

# biblioasia

Vol.  
**14**  
Issue  
**04**

JAN-MAR 2019

**18** / Dare to Drive    **26** / Modern Malayan Home

**32** / Chetty Melaka Kitchen    **36** / Communist Hitman    **50** / Dancers and Boxers

## *Farquhar & Raffles*

The Untold Story

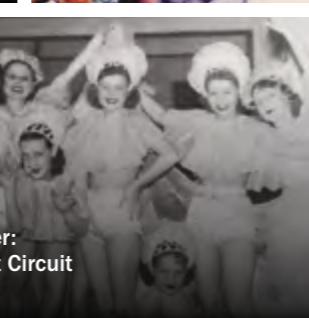
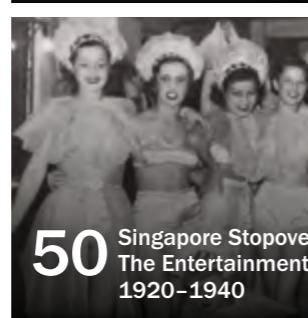
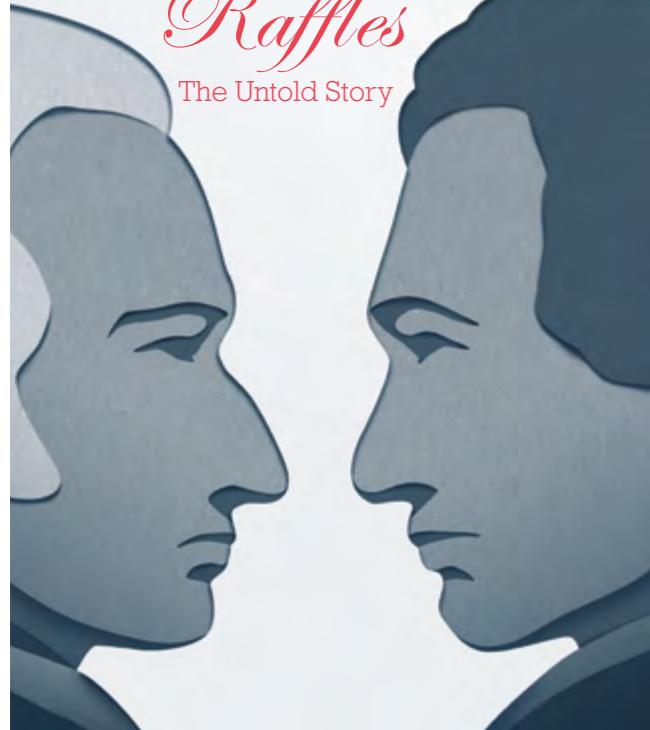
— p. 2 —

# CONTENTS

## FEATURE

**02**

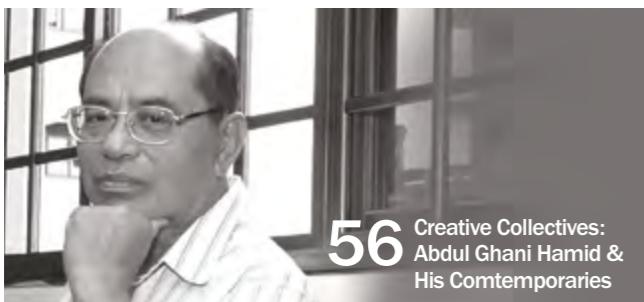
### *Farquhar & Raffles* The Untold Story



**36** Iron Spearhead:  
The Story of a  
Communist Hitman

**42** Bridging History:  
Passageways  
Across Water

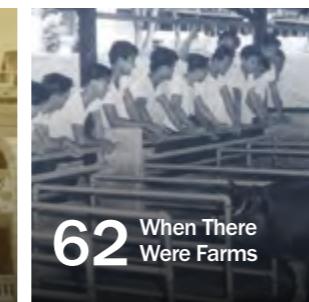
## NL NOTES



**56** Creative Collectives:  
Abdul Ghani Hamid &  
His Contemporaries



**60** Singapore's Chin  
Kiang Heritage



**62** When There  
Were Farms

**biblioasia**

VOLUME 14 | JAN  
ISSUE 04 | MAR  
2019

## Director's Note

Welcome to the first issue of *BiblioAsia* for 2019. This year we mark a major turning point in Singapore's history, the 200th anniversary of the founding of a British trading post on the island – a date generally accepted as the beginnings of modern Singapore.

It is common knowledge that Stamford Raffles and his deputy William Farquhar landed on Singapore on 28 January 1819 and later negotiated with the Temenggong to set up a settlement on the island. Most history books highlight Raffles' role in the subsequent development of Singapore into a flourishing port and gloss over Farquhar's contributions. Nadia Wright attempts to set the record straight in this issue's cover story.

Even so, Singapore's history did not begin with Raffles' arrival in 1819: it goes back some 500 years earlier. Tan Tai Yong provides a brief history of Singapore since the 14th century when Temasek – as the island was known then – was already a thriving regional maritime hub.

In April 1907, two gutsy women, Mrs G.M. Dare and her friend Miss Hardman, set out on a road trip across the Malay Peninsula in a two-seater automobile. Their adventures – from Penang to Singapore – were published in *The Straits Times* over three days in June 1907. An abridged version of the trip is featured in this issue. In another essay about intrepid women, Chantal Sajan remembers her grandmother, a no-nonsense Chetty Melaka matriarch who perfected the skill of *pegang tangán* ("touch of hand") in her cooking.

In the early 20th century, access to gas, electricity and running water led to a proliferation of modern home appliances that revolutionised housework for busy wives and mothers. Advertisements featuring such gadgets were targeted mainly at the fairer sex, as Georgina Wong tells us.

Iron and steel bridges were similarly hailed as marvels of technology when they were first erected in Singapore. Lim Tin Seng traces the origins of nine iconic bridges that have become landmarks along the Singapore River.

Singapore's diminutive size belies its rich history. Between 1920 and 1940, the city was a favoured pit stop for foreign entertainers and boxers who appeared at the Victoria Theatre and Happy World, as Paul French discovered. Ronnie Tan and Goh Yu Mei reveal an unsavoury side to Singapore history in their account of a communist cadre who was responsible for a string of grisly murders here in the 1950s.

We also feature the National Library's collections in articles on the early Malay art scene, the Legal Deposit Collection and a recent donation of rare materials by the Singapore Chin Kang Huay Kuan.

On behalf of the National Library, we would like to wish everyone a fabulous start to 2019!

## Ms Tan Huism

Director  
National Library

## Editorial & Production

### Managing Editor

Francis Dorai

### Editor

Veronica Chee

### Editorial Support

Masamah Ahmad  
Stephanie Pee  
Jocelyn Lau

### Contributors

Chantal Sajan  
Goh Yu Mei  
Georgina Wong  
Jessie Yak  
Lim Tin Seng  
Nadia Arianna Ramli  
Nadia Wright  
Paul French

### Ronnie Tan

Tan Tai Yong  
Zoe Yeo  
**Design and Print**  
Oxygen Studio  
Designs Pte Ltd

### Please direct all correspondence to

National Library Board  
100 Victoria Street #14-01  
National Library Building  
Singapore 188064  
Email: ref@nlb.gov.sg  
Website: www.nlb.gov.sg

### On the cover

An illustration depicting the profiles of William Farquhar (left) and Stamford Raffles (right). Cover design by Oxygen Studio Designs Pte Ltd.

All rights reserved.  
National Library Board, Singapore, 2019.

ISSN 0219-8126 (print)  
ISSN 1793-9968 (online)

The views of writers and contributors do not reflect the views of the Publisher. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior written permission from the Publisher and copyright owner(s).

Whilst reasonable care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information in this publication, the Publisher accepts no legal liabilities whatsoever for the contents of this magazine.



[www.nlb.gov.sg/biblioasia/](http://www.nlb.gov.sg/biblioasia/)

*BiblioAsia* is a free quarterly publication produced by the National Library Board. It features articles on the history, culture and heritage of Singapore within the larger Asian context, and has a strong focus on the collections and services of the National Library. *BiblioAsia* is distributed to local and international libraries, academic institutions, government ministries and agencies, as well as members of the public. The online edition can be accessed with the QR code on the right.

# Farquhar & Raffles

## The Untold Story

The founding of Singapore in 1819 and its early development have traditionally been attributed to Sir Stamford Raffles. **Nadia Wright** claims that his role has been exaggerated at the expense of another.

**Dr Nadia Wright**, a retired teacher and now active historian, lives in Melbourne. She specialises in the colonial history of Singapore and Armenians in Southeast Asia. Her book, *William Farquhar and Singapore: Stepping Out from Raffles' Shadow*, was published in May 2017.

In 1830, William Farquhar (1774–1839) wrote to *The Asiatic Journal* explaining why he was due “at least a large share” of the credit in forming Singapore.<sup>1</sup> Yet, it is Stamford Raffles (1781–1826) alone who is hailed as the founder of Singapore. This notion, propounded by his biographers, has been reinforced by constant repetition, official acceptance and the omnipresence of Raffles’ name in Singapore.

In contrast, Farquhar’s pivotal role in the events leading up to the founding of the British settlement in Singapore in February 1819 and during its nascent years has been vastly underrated. To add insult to injury, Farquhar has been mocked, and his character and accomplishments belittled over the years.

To understand the origins of this aberration in Singapore’s history, we must turn to the biographies of Raffles. The first, *The Life of Sir Stamford Raffles*, written by Demetrius Boulger in 1897, during the heyday of the British Empire, would establish the trend of glorifying Raffles and disparaging Farquhar.<sup>2</sup>

### The First Biography on Raffles

Boulger portrayed Raffles as a hero who had risen from poverty, who was forced to leave school prematurely to support his mother and sisters, and who rose to fame solely by his own efforts. None of this is true.

Raffles’ father, Captain Benjamin Raffles, was a commander of vessels until the late 1790s, and lived until 1811. When Raffles left school around 1795, some 16 years earlier, his father was still living with the family. Raffles was privileged to have remained at a private school until he was 14 (most children then would have left school by age 11) and to have obtained a highly sought after position as an extra clerk at East India House.

Raffles owed much to the financial support and patronage of his wealthy uncle, Charles Hamond, who secured Raffles’ entry into Mansion House Board-



(Above) Colonel William Farquhar, c. 1830. Image source: Wikimedia Commons.



(Above right) A portrait of Sir Stamford Raffles presented by his nephew, W.C. Raffles Flint, to London’s National Gallery Portrait Gallery in 1859. Image source: Wikimedia Commons.

ing School and paved the way for his employment at India House, while his later career and status were propelled by his patron, Lord Minto, the Governor-General of Bengal. However, Boulger’s “facts” have become part of the myth surrounding Raffles and helped create an enduring fascination with the man. Boulger was scathingly dismissive of any role for Farquhar, declaring that Raffles was the sole founder of Singapore and wholly responsible for its development.<sup>3</sup> Such views were accepted and repeated without question by subsequent biographers.

Farquhar’s role in Singapore has been defended in the past by eminent historians such as John Bastin, Mary Turnbull and Ernest Chew. Bastin wrote that Singapore’s early success “must be attributed generally to [Farquhar’s] fostering care and benevolent administration”. Mary Turnbull noted that Farquhar had nurtured the settlement through its precarious early years, while Ernest Chew argued that Farquhar had been neglected in the founding narratives of Singapore, contending that Farquhar had been “left behind” by Raffles to run the settlement and subsequently also “left behind” in history.<sup>4</sup>

Although Farquhar’s role was periodically raised in the press and more

recently included in the history curriculum of Singapore schools, the Raffles myth has prevailed. A group of students who re-assessed the roles of Raffles and Farquhar in 2007 could not have expressed it better, concluding that Raffles was “the real founder of Singapore as all the history textbooks say so”, and because he had a statue erected in his honour and an MRT station named after him whereas Farquhar had nothing.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, landmarks in Singapore such as Farquhar Street, Mount Farquhar and Farquhar’s Strait have all disappeared.<sup>6</sup> Singapore’s first and only Commandant and Resident suffered the converse of memorialisation: the “phenomenon of forgetting”,<sup>7</sup> a phrase coined by the 20th-century French philosopher Paul Ricoeur.

### Farquhar’s Accomplishments in Malacca

From as early as the 17th century, European trading companies competed for trade in the region. By the early 1800s, the British had secured trading posts at Penang and Bencoolen (Bengkulu) while the Dutch ruled Malacca, the Maluku islands and Java.

The British, however, came to occupy Malacca serendipitously as a result of the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1788,

which stipulated that if a war should break out, either party could occupy the colonies of the other to protect them against enemy invasion. This occurred in 1793 when France, already at war with Britain, attacked the Dutch Republic. William V, the Dutch ruler was overthrown and fled to England in 1795. There, he ordered Dutch officials to hand their bases over to the British for safekeeping and to stop them from falling into French hands. The understanding was that the British would return these Dutch territories when peace was eventually restored.

Into this fractious scene entered Farquhar and Raffles. Farquhar and Raffles were employees of the powerful East India Company (EIC), formed at the turn of the 17th century ostensibly to trade with India and Southeast Asia, but which eventually became a powerful agent of British imperialism.

Farquhar first arrived in Malacca as an officer of the EIC in 1795 when the British occupied the Dutch port. He was appointed its Commandant in 1803, and in 1812, in recognition of his wide responsibilities, his title was changed to Commandant and Resident. It was in Malacca that Farquhar honed his skills as an administrator, the experience laying a strong foundation for his subsequent management of Singapore.

During Farquhar's 15-year stint in Malacca, he was answerable to two lieutenant-governors and nine governors in Penang, all of whom were more than satisfied with his administration.

Farquhar dramatically turned Malacca's economy around, implemented British laws declaring the slave trade a felony, and fought for the town's survival. It is implausible that Farquhar would have changed from being a competent ruler in Malacca to an incompetent one in Singapore.

Following the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the British were obliged to return Malacca to the Dutch. Merchants in Penang, whose trade had flourished during the British occupation of Malacca and Java, were worried that their inroads into new markets might be curtailed after the Dutch reclaimed their possessions. Along with Farquhar, the merchants pressed Colonel John Bannerman, the Governor of Penang, to protect British commercial interests in the Eastern Archipelago (present-day Indonesia).<sup>8</sup>

#### The Search for a New Site

Bannerman thus sent Farquhar to negotiate with rulers in the region, and in August 1818, he managed to secure a trade treaty with Sultan Abdul Rahman of the Johor Empire. Although the treaty gave Britain most favoured nation status, Farquhar knew that something more substantial was needed to protect British interests once the Dutch returned.

In 1816, Farquhar had advocated founding a new base south of the Straits of Malacca and now he urgently pushed to secure the Carimon Islands (Pulau Karimun), situated some 20 miles southwest of Singapore and commanding the entrance to the strait.<sup>9</sup>

Bannerman was unconvinced, citing the costs involved, but he did forward Farquhar's suggestions to the Marquess of Hastings, the EIC's new Governor-General who administered British interests in the Far East.

Hastings faced further pressure to act from the merchants in Calcutta and then from Raffles, who had arrived in the Indian city. Hastings decided to build upon the strong footing obtained by Farquhar's commercial treaty and sent Raffles on a two-fold mission: first, to settle a dynastic dispute in Aceh, and then, to establish a new post at Rhio (Riau). Because of Farquhar's experience and expertise, Hastings appointed him to take charge of any new post, but made him subordinate to Raffles, who was based in Bencoolen, Sumatra, at the time.<sup>10</sup>

Raffles and Farquhar met in Penang and on 19 January 1819, Raffles' small fleet sailed for the Carimon Islands.<sup>11</sup> As the islands proved unsuitable, Farquhar suggested Singapore as an alternative base.<sup>12</sup> After Raffles and Farquhar stepped ashore on 28 January, Raffles, who had only recently contemplated Singapore as an option, realised that the island was an ideal spot to stake British claim.

But there was a problem. The island was part of the Johor Empire and its ruler, Sultan Abdul Rahman, had sworn allegiance to the Dutch. Raffles got around this by exploiting a dynastic dispute: he made a deal with the sultan's older brother and rightful heir, Tengku Long, offering him the throne in return

for permission to establish a post in Singapore. Tengku Long agreed and Raffles installed him as Sultan Hussein Mohamed Shah of Johor.

Raffles then signed a treaty with Sultan Hussein and Temenggong Abdul Rahman, the local chief of Singapore, on 6 February 1819. This treaty allowed the EIC to lease land for a trading post. It was tiny – extending only from Tanjong Katong to Tanjong Malang, and inland for about one mile. The rest of the island belonged to Malay nobles and even within the British post, British regulations did not apply inside their compounds.

Raffles did not purchase the island of Singapore, nor acquire it for Britain as often claimed. Indeed, the acquisition was far from guaranteed. After appointing Farquhar Resident and Commandant as ordered by Hastings, Raffles gave Farquhar a list of instructions and departed for Penang on 7 February 1819.

The Dutch were furious at Raffles' actions. So was the British government which was engaged in negotiations with the Dutch over their respective spheres of influence in the East. The Dutch protested, and reports were received that they would retake Singapore by force. Although Bannerman tried to persuade Farquhar to leave at once, he refused to abandon Singapore: Farquhar knew this was Britain's last chance to obtain a new base in the region.

In the meantime, Sultan Hussein and the Temenggong regretted having signed the treaty. They wrote to Sultan Abdul Rahman and to his viceroy asking for forgiveness and accused Raffles of having coerced them into signing it. Farquhar persuaded the nobles to retract their statements, and due to his early actions, the post remained in British hands – at least for the time being. However, Baron Godert van der Capellen, the Governor-

(Left) A painting of Francis Edward Rawdon-Hastings, first Marquess of Hastings, Governor-General of India (1813–23), by Joshua Reynolds. Image source: Wikimedia Commons.

(Below) "View of the Town and Roads of Singapore from Government Hill", 1822–1824, as drawn by Captain Robert James Elliot. This panorama looks seawards from Government Hill and shows the Plain used to garrison troops on the left, with the Singapore River Basin in the centre, and Chinatown to the right. The painting was drawn during William Farquhar's term as Resident and Commandant between 1819 and 1823. All rights reserved, Crawfurd, J. (1828). *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochinchina*. London: Henry Colburn. Collection of the National Library, Singapore. (Accession no.: B20116740)



General of the Dutch East Indies, continued to insist that Sultan Hussein had no right to allow the British to establish a post, and demanded that the British withdraw from Singapore.

#### Farquhar's Work in Singapore

While the politicians argued, Farquhar got down to work. Few of Raffles' supporters have given Farquhar credit for building the settlement from scratch with precious little money, and limited manpower and resources. Yet Farquhar achieved the near impossible: he cleared over 650,000 square yards of jungle and swamp, built a reservoir and aqueduct, defence works, accommodation and facilities for the troops, and roads and small bridges. The population grew significantly as men from Malacca who knew and respected Farquhar flocked to Singapore to find work or to trade, bringing with them the money and muscle that were vital to the growth of the settlement.

The wealthy businessman Tan Che Sang, who had formed a close rapport with Farquhar in Malacca, followed him to Singapore, bringing capital for investment and trade as well as leadership expertise. Entrepreneurs such as Tan Tock Seng and Tan Kim Seng who similarly moved from Malacca, played vital roles in cementing Singapore's position as a commercial centre.

Raffles made a short visit to Singapore in late May 1819. Delighted at its metamorphosis, he commented on the numerous ships in the harbour and the large kampongs (villages). Proudly he claimed to the Duchess of Somerset:

"[Singapore] is a child of my own, and I have made it what it is. You may easily conceive with what zeal I apply myself to the clearing of forests, cutting of roads, building of towns, framing of laws, &c &c."<sup>13</sup>

But in fact, Raffles had not been in Singapore all this while: the improvements to the island's economy and infrastructure were all due to Farquhar's able leadership. Farquhar administered Singapore for nearly four-and-a-half years between 7 February 1819 and 1 May 1823, while Raffles was present for barely eight months during those years: from 31 May to 27 June 1819 and returning on 10 October 1822.

During Raffles' absence, Farquhar turned the fledgling port into a success-

ful settlement. Visiting merchants and sea captains praised the conditions and prospects of Singapore. Letters sent to Calcutta described the settlement as "most flourishing", affirming that the shore was "crowded with life, bustle and activity and the harbour is filled with square-rigged vessels and prows".<sup>14</sup> Visitors enthusiastically wrote of its increasing population, the cleared lands, the roads, the buildings and the busy port with its burgeoning trade in regional produce. They were impressed by the large neatly laid out cantonment, the extensive Chinese and Bugis *kampongs*.<sup>15</sup> Even William Jack, a sycophant of Raffles, praised the great progress of the settlement.<sup>16</sup>

By late 1821, Singapore was a successful commercial settlement of some 5,000 settlers. The plain at Kampong Glam was marked out for the European town, with roads neatly laid out.<sup>17</sup> Land allotments were numbered, registered and marked on a map and the major streets were named. Buildings, including a boat office, engineers' park, three hospitals and the Resident's bungalow were erected and a spice plantation established.<sup>18</sup>

Over 15 miles of road were laid, nearly half of which were carriage roads between 12 and 16 yards wide. Farquhar ordered further dredging of the Rochor River, making it more navigable. This led to an expansion of the Bugis village along the river banks as the community took advantage of the better facilities for trade and boat repairs.<sup>19</sup>

Farquhar passed measures to ensure the health and safety of residents, in particular to combat fire and disease. As most buildings were constructed from timber with *attap* (thatched) roofs, fire could easily spread. So Farquhar instructed residents to store as much water as possible to fight such a threat. To combat the outbreak of disease,

especially cholera, residents were asked to keep their houses and yards clean. Farquhar also forbade residents from throwing rubbish onto the road, ordering that it be dumped in designated areas.<sup>20</sup> The modern-day image of Singapore as a clean city has a long history, beginning with Farquhar.

As well as building the town infrastructure, Farquhar was proactive in establishing Singapore as a trading centre. He wrote to rulers in the region, encouraging them to trade with Singapore – taking pains to emphasise its facilities, its extensive roadstead and the gateway it offered to the Eastern Archipelago. He also highlighted Singapore's free trade status – although Raffles intended this to be only a temporary measure. Farquhar opened up trade with Brunei, and hoped to extend it to Siam, and as far as Japan. He envisaged Singapore as the new emporium of the East, outdoing even Batavia (Jakarta).<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, by 1822, Singapore's trade had reached \$8 million – mainly in regional produce. Opium topped the list followed by Indian textiles, silver coins and tin. But Farquhar's ambitions were hampered by reality. Hastings doubted the legality of Raffles' treaty with Sultan Hussein and was worried that the settlement would be returned to the Dutch. Hence, in October 1819, Hastings imposed severe reductions on costs and personnel, and ordered that no new construction work was to take place in Singapore.

Other issues arose. As the population increased, so did the crime rate – largely due to gambling and opium smoking. Farquhar planned to rein in these activities by selling licences for the sale of arrack (a local alcoholic spirit) and opium, and for the running of gaming houses.<sup>22</sup> This would also generate revenue which he could use to pay for a much-needed police force.

"The Esplanade, Singapore" (c.1845), watercolour on paper, by Scotsman Charles Andrew Dyce who lived in Singapore in the 1840s. Concerned that Stamford Raffles was selling large plots of land to the residents, William Farquhar reserved valuable ground near the shoreline for military use and this eventually became the Esplanade (the Padang today). National University of Singapore Museum Collection, courtesy of NUS Museum.



Contrary to what has been written, Farquhar did not introduce cock fighting licences, a charge that is often levelled against him. In fact, Farquhar abhorred the sport and had refused to allow cock fighting licences in Malacca. In Singapore, he "strictly prohibited" cock fighting except on specific Malay festivals, and then only with his permission. It was John Crawfurd, who succeeded Farquhar as the next Resident of Singapore in June 1823, who first allowed a cock fighting licence to be issued in the settlement.<sup>23</sup>

Initially, Raffles was wary of introducing opium licences, fearing it would adversely impact the EIC's opium trade. He saw Singapore as an outlet for selling opium throughout the region and was determined that the EIC's opium trade be "protected and offered every facility".<sup>24</sup> However, despite his own concerns, Raffles issued instructions for the introduction of opium licences, declaring that "a certain number of houses may be licensed for the sale of madat or prepared opium".<sup>25</sup>

Raffles not only instructed Farquhar to auction the licences and re-auction them "every three months until further orders", but he also took a 5 percent commission on each opium licence for himself.<sup>26</sup> Raffles' supporters have distanced his role in the opium licensing scheme by accusing Farquhar of introducing these licences by wilfully disobeying Raffles' orders. Ironically, the opium farms "introduced" by Farquhar and sanctioned by Raffles became Singapore's largest single source of revenue from 1824 until 1910.<sup>27</sup>

While Farquhar has been acknowledged as the founder of the first police force in the settlement, several of his other achievements have been overlooked. For example, it was Farquhar who rediscovered Singapore's deep water harbour, recognising its commercial and strategic significance, and arranging for its depths to be measured.<sup>28</sup> Farquhar named it New Harbour, a name that remained until 1900 when the harbour was dedicated to Admiral Henry Keppel.<sup>29</sup>

Farquhar undertook the first survey of the island, later compiling a map that was forwarded to Raffles. He also drew up a schematic town plan in 1821, as well as a detailed map showing the town, New Harbour and adjoining islands which he presented to the EIC.<sup>30</sup> He began the practice of recording Singapore's daily temperature and pressure readings, maintaining these for two years and providing a benchmark for comparisons today.<sup>31</sup>

Farquhar also established a spice plantation and the first botanical garden, experimenting with the cultivation of pepper, coffee, spices and cotton. Although Farquhar was following Raffles' orders, the success of these gardens owed much to Farquhar's keen interest in natural history. Later, concerned that Raffles was selling large plots of land to the residents, Farquhar reserved valuable ground near the shoreline for military use, land that eventually became the Esplanade (and known as the Padang today).<sup>32</sup>

Farquhar established a prototype post office, which Raffles refined into an official Post Office in 1823, after receiving practical advice from Farquhar.<sup>33</sup> Just as he had done in Malacca, Farquhar encouraged the work of missionaries, and helped them to set up Singapore's first school.<sup>34</sup> Having laid the foundation stone of the Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca in November 1818, Farquhar was similarly involved in the establishment of the Singapore Institution (precursor of today's Raffles Institution). He was its President and also a trustee and patron, as well as a generous contributor to its subscription fund.

