A HISTORY OF PORT SWETTENHAM

By

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Number Three: Singapore Studies on Malaysia

Published by Malaysia Publications Ltd.
for
The Department of History
University of Singapore
1965

SINGAPORE STUDIES ON BORNEO AND MALAYA

This monograph by Mon bin Jamaluddin is the third in the series on Borneo and Malaya being published by the Department of History of the University of Singapore. It was first submitted as an academic exercise in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of B.A. (Honours) at the University of Singapore.

Port Swettenham has been a problem child for many years. This examination of its life may help to explain the problem. It also may lead to an examination of the history of other ports in Malaysia. In the hope that both these objectives may be attempted, this work is here published.

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First Printing 1963
Reprinted 1965

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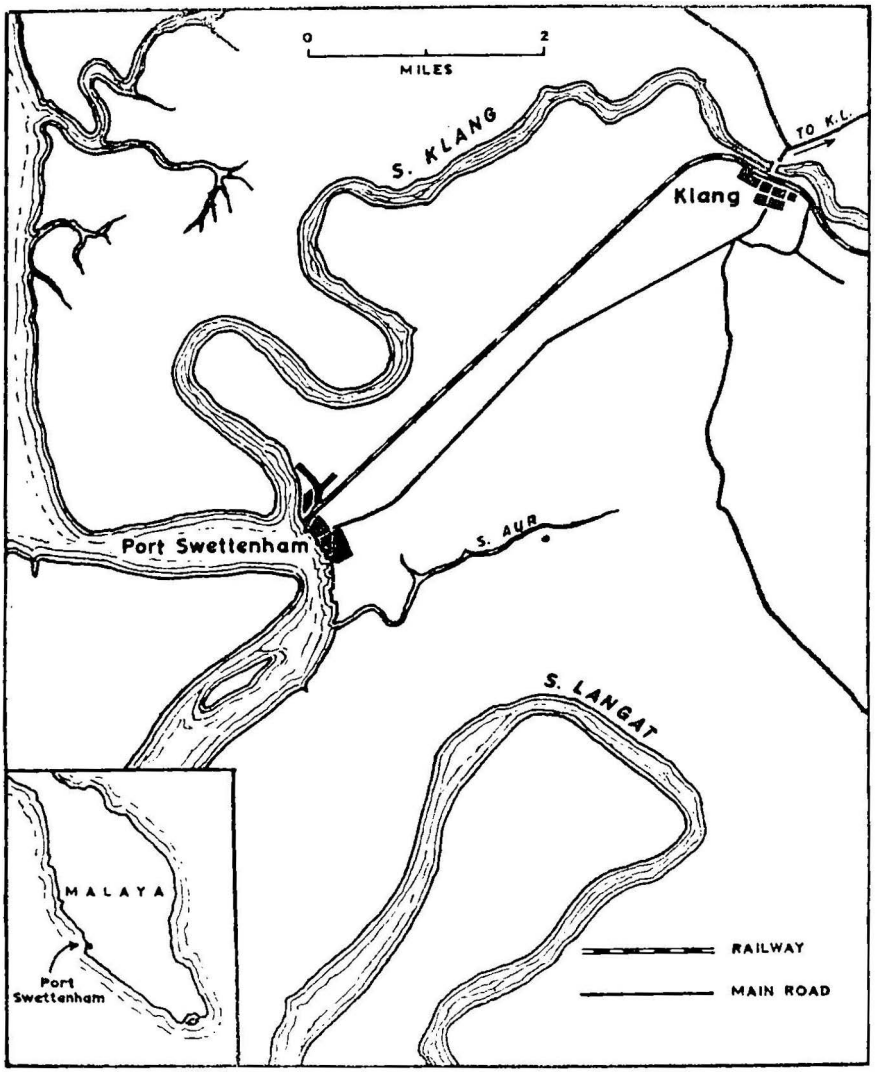
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1: THE CASE FOR PORT SWETTENHAM

The port of Port Swettenham is a very recent creation compared to Penang or Singapore, having been in use only since 1901, but it has become one of the three major ports of Malaya. It has assumed an important role in the development of central Malaya from Ipoh in the north to Malacca in the south, and western Pahang in the east. The importance of the port is enhanced by the fact that it is only 30 miles from the Federal capital. This is taking a jump into the port's history and, by way of introduction, it is necessary to go back to the days when Klang, and not Port Swettenham, was the port of Selangor.

