

# Malacca/Melaka: An Historic Malaysian City

Barry Floyd takes a look at the city and the stamps which have been used there

The port of Malacca/Melaka, located on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, is the principal historic city of Malaysia. It is rich in vernacular architecture and cultural artifacts from successive waves of inhabitants: settlers from the adjacent island of Sumatra, traders from Thailand and more distant China, Persian and Arab merchants from the Near East, Tamil and Bengali Indians, then Portuguese colonisers, to be followed by the Dutch and British, intent on controlling spice trade traffic via the narrow and strategic Strait of Malacca.

Early maps and prints provide insights into the flourishing port after Europeans took control of the town. *Fig 1* is a plan of the Portuguese *Fortaleza de Malaca* dating from the early 16th century. *Fig 2* is a 17th century map of the region, with the entire Malay peninsula named 'Malacca'. *Fig 3* is an early 19th century picture of the town square of Malacca, while *Fig 4* provides an early 19th century painting of the Malacca River.

After 150 years of occupation by the Dutch East India Company, Malacca was transferred to the British during the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, in 1795. The town and eventually all of Malaya remained within the British Empire—later the Commonwealth—until the country received its independence in 1957.

## The stamps of Malacca

For administrative purposes, Malacca was added to other British-controlled towns, Penang and Singapore, to become part of the so-called Straits Settlements. Following a period in which Indian stamps were in use (1854–1867) the first postage stamps specifically produced to serve this tripartite colony arrived in 1867: overprinted stamps of India (*Fig 5*, SG 1/9). In the same year however—and continuing into 1872—nine stamps specifically inscribed 'Straits Settlements' were issued. Like the

stamps of India, they bore the head of the young Queen Victoria, ruler of the British Empire. From the set, the 2c. yellow-brown stamp, watermark Crown CC, is shown here (*Fig 6*, 11).

Postal stationery for the Straits Settlements followed a few years later, in 1884. Shown here is the front of a 1c. reply-paid postcard with a 1c. card attached intended for an answer (*Fig 7*). In 1885 a three cents postcard was put on sale, under the rubric of the Union Postale Universelle.

There were numerous surcharges of the 1867–1872 Queen Victoria Straits Settlement stamps between 1879 and 1883, when a new set of nine stamps was issued. These in turn received surcharges until a set of 11 new stamps was issued between 1892 and 1899 (*Fig 8*, 95/105). With various designs, ten of the stamps are shown here: 1c. to 50c., watermark Crown CA. The high value orange and red \$5 stamp is currently valued by SG at £325 unused and £250 fine used.

The Queen Victoria Straits Settlements issues continued to feature the vignette of a young woman until her death at the age of 82 in 1901, after 64 years as a reigning monarch. The successive reigns of British kings were all featured in Straits Settlements issues, available from post offices in the growing town and port of Malacca.

*Fig 1 (below) Plan of Portuguese 'Fortaleza de Malaca', early 16th century*  
*Fig 2 (right): 17th century map of the region*



*Fig 5 Indian stamp overprinted for use in Straits Settlements, 1867*

*Fig 6 2c. yellow-brown of 1867–72*

*Fig 7 Reply-paid postal stationery card of 1884*





Fig 8 Straits Settlements stamps of 1892-99

### The Kings

Stamps with the head of the new ruler, King Edward VII, appeared in 1902 and continued to be issued in several different sets until 1911. At first the format of some of the Queen Victoria stamps was followed, before new designs were introduced. A selection of these stamps is shown here (Fig 9, 1c. green (110); 8c. purple on blue, (114); 1c. green (127) and 4c. dull purple (197)).

George V was the next British monarch, and Straits Settlements stamps with his vignette were issued from 1912 until 1937. A selection of these stamps is shown here: the 1912-1925 issues with watermark Multiple Crown CA, and the 1919-1933 issues with watermark Multiple Script CA (Fig 10).

The Silver Jubilee of George V's reign was celebrated with an issue of four stamps in 1935, with the King in full regalia looking over

Windsor Castle (Fig 11, 256/9). The 5c. blue and grey issue is shown (256).

A final definitive issue of 15 Straits Settlements George V stamps was issued a year after the Silver Jubilee set, in 1936 (Fig 12, 260/74). A fresh design has the King's head framed by palm trees. The 5c. brown stamp, watermark Multiple Script CA, is shown (263).