On his own initiative and risking censure from Raffles and Hastings, Farquhar granted asylum to Prince Belawa and 500 of his Bugis followers who had fled from the Dutch in Rhio. Despite angry protests by the Dutch, Farquhar stood his ground, and Raffles and Hastings supported this decision.<sup>35</sup> The Bugis established themselves along Rochor River as traders and boat builders, and the community proved a great asset to Singapore. The Bugis remained grateful for Farquhar's resolve as seen in their farewell address to him.<sup>36</sup>

While Farquhar was expeditiously developing Singapore, Raffles remained in Bencoolen and took only periodic interest in the settlement. He was most tardy in replying to Farquhar's letters, even urgent ones, and seemed to hinder rather than support the work Farquhar

was doing. Returning in October 1822 after three-and-a-half years' absence, Raffles was elated with the rapid progress of Singapore, telling the Duchess of Somerset that:

"Here is all life and activity; and it would be difficult to name a place on the face of the globe, with brighter prospects or more present satisfaction. In little more than three years it has risen from an insignificant fishing village, to a large and prosperous town."<sup>37</sup>

All this Raffles attributed to the "simple, but almost magic result" of freedom of trade – with no mention of Farquhar's instrumental role.<sup>38</sup>

Even so, Raffles decided to demolish much of the town and remodel it according to his new plans. By this stage, he was in poor health and intended to return to England by mid-1824. Believing that Britain would retain Singapore, Raffles

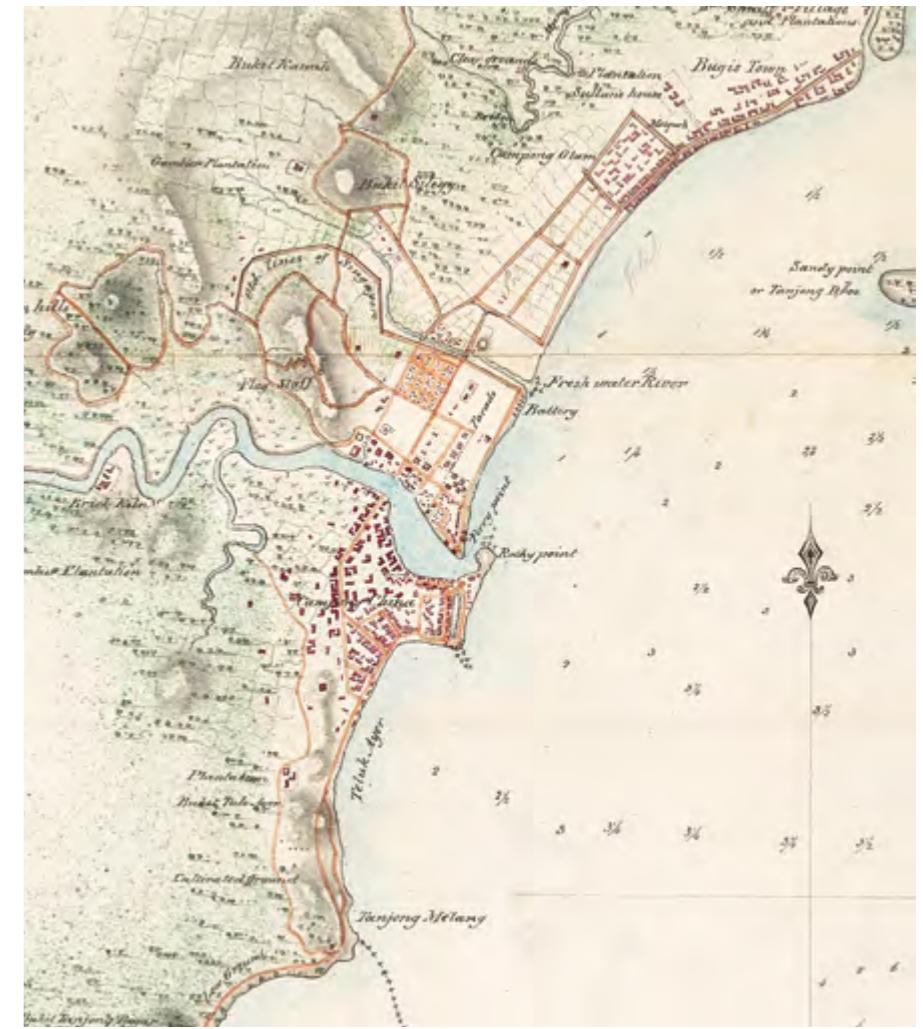
saw that his last chance to retire in glory was to reclaim Singapore as his own.

Raffles had earlier set aside land at East Beach (Kampong Glam) for the European merchants, but they were most unhappy as the site was unsuitable for loading and unloading goods. Instead, the merchants wanted to build their godowns along the north bank of Singapore River – land that Raffles had reserved for the government. Aware that trade was vital for Singapore's future, Farquhar had allowed the merchants to provisionally build warehouses there. As he later explained, had he not done so, Singapore would have "completely withered in the bud".<sup>39</sup>

Upset by Farquhar's actions, Raffles complained to Hastings that his subordinate had deviated from instructions by allowing construction along the north bank, claiming that he would have to demolish these buildings and several others at great cost to the government.<sup>40</sup>

Realising that his original orders to build on East Beach were impractical,

"Map of the Town and Harbour of Singapore" drawn by William Farquhar between 1821 and 1822, and presented to the East India Company in 1825. © The British Library Board (IOR/X/3346).



Raffles then sought another location. He chose the swampy south bank of the river, where he had ordered the Chinese to establish their *kampong* in 1819. Disregarding the distressed pleas of the scores of Chinese whom he had settled there, as well as the need for financial prudence, which he had so impressed upon Farquhar, Raffles ordered the swamp to be filled in to form a new commercial precinct.<sup>41</sup>

The relationship between the two men grew more acrimonious. Raffles continued to undermine Farquhar's reputation by sending letters to Hastings making accusations against Farquhar. He repeated his earlier complaints that Farquhar had overspent government funds, but later withdrew that criticism.<sup>42</sup> Raffles later asked his friend Dr Nathaniel Wallich to hint to Hastings that Farquhar had illegally acquired large areas of land, but later retracted that allegation. In fact, after admitting that he had been misled over the extent of Farquhar's land acquisitions, Raffles went on to authorise him a grant of some 150 acres.<sup>43</sup>

Raffles further claimed that Farquhar had not provided a detailed account of the land grants he had allotted, and favoured certain individuals when granting land. In contrast, Raffles selected the best allotments for his family and friends, and allowed his brother-in-law William Flint to build on reserved land.<sup>44</sup> Although Farquhar sent detailed despatches and documents to Hastings that clearly refuted those charges, the seeds of doubt had been sown.<sup>45</sup>

Raffles began to sideline Farquhar. He excluded Farquhar from his new Town Committee that he had set up in October 1822, and instead relied on the inexperienced Philip Jackson for engineering advice. In February 1823, Raffles took Farquhar's place at the weekly Resident's court.<sup>46</sup> Despite these and other rebuffs, Farquhar assured Raffles of his full cooperation, gave advice when asked, and allowed the committee to use his maps.

Farquhar's and Raffles' differing attitudes on the status of Singapore further strained relations between them. Raffles saw Singapore as a British port, while Farquhar regarded it as a Malay port that belonged to the Malay rulers. Farquhar insisted on abiding by the terms of the treaty signed by Sultan Hussein and the Temenggong on 6 February 1819, without which Singapore could not have been founded, as well as the arrangements Raffles and he had signed with the Malay rulers on 26 June 1819.

Farquhar expressed concern when Raffles began to sell land, pointing out that Raffles had no authority to do so as the land rightfully belonged to the Malays. Raffles interpreted this as another instance of Farquhar's opposition to his plans.

Raffles wrote to Hastings on 11 January 1823, stating that he did not consider Farquhar capable of running Singapore after his own resignation, when Singapore would fall directly under the Bengal government's supervision. Hence, he wanted Farquhar quickly replaced by "a more com-

The silver cup that Farquhar received from European and Armenian merchants as a gift when he left Singapore on 28 December 1823. © Private collection.



petent" local authority.<sup>47</sup> Yet the very next day Raffles wrote to his cousin, ecstatic at the progress Singapore had made under Farquhar:

"The progress of my new settlement is in every way most satisfactory, and it would gladden your heart to witness the activity and cheerfulness which prevails throughout. Every day brings us new settlers, and Singapore has already become a great emporium. Houses and warehouses are springing up in every direction."<sup>48</sup>

- 7 Ricoeur, P. (2004). *Memory, history, forgetting* (p. 284). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Call no.: SING 128.3 RIC)
- 8 The Eastern Archipelago refers to the islands that form much of today's Indonesia – Sumatra, Java, Bali, Lombok, Bangka, Belitung, Maluku Islands and Borneo. Retrieved from Internet Archive website.
- 9 Memorandums, vol. 10, SSFR; Farquhar to Bannerman, 6 September 1818, vol. 67, SSFR.
- 10 Hastings to Bannerman, 28 November 1818, vol. 182A, SSFR; Adam to Farquhar, 28 November 1818, L. 10, East India Company, Straits Settlements Records, Government of the Colony of Singapore, Raffles National Library Archives, 1961. Microfilm, Monash University. Hereafter these records are cited as SSR.
- 11 Jack to Wallich, 8 June 1819, in Burkitt, I.H. (1916, July). William Jack's letters to Nathaniel Wallich, 1819–1821. Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Raffles National Library Archives, 1961. Microfilm, Monash University. Hereafter these records are cited as SSR.
- 12 Elout to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 13 Raffles had disobeyed the sequence of Hastings' instructions which caused an irrevocable rift with Bannerman.
- 14 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 15 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 16 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 17 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 18 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 19 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 20 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 21 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 22 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 23 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 24 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 25 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 26 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 27 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 28 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 29 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 30 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 31 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 32 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 33 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 34 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 35 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 36 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 37 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 38 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 39 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 40 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 41 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 42 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 43 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 44 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 45 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 46 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 47 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 48 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 49 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 50 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 51 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 52 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 53 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 54 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 55 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 56 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 57 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 58 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 59 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 60 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 61 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 62 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 63 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 64 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 65 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 66 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 67 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 68 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 69 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 70 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 71 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 72 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 73 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 74 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 75 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 76 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 77 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 78 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 79 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 80 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 81 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 82 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern isles* (p. 451). London, Hodder and Stoughton. (Call no.: RCLOS 959.570210924 WUR)
- 83 Raffles to Capellen, 25 August 1818, in Wurtzburg C. (1954). *Raffles of the eastern*

# Looking Back at 700 Years of Singapore

Singapore's history didn't begin in 1819 when Stamford Raffles made footfall on the island. **Tan Tai Yong** makes sense of our 700-year history in this wide-ranging essay.

**O**n 28 January 1819, Stamford Raffles and his entourage landed on an island that was home to some 1,000 Chinese, Malay and *orang laut* ("sea people" in Malay). Soon after their arrival, they met Temenggong Abdul Rahman, the local chief in Singapore, and Tengku Long – eldest

**Professor Tan Tai Yong** is the second President and Professor of Humanities (History) at Yale-NUS College. He is also Honorary Chairman of the National Museum of Singapore and a member of the Board of Trustees of ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, among other appointments.

son of the late sultan of the Johor-Riau-Lingga empire – who was later installed by the British as Singapore's first sultan, Hussein Mohamed Shah.

Along with a formal ceremony and banquet, a treaty was signed on 6 February 1819 allowing the British East India Company (EIC) to set up a trading post on the island.<sup>1</sup> Conventional narrative looks back to this day as the beginning of modern Singapore.

Wa Hakim, then 15 years old, was one of the *orang laut* who was present on the day the British arrived. Already an old

man in his 80s, he shared his recollection of what transpired on that day:

"I remembered the boat landing in the morning. There were two white men and a Sepoy on it. When they landed, they went straight to the Temenggong's house. Tuan Raffles was there, he was a short man... Tuan Farquhar was there; he was taller than Tuan Raffles and he wore a helmet. The Sepoy carried a musket. They were entertained by the Temenggong and he gave them

rambutans and all kinds of fruit... Tuan Raffles went into the centre of the house. About 4 o'clock in the afternoon, they came out and went on board again."<sup>2</sup>

But the story of Singapore goes back much further. The island as it was 700 years ago in fact shares a number of similarities with today's cosmopolitan city-state. In the 14th century, Singapore was already a centre for a vast trading network and actively engaged in commerce with neighbouring ports and regions. Commodities such as hornbill casques and lakewood (a type of aromatic wood used as incense) were exported from Singapore, or Temasek, as it was known then.

Archaeological finds provide evidence that early Singapore imported ceramic wares from China, along with other products from around the region. Singapore also traces a royal lineage that has its roots in the 13th century, beginning with a prince from Palembang, Sri Tri Buana (also known as Sang Nila Utama), and ending when the last king, Iskandar Shah, fled to Malacca, following a scandal involving the daughter of a royal minister and an invasion by Majapahit forces from Java.<sup>3</sup>

All this is proof that Singapore was already a city of considerable stature centuries even before Raffles set foot here. Hundreds of years before modern Singapore came to be, the island was already firmly embedded in a wider regional web and frequently engaged with

powers and political entities well beyond its immediate borders.

Yet, it is undeniable that Raffles and his deputy William Farquhar, along with the machinery of the colonial administration, played an instrumental role in furthering Singapore's rise into a bustling port-city, and by extension, the global city we know today. The year 1819, therefore, marks the beginning of a journey that resulted in the eventual blossoming of a cosmopolitan and independent republic.

Two hundred years after that fateful day, we can reflect on our history and heritage and the elements that contributed to the Singaporean identity and spirit as we know it today. A series of setbacks that threatened to pronounce the demise of the island at various stages of its post-1819 history, such as the devastation of World War II, the exit of the British, the merger with the Federation of Malaya and then separation from Malaysia, have become inextricably woven into a narrative that speaks of ever-resolute tenacity.

## Linkages and Connectivity

A confluence of regional and international factors contributed to the rise of Temasek as a port in the 14th century. Under the Song dynasty, Chinese trade with Southeast Asia grew between the 12th and 13th centuries. The new trade policies reduced reliance on a single main entrepôt – Srivijaya in Palembang – in the Malacca Strait and encouraged the rise of numerous autonomous port-polities in the region that engaged directly with China.<sup>4</sup>

View of Singapore from Government Hill (present-day Fort Canning Hill), based on a painting by government surveyor J.T. Thomson, 1846. It illustrates the ceremony during which Governor of the Straits Settlements William J. Butterworth (shown in the foreground with his family) presented a state sword to Temenggong of Johor Daing Ibrahim on 31 August 1846 to acknowledge his role in helping to curb piracy in the area. Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

At the end of the 13th century, the aforementioned Palembang prince Sri Tri Buana was on an expedition in Bintan (Bintan) when he spotted the white sandy coast of Temasek from a distance. He decided to relocate here and rename the island Singapura.<sup>5</sup> We know something of Temasek's life, trade, people and culture from sources such as the 14th-century *Daoyi Zhilue* (島夷志略; *A Description of the Barbarians of the Isles*), a collection of accounts from Yuan dynasty Chinese traveller and trader Wang Dayuan (汪大淵), and *Sejarah Melayu* (*Malay Annals*), a 17th-century Jawi work that traces the history and genealogy of the Malay kings of the Malacca Sultanate.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, almost everything we know of Singapore from this period of its history comes from textual sources beyond its shores – all of which point to early Singapore as being part of a much wider sphere and sustained by trade.

Similarly, the establishment of modern Singapore in the early 19th century had very much to do with its position as a strategic location for trade. Lying at an important crossroad along the East-West trade route between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, the Malacca Strait was the key passageway through which the markets of the Indian subcontinent, and the Middle East and beyond gained access to China, Southeast Asia and Australasia.<sup>7</sup>

As the Dutch held sway over much of Southeast Asia at the time and controlled the seaways through which EIC ships had to pass, Raffles saw the need for the



Yet with the abrupt arrival of independence in 1965, a massive burden was thrust upon the new government led by the People's Action Party. How the first generation of leaders laid the foundations of what Singapore has become today is a whole other story of its own, complete with its fair share of moral courage, enterprise and resilience against a backdrop of struggle and turbulence.

### Diversity and Differences

Whether in colonial, independent or early Singapore, a diverse, migrant population has always characterised the island-city. In *Daoyi Zhilue*, Wang Dayuan notes that Chinese people lived alongside *orang laut* natives at Longyamen ("Dragon's Tooth Strait"; most likely referring to the waterway between Sentosa and Labrador Point), where ships called for trade. Later, the Malaccan immigrants who came with Farquhar largely comprised Indians and Straits Chinese.<sup>24</sup>

In 1822, Raffles, dissatisfied with the way Farquhar had developed the settlement, instructed assistant engineer Philip Jackson to draw up a plan for the town of Singapore. Titled "Plan of the Town of Singapore" (more commonly known as Raffles Town Plan or Jackson Plan), the blueprint demarcated living spaces and organised the island's layout according to ethnic communities. Hence, the diverse population was segregated rather than united, with different neighbourhoods laid out for the Chinese, Malays, Bugis and Indians, as well as a dedicated European Town by the Singapore River.<sup>25</sup>

Each ethnic group retained its distinct culture and livelihood, and continued speaking its native language or dialect. Because the groups were kept separate, there was minimal interaction and little need to negotiate differences in the pursuit of unity. As already mentioned, the idea of a distinct Singaporean nationhood and the question of national identity only began to take shape around the 1900s, as Asian locals became better educated and increasingly dissatisfied with their lot.

By 1833, "Chinese, Malays, Bugis, Javanese, Balinese, natives of Bengal and Madras, Parsees, Arabs, and Caffrees [Africans]" could all be found in Singapore, as a great variety of ships sailed into its protected harbour.<sup>26</sup> The story of Singapore as a thriving port city in Asia is "the story of multi-racial communities and networks".<sup>27</sup>

In the earlier decades of the 20th century, *The Malaya Tribune* received

much support as the newspaper that expressed the voices of the local communities. Readers and contributors often discussed ideas of nationhood and belonging, and of their role in Singapore.

As Chinese and Indian workers continued to stream into Malaya in search of work, questions of who were the rightful sons and heirs of the Malayan land (was it open to all races who claimed Malaya as their home, or were only the Malays eligible?), and whether it was appropriate to maintain ties with one's country of origin, were debated in the *Tribune*. One lawyer wrote in the newspaper: "No matter what their nationality is, they [the local-born] should be proud to be called Sons of Malaya as much as Sons of other Countries."<sup>28</sup>

### Identity and Unity

In light of the increasing dissatisfaction with the colonial administration, a sense of collectiveness among the locals began simmering: what was the significance of their living together, and how were these dwellers to distinguish themselves through their sense of belonging to this island? If these migrants of diverse backgrounds considered this land as their home, how should they be united in order to be set apart?

As much as these issues lingered in people's minds, they only remained abstract concepts until the British left and a united Malaya – and later, a united Singapore – was born. When Malayans were left to govern themselves, free of their colonial masters, the questions of identity and unity became more

pertinent than ever. These questions now needed answers, and the answers would come to impact the everyday lives of the people.

Questions of racial identities and citizenship featured prominently in the negotiations leading to Singapore's merger with the Federation of Malaya in September 1963. While part of the Federation, tensions ran high as Singapore's Chinese-dominant People's Action Party (PAP) directly contested the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), which sought to protect Malay interests. As a result, riots broke out in Singapore between Chinese and Malay factions in 1964.<sup>29</sup> Even after Singapore and Malaysia went their separate ways and Singapore gained independence in 1965, the racial divide within the island's boundaries presented the PAP government with the daunting task of managing these racial tensions and forging a common Singaporean identity.

The ruling party's stand was clear: equal treatment across ethnic groups, and integration rather than separation. English, a "neutral" language among the main ethnic groups, was to be the language of business as well as of inter-racial communication in Singapore. English was hence taught alongside ethnicity-based mother tongue languages, in line with the government's bilingualism policy.<sup>30</sup> By 1987, all schools used English as the primary medium of instruction – bringing the curtain down on ethnic-based vernacular schools – with Chinese, Malay and Tamil taught as second languages.<sup>31</sup>

On 9 August 1965, Singapore separated from Malaysia to become an independent and sovereign state. Singapore's union with Malaysia had lasted for less than 23 months. Image reproduced from *The Straits Times*, 10 August 1965, p. 1.



Singapore's growth as a global port and the world's busiest transhipment hub has come a long way since the 14th century. Today, the container port operated by PSA Singapore consists of the Tanjong Pagar, Keppel, Brani and Pasir Panjang terminals. These function as an integrated facility, handling transhipment arrangements seamlessly around the clock. Photo by Richard W.J. Koh.

A trans-cultural Singaporean identity and business practicality took precedence over one's ethnicity, with the government envisioning that racial differences would give way to a sense of collective nationhood. Concrete policy steps were taken: in stark contrast to the racially segregated clusters that Raffles mandated, the PAP set ethnic quotas in public housing estates in 1989, ensuring that every such estate and block of flats housed families of different races.<sup>32</sup> This move made clear the government's stand against the formation of communal enclaves: in the PAP's opinion, the key to harmony was not to keep diverse peoples apart, but to bring them together. ♦

Since Singapore's earliest days as an entrepôt 700 years ago, diversity has been a constant. Singapore has always been a city of migrants, who brought with them trade, dynamism, cultural diversity, and the wherewithal to make the nation what it has become today. Colonial Singapore required migrants to build up its infrastructure and develop its economy, and all throughout its history, waves of foreigners have been arriving on its shores in search of better prospects.

Contemporary Singapore is no different: as the city continues to search for new ways to remain relevant in the global marketplace, people from all around the world find themselves here in search of investment and work, and to carve out a better life for themselves.

- 10 Tan, 2005, p. 4  
11 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, pp. 18, 63, 65; Tan, 2005, p. 3.

- 12 Rajaratnam, S. (1972, February 6). *Singapore: Global city*. Retrieved from the National Archives of Singapore website; National Archives of Singapore. (2016, June 24). *Connecting Singapore to the world – from submarine cables to satellite earth stations*. Retrieved from National Archives of Singapore website.

- 13 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, p. 63; Abdullah Abdul Kadir (1849). *Hikayat Abdullah*. Singapore: Mission Press. (Microfilm nos.: NL7912, 9717, 7810)

- 14 Abdullah Abdul Kadir. (1985). *The Hikayat Abdullah: The autobiography* (A.H. Hill, Trans.) (p. 162). Singapore: Oxford University Press. (Call no.: RSING 959.51032 ABD) (Original work published 1969)

- 15 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, pp. 132, 150; *Singapore: Island, city, state*. (1990). (p. 83). Singapore: Times Editions. (Call no.: RSING 959.5705 SIN-[ISK])

- 16 *Singapore: Island, city, state*, 1990, pp. 84–85; Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, pp. 152, 204–205.

- 17 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, p. 182.

- 18 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, pp. 182–183.

- 19 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, pp. 189, 197.

- 20 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, pp. 194–195.

- 21 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, pp. 275, 314.

- 22 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, pp. 306, 315.

- 23 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, pp. 322–323.

- 24 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, pp. 23, 63.

- 25 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, p. 66.

- 26 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, p. 84.

- 27 Lee, P., & Wang, N. (2017, January). Port cities: Multi-cultural emporiums of Asia. *Muse SG*, 9, p. 5. Singapore: National Heritage Board. Available via PublicationSG.

- 28 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, pp. 200–202.

- 29 Frost & Balasingamchow, 2009, pp. 414, 417.

- 30 Chong, T. (2011, July). Manufacturing authenticity: The cultural production of national identities in Singapore. *Modern Asian Studies*, 45 (4), p. 887. London: Cambridge University Press. (Call no.: R 950 MAS)

- 31 The exception was Special Assistance Plan schools that offered both English and Chinese at the first language level. See Alfred, H., & Tan, J. (1983, December 22). It's English for all by 1987. *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

- 32 Wee, A. (1989, February 17). Racial limits set for HDB estates. *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.



MALAY ANNALS:

TRANSLATED

FROM THE MALAY LANGUAGE.

# THE FIRST PRINT

## Stories and Legends of Early Singapore

23 January - 24 March 2019

Level 11  
National Library Building

25 March - 31 October 2019  
Various Public Libraries

Learn more from  
[www.nlb.gov.sg/exhibitions/](http://www.nlb.gov.sg/exhibitions/)

We all grew up with the story of Sang Nila Utama and learnt how he founded Singapura, the "Lion City". The 17th-century Malay court chronicle, *Sulalat-al-Salatin*, more commonly referred to as *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), is one of the few surviving materials that describe the early history of Singapore before the arrival of Raffles – when the island was a key centre of regional power and Malay kings reigned supreme.

Discover timeless stories from the *Sejarah Melayu*, such as the strong man Badang and the attack of the garfish, which continue to enchant writers and readers everywhere.

This exhibition is a chance to see a rare 1840 copy of the *Sejarah Melayu*, edited by the acclaimed scholar Munsyi Abdullah (1797-1854) and printed in Singapore. Recently acquired by the National Library for its Rare Materials Collection, this is one of five known copies in the world today.



An exhibition by

NLB | National Library  
Singapore



# MRS DARE AND HER MAGNIFICENT DRIVING MACHINE

The intrepid Mrs G.M. Dare was – true to her name – Singapore's first woman driver. In April 1907, she embarked on a 686-mile road trip across the Malay Peninsula.



