

# Introduction

**I**t is January 1892 at a place called Raub in the British Protected Malay State of Pahang. Raub nestles in the upper reaches of a valley in the east of the State, separated by a mountain range from the State of Selangor. The region's colloquial name is the Ulu Pahang, or in Australia 'the bush' – but it is a quite different type of bush that grows here. It is a hot and steamy late morning with the annual monsoon now well advanced.

There is an unusual presence and air of purpose about this place not present before these particular Europeans came. For the native Malays, there are many things that have changed since the arrival of the Australians.

A large single storey house rests atop a hill on the eastern side of the Raub valley. Commanding the ground around and facing west, it is built of merabau, a local hardwood also found in Australia, with a tin roof. Solid looking, it sits on stumps and the carpentry is of a particular kind normally found underground. The house is square with full length wide verandas front and side. Strangely for such a place it is in a style familiar in Queensland, Australia.

West from its front door over the valley less than a mile across, where there was jungle there is no more. A longer distance to the north and south is a scene of deforestation. Beyond that in all directions, there is dense jungle. Further west, north, and east, more hills define the valley. Beyond them further west is a higher range, also covered in dense jungle where fast flowing rivers rush, one to be tamed later by these Australians.

In the foreground some four hundred yards across the valley in front of this hilltop house is a large shallow cleared depression from which a low ridge runs north with random bumps – small hills called a bukit in Malay. Some short distance further to the north there are the steeply rising once jungle clad hills, a central ridge, and more jungle, also thinned by the taking of any useful timber.

At the southern end are the makings of a town – a small collection of wood and attap clad huts, a Kampong as it is called in Malay. There are two similar but smaller houses like the hilltop one, an office building, and a storehouse all built by these Australians. A further three miles directly south, there is a well-used landing place called Penkalan Labu on a river called the Bilut. It comes from the west and runs south until it joins other rivers running to the eastern coast more than a hundred miles away. From

the river there is a recently built but well-worn and substantial road. This river system is the lifeblood of Raub. There are no roads in any other direction, only pony tracks. The river landing place and road were also built by these miners from Australia.

In the valley below the hilltop house, stands a ten-head battery of Stamps from Thompson Bros of Castlemaine in Victoria, Australia; also a forge and a steam engine boiler. The boiler is like a locomotive without wheels and is there to drive the stamps. All came by three rivers, in sampans, to get where they are today – with everything else foreign here. The tailings from the battery fill the crevices and hollows of the ground, obliterating any evidence of what was there before. They run to the north and west covering the once lush ground vegetation. These tailings cover the valley floor, a mat of cloying fine yellow-grey grains leading to where, on the western side, a dam can be seen. A viaduct runs from it to the battery.

The battery is fed by the ore from what is called the Raub Hole, the so-called Eldorado. The hole lies at the centre of the large depression three hundred yards to the west in the valley middle. The Eldorado has now proven not to be so. But good gold is there and to the north to be taken still, and for many years to come. At the Raub Hole there are shafts and tunnels and many stopes can be seen in a general line running north and south. There are more stopes running south to where another shaft is being dug – where winding gear is to be installed. This will be called the Western shaft. Another shaft called the Telegraph will follow soon, two-hundred yards further south. Preparations can be seen for another shaft north of the Raub Hole where there will eventually be two, complete with winding gear. All are connected by a tramway for the trucks that carry the ore but which now stand idle.

This is the Raub Australian Gold Mine Ltd in its early days. Gold production began a year ago. But there is trouble afoot and it has nothing to do with mining or the ever present threats of flood, malaria, or dysentery. The Raub Hole, usually a hive of activity, lies temporarily abandoned. And what is most unusual now is the quiet in the air. There is no longer an almost constant thumping of Stamps, hiss and roar of steam from the boilers, and the ground no longer quivers to the dull and distant thump of dynamiting underground. The unusual quiet is because the battery has fallen silent after running non-stop for many months from the first crushing. This absence of the constant sound of stamps has brought a questioning silence to the place.