The coronation of the new King and Queen, George VI and Elizabeth, in 1937 was celebrated with a special issue which letter writers in Malacca were keen to purchase. The three stamps, valued at 4c., 8c. and 12c., have Multiple Script CA watermark, a cancelled 4c. is shown (Fig 13).

### Japanese occupation

In the same year, 1937, and continuing to 1941, a definitive set of 18 values appeared, terminated only by the Japanese occupation of Malaya in World War II. The same palm-frame of the George V stamps was used, with the new king's head now facing right. The 3c. green stamp from this set, watermark Multiple Script CA, is shown in Fig 14a, (295). With the defeat of Japan in 1945, a British Military Administration assumed control of the country until civil rule could be re-introduced; the George VI definitives were issued with the overprint 'BMA/MALAYA' (Fig 14b).



Fig 9 King Edward VII stamps



Fig 10 King George V stamps



Fig 11 Silver Jubilee of King George V



Fig 12 The final King George V definitives



Fig 3 (below left) Town Square, Malacca, early 19th century  
Fig 4 (below right) Malacca River, early 19th century



Fig 13 Coronation of King George VI



Fig 14a King George VI definitive



Fig 14b British Military Administration overprint



Fig 15 Royal Silver Wedding

Fig 16 Malacca definitive stamp



Fig 17 75th anniversary of the Universal Postal Union



Fig 18 Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II



Fig 19 First Elizabethan definitive



It was not until after World War II that the state of Malacca, and hence the town, had stamps bearing its own name. In 1948 two stamps marking the Royal Silver Wedding of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth were issued (Fig 15, SG 12). This set was followed a year later by definitives with the head of George VI, identical in design to those issued under the Straits Settlements imprimatur (Fig 16, 3/17).

Also In 1949, the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Postal Union was commemorated with four Malaccan-dedicated stamps, watermark Multiple Script CA: (18/21) All four stamps are shown in Fig 17.

Following the death of George VI in 1953, the coronation of his daughter and successor—Queen Elizabeth II—was marked by an attractively-designed 10c. stamp, black and reddish purple (Fig 18, 22).

Between 1954 and 1955 16 definitives depict her in the same frame as her late father, although, in the vignette, she is facing right. The 1c. black stamp, watermark Multiple Script CA is shown (Fig 19, 23).

### Colourful pictorials

A colourful pictorial set of definitives was issued in 1957, the final set to bear Queen Elizabeth's profile. She was the last British monarch to be featured in Malayan issues prior to independence in 1957. The stamps

illustrate numerous scenes and activities around Malaya at the time (Fig 20, 39/49).

The 1c. black stamp depicts the harvesting of copra; the 2c. orange-red shows a crop of pineapples; the 4c. brown illustrates a rice (padi) field being prepared for planting by a water buffalo-drawn simple plough; the 5c. carmine-red shows a mosque (Malaya being an Islamic country); the 8c. myrtle-green shows a train running along the west coast railway of peninsular Malaya; the 10c. brown figures a tiger: a rare animal to be found in the wild nowadays; the 20c. blue depicts a single-sailed fishing craft; the 50c. black and blue shows (though they are hard to see without a magnifying glass) two aboriginal hunter-collectors in the rainforest, using blow-pipes to kill their prey; the \$1 ultramarine and reddish-purple shows government offices in the *padang* or central square in Kuala Lumpur; the \$2 bronze-green and scarlet depicts two men engaged in unarmed combat (*bersilat*); and finally the \$5 bronze and bronze-green shows a woman engaged in weaving.

Following independence there have been numerous Malaccan issues to interest the thematic collector. In 1960 the pictorial set was reissued without the Queen's vignette, featuring in its place a diminutive mouse-deer under a Melaka tree. The 4c. sepia stamp, is shown (Fig 21, 52).



