bay. Here we stayed for a couple of nights before driving on to Wollongong for week long break. Wollongong is built in the narrow coastal strip between the Illawarra Escarpment and the Pacific Ocean, just to the south of Sydney. It is noted for its port activity and has a long history of coalmining and industry, now in decline. It really does feel like a north of England town that has perhaps seen better days but is now on the mend. Gek had been here before in 2001 when she stayed at the Nan Tien Temple, the largest Buddhist temple in the southern hemisphere. On that visit she arrived with two strangers, both Singaporeans and friends of a friend who offered Gek her place on the trip when she, the friend, had to pull out at the last minute. The name "Wollongong" is believed to mean "seas of the South" in the local Aboriginal language, referring to NSW's Southern Coast. Other meanings have been suggested, such as "great feast of fish", "hard ground near water", "song of the sea", "sound of the waves", "many snakes" and "five islands", although, to me, why the meaning of the name remains a mystery is mystery in itself.

By the time we arrived in Wollongong, we both felt like we need a rest from travelling. We had been on the road for five weeks by then, having slept in seven different beds and met up with a mixture of ten relatives and old friends. Time to gather ourselves for the next half of our journey. And Wollongong proved to be just what the doctor ordered; a place very easy for us to feel at home in. This was no doubt helped by the accommodation the Gek booked us into, an IBIS with a difference. One floor of the hotel was given over to student accommodation to house postgraduates from the local university. We had a double ensuite room, sharing kitchen facilities with the rest of the floor's residents. We were only able to book this room through a contact Gek had found on the internet at the university, Anthony. Because it was vacation time for the students, we had the place to ourselves and didn't have to eat out for every meal. The Anthony email exchanges with Gek were extremely friendly, prompting my suspicions as to what was really going on here? The city library was another place of refuge, dry and warm away from the inclement weather, with free internet connection and just a hop, skip and jump from the hotel.

For a day out of Wollongong we drove over the Sea Cliff Bridge on the Great Pacific Drive to Botany Bay, to the place where Captain James Cook first landed on the east coast of Australia in April 1770. Now, I must confess to be a fan of Cpt. Cook, having read a couple of his biographies including one I picked up from a second-hand book shop on this trip. Australia is great for secondhand book shops, by the way, practically every town seems to have one. So, I hope you will indulge me whilst I give a little detail about his remarkable life here.

Captain James Cook, FRS, RN (1728 – 1779) was a British explorer, navigator, cartographer, and captain in the Royal Navy. He made detailed maps of Newfoundland prior to making three voyages to the Pacific Ocean, during which he achieved the first recorded European contact with the eastern coastline of Australia and the Hawaiian Islands, and the first recorded circumnavigation of New Zealand.

Cook joined the British merchant navy as a teenager and joined the Royal Navy in 1755. He saw action in the Seven Years' War, and subsequently surveyed and mapped much of the entrance to the Saint Lawrence River during the siege of Quebec. This helped bring Cook to the attention of the Admiralty and Royal Society. This notice came at a crucial moment in both Cook's career and the direction of British overseas exploration and led to his commission in 1766 as commander of HM Bark Endeavour for the first of three Pacific voyages.

The Royal Society engaged Cook to travel this first voyage to the Pacific Ocean to observe and record the transit of Venus across the Sun. Cook, at the age of 39, was promoted to lieutenant and named as commander of the expedition. The Royal Society also agreed that Cook would receive a one hundred guinea gratuity in addition to his Naval pay.

The expedition sailed from England on 26 August 1768, rounded Cape Horn and continued westward across the Pacific to arrive at Tahiti on 13 April 1769, where the observations of the Venus Transit were made. However, the result of the observations was not as conclusive or accurate as had been hoped. Once the observations were completed, Cook opened the sealed orders which were additional instructions from the Admiralty for the second part of his voyage: to search the south Pacific for signs of the postulated rich southern continent of Terra Australis. Cook then sailed to New Zealand and mapped the complete coastline, making only some minor errors. He then voyaged west, reaching the south-eastern coast of Australia on 19 April 1770, and in doing so his expedition became the first recorded Europeans to have encountered its eastern coastline.

On 23 April he made his first recorded direct observation of indigenous Australians at Brush Island near Bawley Point, noting in his journal: "...and were so near the Shore as to distinguish several people upon the Sea beach they appear'd to be of a very dark or black Colour but whether this was the real colour of their skins or the C[l]othes they might have on I know not." On 29 April Cook and crew made their first landfall on the mainland of the continent at a place now known as the Kurnell Peninsula. Cook originally christened the area as "Stingray Bay", but he later crossed it out and named it Botany Bay after the unique specimens retrieved by the botanists Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander. It is here that James Cook made first contact with an aboriginal tribe known as the Gweagal.