For many years before 1895, coastal steamers trading between the Straits Settlements and Selangor called at Klang, bringing chiefly foodstuffs, opium and other goods. The port of Klang was 12 miles up the winding and muddy Klang River, and according to a traveller, Isabella Bird, only ships drawing less than 13 feet of water could come up to the jetties at Klang. The port was no doubt small, for in 1883 Isabella Bird wrote of the port: "A substantial flight of stone steps leads from the river to a skeleton jetty with an attap roof, and near it a number of attap-roofed boats were lying, loaded with slabs of tin from the diggings in the interior, to be transhipped to Penang."[1] By 1894, the picture had not changed much, except that there were by then three wooden jetties of a temporary nature built in 1890[2] The accommodation available for increasing traffic, due to the growing prosperity of the state and the adjoining territories, was therefore limited.

By the early 1890s, the large increase of imports and exports could not be satisfactorily dealt with at the available jetties at Klang, and plans were made for the development of a port at a site on the coast. The idea for a port more suitable than Klang had been mooted as far back as 1885 when plans were made to build a railway from Kuala Lumpur to the coast. The construction of a railway to the coast implied the necessity of providing wharves at the new railway terminus. In 1884, Mr. Spence Moss, who came from Ceylon at the request of the Selangor Government to advise on the

1. Isabella Bird, *The Golden Chersonese*, LONDON. 1883. p. 217.
2. *The Straits Times*, 17 April, 1894. and *Fifty Years of Railways in Malaya*. Kuala Lumpur. 1935. (Published and compiled by the Federation of Malaya Railways) p. 51. Hereafter. F.Y.O.R.I.M.

construction of the railway, made a survey of the proposed railway line to the coast and reported on two possible sites for a harbour for Selangor.

In his report, Mr. Moss discussed two possible railway routes from Klang to the coast. The first route was almost a direct line from Pengkalan Batu, on the south bank of the Klang river, to Kuala Klang; the distance was five miles and the proposed line would have to cross only one small stream. The second route would begin from Bukit Kuda and would traverse a swampy country along the right bank of the river to Kuala Sungai Dua, 9 miles away. At Kuala Sungai Dua, reported Mr. Moss, "a favourable site for a port is to be found. But there is no fresh water and no hills from which to get soil for reclamation."[3] The site offered considerable advantages as a port for ocean steamers, whereas the site at Kuala Klang was land-locked and in a swamp area.

Although he reported favourably on the site at Kuala Sungai Dua, Mr. Moss was more in favour of extending the Kuala Lumpur – Klang railway from Pengkalan Batu to Kuala Klang. His reason for recommending this route, it seems to me, was influenced by considerations of cost. He estimated that the cost of constructing a line from Bukit Kuda to Kuala Sungai Dua would be very much in excess of the cost of extending a line to Kuala Klang; the construction of the northern line would entail heavy expenditure since numerous small streams had to be crossed and expensive bridges built.

In an editorial comment, the Straits Times of 1st November, 1886 commented that, though it was desirable to have a harbour at Kuala Sungai Dua, the scheme "would entail an enormous expenditure to carry the (railway) line to this point, and there is no necessity for it at present. Captains and owners of steamers at present frequenting the port of Klang are of opinion that there is plenty of accommodation. . . ." at Kuala Klang.[4]

Having regard to the question of finance, the Selangor Government agreed with the recommendations of Mr. Moss to extend the line to Kuala Klang, where wharves were to be built. This was indeed a short-sighted policy for it is now seen that Deepwater Point, as Kuala Sungai Dua is sometimes called, would have made a better harbour than Kuala Klang. But in justice to the Government when the decision was being made, the Selangor Government was in financial difficulties. Originally, the Straits Settlement Government had agreed to loan $360,00 to Selangor to meet the cost of a railway from Kuala Lumpur to the coast. When only $100,000 had been given, Singapore was unable to continue the loan

3. S.S.M.P., 448/85, of Feb. 22. 1885.
4. *The Straits Times,* 1st. November, 1886.

but Perak came to the rescue with two loans of $100,000 each.[5] In this situation, it was only possible to construct a line from Kuala Lumpur to Bukit Kuda, and the plan to extend the line to Kuala Klang had to be abandoned for a number of years.

This question was raised again in 1890 when the British Resident (William Maxwell) urged upon the Governor in Singapore the great need of a port, preferably at Deepwater Point. Not until 1963, however, was the scheme to extend the line to Kuala Klang finally decided and sanctioned by the Governor. In August 1893, Mr. E. C. Spooner (Resident Engineer, Selangor Railways) was instructed by the Resident to report on the scheme. In his report, Mr. Spooner recommended the extension of the line to Kuala Klang where wharves could be constructed to the south of the river.[6] The Engineer wrote:

> "The accommodation available for shipping and the depth of water obtainable at this point had formerly been reported upon unfavourably, but after roughly sounding the proposed harbour I reported upon it as a suitable site for the construction of wharves, and with abundance of water and swinging room for vessels lying in the harbour."[7]