(Below) Mrs G.M. Dare, Singapore's first lady motorist, and her husband George Mildmay Dare on their Adams-Hewitt with the licence plate number S-1. The car was named "Ichiban", Japanese for "Number One". Image reproduced from Makepeace, W., Brooke, G.E., & Braddell, R.S.J. (Eds.). (1991). *One Hundred Years of Singapore* (Vol. 2, p. 364). Singapore: Oxford University Press. (Call no.: RSING 959.57 ONE-[HIS]).

(Bottom right) Mrs Dare's driving adventure was published as "Motoring in Malaya: Adventurous Trip of Two Ladies in F.M.S." in *The Straits Times* on 18, 19 and 20 June 1907. Image reproduced from *The Straits Times*, 18 June 1907, p. 11.

Mrs G.M. Dare, originally from Yorkshire, England, is said to be Singapore's first lady motorist. Her first car was a two-cylinder Star before she switched to a two-seater single-cylinder Adams-Hewitt in 1906 when car registration in the colony became mandatory. Mrs Dare in fact holds the distinction of driving Singapore's first registered car – licence plate number S-1 – which was nicknamed "Ichiban" (Japanese for "Number One").

Cars were a relatively new mode of transportation in Singapore then (the first automobiles made their appearance here only a decade earlier in 1896) and Mrs Dare soon became a novel sight on the roads. Locals were amazed and fearful by turns to see her at the wheel and soon took to calling her car the "Devil Wind Carriage".

Not content with driving on Singapore's roads, Mrs Dare decided to embark on a driving expedition across the Malay Peninsula. On 15 April 1907, accompanied by her friend, Miss Hardman, and her Malay gardener, she took off from Penang, where the journey began, in her Adams-Hewitt. Both the car and its occupants had arrived a few days earlier by steamer from Singapore.

Mrs Dare's driving adventure created quite a stir in the press and she took to writing about it. Her articles were published as "Motoring in Malaya: Adventurous Trip of Two Ladies in F.M.S" in *The Straits Times* over three days on 18 June, 19 June and 20 June 1907. The following is an abridged account of her 686-mile road trip across the Malay Peninsula.

## W

When we two ladies contemplated making a motor tour through the Malay Peninsula, accompanied only by a native gardener (who knew nothing of mechanics), people thought it rather a wild scheme. But as we both felt capable of looking after the machinery ourselves, and only wanted our man to clean and oil the car, we were determined to take the risk. We started off on our travels in April 1907.

Our car was a quite new Adams-Hewitt, constructed with especially large 34-inch wheels to ensure a good ground clearance. The wheels were fitted with Moseley "Perfect" tyres and detachable rims. We carried our baggage with us, and were provided with all necessary spares as well as one outer cover and two inner tubes in a waterproof case. These were never used; although we crossed many patches of unrolled granite and sharp marble road metal, we never suffered from a single puncture and rarely had to pump up the tyres. Our car was named "Ichiban" (Japanese for "Number One"), as it bears the registered number S-1.

### Starting from Penang

Having decided to start our trip from Penang, we planned to ship ourselves and Ichiban by the steamer Perak for the settlement. As the Perak could not dock

at the wharf in Singapore, poor Ichiban had a bad start being transported to the steamer. It happened to be low tide in the Singapore River, so she had to be pushed down three flights of steep stone steps onto a series of uneven planks of different lengths and full of nails, and into a *tongkong* [sic], a Chinese cargo boat, at an angle of 45 degrees. The strain on the brakes and frame was very severe, and how the tyres stood the pinches and drops between the planks was a marvel.

**Motoring in Malaya.  
ADVENTUROUS TRIP OF TWO LADIES IN F.M.S.**

(WRITTEN FOR THE STRAITS TIMES BY MRS. DARE.)

When we two ladies contemplated making a motor tour through the Malay Peninsula, accompanied only by a native gardener (who knew nothing of mechanics), people thought it rather a wild scheme. But as we both felt capable of looking after the machinery ourselves, and only wanted our man to clean and oil the car, we determined to take the risk, and accordingly started off on our travels early in April.

Our car was a quite new Adams-Hewitt, constructed with specially large 34 in. wheels to ensure a good ground clearance. The

Fortunately, Ichiban escaped with only a bent mudguard and a broken oilcap.

Penang is 395 miles north of Singapore. On arrival, we discovered that the steamer would not call at the wharf in Penang until the next day. As a repetition of the *tongkong* experience was not desirable, we left our faithful gardener on board to guard the car while we spent the day and night up the hill at Crag Hotel, at an elevation of 2,400 feet, where the temperature is cool and the views magnificent.

Returning the next afternoon, we were lucky enough to meet the genial secretary of the Straits Automobile Association, who gave us valuable assistance in landing our car, and we were soon driving smoothly off the wharf to the Eastern & Oriental Hotel.

We spent several days in Penang and made some delightful excursions on the roads about the island. One particularly lovely drive was along the coast of Batu Ferringhi, and then inland beyond Teluk Bahang and up a mountain pass into Pahang. After repeated delays caused by the steamer's defective water tank, we finally left Penang by the 3.26 pm steam ferry bound for Prai in Province Wellesley.

#### Flabbergasted Natives

On reaching the mainland, we screwed on the milometer and embarked on our 34-mile run to Bagan Serai in Perak. There are many good roads in this district such that it is easy to take a wrong turn – and

we did it twice! We found it exceedingly difficult to get reliable directions. The natives were so flabbergasted at the spectacle of a lady driving a "devil wind carriage" that they were quite incapable of answering our questions, and the only correct information we obtained was either from the Chinese or sharp little Kling boys.

However, we got on the right track at last, and after crossing the Krian river on a pontoon bridge, and passing through Parit Buntar, we eventually reached Bagan Serai Resthouse at 7 pm. Our first thought was to see how many miles we had done, but alas the milometer was gone! We informed the police of our loss, hoping that someone might have picked it up. We had very little hope of recovering it, not having a notion where it had been lost, but to our great joy, a constable came round to the resthouse at 9.30 pm to say that the milometer had been found at Sempang Lima – five miles back.

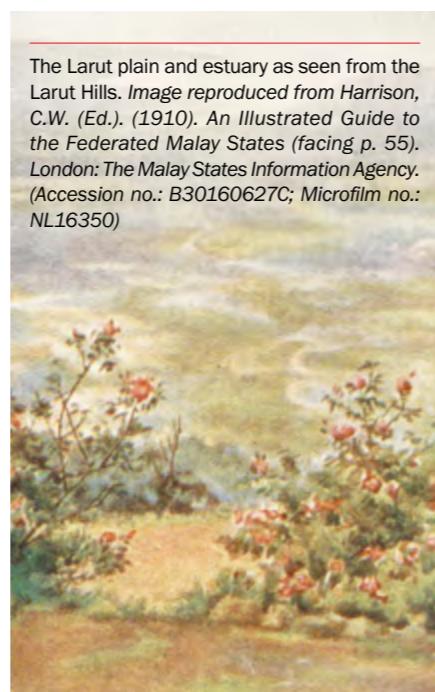
#### Taiping and the Larut Hills

Bagan Serai Resthouse is not at all a bad place with an upper storey, but if it were only kept clean! The rooms were thick with dust and the furniture broken. The beds, however, were clean, and the dinner quite good.

In the morning, we drove back for the milometer – which was quite uninjured but the journey delayed us somewhat – and headed for Taiping 26 miles away. Six miles beyond Bagan Serai, the

Kuran river is crossed by a small pontoon boat, which is hauled across the stream by a wire rope. Two planks were laid each side to bridge the intervening space of water from the pontoon to the boat, and we drove over these on board, the planks being carried with us to be utilised in the same manner on the other side.

From this point, the road began to ascend, and we crossed the Semangol Pass, which at 1,279 ft affords a glorious vista of the wooded Larut Hills and the grand mountain ranges of Perak.



The Larut plain and estuary as seen from the Larut Hills. Image reproduced from Harrison, C.W. (Ed.). (1910). An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States (facing p. 55). London: The Malay States Information Agency. (Accession no.: B30160627C; Microfilm no.: NL16350)

The road surface was excellent, and a pleasant spin through flat, open country past many deserted tin mines took us into Taiping by 9.30 am, quite ready for the excellent breakfast provided for us by the kind friends with whom we stayed.

Taiping is prettily situated on a flat plain, backed by the Larut Hills (3,600 to 7,000 ft). There is a picturesque lake in the Public Gardens, a good racecourse, rifle range and cricket ground, and two excellent clubs. The well-stocked museum contains the best collection of old Malay krissees and knives in the Federated Malay States.

There are also several bungalows on the Larut Hills belonging to the government as well as private individuals. English flowers and vegetables thrive up there and the temperature is cool enough to make a nice fire at night. The Resident of Perak E.W. Birch kindly placed the bungalow named "The Box" at our disposal and we spent a day and night up there, revelling in a perfect wilderness of lovely roses, heliotrope, lilies, geraniums, azaleas and all sorts of English flowers, in addition to varieties of tropical blooms.

From "The Box" at 4,200 ft, the views are immense. Below, Taiping looks like a tiny map and the roads (being of white limestone and marble) show out distinctly, as was the very straight line of railway to the coast of Port Weld. To the right, in the distance, is the island of Penang and to the left the group of

islands called the Dindings; on a clear day, the opposite high mountains of Sumatra are faintly visible.

Inland, one looks into the heart of the Malay Peninsula. Range upon range of mountains from 4,000 to 9,000 feet, nearly all untouched and unscaled by man – primeval jungle – the happy hunting ground of tigers, elephants, deer, wild pig, bears, monkeys and what not!

We returned to Taiping and motored out to the 18th milestone on the Kuala Kangsar road where, at the Penghulu's, we were provided with an elephant, on which we rode for two miles. On arrival at the cool shady riverside, we found a shed erected and a delicious tiffin of Malay curries for our benefit. It was great fun watching the Malays and the men of our



A map of the Malay Peninsula created in 1906. It includes the places that Mrs Dare and Miss Hardman visited during their road trip in 1907. Image reproduced from Swettenham, F.A. (1907). British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya. London, New York: John Lane the Bodley Head. (Accession nos.: B29031891K, B29267224A; Microfilm nos.: NL19101, NL3279)

#### MRS DARE'S DARING DRIVE THROUGH MALAYA



**15 April**  
Penang  
  
Left Penang for Bagan Serai.  
(Took two wrong turns and  
lost the car milometer)

**16 April**  
Bagan Serai  
  
Left Bagan Serai  
for Taiping.  
(No mishaps)

**20 April**  
Taiping  
  
Left Taiping for Ipoh.  
(Problem with loose chain-guard.  
Detained by storm, and no fewer  
than four trees right across the road,  
two of which had to be surmounted)

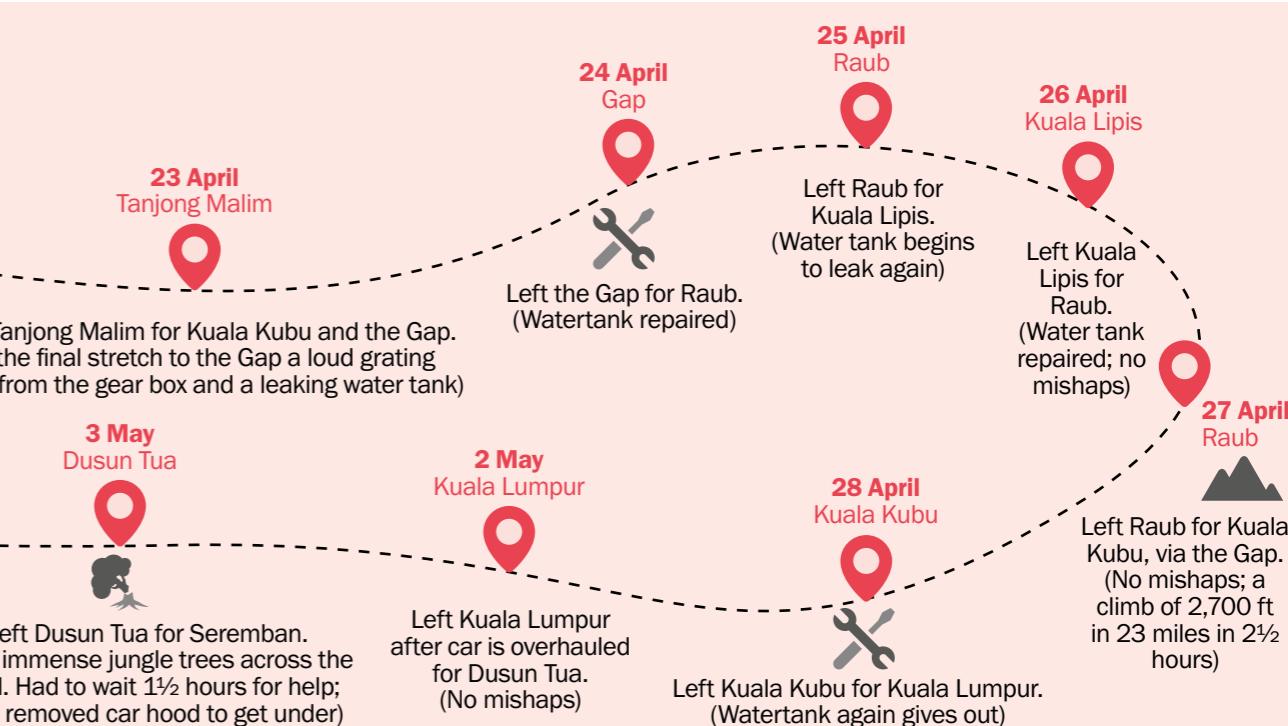
**22 April**  
Ipoh  
  
Left Ipoh for  
Tanjong Malim.  
(A long run; no  
mishaps)

**5 May**  
Seremban

Left Seremban for Malacca  
via Tampin. Thence from  
Malacca to Tanjong Kling.  
(No mishaps)

Itinerary extracted from "Ladies Motoring in the Malay Peninsula" published in *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* on 9 and 11 May 1907.

\* After spending a week in Tanjong Kling, the ladies returned to Malacca, where they boarded a steamer and arrived in Singapore on 13 May 1907.



party seated on thick pieces of plantain fibre called *upih* and tobogganing down some 60 feet of smooth rock in the river into the cool inviting pool below – an activity called *menggelunchor*.

#### Bound for Ipoh

We left Taiping for Ipoh via Kuala Kangsar, a distance of 56 miles, at 8.30 am on 20 April, and had a delightful run over the Bukit Larut Pass. The morning was exceptionally clear and the mountains a magnificent sight. Right in front of us was Gunong Pondok, a huge perpendicular pinnacle of limestone rock.

Kuala Kangsar is the former capital of Perak, and the sultan lives in a fine

palace on the banks of the broad river. We proceeded along the upper road, which leads through the official portion of the town past the hospital, barracks and various government offices to the Malay College, where we breakfasted with friends. Then, taking *riskshas*, we visited the School of Art and the new Residency situated on a wooded knoll. After tiffin, we left Kuala Kangsar immediately so as to arrive in Ipoh in time for tea and to escape the usual afternoon rain squall.

#### Crossing Perak River

At Enggor we drove across Perak River on a rickety bridge of boats, and proceeded

(Below) In Taiping, Mrs Dare and Miss Hardman travelled on elephants like these to the cool shady riverside for a delicious tiffin of Malay curries. Image reproduced from Harrison, C.W. (Ed.). (1910). An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States (facing p. 70). London: The Malay States Information Agency. (Accession no.: B30160627C; Microfilm no.: NL16350)

(Bottom) Menggelunchor involves sitting on thick pieces of plantain fibre called *upih* and tobogganing down the smooth rock in the river into the pool below. Mrs Dare was treated to such a scene in Taiping.



without mishap along the smooth undulating road through well-wooded country until we reached the tin-mining town of Sungai Siput.

There, we were alarmed by a fearful clattering in the car, and were relieved to find that it was caused by nothing worse than the top section of the chain-guard having somehow caught in the number plate! It was of no real consequence but it meant a vexatious delay as the whole cover had come off and a piece cut out. A Chinese tinsmith's shop was close by, but no offers of money would induce him to lend us his metal-cutting scissors, or to come and work himself unless the car was taken to his shop, which was obviously impossible, as there was no road! So we set to work and cut away the metal with two pairs of wire-cutters, a long and tedious job, made doubly difficult by the large crowd of rude Chinese coolies who had surrounded us by then but offered no assistance. After three quarters of an hour's delay, we continued our journey.

#### More Obstacles on the Road

A few miles further on it began to pour in torrents, necessitating another half an hour's stoppage under the trees with the apron up, till the rain moderated a bit and we proceeded another few miles; then to be once more held up by a couple of huge tree trunks that had fallen right across the road. The second of these had been sawn in pieces, and could be pushed out of the way, but the first one was immovable!

As we were only nine miles from our destination, it seemed ridiculous to go back all the way to Kuala Kangsar, so we were determined to bridge the obstacle. We and our Malay attendant pulled up some planks from the wayside benches, laid them in position so as to form an inclined gangway from the road to the top of the prostrate trunk, and covered the uneven ends of the planks with bits of bark. Some natives helped to push the car over and after an hour and a half's delay, Ichiban was again on the move. Half a mile on, another and yet larger tree blocked the way but here the government coolies were already at work sawing it up, so half an hour more saw us again spinning along, and enjoying the now fine evening and beautiful sunset.

We had, however, only covered another mile when a fourth large tree obstructed us. It was getting dark and the road was lonely. A bullock cart laden with split logs was parked behind it, with

the Sikh driver fast asleep beneath. We were now so accustomed to climbing trees that we soon had the contents of the cart piled on each side of the tree in a sort of sloping bridge and while two of us looked on, the third drove the car over triumphantly!

Ichiban took it like a bird, but the toolbox under the step caught on the logs and was wrenched off, the contents spilling out; thankfully the step itself was uninjured. We picked up the tools and the debris, and packed everything away as neatly as possible and were off again, ultimately reaching the Residency at Ipoh without more misfortunes. We felt that quite enough for one day had fallen to our lot, and congratulated ourselves on having surmounted all with so little damage to Ichiban.

#### Ipoh and Beyond

Ipoh is a large and flourishing town in the centre of the tin mining district. There are also interesting marble works, the whole country being full of huge limestone and marble rocks. Even the milestones are made of white marble! We stayed two days for repairs, thoroughly appreciating the rest in this most comfortable and prettily situated Residency, the garden extending to the edge of the Kinta River.

We left Ipoh on 22 April at 8 am for our longest run of 98 miles to Tanjong



Malim. The road to Gopeng is more hilly but it has an excellent surface and the scenery is very pretty. We stopped en route at Sungai Raya to look at a curious five-storeyed Chinese temple built inside some limestone caves. At Gopeng, the road diverges along a high ridge on which are situated the District Officer's house and a nice resthouse with an upper storey and broad verandah. The resthouse commands a fine view over the town and adjoining mining country, backed by ranges of limestone cliff.

The rest of the road to Tapah was equally smooth, and we ran up a very steep hill to the resthouse where we tiffined. At 2 pm, we started on our remaining 58 miles to Tanjong Malim, and arrived at 7 pm. The road is very winding and too overgrown to travel at any great speed, although the surface is smooth and made of red laterite. From Bidor, the road goes through the thickest jungle, and here we spotted jungle cocks, blue pheasants, brilliant blue flycatchers and kingfishers as well as colourful butterflies. We ran over two snakes and saw a huge black scorpion about nine inches long! Two strong-smelling musangs (civet cats) ran across the road at different times, and in one place a very distinct scent of tiger was apparent – it is not a place one would care to spend the night in, should one's car break down!

The resthouse at Tanjong Malim is very comfortable and the food good.

(Bottom left) The Malayan kingfishers that Mrs Dare and Miss Hardman saw when they were driving through the jungle were likely the white collared kingfisher (top) and the white-breasted kingfisher (bottom). Image reproduced from Robinson, H.C. (1927). The Birds of the Malay Peninsula: Volume 1: The Commoner Birds (p. 100). London: H.F. & G. Witherby. (Call no.: RSING 598.29595 ROB)ILL

(Left) The Motor Service along Kuala Kubu-Kuala Lipis Road. The road connects Kuala Kubu Bahru in Selangor to Kuala Lipis in Pahang. Image reproduced from Harrison, C.W. (Ed.). (1910). An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States (facing p. 218). London: The Malay States Information Agency. (Accession no.: B30160627C; Microfilm no.: NL16350) B30160627C; Microfilm no.: NL16350

We found our supply of petrol waiting for us here, sent from Kuala Lumpur by the Federated Engineering Company.

We left the next morning at nine, and covered the 17 miles of charming road to Kuala Kubu in an hour. After calling at the post office to pick up our mail, we turned up the road to the Semangko Pass, at 2,700 ft. The gradient is very easy and the splendidly made road winds up and through magnificent jungle, every turn revealing some new beauty. Being the only road into Pahang at present, we encountered much bullock cart traffic. Almost every turn we encountered two or three bullock carts, but as they are accustomed to the Motor Mail Service, the bullocks themselves move to the proper side of the road the moment they hear the horn, even when their drivers have fallen asleep!

About one-third of the way up, a horrible grating noise proceeding from the interior of the car greatly alarmed us, but we could not locate it and thought the noise was due to an insufficiency of oil in the gear box. In addition to this awful din, our new water tank began to leak badly so we went up very slowly, stopping at every stream or waterfall to fill up the tank and cool down the overheated engine. On arriving at the Gap (the boundary between Selangor and Pahang) at 2.40 pm, we decided to stay there for the night.

The next morning, after giving the gear box a good dose of oil, we started



(Right) Government offices in Kuala Lumpur. Image reproduced from Swettenham, F.A. (1907). *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya* (p. 276). London, New York: John Lane the Bodley Head. (Accession nos.: B29031891K, B29267224A; Microfilm nos.: NL19101, NL3279)

(Below) The Public Gardens in Kuala Lumpur that Mrs Dare visited. The lake can be seen on the right. Image reproduced from Harrison, C.W. (Ed.). (1910). *An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States* (facing p. 218). London: The Malay States Information Agency. (Accession no.: B30160627C; Microfilm no.: NL16350)

(Facing page) A resthouse in Seremban, one of Mrs Dare's final stops. Image reproduced from Harrison, C.W. (Ed.). (1985). *An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States: 1923* (facing p. 121). Singapore: Oxford University Press. (Call no.: RSING 959.5 ILL)



on our 15-mile-run downhill to Tras, and thence for eight miles on to Raub, the water tank having to be filled at every available opportunity. Whilst tiffining at Raub Resthouse, the car was left at the local garage to have the tank resoldered. The manager there informed us that special riveted tanks should be used in this climate. We had only travelled eight miles out of Raub when the tank began to leak worse than ever! This time, the solder at the junction of the waterpipe and radiator had given way. We bound it up as well as we could with rubber tubing and wire, and by dint of constantly refilling we eventually arrived in Kuala Lipis at 7 pm, making a total of 62 miles for the day.

After crossing the Lipis River, the road skirted its bank for a good part of the way. Kuala Lipis is pleasingly situated at the junction of the Lipis and Jellei rivers, after which they join and become the main Pahang river, the sole route to the east coast from the interior – a trip of over 200 miles. We stayed two days

at the Residency, the walls of which are made entirely of plaited palm leaves, in white and brown.

#### Raub to Kuala Lumpur

The manager of the Motor Service kindly took our radiator in to Raub to have the pipe properly fixed and brought it back the next morning. The same afternoon we left on our return journey, only doing the 39 miles into Raub, where we spent a most comfortable night in the resthouse. We left Raub the next day at 10.30 am, the car going up the Semangko Pass quite nicely this time.

After a rest and cool down at the Gap, we started off again at 2.45 pm, and ran down the hill to Kuala Kubu in two hours – 50 miles in all during the day – a countryfied spot on the banks of a river.

We left on 28 April at 11 am for Kuala Lumpur – a run of 38 miles – but it took us the best part of the day as the wretched tank again leaked like a sieve and we had to stop every two or three

miles to replenish the water. The road was somewhat more stony and hilly in places. We passed a great many alluvial tin mines with their armies of Chinese coolies. Seven miles from Kuala Lumpur we passed the famous caves at Batu, and from there a fine broad road goes into the capital of Selangor.

#### Kuala Lumpur

The capital has a large European population, with well-built bungalows, churches, hospitals, government offices, a town club, a country club and the Public Gardens with a fine large lake.

The Resident General, W. Taylor, with whom we stayed, has a beautiful house up on the hill overlooking the lake and gardens. In fact, the place is very hilly, each house standing on its own separate eminence. There are many motorcars here, and the big engineering works belongs to the Federated Engineering Company, so we had Ichiban thoroughly overhauled during our four-day visit.

We left on 2 May for Dusun Tua – 17 miles of charming road through very pretty scenery. The day was perfect and the car going beautifully, so we did not hurry. It is impossible to drive right up to the resthouse now, the old bridge having been replaced by a narrow and high iron suspension bridge, but on this side of the river there is an iron roofed shed, big enough to shelter two motorcars, and a little beyond, stabling and syces' quarters. Ichiban was deposited in the shelter, and our baggage carried up to the resthouse. Not having telegraphed beforehand, we did not expect to get anything solid to eat till dinner time, and were going to order tea. But some other person who had ordered a tiffin had not turned up, so we instead ate it thankfully!

The resthouse is beautifully clean and the attendants most obliging, especially a cook who made delicious cakes for tea. The hot sulphur baths are delightful; the water is led into big bath tanks direct from the natural spring, which bubbles up at a temperature of 162 degrees Fahrenheit.

After tea, we had a stroll up the road for a couple of miles, and saw a few huts or shelters, much like fowl houses, and caught sight of some figures inside, but really did not see any Sakeis (aborigines) properly. The following day at 10.30 am, we left for Seremban, a distance of 44 miles, and had a delightful run to Kajang, Semenyih and Beranang – the roads were very good but as soon as we passed the frontier into Negri Sembilan, they became stony and full of ruts. Moreover, many of the bridges were being re-made,

so we had to cross rough little structures at the side of the road.