After his departure from Botany Bay he continued northwards. On 11 June a mishap occurred when the HMS Endeavour ran aground on a shoal of the Great Barrier Reef, and then "nursed into a river mouth on 18 June 1770". The ship was badly damaged, and his

voyage was delayed almost seven weeks while repairs were carried out on the beach (near the docks of modern Cooktown, Queensland, at the mouth of the Endeavour River). The voyage then continued, sailing through Torres Strait and on 22 August Cook landed on Possession Island, where he claimed the entire coastline that he had just explored as British territory. He returned to England via Batavia (modern Jakarta, Indonesia where many in his crew succumbed to malaria), the Cape of Good Hope, and arriving on the island of Saint Helena on 12 July 1771.

(15th June 2015 – Singapore)

In his three Pacific voyages, Cook sailed thousands of miles across largely uncharted areas of the globe. He mapped lands from New Zealand to Hawaii in the Pacific Ocean in greater detail and on a scale not previously achieved. As he progressed on his voyages of discovery he surveyed and named features and recorded islands and coastlines on European maps for the first time. He displayed a combination of seamanship, superior surveying and cartographic skills, physical courage, and an ability to lead men in adverse conditions.



Forby Sutherland's Memorial Plaque

Cook was killed in Hawaii in a fight with Hawaiians during his third exploratory voyage in the Pacific in 1779. He left a legacy of scientific and geographical knowledge which was to influence his successors well into the 20th century and numerous memorials worldwide have been dedicated to him. Perhaps the most poignant memorial on the site of the first Botany Bay landing is a small plaque dedicated to the first British subject to die and be buried in Australian soil, Seaman

Forby Sutherland. Strangely, Cook's memorial here is much smaller than his soon to be famous expedition botanist, Sir Joseph Banks.

From Wollongong we headed inland to the Blue Mountains. We arrived just as the setting sun was lighting up the Three Sisters at Echo Point. The Blue Mountains comprises a range of mountains, plateau and escarpments extending off the Great Dividing Range about 4.8 km northwest of Wolgan Gap in a generally south-easterly direction for about 96 km, ending at Emu Plains. For about two thirds of its length it is traversed by the Great Western Highway and the Main Western railway line. Several established towns are situated on its heights, including Katoomba, Blackheath, Mount Victoria, and Springwood. As an Englishman travelling in Australia it can be very disorientating to come across so many towns named after English one. Take for example, Blackheath, a town whose namesake sits on the hill behind Greenwich on the River Thames, London, England. Ruth and Richard live in Blackheath, London, and I know the place very well having stayed there numerous times

over the last thirty years. And I can tell you that Blackheath, Australia could not be more different than Blackheath, London. My guess is that the Australian town's founder must have been extremely homesick, and his memory was affected by him being so long time away from his roots.



The Three Sister

The Blue Mountains are not really mountains in the normal sense of the word. They are more akin to flat topped islands, not separated by water but by gorges up to 760 m deep, carved into the sandstone bedrock over the millennia by river water flowing to the sea. The highest point in the Blue Mountains is an unnamed point at 1,189 m. However, the highest point in the broader region is Mount Bindo, with an elevation 1,362 m. This whole area was at

one time under the Australian inland sea which was subsequent lifted vertically upwards by movements in the earth's crust. The horizontal layers of sandstone deposited in that ancient sea are seen not only in exposed cliff faces, like the Seven Sisters, but also at the side of the roads where they pass through cuttings in the hill side. I did stop the car a couple of times to look for fossils in these man-made cliffs but didn't find any.

Our next port of call was Sydney. Sydney is the state capital of New South Wales and the biggest city in Australia. The city surrounds the world's largest natural harbour and sprawls towards the Blue Mountains to the west. The area has been inhabited by indigenous Australians for tens of millennia. The first British settlers arrived in 1788, eighteen years after Cook first landed in Botany Bay. He missed this large inland bay formed by flooded river valleys as the sea levels rose after the last Ice Age, probably because the entrance from the sea is very narrow and easily missed if you are in a hurry to be on your way. The first settlers came here from England to set up a penal colony, the first European settlement in Australia. Since convict transportation ended in the mid-19th century, the city has transformed itself from a colonial outpost into a major global cultural and economic centre and one of the most multicultural cities in the world. There are more than two hundred and fifty different languages spoken in Sydney, with about one-third of residents speaking a language other than English at home.

