

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MALAYA'S COLONIAL 'AMATEUR' HISTORIANS

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Abstract

In comprehending nineteenth-century British imperial activity in the Malay states, economic reasoning, especially capitalist expansion, is conventional. This essay argues, in general, that imperialism was also an intellectual effort. During the colonial period, colonialists produced (in)valuable historical accounts, books, and travelogues, providing insight into Malaya's native inhabitants and history, despite being amateurs. Historical events are vividly pictured, as are colonisers' perceptions of the region, its inhabitants, and its history. Considering these were very subjective and personalised, this article offers a background check on the colonial authors, who were travellers and administrator-scholars, as a prelude to analysing their work.

Keywords: Malaya, Colonialism, Amateur Historian, Travellers, Administrator-Scholars

Introduction

British expansionism was a diverse phenomenon. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, colonies and trading posts in large parts of the Asian and African continents were added to the imperial fold of colonial possessions already acquired in the 16th and 17th centuries. The orthodox thought to make sense of this age of heightened imperial operation has been the economic logic, or specifically the expansion of capitalism, as influentially argued by Hobson and Lenin, and also less explicitly by Marx. The 19th-century imperial century was when the Malay Archipelago became an attractive destination. The East India Company officials, traders, missionaries, British travellers, and government officials did not, however, engage with Malaya as economic agents *per se*. In defence of an eclectic interpretation of imperialism, this article broadly argues that imperialism here was also their intellectual activity. During the colonial period, the colonialists wrote books, personal notes, travelogues, historical accounts, and articles. Whereas all of them may be classified as colonial historiography, these were historical sources that are valuable for their straightforward, historical purpose. They shed considerable light on historical events of the time and show vivid instances of how colonisers perceived and depicted the area, its inhabitants, and its history. Although they were amateurs, they were either partially or fully instrumental in running a parallel course of knowledge advancement alongside formal territorial colonisation in the Malay Archipelago in the 19th and 20th centuries. Since their works were highly subjective and personalised, this article gives a background check of the colonial authors, who were mostly travellers and colonial administrators who published their works elsewhere, but most crucially, in reputable (now, historical) journals. It talks as much about their life stories, educational and professional backgrounds, as well as personalities as a precursor before analysing their writings. This makes way for a closer look of the authors' peculiarities in order to assess their views and opinions about the Malay states and local Malays as objectively as possible.

Much has been written on travellers and administrators in Malaya by scholars from the 1970s to the present. Such works are by John Gullick (1995) (1995), *Adventurous Women in South East Asia, Europeans in South-East Asia*; John Turnbull Thomson (1984), *Glimpses into the Life in Malayan Lands* (Singapore, OUP, 1984); George Maxwell (1957), *In Malay Forests*; Ambrose B. (1984), Rathborne, *Cramping and Tramping in Malaya: Fifteen Years Pioneering in the Native States of the Malay Peninsula*; George Maxwell (1957), *In Malay Forest*, William H.M. (1901), *Read, Play and Politics: Recollections of Malaya by an Old Resident* and Sivachandralingam Sundara Raja (2010), *Accounts by Merchants, Travelers' and Missionaries as Historical Sources for the Study of the Malay Archipelago in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century*. All these works, except for Sivachandralingam, merely narrates life in Malaya in the 19th and early 20th century and do not explore how travellers and administrators who were amateur historians provide insight into Malaya's history. This work attempts to bridge this lacuna.

Travellers

Travelogues are written accounts of a traveller's experiences, insights, and observations of events, people, and places encountered along the journey. Long after they were written, travel books are recognised as historical sources. Since the architectural and political structure of a region changes with time, and in the absence of contemporary witnesses, accounts chronicled by travellers have kept the memory of the past alive. Travellers were generally thrilled by the peculiarities of lifestyle, human relations, and cultures. Unlike official archives, travelogues enrich historical research with animated, picturesque impressions of the past. These texts contain various interpretations of events that are not addressed in official documents. As travelogues are personalised and are the record of subjective experiences, reading them as a historical source necessitates knowledge of the traveller's own background. It is critical to examine the traveller's past, just as it is exciting to analyse the travelogue itself.

Isabella Lucy Bird (1831-1904)

Isabella Bird, a well-known travel writer, was born on 15 October 1831 in Yorkshire, England. She is best known for her extensive travels across several continents. Despite hailing from a conservative Victorian-era society, she was an audacious wanderer who often set out on solo journeys. Bird was raised in a middle-class family with an evangelical Christian upbringing. Her father was Edward Bird, and Dora Lawson, Edward's second wife, was her mother. Inspired by her father, Isabella became a devout member of the church. Her devotion was so intense that he would dismiss all other religions as mere superstitions except hers. Bird grew up in Tattenhall from 1834 to 1842, Birmingham from 1842 to 1848, and Huntingdonshire, where her father served from 1848 onwards.¹

Bird suffered numerous health issues throughout her life, most of which her doctors had difficulties diagnosing. At 18, she underwent spinal surgery. She then had insomnia, nausea, and various ailments. She usually spent her entire day at home. These pains would miraculously disappear when she travelled abroad. Her doctors recommended her to get out in the open air since she was not quite responding to medications. Isabella, at the age of 23, visited her relatives in North America with the help of a budget from her father. During her journey, she actively pursued every step and travelled alone for the first time. She gained confidence in her ability to handle things. She began journeying for health reasons and

eventually became a full-time traveller. From Canada, she embarked on a three-month journey that included visits to Toronto, Chicago, and Montreal.² Isabella's family relished her letters so much that they suggested she make them into a book. Following their advice, Isabella published *The Englishwoman in America* in 1856, which was based on her letters.³

When she returned home, she faced health issues. Since her mental health and emotional well-being were deteriorating, Isabella's father suggested she travel to the United States and Canada. She showed no signs of recovery. In 1858, due to a strenuous work schedule, her father died. Following his death, she relocated to Edinburgh with her mother and sister Henrietta. Isabella's mother died ten years later. Henrietta moved to Mull Island, Scotland, but Isabella struggled to adapt to the climate and decided to travel to New Zealand and Australia in 1872. Upon her return, she lived with her sister for a time and took botanical lessons.