On receipt of this report the Governor directed Commander F. M. Field, of H.M.S. *Egeria,* to make a survey of the proposed harbour. In December 1893, Commander Field submitted his report in which he showed that the proposed harbour had a deep anchorage, clear of dangers and very suitable for wharves. He also indicated that ships might lie at anchor in the fairway without obstructing the entrance to the harbour, while in his opinion the approaches to the port would constitute no danger to shipping.[8]

The favourable report of Commander Field and plans for the harbour were sent in April, 1894, to the Secretary of State for the Colonies for his approval. The estimated cost of five miles of railway was between $120,000 and $130,000 but no estimates were given for the construction of wharves, godowns and railway sidings. The scheme included the construction of permanent wharves capable of accommodating five coastal steamers at a time, customs house, goods sheds and other facilities. This scheme also proposed to build the goods sheds on the wharves which would also carry one rail track.

In May, 1894, the Secretary of State gave his general approval to the proposed scheme. Even before receiving this approval from London, the Governor on April 5th sent instructions to the British

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5. For details of this, see Kalam Azad: *"Railways in Selangor, 1882-1902"*. Singapore, 1952. This is an academic exercise written for the Department of History, University of Singapore.
6. The Straits Times, 17 April, 1894.
7. E. C. Spooner, "Report of the Resident Engineer, Selangor Railways, 1893", in *F.Y.O.R.I.M.*, p. 35.
8. S.S.M.P., 2844/94.

Resident, Selangor, to proceed at once with a final survey of the route from Klang to Kuala Klang. But, when the approval was already given, the construction of the wharves was delayed by prolonged dicussions of alternative plans before a final decision was reached. Actual work on the construction of the wharves was not started until the latter part of 1896.[9]

Initial progress on the construction of the three wharves was very discouraging. When the final decision was reached, the Selangor Government engaged local contractors in Singapore to provide material for the cast-iron work required for the cylinders and screw-piles, while material for the superstructure of the wharves was being obtained from England. In his Annual Report for 1897, the British Resident (H. C. Belfield) complained that there was delay in the construction work on account of the failure of the Singapore contractors in supplying enough cast-iron material. Evidently this delay was soon remedied, for in the Annual Report for 1898 the Resident (J. P. Rodger) wrote that one passenger jetty was completed and that at least one coastal wharf was nearing completion.

But there were other delays. At the site of the proposed wharves the depth of shifting mud averaged about 120 feet. The construction of the wharves was often stopped while the cylinders were adjusted, now and then, into their exact position. At the same time, much difficulty was experienced in keeping the bad foundation as firm as possible. Despite these difficulties, the construction work progressed to a successful conclusion and, by 1900, one passenger jetty and three wharves were ready for use. However, work had still to be completed on the passenger jetty and on some ancillary facilities before the port could become operative.

The construction of wharves and other works involved unexpected heavy expenditure. As mentioned above, the work of keeping the cylinders in position had been tediously long, while earth had to be brought by rail from Bukit Jati, one mile north of Klang, to be dumped into the shifting mud as well as to reclaim the swamps behind the wharves. In 1893, the estimated cost was $422,188 but it had risen to $660,269 in 1895. By 1898, $894,736 had been spent. When the port was opened to traffic, the cost amounted to $1,108,791;[10] this sum did not include the cost of the railway line from Klang. The whole scheme was financed from Federal revenue which by this period had been receiving surplus from railway and other sources.

All the necessary work was completed by the middle of 1901 and the port facilities were handed to the Ways and Works Department of the Railways, which was made responsible for the port and its

9. Annual Report, Selangor State Administration, 1896
10. Annual Report, Federated Malay States, 1901.

administration. The port of Klang was closed and on 15 September, 1901, the port of Kuala Klang was officially opened to traffic. It was "an event of great importance to the State and the shipping trade," wrote E. M. Merewether, the British Resident.[11] The new port was named Port Swettenham, after the man who was then the High Commissioner for the Malay States and who, first as Resident and then as Resident-General, had shown very keen interest in the construction of railways in Perak and Selangor.

11. Ibid. A.R., F.M.S. 1901.

2: FROM COASTAL TO OCEAN PORT

Port Swettenham made a poor start and in the first few months it was in danger of being abandoned. For in October and November 1901, the spread of malaria all over the coastal districts of Selangor affected the operation of the port. Almost all the labourers and the staff went down with the sickness so that for several weeks no work could be done to load and unload ships. So serious was the situation that steamers had to leave the port without discharging their cargoes while other steamers bound for the port were diverted to Penang or Singapore. This state of affairs was fortunately only temporary but it was severe while it lasted. Malaria continued to plague the port for a number of years but by 1904 Dr. E. M. Watson had drained the swamps and controlled the spread of malaria.[1]

There were other difficulties as well. The approaches to the port, through the North and South Klang Straits,[2] had not been surveyed. In 1893 Commander Field had made a careful survey of the harbour but not the approaches to the port; he however believed that the approaches would be safe. The Admiralty chart indicated a depth of 14 feet in the middle of the main channel but in the course of his survey, Field came to believe that the channel had a depth of at least five fathoms. It was claimed that lack of proper charts of the approaches prevented large steamers from using the port. The British Resident recommended that the approaches should be surveyed for he believed that, given proper charts, it would be possible to accept ocean steamers of medium size, such as the ships of the British India Steam Navigation Company.

