

In the Spotlight – The Beginning, How and Where the Hash House Harriers were Founded

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While many hashers have been led to believe that the “Hash House” Harriers were some new and unique sporting activity founded in 1938 in Malaya (now Malaysia), that is only tangentially accurate.

A correspondent of the Times of Malaya writes:—The Kinta Harriers had another enjoyable run on Sunday. The pack covered an interesting trail of 3½ miles through clearings, rubber and mining land, finishing at the M.T.D. swimming pool, where they changed into bathing kit and altered the pace to a “crawl” (or the breast stroke). The pack is versatile! In the pool they gave a very creditable performance of diving seals, from the high, low and spring boards. Only one of the pack—a lady—was seen to be really “tired.” She did not mind. She had it about her neck and was floating about the pool. And some records—gramophone puny—at the pool were very nice. Your correspondent of last week, “Slightly Shocked,” has no cause to worry. The pack members were not scantily clad, nor did they pass through populated areas. The bathing costumes were donned in the right place—at the pool. The numbers still continue to increase and about a third of the pack is composed of ladies.

Singapore Free Press And Mercantile Advertiser, 22 June 1932, Page 3
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Harrier clubs were established in SE Asia as the British Empire expanded throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries. The articles on this page clearly establish that there were many harrier clubs throughout the region in the early 20th Century, as early as 1912. Some of these clubs were of the more competitive nature, preparing for races, but some were similar to the easy going fun of the HHH.

The Kinta Harriers were running as early as 1932 in and around Ipoh, about 200 kms north of Kuala Lumpur. And it appears that the Kuala Lumpur Harriers were still running as late as 1938.

There was even a Selangor Harriers running club active at the same time the HHH was believed to have started.

Horse Thomson stated he had run with a harrier club that included the same frivolity as the HHH, in Johor Bahru, as far back as 1932. We clearly know that G and Torch ran with the Springgit Harriers in Malacca in 1938.

Runners at Kuala Lumpur

(From Our Own Correspondent)

Kuala Lumpur, Sunday.

THROUGH mud and slush and up hill and down dale for five miles ran 20 athletes this evening as they contested Selangor's first cross-country race between the Selangor Harriers and the Police Depot.

The run was completed in just over 35 minutes and was won by the Police Depot, who gained 63 points.

Conditions were perfect for the event; rain had fallen throughout the afternoon, and, coupled with the mud, was “just the stuff,” as one competitor hailed it.

Cross-country running has been indulged in frequently by the Harriers, among whom are some of the finest runners in Selangor.

Enthusiasm among the Police has also been evident, and hence this afternoon's run which attracted considerable attention.

THE START

The start was in Lornie Road, and the first mile run along a grassy bank of the Klang River. The second mile was more gruelling, being through heavier and hilly country.

Then down came the string of competitors on to a muddy, straight stretch through a Chinese cemetery, before they emerged into a green valley, the finish being a straight half-mile along Lornie Road.

Cross-country Runners at Kuala Lumpur
Pinang Gazette And Straits Chronicle, 7 February 1939, Page 14

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MALAY HARRIERS.

Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 3 February 1912, Page 4

MALAY HARRIERS.

The members of the Muth-hibol Ahzan Football Club have arranged a paperchase to-morrow. The start will be at 5 p.m. from the Club house to the Chinese Temple, Ayer Itam.

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CROSS-COUNTRY RACE

Selangor Harriers For Ipoh

Kuala Lumpur

The Selangor Harriers will be represented by the following runners in the forthcoming Inter-team Cross-country Race in Ipoh: A. Theivendiram, Henderson, Woodrow, R. S. Daubia, Edgar de Silva, Saroop Singh, A. Thomas, Bahrin, M. Thomas, Thavaraja, Katar Singh and Rajoo.

The team as a whole are expected to offer any team the strongest opposition. A. Theivendiram who came in first in the recent annual cross-country match between the Police Depot and the Harriers, is Selangor's biggest hope and is expected to repeat his success. Messrs. Henderson and Woodrow are both well-known members of Harriers Clubs in England.

Pinang Gazette And Straits Chronicle,
3 February 1940, Page 4

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All this evidence provides a solid picture that there was a great deal of overlap between the HHH and all these other harrier clubs of the early 20th Century.

Next, the current history of the HHH is believed to have started sometime in December 1938. Other facts we know are that G transferred from Malacca to Kuala Lumpur in or about December of 1938. Torch states he departed on home leave in November 1938, and G had not yet arrived. In a letter to Colin 'Hema' Snow in Bangkok, Torch wrote in 1980 . . .

