

= Changi Murals =

The Changi Murals are a set of five paintings of biblical theme painted by Stanley Warren , a British bombardier and prisoner @-@ of @-@ war (POW) interned at the Changi Prison , during the Japanese occupation of Singapore in World War II (WWII) . His murals were completed under difficult conditions of sickness , limited materials and hardships . With a message of universal love and forgiveness , they helped to uplift the spirits of the POWs and sick when they sought refuge in the prison chapel .

After the war , the walls of the chapel were distempered over , hiding the murals from view . They were forgotten until its rediscovery in 1958 . Due to their historical significance , an international search was conducted to locate the original painter in helping to restore the damaged and faded murals . Stanley was eventually found in 1959 and , after much persuasion , agreed to assist in the restoration project . He made three trips to Singapore between 1963 and 1988 to restore his former paintings . Due to Stanley 's advanced age , only four of the original murals were fully restored . In the 1990s , the former site of the murals was gazetted as a Heritage Site by the National Heritage Board of Singapore .

= = History = =

Stanley Warren was born in England in 1917 . He was talented in art from young and was a religious man . Stanley was employed as a commercial designer producing poster ads with the Grenada organisation before the war . In January 1940 , he enlisted in the army to join the fight against Nazi Germany and was posted to the Royal Regiment of Artillery as an Observation Post Assistant . His responsibilities included having to make quick drawings of panoramas used to plot targets for the guns .

= = = Changi = = =

In early 1942 , he was posted overseas to Malaya (former name for Malaysia) with the 15th Field Regiment Royal Artillery after the Japanese had invaded Malaya and Thailand , and Pearl Harbor had been bombed . Upon their arrival , their fight against the Japanese was brutal and short @-@ lived , and soon his battalion began retreating to Singapore . The Changi Garrison , a heavily fortified coastal defence where most of the British forces were based , consisted of three army barracks ; the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders in the Selarang Barracks , the Royal Engineers in Kitchener Barracks , and the 9th Coastal Artillery Regiment of the Royal Artillery in Roberts Barracks . By 12 February , the situation in Singapore was desperate and Lieutenant @-@ General Arthur Ernest Percival , General Officer Commanding of HQ Malaya Command , ordered the Changi Garrison to withdraw to Singapore Town . After the British surrender of Singapore on 15 February 1942 , Stanley and Allied POWs were ordered to march to Changi for internment ; the 15 @,@ 000 Australians went into Selarang Barracks and the British to Roberts and Kitchener Barracks . Stanley was interned at Roberts Barracks and later joined other POWs to work around Singapore , repairing damage inflicted by the Japanese attacks and getting essential services back to working order . Percival was held in Roberts Barracks until , with all senior officers above the rank of Lieutenant Colonel , he was sent to Formosa (now Taiwan) by the Japanese . The food given to the prisoners was of poor quality and inadequate for men working as slave labour . As a result of this and the harsh treatment meted out by the Japanese guards such as the beatings and executions of escaped prisoners , the men 's health and morale began to suffer in the long run .

= = = St Luke 's Chapel = = =

During one of the work parties , Stanley was sent to build a road and stairs leading to a memorial to the Japanese dead on Bukit Batok Hill (Marked with a Bukit Batok Memorial plaque today , only the stairs and road called Lorong Sesuai are still there to be seen) . The chaplain of the regiment , well

aware of Stanley 's religious conviction and artistic background , requested him to decorate the asbestos walls at the altar area of a small open attap @-@ roofed chapel at Bukit Batok . With charcoal salvaged from around the camp , he drew two murals : Nativity , which featured a Malay Madonna and Descent from the Cross in which he included soldiers in uniforms , using his comrades as models . By then , he was becoming ill and was suffering from a severe renal disorder complicated by amoebic dysentery . On 23 May 1942 , Stanley was lying comatose and was sent to Roberts Barracks in Changi which was converted for use as a hospital for POWs to recuperate .