Meanwhile, it was found that the three wharves for the use of coastal steamers were nearly always occupied and already after 1902 there were signs that the accommodation at the port was insufficient "to cope with the reasonable requirements of shippers, shipowners

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1. A.R., F.M.S. 1904. For the work of Watson in combating malaria, see *Fifty Years of Medical Research in Malaya* editor J. W. Field, (for the Institute of Medical Research, Kuala Lumpur). Kuala Lumpur, 1951.
2. See Map. I.

and consignees."[3] The chief drawback was lack of rolling-stock to facilitate the quick movement of cargoes and the want of sufficient rolling-stock contributed to unnecessary delays at the port.

The delays at the port were accentuated by the large number of ships using the port. The existing berths were inadequate while the rise and fall of the tide by 14 feet alongside the wharves caused much inconvenience. However, in 1903 the Resident-General (Treacher) reported that 10 tongkangs were acquired to lighter cargoes to and from ships and that enough rolling-stock and other necessities had been provided so as to minimise ship's stay in port.[4]

Despite the malaria and the early difficulties, the tonnages of shipping and cargoes dealt with at the port, even in its first year, justified its formation. After much work and expenditure on constructing a foreshore by dumping tons of earth, a town grew up "and the dismal swamps of past days has been transformed into one of the healthiest and busiest places within the confines of the State."[5]

Compared to Penang or Singapore, the first few years of growth of the port was not as phenomenal as at the other two ports, but the figures for the period 1901-1912 revealed that the port made rapid progress. Despite the difficulties, Port Swettenham handled more ships year after year. In 1901, 1,611 steam vessels above 75 tons in weight, totalling 463,238 tons, called at the port while native crafts numbered 239, with a total tonnage of 5,781. Improvement of facilities at the port and the provision of proper charts of the approaches to the port allowed steamers of a larger class to make regular calls. Most of these were ships of the B.I.S.N. Company bringing fortnightly shipments of 1500 to 2000 bags of rice from Rangoon, and immigrants from India.

Table I gives the aggregate tonnages of shipping at port and Table II gives the number of ocean steamers using the port. From these tables, it can be seen that the number of ship dropped after 1904 but that their total tonnages showed an increase. The reason for this was that larger ocean steamers — a B.I.S.N. ship weighed about 3,300 tons each — were using the port in greater numbers. After 1907, ships called direct from Europe instead of only from India; in that year, 45 ocean steamers made direct homeward and outward runs from Europe, many of which were ships of the P. and O. S.S. Navigation Company.[6]

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3. A.R., F.M.S. 1902.
4. A.R., F.M.S., 1903.
5. A.R., F.M.S., 1902.
6. A.R., F.M.S. Railways. 1907.

TABLE I.[7]

SHIP TONNAGES AT PORT SWETTENHAM

	SHIPS OVER 75 TONS		NATIVE CRAFTS	
YEAR.	No.	TONS.	No.	TONS.
1901.	1,611.	463,238.	239.	5,781.
1902.	1,949.	612,813.	394.	6,034.
1903	2,620.	860,451.	555.	7,231.
1904.	1,386.	931,938.	—	—
1905.	1,225.	895,935.	—	—
1906.	1,213.	974,211.	653.	8,343.
1907.	1,071.	1,082,756.	714.	11,793.
1908.	1,133.	1,119,483.	415.	11,603.

Apart from coastal and ocean steamers, native crafts made frequent use of the port. Their number always compared well with the number of steamers but their tonnages were a small fraction of the total tonnages recorded for any particular year. In 1901, there were 239 native crafts, of 5,781 tons, and by 1907, the number rose to 714 crafts and 11,793 tons. Most of these crafts were engaged in fishing and in carrying firewood.

The rapid growth of the port between 1901 and 1910 was reflected in the volume and values of cargoes imported and exported. In 1898, the sea-borne trade of Selangor (handled at Klang) amounted to slightly over 60,000 tons,

TABLE II[8]

OCEAN STEAMERS AT PORT SWETTENHAM

YEAR	No. of Ships	TONS
1906.	14.	Unknown.
1907.	45.	140,543.
1908.	112.	383,577.
1909.	174.	591,142.
1910.	224.	751,755.
1911.	256.	837,130.

but after 1901, the tonnage of cargoes increased rapidly, as can be seen from Table III. In 1902,

7. Based on Annual Reports, F.M.S., 1901-1908.
8. Based on Annual Reports. F.M.S., 1906-1911.

TABLE III[9]

GOODS RECEIVED AND FORWARDED BY RAIL.