Around May/June 1938 I was in Malacca with "G" who was office manager and with him ran with the Springgit Harriers there. I returned to K.L., went off on leave about late November and "G" was still in Malacca, so H3 definitely did not start in 1938.

I returned from leave late July 1939 to find "G" manager of the K.L. office and H3 in action, and have always felt that I got back in time for the 4th or 5th run. I'm sure we broke off for Xmas and the New Year and probably Easter which would make 6 misses in the two years [1939-1940] which, back from the 100th run, would make the 1st about 1 Aug. 1939, so to fit in with the fact that it was operative, when I got back at the end of July, we must assume that there were one or two additional misses and make it early July. I'm sure I am right as my leave gives me an anchor from which to work and I hope my reasoning is clear.

In contrast to Torch's statement, we have Frank Woodward's statement, made in 1987 in a letter to Magic . . .

The Hash House Harriers were founded by G. Gispert, a chartered accountant, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, in or about the month of December, 1938. Other founder members were 'Horse' Thomson, of Malayan Posts and Telegraphs; Eric Galvin of the Malay Mail; Morris Edgar, a solicitor; Cecil Lee of Harrisons and Crosfield; John Barrett, an accountant, and several others.

The founder members, all bachelors, lived in the Selangor Club Chambers which were residential rooms above the club restaurant and they had their meals in the restaurant.

I left Guernsey - my father lived at Dalswinton, Les Hubits in January 1939 and arrived in Kuala Lumpur about mid-February, 1939. I had been booked into the Selangor Club Chambers by my boss.

At my first breakfast, I was invited to join the Hash House Harriers and as I had been a cross-country runner at school, I was delighted to accept. I took part in the sixth or seventh run of the club since it was founded.

Keep in mind, both of these letters were written more than 40 years after the events to which they describe. Frank's comment about the residential rooms being above the club restaurant is likely misstated. The Selangor Club, and club restaurant, were across the street, adjacent to the Club Chambers. The cocktail bar, lounge and grill room is what he is actually describing. Otherwise, both men make claims to the best of their recollections, with solid grounding points.

Here are some more points to consider.

Many accounts over the years have stated that it took many discussions and much convincing by G, to get the other men committed to joining his folly of a new harrier club. This grill room is in fact, the location where most discussion of starting this new harrier club took place, and is in fact the origin of the moniker HASH HOUSE. If G only arrived at the earliest, in December 1938, how could all these discussions take place so quickly?



The cocktail bar, lounge and grill room at the **Selangor Club Chambers**.

While this evidence is compelling, it does not rise to a level for a change to the origin date (December 1938), although I do have serious doubt that the first run was actually in 1938. More research is in order.

Now, let's discuss the building itself, the Hash House. The underlying discussion has been, where was the Hash House Harriers (HHH) running club founded? Early on it was believed that the HHH were founded in the Selangor Club, but it has been proven that clearly the Club Chambers cocktail bar, lounge and grill room, and not the Selangor Club restaurant (again, across the street, adjacent to the club chambers), was what was dubbed the Hash House. As you can see from the picture above, the grill room was sized for about 18, which was the number of rooms in the chambers building.

In current times, the Royal Selangor Club claims to be the home of the worldwide running club, the Hash House Harriers. What is currently known as the Royal Selangor Club, was built in 1884, and originally called the Selangor Club. It would not become the Royal Selangor Club until a century later in 1984.

The Hash House Harriers (a.k.a. Hash House Harriers Kuala Lumpur, or Mother Hash) (while KLH3 has also been used, today KLH3 refers to the Kuala Lumpur Harriettes) has established a theory, called the Great Misunderstanding, that the Hash House was simply called the Selangor Club Chambers due to its proximity to the main club.

I have recently conducted additional research and analysis of details, and found the following specific facts concerning the building so lovingly dubbed, the Hash House. According to the Malayan History Society, the HASH HOUSE, was originally named the F.M.S. Hotel (FMS = Federated Malay States), built in or about 1902 (see picture below).



In my book [TRUE TRAIL – How Hashing Migrated Around the World . . .](#) I listed different ownership dates for the building. As noted, my previous source of information came from the Malayan History Society.

I have since uncovered new evidence that the F.M.S. Hotel was sold at auction in 1918, and was purchased by the Selangor Club. It was then renamed the Selangor Club Chambers, as stated in the article below.

SELANGOR CLUB CHAMBERS.