All went well until after we had passed Mantin and were well up the pass to Setul. There we were stopped by two fallen trees right across the road. As these trees must have been about 150 feet long and thick in proportion, it would have taken days before they are removed. So we were thankful when the government coolies arrived and cut away the bank on the hillside and widened the road sufficiently for our car to crawl underneath, with her hood taken off completely and the driver's head well bent down. It really was great fun, in spite of the hour-and-a-half's delay! Several carts, with their *kadjang* (screw pine) roofs removed, and two dog-carts also got safely through. After this, we met with no more adventures, and the rest of the road was in good order right into Seremban, which we reached at 2.40 pm.

#### Seremban and on to Singapore

Seremban, the capital of Negri Sembilan, is a good-sized town prettily situated on hilly ground and backed by ranges of fine mountains. A great deal of tin is brought in here for export by rail to Port Dickson on the coast, and thence by steamer to Singapore. There are boxes, vases, trays, frames, and all sorts of quaint Chinese things manufactured in solid tin and fancifully engraved. It is as bright as silver and only requires polishing with a hard brush to keep bright.

Kind friends again hospitably entertained us for a couple of days and then we continued our journey to Malacca by the Remban road, a distance of 60 miles. An

excellent surface and shady road greeted us, and we passed through well-grown rubber plantations and finely wooded hills. We drove leisurely as it was so cool and pleasant, and reached Tampin (33 miles) by 12.30 pm.

After a pleasant little tiffin with the District Officer Mr Flemming, we continued at 3 pm and crossed the boundary into Malacca territory. The road became execrable as far as Alor Gajah and turned into a series of mud holes. On nearing Malacca, there was a distinct improvement and we were able to quicken the pace a bit. We drove all the way to Tanjung Kling by the excellent coast road, before staying a week with the Resident Councillor and his wife. Meanwhile, Ichiban was sent by train to Port Swettenham and shipped from there in the steamer Selangor.

We boarded the Selangor in Malacca and reached Singapore on 13 May, after a most enjoyable trip of 686 miles.

A few months after Mrs Dare returned to Singapore, her first husband George Mildmay Dare passed away. Some years later, she married G.P. Owen and became known as Mrs G.P. Owen. She was an accomplished singer and musician, and an active figure in the social and cultural life of the colony, frequently taking part in musical and theatrical performances. She was also one of the founders of the Ladies' Lawn Tennis Club.

She passed away from an illness on 28 January 1927 and her remains were laid to rest at Bidadari Cemetery. ♦

#### References

- Death of Mrs. G.P. Owen. (1927, January 29). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Ladies motoring in the Malay Peninsula. (1907, May 9). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 6. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Ladies motoring in the Malay Peninsula. (1907, May 11). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 12. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Makepeace, W., Brooke, G.E., & Braddell, R.S.J. (Eds.). (1991). *One hundred years of Singapore* (Vol. 2, p. 364). Singapore: Oxford University Press. (Call no.: RSING 959.5 ONE-[HS])
- Monday, April 8, 1907. (1907, April 8). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 232. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Motoring in Malaya: Adventurous trip of two ladies in F.M.S. (1907, June 18). *The Straits Times*, p. 11. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Motoring in Malaya: Adventurous trip of two ladies in F.M.S. (1907, June 19). *The Straits Times*, p. 11. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Motoring in Malaya: Adventurous trip of two ladies in F.M.S. (1907, June 20). *The Straits Times*, p. 11. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- The late Mr. George Mildmay Dare. (1907, December 16). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

# The Modern Malayan Home



Along with the introduction of running water and electricity at the turn of the 20th century were advertisements featuring modern home appliances. **Georgina Wong** has the story.

**Georgina Wong** is an Assistant Curator with the Exhibitions & Curation department, National Library, Singapore. She is the co-curator of the exhibition, "Selling Dreams: Early Advertising in Singapore". Her research interests include historical architecture and decorative art history.

**m**odern utilities and amenities revolutionised home life across the world in the early 20th century, and Singapore was no exception. What it really boiled down to was the introduction of gas, electricity and running water to households. In their wake, a vast array of appliances that made use of these modern utilities soon appeared on the market, radically changing the way people cooked, cleaned and entertained themselves at home.

Singapore's march to modernity from the 19th century onwards was not without its complications. This was primarily due to the vastly differing living circumstances and situations of the population at the time. Most European expatriates – who lived in the city centre and its environs in "modern" homes made of brick – were generally the first to receive new amenities such as sanitation and electricity. The majority of the Asian population, on the other hand, were either living in *attap* houses in *kampongs* (villages) on the outskirts of town and beyond or crammed into tenement shophouses well into the 1960s. Unfortunately, the physical construction of these dwellings did not facilitate access to modern amenities.

A major factor in the modernisation of the home was the introduction of running water and proper sewerage. Prior to 1910, the use of night-soil buckets was the primary means of waste disposal, the term "night-soil" being a polite term for human excreta. Residents would pay night-soil collectors to remove their human waste from outhouses – literally a shed outside the main dwelling – for use as fertiliser in gardens and plantations. The implementation of islandwide sanitation was a massive infrastructural project, and it was not until 1987 that the night-soil system was finally phased out.<sup>1</sup>

Running water was another issue that took many decades to resolve. While wealthier households in the town centre had access to piped water by the mid-1800s, some villages were still drawing water from communal pumps and wells as recently as the 1950s.<sup>2</sup>

Naturally, in those early days, modern home appliances like electric washing machines were targeted at those who had access to running water and electric-



(Facing page) This 1940 General Electric advertisement emphasises the suitability of its radios for the tropics through its depiction of a "Malayan" scene. People initially feared that radios made in the West could not withstand Singapore's hot and humid weather. The illustration was executed by Warin Advertising Studios in its signature painterly style. *Image reproduced from The Straits Times Annual, 1940, p. 98.*

(Left) By the 1920s, some households in Singapore had begun to use gas as a primary fuel source for cooking and for heating water. Ads for gas, such as this one by the City Gas Department in 1953, were placed in cookbooks, among other publications, specifically targeting homemakers. *Image reproduced from Allix, P. (1953). Menus for Malaya (p. 80). Singapore, Malaya Publishing House. (Call no.: RCLOS 642.1 ALL)*

(Below) Kampong folks making the move to high-rise living in HDB flats in 1963. These village dwellers did not have access to modern amenities until they relocated to public housing. *Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*



ity. Until the 1950s and 60s, when more residents had been relocated to public housing that could support a full range of utilities, only a handful of dealerships importing home appliances existed.

## Gas and Electricity

Before the advent of gas and electricity in Singapore, the energy source for municipal and household uses, such as street lighting and cooking, came from the burning of oil, coal and wood. In 1862, Singapore Gas Company opened Kallang Gasworks, the first plant dedicated to

manufacturing gas for street lighting.<sup>3</sup> In 1901, gas production was taken over by the Municipal Commission and expanded for home use.<sup>4</sup>

Electricity followed soon after: in 1906, Raffles Place, North Bridge Road and Boat Quay became the first streets to be lit by electric lighting.<sup>5</sup> Electrical supply was made available for private use soon after, albeit only to households that could support and afford the installation of wiring systems.

As a result, home gas and electricity became commonly advertised in

## WHO RUNS THE HOUSEHOLD?

From the early 20th century onwards, many advertisers of household- and domestic-related goods in Malaya began to target women as their main audience.<sup>1</sup> An overwhelming number of advertisements featured women – and very rarely men – as the main consumers and users of home technology.

The prevalence of such advertisements – unprecedented before the advent of pictorial advertising<sup>2</sup> – reflected as well as influenced public perception of women's roles in society: the fairer sex was often depicted as belonging in the domestic sphere, and responsible for caregiving and household management.<sup>3</sup>

Advertisements published in Singapore during this time mostly portrayed women – of various ethnicities and economic backgrounds – posing with household goods while looking glamorous alongside high-end appliances, or else engaged in domestic chores such as cooking, sewing or doing laundry. A rare household ad targeted at men in 1969 promoted Singer sewing machines as good gifts for their wives.<sup>4</sup>

By the 1950s and 60s, women in Singapore began entering the workforce in fairly large numbers, but were generally still expected to undertake housekeeping and child-rearing as their primary tasks. This doubling up of duties, among other reasons, relegated many women to shift work and other relatively less demanding lower-paying jobs, such as factory or secretarial work, so that they would have the time to take care of the home after work hours.<sup>5</sup>

With this in mind, most household appliance advertising focused on making women's lives easier. Advertisements stressed how the cost of purchasing modern household products would be more than amply justified by the reduced time and effort spent doing housework and,

in the process, reward the busy woman with a more stress-free and simple life.

More importantly, advertisers tried to mould public attitudes to suit household consumerism, for instance, by imbuing housework with notions of idealism and romanticism. Advertisements sometimes implied that the work performed by a woman around the house was not done

out of necessity but more as a labour of love, and that the care she put into it was an indication of her love for her husband and children. Purchasing household appliances that allowed housework to be done better and faster was therefore an investment of care in the family, a symbol of a woman's dedication to her primary role as wife and mother.<sup>6</sup>



(Above right) In the 1950s and 60s, Singaporean women began entering the workforce, but were still expected to undertake housekeeping and child-rearing duties. Women did shift work or less demanding jobs in factories so that they would be able to take care of the family after work hours. Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

(Right) Singer put out many creative and visually interesting ad campaigns targeted at women, as evident in this 1961 ad. Image reproduced from *The Straits Times Annual*, 1961, p. xi.

This 1956 ad by The East Asiatic Co. depicts a "glamorous housewife" alongside a Kelvinator refrigerator. Many ads at the time featured impeccably dressed women with nary a hair out of place, even while in the midst of doing household chores. Image reproduced from *The Straits Times Annual*, 1956, p. xx.



Get a NEW  
**Kelvinator**  
For Beauty, Convenience and Greater Value  
Only Kelvinator gives you so much to choose from  
when you buy your new refrigerator!  
Sole Distributors:  
**THE EAST ASIATIC CO., LTD.**  
SINGAPORE • MALACCA • KUALA LUMPUR • IPOH • PENANG

### Notes

- Fox, B.J. (1990, March). Selling the mechanised household: 70 years of ads in *Ladies Home Journal*. *Gender and Society*, 4 (1), 25–40, pp. 27–28. Retrieved from JSTOR via NLB's eResources website.
- Cowan, R.S. (1976, January). The 'Industrial Revolution' in the home: Household technology and social change in the 20th century. *Technology and Culture*, 17 (1), 1–23, pp. 9–10. Retrieved from JSTOR via NLB's eResources website.
- Fox, (1990, March), pp. 25–40; Quah, S.R. (1980, July–December). Sex-role socialization in a transitional society. *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 10 (2), 213–231, pp. 214–215. Retrieved from JSTOR via NLB's eResources website.
- Singer. Take home a jade lady. (1969). *FDAWU Magazine* of 1969 (p. 62). Singapore: Food, Drinks and Allied Workers Union. Retrieved from PublicationSG.
- Wong, A.K., & Ko, Y.-C. (1984). *Women's work and family life: The case of electronics workers in Singapore*. East Lansing: Michigan State University. (Call no.: RSING 331.4821381095957 WON); Deyo, F.C., & Chen, P.S.J. (1976). *Female labour force participation and earnings in Singapore*. Bangkok: Clearing House for Social Development in Asia. (Call no.: RSING 331.4095957 DEY); Quah, Jul–Dec 1980, p. 221.
- Interestingly, according to studies on advertising and gender beyond the 1960s, the representation of women in household roles did not necessarily decrease. Instead, brands attempted to diversify the images of families using household items, with men occasionally shown participating in the upkeep of the household, at least from the late 60s onwards.

newspapers, books and magazines, with the messaging revolving around their economic benefits, reliability, safety and convenience. Through the medium of print advertisements, the municipal gas and electricity departments took pains to assure customers that the energy saved in the long run would be worth the relatively large start-up cost of installing gas pipes and electrical wiring in their homes.

## Modern Home Gadgets and Appliances

The introduction of electricity in the home fuelled demand and created a consumer market for household goods and entertainment, resulting in a flood of new inventions from the United States, Europe and, later, Japan. Besides home staples such as electric lights, appliances such as refrigerators, blenders, electric irons, ceiling fans and vacuum cleaners were also heavily advertised in the early 20th century.

In general, the advertising of household goods in Malaya was undertaken by local dealerships as well as the department stores that imported them. However, major brands such as General Electric Company, Morphy-Richards and National also placed advertisements for their own products, as they had the means to run extensive advertising campaigns to promote their goods in what had become a fairly competitive market for household products.

Initially, only the more affluent had the means to purchase modern household appliances. For example, an electric iron advertised in *The Straits Times* in 1947 cost 11.50 Straits dollars,<sup>7</sup> which was equivalent to almost two months of a factory worker's wages at the time.<sup>7</sup> By the 1950s and 60s, however, such appliances had become much more affordable to middle-class households.

Home goods were often touted as essential to the "modern home". The "ideal household" was a concept that had existed long before the introduction of electrical home gadgets but thanks to a slew of advertisements in the early decades of the 1900s, it soon came to mean a home that was fully equipped with modern conveniences such as a washing machine, gas stove, refrigerator, electric lighting, fans and even air-conditioners. Smaller appliances like electric irons and hair dryers were marketed as practical gifts to buy for friends and loved ones to help make their lives a little easier.



(Above) A 1952 ad by Osram depicting the warm and cosy home atmosphere that its lamps promised to create. Image reproduced from *The Straits Times Annual*, 1952, p. 8.



(Above right) Ads such as this one for Morphy-Richards in 1953 were mostly found in newspapers and magazines read by the more well-to-do. The "modern" way of life was cast as an aspirational ideal. Image reproduced from *The Straits Times Annual*, 1953, p. 14.

### Home Entertainment

One of the most exciting introductions to households in the mid-20th century was home entertainment in the form of radio, television and the gramophone. These innovations grew to become household staples in Singapore, creating an entirely new way for families to spend their leisure time. One could enjoy vinyl recordings of popular and classical music, radio and television shows and dramas, daily news from around the world as well as sports and racing commentaries and broadcasts – all from the comfort of one's home. Radio and television would eventually grow to dominate media and communication around the world, with advertisers quickly adopting these new media to sell their goods and services.

#### On the Radio

Radio broadcasting in Singapore began as a niche interest in 1924, with the

Amateur Wireless Society of Malaysia (AWSM) effectively the preserve of the wealthy wireless enthusiast.<sup>8</sup> This was soon followed by the establishment of Radio Service Company of Malaya in 1933, which set up Radio ZHI and British Malaya Broadcasting Corporation in 1935.<sup>9</sup> By the 1930s, radios in Singapore could receive shortwave broadcasts from around the world, such as the Empire Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (now the BBC World Service).<sup>10</sup>

However, local demand for radios was slow on the uptake: in 1929, the Federated Malay States government received applications for only 119 radio licences, compared with the 1,000 issued in Hong Kong the same year. This was largely due to misguided public opinion on the reliability of radio reception and the longevity of radio mechanisms in the tropics. It was commonly thought

that radio parts would easily rust and warp in the humid Malayan weather, and that the lack of radio engineers or technicians in the region meant that there might be no real hope of repair.<sup>11</sup> As a result, advertisers throughout the early 20th century went out of their way to assure customers that their radio models had been specially made to withstand the tropical climate.

Unsurprisingly, the growth of the industry was driven mainly by the providers of radio services and products, who stoked demand via advertising. The founders of the early broadcasting groups, such as AWSM, were representatives of companies with a vested interest in developing a radio audience, such as General Electric and Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Company.<sup>12</sup>

As demand for radio sets increased and prices became more affordable, dealers began importing the latest mod-

(Below left) Transistor radios, such as the one featured in this Philips ad in 1966, made their debut in Singapore in the mid-1950s and became highly popular in the following decades after portable battery-powered versions were introduced. Image reproduced from *The Straits Times Annual*, 1966, p. 12.

(Below right) A 1966 Mitsubishi ad for a "micro TV". Image reproduced from *Her World*, January 1966, p. 9.



els from various brands. To distinguish themselves from the competition, advertisers would boast of the reliability and reception quality of their products, and assure buyers that they were purchasing the best and latest technology available in the market.

#### Turn on the Telly

The first television station in Singapore, Television Singapura, aired the first broadcast on 15 February 1963, which ran for five hours. It featured the national anthem, an address by then Minister for Culture S. Rajaratnam, followed by a documentary programme on Singapore, cartoon clips, a newsreel, a comedy programme and a variety show.

Singapore households readily embraced television – the first broadcast was watched at home by 2,400 families as well as by members of the public gathered at Victoria Memorial Hall and 52 community viewing centres spread across the island.<sup>13</sup>

Some of the earliest programmes aired in Singapore were *Huckleberry*

*Hound*, *Adventures of Charlie Chan* and local variety shows like *Rampaian Malaysia*, which featured music from various local ethnic groups.<sup>14</sup>

Advertisements for television sets not only emphasised their high-quality picture and sound reception, but also promoted the idea that with their "luxury styling" and "cabinet construction", these new entertainment devices would double up as attractive furnishings for one's living room. ♦

This essay is reproduced from the book, *Between the Lines: Early Print Advertising in Singapore 1830s–1960s*. Published by the National Library Board and Marshall Cavendish International Asia, it retails at major bookshops, and is also available for reference and loan at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library and selected public libraries (Call nos.: RSING 659.1095957 BET and SING 659.1095957 BET).

#### Notes

- 1 The disposal of night soil at Singapore. (1894, January 19). *The Straits Times*, p. 3. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 2 Staines, V. (1949, May 21). Water is their main problem. *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 3 Municipal Council. (1862, June 14). *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 4 Energy Market Authority. (2016, December 20). *Singapore energy story*. Retrieved from Energy Market Authority Singapore website.
- 5 Energy Market Authority. 20 December 2016.
- 6 "Utility" iron. (1947, February 23). *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 7 Huff, W.G. (2001, May). Entitlements, destitution, and emigration in the 1930s Singapore Great Depression. *The Economic History Review*, 54 (2), 290–323, p. 305. Retrieved from JSTOR via NLB's eResources website.
- 8 Chua, A.L. (2016, April–June) The story of Singapore radio: 1924–41. *BiblioAsia*, 12 (1), 22–27, p. 22. Retrieved from BiblioAsia website.
- 9 McDaniel, D.O. (1994). *Broadcasting in the Malay world: Radio, television and video in Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore* (pp. 34–37). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Pub. (Call no.: RSING 302.2340959 MAC)
- 10 Chua, Apr–June 2016, p. 25.
- 11 McDaniel, 1994, pp. 27–28.
- 12 Chua, Apr–June 2016, p. 22.
- 13 McDaniel, 1994, p. 71.
- 14 McDaniel, 1994, p. 72.

LIFE  
LESSONS  
IN A

# Chetty Melaka Kitchen



Thrift, hard work and resilience are qualities that can be nurtured through food. **Chantal Sajan** recalls the legacy of her grandaunt.

**Chantal Sajan** is a sub-editor with Singapore Press Holdings. She currently works in the newsroom of *The Business Times*.

**t**here was a time – before the invention of modern kitchen miracles such as electric blenders and KitchenAid – when Chetty Melaka<sup>1</sup> families in Singapore plated up a veritable cornucopia of Indian Peranakan dishes on a very tight budget, using the simplest of kitchen utensils.

There were the *lesung* (granite mortar, usually sold with a matching granite pestle) – the “eclectic blenders” of the era – which could pulverise, mash up and liquefy almost any ingredient known to man. With such simple but sturdy early-day “appliances”, one hardly needed the KitchenAid either. And there was no need to go to the gym too: the arduous pounding made sure one had quite a workout – to say nothing of toned arms.

Through skilful time management, the freshest produce and a system of cooking that entailed *pegang tangan* (touch of hand), the matriarchs of Chetty Melaka kitchens prepared food that hardly needed refrigeration, with their uncanny sense of *pegang tangan*

(Facing page) The writer's mother Madam Devaki Nair (left) and grandaunt Madam Salachi Retnam in 1991, with some of the Indian Peranakan dishes they had prepared using recipes that were passed down through oral tradition. *Pegang tangan*, or touch of hand, ensured that the right quantities of ingredients were used and nothing was wasted. Image source: *The Straits Times* © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

(Right) Group photo of Indian Peranakan girls, some wearing the *baju panjang*, 1910–1925. Lee Brothers Studio Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

(Below right) A typical Indian Peranakan house in Kampung Chetti, or Chetty Village, at Jalan Gajah Berang in Malacca. The front porch of the house is called *thinnai*, where strangers are allowed to rest or spend the night. This tradition is not practised by other South Indians in Singapore and Malaysia. Image reproduced from *Dhoraisingam, S.S. (2006). Peranakan Indians of Singapore and Melaka: Indian Babas and Nonyas – Chitty Melaka (p. 23)*. Singapore. (Call no.: RSING 305.8950595 SAM).

greatly reducing wastage – from the food preparation stage right through to the quantity served.

It was anathema in our family to write down recipes. Everything was passed down through the generations by *agak-agak* (guesswork). If you got it wrong, you had to finish your mess yourself – and God forbid any chucking of food down the rubbish chute.

Food wastage is such a cardinal sin in Chetty Melaka kitchens that – even to this day – the matriarchs would consume the leftover food themselves rather than invoke the wrath of Annapurni, the resident kitchen deity of Chetty Melaka families, who although dress and speak like Malays, are staunch Hindus. The goddess, we were all taught even before we grew our front teeth, presides over the making of food, so every precious morsel wasted is an insult to her.

Because of this, we grew up valuing money even more – that by cleaning our plates, we were building up our store of merit by honouring the work of those who had slaved in the kitchen all day to put food on the table and also to those who worked all day to make it possible to buy the produce and the ingredients in the first place.

This deeply ingrained value would, in our later lives, hold us in good stead when we procured ingredients from the supermarket, mentally calculating how much we needed to prepare our dishes without buying in excess – so that food did not sit in the fridge and spoil.

I can still remember my grandaunt Salachi Retnam, who became my mother's



guru in everything fragrant, aromatic and downright mouth-watering relating to food after my grandmother had passed on in the 1980s.

In 1991, she was the subject of a cover story by food writer Violet Oon for her culinary magazine, *The Food Paper*. Ms Oon interviewed my grandaunt and my mother on the fading art of Indian Peranakan cuisine, together with photographer-turned-food writer K.F. Seetoh, who also shot a few photos for our family album.

Achi Atha, as we called our grandaunt (*atha* is the Tamil word for “grandmother”, making no distinction between grandmother and grandaunt), was born at the turn of the century in 1903, a British subject who lived with her uncle in Katong after her parents passed on early in her life.

Achi Atha came under the care of her unmarried uncle and his sisters, and was taught the intricacies of Chetty Melaka traditions. She lived through World War I as well as the Japanese Occupation of Singapore during World War II.

According to her granddaughter (and my cousin) Madam Susheela, Achi Atha would wake up at the crack of dawn to make sure breakfast, lunch and dinner were taken care of, and then she would prepare the “kueh menu” for the day.

“Atha would gather *bunga telang* (butterfly pea flowers) to extract its blue dye for popular desserts like *pulut inti* and *kueh dadah*, and then she would prepare *inti* (grated coconut cooked with *gula melaka* and pandan leaves) to be used as fillings for these desserts, all of which were usually made “a la minute” when an unexpected guest dropped by,” she said.

Even in such frugal times as between the two world wars, Achi Atha always had something homemade and sweet on hand for guests. “No one was allowed to leave without a drink or a dessert,” said Madam Susheela. “That was the custom in our ancestors’ homes, which has continued in our lives until this present day.”

For Hindus, the mantra “the guest is God” – from the Sanskrit *Atithi devo Bhavah* – has manifested in the age-old Chetty Melaka practice of honouring any



An advertisement for the 4711 Eau de Cologne. Chetty Melaka women swore by this cologne which they used to treat almost every malady. Image reproduced from *The Straits Times Annual, 1936*, p. 11.

guest with warm hospitality and food and drink, even if they visit our homes unannounced.<sup>2</sup> Chetty Melaka women are known not only for their Malay-Indian dishes but also for their Straits-influenced grooming and attire. Like the Chinese Peranakan (Straits Chinese), they were resourceful in every aspect of their culture.

My grandaunts and grandmother would frequent Geylang Serai or Arab Street to buy *kain lepas* (sarong kebaya, which were sold in 4–5-metre lengths), and they would tie these wraps in such a way that would allow them free movement to do their housework – from squatting over a charcoal stove to climbing the jackfruit tree to slice off ripe backyard produce to even bedtime, with a change of their very diaphanous blouses that showed a plain chemise underneath. No nighties needed – why allow that extra expense?

Even their hair had to be neatly combed with scented oil to make sure not a strand was out of place. To achieve this, the matriarchs used a single thread that they held tightly around the hair starting from the crown and down to the ends of their tresses – to catch every stray, non-compliant strand. This was all neatly coiffed into a *cucuk sanggul* – or chignon bun.

Hairdressers and hair salons hardly did any brisk business with these tight-wadded, chignon-sporting women looking their best, even on a windy, bad-hair-day

afternoon. Their shoes, which matched their kebaya outfits, were embellished with indigenous beaded designs in a recurring leitmotif.

Even when she was well into her mid-90s, when she turned up early in the morning to advise my mother on the finer points of cooking *ayam buah keluak*,<sup>3</sup> my grandaunt parlayed raw produce, fowl and grains into scented rice, rich, curries and melt-in-the-mouth desserts without breaking a sweat.

The perfume du jour since the early 1900s among Chetty Melaka women was none other than that must-have curio of scents, the 4711 Eau de Cologne – and my grandaunt literally bathed in it. She also swore that it fended off almost every malady known to man – from cooling the body down to curing insomnia and even the common cold. Now, how many of us can boast that our French perfume can multitask like that in the sweltering Asian heat? That tiny bottle of Eau de Cologne, conceived in 1792 in Germany, certainly punched way above its weight.

By the early 1980s, my mother had already become quite the exponent of this Indian sub-culture's cuisine. She had learnt how to prepare curry powder – not from store-bought packets – by manually drying the raw ingredients under the sun and then getting them milled in Little India in big batches that could last for up to three months when kept in the fridge.

