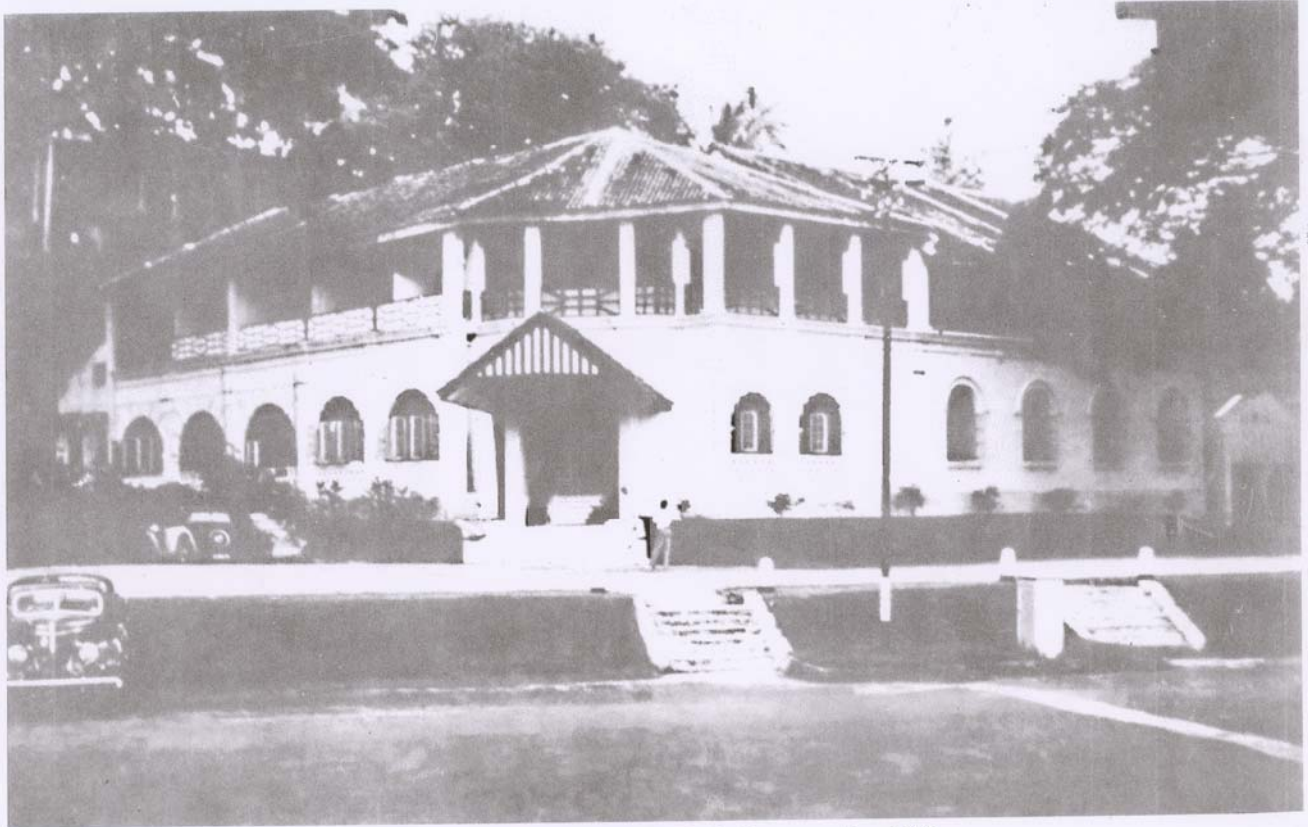


Origin of Hash House Harriers Several Versions

In keeping with the traditions of Hash there is some considerable debate about our origins. This text presents 3 versions Plus some original photos to fuel the debate.

This original Hash House photo was kindly supplied by God Knows



The original 'Hash House' in Kuala Lumpur, circa 1938

“ORIGINS” Version 1

by Unknown

Hash House was the nick-name, given for its indifferent food, to the Selangor Club Chambers where resided a number of bachelors and others separated from their wives - long separations being an inevitable facet of colonial life at the time. There had been Harriers chasing paper in Malaya before, in Kuala Lumpur and Johore Bahru, but they became extinct around 1934 (there were also the Shanghai and Kuching Clubs who had it on horse back). The only surviving Harriers were in Malacca, and it was the enjoyment of running there whilst on outstation accounting stints, that inspired two of the founders. So the Hash House Harriers was not a new idea, but was a completely new show with a novel name.

