

Headline	Preserving a slice of heritage		
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# Preserving a slice of heritage

Located in Kampar, Perak, is a fascinating museum of tin mining artifacts where one of the exhibits on display dates back 6,500 years!

**Story and photos by LIZ PRICE**  
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**T**HE two security guards welcomed me as I walked into the Kinta Mining Kongsu and handed me a ticket. I knew that admission was free, so I was a bit surprised to receive a ticket. I had entered the Kinta Tin Mining Museum. Located in Kampar, Perak, this one-year-old museum is a wonderful display of artifacts and relics from the days of tin mining.

I know for many Malaysians, learning about tin mining (gravel pump) at school was probably one of those dull subjects that held little interest for a child. But for me, a foreigner in Malaysia, I am fascinated by the subject and love any opportunity to learn more about the bygone days of the tin mining industry. I guess this is related to my love of caves, although, of course, mines are man-made whereas caves are totally natural.

As I walked into the outdoor compound, I noticed a couple of people in the corner. I was quite glad I wasn't the only visitor on a Monday morning. I was soon absorbed looking at the first display of a *palong* (where the tin is separated from the sludge). However, I was a bit puzzled when I glanced over and realised that the figures hadn't moved. I looked again, and the penny dropped. They weren't people, but life-sized models of tin miners.

Apart from the display of actual machines and equipment, the museum has incorporated many such figures to show the various jobs done by tin miners. These include two female *dulang* (manual separation of the tin ore using a pan) washers and a group of men

moving stones and operating a gravel pump. In fact, there were several more of these figures in the outdoor exhibition area. It is a commendable tribute to the men and women who sweated and toiled in this industry.

The sun was beating down during my visit, adding to the atmosphere as I could imagine the tin miners being out in similar conditions during their working day. They would have had to endure all the elements – hot sun, rain and high humidity. I was glad I was only walking around, not actually having to do any work.

From the *palong* area, I had a look at the large machinery that included generators, engines and pumps, as well as huge buckets from a dredge.

The next group of life-sized models puzzled me as there were no labels and I wasn't sure what they were doing. They seemed to be pounding poles into the ground which I assume is a vital process in the tin extraction process, but I couldn't be sure! However, I found out later in the exhibition that they were "prospecting".

Generally, the exhibits were adequately labelled, although some could do with more explanation.

I've been lucky enough in the past to visit operational open-cast tin mines in Perak, so I have first-hand knowledge of how tin is extracted. Names such as gravel

pump, *palong*, sluice and pig basket are familiar to me. So, it was good to see examples of these on display, as well as an old tractor and lorry.

I then moved into the coolness of

the exhibition hall which is divided into two large rooms. The first one I entered has two floors. Lots of old photos and small tools can be found downstairs, as well as tableaux representing a kitchen and dining area and also a shop for trading tin.

In the middle of the hall is a collection of large tree trunks. I thought they were for decoration until I read they are actually part of a fossilised tree trunk named "The Star". This was discovered about 1978 in the nearby Batu Karang tin mine. It was ignored, along with several other fossilised trunks for 30

years. Then "The Star" found a new home in the museum and a piece was sent to the USA for radiocarbon dating – it proved to be around 6,500 years old and is so well-preserved, having been buried in sediments for all that time. **The Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) identified it as a *chengal* tree.**

The space upstairs is devoted mostly to documents and charts relating to mining and geology. The earliest records of the Malaysian tin industry are dated 1851, when tin production was far higher than that of both Indonesia and Thailand combined.

I moved into the next gallery where I saw, on display in the centre, a model of Larut, a pet elephant belonging to Long Ja'afar in the

1800s. The story goes that the elephant had stumbled on tin deposits near Taiping (later named Larut).

Other exhibits display the uses of tin and associated products, and there are replicas of methods of hand-digging and mining as well as more models of *dulang* washers and newly

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arrived Chinese labourers from the 1860s.

There are a couple of large models of open-cast mines, and buttons you can press to light up various items of machinery. It was a pleasure to find that the lights worked, as so often in museums you press a button and nothing happens. Obviously, this museum is better maintained than some others!

I was interested in seeing the old photos of various tin mines and their workings. They brought back memories of the two mines I visited years ago. I realised that there wasn't much mention of tin dredges, although of course it would be impossible to display much from these giants, apart from the buckets. Also the Kinta Tin Mining Museum is mainly devoted to the gravel pump method.

The museum opened just a year ago, at the end of October 2012. It is the first of its kind in the country and was set up by Tan Sri Hew See Tong, a former tin miner from 1949-1989.

It is great that entry is free although I feel most people would be willing to pay an admission fee, especially considering the exhibition halls have to be kept cool for the visitors. There are donation boxes in the main halls so I hope visitors will be generous and give some money.