Coriander seeds were dried in the sun on flat baskets, which also acted as sieves to drain out excess water. So were cumin, fennel, dried chillies and fenugreek seeds. These were later combined to make curry powder for vegetable curries, meat and fish dishes.

The homemade curry powder, if done according to matriarchal dictates, never stuck to the pan when it hit the oil, as no flour or fillers were allowed. And that meant that one needed to use less of these spice mixes, as they were potent dish enhancers.

This is also where the *pegang tangan* approach comes in handy during the cooking process – the touch of hand that allows the cook to use the spices judiciously with no wastage; just by the touch of the hand, one can intuitively gauge how much chilli powder to add for heat, and how much curry mix to put in the *ayam buah keluak* so that it does not overpower the distinctive taste of the *buah keluak*.

It is an alchemical moment when cook, spice and ingredients are almost immersed in some sort of inexplicable

kitchen Zen, on a level beyond the abilities of lesser neophytes, who can only pore over recipe books, trying to cook by rote.

For the interview with Violet Oon, in just one morning, my mother had whipped up a chicken curry, a dry-fry mutton Mysore dish, a fish stew, *ikan panggang* (grilled fish), stir-fried vegetables, Indian Peranakan *chap chye* (braised mixed vegetables), fragrant *basmati* rice, a range of yogurt accompaniments made with mint and pomegranates, and desserts – rich, chocolate cake and Malay-style coconut candy. My grandaunt's disciple had truly come into her own.

Nothing goes to waste, true to the teachings of my grandaunt – as after the photo shoot, there were takeaway boxes on hand for everyone as well as another round of guests in the evening that my mother had scheduled earlier that day – to finish up every last grain of *pandan*-infused and cardamom- and cinnamon-enhanced *basmati* rice and curries.

Achi Atha passed on two years after that great repast, followed by my mother six years later. But their teachings and their culinary values have gone on to inspire every other aspect of their children's, grandchildren's and great-grandchildren's lives.

The lessons in the kitchen taught us to be prudent, resourceful, hardworking and frugal, and yet to always seek a richness in our lives through well-prepared dishes made from the freshest, and not necessarily, the most expensive of ingredients. ♦

This article was first published in *The Sunday Times* on 5 August 2018. © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

#### Notes

1 Also spelled as Chetti Melaka or Chitty Melaka. The Chetty Melaka are descendants of South Tamil Indian traders who settled in Malacca during the Malaccan Sultanate (1400–1511) and married local women who included Malays, Javanese, Bataks and Chinese. Chetty Melaka are mostly Hindu, and speak a patois of Malay, Tamil and Chinese. The community of some 500,000 in Singapore traces its roots to Kampung Chetti at Jalan Gajah Berang, Malacca.

2 This is extended only to those we are accustomed with, and not to rank strangers. The rule was that when in doubt about a guest, never allow them to enter but apologise a few days later after you have established their relationship to the family.

3 *Buah keluak* is a poisonous seed from the *kepayang* tree, native to Malaysia and Indonesia, which is "cured" of its cyanide content by a careful process of boiling, immersion in ash and followed by burial in the earth for a certain period of time.

# Coffee Mates

Good books and great coffee share something in common: they keep you wide awake at night.

Artist Kwan Boon Choon pairs his love for reading and caffeine by creating art out of coffee and inspired by books.

The National Reading Movement unveils eight of Kwan's unique coffee artworks – based on books available for loan using the NLB Mobile App.

**Kwan's coffee artworks are on display at selected Kith outlets ([kith.com.sg](http://kith.com.sg)) from now until 12 February 2019.**



Visit any Kith outlet during this period, download an ebook on the NLB Mobile app and receive a complimentary coffee voucher in return.



Gretchen Rubin's *The Happiness Project* inspired Kwan to create this artwork using liquid coffee as his "paint".



**Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience**

by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

**The Happiness Project**

by Gretchen Rubin

**The Intelligent Investor**

by Benjamin Graham

**Kiss That Frog!: 12 Great Ways to Turn Negatives into Positives in Your Life and Work**

by Brian Tracy & Christina Stein

**The Little Book of Skin Care**

by Charlotte Cho

**The New Retirementality: Planning Your Life and Living Your Dreams... at Any Age You Want**

by Mitch Anthony

**Think Like Zuck: The Five Business Secrets of Facebook's Improbably Brilliant CEO Mark Zuckerberg**

by Ekaterina Walter

**The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You**

by Robert L. Leahy

# IRON SPEARHEAD

## THE STORY OF A COMMUNIST HITMAN

**Ronnie Tan** and **Goh Yu Mei** recount the story of a ruthless Malayan Communist Party cadre whose cold-blooded murders caused a sensation in Singapore in the 1950s.



Wong Fook Kwang, who went by several aliases, including Tit Fung (literally "Iron Spearhead" in Cantonese)<sup>1</sup> was the dreaded Commander of 'E' Branch, the assassination wing of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). The MCP was most active during the Japanese Occupation years when it formed the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) to fight the enemy, and again in the aftermath of World War II, in the thick of the Malayan Emergency (1948–60), when it waged a guerilla war against the British in a bid to topple the colonial government and set up a communist regime.

Sometime in April 1951, Wong received a terse message from the MCP's South Malayan Bureau's jungle headquarters in Johor, Malaya.<sup>2</sup> The order was clear: Lim Teck Kin, a 62-year-old "rich but kind and highly respected towkay" and pineapple magnate, must die.<sup>3</sup> Lim was marked for assassination because he was, in the eyes of the communists, a "reactionary capitalist" employing hundreds of workers. He was therefore deemed as "an oppressor of the masses".<sup>4</sup>

To carry out the killing, Wong ordered his henchman Yang Ah Lee<sup>5</sup> to keep Lim under close surveillance for a

week. Once the two men had established Lim's daily routine, they put their plan into action.

Shortly after 8 am on 21 May 1951, two masked assailants intercepted Lim's chauffeur-driven car just as it was about to leave the driveway of his house and turn onto East Coast Road. The Malay chauffeur Sairi was held at gun-point by one of the assailants, while the other fired two shots at his employer in quick succession. The deed done, the assailants walked away calmly to a waiting taxi driven by a fellow communist.



After the assailants had fled, Sairi immediately reversed the car into the driveway and raised the alarm. While one of Lim's daughters frantically called the police, another instructed Sairi to drive her wounded father to the hospital. Lim, however, succumbed to his injuries along the way. Before losing consciousness, Lim's last words to his chauffeur were "Apa macam?"<sup>6</sup> or "What's happening?" in Malay.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from masterminding Lim's killing, Wong also instigated the murder and attempted murder of several others, including a student and even one of his comrades. Unlike in Malaya where MCP fighters could conduct open warfare from their jungle hideouts, the communists here, given that "every approach to Singapore was well-guarded", sought to overthrow British rule "by means of subversion and terror" in order "to bring about social and industrial disruption".<sup>8</sup>

The methods employed to achieve this included intimidation, arson attacks and murder. Wong, as the Commander of 'E' Branch, was tasked to carry out the killings. It was clear that he was nicknamed "Iron Spearhead" because of his cold-hearted and steely nature.

### Chief Executioner of the MCP in Singapore

Little is known about Wong's early years, except that he was born in China around 1926 and left for Singapore with his parents while still as an infant. When the Japanese invaded Singapore and Malaya



during World War II, one of the first things they did was to extract revenge by singling out the Chinese for persecution, knowing that the latter had provided financial and material support for China's war efforts against Japan. The oppressive rule of the Japanese during the Occupation years between 1942 and 1945 was exploited to the hilt by the MCP "who in the guise of patriots, enticed several thousands of young Chinese, including women, to join the MPAJA".<sup>9</sup> Wong was one of their most ardent recruits.

As an MPAJA member, Wong's role was to "eradicate evils and kill traitors".<sup>10</sup> He was also believed to have planned the assassination of several senior Japanese officials as well as those suspected of

colluding with the enemy. Wong was held in high esteem by his superiors in the MPAJA and quickly moved up the ranks. When the Emergency was declared in Malaya and Singapore in 1948, Wong, then barely 23 years old, was appointed as the MCP's Commander of 'E' Branch after his predecessor left for Malaya to command a fighting unit.

The appointment obviously suited Wong to a T, for he was described as "a formidable character: ambitious, dedicated and ruthless". He not only had a tight grip on the unit's finances, his word too was law, for in meetings he was "always in the chair, directing and giving orders".<sup>11</sup> It was at one of those meetings that businessman Lim Teck Kin's fate



was sealed as well as that of 12 other victims – including the failed attempt on the life of a 14-year-old student.

### How to Murder a Teen

Upon receiving instructions from the MCP's South Malayan Bureau's headquarters to take out an unnamed 14-year-old male student – who was suspected to have provided leads to the police about an acid attack on a teacher – Wong took a personal interest in planning the murder. The heinous attack on the teacher was believed to have been

(Facing page) A mug shot profile of Wong Fook Kwang at the time of his first arrest on 11 June 1952. Image reproduced from Clague, P. (1980). *Iron Spearhead: The True Story of a Communist Killer Squad in Singapore* (n.p.). Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd. (Call no.: RSING 335.43095957 CLA)

(Left) The car in which pineapple tycoon Lim Teck Kin was killed. Image reproduced from Clague, P. (1980). *Iron Spearhead: The True Story of a Communist Killer Squad in Singapore* (p. 23). Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd. (Call no.: RSING 335.43095957 CLA)

(Top) The gun that was used to kill Lim Teck Kin as well as in the attempted murder of a 14-year-old schoolboy. Image reproduced from Clague, P. (1980). *Iron Spearhead: The True Story of a Communist Killer Squad in Singapore* (p. 6). Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd. (Call no.: RSING 335.43095957 CLA)

**Ronnie Tan** is a Senior Manager (Research) with the National Library, Singapore, where he researches on public policy and library-related issues.

**Goh Yu Mei** is an Associate Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. She specialises in Chinese arts and literature, and is interested in exploring the relationship between society and literature.

(Below) The Malayan National Liberation Army was a guerrilla force created by the Malayan Communist Party to fight British and Commonwealth forces, and set up a communist regime in Malaya. Its use of violence and acts of terrorism resulted in the Malayan Emergency, which lasted from 1948 until 1960. Its predecessor was the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, which fought the Japanese during the Japanese Occupation. Image reproduced from Van Tonder, G. (2017). *Malayan Emergency: Triumph of the running dogs, 1948–1960* (p. 10). Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military. (Call no.: RSING 959.5104 VAN)

(Bottom right) The skeletal remains of Siu Moh were discovered by the police in the swamplands of Serangoon in November 1954, three years after he was killed. Image reproduced from Clague, P. (1980). *Iron Spearhead: The True Story of a Communist Killer Squad in Singapore* (p. 149). Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd. (Call no.: RSING 335.43095957 CLA)



carried out by his own pupils.<sup>12</sup> Just as he had planned the earlier murder of Lim Teck Kin, Wong monitored the student's movements and ambushed the teen while he was cycling home after a game.

On 2 October 1951, the plan was put into action. With Wong watching expectantly from behind an inconspicuous doorway, two of his assailants, one of whom acted as a look-out, waited for the student to cycle past River Valley Road. However, unlike other days, this time the boy was not alone. He had met a friend earlier and decided to dismount his bicycle and walk with his friend along the pavement while pushing his bicycle.

While fleeing from the scene, Wong and the gunman had a close call: the trishaw they were travelling in was stopped by a police car on routine patrol. Fortunately for the two men, the police officers had no inkling of the botched attempt to kill the boy and only did an identity card check. Had they carried out a full body search, the outcome for Wong and his accomplice would have

been very different as the weapon used in the attempted murder was still in the gunman's possession.

### How to Murder a Comrade

Even before the attempted murder of the student, Wong had ordered and planned the murder of one of his own comrades, a 30-year-old man named Siu Moh. Siu was suspected by his superior Ah Poh of embezzling \$300 – money that had been extorted from various businessmen and shopkeepers. Wong concurred with Ah Poh that Siu must pay for his alleged misdeeds with his life.

Kong Lee,<sup>13</sup> a member of the 'E' Branch Committee, however, disagreed with the plan to kill Siu and made his view known to Wong. The latter paid no heed to this and was prepared to contravene party rules, which made it clear that no one was to kill a fellow communist without the express approval of the MCP headquarters in Johor. So Wong decided to carry out his task quietly, seeing to it that Siu "would simply disappear forever".<sup>14</sup> To this end, both he and Ah Poh hatched a meticulous plan to kill Siu and dispose of his remains secretly. They decided that after the murder, Siu's remains would be buried in a prawn pond in a tidal swamp at the end of Upper Serangoon Road.

On 1 September 1951, Siu was lured to a desolate hut rented from a shrimp catcher. Here, he faced a kangaroo court, with Wong acting as both accuser and judge. During the mock trial, Wong accused Siu of embezzlement, despite the latter's denials. Wong's co-accusers at the clandestine gathering included Ah Poh, a lady named Lim Wai Yin (alias Ah Soo) and



two other unnamed accomplices. Siu's protestations were ignored. His accusers bound him hand and foot, gagged him with a cloth, bundled him into a boat and rowed out to a site nearby where he was mercilessly hacked to death. After the deed was done, Wong "swore his followers to secrecy – on pain of death".<sup>15</sup>

### Capture and Detention

On 11 June 1952, four policemen, including a Chinese lieutenant, were in a police car patrolling the area around Bugis and Rochor roads. At 1.10 pm, they turned onto Albert Street, which was "renowned for good, inexpensive, Chinese food",<sup>16</sup> with the intention of conducting surprise checks at coffee shops in the area. The police officers approached a table with three Chinese men, who were so engrossed in eating and drinking that they did not notice them.

When asked to produce their identity cards, all three men refused to do so. The police lieutenant then raised his voice, to which the men reluctantly complied. Unbeknownst to the police officers, one of the men in the group was the villainous Wong Fook Kwang. An unsuspecting police corporal turned to Wong and did a body search for weapons, finding on his person instead a paper packet containing what appeared to be dried plums. Still suspicious, the corporal separated the fruit from the paper. In that instant, Wong bolted from the coffee shop and into a side street leading to Rochor Road, with the police officers hot on his heels.

At the height of the chase, a young Englishman happened to be driving along Rochor Road. On seeing a Chinese man being pursued by the police, he decided to join the chase, stepping on the accelerator to catch up with the fleeing suspect. The Englishman managed to knock Wong down with the fender of his car and got out to apprehend him until the pursuing policemen arrived. A search of the suspect's pockets unearthed several Chinese newspaper cuttings relating to communist activities. An examination of his identity card revealed that he was Wong Fook Kwang – a name that did not mean anything to the police officers at the time.

Wong's name did not show up on the wanted list because the police were blissfully unaware of his identity as the commander of the MCP's assassination wing in Singapore. As author Peter Clague put it, "The police lieutenant

was like a man who shoots at a noise in the jungle hoping to kill a pigeon and discovers that he has shot a tiger".<sup>17</sup> In the meantime, the other two men who had been with Wong had already made their escape by the time the policemen returned to the coffee shop.

Wong was taken to Beach Road Police Station where Special Branch officers were waiting to question him and examine the newspaper cuttings. True to his nature, Wong remained silent<sup>18</sup> when he was interrogated by Special Branch officer, Superintendent John Fairbairn.<sup>19</sup> A police search of the house located at the address listed in Wong's identity card unearthed a cache of communist literature and documents, evidence which proved that Wong "had important communist connections and was a leader of some kind".<sup>20</sup>

On 27 June 1952, Wong was ordered to be detained under the Emer-

gency Regulations<sup>21</sup> for two years. Shortly after his arrest, Wong was visited by an elderly Chinese lady who claimed to be his mother.<sup>22</sup> She said that Wong was her only son, and appealed to the authorities for his release but to no avail. The Special Branch came down hard on anyone deemed to have communist connections.

The day after his arrest, Wong appeared ill and a doctor confirmed that he was suffering from advanced tuberculosis and had to be moved to the prison ward at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) for observation and treatment. When doctors assessed that Wong had recovered sufficiently, he was transferred back to Changi Prison on 16 October 1952 and placed in solitary confinement. Twelve weeks later, on 15 January 1953, Wong suffered a relapse and was sent back to the prison ward for treatment. His condition had deteriorated



(Top) View of Albert Street. On 11 June 1952, Wong Fook Kwang and two of his cronies were at one of the coffee shops on Albert Street when they were approached by police officers. Wong bolted from the scene but was eventually caught and taken to Beach Road Police Station for interrogation. All rights reserved. Lee Kip Lin Collection, Lee Kip Lin and National Library Board, Singapore.

(Above) Wong Fook Kwang was recaptured at his hideout in Pasir Laba on 9 July 1954, after being on the run for more than a year. Image reproduced from Singapore Standard, 11 July 1954, p. 1.

to the point that it was presumed his end was near. But somehow he survived.

During Wong's second stay in hospital, the elderly woman who had earlier claimed to be his mother visited him several times. On one of her visits, she was accompanied by a man (later found to be a member of the MCP who had taken the opportunity to survey the surroundings). The information was likely used to plan Wong's escape after MCP leaders had sanctioned it.<sup>23</sup>

On 4 March 1953, between 2 and 4 pm, the elderly woman again visited Wong at the prison ward. She also brought him a parcel of food. The parcel was thoroughly examined by a senior guard on duty before she was allowed entry. After being let through, Wong's "mother" spoke to him in hushed tones – likely informing him of the impending attempt to help him escape.

### The Brazen Escape

A severe thunderstorm raged that night. At 9.30 pm, the nurse on duty visited the 12 patients in the prison ward and noticed that Wong was in bed but awake. Shortly after, the duty police corporal switched off the lights and the nurse's assistant went round the ward to place the last dose of medication for the day on the patients' bedside tables. When the assistant reached Wong's empty bed, he assumed that Wong had gone to the bathroom, so he put the medicine on the table and moved on.

Unbeknownst to him, Wong had made a run for it earlier, barefooted and in

his hospital pyjamas. How he had pulled off this brazen prison break "without being seen by the three constables who guarded the ward" is a mystery to this day. The 1.7-metre-tall fugitive managed to escape with the help of a man named Ah Hong, who had sawn through the wire netting that covered most of the window of his cell as well as the inch-thick iron bars, bending it outwards in the process. "While the sawing was going on, Wong hid quietly in the verandah. He had managed to slip out of his bed unnoticed."<sup>24</sup>

The alarm was raised at 9.40 pm when a sentry doing his rounds discovered the sawn iron bar. Special Branch was immediately alerted and road blocks set up islandwide to recapture Wong. A bounty of \$2,000 was offered for information leading to his recapture. Sometime close to midnight, the hacksaw used to commit the mischief was discovered nearby. The four guards were suspended for being negligent in their duty and subsequently sacked.

Wong had escaped without his identity card as it was kept in a safe by Fairbairn. Since it was not possible for Wong to move around Singapore freely without one, especially with police road blocks set up in densely populated areas, Fairbairn knew that Wong would most likely seek refuge in rural suburbs where it would be easier to hide. The search for Wong, however, turned out to be a protracted affair that took more than a year.

Fairbairn's hunch was right; after Wong had successfully evaded the police dragnet, he found his way to Pasir Laba<sup>25</sup>

in Jurong, in the western part of the island. There, for more than a year, he posed as a farmer and lived in an "attap-roofed shack, surrounded by *lallang* and bushes" in a low-lying, swampy area.<sup>26</sup> During his time on the run, Wong had recovered fully from tuberculosis, dosing himself on controlled drugs smuggled into Singapore by fellow communists in Johor.

### Wong's Recapture

It was in October 1953, seven months after the brazen escape in March, that Special Branch received a tip-off from underworld sources that Wong was hiding out "in a small hut in a patch of jungle on Singapore Island, about 200 yards from an unnamed village north-west of the city".<sup>27</sup> They were also informed that Wong was protected by two armed men at all times.

It would take another nine months before Wong would be nabbed. Special Branch officers devised a meticulous plan. It initially involved gathering intelligence on the terrain and inhabitants in the area. Later, the officers discovered that there were many stray dogs in the area that were likely to bark at approaching strangers and alert Wong. It was clear that the best way to recapture Wong was to have policemen encircle the entire area surrounding the hideout.

Fairbairn also requested for Royal Air Force reconnaissance planes to fly over the area at irregular intervals to obtain aerial photographs. After carefully studying the images, Fairbairn concluded that he would need some 300 men for



the job. Fortunately, he had the support of Alan Blades, Head of Special Branch, for the massive operation.

Shortly after midnight on 9 July 1954, a police convoy travelled along Jurong Road towards Pasir Laba. Soon, the entire area was completely surrounded by police officers. At 8.40 am, they barged into Wong's shack but found that it had already been evacuated. Wong had managed to escape again!

A thorough search was made of the surroundings to flush out the fugitive. This time Wong did not get very far: he was found lying face down in the *lallang*, hoping that the tall grass would shield him, when a policeman nearly stepped on him. Wong did not put up a struggle, and was handcuffed and brought before Fairbairn. In Wong's makeshift dwelling, the police found the drugs he had been using to treat his tuberculosis as well as banned communist publications. He had apparently made a full recovery by the time he was caught.

### Postscript

At Wong's trial in November 1954, his one-time comrades, Kuan Kay Tee and Yang Ah Lee, both of whom had defected, spilled the beans on him. They revealed details of the events leading up to Siu Moh's murder, the whereabouts of Siu's remains as well as Wong's role in Lim Teck Kin's murder. Despite their testimonies against him in court, Wong was not convicted of murder due to insufficient evidence. He was sentenced to a three-month jail term for escaping from prison, in addition to another five years for possessing banned communist

literature. Even so, the punishment meted out to Wong seems light given the severity of his crime. During his trial, Wong asked to be banished to China with his mother instead of a prison sentence. It would take two years before his wish was granted on 20 June 1956.

Sometime in 1953, Wong had become engaged to Lin Hui Ying (林惠英), a fellow MCP member.<sup>28</sup> Shortly after their marriage was approved by the MCP, she was arrested for her communist work.<sup>29</sup> In 1954, Lin gave birth to their daughter in prison, and upon her release in 1955, she was deported to China. She settled in Hainan island and Wong subsequently lost contact with her.

In China, Wong married another woman. Although the union resulted in the birth of a son and daughter, it did not last and the couple were divorced in 1980. Wong then began searching for Lin.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, by the time Wong received news of her in early 2004, she had already passed away the year before on 14 February 2003 at the age of 89. Wong died three years later in a hospital in Fuqing, in the city of Fuzhou.<sup>31</sup> ♦

### Notes

- Clague, P. (1980). *Iron Spearhead: The true story of a communist killer squad in Singapore* (p. 3). Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd. (Call no.: RSING 335.43095957 CLA)
- Yang Ah Lee would later defect to the British and work for the Criminal Investigation Department. He also testified against Wong during the latter's trial for Siu Moh's murder.
- Man dies before reaching hospital. (1951, May 22). *Singapore Standard*, p. 2. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Clague, 1980, p. 25.
- Hsiao-shuang. (1980, July 12). First class thriller material. *New Nation*, p. 15. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Clague, 1980, pp. 1-2.
- 彭国强. (编). [Peng, G.Q. (Ed.)] (2005). 激情岁月 [Fervid Times] (p. 107). 香港: 香港见证出版社. (Not in NLB holdings)
- Clague, 1980, pp. 17-18.
- In those days, the communists infiltrated and subverted Chinese schools to rally the students to their cause.
- Kong Lee is the alias of Kuan Kay Tee who, like Yang Ah Lee, later defected and joined the police force as a detective corporal attached to the Special Branch of the Criminal Investigation Department. Kuan also testified against Wong at his trial for Siu Moh's murder.
- Clague, 1980, p. 52.
- Clague, 1980, p. 37.
- Clague, 1980, p. 49.
- Clague, 1980, p. 52.
- Throughout his time under police custody, Wong pretended to cooperate with the police but Special Branch officers knew that he was lying. The only crime he admitted to was his unsuccessful attempt to burn down a bus. Wong was eventually charged with the possession of communist publications.
- This is the same John Fairbairn who conducted a joint operation with his Malayan counterparts to arrest Ah Shu, a communist courier, in Singapore in 1952, and uncovered a trail that eventually resulted in the arrest of Lee Meng, the head courier of the MCP. For more information, see Tan, R. (2018, April-June). Hunting down the Malayan Mata Hari. *BiblioAsia*, 14 (1), 24-29. Retrieved from BiblioAsia website.
- Clague, 1980, p. 52.
- For more information on the Emergency Regulations, see Renick, R. (1965, September). The Emergency regulations of Malaya causes and effect. *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 6 (2), 1-39. Retrieved from JSTOR via NLB's eResources website.
- After the elderly lady was arrested shortly after Wong's escape, it was revealed that she was a communist agent. However, in an article published in 2005, Wong confirmed that the elderly woman was indeed his mother. See 彭国强, 2005, pp. 115-116.
- 彭国强, 2005, p. 115.
- Police arrest mother after red rag leader escapes. (1953, March 6). *The Straits Times*, p. 1; Daring escape of red arson expert. (1953, March 8). *Singapore Standard*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- On 14 February 1966, the area around Pasir Laba became a military training ground with the establishment of the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI).
- Peries, B. (1954, July 11). 'Iron Spearhead' posed as a farmer. *Singapore Standard*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Clague, 1980, p. 127.
- Lin Hui Ying adopted another name, Lin Fei Yan (林飞燕), after she was banished to China. See 张惠宁和潘正悦. [Zhang, H.N. & Pan, Z.Y.] (2004, January 20). 八旬老人欲寻当年“红色恋人”180岁老人希望找到他的“红 lover”. 海南日报. Retrieved from Sina website.
- According to Leon Comber, however, Ah Soo (the alias of Lim Wai Yin), who was arrested in early 1952 for communist activities, was Wong's wife. See Comber, L. (2008). *Malaya's secret police 1945-60: The role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency* (p. 229). Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies; Australia: Monash Asia Institute. (Call no. RSING 363.283095951.COM)
- 张惠宁和潘正悦, 20 Jan 2004.
- 张惠宁和潘正悦. [Zhang, H.N. & Pan, Z.Y.] (2004, February 3). 伊人已逝：此情只可成追忆 [She has passed on and the love has turned to a memory]. 海南日报. Retrieved from Sina website.