(17th Jun 2015 – Singapore)

We had two offers of accommodation for our stay in the City. First, we went for a couple of night's stopovers at my cousin Stephen's place who I also last saw in 1965 as he was leaving the UK with parents. He was ten years old then. Steve's bungalow is in the eastern city suburb of Graystones and like Peck Kheng's place in Albany is surrounded by a six-foot high solid fence. And each bungalow on the estate is the same. I guess Australians are not very

'Neighbourly' after all and treasure their privacy, perhaps a little too much? Steve took us around the east of Sydney, visiting the Sydney Olympic Park and Parramatta. The Olympic complex still had not found a reason to be, even after twelve years. I was reminded of a visit to the 1992 Barcelona Olympic site some years ago and feeling the same atmosphere of lost purpose, the underused buildings and feeling the sense of desertion. The 2008 London Olympic planners seem to have learned the lessons of previous games venues and had a long view for the use of the venues structures after the last game was played. One building, as I remember it, was reduced in size and another was dismantled all together, a bit like a Lego kit. From Steve's we moved to the home of an ex-work colleague of Gek in Ngee Ann Poly. Meow and her husband, William who live in the Castle Cove District, north of the city centre. During our stay in Sydney we also met up with two more of Gek's friends, Timothy and Gek Keow, both originally from Singapore.



The Harbour is the reason to go and visit Sydney, the City. It is very big. You can get around the many inlets and bays on a wide variety of ferries, both in size and type, from a small water taxi to large a catamaran. We took an old passenger ferry from the quay by the Opera House across to Manly. These older vessels are unusual in that they are pointed at both ends, making for a quicker turnaround time between journeys. They are not very stable. Our one-

hour sail took us across the entrance to the bay, where the incoming waves from the open sea hit the ferry broadside and with the boat having no stabilisers, they caused it to roll quite alarmingly. Fortunately, the worst was soon over, or I am sure we would both have been feeling a little nauseous.

Saying goodbye to Meow and William, we drove north via the coast road towards Brisbane, taking one-night stopovers on the way at Port Stephens, Port Macquarie and Yamba before knocking on Vicki's door at the Cedar Grove in Logan.

Queensland, Australia

Vicki is the daughter of my Mum's cousin Frank Cartwright, who incidentally lives in New Zealand – our next holiday destination scheduled for 2012. I had met Vicki before in 1984 during her short stopover in Singapore on her way to Europe. She was just 21 years old then and on her first trip north across the equator. On that occasion, the first time I picked Vicki up from the hotel where she was staying in downtown Singapore, she came tripping



Cedar Grove

down the steps to our waiting car and I swear she looked the spitting image of my grandma Ribchester in her younger days. We spent a couple of enjoyable days together including a dinner at Newton Circus where we got to know each other quite well over a long chat and a couple beers. Now, thirty years on Vicki was married with three daughters and living in a bungalow set amongst the trees of a

large wooded area to the south of Logan, a very different setting to the urban Australian homes we stayed in so far.

After a couple of days catching up on the intervening years, Gek and I set off north again to our last home from home on this trip to Australia with John and Lyn in Morayfield, north of Brisbane, where we made a day of visiting the city on the way.

Brisbane central area stands on the original European settlement and is situated inside a bend of the Brisbane River, about 15 km from its mouth at Moreton Bay. The metropolitan area extends in all directions along the floodplain of the Brisbane River valley between the coast and the Great Dividing Range. When the river floods, it floods with a vengeance. A couple of years before our arrival, the city it had suffered its second biggest flood in its modern history. We had parked the car in an underground carpark in a mall on the rivers southern bank. I commented to Gek how well maintained the walls and floors were, not realising until I saw the high-water mark recorded in the park on the opposite bank, just how deep the water had been. This car park must have been at least sixty feet under water during the flood. It is a testament to human resilience that walking around the city today you would never guess that the whole city centre had been a lake, just a few years ago. I liked Brisbane, a very liveable city as cities go.



John and Lyn's Place

John and Lyn's place on the outskirts of Morayfield is another large bungalow set in even bigger grounds than Vicki's in Logan. In fact, their garden is more akin to a botanical garden, if a little landscaped. John started his working life as a builder and through his inherent skill at the trade he became a master builder. This bungalow is his and Lyn's pride and joy, not only having designed it but also built most of it with his own hands. What

a brilliant place to stay for our last week in Australia. The four of us picked up on where we had left off in Mongolia, notably reviving evenings spent playing the card games we had learnt in Mongolia, games taught to us by Biasa during our journey west to Tsetseleg.