I found the museum to be quite fascinating and spent an hour there, absorbed in looking at the displays and thinking of how hard the miners worked to produce the tin that we

take for granted.

The museum is definitely worthy of a visit and should be of interest to children as well

as adults. It is a fun way to remind and teach people of the heyday of tin mining in Perak and one of Malaysia's most important industries.

## KINTA TIN MINING (GRAVEL PUMP) MUSEUM

Taman Bandar Baru  
31900 Kampar, Perak  
Ph: 05-466 2632  
Fax 05-466 4885.

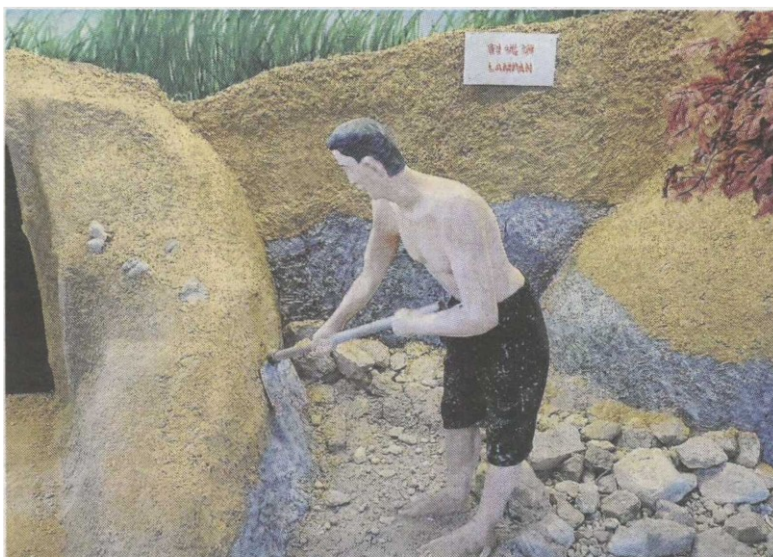
> Kampar is 35km south of Ipoh on the old Ipoh-KL trunk road. There are no signs to the museum. Follow the signs to the Grand Kampar Hotel. Turn right after Petronas. The museum is located next to Petronas and just before the hotel.

> The museum is open from 9am to 1pm from Mondays to Fridays, and from 9am to 4pm on weekends and public holidays. Admission is free.

> There are toilets on the premises.

> Plenty of free parking is available outside the museum.

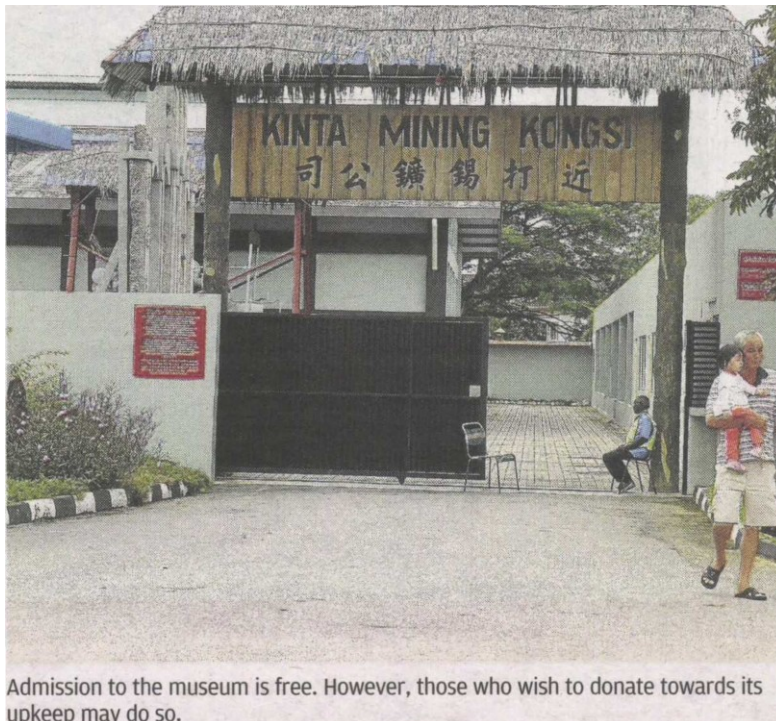
> Across the road from the hotel are shops and eating places. Alternatively there is a Tesco with other shops and a food court located a couple of kilometres away.



Imagine the sun beating down while the miner is toiling away.



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**Back-breaking work:** Life-sized models of yesteryear's tin miners using manual methods to obtain the precious ore, at the Kinta Tin Mining Museum.



After a hard day's work at the tin mine, the labourers would have worked up quite an appetite. (Pic inset) Female cooks were employed to prepare the workers' food.



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Assorted heavy machinery is utilised in tin mining.



Operating a water monitor. (Pic inset) It wasn't just men who worked at the tin mines; women also played an important part.