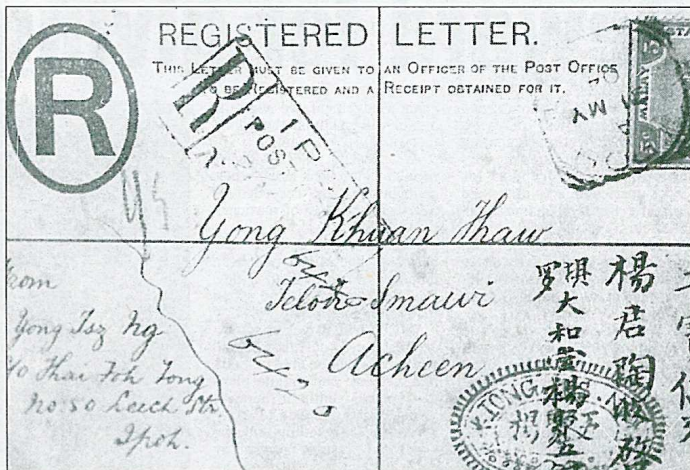


A GEM ... a rare sample of a letter that was sent from Pangkor island which reached Sitiawan on Oct 18, 1941.



PART OF HISTORY ... an old registered letter with a postmarked stamp dated May 21, 1904.

Historian bemoans loss of history

By CHRISTINA KOH

IPOH: British postal historian Malcolm H. Wade bemoans the fact that many stamp collectors in the old days kept just the stamps instead of retaining the envelopes with their original postmarks.

And his unhappiness is quite understandable.

The "cover" or the envelope could be even more important than the stamp in terms of historical significance, said Wade, and collectors might damage not only the stamp when removing it but the envelope as well.

"From the postmarks, we can see which post office a letter or postcard originated from and the date.

"We can also see all the post offices it had passed through along the way, and eventually its final destination," he said during a talk here at Perak State Library last month on the state's postal history from 1880 to 1900.

His talk included an exhibition of his treasured collection of colonial stamps, envelopes and postcards with many of the addresses still intact.

Every piece is painstakingly preserved and documented, and Wade claimed he had no favourites as he felt that the historical value of each one was priceless, more so if its postmarks were legible.

He said most of his collection came from people in the upper class, who saw the need to keep their letters with the stamped envelopes for business reasons.

"When I was a boy, most children would collect stamps as a hobby. We would buy more stamps and swap them in school, and at the end of the week we would count them to see how our collections had grown.

"When I came to Malaya as a young soldier in the early 1950s, I decided to collect the local stamps out of pure interest," said Wade, in his 70s, who is from Yorkshire, England.

However, Wade only came to realise that the way a stamp had been used was actually more interesting than just collecting the stamp itself in 1967 when he returned to England and joined the Malaya Study Group there.

The society specialises in learning about the stamps, sta-

tionery and postal history of Malaya right up to 1963, and has members worldwide, including its first from Russia recently.

Calling himself a mere "student of the Perak post," Wade said the first post office to open in the Federated Malay States was in Taiping in 1877.

In conjunction with a talk given in Taiping later, he stepped foot in that "pioneer" post office, which is still operating to this day, and described the visit as "absolutely delightful."

"Malaya's postal history began the way it did in the (American) Wild West during the Gold Rush. There were few or no roads, and often the only way people could keep in touch was through letters.

"The postal system in Malaya evolved in the late 19th century once there was a large and literate enough population," he said.

Before the 1880's, local mail was delivered a variety of ways, including the use of runners, while overseas mail would be left with a forwarding agent who would pass it to a ship's captain for dropping off at the port nearest to its destination.