In 1877, she started planning for a journey to Japan. She journeyed across Japan from north to south with some Japanese guidance for seven months. But she also had religious guidance, as it were, in Christian civility, which would lead her to arrive at judgements. She despised Japanese religion and felt the aristocrats were both haughty and immoral. However, she appreciated the down-to-earth nature of the individuals residing in rural Japan. Isabella visited Hokkaido and met the Ainu people, Japan's indigenous inhabitants. She was most likely the first European woman to ever visit them.⁴ Isabella enjoyed her trip and the excitement of exploring unfamiliar places. She was always up for trying out new and adventurous routes. Her *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan: An Account of Travels on Horseback in the Interior*, was published in two volumes, demonstrating not only her wealth of experience, but also her strong curiosity, which she likely developed to relieve herself of her own mental and emotional setbacks.⁵

As she reached middle age, Isabella travelled extensively around America, Australia, and New Zealand. She also explored lesser-known Asian regions, such as China, Korea, Malaya, and the Middle East. The British colonial administration had not yet thoroughly explored the Malay peninsula. The peninsula's western coast and trading ports were widely recognised, but virtually nothing was known about its interior. During her five weeks in Malaya, she penned letters to Henrietta. Most of her early works were letters to her sister. Henrietta was proficient in classical languages such as Greek and Latin. Based on her knowledge of Ptolemaic history, she suggested titling the travelogue *The Golden Chersonese*.⁶ In 1880, Isabella's sister Henrietta died shortly after Isabella came home. She felt awfully alone in her grief at her sister's death.⁷ While writing *The Golden Chersonese*, Isabella reached out to her publisher, John Murray, for help in gathering information about Malaya.

Isabella authored nine travelogues, including *The Golden Chersonese*. In a travelogue of twenty-three letters, Isabella wrote about the British presence in Malaya. She focussed on the Straits Settlements (Singapore, Malacca, and Penang) and the three Malay Protected States – Perak, Selangor, and Sungei Ujong. Despite the informal and flowing tone of the letters, the travelogue has a professional structure. The book's introduction provides an in-depth overview of Malaya's history, politics, people, and geography. Isabella's accounts in each settlement or state begin with a brief introduction of the area, followed by her impressions and adventures. The text also includes parts of Isabella's trips to China, Vietnam, and Saigon, making it more extensive.

Isabella started her adventure on the Malay Peninsula in Singapore in 1879. On her way back from Japan, she stayed there for around five weeks. Cecil Clementi Smith, the Colonial Secretary at that time, invited her to explore the newly established Malay protected states. Smith thought that Isabella's writing could help promote the Malay States. Isabella's descriptions included specific information, fascinating details, and a general impression of her encounters. She provides a detailed account of the many tribes that lived in Singapore in the late 19th century. Her trip to the Malay States was challenging, since she had to board a small Chinese boat called Rainbow to get to Malacca. Isabella was the only foreign female passenger. However, for the most of her voyage, she was accompanied by Babu, a local butler, the governor's two teenage daughters, and about eleven workers. As a woman, Isabella had the empathy for the intimate aspects of Malaya's life, especially for native women and children. In her writings, she describes the native women's clothing and their children.⁸

The *Golden Chersonese* is a valuable literature that not only depicts the inhabitants of the 19th-century Malay regions but also offers crucial details on the administrators of the protected Malay states. In Perak, for example, Isabella met William Edward Maxwell. She was characteristically open and honest about her experiences on the Peninsula. She did not try to conceal any challenges she faced. When she first arrived in Selangor, she bluntly shared her unpleasant impressions of the riverside village and reflected on the difficulties of walking four miles through swamps and forests on her elephant ride from Larut to Kuala Kangsar. She also pointed out annoyances, such as being constantly bitten by mosquitoes and occasionally feeling let down by her hosts' food offerings after a long day of travelling. Despite hardships, Isabella demonstrated her aesthetic sensibility by finding beauty and uniqueness in her experiences. Despite the dangers and inconveniences she encountered, she vividly portrayed the landscapes of the Malay States.⁹

Isabella's *The Golden Chersonese* was published following her marriage to Dr John Bishop in 1881. Their marriage was short-lived, as Dr John Bishop died in 1886. Isabella then pursued practical medicine at St Mary's Hospital in London in 1887. Additionally, she taught French and art.¹⁰ In 1892, she gained popularity after presenting at a Royal Geographical Society in London. That same year, she became Royal Geographical Society's first female member.¹¹ Isabella embarked on two extended journeys, the first of which took place in East Asia from 1894 to 1897. She travelled to Chinese Manchuria and then made to the Tibetan border via Szechwan (Sichuan) after visiting the Yangtze (Yangzi). Isabella traversed 8,000 miles during her fifteen-month journey in China. She returned to England in 1897 and published *Korea and Her Neighbours* (1898)¹² and *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond* (1899).¹³

Isabella, despite being seventy years old, was not ready to settle down and enjoy a quiet life. She went on a journey to North Africa, traversing 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometres) over Morocco's Atlas Mountains.¹⁴ This was her final journey. Bird died three years later, on 7 October 1904, at her house in Edinburgh, Scotland, and was laid to rest in the Dean Cemetery.¹⁵ Though Isabella was short and gentle, Bird had the courage to travel alone in treacherous regions. Her passion for travel remained unhindered by her chronic illnesses or the loss of her family members. Her missionary enthusiasm further motivated her. Isabella published many books that combined her passion for adventure with scientific curiosity.