The principal Dramatis Personae were:

A.S.Gispert

Cecil Lee

"Horse" Thomson

"Torch" Bennett

and a fairly small supporting cast. Members on the books probably only rarely got over 50 right up to 1966 and were very much less sometimes - directly after World War II, after Malaysian Independence in 1957, and again in the second half 1965, when the Hash was an endangered species.

Gispert is given the credit by Cecil Lee for being the one who provided the push that actually got it off the ground, turning post-prandial chatter into physical reality; but he had only a short time with it, being killed in Singapore on 11th February 1942, four days before the surrender. The actual place is believed to be some 200 yards up Dairy Farm Road from its junction with Bukit Timah Road, and since he was officially posted missing he was probably buried somewhere in the vicinity. At that time he was serving as O.C.Mortar Platoon with the Argylls.

The Founding of The Hash by Cecil Lee (founder member)

The Hash House Harriers were founded in a moment of postprandial inspiration at the Selangor Club Chambers, about 1937/8, by the inmates, who included myself, E.J. Galvin, Malay Mail., H.M. Doig (H & C - killed in air crash just before the Japanese War) and A.S. Gispert of Evatt & Co. Gispert was the real founder - a man of great wit and charm, who was killed on Singapore Island in February, 1942 whilst serving with the Argylls, having only just returned from leave in Australia to rejoin the Volunteers. I am glad of this opportunity to salute his memory. He was a splendid fellow, and would be happy to know the Harriers are still going strong, and are as merry and bright as ever - or more so. Gispert was not an athlete, and stress was laid as much on the subsequent refreshment etc as on the pure and austere running. It was non-competitive, and abounded in slow-packs. Life was then conservative rather than competitive.

The name was a mock allusion to the institution that housed and fed us. Later, Torch Bennett returned from leave, and produced order out of chaos - a bank account balance sheet, and some system. But we prided ourselves on being rather disorganised - or the minimum organisation sufficed. The original joint masters were myself and "Horse" Thomson, still running somewhere - a past-master at short-cuts and the conservation of energy.

Celebrations were held in various places, and the first was in what is now the Legislative Council, then the Volunteer Mess. The oratory, I recall, was much the same as now.

Lew Davidson is an old member. Morris Edgar was one, but apart from Lew and John Wyatt-Smith I do not think there are any more ante-diluvians, still running. Philip Wickens was also one who kept us going post-war.

We started up again after the War due to Torch Bennett who discovered a Bank Balance and put in a claim for War Damage on one tin-bath, and two dozen mugs, and possible two old bags (not members). We started by a small run in reduced circumstances round the racecourse - then the horses were not much better.

The Emergency cramped our style but did not diminish our activities, and we were even called in for information on various by-ways in Selangor, but our period of usefulness to MI 5 was brief, and our information probably otiose. But the hares ran into two bandits at Cheras, who were later copped.

An Irish Accountant, Kennedy, drew up the Rules when we had to register as a Club, and he seems to have preserved the old traditions just as you do know. Selamat tinggal H.H.H.

(C.H. Lee)

Kuala Lumpur, 24th October, 1958.

History of the Hash House Harriers – Another Version

by John Duncan

Hash House was the nickname, given for its institution food, to the Selangor Club Chambers, a social centre of the times, where some lived and many others regularly lunched. The idea of Harriers chasing paper was not new to Malaya, as there had been such clubs before in Kuala Lumpur and Johore Baru, and there was a Malacca club and the Kinta Harriers in Ipoh in existence at the time (there were also the Shanghai and Kuching clubs who had it on horseback). So the Hash House Harriers was not a new idea, but was a new show with a completely novel name.

The principal Dramatis Personae were: A.S. Gispert ("C")

Cecil Lee

"Horse" Thomson

"Torch" Bennett

and later,

Philip Wickens

and a fairly small supporting cast. Members on the books probably only rarely got over 50 right up to 1966, and were very much less sometimes (directly after World War

II, after Malayan Independence in 1957, and again in the second half of 1965) and the Hash an endangered species.