YEAR.	TONS FORWARDED.	TONS RECEIVED.
1902.	103,053.	28,232.
1903.	110,312.	28,052.
1904.	112,813.	28,603.
1905.	126,464.	27,970.
1906.	147,524.	28,802.
1908.	155,611.	34,934.
1909.	161,118.	32,698.
1910.	174,659.	32,678.

cargoes handled at the port were 131,285 tons and in 1910, 201,337 tons of goods passed through the port. The tonnage of goods received remained around the 28,000-ton mark, though after 1907 this had increased to over 30,000 tons, the increase being due mainly to the export of rubber which was started in that year. In the case of imports, the tonnage increase was very encouraging; in 1902, the port handled 103,053 tons of imports while eight years later the tonnage had increased by more than 70,000 tons.

The total value of both imports and exports for 1901 was $42,784,621 and that for 1907 was $54,984,961, whereas the value of imports and exports dealt with, at Klang in 1898 was only $26,158,056. The trade through Port Swettenham before 1906 consisted mainly of tin for export, as well as some timber and copra, and of rice and opium as the chief imports. Trade declined in 1905 and 1906 due to a slight trade recession but recovered after 1907. Exports exceeded 30,000 tons and the chief export commodity was rubber. Rubber had been planted in Perak and Selangor at the turn of the century and by 1907, the export of rubber was commenced; by 1908, rubber and tin formed the bulk of exports from Port Swettenham.

The trade recovery after 1907 made Port Swettenham increasingly important but it also brought complications to the management of the port. The harbour was large enough to accommodate eight or nine ocean steamers at a time, besides coasters, but by 1908 the port was often congested.[10] Within five years, the main function of the port had changed altogether. It was no longer a port mainly serving coastal steamers, as was originally intended, but had become a thriving ocean port. The available facilities were constantly employed

9. Based on Annual Reports. F.M.S., Railways, 1902-1910.
10. Wright and Cartwright: *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya.* p. 191.

to load and unload cargoes as fast as possible, but delays often occurred.

The situation at the port in that period may be summed up in the words of Mr. H. D. Griffiths, a member of the Federal Council:—

> "For some time past, the traffic at that port has been increasing so rapidly that the present appliances are totally inadequate to cope with the work. What answered the purpose some years ago is now out of date, and is detrimental to the quick despatch, economy and convenience. The system of loading and off-loading by means of lighters, which are themselves again loaded and off-loaded at the wharfs, is antiquated."[11]

It was necessary to improve the port facilities and many proposals were made to turn Port Swettenham into an ocean port.

Other reasons also favoured the creation of an ocean port. The period up to 1914 was one of economic expansion in the F.M.S. Rubber and tin were being exported in large quantities and it was necessary to facilitate the quick transhipment of import and export goods — and cheaply — thus avoiding the need to tranship them to and from Singapore or Penang. It would also make the F.M.S. less dependent on either Singapore or Penang.

To the F.M.S. Railway, which controlled the port, the idea of an ocean port on the west coast of central Malaya was generally welcome. It would mean that more goods would be carried by rail to and from the port. Moreover, if goods were to be shipped through Port Swettenham and less through either of the other ports, the F.M.S. Railway would no longer have to rely much on the facilities provided at either Penang or Singapore. The proposal would be advantageous to the traders, the Railway and the F.M.S. Government. To have an ocean port near to the capital of the F.M.S. therefore had both economic and political appeal.[12]

Those connected with the port were generally in agreement that it should be turned into a fully-equipped ocean port, but as had happened in the 1890's, this question was bound up with the question of site — whether the ocean wharves should be built at the present site or at Deepwater Point. In 1909, J. H. M. Robson raised the question of providing ocean wharves and urged that they be constructed at Deepwater Point.[13] According to him, the existing facilities should be used for tongkang traffic only, while the actual port would be at Deepwater Point, the project to be financed from the money about to be budgeted for a tongkang wharf at Port Swettenham. This proposal was supported by the chambers of commerce but was turned down by the Government on the grounds

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11. Proceedings of the Federal Council, F.M.S., 25-10-1911.
12. D. F. Allen, *Report on the Major Ports of Malaya*, pp. 34-35.
13. Proceedings of the Federal Council, F.M.S., 14-12-1909.

that the existing facilities were adequate and that there was no intention to move the port elsewhere, since "This country is not big enough to have half a dozen large ports."[14]