Fig 20 Pictorial definitives of 1957, the last to bear a British monarch's portrait

Fig 21 A value from the replacement set of 1960 featuring a mouse-deer beneath a Melaka tree in place of The Queen's head



Fig 22 Orchid definitives of 1965

Fig 23 Butterfly definitives of 1971



Fig 24 1979 Flower definitives

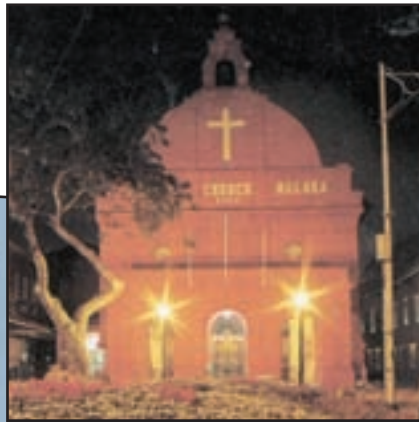
## Legend

The local deer species is the smallest of all hoofed animals. Legend has it that a Prince Parameswara, arriving in the area from Temasek at the southern end of the Malaya Peninsula, decided to go hunting along the river. While resting under a tree one of his dogs cornered a mouse-deer. Normally timid by nature, the tiny animal defended itself and attacked the dog, forcing it into the river. Parameswara was so impressed by the courage of the deer that he decided to found a town at the very site of the encounter. He enquired of locals the name of the tree under which he had sought shade and was informed it was a 'Melaka'; thereafter he proposed to call his envisioned community by the same name: thus Malacca or Melaka was born. The pictorial stamps were also issued for the other states in peninsular Malaysia, with the rulers' heads replacing that of Queen Elizabeth. Malacca has, however, no hereditary sultan or rajah.

In 1965 a states-wide issue with seven values featuring beautiful orchids appeared, with the arms of Malacca replacing the symbol of the tree and deer. The used set is shown in Fig 22, (61/7). This was followed in 1971 by an equally colourful set illustrating the country's butterflies. Some are shown in Fig 23 (70/6).

Continuing with the tradition of artistic excellence, a definitive series of flowers adorned Malaccan covers in 1979 (Fig 24, 82/8); this set was also replicated in other states of Malaysia, including the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, established in 1974.

Fig 26 Malacca Square at night



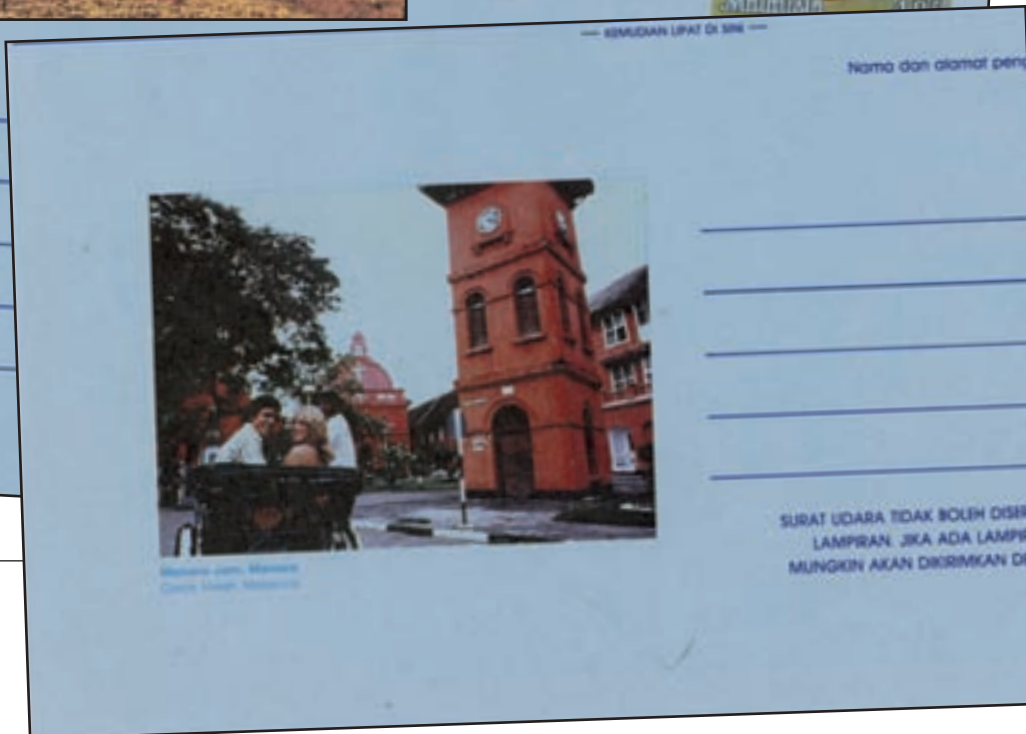
## Controversy

In 1984 an aerogramme was put on sale, with a facsimile of a 40c. stamp depicting a flying lemur on the front and, on the reverse, a picture of Malacca's clock tower located in the town square (Fig 25). In the background, the façade of the 1753 Christ Church (built by the Dutch colonizers) appears, with a white cross—the symbol of Christianity—just visible. Within a month of the airletter's issue, it was withdrawn, apparently after protests concerning the church's depiction. The official state religion of Malaysia is Islam, but adherents to other faiths are allowed to worship freely and they have their own churches and temples. The objection to the illustration is therefore questionable. Christ Church appears in the centre of the early nineteenth century painting of 'Dutch Square' (Fig 3) but was unpainted at that time and bore no cross on the façade. A contemporary picture of the square by night offers a closer look at the controversial white cross (Fig 26).