Our stay with John and Lyn coincided with our fourth wedding anniversary and as treat to mark the occasion they took us to a restaurant on the ridge overlooking the Glass House Mountains. The Glass House Mountains are a group of eleven hills that rise abruptly from the coastal plain on the Sunshine Coast. The highest mountain is Mount Beerwah at 556 m above sea level, but the most identifiable of all the mountains is Mount Tibrogargan which from some directions appears to be a face staring out to sea. Whilst the traditional names for the mountains themselves are very old, the term 'Glasshouse Mountains' was given more recently by Captain James Cook. The peaks reminded him of the glass furnaces in his



home county of Yorkshire. The views of the Glass House Mountains from up here on the ridge were very memorable and what we saw is preserved in the davidvso blog and the Photo Gallery.

Before leaving for home, we took a diversion to a local shopping centre where Gek fell for an oven. I know, whoever falls for an oven. This particular design of oven is simply a

large glass bowl with a heating element and fan mounted in a removable lid. Gek even wanted to buy one there and then haul in back to Penang with us on the plane. To do so we would have to leave most of our other belongings down under and, as a result, that idea was quickly scotched. But nothing daunted. When we finally settled down after our two months away from Penang, Gek was still going on about this strange oven. We had searched the Singaporean malls on our way home for an example but to no avail. And then, one day as we were returning from a visit to the utility board to pay our water bill, I suggested to pop into a local electrical shop on the off chance they had one of these odd cooking devices. And they did. Christmas time for Gek. I have never seen anyone as happy as Gek was that day, at buying an oven.

Visitors to Penang

The biggest contingent to visit us from Singapore was Gek's older brother Lak Hai and the whole family, Luang, Joe, Adeline, Yang Hui and Schumaecher who took his maiden flight to Penang, her sister Meng with her daughter Angelina, and her Auntie. We arranged the hire of a 10-seater van and went round the island to indulge in Singaporean's favourite pastimes,

eating and shopping. Even so, there were still a lot of places not visited reserved for their next trip.



Dinner at Bellevue Hotel, Penang Hill

Other visitors included Mavis, a fellow VSO volunteer in Mongolia and her Australian friend Val, Raymond who we had earlier visited in Thailand, See Rock with his wife Pat from Singapore, Polly and Ruth from the

UK, to name but a few. Even Yin Yoke from Spain came to stay with us while she was in SEA visiting her mother. Of course, we benefited from the car we invariably hired on these occasions which meant that Gek and I could visit parts of the island not easy to get to on public transport. By the end of our stay in Penang, we had entertaining our house guests down to a fine art and developed a well tried and tested itinerary for them to follow.

The Peranakan Museum in Church Street



Peranakan Courtyard

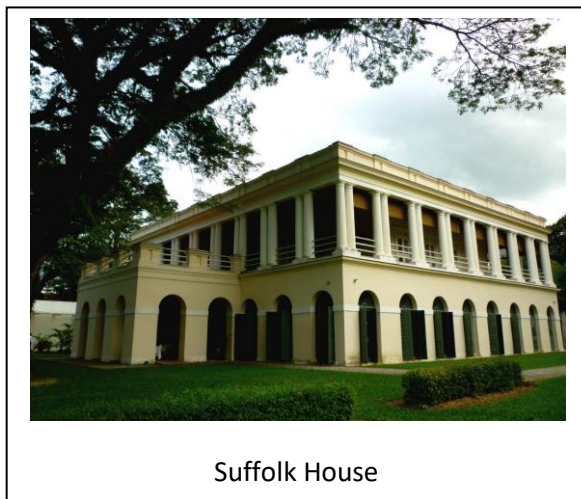
'The Peranakans, also known as the Babas and Nyonyas, were a prominent community of acculturated Chinese unique to this part of the world, especially in the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore) hence their other name, the Straits Chinese. Adopting selected ways of the local Malays and later, the colonial British, the Peranakans had created a unique lifestyle and customs which had not only left behind a rich legacy of antiques but its cultural influences like cuisine and language are still evident in Penang today.

At the Penang Peranakan Mansion, the typical home of a rich Baba of a century ago, is recreated a glimpse of their opulent lifestyle and of their many customs and traditions. With over 1,000 pieces of antiques and collectibles of the era on display, this Baba-Nyonya museum is also housed in one of Penang's heritage mansion. Built at the end of the 19th century by one of local history's famous personalities, Hai Kee. He had once served as the Residence and officer of Kapitan Cina Chung Keng Kwee. Though not a Baba himself, his

Chinese courtyard house was much like a typical large Baba home, incorporating Chinese carved-wood panels and English floor tiles and Scottish ironworks. Having survived many decades of neglect and decay, the mansion has now been restored to its former glory of a stately home.'