Emily Anne Innes (1843-1927)

Emily Anne Innes was born on 5 March 1843 in Boxley, Kent, the third of six children. Her father, James Craigie Robertson, was a pastor in Boxley as well as a well-known theologian and church historian who joined the board member of Canterbury Cathedral as a librarian in 1859. Emily's mother was Julia Maria Stevenson. Although we do not have information about her formal education, it is believed that Emily received home-schooling while living with her family. Unlike her siblings, who pursued their careers or married early, Emily stayed with her family until she was in her thirties to look after her mother. On 28 January 1875, she married James Innes, a colonial official.¹⁶

Emily moved to Sarawak with James. Despite her husband's reputation as an inept official, Emily remained a loving and respectful wife until his death in 1901. James lost his job in 1876, but in 1877 he was appointed as a collector and judge at Kuala Langat, Selangor. Emily and James lived for six years in Selangor and briefly in Perak. Living far away from her hometown, Emily often felt lonely and bored. To better acquaint herself with the country, she studied the Malay language through books and practised with her visitors. Her medical expertise was invaluable in aiding the locals. Over time, James and Emily faced conflicts with the British residents, other officials, and their spouses, which worsened Emily's solitude. According to some research, James struggled with financial issues throughout his career. He was also deemed impractical, lacking foresight, and unable to engage with his superiors. In her book, Emily defended her husband, who resigned in 1881. In her later years, Emily enjoyed a life of comfort and prosperity in Nairn, Scotland. Emily died of pneumonia on 7 November 1927, at her home.¹⁷

During the late 19th century, Malaya was extensively documented in travelogues, history books, journal articles, and official reports. Most of these works were authored by males. Female writers' books were limited to well-known travellers like Isabella Bird and Florence Caddy or the spouses of British administrators like Sophia Raffles and Emily Innes.¹⁸ Emily Innes' publication, *The Chersonese with the Gilding Off* (1885), was unique as she wrote as the wife of a junior British colonial officer. Innes wrote her travelogue from a perspective of a long-term resident rather than a short-term traveller. Isabella's travelogue of the Malay provinces spanned more the five weeks between January and February 1879, while Emily's spanned more than five years, from 1876 until her husband's resignation in 1881. Emily realised the value and contradicting realities portrayed in her and Isabella's writings. Isabella had the opportunity of touring the Malay states with the assistance of government officials, whereas Emily had to confront with the challenges of living in swampy places, solitude, and adapting to a lifestyle that was alien to her.

The travelogue begins with the Innes' stay in Langat, Selangor, their first experience in the protected Malay states. They then went to Durian Sabatang in Perak, where they had yet another unpleasant stay, even harsher than the previous one. They had planned to stay for six months but ended up staying for six years. Emily describes her experiences in her village struggling with hygiene issues and cooking without much. She further talks about the behaviours of her Malay neighbours and James Innes' relationships with the Selangor Resident Bloomfield Douglas and Tunku Dia Udin. The tragic death of Inspector Captain Lloyd at Pangkor and Emily's injuries during the assault are also recounted, as well as the Innes family's transfer to Durian Sabatang. Her text highlights the tremendous rise in tin mining production and rice cultivation due to innovative Chinese techniques adapted in Perak

and Selangor around the 1870s. This led to a large influx of Chinese immigrants, which resulted in conflicts among former Malay rulers due to wealth disparity.¹⁹

While some argue that Emily was pessimistic, it is necessary to consider her difficult circumstances. Emily lacked close female friends from her own country and was always bored due to deep loneliness. Although or rather because her life was dull, she interspersed sarcasm when narrating her experiences and encounters in her book. As the Innes resided in the protected Malay states shortly after the British intervention in 1874, Emily's book presents a contemporary and vivid impression from the unique perspective of an English woman who lived in the Peninsula's interior. Emily's descriptions of the Malay rulers, local villages, and peasants, as well as her initial reactions to the British presence during the intervention, are essential sources for historians researching this period. Despite inherent biases, her travelogue offers researchers with fresh perspectives of a British lady. *The Chersonese with the Gilding Off* was republished in 1974, with an introduction by Khoo Kay Kim.²⁰

Florence Caddy (1837-1923)

Florence Caddy was born in London in 1837. She was the only child of John Charles Tompson, a commissariat official, and his French wife. There are indications that Florence's father died when she was a baby, leaving little to support the family. Her mother returned to her home in southern France. Florence was raised and educated in a French environment, most likely influenced by Roman Catholic culture. After her mother died a few years later, she had to return to England as a young girl. She was looked after by distant relatives who were all very kind to her. They sent her to various schools in England and overseas. She had received an exceptional level of education by the time she was eighteen. On 29 January 1857, she married John Turner Caddy (1821/2–1902) at the Catholic Apostolic Church in Gordon Square, London. John was a navy surgeon from a Devon family who received his training at Guy's Hospital and Aberdeen University. He served thirty-one years at sea before working in Falmouth and Bristol.²¹