Our story really starts on a day in Johore Baru in 1932/33 when Horse Thomson, who had come to J.B. in 1932, was invited to go on a run next Monday evening. He found himself joining a club which chased a paper trail following basic Hash rules every week but was so magically unorganised that it had no name. The club flourished in the early 1930's but is believed to have died out around 1935. The other branch of our ancestry comes from Malacca. Gispert was transferred there in 1937/38 and joined a club called the Springgit Harriers, who also operated weekly under Hash rules and are believed to have been formed in 1935. Some months later, Torch Bennett visited him and came as a guest on a few runs. By 1938/39 Thomson, Lee and Gispert had all moved to KL, and founded there their own club following the rules they had learnt elsewhere. It is not clear that it actually had a name at the beginning but Gispert is credited with proposing the "Hash House Harriers" when the Registrar of Societies required the gathering to be legally registered. Torch Bennett technically missed being a founder member because he was then on leave, but on his return he introduced the first necessary minimum organisation - a bank account and a balance sheet. More important he seems with Philip Wickens who joined later in 1939 to have helped keep the thing going immediately postwar.

Sadly, Gispert had only a short time with his extraordinary creation, being killed in the fighting on Singapore Island in 1942. But with the exception of Philip Wickens who died in London in April 1981 the others by comparison are still very much with us and the Kuala Lumpur Hash House Harriers is in touch with them all.

Cecil Lee's direct association lasted with only two short breaks (the Pacific War and another three-year period) right through to his retirement in 1961. He now lives near Leatherhead, Surrey. Torch Bennett retired in the late 1950's to Durban, South Africa. Horse Thomson moved to Ipoh in 1948 and now lives in the Philippines. Philip Wickens was transferred to Singapore around 1958 and to London a few years later from where he used to visit KL from time to time.

The founding members were all British, although Gispert was actually Spanish or Portuguese in origin, his parents having migrated to London some time before he was born. Extraordinarily both he and Bennett were accountants, as were Paul Barnard and Jack Bridewell who made a significant contribution to our activities of later years. Some Hash psychiatrist should investigate whether the work leads to extreme forms of escapism.

The HHH duly celebrated its 100th run on 15 August 1941, but only 17 runs later was forced into temporary hibernation by the arrival of the Japanese. Post World War II, it was nearly 12 months before the survivors reassembled. Torch Bennett put in a claim for the lost Hash mugs, a tin bath and two old bags, on the fund set up with the proceeds from confiscated Japanese property and run No. 1 was a trot around the racecourse in August, 1946. Subsequent to the 1000th post war run the celebrations surrounding it were considered to be such a success that the 117 official pre-war runs were added to the total so we could celebrate the 2000th run as soon as possible.

With the advent of the Emergency in 1948, the Hash was automatically in bad official odour, as their activities were generally illegal in terms of the curfew imposed on most of the areas surrounding Kuala Lumpur and in the years 1948/51, they maintained a precarious existence at best. The turn round came with the famous bandit incident at Cheras.

This has been widely misreported, but what actually happened was that below where the Lady Templer Hospital is now, in an area that was then rubber and belukar, the Hares on a darkening and rainy evening came across some men wrapped in ground sheets sleeping on the ground. The following pack found the bandits on

their feet but somehow in the general confusion nobody got hurt. One member ran to Cheras Police Station and raised the alarm; the army laid ambushes on tracks leading out of the area and first thing the following morning bagged three bandits trying to break out. One of them was found to have a substantial price on his head and the bounty was shared among the non-government employees on the run (government servants were not allowed to participate in such rewards).

The second Hash Chapter was founded in Singapore in 1962, followed by Kuching in 1963, Brunei, Kota Kinabalu and Ipoh in 1964, Penang in 1965, and Perth was the first outside Malaysia and Singapore in 1967. Even by the time of the KL 1500th run in 1974 the total was only 35, so the subsequent explosion has been spectacular indeed. The 1988 international list will total around 600 clubs in maybe 75 countries, and all continents except Antarctica, where the hash format is often adapted to environments very different from the neat rows of Malaysian rubber trees amongst which it was conceived. Kabul HHH understandably foundered, but what can it be like to hash in Sinai, Peking, Addis Ababa or the Falkland Islands?

The Hash has come a long way from the group of sunburnt men in the standard long baggy shorts round the amah's laundry bowl full of ice and beer in the setting sun somewhere on the edge of Kuala Lumpur all those years ago. But that is our next story.

Some Mug Shots of the Founders



A. S. GISPERT



CECIL LEE



"TORCH" BENNETT