The question was raised again in 1911. Mr. Griffiths in the Federal Council urged the construction of the ocean wharves at the existing site.[15] This proposal was supported by Mr. W. F. Nutt; speaking in the Federal Council, he endorsed the Government's proposal to construct the ocean wharves at the existing site and remarked that the addition would enable 1¼ million tons more of shipping to be dealt with by the port.[16]

While these proposals were being made, the Government in 1911 instructed the General Manager of the Railway to report on the feasibility of constructing the wharves at Port Swettenham. With the help of Mr. W. King (of the Tanjong Pagar Dock Board, Singapore), Mr. P. A. Anthony (the General Manager) submitted his reports on April 26th, 1911.[17] In his reports, Mr. Anthony was against incurring heavy expenditure at Deepwater Point and made it clear that, at Port Swettenham, accommodation for berthing 4 or 5 local steamers and three ocean steamers could be provided and that the additional wharfage and facilities would be sufficient for the requirements of many years to come.

Mr. Anthony's plan included the construction of an additional berth for one coaster, to be built in 1912; this was to be given priority. In the main, he urged the construction of new wharves, 1377 ft. long and having a depth of water from 24 to 30 ft; the cost of the completed scheme including godowns, sidings, turn-tables, etc., was estimated at 2,750,000. Mr. Anthony recommended that work should start in 1912, and the whole scheme was to be completed in four or five years.

This report was submitted to the Chief Secretary, F.M.S., Sir Arthur Young, who agreed with the proposals in it. Before giving his approval, Sir Arthur referred the proposals to Commander Mills, the Harbour Master. Mills reported that he would have no hesitation in taking an ocean steamer alongside the proposed wharves, and that

> "... if there is enough water the vessels can get alongside. I have already had a vessel 360 feet long, drawing 24 feet of water, 4274 tons, alongside the pontoon jetty and that this jetty is well up the harbour. I experienced no difficulty in getting her alongside or getting her away again."[18]

Mr. Anthony's report and Mills' comments decided the issue

14. Proceedings of the Federal Council. F.M.S., 2-5-1910.
15. Proceedings of the Federal Council. F.M.S., 25-10-191
16. Proceedings of the Federal Council. F.M.S., 13-11-1912.
17. See Appendix.
18. G.M.R. No. 2453/1911.

whether to construct the ocean wharves at the existing site or at Deepwater Point. Allen, in his report, believed that the final choice of site was influenced by questions of land-ownership.[19] These questions in no way influenced Government's decision, for the final choice was related to questions of finance. In making this decision, Sir Arthur Young concurred with Mr. Anthony's views:

> "...if as has been suggested we were to construct wharves at Sungai Dua now and incur the necessary expenditure on the railway, reclamation and township, it would mean moving the port altogether and abandoning the whole outlay already incurred at Port Swettenham, as it cannot be argued that at the present time there is sufficient trade to justify the upkeep of two ports."[20]

Although the trade at Port Swettenham had increased between 1901 and 1910, the trade then certainly did not justify the maintenance of two ports. The final choice was made on whether there would be sufficient trade or not, and it was thought that the trade of Port Swettenham would not increase much beyond the 1910 volume.

Work on the construction of the ocean wharves was begun in 1912. The original plan provided for the construction of 1377 feet 6 inches of wharfage, but after modification, the ocean berths measured 1,010 feet only. The ocean wharves were built on steel piles sunk to a depth of about 40 feet below mud level. The superstructure, 50 feet wide, was of steel and carried rails and powerful electric cranes for working cargoes. The construction was completed after three years, and in 1914, Port Swettenham became a truly ocean port.[21]

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19. D. F. Allen, *Report on Major Ports*, P. 35.
20. G.M.R. No. 2453/1911.
21. *F.Y.O.R.I.M.*, p. 52.

3: BETWEEN TWO WORLD WARS

As an ocean port between the First and Second World Wars, Port Swettenham did not experience any basic constructional changes. When the port was completely converted into an ocean port in 1914, there were two berths for ocean steamers and three berths for coasters. The Ocean Wharf, at the southern end of the harbour, was connected to the shore by four bridge-heads and by railway tracks. Immediately behind the bridge-heads were small transit sheds, built on reclaimed land. These transit sheds were some distance from the wharf so that railway wagons, and turn-tables, had to be provided to store goods in the transit sheds.

The three coastal piers, built in 1901, underwent little modification. These T-headed piers were located to the north of the Ocean Wharf, as were also the passenger jetty and the pontoon jetty for the use of tongkangs. Transit sheds for these piers, too, were far behind the piers while the main railway tracks lay beyond the transit sheds. The port area was limited to the north and south by Sungei Klang and Sungai Aur, to the west by the harbour and to the east by the main railway tracks. The port area therefore suffered from the defects of a cramped site and these defects were aggravated by unsatisfactory lay-out of the roads, tracks and godowns within the area, the development of which seemed "to have been more or less opportunist".[1]

Port Swettenham became an ocean port only after war had broken out in Europe. As a result of the war, Port Swettenham did not get much more traffic than it had before 1914. The small increase in the shipping tonnage was due to the increase in costal traffic. Before 1925, there was relatively little increase in the tonnage of ocean shipping. The reason for this was because the major shipping companies did not like the creation of the port. They argued that, on a tropical coastline of 500 miles, two ocean ports at Singapore and Penang were enough to serve the needs of Malaya. Another ocean port half-way between Penang and Singapore would be of little advantage; it would only mean reduced speed and delay in passage time and would add to shipping costs. Hence, few ocean steamers made full use of the port.