By mid @-@ August 1942 , Stanley had recovered enough to be moved to the dysentery wing at Block 151 of Roberts Barracks . Padres Chambers and Payne had heard that Stanley had decorated the prisoners ' chapel at Bukit Batok . So they asked him if he would do some paintings for St Luke 's Chapel , which was recently converted from the ground floor of Block 151 , near the area where Stanley was recuperating . The Chapel was dedicated to St Luke the Physician . Stanley agreed , and sought inspiration for the proposed paintings in the Gospels .

= = = The five murals = = =

On 30 August 1942 , at the time when Stanley was preparing the draft drawings of the murals , the Japanese began an action which would become known as the Selarang Barracks Incident . It was an incident concerning seventeen thousand Anglo @-@ Australian POWs , who were forced to vacate their buildings and be exposed for nearly five days in the open without water or sanitation for refusing to sign a " No Escape Pledge " . Against this backdrop , Stanley began to paint the murals . No one had asked the Japanese for permission to draw and at no stage did they interfere with his work . Considering the purpose of the murals , Stanley felt that the Chapel was basically dedicated to peace and reconciliation , and so he choose universal themes for the murals which would embrace all mankind . Paint was not readily available in the camp , but with the aid of the other prisoners , who unquestionably put themselves at great risk , materials to make the paint were gradually acquired ? brown camouflage paint , a small amount of crimson paint , white oil paint and billiard chalk were found and brought for Stanley use . Despite still being very ill , Stanley set to work on the murals in early September 1942 . His illness meant that he could only paint for a limited period each day , for perhaps 15 minutes at a time followed by a rest . To compensate as much as he could for the lack of coloured paint , Stanley resorted to using large brush strokes and big areas of solid colour when painting . In September 1942 , a few weeks after Stanley began painting the murals , he was informed that his work party was to be sent north to Thailand to work on the Thai @-@ Burma Railway . A colonel in charge of the hospital , who knew of his work @-@ in @-@ progress murals , intervened to have Stanley transferred back to the hospital so that he could continue on his work in the Chapel . Most of Stanley 's unit who went to the Thai @-@ Burma Railway never returned . Stanley recounted : " Had I gone with them , most certainly , I would have died . So the murals very directly saved my life in the way I could never have foreseen ... It 's a terrible sense of debt ... that one feels to the chapel . "

By Christmas 1942 , he completed his first mural , the Nativity . Altogether , Stanley managed to produce five large murals on the walls of the Chapel , each mural being about three metres long , in the following order :

Nativity

Ascension

Crucifixion

Last Supper

St Luke in Prison

All of them were subjects which are at the very heart of Christian belief . The completed murals uplifted the spirits of the POWs and sick when they seek refuge in the Chapel . Stanley never put his name on any of his paintings as he considered them " a gift to God " . In May 1944 , Block 151 with the St Luke Chapel 's inspiring murals was designated to become a store for an airfield nearby . The lower portion of St Luke in Prison mural was almost completely destroyed when it was demolished to make a link to an adjoining room . The walls of the Chapel was distempered over , hiding the

murals from view . Stanley was later sent to Kranji in the north of Singapore , not far from the Causeway to Malaya , and remained there till the Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945 . After the war , Stanley returned to England believing that his murals had been destroyed by Allied bombing towards the end of the war . He married and became an art teacher at the Sir William Collins School , later South Camden Community School and currently Regent High School in Somers Town , London .