In 1986 the longest running definitive set for the whole country appeared, featuring agricultural products: coffee, coconuts, cocoa, black pepper, rubber, oil palm and rice. The set is shown in Fig 27, (96/102). These stamps are still sale in 2006, being only slowly replaced by a new definitive set of Malaysian birds.

The same year, 1986, saw the issue of four stamps showing historic buildings in Malaysia, the first such series to illustrate important structures which have survived from the British colonial period and earlier. The 40c. value shows the original *Stadhuis* or State House built by the Dutch between 1641 and 1660 (Fig 28, 363). This is one of the oldest surviving Dutch buildings in the Far East. At the time of issue, the building was known as the Old Town Hall; it is now the site of a highly informative Historical Museum of Malacca. The bright red colouring of the walls is thought

Fig 25 The controversial aerogramme of 1984 with Malacca's clock tower and façade of Christ Church on the reverse





**Fig 27 The long-running Agricultural definitives first appeared in 1986**

to be a recreation of its façade during the Dutch era. The same building is shown to the right of the early nineteenth century picture of the 'Dutch Square' (Fig 3) but was stone-coloured at that time.

**Historic city**

Three years later, in 1989, a special issue of three stamps marked the Declaration of Malacca as an Historic City (Fig 29). The intention was to make known to the wider world the intriguing heritage of the community and thus attract larger numbers of visitors from other countries, a well as from other Malaysian states. The illustration on the left of the envelope shows the Kampung Kling mosque, one of Malacca's earliest places of worship and of Sumatran design.

There were three stamps in the set: two 20c. and one \$1. The first of the lower values shows the Sultanate's Palace. This is a modern recreation of an earlier royal residence and remarkable in that no metal nails were used in its construction. Instead it uses a system of inter-locking cuts, slots and grooves, supplemented by wedges and dowels. There are other old buildings around Malaysia which were constructed in a similar fashion. The re-created Sultan's Palace now houses the Museum of Culture and History of the Melakan Empire.

The second 20c. stamp shows the Memorial *Perisytiharan Kemerdekaan* or the Proclamation of Independence Building, commemorating the granting of independence to Malaya in 1957. Before World War II the building served as a social club for

British civil servants in the town, and for European rubber planters in Malacca's hinterland who came to town on weekends for a good 'booze-up' and tiffin.

**Devastation**

The \$1 stamp illustrates the most important architectural relic in Malacca, if not all Malaysia. A contemporary view shows the Porto de Santiago entrance gate to the former Portuguese fort of A Famosa (Fig 30). It is the only surviving structure from the defensive wall which once surrounded the town. Following the British occupation of Malacca, some 300 years after construction of the fort by the Portuguese, a complete destruction of the A Famosa defences was planned. Large numbers of manual labourers and explosive charges were used, in a struggle to demolish the thick stone walls of the fort. The destructive effort went on for many months and only ended through the intervention of Sir Stamford Raffles, who, on a visit from Singapore, was shocked by the scenes of devastation. Today, the Porta de Santiago Gate remains as a tangible reminder of the epic Portuguese construction. To judge from the mingling colourful crowds viewing the ancient gateway, Malacca is succeeding in acting as a 'honey-pot' for tourists far and wide.