At the age of forty, Florence had yet to publish a book. She engaged herself in productive writing for twelve years (1877-89). She wrote two three-volume novels, two biographies (one spanning two volumes), two books on household management, design, and interior decoration, and her final book, *To Siam and Malaya*. Despite living for another thirty-four years, she published no other writings. Florence's literary works were diverse, but she remained within the limits of her experiences and areas of interest. Before 1889, she travelled extensively throughout Europe, even venturing as far east as Palestine and Egypt. She took interest in artistic subjects such as painting, sculpture, and architecture, and she was an avid reader. Florence's writing style is characterised by vivid descriptions of the countryside, particularly plant life, as well as historic public buildings and house exterior and interior designs. These are the recurring themes in her novels, biographies, and domestic management and decor studies.²²

Her first published work, *Household Organisation*, published in 1877, emphasised the importance of economic management and the idea that no task unfit for a lady. She attempted novel writing with *Artist and Amateur* (published in 3 volumes in 1878) and *Adrian Bright* (published in 3 volumes in 1883), but then returned to her original genre with *Lares and Penates* (published in 1881), which comprised homilies and reflections. *Footsteps of Jeanne*

d'Arc (1886) was a unique approach to exploring history through geography. It is possible that the character Jeanne d'Arc was Florence herself, who visited the same locations to gain a sense of a traveller. A comparable approach was used in Florence's *Through the Fields with Linnaeus* (2 volumes, 1887). Although she expressed sympathy for the Scandinavians, her observations lacked depth.

Florence's last book, *To Siam and Malaya* (1889), demonstrates her inquisitiveness and astute observations of the lesser-known regions she explored while travelling on the Duke of Sutherland's yacht, *Sans Peur*. She did her research and read up on many sources before her visit. This included the writings of Camoens, a sixteenth-century Portuguese poet and traveller, the narrative of Sir John Bowring, who successfully negotiated the first Anglo-Siamese commercial treaty, and the February 1889 issues of the *Bangkok Times* and a translated Siamese newspaper. A four-month journey to South-East Asia was an opportunity not to be missed. She carried her notebook everywhere, even at a public funeral in Bangkok. Instead of viewing the streets from a carriage, she walked around to have a closer look. She followed the telephone lines along the main roads, exactly as she did in France. She attentively observed plants and classified them according to Linnaean categories, a process known as botanising. Caddy's *To Siam and Malaya*, there are fourteen chapters. However, only chapters ten and eleven, titled "The Sultan of Johore" and "Muar" respectively, are considered important sources for historians. Caddy briefly mentions her stop in Singapore from February 6th to 9th before heading to Bangkok in chapter three. During her time there, she visited the Botanic Garden and the surrounding Chinatowns. Caddy also learned that the name Singapore comes from the Malay term for "Lion City." She expresses sympathy for the Chinese community in Singapore and admires their hard work. Additionally, Caddy provides information on both working-class Chinese and affluent individuals, such as Sia Liang Sia, who has never been to China but is fluent in English and knowledgeable about Europe.²³ Chapters four to nine of Caddy's book recount her two-week excursion to Bangkok. Upon returning to Johor, she also shares some details about their brief visit to Singapore. During her stay, she witnessed a military exercise aimed at safeguarding the Singapore port. Additionally, Caddy attended a cathedral service in Singapore and described the church as neat and lovely, with open cloisters on both sides.²⁴ Caddy refrains from making any negative comments about Muslims or other religions in the region, unlike Isabella and Innes. The book provides a detailed and informative account of a voyage through Egypt, Eritrea, Aden, India, Singapore, Siam, Johor, and Ceylon. For social historians interested in Malayan aristocratic culture, the chapters on Johor offer a rare insight into Sultan Abu Bakar's lifestyle. Overall, the book is an enjoyable read.²⁵ Florence lived comfortably in London and the West Country until her death at the age of 86 in 1923.

Administrators

The signing of the Pangkor Treaty in 1874 marked a crucial turning point in the historiography of Malaya.²⁶ Following the intervention, British colonial officials were stationed throughout the Malay Peninsula, even in many hitherto unknown areas. This necessitated their awareness of the region's inhabitants, culture, customs, religion, language, and literature. British officials were mostly concerned with establishing and sustaining British authority over the Malay States of Perak, Selangor, and Negeri Sembilan. They eventually learned and gained a command of the local language in order to conduct research and policymaking using local materials. The primary sources were no longer the commercial reports of European trade enterprises, but local English-language newspapers/periodicals and

scholarly publications on Malay history and culture, as well as a growing number of personal memoirs and travel writings.²⁷ Most of those documents were written by British administrators. Their works eventually constitute a significant corpus of historical sources, revealing the extent to which knowledge advancement in a colonised region supplemented political and economic colonialism. Although they were amateurs, in the sense that they were not professional historians, their works represented the exercise of intellectual force. The following British administrators contributed most evidently to the historiography of Malaya, comprising Frank Athelstane Swettenham, Richard James Wilkinson and Richard Olaf Winstedt.