A Welcome Institution.

An innovation which will prove most welcome to the bachelor section of the residents of Selangor (and for the matter of that the Benedicts and their wives also), was the opening of the Selangor Club Chambers on Friday. As is well known, the commodious building on the west side of the railway opposite to the Selangor Club was recently acquired at auction by the Club. For some time past the premises have been in the hands of builders and decorators, with the result that a complete transformation has taken place, says the "Malay Mail."

There are eighteen bedrooms, nearly all of which open on to room verandahs and have bathrooms attached, and all are furnished alike with dark teak fittings. These rooms are being let at a very nominal rental as permanent abodes for members of the Club, while a certain number are to be reserved for visitors from outstations.

The major portion of the ground floor is devoted to the commissariat department. The large dining room has been tastefully fitted and decorated, and with the occasional tables will seat over a hundred guests, whilst for special functions a still larger number can be seated. A lounge adjoins the dining room and there is also accommodation for card parties.

The kitchen has been re-fitted, and a complete service of meals is now supplied at a fixed tariff. For members who wish to take tiffin only a special rate for five, six or seven days a week is made.

As we have mentioned above, the ladies are also to be catered for. One day each week is to be a guest night, when ladies may be invited to dinner. A similar concession will also be made on special occasions, such as dramatic performances at the Town Hall, dances, etc., and should prove a boon to those foregoing from outstations.

Pinang Gazette And Straits Chronicle, 6 November 1918, Page 7

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We can then state for the record, that the Selangor Club Chambers did exist, contrary to what some have previously reported. The building was subsequently advertised for sale in October 1951, and sold to the Kuala Lumpur City Government in November 1952, and was then renamed a Rest House until its destruction in 1963.

TENDER NOTICE

SELANGOR CLUB

Tenders are invited from principals only, for the purchase of the **Selangor Club Chambers** building and the freehold land on which it stands. Tenders, which should be in sealed covers marked "**PURCHASE OF CLUB CHAMBERS**" should be lodged, not later than 15th November, 1951, with the Secretary, **Selangor Club**, Kuala Lumpur, from whom further particulars can be obtained. The **Selangor Club** does not bind itself to accept the highest, or any tender.

BY ORDER OF THE COMMITTEE.
SELANGOR CLUB.

Page 2 Advertisements Column 2
The Straits Times, 31 October 1951, Page 2

Selangor Club To Be Govt. Rest House

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — The Selangor State Council today approved the following expenditures:

PURCHASE of the Selangor Club Chambers including land, furniture and fittings to be used as a rest house for State and Federal officers who are not staying in government quarters — \$354,000.

Selangor Club To Be Govt. Rest House
Singapore Standard, 13 November 1952, Page 4

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The Club Chambers / Hash House were bachelor quarters, and many of the original group of members that formed the HHH lived there. In those days, when businessmen accepted an overseas assignment, some businesses had a requirement that they not be married, and if they were, their family would not be supported until at least 10 years of service had been completed. So, bachelor quarters were common.

It was during this time that it also became known in jest as the Hash House. Legend has it, that it was called Hash House due to its mundane food, but several occupants (original members of the HHH) clearly stated, and you can hear [Cecil Lee, in an interview](#) sometime later state, that the food was actually quite good. So more likely, I believe the name came from pure slang, which probably originated due to the lack of refrigeration in those days, ice boxes were still the primary option and space was limited. Leftovers from the weekend brunch were chopped up and served during the following week, commonly known as leftovers . . . or hash. So not the quality of taste of the food, but more the repetitive nature of eating this hash attributed to the name.

According to [cookingpro.com](#) . . .

***A Brief History of Hash:** The concept of hash, a dish made from a mixture of chopped ingredients, dates back to ancient times. The word “hash” itself is believed to have originated from the French word “hacher,” meaning “to chop.” This etymology suggests that the idea of chopping and mixing ingredients together has been around for centuries.*

The Hash House now only exists in pictures and memories, as it was taken down to build the [Jalan Kinabalu Flyover](#) in 1963. While some discussion of forming the HHH may have been done in the Long Bar at the Selangor Club, most coordination and planning actually occurred in the grill room of the Hash House. This means that the Royal Selangor Club, or simply the Selangor Club as it was known before 1984, was technically not the home of the Hash. The true home of the HHH was the Hash House (club chambers) cocktail bar, lounge and grill room.

Should any new and/or additional information be uncovered, additional updates will be made; but for now, this is most up to date information on *the Hash House*.

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