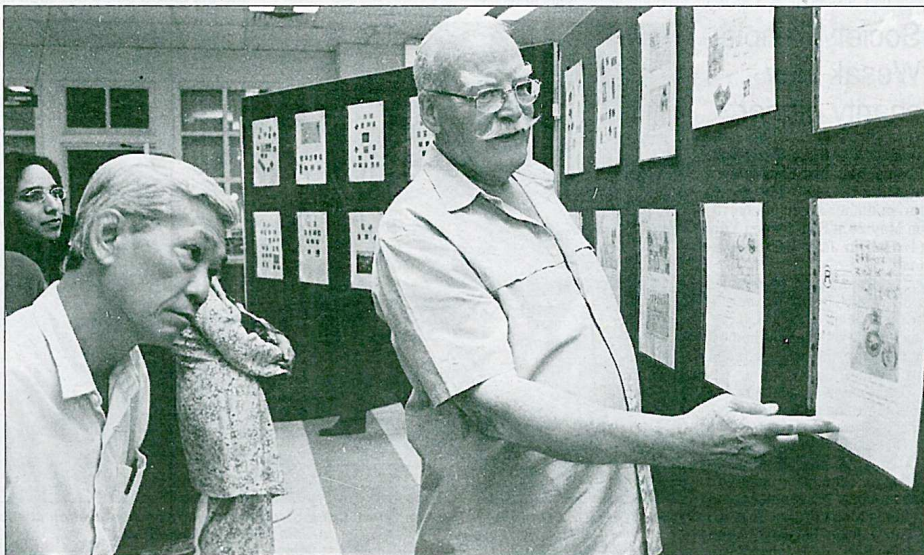
Wade added: "The mail would then usually go through mining offices to employees who had received letters or to the district officers.

"In those days, the addresses on letters sometimes carried just the recipient's name and profession. There were no postcodes or even roads like today, but chances were the district officer would know the person addressed on the envelope because they lived in his area."

He said once the population grew large enough and there was a demand, post offices were set up along routes of communication in the state, such as railways and roads.

"Once the first railway lines were completed, 17 post offices sprung up in other parts of the state, including Port Weld in the Larut district in 1882, Batu Gajah in the Kinta district (1883), Durian Sebatang, which would later become Teluk Anson (1882), and Kuala Kangsar (1883)."

As a soldier, Wade had seen service on Pulau Blakang Mati, now known as Sentosa, with the Singapore Regiment,



THIS IS IT ... Wade pointing a piece from his collection which still had their envelopes and postmarks intact.

Royal Artillery.

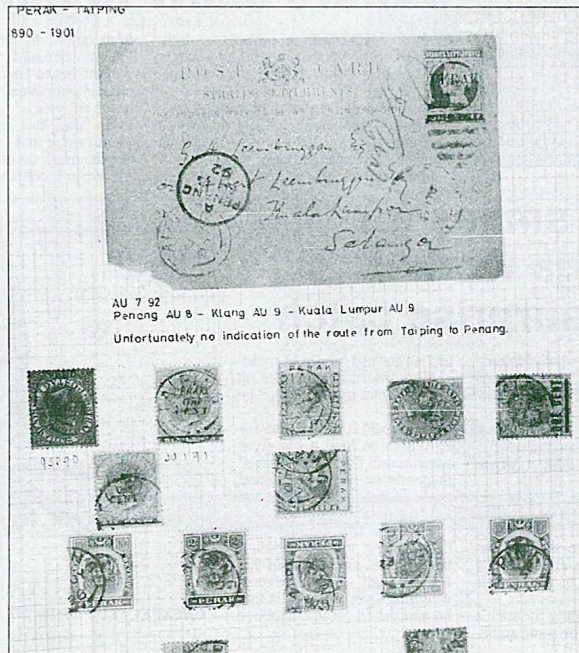
He had also served in Seremban with the Gurkha Signals, in East Africa as a Somaliland Scout, and with the Federation Signals as a senior technical instructor in the Malaysian School of Signals in Kuala Lumpur.

"Life has never ceased to be exciting. Fifty years ago I came to Malaya as an innocent young soldier full of interest and enthusiasm for adventure, and now here I am still full of enthusiasm, although not so innocent," he quipped.

Wade's one-month visit to Malaysia was made at the invitation of the Perak Heritage Group. These days, he continues to help preserve an aspect of Malaysia's heritage by documenting its postal history, and hopes to eventually produce a map detailing the post offices that had first sprung up in Malaya.

He is sad, however, that fewer people use the post office nowadays in favour of other channels such as e-mail.

"I think we should stand and bow our heads to the post office in honour of its role in the days when communication was more difficult," he said.



AU 7 92 Penang AU 6 - Klang AU 9 - Kuala Lumpur AU 9 Unfortunately no indication of the route from Taiping to Penang.

PRECIOUS SET ... one of Wade's treasured collection of colonial stamps, postcards and envelopes which he showed to the public recently.