Sir Frank Athelstane Swettenham (1850-1946)

Frank Athelstane Swettenham was born in Derbyshire on 28 March 1850, the son of lawyer James Oldham Swettenham and Charlotte Elizabeth. He was raised at home and later relocated to Dollar, Scotland, with his mother after his parents separated. He attended Dollar Academy until 1866, followed by St Peter's School in York from 1866 to 1868. His older brother, James Alexander, the Governor of Jamaica, recommended that he apply for a cadetship in the Straits Settlements civil service.²⁸

Swettenham arrived in Singapore in January 1871 and began working for the colonial secretariat. He quickly learned Malay and became fluent in the language. This allowed him to communicate effectively with the locals and make significant contributions throughout his career. In 1872, he was appointed to work at the land registry offices of Penang and Province Wellesley.²⁹ Commercial interests pressured the Straits government to alter their policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the Malay states. In response, the new governor, Sir Andrew Clarke, commissioned an investigation into the situations on the ground. During his visit to Pangkor Island, Clarke held discussions with Raja Abdullah, local chiefs, and representatives of the Chinese tin miners who were in conflict. Eventually, the miners agreed to settle their dispute through a three-person commission that included Swettenham. As one of the commissioners, Swettenham was able to resolve border disputes among the miners. He also freed several captive Chinese women. In January 1874, Clarke acknowledged Raja Abdullah's sultanate, but only if he consented to have a British Resident as an advisor to his palace. Except for Malay customs and Islamic aspects, the Sultan would have to comply with the Resident's counsel on all matters. The Treaty of Pangkor was drafted in both Malay and English with the help of Swettenham as a translator. However, there were disagreements over the translation of certain critical articles from English into Malay.³⁰

Swettenham's proficiency in Malay proved advantageous for his political role. He worked as an Assistant Resident in Selangor to gain the Sultan's favour. In 1875, he regularly travelled to Perak to assist J.W.W. Birch, Perak's first Resident, who had conflicts with the natives and was eventually killed in the Perak River on November 4. During this time, Swettenham was upriver and managed to escape from the local people who tried to attack him. The individuals responsible for Birch's killing sought to challenge British influence in Perak. Swettenham played a vital part in quelling the Perak rebellion and in capturing the rebel leaders.³¹ Meanwhile, in 1876, he was appointed Assistant Colonial Secretary in Singapore, where he was responsible for the affairs of the native Malay States. He regularly visited Selangor and Perak to audit the government's residential system and accounts.

Swettenham was appointed as the Resident of Selangor in 1882. Throughout his term, he oversaw significant developments as well as challenges. Kuala Lumpur was reconstructed in a modern style. He expanded his influence in local government by bringing rebelling Malay chiefs back under British control. Swettenham also worked on extending the highway system and planning the region's first railway, which would connect Klang to Kuala Lumpur.³² From 1884 to 1886, he was Perak's Acting Resident and oversaw the construction of the first railway from Taiping to Port Weld. Swettenham also developed Taiping as Perak's capital.³³ During this period, however, tension arose among colonial officials, notably between Swettenham and William Edward Maxwell. Swettenham narrowly avoided suspension as Maxwell launched an investigation into private land dealings in Selangor.³⁴

In the 1890s, the disparate and unorganised structure of government in each Malay state led to the idea of a federation. Swettenham visited the sultans of Perak, Pahang, Selangor, and Negeri Sembilan, assuring them that their authority would not be compromised. The Federation Agreement was rapidly ratified by mid-1895, and Swettenham was appointed as the first Resident General in 1896. Although Perak Sultan Idris objected to his restricted powers, the plan went on. Swettenham established Kuala Lumpur as the Resident-General's administrative office and constructed an impressive State Secretariat in the city.³⁵ In 1901, Swettenham was appointed Governor of the Straits Settlements, granting him even more authority.³⁶ He sought to bring the northern Malay states under British rule but failed owing to discontent among the sultans, corruption allegations against him, disagreements with colonial officials, and personal trouble. Swettenham retired in 1904 as a consequence of these, and his pension was paid by administrative fees from rubber companies.³⁷

On 21 February 1878, Swettenham married Constance Sydney when she was 19 years old. Their almost sixty-year marriage was, however, fraught with problems.³⁸ Swettenham eventually divorced his ex-wife in 1938, and a year later, he married Vera Seton Guthrie.³⁹ Swettenham died on 11 June 1946 at his home in London and was laid to rest in Brookwood Cemetery.⁴⁰ Swettenham was a gifted writer and artist who revealed his skills while in Malaya. He published most of his works between 1895 and 1912, focusing on various aspects of Malay society. His early works, such as *Malay Sketches* (1895) and *The Real Malay* (1899), offer a detailed account of Malaya and rural life at the time. *Unaddressed Letters*, published in 1898. This was a collection of his personal sentiments and observations on life in Malaya and Burma, and other places. Additionally, in 1907, he wrote a book on the history of British Malaya. The book covers historical events, including J.W.W. Birch's murder and Swettenham's escape from the attack, as well as Malay beliefs and social life. *British Malaya* is also a memoir of Swettenham's personal experiences, adventures, and achievements during his tenure. Swettenham did not conceal his character and prejudices while writing this account, leading to personal judgements in his writing. Critically acclaimed by administrator-scholars from other times, *British Malaya* ran through several editions until the 1950s. His last publication before he died was his autobiography *Footprints in Malaya* (1942) at the age of 91.

