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OBITUARY
DATO SIR JOHN PEEL (1912-2004)

AVM Horton

ABSTRACT

Dato Setia John Peel, who died at his London home on Saturday 8 May 2004 aged nearly ninety-two, was the first post-war British Resident (administrator) in Brunei, taking up his duties officially on 6 July 1946, which, coincidentally, was only a few days before the birth (15 July) of the present monarch. His Majesty Sultan Sir Hassanal Bolkiah. Sir John always enjoyed excellent relations with His Majesty's father, the late Seri Begawan Sultan. Peel was instrumental in the latter's installation as Pengiran Bendahara in 1947; and the friendship, which endured long after Peel had left the colonial service, was rewarded with not one, but two, *dato* titles (DSLJ 1969, DSNB 1971).

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In mid-1946 it had actually been a shattered country which greeted Mr W.J. Peel, as he was at the time. War damage was considerable. Brunei's economy had been disorientated through being cut off from its export markets and its sources of imports. Stretches of roads had become overgrown. The health and education systems, fairly rudimentary even before the war, had run down during the Japanese interlude and, despite the re-opening of school buildings, fundamental problems remained. Public utilities were out of order. The achievements of the British Military Administration (1945-6) had been limited. Relations with Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin (r. 1924-50) were not good; and there were stirrings of Malay nationalism. According to an obituary in the London *Daily Telegraph*, however, it "was regarded as an auspicious sign that a mango tree in the residency's grounds flowered for the first time since the Japanese occupation".¹