Also, ships were discouraged from calling at the port by the

1. D. F. Allen, *Report on the Major Ports*, p. 35.

TABLE V[8]

TONNAGES HANDLED AT PORT SWETTENHAM

YEAR	IMPORTS	EXPORTS	TOTAL
1911	207,894	37,570	245,464
1912	219,037	44,569	263,606
1913	250,852	53,795	304,647
1914	233,046	53,414	286,460
1915	171,345	53,542	224,887
1916	159,521	58,670	217,191
1917	144,267	64,228	208,495
1918	135,422	60,157	195,579
1919	141,875	68,505	210,380
1920	184,211	68,317	252,528
1921	140,934	63,415	204,349
1922	134,764	69,271	204,035
1923	184,660	71,716	256,376
1924	229,436	74,537	303,973
1925	272,889	87,129	360,018
1926	347,456	107,401	454,857
1927	418,945	93,360	512,305
1928	469,700	126,833	596,533
1929	440,779	161,059	601,838
1930	372,413	139,091	511,504
1931	254,725	120,496	375,221
1932	192,540	115,673	308,213
1933	204,052	148,678	352,730
1934	249,513	149,398	398,911
1935	262,751	133,912	396,663
1936	309,243	141,945	451,188
1937	400,749	169,806	570,555
1938	384,590	152,568	537,158
1939	384,590	152,568	537,158
1940	428,236	183,574	611,810
1941 (Jan.—Oct.)	388,756	143,329	532,085

handled at the port between 1901 and 1911. The volume of trade fluctuated, decreasing to the lowest total of 195,579 tons in the last year of the War. There was a trade recovery after the War but with the trade depression of 1921-23, there was again a considerable drop in the import-export figures.

There was almost a steady increase in export goods. Despite the

8. D. F. Allen, *Report on Major Ports*, pp. 36-7.

surcharge imposed by shipping companies and despite the Trade depressions, the export figures rose steadily from 37,570 tons in 1911 to 60,157 tons in 1918 and to 87,129 tons in 1925. The reason, I think, was that rubber and tin, needed for war and other purposes, formed the bulk of exports and that there was only a small surcharge on rubber for export. In the same period, imports dropped very considerably; in 1911, 207,894 tons of goods were imported through the port and in 1918 imports dropped to 135,422 tons while at the height of the depression 134,764 tons of goods were imported.

After the period of trade depression, the volume of traffic and cargo passing through the port began to increase. In 1926, 359 ocean steamers called at the port with imports and 274 called for exports, and in 1929, when goods handled reached a maximum figure before World War II, 754 ocean steamers called with imports and 693 for exports. After 1929 the number of ships calling at Port Swettenham, both on the outward and homeward runs, increased despite the depression of 1931-33 until in 1939, when war broke out in Europe, there were 1999 ocean steamers in port during that year.

With the increase in traffic, there again rose the problems of delays and congestion. Even during World War I and the trade depression, the facilities at the port could not deal quickly enough with the cargoes. After 1926 these problems became serious and there were complaints that these had been caused by lack of enough deep-sea berths. The real cause for this seems to be that captains of ocean steamers were reluctant to berth alongside the Ocean Wharf owing to the risk of damage on account of wind and tide. Before 1927, few ships came alongside the Ocean Wharf; in 1925 there was none and in 1926 there were only 21 steamers alongside.

The trade of the port began to recover rapidly after 1926, and the amount of goods handled rose from 454,857 tons in that year to 601,838 tons in 1929. The tonnage for 1929 was the highest figure obtained before World War II started. This trade recovery, however lasted for only about 5 years before the Great Depression of 1931-33 set in. The effect of the slump was to bring a appreciable reduction in the volume of trade. After the all-time high of 1929, the amount of goods handled during the slump period averaged about 380,000 tons a year. The trade of the port rose again after 1936 and the amount of goods sent in and out of Port Swettenham was as much as the amount handled during 1926-30. A peak was reached in 1940 when the tonnage of goods rose to 611,810 tons. The lifting of the surcharge on export cargoes and the inclusion of the port as a base port partly contributed to the increase of trade at the port.