Richard James Wilkinson (1867-1941)

Richard James Wilkinson was the first child of his family, born on 29 May 1867 in Thessaloniki, Greece. His father, Richard Wilkinson, was a British Consul, and his mother was Jane Whitehall. He was raised in Malaga, Spain, where his father worked. Wilkinson had

a natural aptitude for learning foreign languages, and he became fluent in French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Greek. After his father was promoted to the position of Consul-General in Manila, Philippines, Wilkinson and his brother were sent to Felsted School in Essex in 1881. Wilkinson later attended Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1886 to 1889. He was an active student there, winning multiple awards and chairing student clubs. Despite excelling on the French exam, he failed the equestrian exam required for entry into the Indian Civil Service. He then dropped out of Cambridge without completing his undergraduate degree.⁴¹

In 1889, Wilkinson began working for the Straits Settlements civil service. He passed the Malay and Hokkien exams in 1891 and 1895, respectively. Although he was learning Chinese to join the consular service in China, he chose to remain in the Straits Settlements. Wilkinson's scholarly abilities were recognised by William Maxwell, the colonial secretary of the Straits Settlements, who encouraged him to compile a Malay-English dictionary, which was essential for administrators at the time. The two-volume dictionary was published in Singapore in 1902 and became a widely used resource. Wilkinson became the head of the education department of the Federated Malay States between 1903 and 1906. During his tenure, he was instrumental in the establishment of the Malay College Kuala Kangsar, which provided higher-quality education to the children of the Malay elites. He also initiated extensive research that resulted in the publication of several textbooks and Malay classical texts. From 1907 to 1909, Wilkinson also served as the Deputy to Perak Resident Ernest Birch.⁴²

In 1910, Wilkinson was appointed as the Resident of Negeri Sembilan. He later became the Colonial Secretary of Straits Settlements, where he dealt with local food and tin shortages during the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. He served as Governor of Sierra Leone in for six years, from 1916 to 1922. Following his retirement, he planned to live in Izmir, Turkiye, but due to the Turkish-Greek war, he ended up in Mytilene. When Germany invaded Greece in 1939, he was forced to relocate to Izmir. Wilkinson died on December 5 1941, at the age of 74.⁴³

Wilkinson began writing articles in 1906 to help junior British officers comprehend the Malay people's customs and life. During his tenure in Perak, he researched and observed various aspects of Malay society and traditions, including arts and crafts, agriculture, literature, history, and law. He published his monographs in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* under the title *Papers on Malay Subjects*. Wilkinson later published *A History of Peninsular Malays with Chapters on Perak & Selangor* (1923). The selected edition of *Papers on Malay Subjects* was last published by P. L. Burns in 1971.⁴⁴ Wilkinson's book is a significant reference source for Malaysian scholars and students to examine what life and customs looked like on the peninsula in 1906, as well as the history of Malaya from a unique perspective. Wilkinson became one of Malaya's few colonial administrators with outstanding contributions to education and academics that were consistent with colonial policies.

Sir Richard Olaf Winstedt (1878-1966)

Sir Richard Olaf Winstedt was born on 2 August 1878 in Oxford. He was the son of Swedish-descent Isaac Olof Winstedt and Sarah Mary Castell from Oxford. He attended Magdalen College School and New College, Oxford. After passing the Civil Service Examination, he joined the Federated Malay States civil service in 1902.⁴⁵ His first duty post was in Perak, where he remained around for ten years.⁴⁶ During his tenure, he worked closely with locals under the administration of Perak Resident Ernest Birch and his Secretary R. J. Wilkinson. Winstedt contributed to Wilkinson's *Papers on Malay Subjects* on subjects that included Folk Literature, The Circumstances of Malay Life, Arts and Crafts, and Fishing, Hunting, and Trapping. He was particularly interested in folk literature, and he worked with A. J. Sturrock to publish traditional Malay texts. He also contributed articles to the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

Winstedt gained recognition as a scholar with the publication of his book *Malay Grammar* in 1913. During this time, he also delved into customary law. In 1914, he collaborated with Wilkinson to publish "Pantun Melayu", a collection of Malay quatrains. Winstedt continued to focus on the Malay language, writing "Colloquial Malay: A Simple Grammar with Conversations" (1916) and "An English-Malay Dictionary" (1914-17). After returning to Singapore in 1916, he was appointed Assistant Director of Education of the Straits Settlements. He was in charge of developing a Malay education system in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States.⁴⁷ To achieve this goal, he travelled to Java and the Philippines to study their education systems.⁴⁸ Winstedt's report, published in 1922, led to the closure of two outdated teacher training schools and the establishment of Sultan Idris Training College in Tanjong Malim. The Malay Translation Bureau was also established to produce Malay school books and literature. These initiatives improved school education and contributed to the development of the Malay language. The school's curriculum was based on native traditional values and virtues.⁴⁹

While in Singapore, Winstedt was most active as a writer. In 1920, he published two books, *A Dictionary of Colloquial Malay* and *Malay text*, as well as over twenty articles. The articles consisted of themes including history, folklore, ethnology, philosophy, literature, and bibliography. In 1921, he became the first President of Raffles College, a position he held for ten years.⁵⁰ Winstedt married Sarah Mary Josephine O'Flynn, a doctor in Malaya, on 2 March 1921. They had no children from this marriage.⁵¹

From 1924 to 1931, Winstedt was the Director of Education of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States.⁵² *Shaman, Saiva, and Sufi*, which describe the evolution of Malay magic, was published in 1925. In 1921, he was appointed as a consultant to Johor, one of the Unfederated Malay States. He served in this position for four years before retiring.⁵³ Meanwhile, his research in the region centred on history and Malay classical texts. His published writings include *A Malay History of Riau and Johore, Raja Haji Ali's Tuhfat al-Nafis* (Malay text with English Summary) (1932), *History of Johore, 1365-1895* (1932), *Histories of Selangor and Negri Sembilan* (1934), and *The History of Malaya* (1935).⁵⁴

