

Cemetery in need of makeover



The different shapes and sizes of the tombs at the Jewish cemetery in Jalan Zainal Abidin, Penang.

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GEORGE TOWN: A visiting German historian has lamented the poor state of the historic Penang Jewish cemetery.

Albert Heinstein, who was here recently, said he was shocked to find many of the inscriptions on the tombstones in a deplorable condition.

He said although the cemetery was generally well-maintained, the inscriptions were not.

"Some of them are hardly visible," he said.

The cemetery was set up in 1805 and is believed to be the oldest Jewish cemetery in the country.

It is located in Jalan Zainal Abidin which was formerly known as Jalan Yahudi.

A check at the cemetery showed the last person to be buried there was a Harry Moses in 1978.

The oldest tombstone, dated July 9,

1835, belongs to Shoshan Levi, who was believed to have donated the land for the cemetery.

Most of the tombs are in the form of triangular vaulted-lid caskets, resembling ossuaries, commonly found in Israel.

There are 125 tombs at the cemetery.

Heinstein said he read about the cemetery on the Internet and decided to make a trip here to visit it.

He was also sad to see the main entrance to the cemetery was through a worn-out wrought iron gate.

It is learnt that the cemetery is supposedly managed by a board of trustees established and registered in 1885.

However, with the descendants of the trustees residing outside Malaysia, its maintenance is uncertain.

Caretakers, who were seen at the cemetery, refused to comment on who paid them to do the maintenance.