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URBAN DEVELOPMENT

BRICKFIELDS, BANGSAR, OLD AND NEW

Bangsar has gone through changes yet retained its past, but Brickfields has seen a makeover



B. SURESH RAM

THERE is a unique problem I face each time someone asks where my hometown is or where I grew up.

Having to move from one place to another following the job transfers of my late father, uncle and grandfather, I could easily count Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lipis, Kuala Terengganu and Ipoh as my hometowns.

All the locations where I grew up have their special memories. But it was Kuala Lumpur, specifically Brickfields and nearby Bangsar, which, despite time and space separating my growing years, if combined together was the longest I had stayed in one place and grew up to have fond memories.

The earliest memories of growing up in Brickfields were of the



The century-old Vivekananda Ashram in Brickfields is one of the few structures that have remained untouched by development.
FILE PIC

KTM Railways quarters at Jalan Travers – now known as Jalan Rakyat – in 1971 or 1972.

Growing up in the wooden-and-brick railway quarters, with their standard cream and maroon walls, the world of a 5-year-old was the four walls of his home, as well as that outside the front door, which faced Jalan Bangsar.

Outside home, the scene that greeted me included traffic zooming along Jalan Bangsar (despite there being fewer vehicles in those days) and the sudden screech of tyres before the inevitable crash, which saw everyone at home rushing to the

front door to see what happened.

And, when the heavy rain came down in buckets, Jalan Bangsar, which at that time was on lower ground than the surrounding areas, would become “Sungai Bangsar”, albeit temporarily.

At the back of the railway quarters was the main marshalling yard/depot for the then seven-decade-old Kuala Lumpur Railway Station.

These formed among the earliest sights and smells for me.

Some 10 years later, having returned to Kuala Lumpur, this time for good, the family settled down not far from its former abode in Taman Lucky in 1983.

This was among the earliest homes in Bangsar to be built. They were made well in the 1960s, with the walls being at least a foot thick – good for listening to music loudly!

Apart from those staying in the neighbourhood, many were unsure where Taman Lucky was.

Not many knew where exactly my home was until I told them that it was in the neighbourhood where streets are named after fish.

The street names of Jalan Kurau, Jalan Sepat, Jalan Senangin, and Jalan Tenggiri are well known among past and present staff of the *New Straits Times*, *Berita Harian* and *Harian Metro*, as well as *Tenaga Nasional Berhad* (TNB), which was then

known as Lembaga Letrik Negara.

Many a former or current journalist or TNB staff would rent a room or home in the neighbourhood.

More than 30 years have since passed, but our former home is still standing today, as are the neighbouring homes, which, despite renovations over the years, have retained their original designs externally.

Gone are the row of commercial properties that had a barber, hair salon, grocery shop, Chinese restaurant and newspaper vendor. In their place today are specialised restaurants.

Despite the beckoning of Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, Brickfields in the 1980s was still the place I would hang out with my friends.

The former Lido Cinema, where I enjoyed my favourite movies, Peking Hotel, which served Chinese delicacies such as *kuey teow goreng* that titillated my palate, as well as several Indian restaurants (some still remain), and the Anthonian book store, which endeared me to fiction and non-fiction books, were some places of my best memories growing up.

Most of the shops along Jalan Tun Sambanthan had undergone change in the last 30 years, with the exception of the Modern Store grocery shop, which has

been around since my late grandparents’ time.

Other structures that remain, despite the rapid development that Brickfields is caught up in, are the PosLaju centre, the century-old Vivekananda Ashram, the YMCA, schools, as well as churches, temples and mosques.

The railway quarters at Jalan Travers, as well as surrounding areas of the railway marshalling yard, have since undergone a major makeover.

In its place stands KL Sentral, a transit-oriented development designed as an intermodal transport hub.

It offers seamless linkage of urban and suburban residential, commercial and industrial areas, with transportation choices in the form of the Light Rail Transit, Mass Rapid Transit, KTM Inter-city, KTM Komuter, KLIA Express and Transit and KL Monorail.

It is also the home of some of the latest smart offices, shopping areas, tourist spots and living space. This includes the likes of Hilton and Le Meridien; Sooka Sentral; Suasana Sentral Condominium; Suasana Sentral Loft; Platinum Sentral; Aloft Hotel; and NU Towers.

One neighbourhood has evolved while retaining its past, another had undergone a complete metamorphosis, something I am glad to have witnessed.



Many shops along Jalan Tun Sambanthan in Brickfields had undergone change in the last 30 years. PIC BY HAFIZ SOHAIMI