= = = Rediscovery = = =

Forgotten for nearly 13 years , the Changi Murals were accidentally rediscovered in 1958 by servicemen of the Royal Air Force (RAF) occupying the Roberts Barracks . The Chapel was again used as a store , and later as accommodation by the RAF . Once rediscovered , the distemper coating covering the murals was carefully removed ? four complete murals and the top @-@ quarter of a fifth were revealed . As there was no signature on any of the murals , a search for the artist was undertaken but failed after initial investigations . By a stroke of luck , the artist 's name came to light in the RAF Changi Education Library of all places . A reader came across a book titled The Churches of the Captivity in Malaya , mentioning about the Chapel of St Luke in Roberts Barracks and the artist 's name ? Bombardier Stanley Warren . The Daily Mirror was notified and again went to work looking for the known artist . In February 1959 , he was found living in London with his wife and son . He was shocked when he saw the photo of his mural of the Crucifixion , when a keen @-@ eyed colleague of his showed him the papers .

= = = Restoration = = =

In 1960 , the RAF contacted Stanley and the idea of restoring the murals was brought up . He was initially reluctant to return to restore his works due to the painful memories of war and captivity the murals would bring back to him : " I didn 't immediately want to come . I felt that there would be some sort of ... trauma . I 'm trying to forget this , you know , I tried so hard ... It took years really to eliminate the memories and fears ... the long drawn out experience and really waiting for death over three and a half years , it 's long time to expect death . And I really tried to forget ... But of course I was never able to do that . "

After much persuasion , he overcame his fear and eventually made three trips to Singapore to restore his murals in December 1963 , July 1982 and May 1988 . The 1982 restoration was more intensive and the invaluable assistance given to Warren by the officers and boys of the SAF Boys ' School enabled the bulk of the work to be completed . Of the original five murals , only one was not fully restored ; the mural of St Luke in Prison . Stanley 's original tracing of the drawing was missing , and he could not remember the details of the missing portion . In 1985 , Stanley 's original drawing was discovered in the memorabilia of Wally Hammond who had been a fellow prisoner with Stanley . These original sketches were subsequently donated to the National Archives of Singapore . From the original , Stanley painted a small picture , which was placed below the remaining piece of the mural in 1988 . He was , by then , not fit enough to restore the actual mural .

On 20 February 1992 , Stanley died in his home in Bridport , England at the age of 75 .

= = = Parliamentary discussions = = =

Stanley 's murals were discussed in the British Parliament in October 1968 . Charles Morris , minister of parliament for Openshaw , asked the Defence Ministry , Denis Healy , to consider moving the murals to England . His proposal was unsuccessful when the Singapore Ministry of Defence decided to take responsibility of the murals and to keep them in good condition for display in 1969 . (Singapore gained independence from Britain in August 1965) . In addition , a copy of one of the murals painted by Stanley had been brought to England and installed in the Garrison Church at Larkhill in Wiltshire .

= = The murals today = =

The three @-@ storey Block 151 of Roberts Barracks (off Martlesham Road) still stands today , but is now part of the Ministry of Defence 's Changi Airbase Camp . Most of the buildings surrounding Block 151 were demolished in July 2003 . Inside the Chapel , there is a photo of Stanley and some narrative about him and the murals but access to the Chapel is restricted . However , for public interest , a replica of Stanley Warren 's murals is also on display at the Changi Chapel and Museum , along with an audio @-@ visual theatre that screens videos about POW life , display of POW belongings and collection of books about Singapore during WWII .

Since 1993 , the Changi Murals , Changi Prison and other WWII sites in Singapore , is part of a Battlefield Tour organised by the National Institute of Education and the Ministry of Defence , a bi @-@ annual five @-@ day residential National Awareness programme to create greater awareness of national and security issues among trainee teachers .

= = = Commemoration = = =

In November 1994 , a two @-@ man British team was in Singapore to film the Changi Murals and Kranji War Memorial for a BBC documentary , for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission which marked the 50th Anniversary of the end of World War II .

On 15 February 2002 , more than 250 former POWs and their families from Australia , New Zealand and the United Kingdom came over to Singapore for a reunion @-@ cum @-@ memorial service that was held at the Changi Chapel and Museum , and a tour of the Changi Murals and the Selarang Camp . The event was organised by the Singapore Tourism Board to mark the 60th anniversary of the fall of Singapore .