(Below) Wong Fook Kwang escaped from the prison ward of the Singapore General Hospital on 4 March 1953. He was on the run for more than a year before he was captured. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

(Right) Following Wong Fook Kwang's escape from the Singapore General Hospital prison ward, a bounty of \$2,000 was offered for his recapture. Courtesy of ISD Heritage Centre.

(Facing page top) The attap-roofed shack in Pasir Laba, Jurong, where Wong Fook Kwang was hiding out while on the run until his recapture on 9 July 1954. Image reproduced from Clague, P. (1980). *Iron Spearhead: The True Story of a Communist Killer Squad in Singapore* (p. 135). Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd. (Call no.: RSING 335.43095957 CLA)





# BRIDGING HISTORY



The bridges erected over the Singapore River during the colonial period are more than mere structures providing safe passageway across this historic body of water. They were hailed as marvels of engineering – given the technology and building materials available at the time. More importantly, by promising conveyance to an endless stream of human life and cargo, these bridges also came to symbolise the life-blood of transportation, commerce and social interaction in pre-independent Singapore.

Despite such lofty associations, many of these colonial bridges started out as humble wooden structures. One of the earliest that spanned the Singapore River dates back to 1823. This rickety bridge made of wood was known as Presentment Bridge, and

stood at the site where Elgin Bridge is found today.<sup>1</sup>

Stronger materials such as iron, steel and reinforced concrete, as well as more sophisticated structural bridge designs like the steel truss arch, the tied-arch and the truss girder, were not adopted until after the second half of the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> The introduction of new materials, designs and technology to Singapore was the legacy of the colonial government, who called upon foreign architects, civil engineers and builders to lend their expertise to bridge building projects on the island.

From the final decades of the 19th century until the 1950s, Singapore would witness the construction of modern iron bridges, such as the first Elgin Bridge, Ord Bridge, Read Bridge, Cavenagh Bridge and the third Coleman

Bridge, as well as stronger steel or reinforced concrete bridges like Anderson Bridge, the second Elgin Bridge and the second Read Bridge.

## ① Anderson Bridge

Anderson Bridge, which connects Empress Place to Collyer Quay, is named after John Anderson, Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States (1904–11). In 1901, a proposal was made to replace Cavenagh Bridge – which had been used since 1869 – with Anderson Bridge.

Cavenagh Bridge could no longer support the growing vehicular and pedestrian traffic that came with the rapid development of Singapore because its low height allowance prevented vessels from passing unencumbered beneath at high tide. After Anderson Bridge was

**Lim Tin Seng** traces the history of nine iconic bridges spanning the Singapore River that have ties to the colonial period.



built in 1910, Cavenagh Bridge was, fortunately, spared the wrecking ball and turned into a pedestrian bridge.

Anderson Bridge was designed by Municipal Engineer Robert Peirce and his assistant D.M. Martin. With a length of about 230 ft (70 m), the bridge has an elaborate steel truss structure comprising three steel arches spanning the length of its deck framed by a towering column at each end. Each column bears a plaque made of red granite imported from Egypt. The bridge also has two pedestrian footpaths, one on each side, and rusticated archways flanking each footpath, making a total of four archways.

The bridge was constructed by Howarth Erskine Ltd and the abutments by the Westminster Construction Company Ltd. The steelwork was fabricated in



(Above) This illustration shows the locations of nine bridges along the Singapore River. Anderson Bridge is sited nearest the mouth of the river, while Kim Seng Bridge is the furthest.

A c.1910 photograph showing Anderson Bridge and the clock tower of Victoria Memorial Hall on the left. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.



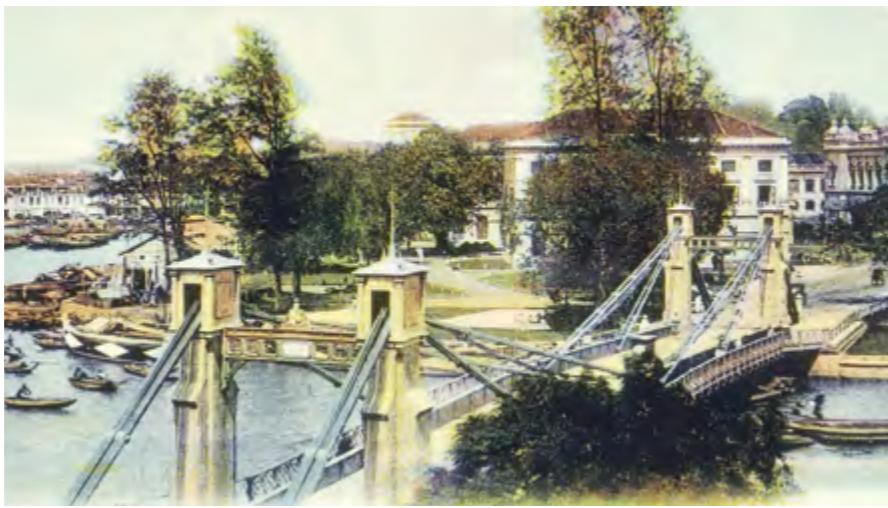
Britain, while other components such as the railings, castings, rainwater channels, gully frames and covers were produced locally at the municipal workshops on River Valley Road.

In 1987, the bridge was refurbished as part of the Singapore River masterplan and subsequently earmarked for conservation by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) in 2008. Today, the bridge is used by both vehicles and pedestrians. Every year since 2008, the bridge is bathed by the glare of floodlights after darkness falls as one of the landmarks in the serpentine Formula One Singapore Grand Prix.

### ② Cavenagh Bridge

Cavenagh Bridge is named after William Orfeur Cavenagh, the last Governor of the Straits Settlements under British India control (1859–67). Completed in 1869, it is the oldest bridge in Singapore that still exists in its original form.<sup>3</sup> The bridge was designed by George Chanceller Collyer, Chief Engineer of the Straits Settlements, and Rowland Mason Ordish, a civil engineer based in London.

Ordish was responsible for the design of several notable projects in London, including Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace (1851) and the dome-shaped roof of Albert Hall (1871). He was also a prolific bridge builder, having designed the Franz-Josef Bridge in Prague (1868) and the Albert Bridge in London (1873). In 1858, Ordish patented a bridge construction method called Ordish's straight-chain suspension bridge, which comprised a rigid girder suspended by inclined straight chains instead of hanging chains. This



(Above) A 1900s postcard of Cavenagh Bridge, with a view of the government quarter. Completed in 1869, it is the oldest bridge in Singapore that still exists in its original form today. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

cutting-edge technology was adopted for Cavenagh Bridge, giving the bridge the design we see today.<sup>4</sup>

The bridge was constructed using iron to ensure that it could withstand the high tensile forces of the cables. The iron components were fabricated in Glasgow, Scotland, by P & W MacLellan, the same firm that made the cast iron for Telok Ayer Market. The components were later shipped to Singapore and assembled by Indian convict labour.

Although Cavenagh Bridge was built too low for vessels to pass beneath it during high tide, it served the local populace and business community well. In fact, it was used by both vehicles and people who traversed between

the business district of Commercial Square (today's Raffles Place) at the south bank of Singapore River and the administrative district in the north. By the time Anderson Bridge was opened in 1910, Cavenagh Bridge had served its purpose and was converted into a pedestrians-only footbridge.

Around 30 years ago, Cavenagh Bridge underwent a five-month refurbishment at a cost \$1.2 million to preserve and strengthen its structure. It reopened on 3 July 1987.

### ③ Elgin Bridge

As mentioned earlier, Presentment Bridge was one of the first bridges erected by the colonial government over the Singapore

River. Built in 1823 by Philip Jackson, the Assistant Engineer and Surveyor of Public Lands, to link the northern and southern banks of the river, the wooden bridge sat on timber piles. It was 240 ft (73 m) long and 18 ft (5.5 m) wide, and had an arch in the middle that could be drawn to allow vessels to pass beneath.<sup>5</sup>

After numerous repairs undertaken between 1827 and 1842, Presentment Bridge was demolished and replaced by another wooden bridge in 1844 called Thomson Bridge. It was named after its architect John Turnbull Thomson, who was then Government Surveyor of the Straits Settlements. Like its predecessor, the bridge also underwent several rounds of repairs before it was dismantled and replaced with Elgin Bridge in 1862.

The bridge that we see today is, in fact, not the first but the second Elgin Bridge. It is named after the 8th Earl of Elgin, Lord James Bruce, also the Governor General of India (1862–63), and connects North Bridge Road with South Bridge Road. The first Elgin Bridge was built in 1862 by engineer George Lyon to replace the aforementioned Thomson Bridge.

When completed, the first Elgin Bridge, like the bridges before it, served as an important transportation conduit between the north and south banks of the Singapore River. In 1886, the bridge was widened and strengthened to accommodate growing traffic as well as a tramway line. By the 1920s, traffic using the bridge had become so heavy that a decision was made in 1925 to replace it with an even wider one that could accommodate two 25-ft (7.5 m) carriageways and a "five-foot way" (as pavements or walkways were referred to in the colonial period) on each side.

The new structure, which would become the Elgin Bridge we see today, was completed in 1929. It was designed by Municipal Bridge Engineer T.C. Hood and features three elegant arches supported by slender hanging columns. The concrete-encased steel framework was fabricated in Glasgow and assembled locally. On both ends of the bridge are cast-iron lamp posts and roundels of the Singapura lion designed by Italian sculptor Cavalieri Rodolfo Nolli. These embellishments were salvaged from the first Elgin Bridge.

In 1989, Elgin Bridge was repaired and strengthened as part of the masterplan to liven up the Singapore



(Top) A view of Presentment Bridge in the 1830s. Built in 1823, this was one of the earliest bridges that spanned the Singapore River. It was replaced in 1844 with Thomson Bridge. In the background is Government Hill (present-day Fort Canning Hill). Courtesy of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

(Middle) View of North Boat Quay with the first Elgin Bridge across the Singapore River, c. 1910. Docked on the river are twakow or tongkang (bumboats) that used to transport goods. The clock tower of Victoria Memorial Hall stands in the left background. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

(Above) The second and current Elgin Bridge, 2016. The bridge stands on the site of one of the first bridges built across the Singapore River called Presentment Bridge. Elgin Bridge is named after the 8th Earl of Elgin, Lord James Bruce, also the Governor-General of India (1862–63). Courtesy of National Heritage Board.

River. Two pedestrian underpasses were added in 1992. On 3 December 2009, the bridge was given conservation status by the URA.

#### ④ Coleman Bridge

Coleman Bridge, which links Hill Street and New Bridge Road, was named after its brainchild, George D. Coleman, Singapore's first Government Superintendent of Public Works (1833–44). History, however, records four Coleman bridges in all.

The first was conceived as early as 1833 as an iron suspension bridge to provide a second passageway – in addition to Presentment Bridge – across the Singapore River. But when the bridge was erected in 1840, the builders again used wood instead of iron. The 20-ft-wide (6 m) bridge was made of wood harvested from the *damar laut* tree, a material considered to be “of the very best description of timber”.<sup>6</sup>

Although this first Coleman Bridge was deemed a “perfect [work] of a permanent and substantial order”, it soon succumbed to wear and tear.<sup>7</sup> In 1864, it was torn down and replaced with the second Coleman Bridge. Completed in 1865, the second bridge was designed to be “stronger and more serviceable” than the first.

However, once again, due to budget constraints, a wooden rather than steel structure was erected, much to the chagrin of the public.<sup>8</sup> The bridge was also poorly constructed, and on the eve of its opening, it was reported that several parts of the bridge were already “improperly fastened” and its piles “eaten by sea worms”.<sup>9</sup> The bridge was closed in 1883 and replaced three years later in 1886 by the third Coleman Bridge.

To rectify the shortcomings of its predecessors, the third reincarnation of the bridge was constructed using iron. The entire length of the deck was held up by a continuous girder with a curved lower flange that spanned 76 ft (23 m) at the centre and 38 ft (11.5 m) at both ends. It featured a pedestrian walkway on each side as well as three lanes to accommodate the ever increasing traffic between the northern and southern parts of town. The bridge was adorned with ornamental cast-iron lamp posts and intricate iron balustrades bearing Victorian motifs.

The bridge was built to last, and so it did for a full 100 years before it

(Below) View of Coleman Bridge leading to New Bridge Road, c. 1950. This is the third Coleman Bridge – named after the city's first Superintendent of Public Works George D. Coleman – before it was replaced by the fourth (and current) bridge in 1990. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

(Bottom) The first Read Bridge was completed in 1889. It had two spans supported by a concrete pier in the middle, as seen in this 1904 photograph. Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

(Facing page) The second and current Read Bridge, 2016. It replaced the first Read Bridge in 1931, which in turn had replaced Merchant Bridge, or Tan Tock Seng Bridge, in 1889. Read Bridge is named after the Scottish merchant and public figure, William Henry Macleod Read. Courtesy of National Heritage Board.



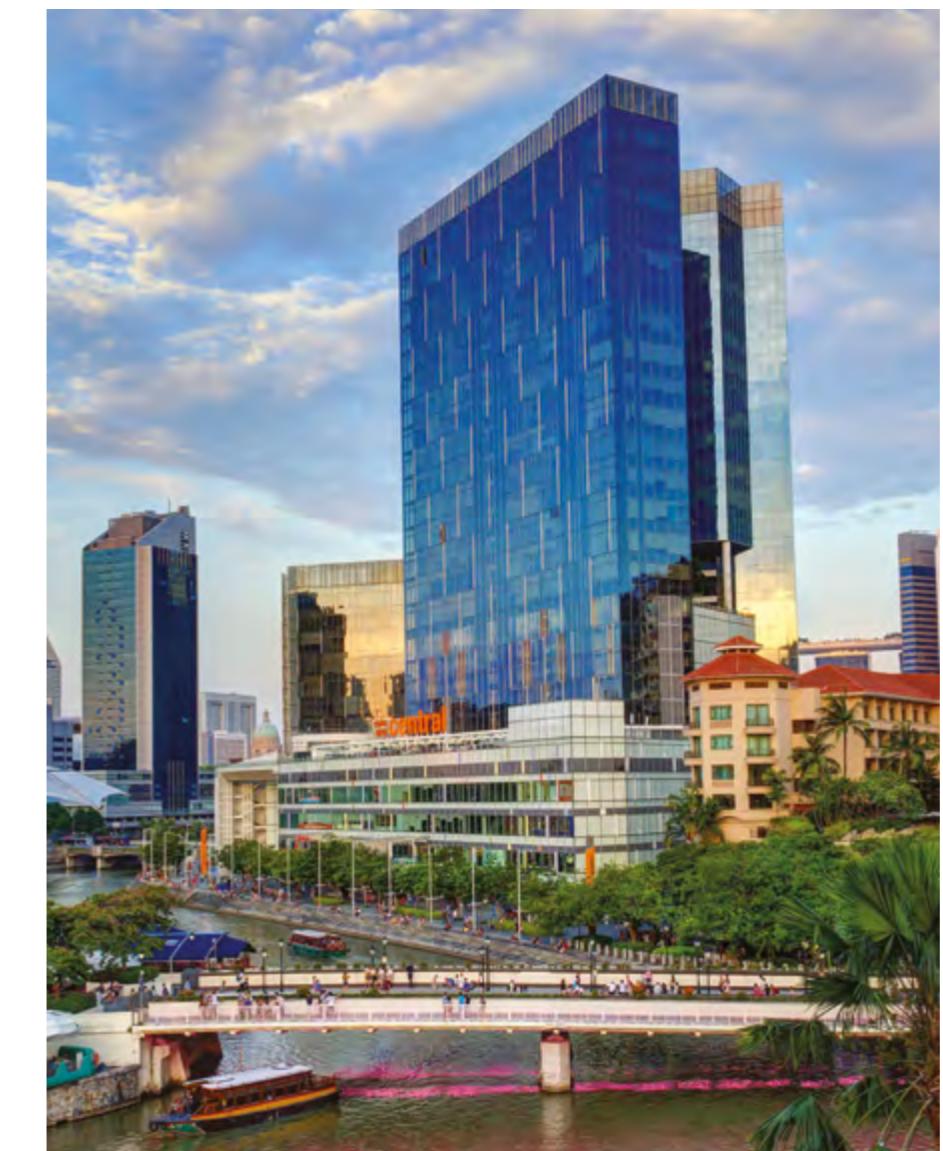
was replaced by the fourth and current Coleman Bridge. Constructed in phases between 1986 and 1990 as part of the New Bridge Road Widening Scheme, the new twin-bridge hosts a four-lane carriageway on each of its decks as well as pavements and underpasses for pedestrians. To preserve the history and heritage of the bridge, elements from the third Coleman Bridge, including the arched support, cast-iron lamp posts and iron balustrades, were retained.

#### ⑤ Read Bridge

Read Bridge was built to link Clarke Quay and Hong Lim Quay, and the one standing today is not the original but the second Read Bridge. Before the first Read Bridge was constructed in 1889, Merchant Bridge occupied the same location – named after the merchant warehouses that once lined both ends of the bridge. The wooden structure,

which was completed in 1869, was also referred to as Tan Tock Seng Bridge, after the prominent Chinese merchant and philanthropist, Tan Tock Seng, who owned several shophouses nearby. In 1886, the municipality decided to replace Merchant Bridge with the first Read Bridge after the former was found to be “in a shaky condition”.<sup>10</sup>

The first Read Bridge was an iron girder bridge, with two 77-ft (23 m) spans and a concrete pier in the middle to support the structure. Construction of the bridge began in 1887, and its first cylinder was laid by William Henry Macleod Read, the Scottish merchant and public figure after whom the bridge was named. Although the bridge served the mercantile community well, it turned out to be too low for heavily laden twakow (lighter boats) to pass under during high tide, and had to be replaced eventually.



Completed in 1931, the second Read Bridge was a steel box girder bridge designed by Municipal Engineer K.G.M. Fraser. It was a utilitarian structure simply adorned with only four ornamental street lamps.<sup>11</sup> The initial design, however, by Municipal Bridge Engineer T.C. Hood, was envisaged as a tied-arch structure with a towering 120-ft-high (36.5 m) arch similar to that of the current Elgin Bridge. But due to insufficient funds, this design was abandoned.

The steelwork of the second Read Bridge was manufactured by the British firm Motherwell Bridge and Engineering, but as the material became exposed to the harsh tropical climate, it began to corrode not long after its completion. By the end of the decade, the bridge was reported to have suffered “exceptionally heavy corrosion, despite being designed with particular care”.<sup>12</sup> In 1991, the bridge underwent major repairs as part of the Singapore River clean-up and was converted into a pedestrian bridge.

In the early days, Read Bridge was variously known as Malacca Bridge as it was located close to Kampong Melaka, and also Green Bridge due to the colour of its original paintwork. At the time, the area around the bridge was also a hub for the Teochew community, with Teochew labourers gathering on the bridge after work in the evenings to listen to traditional storytellers. In 2008, the bridge was conserved by the URA.

#### ⑥ Ord Bridge

Ord Bridge – which links Clarke Quay and River Valley Road – was constructed in 1886 and named after Harry St George Ord, the first Governor of the Straits Settlements (1867–73). It replaced a footbridge known as Ordnance Bridge, which was built in 1865. The latter was so named because an arsenal and commissariat store was located nearby. Ordnance Bridge was also called ABC Bridge, after ABC Road, which later became Ord Road (now expunged).

Structurally, Ord Bridge is an iron bridge with distinctive X-shape girders. The 135-ft-long (41 m) and 24-ft-wide (7 m) bridge has a structure that resembles standard-gauge railway bridges as it was modelled after similar bridges in India. However, about a month after the bridge was opened, it suffered a mishap, with the weight of the structure causing the northern abutment to slip. This problem was later traced to the way in which the piers had been laid during



Ord Bridge near Riverside Point at Clarke Quay, 2010. The bridge is named after Harry St. George Ord, the first Governor of the Straits Settlements (1867–73). It replaced a footbridge known as Ordnance Bridge, which was built in 1865. Courtesy of William Cho via flickr.

construction; they were found standing on "tiptoe" on a sloping bedrock rather than embedded firmly into solid foundation.<sup>13</sup>

Ord Bridge was also known as Toddy Bridge because of the many toddy (palm liquor) shops operating in the area. The bridge has since come under URA's conservation programme.

### ⑦ Clemenceau Bridge

This bridge that spans the Singapore River today is the second Clemenceau Bridge at this site. It is named after Georges Benjamin Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister (1906–09 and 1917–20) who visited Singapore in 1920.

The first Clemenceau Bridge was built in 1940 by Fogden, Brisbane and Company Ltd. The original structure was 330 ft (100 m) long and 60 ft (18 m) wide, with a height clearance of 7 ft (2 m) for vessels to pass beneath during high tide. This bridge was designed by Municipal Bridge Engineer T.C. Hood. Although it was a simple looking structure, it is remembered as the first bridge in Singapore that used web girders. The entire bridge was constructed using reinforced concrete to improve its resistance against corrosion, a problem that had plagued most

of the bridges along the Singapore River at the time. The bridge was built as part of a road scheme that stretched from Clemenceau Avenue to Keppel Road, and replaced the Havelock stretch of Pulau Saigon Bridge. The latter was referred to in the early maps of Singapore town as Bridge No. 1.

The first Clemenceau Bridge stood for nearly 50 years before it was demolished in 1989 to make way for the Central Expressway (CTE). A new replacement bridge with the same name was then built in 1991. Today, the bridge, which has eight lanes instead of the previous four, connects the CTE's Chin Swee Tunnel with Clemenceau Avenue.

### ⑧ Pulau Saigon Bridge

Pulau Saigon Bridge is named after a small island that once sat in the middle of the Singapore River between Clarke Quay and Roberston Quay, facing Magazine Road. Initially a mangrove marsh, the island was later home to a village called Kampong Saigon. After the island was enlarged in 1884, merchants began to use the island to store goods from Indochina. By the early 1900s, the island had become a rather busy place filled with warehouses and sago mills. There was reportedly even a municipal waste

incinerator as well as a railway depot on the island.

In post-1890s maps of Singapore, Pulau Saigon Bridge is shown to be made up of two bridges, Bridge No. 1 and Bridge No. 2. Both bridges were built during the 1890s: the first linked Pulau Saigon to the northern bank of the Singapore River, leading to roads such as River Valley Road and Merbau Road, while the second bridge, on the other side of Pulau Saigon, linked the island to roads at the southern bank, such as Havelock Road and Magazine Road.

When the first Clemenceau Bridge was constructed in 1940, Bridge No. 1 was demolished. Bridge No. 2, which had a single arch similar to that of Anderson Bridge and Elgin Bridge, would remain

standing until Pulau Saigon was reclaimed to join the mainland in the 1980s. The 141-ft-long (43 m) Pulau Saigon Bridge we see today was built in 1997. The five-lane bridge, which links Saiboo Street and Havelock Road, has a granite-finished pedestrian pavement on each side as well as a 197-ft-long (60 m) pedestrian underpass.

### ⑨ Kim Seng Bridge

Kim Seng Bridge is located at the stretch of the Singapore River just before it



(Top) Pulau Saigon Bridge was originally made up of two bridges, known as Bridge No. 1 and Bridge No. 2. Built during the 1890s, the first bridge was replaced by Clemenceau Bridge in 1940, while the second was dismantled in the late 1980s to make way for the Central Expressway. This 1985 photograph shows Bridge No. 2. Ronni Pinsler Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

(Above) A view of the second Clemenceau Bridge, 2015. It was completed in 1991 and connects the Central Expressway's Chin Swee Tunnel with Clemenceau Avenue. Courtesy of Remember Singapore blog.

emerges from a small canal.<sup>14</sup> It is named after Tan Kim Seng, a prominent merchant and philanthropist who donated 13,000 Straits dollars to the colonial government in 1857 for the construction of Singapore's first reservoir and waterworks.

Predating the present bridge are two earlier constructions. The first was reportedly built in 1862 before it was replaced by the second bridge in 1890. The second bridge was depicted in early maps of Singapore as being part of Kim Seng Road, which runs from River Valley Road at the northern side of the Singapore River to Havelock Road in the south.

In 1953, the City Council decided to replace the second Kim Seng Bridge with the present bridge. A new bridge was needed to relieve traffic congestion as well

as eliminate a dangerous horseshoe bend at the southern end of the bridge that had been the scene of many fatal accidents.