I, of course, love the building and took some inspiration from it when designing the two shophouse models I have built. The Victorians and the Peranakans shared a delight in strong colours and intricate design features on both their buildings and the artefacts that they filled them with. Myself, I can abide the sense of clutter they achieved by their choice of designs, but I do very much appreciate it in miniature.

Suffolk House



'The Suffolk House refers to two early residences built on the same site, located some four miles west of George Town on the banks of the Air Itam River (Black Water River in the Malay language). The earlier of the two buildings is notable for serving as the residence of Francis Light, the founder of the British settlement on the Prince of Wales Island, commonly known as Penang Island. Following Light's death in 1794, and with Penang becoming the fourth presidency of India in 1805, a newer Suffolk House

replaced the original house, assuming multiple roles and was later neglected before its current restoration. The mansion and the estate it was built on, the Suffolk Estate, is presumably named after Suffolk County in England. Light was born in Dallinghoo, Suffolk in East Anglia.'

A two-hundred year old English Country House built by a small river on a tropical island 7,000 miles east of its nearest cousins, I still find truly astonishing, on a par with the inhabitants in Orkney Isles having flushing toilets 5,000 years ago. The 15-year restoration project has resulted in a beautiful building to enchant the people who visit it, no matter that it is so far away from its naturally home. In 2014 Gek and I attended a wedding held there of our friend's son. A perfect setting for such a ceremony.

Genting Hill Theme Park and Resort

This is a very different and, in some respects, a very strange place. The theme park is the manifestation of someone's very overactive imagination, with models of animals, real and imaginary, in all sizes from a gigantic spider whose web covers the car park to tiny birds on a

swing. There are also snakes, very much alive in the vines around the restaurants serving counter. The restaurant and the view are the reasons we return to this place time and again. Also, the drive to and from the resort is quite interesting, being in parts as steep as the drive-up Penang Hill which you are not allowed to do in your own car.



Bukit Genting Twilight



Bukit Genting View

Penang Hill and the Bellevue Hotel



Bellevue Hotel

‘Captain Francis Light first plotted a horse track from the Penang Botanic Gardens waterfall up to the top of the hill in 1788. He cleared an area in order to grow strawberry, which became known as Strawberry Hill. Its official name however was Flagstaff Hill, which is still reflected in its name in Malay, Bukit Bendera (literally "Flag Hill"). The name was a reference to the flagstaff outside "Bel Retiro", which was the residence of the Governor of Penang built c. 1789. The area is however widely

known as Penang Hill. The hill became a cool retreat for the British colonists from the heat of the lowlands and threat of malaria, and many bungalows were built on the summit of Penang Hill for government servants and army. One of its earliest buildings was the Convalescent Bungalow built in 1803.

In the early days the only way to the top of hill was to travel on foot or horseback or be carried on dooly (sedan chair). The first attempt at a mountain railway on Penang Hill began in 1897 but it proved unsuccessful. It was built between 1901 and 1905 but had technical faults. The Straits government then organized a new project to construct the Penang Hill Funicular Railway at a cost of 1.5 million Straits dollars. The railway was first opened to the public in October 1923 and officially opened in January 1924. The funicular railway led to a

sharp increase in residential development as it became a location for the building of holiday villas and bungalows by Europeans and wealthy local Chinese towkays alike. It has also developed into a tourist destination.

At 800 meters above sea level and enjoying a spectacular panoramic view overlooking Georgetown and towards the Kedah Mountains on the mainland, is the Bellevue Hotel. The



Craig Hotel

hotel was once the residence of Mr. Halliburton, the first Sheriff of Prince of Wales Island and dates back to the early 18th century under the British East India Company, hence the site was named Halliburton's Hill.'

I first came to the Bellevue in 1983 on our holiday visit to Penang from Singapore and have returned to the place many times since, drawn by its glorious view across

Georgetown and the timeless feel to the old building. The Craig Hotel on a lower hill opposite the Bellevue was built by the famous hoteliers, the Sarkies brothers, in 1890. In recent times it was leased to the Upland International School before it was abandoned for a second time. It was also a filming location for the movie Indochina in 1991-1992 and more recently used as a location shoot for the Channel 4 drama series, Indian Summers. There are always plans to develop the Hill, but things seem to happen very slowly at this altitude. Not a bad thing in the long run.

Notes