Winstedt's *A History of Malaya* provides a comprehensive overview of the country's history from its beginnings to the present day. It is an invaluable resource for academics as well as general readers interested in Malaya's past. Originally published in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1935, the book was revised with additional information in 1962. It is unclear, however, how much of the revised edition was based on

contemporary sources. Nonetheless, Winstedt's extensive research on the Hindu, Portuguese, and Dutch periods, as well as his expertise in Malay sources, is impressive. Although the book is written in an academic style, the lack of footnotes is glaring. This omission makes it difficult for readers to trace the sources utilised. While there is a list of bibliographic sources at the end of the book, it only partially compensates for the lack of footnotes. Despite its limitations, *A History of Malaya* is one of the most important reference sources on Malaya's history up to the eighteenth century.

After retiring from public service in Malaya in 1935, Winstedt began teaching the Malay language at the University of London's School of Oriental Studies.⁵⁵ In 1937, he was promoted to lecturer and retained it until 1946. While in London, he had access to original Malay manuscripts, many of which were part of the Raffles Collection of the Royal Asiatic Society. Winstedt's studies resulted in a Latinised and annotated text of the Raffles manuscript of the *Malay Annals*, presenting a new perspective from the previous editions. In 1938, this text was published in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. In 1939, he published *A History of Malay Literature*, which became one of his most important books on literature. Winstedt's contributions to regional literature were extensive, publishing over 340 works throughout his lifetime, including articles, books, dictionaries, and reviews. His studies covered history, literature, culture, religion, law, and language. In 1947, he published *The Malays: A Cultural History*. In 1951, he was awarded an honorary LLD degree by the University of Malaya.⁵⁶ He spent the remainder of his life working for the Royal Asiatic Society, where he was a director for almost 24 years. Winstedt died on 2 June 1966 in Putney, London.⁵⁷

Journal Contributors

History journals play a significant role in the intellectual progress of the discipline. Historical journalism in Malaysia may be traced back to the British colonial period. The British government in the Peninsula supported the publication of scholarly journals for administrative, political, and economic benefits. The first scholarly journals were the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago*, the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1878-1988), and the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1923-until present). The *Journal of the Indian Archipelago* was published through the dedicated efforts of James Richardson Logan (1819-1869), a well-known lawyer. The Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, which was the first colonial society formed in Singapore on 6 May 1878, founded the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* and the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. These journals were the result of the society's collective efforts.

Thus, journalism on the Malay Peninsula began as an individual initiative and progressed into an institutional pursuit. British colonial journals covered a wide range of themes, from archaeology and anthropology to geology and history. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under British administration, there was no history journal. Instead, historical studies conducted by British administrator-scholars such as William Edward Maxwell (1846-1947), Richard James Wilkinson (1878-1966), and Richard Olaf Winstedt (1867-1941) were allocated considerable space in scholarly journals. The discussion below will investigate individuals who contributed to Malaya's historical journals. The journals cited were those that were extensively read by British officials.

James Richardson Logan (1819-1869)

James Richardson Logan was born on 10 April 1819 at Hutton Hall in Berwickshire. His father Thomas Logan was a farmer, and his mother Elizabeth was a housewife. Richardson received his education at the Academy of Dunse. He was among the academy's brightest students. After graduating from Dunse Academy, Logan went to Edinburgh to live with his cousin. After studying Scottish law with his cousin, he moved to Bengal at the invitation of another cousin, Daniel Logan, where he engaged with indigo planting. Soon after, in 1839, Richardson travelled to Penang to study British law. This attempt, however, failed when Governor George Bonham dissolved the bar associations in the Straits Settlements. In 1843, Richardson moved to Singapore with his brother. Regarded as Logan's masterpiece, the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia* was first published in 1847. Famously known as Logan's journal, it is widely regarded as the first attempt in scientific publication in the Straits Settlements. Logan shouldered a significant burden as the journal's designer, editor, and financier. Prominent merchants, clerics, military officials, lawyers, doctors, and government officials of the time made remarkable contributions to the journal. Among them were Thomas Braddell, George Earl of Windsor, James Low, Robert Little, John Crawford, and John Turnbull Thomson. Logan himself contributed to the fields of geology, Malay traditions, indigenous peoples, ethnology, and philology. Logan's interest in philology drove him to pursue studies in Asian and European languages. Most of his remaining works focused on grammar and lexicons. Logan returned to Penang in 1853 and managed the Penang Gazette between 1853 and 1855.⁵⁸ Logan died from malaria in Penang on 20 October 1869, at the residence of his son Daniel. He was buried in Penang's Protestant cemetery.