Table V does not include tonnages dealt over the private-owned Shell Company wharf. This wharf, built in 1930 at the mouth of the Klang River, specially dealt with the small tankers of the Company. Other tankers, most of which belonged to the Standard Oil Company and the Asiatic Petroleum Company, berthed at the Ocean Wharf. This hindered the operation of loading and discharging dry cargoes.

At Port Swettenham, imports had always exceeded exports. Apart from oil-fuel which was imported in relatively small quantities for ship-fuel and other purposes, the imports passing through Port Swettenham consisted mainly of foodstuffs, machinery, constructional material, coal and manufactured products. Rice and other foodstuffs formed a large part of the imports, and in 1935 it was reported that the increase in the number of ships calling at the port was due to the fact that many vessels, especially those under Norwegian flag, were engaged in the rice-carrying traffic between Bangkok and Port Swettenham.[9] Coal was imported in quite large quantities for use by the F.M.S. Railway and power stations as well as by coal-burning steamers. Exports consisted of rubber (also as latex), tin, copra and other products of Malaya, which came mainly from areas in South Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and western Pahang.

9. Annual Report, Federated Malay States, 1935.

4: POST-WAR DEVELOPMENT

Port Swettenham suffered severely from war damages both as a result of British denial action and of Japanese bombing. It is not known how the Japanese administered the port or what traffic called there but they certainly neglected to repair the damages and did nothing to remove two wrecked craft which blocked the coastal wharves. The two slipways at the mouth of the Klang River were left in a derelict condition and the pontoon wharf was damaged by bombs. The Japanese also neglected to repair sagging of the southern end of the ocean wharf and did not replace the lighter fleet which had all been sunk.[1]

The immediate concern of the British Military Administration was the rehabilitation of the port. Rehabilitation work was immediately undertaken by the British Army and the Royal Navy but the progress was slow, for at the same time, reconstruction had to be done of some godowns and roads in the port area. With the help of the Royal Navy, the sunken craft alongside the coastal wharves were raised and towed elsewhere in October 1947, and work on joining the T-heads of the coastal wharves was soon begun, to provide 600 feet of berthage. This work was completed by November, 1949. Remedial measures were also undertaken to prevent further sagging at the south end of the Ocean Wharf but the work put 150 feet of the Wharf out of commission until 1950 when the work was done.[2]

Rehabilitation involved also the replacement of the pre-war pontoon wharf by two new ones, consisting of military barges. Military barges were also used to replace the damaged lighter fleet. After the Re-occupation, 66 Unicraft and 8 "Phoenix" barges were used as lighters but they did not prove very satisfactory. The acquisition of 20 100-ton swim-ended barges and about 80 60-ton lighters by 1950 helped to bring the lighter fleet to its pre-war tonnage. By 1952, most of the repairs and improvements had been completed and the port then had better facilities than before the war, but

1. D. F. Allen, *Report on the Major Ports*, p. 41.
2. A.R., F.M.S., 1948, 49.

unfortunately the great increase in tonnages made even these facilities inadequate.[3]

An important post-war development was the expansion to the south of the port area by the construction of permanent installations for bulk palm oil and latex. These were constructed due to the increasing importance of the export of these two commodities. Two latex installations had been built before the war; since 1946, Socfin Latex had added their installations to those of the Malayan American Plantations Latex.

The shortage of facilities and the slow clearance of ships, coupled with increased shipping and cargo, led to serious delays and congestions. Since 1947, traffic using the port increased rapidly from 5,110,504 tons in 1947 to 7,019,726 tons in 1950 and to 9,323,154 tons in 1951. But the clearance of these ships was slow for the Railway, largely responsible for it, had insufficient rolling-stock. Delays at the port could not entirely be blamed on the Railway. For, as Allen has shown,[4] during a period of congestion in 1949 Railway delays contributed only 4 minutes per ship-day in port, while delays caused on board ships (opening of hatches, fixing of derricks, etc.) contributed about 65 minutes and delays due to administrative and other causes contributed about 56 minutes. Strikes abroad caused frequent bunching of ships in the port and left the margins for safety delicately balanced.

After the war, the tonnage of cargo handled at the port far exceeded what was thought possible in about 1910. The increase in trade was due to the great demand for imported material for development and Port Swettenham now served a wider area than before, reaching up to Malacca and north-west Johore. The special low freights charged by the Railway for cargoes travelling relatively longer distances also influenced the pattern of the ports trade, so that in effect the port served almost the whole of the west coast. For example, more than 1000 tons of latex a month had been sent to Port Swettenham, since about 1948, from plantations in Kedah.

Table VI below gives the tonnages of cargo dealt with at the port between 1947 and 1956. The figures given below do not include tonnages of cargo handled at the

3. Annual Report of the Railway Administration, 1952.
4. D. F. Allen, *Report on the Major Ports*, p. 64.