This is the published version:


Available from Deakin Research Online:  
[http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30031838](http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30031838)

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner.

**Copyright** : 1997, Media Transasia
Masjid Kapitan Keling
Conservation Project at Penang

David S. Jones

The mosque, first founded by Muslims associated with the East India Company regiments stationed in George Town, is a distinctive landmark on the Penang skyline and a highly significant religious venue. The committee of management of the Kapitan Keling Mosque in George Town, Penang, has decided to conserve and adapt its existing Mosque complex. In 1996 an extensive site survey and dilapidation inspection was undertaken by the South Australian Heritage Consultants and Contractors Group (SAHCC) for the mosque committee.

Historical Development
The first mosque on the site dates prior to the 1798 map of George Town that indicates a small building marked "Chatter Mosque", which predates the present Kapitan Keling Mosque. An East India Company sepoys, Major Nadir Kain, popularly known as To Nadok Berlogging Kain, is attributed by oral tradition as the founder of the mosque. Erected for the hauildars, jamadars and sepoys within the native section of the East India Company troops based in George Town, it consisted an attap mosque and adjacent burial ground on some 18 acres. The land was purposely allocated by the British colonial administration to the Muslim community to provide income for the maintenance and development of the mosque as part of waqf endowment.

The original structure, erected between 1801 and 1803, was single storey, with minarets at each corner. Named after the first superintendent of the mosque, Kapitan Keling, the structure remained relatively the same until early this century, apart from an ablution tank between the well and mosque building.

In 1905 the Mohammedan and Hindu Endowments Board was established by the Straits Settlements government to administer endowed land holdings and assets, and the mosque was transferred to the Board in 1906. The sale of land
Around the mosque, including the Carnarvon street market, reduced the land holdings from 18 acres to 6 acres, enabling major renovations to be undertaken in 1916 including the construction of numerous smaller domes, minarets and minarets. A separate madrassah for religious education classes was also constructed behind the mosque.

In 1905 the municipal council in London commenced a massive urban renewal project that appears to have combined both social justice and civic improvement objectives. The mosque participated in this programme in the 1920s and 1930s by erecting on adjacent lots several large three-storey apartment blocks, with commercial activities on the ground floor, in an eclectic mix of Art Deco, modernist and Byzantine and crafts influences. In the 1930s the mosque also added the present large ovoidal-shaped dome and existing minaret tanks.

Conservation Study

The study comprised two parts: the dilapidation survey and preparation of a conservation plan that were carried out with regard to the principles in the Australia ICOMOS Burna Charter.

The aim of the project was to provide an understanding of the historical development of the complex; provide a plan to guide all restoration, development and maintenance initiatives and identify opportunities and constraints that would permit or hinder adaptation and development of the mosque and its grounds.
The actual survey involved various components like a measured survey of the mosque and minaret complex, a close examination and review of the existing building fabric and finishes, evaluation of the impact of rising and falling damp penetration upon the structure, preparation of a statement of significance of the structure and complex, and an extensive consultation process with the mosque committee. The process identified a desire to provide additional prayer facilities within and outside the mosque, new madrasah facilities, and careful redevelopment of commercial structures on waqf land adjacent to the mosque.

Layers of History and Problems Identified
The dilapidation survey identified a number of issues and mapped the historical evolution of the structure. Between 1893 and 1916 the original mosque, with its northern extension, was extended to the south and east. The northern extension was probably refaced, and simple Doric columns added to form an outer colonnade. The prayer hall was slightly extended in Moorish style, and a series of small onion-shaped domes and an eastern entrance added to the building. The designer of these additions is not known.

In 1916 the existing prominent minaret by Neubronner was erected, and appears associated with slut clearance around its site to permit an enhanced view of the mosque from Pitt Street (Lebuhr Pitt). The northern ablution tank was added in 1918 in a design by Stark and McNeil of Penang. In 1928 Stark and McNeil prepared plans for a new perimeter wall with cast iron palisading and gates topped with onion-shaped domes in a strong Anglo-Indian style. The plan denoted a strong axial garden pathway system culminating in a circular flowerbed near the south-east corner of the mosque building.

Between 1928 and 1935, as indicated in a plan by architect C E Boucher of Penang, the original interior of the mosque was reconstructed. A new large timber-framed onion-shaped dome clad with large sheets of lapped copper, now painted yellow, was erected around the original smaller spherical-shaped reinforced concrete dome. Another outer colonnade was added, and the pre-1916 single storey extensions were doubled in height to accentuate the scale of the mosque. It appears that the former Imam’s quarters were erected at this time although no date has been identified.

The survey identified rising dampness in the walls, uncovered the original paint colours of the interiors and discovered the dual domes and now yellow-painted copper sheeting. Successive coats of paint have now dulled the ornate details of column capitals and wall detailing. The original simple hipped roof with eaves, added to numerous parapet and box gutters, was now insufficient to counter regular tropical deluges resulting in falling dampness where walls are regularly saturated by overflowing gutters and drainpipes.

The progressive construction of masonry piers and columns has also resulted in varying degrees of deterioration. Rendered brick walls and columns, constructed without damp-proof coursing, have had numerous incorrect cement repairs to the original lime plaster promoting greater damage and forcing dampness up the walls and plaster.

The consultation process identified one key element for design consideration. Additional prayer space within the mosque was sought because, in accordance with Muslim beliefs, women can only pray within the complex in a small curtained area in the corner of the prayer hall. The process also identified the need for more space in the Hall, with better ventilation and views to the western wall, together with related redevelopment opportunities.
and the re-establishment of the school.

**Significance of the Complex**

In proposing a statement of significance for the mosque the consultants recognized the landmark role the complex has in George Town, and the need for the continuity of its functions to the plural culture and life of George town. The structure celebrates the role of the town as a prominent migration venue and the influence of Indian Muslims upon Penang's culture and commerce.

As a mosque it is an outstanding representative of its type in Penang and Malaysia, rivalling the Masjid Acheh in George Town in history and tradition, less in grandeur than the State Mosque in Penang, architecturally less exotic than the Ubudiyah Mosque in Perak or technically less unique as the 1930s Sultan Sulaiman Mosque in Selangor. The maintenance of the simple unity of its design and construction consistently over various phases of additions and renovations displays an unusual attention to design integration.

The statement, in part, identifies the mosque as possessing great cultural significance to Penang in terms of its continuity and religious symbolism "in the lives of past current Muslim communities and Indian Muslims in particular. It accentuates the skyline of George Town and is a geographical and historical marker in the foundation, establishment, consolidation and further development of Penang."

**References**