John Anderson (1795-1845)

John Anderson was born in 1795. In 1813, he began his career as an East India Company clerk in Penang. On 30 May 1818, he married Mary Alison. They had seven children, three girls and four boys. Anderson was appointed as a Malay translator about a year later. In January 1823, he was commissioned on a voyage to the east coast of Sumatra. During this journey, he carried out the mission of providing British protection to the Sumatran native chiefs and deterring them from striking deals with the Dutch. Locals on the coast of Sumatra welcomed Anderson with warmth. In 1826, he published *Mission to the East Coast of Sumatra* in order to attract British merchants to Sumatra's products. Anderson opposed the Anglo-Dutch treaty in 1824. He criticised the British for ceding Sumatra to the Dutch in exchange for Malacca and the Dutch colonies in India. In his book *Political and Commercial Considerations Relative to the Malayan Peninsula and the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, published in 1824, he advocated that British protection should be extended to all Malay provinces in order to expand British commercial activities in the region. In 1825, he was posted to Penang as a government accountant, then the following year as Chief Secretary. After spending about five years in Penang, Anderson returned to London in 1830 to pursue his business activities. His commercial activities concentrated on the Southeast Asian region of Borneo and Sumatra. Anderson died of illness on 2 December 1845.⁵⁹

Sir Ernest Woodford Birch (1857-1929)

Sir Ernest Woodford Birch was born in Ceylon on 29 April 1857. His father was Perak Governor James Wheeler Woodford Birch. Sir Ernest was educated at Hertford Grammar School, Sydney School, and Elstree School until 1874. Before entering university, he took private tutoring lessons for a year at Oxford. In 1876, he joined the Colonial Office and two years later was appointed as a cadet in the Straits Settlements Civil Service. Sir Ernest served as Sir Cecil Clementi Smith's secretary in Singapore. He began working at the Malacca Land Office in 1881 and was appointed Acting Second Assistant Colonial Secretary the following year. In January 1888, Sir Ernest was assigned to Malacca to lead Sir William Maxwell's land policies. His two reports on Selangor's land system in 1890 were received favourably. He was Selangor's Acting British Resident in 1892, and a year later, Perak's Secretary. He was instrumental in the implementation of Perak's new land survey system. Between 1897 and 1900, he was the Acting British Resident in Negeri Sembilan. During his tenure, there were positive public service developments, such as increased land tax revenues and the implementation of new land systems. Sir Ernest's final appointment was as Perak's British Resident in 1904. Perak's administration was reorganised, and scientific studies were supported. Sir Ernest contributed to the knowledge of the region by publishing articles in the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. Sir Ernest's essential articles published in the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* include "The Election and Installation of Tungku Muhammad, C.M.G. Bin Tungku Antah, as the Yang Di Per Tuan Besar, Negeri Sembilan" (1906) and his travel articles "My Trip to Bělum" (1910), "My Visit to Klian Intan" (1910), and "The taking over from Siam of Part of Reman or Rahman" (1910). On 17 December 1929, he died in East Sussex.⁶⁰

Sir William Edward Maxwell (1846–1897)

Sir William Edward Maxwell was born on 5 August 1846. His father was a colony officer, Sir Peter Benson Maxwell (1817-1893) and his mother was Frances Dorothea. Between 1860 and 1864, William Edward Maxwell attended Repton Scholl. He came to Malaya in 1865 and was appointed to the Penang Supreme Court. Maxwell became a practising attorney at a local bar in 1867 and was appointed Police Magistrate in Penang in 1869. A year later, he married Lillias Grant Aberigh-Mackay. In 1875, he was appointed Deputy Commissioner to investigate the murder of British Resident J.W.W. Birch in Perak. He became the Assistant Resident in Perak in 1878, and the following year, he was commissioned to the Australian colonies to study the Torrens land registration system. From 1884 to 1889, he was Penang's Acting Resident Counsellor. In 1889, he was appointed as Selangor's British Resident. Before leaving the Straits Settlements in 1895, Maxwell served as Acting Governor for two years.⁶¹ In 1895, he was appointed Governor of the Gold Coast. Maxwell died two years later, on 14 December 1897, of blackwater fever. Over his long career at the Straits Settlements and the Malay states, William Maxwell gained invaluable knowledge of the region. He wrote about Malaya in his spare time. Maxwell published some of his writings on indigenous peoples, state history, the local language, and geography in the *Journal of The Straits Branch Of The Royal Asiatic Society*. Among his articles, "A Journey on Foot to the Patani Frontier in 1876" and "History of Perak from Native Sources" are particularly illuminating.⁶²

Conclusion

The historiography of Malaysia underwent a change in direction in the 19th century. Amateur historians' research became an invaluable source of knowledge. By the early 20th century, colonial historiography was expanding and provided intellectual underpinning for colonial territorial advances on the peninsula. Although unavoidably imbued with imperialistic impulses, 19th-century historiography was fundamentally engaged with deeper exploration on the political, social, and economic history of the native Malay states. Some of them were scientifically conducted. Intrepid travellers and administrator-scholars who traversed the region were instrumental in the exploration of hitherto unknown knowledge.

Some of the most critical contributors were usually employed in positions of authority. They had a solid grasp of Malaya and continued to study more for policymaking or future development in general. Their published articles, notably in *the Journal of the Indian Archipelago*, *the Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1878-1988), and *the Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1923-1988), contain a wealth of information on diverse facets of Malay life and customs. Many studies provide useful statistics, with the population being the most reported. These journals were renowned for publishing some of the most unusual studies, as well as providing a platform for scholars seeking novel knowledge.

The sheer variety and quality of information found in newspapers, personal accounts, journals, and official records, grew in time. It is important to recognise that a biased perspective existed, particularly during the period of colonial expansion following 1874. This article has focussed on amateur historians' backgrounds and their contributions to Malay historiography. Its aim is to go beyond a simplistic view of their work as colonial texts to gain a better understanding of them as historical sources. The growth of a historiographical tradition exploring local cultural and social histories in the 19th century helped shape British attitudes toward indigenous sensibilities. By equipping themselves with knowledge of local sensitivities, as well as native virtues and limitations, British colonial authors visualised and realised the idea of building a less disruptive colonial development in the native states.

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