The new bridge was completed in 1955 and, at 85 ft (26 m) long and 66 ft (20 m) wide, it is twice the size of its predecessor. The bridge was built by Ewart and Company, which used pre-stressed concrete, a new building material, as well as special high tensile steel from Britain, thus allowing the bridge to hold a load of up to 2,700 pounds per sq ft (13,183 kg per sq m). ♦

### Notes

- 1 Cheong, C. (1992). *Framework and foundation: A history of the Public Works Department* (p. 50). Singapore: Times Editions. (Call no.: RSING 354.5957008609 CHE)
- 2 Tan, I. (2012). *Bridges to our heritage: The significance of five historic bridges over Singapore River* (pp. 50–52). Retrieved from University of Edinburgh website.
- 3 Cheong, 1992, p. 55.
- 4 Curl, J.S. (2016). *The Oxford dictionary of architecture* (p. 539). United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. (Call no.: R 720.3 CUR)
- 5 Lee, K.L. (n.d.). *EIC Letters*, 1, pp. 11, 17, 20, 41. (Call no.: RDLKL 959.5703 EIC)
- 6 Lee, n.d., 1, pp. 116, 123; Lee, K.L. (n.d.). *EIC Letters*, 2, pp. 183, 214, 230, 246, 291. (Call no.: RDLKL 959.5703 EIC)
- 7 Coleman St. Bridge. (1864, February 13). *The Straits Times*, p. 28. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 8 The Singapore Free Press: Coleman Bridge. (1865, March 23). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 2. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 9 Municipal Council: Coleman Bridge. (1865, February 25). *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 10 Town bridges: Merchant Bridge. (1886, July 1). *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 11 Cheong, 1992, p. 55; Tan, 2012, pp. 67–70.
- 12 Singapore River small corrodies bridge. (1939, April 17). *The Straits Times*, p. 13. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 13 Ord Bridge. (1886, September 2). *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, p. 14. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 14 De Silva, L., & Chandras. (1985, September 30). Singapore River preserved. *The Straits Times*, p. 12. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

### References

- Barry, J. (2000). *Pulau Saigon: A post-eighteenth century archaeological assemblage recovered from a former island in the Singapore River* (pp. 11–13). Stamford: Rheidol Press. (Call no.: RSING 959.57 BAR-[HIS])
- Bridges to the past along the Singapore River. (1986, October 5). *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Buckley, C.B. (1984). *An anecdotal history of old times in Singapore* (Vol. 2, pp. 690, 783). Singapore: Oxford University Press. (Call no.: RSING 959.57 BUC-[HIS])
- Goh, C.B. (2013). *Technology and entrepôt colonialism in Singapore, 1819–1940* (p. 112). Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. (Call no.: RSING 338.064095957 GOH)
- Hancock, T.H.H. (1986). *Coleman's Singapore* (pp. 1–2, 66, 87). Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications. (Call no.: RSING 720.924 COL-H)
- National Archives of Singapore. (1913). *Map of Singapore showing the principal residences and places of interest [Survey map]*. Retrieved from National Archives of Singapore website.
- Ng, M.F.C. (2016). *Singapore River walk* (pp. 47–56). Singapore: National Heritage Board. (Call no.: RSING 915.95704 NG-[TRA])
- Samuel, D.S. (1991). *Singapore's heritage: Through places of historical interest* (p. 86). Singapore: Elixir Consultancy Service. (Call no.: RSING 959.57 SAM-[HIS])
- Savage, V.R., & Yeoh, B.S.A. (2013). *Singapore street names: A study of toponymics* (pp. 88–89, 317, 322–324). Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions. (Call no.: RSING 915.9570014 SAV-[TRA])
- Singapore Municipality. (1930). *Administration report of the Singapore municipality for the year 1929* (p. F-2). Singapore: Fraser & Neave, Limited. (Microfilm no.: NL3414)
- Singapore River preserved. (1985, September 30). *The Straits Times*, p. 12. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- Survey Department, Federated Malay States and Straits Settlements. (1893).
- Tan, I. (2012). *Bridges to our heritage: The significance of five historic bridges over Singapore River* (pp. 50–52, 67–70). Retrieved from University of Edinburgh website.
- Plan of Singapore Town Showing Topographical Detail and Municipal Numbers [Survey map]. Retrieved from National Archives of Singapore website.
- Tyers, R.K. (1993). *Ray Tyers' Singapore: Then & now* (pp. 7, 11–12, 26–27, 95). Singapore: Landmark Books. (Call no.: RSING 959.57 TYE-[HIS])
- Wan, M.H., & Lau, J. (2009). *Heritage places of Singapore* (pp. 9–15). Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions. (Call no.: RSING 959.57 WAN-[HIS])



# SINGAPORE STOPOVER

## THE ENTERTAINMENT CIRCUIT 1920–1940

The city was a major pit stop for visiting entertainers and sportsmen in the early 20th century, according to the writer **Paul French**.



Most people are familiar with the idea of Singapore as a major transportation and shipping hub. There is no lack of historical documents that point to its role as an entrepôt that facilitated trade between the East and West for centuries past.

Less familiar, perhaps, is the notion of Singapore as a key nexus in the regional and global entertainment

circuit, not only for the performing arts – dance, theatre and variety shows – but also for popular commercial sports such as boxing.

The island-city's role as the one-time regional centre of the thriving entertainment industry can be attributed to two factors: first, its position as a multicultural centre with a sizeable European

population homesick for Western-style entertainment and sport (and which also enjoyed patronage by some local residents); and second, its geographic location which made it the ideal stopover for entertainers and sportsmen travelling from Europe and heading to China, Australia, Japan and other points east of Singapore, and, in the case of boxers, Australians especially who stopped here en route to bigger and more profitable matches in Europe.

Until now, the role of Singapore as a hub for regional entertainment

**Paul French** was born in London, educated there and in Glasgow, and lived and worked in Shanghai for many years. His book *Midnight in Peking* was a *New York Times* bestseller. His most recent book *City of Devils: A Shanghai Noir* has received much praise from *The Economist*. Both books are currently being developed for television.

and sports has not been formally documented by the academic community. Rather, these threads have begun to emerge from the work of academics who write for popular audiences. Many of these writers uncovered this phenomenon in the course of their research.

One such example is Andrew David Field's *Shanghai's Dancing World: Cabaret Culture and Urban Politics 1919–1954* (2010), which traces the rise and fall of the dance industry in Shanghai as well as the movement of artistes between this city and Singapore. Another interesting subject is that of fashion trends in Lee Chor Lin and Chung May Kheun's *In the Mood for Cheongsam: A Social History, 1920s to the Present*, which documents the movement and adaptation of the elegant form-fitting Chinese dress throughout Asia, including Singapore.<sup>1</sup>

Ferreting through the collections of Singapore's National Library on the subject of early 20th-century Chinese treaty port history whilst researching my books *Midnight in Peking* and *City of Devils: A Shanghai Noir*,<sup>2</sup> I was alerted to a series of intriguing leads relating to European and Australian entertainment troupes who toured the region during this period. Along with these accounts were stories of boxers from China, Thailand, the Philippines and Australia, and also further afield from London and Cairo, who made a stop in Singapore to entertain the public and earn some income at the same time.

Recent work by Singaporean writers and historians, notably Adeline Foo, on the dancehalls of Singapore's famous (and now defunct) trio of "World" amusement parks – Happy World in Geylang, Great World along Kim Seng Road and the New World at Jalan Besar – has uncovered additional details on the links between several Chinese cities, Shanghai particularly, and the nightlife and cabaret scene in Singapore in the 1930s and 40s.<sup>3</sup>

Singapore's role as a nexus of the entertainment and sports industry between 1920 and 1940 sheds light not only on the myriad forms of entertainment and sports that its residents were exposed to but also important aspects of the sociocultural changes that took place here during this period.

Here are three examples I came across during the course of my research at the National Library. These accounts – mainly gleaned from its newspaper

archives NewspaperSG – place Singapore at the heart of the regional and global networks of the entertainment and sports industries in the early 20th century. There are plenty more of such gems, I suspect, buried in the library's collections and archives just waiting to be discovered.

### The Globe Trotters Come to Town

On 5 February 1923, Singapore's Victoria Theatre played host to the glamorous Globe Trotters, a performance troupe comprising English and Australian artistes. The Globe Trotters was described in *The Straits Times* as "The Most Up-to-Date Musical Company Touring the East".<sup>4</sup> The troupe was in Singapore for a week, performing nightly at 9.30 pm and received rave reviews from the local press. Among the cast was a young Australian woman named Florence Broadhurst, who performed under the stage name "Miss Bobby".

After her Singapore engagement, Broadhurst continued to tour Asia with The Globe Trotters for several years, with appearances across Malaya, India and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) as well as Hong Kong, Manila and various Chinese and Japanese cities, among other places.

Three years later, in 1926, The Globe Trotters were scheduled to appear in Shanghai, at its Town Hall in the International Settlement<sup>5</sup> district. Even before the curtains were raised, the gutsy Broadhurst decided to leave the troupe there and then. After spending some time earning a living by dancing in the city's famous cabarets, she started her own school – The Florence Broadhurst Academy and Incorporated School of Arts.

The private school initially offered classes in violin, pianoforte, voice production and the banjolele, a cross between the ukulele and the banjo,



(Facing page) Farren's Follies performing in Shanghai, 1934. The revue was formed by husband and wife, Joe and Nellie Farren. Courtesy of Vera Loewer.



(Above) In the 1930s, Singapore was known as the mecca of boxing in Asia, with most of the bouts taking place at the Happy World amusement park in Geylang. Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

(Left) Florence Broadhurst, who performed under the stage name "Miss Bobby", was among the cast of The Globe Trotters troupe that staged shows in Singapore in February 1923. She established The Florence Broadhurst Academy and Incorporated School of Arts in Shanghai in 1926, offering classes in violin, pianoforte, voice production, banjolele, dance and even journalism. Courtesy of The Powerhouse, Sydney.



(Above) Shanghai's iconic Bund area before World War II. In its heyday between the 1930s and 40s, Shanghai was a cosmopolitan city, thanks to the presence of many foreign settlements. The city earned itself the sobriquet "Paris of the East" and attracted entertainers from all over the Western world. *Kennie Ting Collection.*

(Right) The Globe Trotters was advertised as "The Most Up-to-Date Musical Company Touring the East". The troupe performed at the Victoria Theatre in Singapore in February 1923. *Image reproduced from The Straits Times, 3 February 1923, p. 7.*

which Broadhurst had learnt to play while on tour with The Globe Trotters. Soon, the school began offering lessons in modern ballroom dancing, classical dancing, musical culture and even journalism. Broadhurst lived and ran her academy in Shanghai for a year until the bloody riots of spring 1927 erupted, sparked by the violent suppression of communists by Kuomintang forces led by General Chiang Kai-shek.

Broadhurst decided the city was getting far too dangerous for her liking and in the summer of 1927 moved again, this time to London. She would become a famous couturier in pre-war London and then, after returning to her native Australia in 1948, an accomplished water colourist, wallpaper designer and interior decorator. She founded a successful company called Florence Broadhurst Wallpapers, and her signature handcrafted brand of wallpapers was bought over by another Australian after her death in 1977.

In researching the early life of Florence Broadhurst in Shanghai, I wondered about the circumstances that brought her to this Chinese city in 1926. And this in turn led me to discover her role in The Globe Trotters and her time in Singapore.

Broadhurst originally hailed from Mungy Station, near Mount Perry in rural Queensland. She launched her show business career in 1915 when

**VICTORIA THEATRE**

Commencing  
**MONDAY NEXT, FEBRUARY 5**  
at 9.30 p.m.  
**FOR ONE WEEK ONLY**

DICK NORTON PRESENTS  
**THE GLOBE TROTTERS**

The most up-to-date Musical Company  
Touring the East.  
including

DICK NORTON,  
LEILLA FORBES,  
J. WALLINGFORD TATE,  
FLORENCE BROADHURST,  
CHARLES HOLT,  
BETTY NORTON,  
RALPH SAWYER, Etc.

Booking now open at MOUTRIES.  
Prices \$4, \$3 \$2 and \$1,

she was just 16 after winning a singing competition. The prize was a chance to sing "Abide with Me" with the legendary Australian soprano Dame Nellie Melba, whose concerts raised substantial sums of money for the Australian war effort during World War I.

Broadhurst subsequently appeared at wartime fundraisers across Australia with an entertainment troupe called the Smart Set Diggers, where she was reportedly a popular contralto. After the war, the troupe broke up and re-formed into several new troupes, including The Globe Trotters, which was managed by Australian theatre impresario and comedian Richard (Dick) Norton. He invited Broadhurst to join his troupe and in 1922 they embarked on a tour of Asia.

The first Australian entertainment troupes actually started touring Asia before World War I. Norton had successfully toured the vaudeville circuit in the Far East with the Bandmann Opera Company (more a theatrical company than strictly opera), which was made up of Australian acts but based at the Empire Theatre in Calcutta, India. Norton had returned home to lend his skills to the war effort but after the war, he realised that there was money to be made in taking variety and entertainment shows to the European colonies in Asia. And thus, The Globe Trotters and others of its kind were born.

Singapore was a major stop for visiting theatrical and entertainment troupes from Australia during the period between the two world wars. After Singapore, The Globe Trotters went on to perform

in several towns across the border in Malaya, including Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown in Penang, Siam (Thailand) and India (specifically Calcutta and Bombay). The Globe Trotters continued their tour into 1924 with appearances in Hong Kong, Japan and various Chinese cities, including Tientsin (Tianjin), Peking (Beijing) and Shanghai.

Interestingly, while the reviews of The Globe Trotters in Singapore were generally favourable – with *The Straits Times* proclaiming Broadhurst's singing as "delightful", fellow cast member Leilla Forbes' return to vaudeville as "heralded with success" and praising the troupe as giving yet "another very excellent show" – their performances did not sell out every night.<sup>7</sup> The simple reason was that the post-World War I entertainment scene in Singapore and in other major cities in Asia was already saturated with touring companies from Europe, America and Australia.

These foreign troupes were competing with shows put on by newly formed touring companies based in Asian cities such as Shanghai; such troupes comprised largely of émigré Russians who had settled in China after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. As these troupes crossed paths in cities like Singapore, entertainers often met in between shows, with many leaving one troupe to join another. This appears to have been the case with our next case study – Joe and Nellie Farren.

In January 1928, Joe Farren began organising his own revues in Singapore with a touring American bandleader named Ralph Stone, who later, back in the United States, would include the

(Right) Nellie Farren on stage in Shanghai, c.1933. Courtesy of Peter Hibbard.

(Below) An advertisement for The Midnight Frolics starring Joe and Nellie Farren. The troupe performed at the Adelphi Hotel in Singapore in January and February 1928. *Image reproduced from The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser, 2 February 1928, p. 1.*

song "A Little Street in Singapore" in his repertoire. The venue was once again the Victoria Theatre, where their names appeared in a newspaper advertisement as a "Company of Well-known Continental Revue Artists", billing each of their two-night shows as "Nights of Gladness" and "Dancing Mad" respectively.<sup>9</sup>

The troupe also staged cabaret shows at the Adelphi Hotel<sup>10</sup> – which



**ADELPHI HOTEL**

**THE BIG CABARET**

**The Midnight Frolics**

In an entire change of programme.

Nightly at 9.30 p.m.

Joe Farren	Nellie Farren
Ralph Stone	Vera Keltsova
Adolfo Bellotti	Miss Valentine
Waldemar Volsky	Jenny Duby

Cabaret Dinner and Dance \$3.50.

Admission to non-Diners \$2.00.

Early Booking Advisable. Table Reservation Limited.

Telephone: 937, 938. Telegrams: Adelphi. HARRY H. WILLIES, Managing Director.

used to stand on the corner of Coleman Street and North Bridge Road – in January and February 1928, this time calling themselves The Midnight Frolics. At the Adelphi they offered a nightly "Cabaret Dinner and Dance" for \$3.50.<sup>11</sup>

Old newspaper advertisements also provide clues to the evolving nature of entertainment troupes visiting Singapore. Members came and went, some of the troupes took on new names and at various points were joined by other European artistes as well as Russian émigrés and American musicians. To attract new audiences, the troupes frequently added other popular forms of entertainment to their repertoire, such as cabaret shows and tea dances.

In 1929, Joe and Nellie Farren moved to Shanghai, first as exhibition dancers at some of the best hotels in the International Settlement, and then, as part of their own revue. That revue was named Farren's Follies, with both husband and wife headlining the show. In 1933, Joe returned to Singapore and the Asian entertainment circuit as an impresario with his own troupe comprising mostly Russian émigré dancers recruited in Shanghai.

The National Library's newspaper archives also reveal other, less salubrious, stories that shed light on the lives of these entertainers. In July 1928, at the end of the Midnight Frolics' tour of Singapore, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* reported a case brought before the Civil District Court by one Mrs Alexandra Coublitsky (trading as a milliner under the name Madame Galardi) against Mr Syed Mohamed Alsagoff for \$238, being the cost of a white georgette frock, a mauve night-dress and a marocain coat.<sup>12</sup>

The garments had been supplied to a Miss Nellie Farren, "dancer", on Mr Alsagoff's account. Alsagoff, however, claimed that he had not given Miss Farren permission to charge her expenses to his account. The hearing was eventually adjourned with no decision taken. Nellie Farren, as we know, was the Russian dancer with the Midnight Frolics; Mrs Coublitsky, one can assume from her name, was possibly an émigré Russian settled in Singapore and running her own business; while Alsagoff was a member of a wealthy and politically influential Arab trading and property-owning family of Hadhrami ancestry.

The milliner's claim, although incomplete and possibly alluding to liaisons

of an indelicate nature, offers some insights into the interactions between visiting foreign entertainers and local residents. Whatever the reasons were, Joe and Nellie Farren decided to leave Singapore in 1928 for Shanghai to forge a new start.

### Friday Night Fights

Throughout the 1930s, boxers from all over the world competed for championship belts and prize money at matches held at Asia's grandest sporting arenas. Dubbed the "Oriental Circuit", the fighters were frequently on tour and often fought several times a month. Purses were small but regular, although accusations of match rigging dogged many bouts. As with everywhere else, organised crime was never far from the boxing rings in Asia.

Some of the biggest names in the sport passed through the Oriental Circuit in the 1930s – Young Alde, The Marine Ace, The Japanese Wonder, Clever Henry, the Bronze Bull, Kid Terry, the Siberian Bear, Joe Diamond, Dar-

In the 1930s, boxers from all over the world competed for championship belts and prize money in the "Oriental Circuit" – with Singapore as one of the hubs. One of the boxers was Andre Shelaeff (right), dubbed "The Russian Hammer", a young Russian émigré from the Chinese city of Harbin. Courtesy of Paul French.



ing Jessy, Kid Andre, Knocker Nokano, Lewko and Young Frisco, among others. But only one boxer ultimately had the guts, gumption and talent needed to make it to the top of the heap. This was Andre Shelaeff, also known as "The Russian Hammer", a young Russian émigré boy from the Chinese city of Harbin, then known as the "Moscow of the East".

Shelaeff was born in Harbin in 1919, his parents part of the Russian émigré community that had settled in the Chinese city following the Russian Revolution in 1917. Blessed with both good looks and talent, Shelaeff managed to carve out a successful boxing career in Shanghai, becoming the reigning welterweight champion of both China and the Orient in June 1937.

Having won that title, Shelaeff embarked on a tour of Asia to defend it – first to Manila, and then to Singapore, the regional boxing centre. Singapore was then known as the mecca of boxing in Asia, with most of the bouts taking place at Happy World in Geylang, an



An advertising flyer publicising a series of boxing matches held at the Canidrome Gardens in Shanghai's French Concession on 25 June 1937. The main match was between Andre Shelaeff and Billy Addis. *Image reproduced from North China Daily News, 21 June 1937, p.32.*

amusement park featuring everything from dancehalls, jazz cabarets, circus acts, Chinese opera and Malay *bangsawan* to roller skating rinks, fairground rides and restaurants. On weekends and on public holidays, upwards of 50,000 people would throng Happy World until the wee hours of the morning.

Shelaeff fought several times in Singapore. The archives of *The Straits Times* and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* carry advertisements for all the major fights

### Notes

- 1 Field, A.D. (2010). *Shanghai's dancing world: Cabaret culture and urban politics, 1919–1954* (p. 50). Hong Kong: Chinese University Press. (Call no.: RART 792.70951132 F1E); Lee, C. L., & Chung, M.K. (2012). *In the mood for cheongsam: A social history, 1920s–present*. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet and National Museum of Singapore. (RSING 391.00951 LEE-[CUS])
- 2 French, P. (2012). *Midnight in Peking*. Melbourne, Vic: Penguin Books. (Call no.: 364.1523 FRE); French, P. (2018). *City of devils*. New York: Picador. (Call no.: 364.1060951 FRE)
- 3 Foo, A. (2017). *Lancing girls of a happy world*. Singapore: Ethos Books. (Call no.: RSING 792.7095957 FOO)
- 4 Page 7 advertisements column 4. (1923, February 3). *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 5 The Shanghai International Settlement was formed from a merger of the British and American concessions in the city. These land concessions were established following the defeat of the Qing army by the British in the First Opium War (1839–42). Later, the French also established its own concession.
- 6 For examples, see Page 7 advertisements column 4. (1923, February 2). *The Straits Times*, p. 7; Page 7 advertisements column 4. (1923, February 3). *The Straits Times*, p. 7; Page 7 advertisements column 4. (1923, February 4). *The Straits Times*, p. 7; Page 7 advertisements column 4. (1923, February 5). *The Straits Times*, p. 7; Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 7 The Globe Trotters. (1923, February 3). *The Straits Times*, p. 10; The Globe Trotters. (1923, February 10). *The Straits Times*, p. 9; Page 7 advertisements column 3. (1924, January 26). *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 8 Field, P. (2010). *p. 50.*
- 9 Page 6 advertisements column 2. (1928, January 17). *The Straits Times*, p. 6; Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 10 The three-storey Adelphi Hotel was owned by the famous Armenian Sarkies brothers who were associated with many of Asia's grand hotels, including Raffles Hotel and the Sea View Hotel in Singapore, the Eastern and Oriental in Penang and The Strand in Rangoon (Yangon). The Adelphi was the oldest hotel in Singapore before its closure in 1973; the building was eventually demolished in 1980.
- 11 Page 3 advertisements column 1. (1928, January 21). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 3; Page 1 advertisements column 2. (1928, February 2). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

leaving for a tour of Australia and New Zealand, and returning to Singapore in 1936.

Heading in the opposite direction in 1938 was the Melbourne-based Australian middleweight champion Al Basten, who visited Singapore en route to England for a tour. The boxing scene in Singapore was so vibrant at one time that fans regularly got to see the best fighters from Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Australia battling it out at Happy World on Friday nights.

### A Hub for Trade and Entertainment

Singapore's position as a major touring venue for both entertainment troupes and boxers between the two world wars was largely a spin-off from its role as a key nexus in the regional and global shipping routes. Just about every ship journeying between Europe and Asia, and onwards to Australia and New Zealand, passed through Singapore. This explains perhaps the preponderance of European and Australian entertainers and boxers in Singapore. Occasionally, Americans based in the region visited Singapore on regional tours, but their numbers were few and far between.

Singapore has traditionally been thought of in terms of hard trade, an entrepôt for goods passing through from East to West and vice versa. However, port cities are invariably entry points for ideas, trends and new innovations. In the inter-war period, this exchange of culture included the latest entertainment acts, dances, jazz and big band music as well as sports such as boxing. ♦

12 A dancer's frocks. (1928, July 25). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

13 Page 16 advertisements column 1. (1938, May 19). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 16; Shelaeff wins first minute of first round. (1938, May 21). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 16; Boxing notes. (1938, June 26). *The Straits Times*, p. 31; In this corner boxing notes by "spectator". (1938, August 21). *The Sunday Tribune*, p. 20. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

14 Boxing attraction at Happy World. (1938, May 10). *The Malaya Tribune*, p. 14. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

15 Rocky Montanes, who meets Joe Diamond at the New World next Friday. (1935, December 4). *The Malaya Tribune*, p. 17; Boxing day boxing. (1936, December 15). *The Straits Times*, p. 17; Around the boxing camps. (1937, April 25). *The Sunday Tribune*, p. 20. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

# CREATIVE COLLECTIVES



## ABDUL GHANI HAMID & HIS CONTEMPORARIES



Nadia Ramli traces the history of the Malay art scene in early Singapore through a collection of art-related ephemera, catalogues and publications at the National Library.

**Nadia Arianna Ramli** is an Associate Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. She works with the library's arts collections, with a special focus on literary and visual arts. Her research interests include Singapore literature and theatre studies.

In April 1948, an art exhibition held at the Y.M.C.A. Singapore was reported in *The Morning Tribune* as “the first occasion of the Malay Artists of Singapore holding an Exhibition of Art”.<sup>1</sup> The event, helmed by the Singapore Malay Art Class, was organised by C. Mahat (Mahat bin Chadang),<sup>2</sup> a pioneering Malay artist who had been nurturing budding talent through his art classes since 1947.

### Early Malay Art Groups

In 1949, C. Mahat and another artist, M. Salehuddin, set up the Persekutuan Pelukis Melayu Malaya (PPPM, or the Society of Malay Artists, Malaya).<sup>3</sup> This marked the beginning of a collective effort by Malay artists to establish themselves in Singapore’s visual arts scene.

The society held its first show at the British Council Hall in February 1951, showcasing a total of 197 artworks on themes such as Malayan scenery, occupations and events.

A Straits Times article, titled “Paintings of Nadra on Show”,<sup>4</sup> highlighted two oil paintings that depicted Maria Hertogh, the Dutch teenager who sparked a series of racial riots<sup>5</sup> in December the previous year. (Hertogh was given the name Nadra upon her conversion to Islam.)

In the 1950s, other art collectives and groups emerged, albeit mostly short-lived. In 1956, the Angkatan Pelukis Muda (Young Artists’ Movement) came into the scene, founded by a group of aspiring young artists, but it was unable to garner sufficient support and dissolved soon after.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, in January 1960, a few artists and art enthusiasts came together to form Tunas Pelukis ’60 (Budding Artists ’60), with S. Mahdar as mentor.<sup>7</sup> The latter was known back then for the naturalism and realism in his art.<sup>8</sup>

In April 1961, the art section of Lembaga Tetap Kongres Bahasa dan Kebudayaan Melayu (LTK; Permanent Board of Congress of Malay Language and Culture)

staged a major exhibition at the Victoria Memorial Hall. The exhibition featured the works of 34 Malay artists, both experienced as well as amateur artists. The souvenir publication for the event included photographs of selected works, including that of established artists such as C. Mahat, Sulaiman Haji Suhaimi, M. Salehuddin, M. Sawoot, Aman Ahmad, and younger artists like Abdul Ghani Abdul Hamid, S. Mohdir, S. Mahdar and Rohani Ismail.<sup>9</sup>

The LTK continued to promote art and cultural activities in the following years, with its festivals in 1963 and 1968 providing platforms to exhibit the works of budding artists.<sup>10</sup> In its 1968 cultural festival souvenir publication, Abdul Ghani Abdul Hamid wrote that an “exhibition of paintings such as this is one of the many ways of introducing the artist and his works to the public”.<sup>11</sup>

The call for an art society for Malay artists eventually culminated in the formation of the Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya (APAD; Association of Artists of Various Resources) in July 1962. APAD was led by Abdul Ghani Abdul Hamid, Muhammad Ali Sabran, S. Mohdir, Ahmin Haji Noh, Hamidah M. F. Suhaimi and Mustafa Yassin.<sup>12</sup> The association became active in organising solo and group exhibitions, and also took part in collaborations with other cultural groups, art societies and art galleries, both in Singapore and the region. APAD continues to exhibit works by Malay artists today, making it one of the few art societies in Singapore that have survived the test of time.