To conclude, we would like to encourage stamp collectors world-wide to take an interest in POS Malaysian issues, particularly those featuring the historic state and city

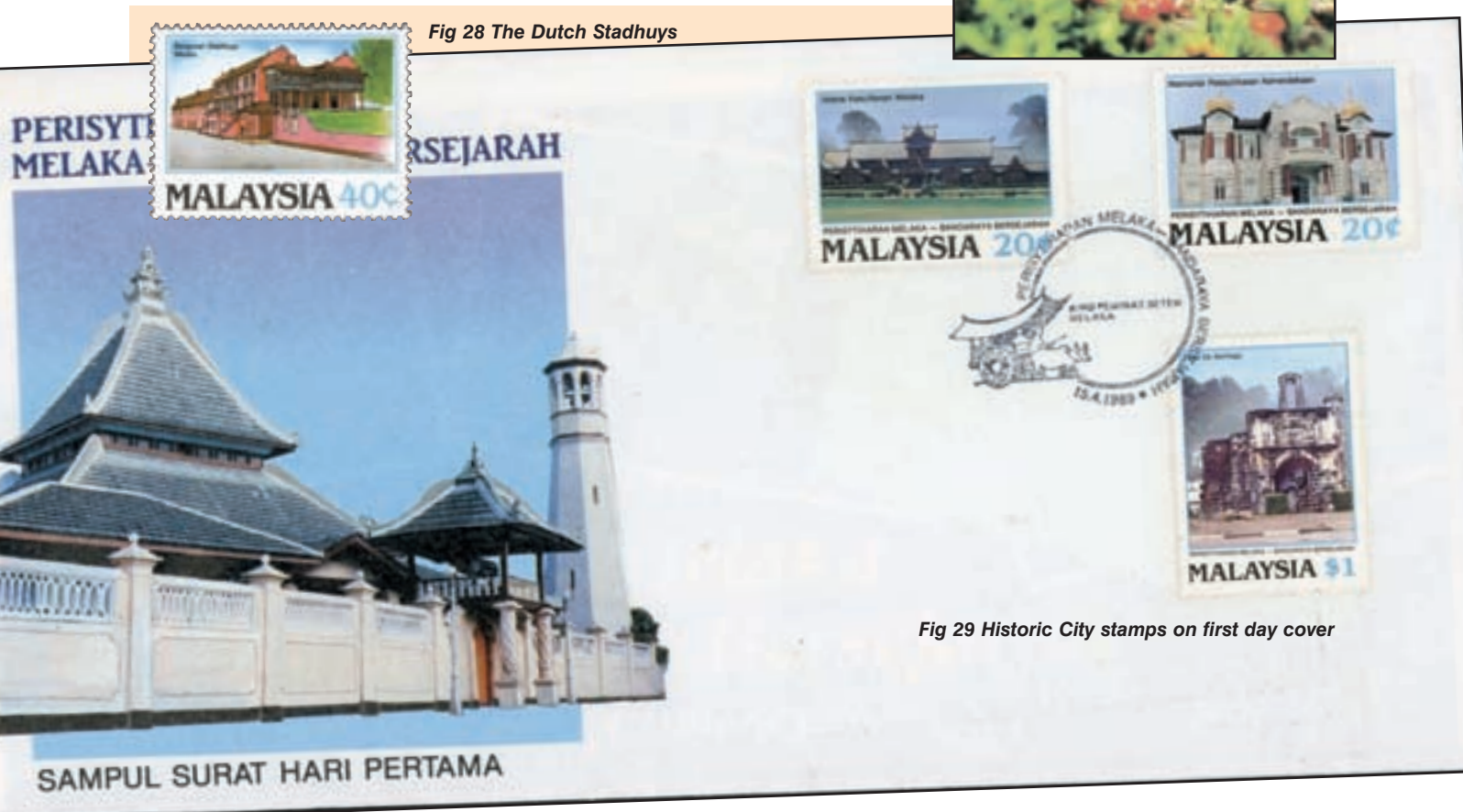
of Malacca. Better still, why not plan to make a visit to this fascinating South-east Asian community? As the authors of the excellent *Insight Guides: Malaysia* book have observed: 'The visitor to Malacca may at first find it difficult to visualize the life behind the medieval fortress 400 years ago. But as one walks the narrow streets, visits old temples and mosques, lingers among ancient ruins and epitaphs, Malacca's history begins to fall into place.'

As you explore the heart of the old town, you will find yourself saying *saya suka berada di sini*, I like it here. But, a word of advice, the intending visitor should not delay. Land reclamation is proceeding seawards apace, creating sites for modern high-rise hotels and apartments, shopping centres and fast-growing residential areas, all threatening to overwhelm the historic fabric of Malacca. Thus, go soon!

**Fig 30 Porto de Santiago, entrance to the Portuguese fort of A Famosa**



**Fig 28 The Dutch Stadhuys**



**Fig 29 Historic City stamps on first day cover**