The large house that surveys this scene is that of mine manager William Bibby. At each corner of the wide veranda surrounding the house there are strange structures, much like palisades. They extend diagonally outwards for twenty feet; four solid wooden walls at each corner a foot thick. Their purpose suggests a warlike function and that is exactly what they are for. It is also why the open veranda is open no more – at least to breast height.

Bibby the mine manager had been to the Crimean War early in his life so he knows how to defend his house; he has turned it into a fort. There is a rebellion in Pahang and the mining for gold has stopped for want of labour, more winding gear, and other parts and food supplies are short. They have the Sultan of Pahang's 'chop' of free passage to the coast, but they are still expecting to be attacked.

The corner structure's purpose is to force into enfilade any rebels that have the temerity to attack Bibby and his men – so they can quickly be disposed of in a standard military manner. All is in the name of the Empire. This is the right and proper thing for British men 'of heart' to do when faced by the rebelling 'natives' in the colonies and protectorates.

Even though Bibby's men come from the young democracy spawned by the Australian goldfields, in some situations – such as the one they are in now – they are apt to think and act like the British. But they are resourceful and independently minded, untainted by the class distinctions present in that country of their birth or origin. They are Australian gold miners at heart and have Eureka in their blood. They treat everyone as an equal in the working of the mine including the Malay, even though he won't go underground, some of whom they think oppose them now.

But the Malay rebels' argument is not with them.

The house is crowded with all Bibby's men. There are three miners, including the wife of one, the bookkeeper, a carpenter, a blacksmith and the engineer, Bibby's eldest son, William Charles. Also the local agent and a smattering of servants, twelve or so souls all told. They sleep with pistols under their pillows and the mine's armoury of Martini Henry rifles with bayonets attached has been moved from the mine office to the house.

They are short of food because their main supply route, the river Bilut, has been blocked by the rebels. The local Malays have fled leaving the Rajah Impeh alone with his minions. The Rajah's house, a lesser one than Bibby's, it is far from being a palace, also stands on a hill, a short distance northwest of the village and south of it. The Rajah has stayed perhaps because not only is he a local Chief and sees it as his duty to the British

Crown he now serves – he has a regular pension to collect – but he also has shares in the gold mine.

The Chinese Kongsie house is empty. Most of Bibby's Chinese coolies, so important for the work underground, have been taken by the government in the fight against the rebels. A Chinese temple and joss house are unattended. Most of the Malay houses are empty as are the police barracks, the few local Sikh police now encamped upon the verandas of Bibby's house among the cases of ammunition. There is a sense of tension and anticipation in the air.

Moisture laden clouds billow and spill into the valley, positioning for the regular afternoon deluge. A fully armed Bibby, a tall energetic, wiry and bearded man with piercing eyes that at fifty-five twinkle still, urges his white horse on to avoid the rain soon to fall. They are a familiar sight to all at Raub. A telegraph station came to Raub along with the police barracks when the government realised the Australians were here to stay and a town was being built by the miners. Bibby is heading for the telegraph station to send a message to Maxwell the British Resident of Selangor, in Kuala Lumpur, the nearest State capital.

Bibby's telegram is relayed through Kuala Kubu, the first major town across the high range to the west; reached by the pony track that followed the telegraph. The telegram requests arms and troops are sent forthwith. Maxwell responds not to Bibby at first, but by sending a coded telegram to the Governor in Singapore which reads in part, 'Bibby ready to undertake reach Kuala Klau down the River Bilut if I provide contingent fifty Dyaks fully armed.'

Neither armed Borneo warriors nor field pieces, requested later, were sent – only sixty armed Sikh police under a Colonel Walker and then not for Bibby to take them down the Bilut to rout the rebels in his private war.

Bibby, the mining manager who wanted to engage in warfare yet again came to the Ulu from the goldfields of Castlemaine in Victoria and Cloncurry and Croydon in Queensland. He was the first manager of the Brisbane Raub Australia syndicate's gold mine, the so-called Eldorado of the east – a hole in the ground full of rich gold found by Robert Sefton, a well-known Queensland character and itinerant prospector.

The early yields from the Raub Hole were very good and teased the greedy shareholders. But the gold production that started in early 1891 is almost halted by the threat of this local rebellion.

It would nearly close the mine.