### Nurturing Young Talent

Before formal arts education became widely accessible to the community (the pioneering Baharuddin Vocational Institute was opened only in 1965), classes run by individual artists and art societies provided the only means of learning art outside of schools. Seeing the importance of art education and building a learning community, APAD

organised outings to draw or paint as well as overseas study tours to Kelantan, Kuala Lumpur and Malacca, in addition to its series of children’s art classes and programmes aptly named TUNAS (Sprouts). These efforts created an awareness of Malay artists and their works, and also expanded their network within the local and regional art communities.<sup>13</sup>

In July 1964, APAD launched its formal art classes. Details of the syllabus and curriculum are found in the information booklet *Kelas Lukis (Art Class)*.<sup>14</sup> Classes for beginners taught students still life and the use of pencil and charcoal, while more advanced classes included portraiture drawing as well as watercolour and oil painting. The association also conducted classes for art students sitting for their GCE O-Level art examination.

Art education also came by way of books. Two landmark publications – one published in 1949 and the other in 1960 – helped to generate interest in visual arts among the Malay community. The first is C. Mahat’s *Petua Melukis (Tips on Drawing)*.<sup>15</sup> Written in Jawi, *Petua* provides instructions on sketching and painting, with notes and diagrams for the beginner on how to draw perspectives, create shadows and depths, and sketch basic figures and animals.

The second publication is Abdul Ghani Abdul Hamid’s *Sa-kilas Pandang Seni Lukis dan Perkembangannya (A Glimpse of the Arts and its Development)*. Chapters in the book include discussions on Eastern versus Western art as well as the development of the arts among the Malay community in Singapore and the region. Advertisements that appeared in *Berita Harian* in 1961 and 1966 marketed it as the first Malay-language book to cover an in-depth study of the art scene in Singapore.<sup>16</sup>

Here is a glimpse of exhibition catalogues and collaterals – published between the 1960s and 90s – from the collection of the National Library.

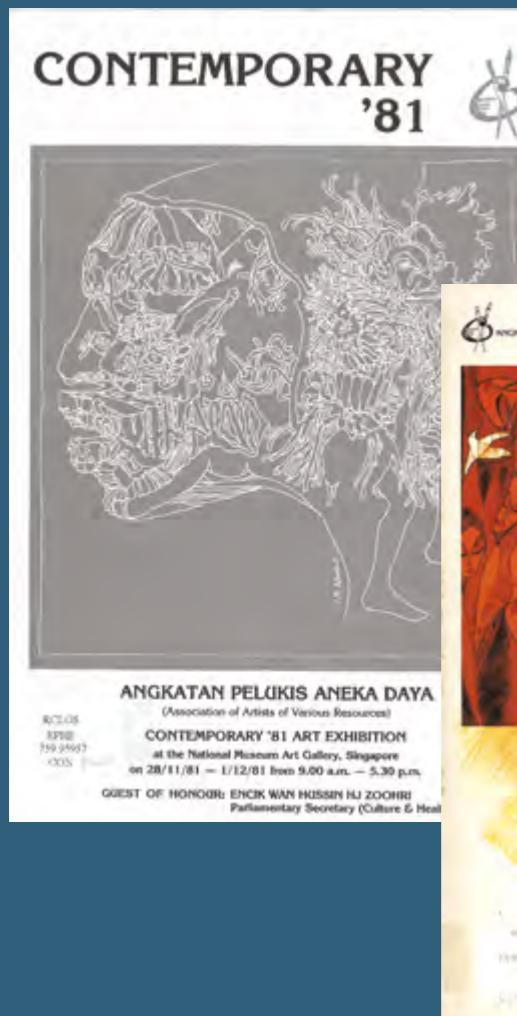


**Pameran Lukisan Anjuran Seksyen Seni Lukis Lembaga Tetap Kongres (1961)**

The souvenir publication of reportedly the largest-scale exhibition featuring Malay artists in Singapore held in April 1961. The event was organised by Lembaga Tetap Kongres Bahasa dan Kebudayaan Melayu (LTK; Permanent Board of Congress of Malay Language and Culture). The back cover features a poem by Abdul Ghani Abdul Hamid titled “Suara!” (Voice!).

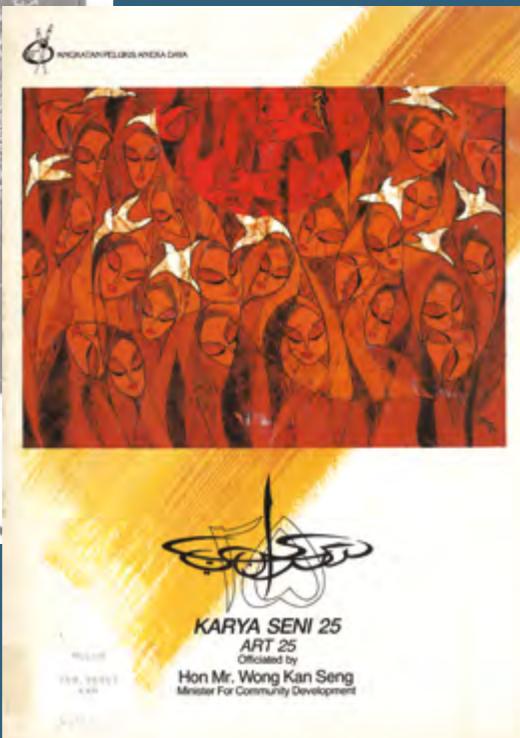
(Above left) “The Face in Meditation” (undated) by Abdul Ghani Abdul Hamid, which depicts a mask-like face and contorted limbs, is reminiscent of batik with its bold colours and strong outlines. Courtesy of National Gallery Singapore.

(Top right) S. Mohdir’s “Dalam” (1975), which means “deep” in Malay, depicts the unexplored depths of the world beneath the sea. This work has often been cited as an example of an early experimentation in surrealism by a Singaporean artist. Courtesy of National Gallery Singapore.



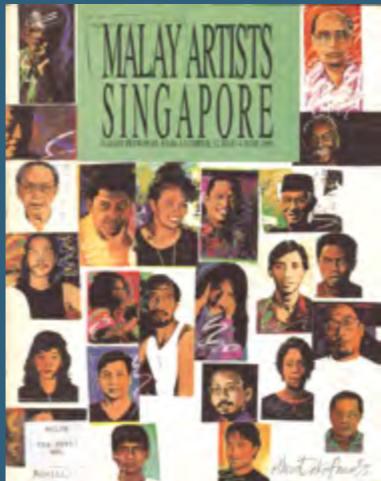
### Contemporary '81 (1981)

This is one of the many contemporary arts exhibitions organised by Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya (APAD; Association of Artists of Various Resources). The cover features a work by pioneering artist Ismail Muda (Ibrahim Bin Muda). The late artist also conducted art classes, including graphic art courses, introduced by APAD in the 1980s.



### Karya Seni 25 (1988)

In celebration of the 25th anniversary of APAD, this souvenir catalogue showcases a selection of exhibited artworks and their creators. The front cover features the artwork "Searching for Peace" by Sujak Rahman. He is regarded as one of the finest *batik* painters in Singapore and is known for his "Mother & Child" series of artworks. Also known in Japan, Sujak won the first prize at the Hokkaido International Cultural Exchange Award (1986) and had his works exhibited in Japan from 1984 to 1988. Apart from *batik*, Sujak also works with other medium such as acrylic and oil.



### Malay Artists Singapore (1995)

N. Parameswaran, the organiser and curator of this exhibition held at Galeri Petronas in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 1995 wrote in the introduction of the publication that it was a "reunion exhibition" of sorts for Singaporean Malay artists and provided an opportunity for them to exhibit their works outside of their usual circles.

#### Notes

- 1 Malay art on view Friday. (1948, April 14). *The Morning Tribune*, p. 3. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 2 *The Morning Tribune*, 14 Apr 1948, p. 3; Syed Muhd Hafiz. (2012). Semangat APAD: The Pioneering Generation. In *Our pioneer artists: Malay visual art practices from post-war period* (p. 4). Singapore: Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya. (Call no.: RSING 759.95957 OUR)
- 3 Ahmad Mashadi. (1995). The study of Singapore Malay art. Some issues and problems. In *Malay artists Singapore: An exhibition* (n.p.). Kuala Lumpur: N. Parameswaran. (Call no.: RCLOS 759.95957 MAL)
- 4 Abdul Ghani Hamid. (1990). Kegiatan kolektif pelukis pelukis Melayu (p.2). Singapore: Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya. (Call no.: Malay RSING 759.95957 ABD); Abdul Ghani Hamid. (1991). An artist's note (pp. 7-8). Singapore: Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya. (Call no.: RSING 759.95957 ABD); Paintings of Nadra on show. (1951, February 12). *The Straits Times*, p. 5; Malay art society plans show. (1951, February 2). *The Straits Times*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 5 The Maria Hertogh riots took place in Singapore in December 1950 when the court ruled that 13-year-old Dutch teenager Maria, who had been raised by her adoptive Muslim parents, should be returned to her Catholic biological parents.
- 6 Mohd Raman Daud. (2013). Artist's sketches: The Malay fine art movement in post-war Singapore (Syed Muhd Hafiz, Trans). In *Moving on: An art exhibition of small works by member of APAD*, 3-10 October 2013 (p. 11) Singapore: Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya. (Call no.: RSING 709.5957 MOV)
- 7 Abdul Ghani Hamid. (1960). *Sa-kilas pandang seni lukis dan perkembangannya* (p. 65). Singapore: Pustaka Melayu. (Call no.: Malay RSING 750 ABD)
- 8 S. Magiar Simen. (1961, November 5). Pelukis muda (modern arts ta' sa-suai) akan ka Tokyo. *Berita Harian*, p. 6; Iryani Jayadi. (1960, June 2). Tunas selukis '60. *Berita Harian*, p. 4; Panorama. (1961, May 1). Mengapa pergolakan tanah ayer tidak di-abadikan? *Berita Harian*, p. 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 9 Abdul Ghani Hamid. (2002, January 10). Renungan massa silam bantu kita lebih memahami diri kita hari ini. *Berita Harian*, p. 11. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 10 Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya. (1997). *Karya seni 35: Art 35* (n.p.). Singapore: Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya. (Call no.: RART 759.95957 KAR)
- 11 Lembaga Tetap Kongres (Singapura). (1968). *LTK mengajarkan pesta budaya LTK '68 = LTK cultural festival '68 dan pameran lukisan* (n.p.). Singapore: Lembaga Tetap Kongres. (Call no.: Malay RCLOS 394.26959 LTK-[CUS])
- 12 Syed Muhd Hafiz. (2013, p. 12; Abdul Ghani Hamid, 1995, n.p.)
- 13 Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya. (1981). Activities in brief. In *Contemporary '81* (n.p.). Singapore: Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya. (Call no.: RCLOS 759.95957 CON); Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya. 1997, n.p.; Syed Muhd Hafiz bin Syed Nasir. (2016). Visual arts development within the Malay community (p. 502). In *Majulah!: 50 years of Malay/Muslim community in Singapore* (pp. 499-515). Singapore: World Scientific. (Call no.: RSING 305.697095957 MAJ)
- 14 Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya. (1964). *Kelas lukis* [booklet]. Singapore: Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya. (Call no.: RCLOS EPHE 028 V1.5)
- 15 C. Mahat. (1949). *Rukuh petua melukis: Penggal pertama* (pp. 9, 12, 36, 39-40). Singapore: Suluh Pengetahuan. (Call no.: Malay RCLOS 741.2 MAH); Syed Muhd Hafiz, 2012, pp. 5-6.
- 16 Advertisement: *Sa-kilas Pandang Seni Lukis dan Perkembangannya* (1961, August 22). *Berita Harian*, p. 4; Advertisement. (1966, June 16). *Berita Harian*, p. 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

### Introspection (1991)

This is a catalogue of Sarkasi Said's (Tzee) solo exhibition "Introspection", held at the National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore, in 1991. As a *batik* painter, Tzee is well known for his works on silk that use mixed-media, acrylic and dye. The catalogue includes an introduction by art historian, T. K. Sabapathy.



### ABDUL GHANI ABDUL HAMID: THE MAN AND HIS ART

Abdul Ghani Abdul Hamid (1933-2014) was a prolific and award-winning writer, poet and artist. Writing primarily in Malay, he penned hundreds of poems, short stories, essays, newspaper articles and plays in his lifetime. His series of abstract paintings, "Lalang", were the most famous in his oeuvre.

Abdul Ghani was an active member of the literary and visual arts scenes in Singapore. He was a founding member of Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya (APAD; Association of Artists of Various Resources) and served as its president between 1962 and 1983. He was also a member of the National Arts Council from 2000 to 2002 and the recipient of three prestigious literary awards: Anugerah Tan Seri Lanang (1998), Southeast Write Award for Malay Poetry (1998) and the Cultural Medallion (1999).

The Abdul Ghani Abdul Hamid Collection at the National Library comprises letters and literary manuscripts as well as publications and ephemera related to the visual and literary arts. Included in the collection are letters and notes that document Abdul Ghani's involvement with art associations, exhibitions and various events in Singapore.

Catalogued by subject matter and time period, the collection provides rich insights into the development of the Malay visual arts scene in Singapore.

Portrait of Abdul Ghani Abdul Hamid. All rights reserved, Eric Foo Chee Meng 1979-2001. Courtesy of National Arts Council.



#### References

- National Library Board. (2014). *Abdul Ghani Abdul Hamid* written by Nureza Ahmad & Shah Alam bin Mohd Zaini. Retrieved from Singapore Infopedia. Syed Muhd Hafiz. (2012). Semangat APAD: The pioneering generation. In *Our pioneer artists: Malay visual art practices from post-war period* (p. 7). Singapore: Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya. (Call no.: RSING 759.95957 OUR)

# Singapore's Chin Kang Heritage

To mark its centenary, a Chinese clan association recently donated its archives of heritage documents to the National Library. Jessie Yak shares highlights from the collection.

To commemorate its 100th anniversary, the Singapore Chin Kang Huay Kuan (新加坡晋江会馆) signed an agreement with the National Library Board on 14 November 2018 to donate its collection of more than 600 heritage materials – the oldest of which dates back to the 1930s – for preservation and research.

The Singapore Chin Kang Huay Kuan was founded in 1918 for male immigrants from the Jinjiang (晉江; Chin Kang) county of Fujian province, China. Built in 1928, the clan association building at Bukit Pasoh Road once housed the headquarters of the Overseas Chinese Mobilisation Council, which was formed in 1941 to defend Singapore against the Japanese. The premises also served as a bomb shelter for residents living nearby during Japanese air raids in the early days of the war. During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (1942–45), the building was turned into a “comfort house”, possibly as an act of retaliation against the Chinese resistance movement. When the war ended in 1945, the association reclaimed the building.

As the Japanese had destroyed almost everything within, including its registry of members, the association issued a notice in October 1945 urging members to re-register. After the building was refurbished and the re-registration of members completed in early 1946, the association held its first general meeting in June that year. It was at this meeting that a landmark amendment

(Background) Façade of Chin Kang School which opened in 1947 within the premises of Singapore Chin Kang Huay Kuan on Bukit Pasoh Road. The school closed in 1975. Courtesy of Singapore Chin Kang Huay Kuan, 2018.

to its constitution was passed: the association would henceforth allow women into its membership ranks, breaking with the long-held practice of admitting only men as members.

Another change in 1946 was the establishment of a Relief Section to provide members with better benefits and support, such as helping with weddings and funerals, both in cash and in kind. To reach out to the wider community the following year, the association set up the Chin Kang School within its premises. The school provided education for children and teens – irrespective of their dialect group – who had their studies disrupted by the war. It closed down in 1975.

Over the decades, the clan association has steadfastly archived various materials documenting its major milestones in history, including the original membership re-registration notice, minutes of meetings and various drafts of the amended constitution. These items donated to the National Library Board will serve as useful primary documents on the history of the Chinese diaspora in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Materials from Chin Kang School will also enhance understanding of the early education scene in Singapore when vernacular schools operated before education became regulated by the government.

The Chin Kang Huay Kuan Collection is in the process of being indexed and catalogued, and will be housed at the National Library building on Victoria Street.

**Jessie Yak** is a Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. She majored in Chinese language and literature at Beijing University and furthered her studies at the University of Cambridge. Jessie is interested in Chinese literature, the Chinese diaspora and the print culture of East Asia.



Voucher to Raise Funds for Education (1978)

Chin Kang School had been self-funded since its founding in 1947, and received government aid only from 1956 onwards. As it was a struggle to operate the school with just its allotted funds, the association sold vouchers, such as the one featured here, to raise funds at various functions. The donor's name and amount donated would be written on the voucher and displayed prominently at the event. Imprinted on the voucher is a phrase that reads “practise frugality so that you can help educate a child”. All rights reserved, Chin Kang Huay Kuan Collection, National Library Board Singapore, 2018.

# WHEN THERE WERE Farms

Zoe Yeo highlights a selection of publications on farming in Singapore from the National Library's Legal Deposit Collection.



**E**Food supplies imported from the far corners of the world catering to the taste buds of Singapore's diverse races have always been readily available on the island. Although agriculture has never been a major pillar in Singapore's economy given the scarcity of land, the city-state has sought to be self-sufficient when it comes to food. This was especially the case in the years following World War II.

During the Japanese Occupation (1942–45), people endured untold hardship and hunger when the main sources of food were cut off abruptly. As there was not enough food to go around, a black market quickly developed with prices hiked up to exorbitant levels. Left with little choice and unable to survive on food rations alone, many people resorted to growing their own food, such as tapioca, sweet potato, vegetables and the like, to stave off hunger during the war years.

In the aftermath of the war, extensive efforts were made to increase Singapore's food production, particularly with regard to vegetables and livestock such as pigs, poultry, cattle, sheep and goats. In fact, the poultry industry developed so rapidly that Singapore became self-sufficient and was able to export the excess to neighbouring countries within a few years after the war.<sup>1</sup>

**Zoe Yeo** is an Associate Librarian with the National Library, Singapore. Her responsibilities include developing the National Library's collections as well as providing content and reference services on topics relating to Singapore and Southeast Asia.

Practical sessions in progress at the Farm School, 1960s. Primary Production Department Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

In 1948, the Department of Agriculture released the first comprehensive report on farming on the island, recording a three-fold increase in the area set aside for the cultivation of miscellaneous crops – from 5,202 acres in 1940 to 15,300 acres by 1947.

## A School for Farmers

On 25 June 1959, barely a month after the People's Action Party won the elections, the government announced the amalgamation of the agriculture, co-operatives, fisheries, rural development and veterinary divisions of the Ministry of National Development into the Primary Production Department (PPD).

The main objective of the new department was to ensure that the needs of farmers and fishermen were better served, and to facilitate cooperation between various units so that policies could be implemented more quickly. One area of priority was the improvement

of production by introducing new methods of farming and fishing.<sup>2</sup>

The Farm School at Sembawang – the first of its kind in Singapore – commenced classes on 1 August 1965. The school aimed to boost the agricultural output of the state with a programme that would equip novice farmers and fishermen with practical and technical farming skills.

Built at a cost of \$250,000, the school – located in the Central Research Station of the PPD office on Sembawang Road – was a joint effort by the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of Education.

To qualify for the farming programme, applicants were required to have at least primary six qualifications and be a full-time farmer. If the applicant was not a farmer, then the person's guardian should be one. School fees were waived and, instead, trainees received a monthly allowance of \$100 from the government, of which \$65 was deducted for food and lodging.

After training more than 20 batches of students, the school announced its closure in November 1984 due to dwindling enrolment – marking the end of the first and only school dedicated to farming in Singapore.<sup>3</sup>

## High-tech Farming

Over the decades, rapid urbanisation has greatly reduced land available for farming in Singapore, from 32,069 acres in 1966 to a mere 3,620 acres today. Farming activities are presently concentrated at six agrotechnology parks located in low density areas such as Lim Chu Kang, Murai, Sungei Tengah, Nee Soon, Mandai and Loyang.

These parks optimise the use of the island's limited land space by increasing productivity through the application of science and technology in farming methods. Apart from food production, farms located in agrotechnology parks also serve as research and development hubs, and have developed innovative and creative farming methods suited for the tropics.

Additionally, these farms have transformed their traditional business models by tapping the eco-tourism market and offering "agri-tainment" to visitors. Today, people who visit agrotechnology parks can participate in activities such as goat milking, learning about frog farming and even opting for a farm-stay to be up close and personal with nature.<sup>4</sup>

Here is a sampling of publications on farms and farming from the National Library's Legal Deposit Collection.

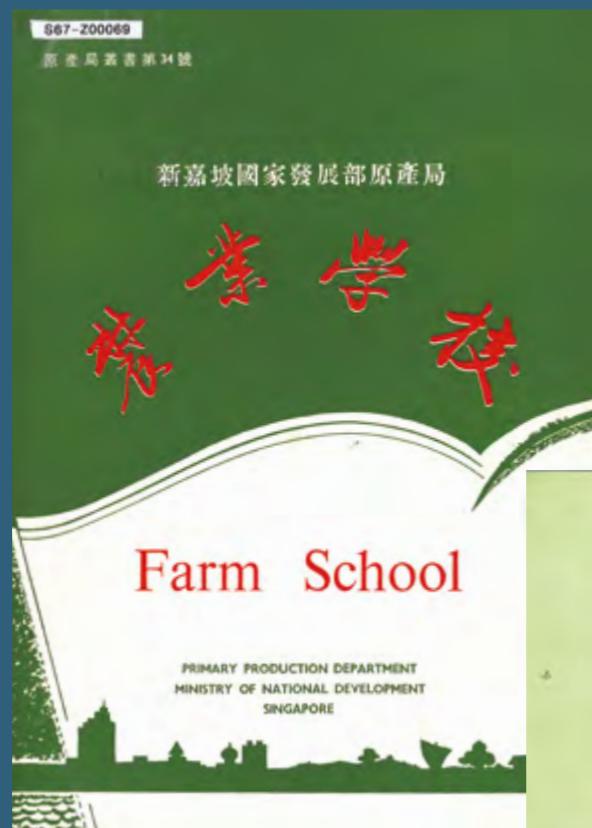


农牧月報  
Farming Monthly (1962)

This publication was started by pioneering poultry farmer Ho Seng Choon, with the aim of keeping farmers in Singapore and Malaya updated on the latest information and technology on poultry farming. Ho's farm, Lian Wah Hang Quail and Poultry Farm, is one of the oldest surviving farms in Singapore today. This inaugural issue, published in August 1962, covers subjects such as best practices in poultry farming and the challenges encountered in the rearing of domesticated birds.

日本魚及其飼養  
Rearing of Japanese Fishes (1963)

Varieties of Japanese fish were first introduced to Singapore during the Japanese Occupation as a substitute for the falling number of local saltwater fish and carps, whose import from China was restricted during the war. Known for their tenacity and ability to adapt to both fresh and salt water, Japanese breeds grew to become one of the most commonly reared fish in Singapore in the 1960s.



农业学校  
Farm School (1967)

The life of a trainee at the Farm School is depicted through photos in this booklet produced by the Primary Production Department. Trainees started their day with practical farming work in the morning and attended lectures in the afternoon. The school also organised film shows and tours to feedmills, private farms, factories and places of interest. Additionally, well-known personalities in the farming industry were invited to give talks on farming and other related topics.



Maternak Kambing  
Rearing of Goats (1965)

Goat farms in 1960s Singapore reared goats ranging from local species to breeds imported from Switzerland and India. Booklets published by the Primary Production Department provided farmers with tips on taking care of different types of goats, including breeding methods, feeding and the proper ways of housing the goats.

#### WHAT IS LEGAL DEPOSIT?

Legal Deposit is one of the statutory functions of the National Library and is supported through the provisions of the National Library Board Act. Under the act, all publishers, commercial or otherwise, are required by law to deposit two copies of every physical work and one copy of every electronic work published in Singapore, for sale or public distribution, with the National Library within four weeks of its publication. The Legal Deposit function ensures that a repository of Singapore's published heritage is preserved for future generations. For more information, please visit [www.nlb.gov.sg/Deposit](http://www.nlb.gov.sg/Deposit).

#### Notes

- 1 Malayan Agri-Horticultural Association. (1956). *The First Singapore Agricultural Show, 1–5 September, 1956; Souvenir Programme*. Singapore: Public Relations Office. (Call no.: RDTYS 630.95951 MAL)
- 2 National Library Board. (2014). *Primary Production Department is formed*. Retrieved from HistorySG.
- 3 农业学校停办. (1984, November 29). 联合早报 (Lianhe Zaobao), p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 4 National Library Board. (2009). *Farmlands in Lim Chu Kang*, written by Jean Lim. Retrieved from Singapore Infopedia.

# PRESERVING MEMORIES



Relive the times that we celebrated, stood up proudly or shed tears. Travel to scenes that have since vanished. *Preserving Memories: 50 Moments in Time* is a showcase of audio-visual materials and oral history interviews that the National Archives of Singapore has collected and preserved over the past 50 years. Watch and listen to memories cherished and treasured by Singaporeans from all walks of life.



An institution of the National Library Board

[www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/50moments](http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/50moments)





# SELLING DREAMS

**Early Advertising in Singapore**

From now till 24 February 2019

Level 10, Gallery, National Library Building

Free Admission

Advertisements reflect society's desires, aspirations, ideals, hopes and insecurities. Featuring a myriad of advertising materials from the 1830s to 1960s in the National Library's collection, this exhibition explores the dreams behind the advertisements and how they have changed over time.

Join us and learn more about Singapore's past through advertising.

