

= Poh Ern Shih Temple =

Poh Ern Shih (Chinese : 普賢 ; pinyin : bào 'xūn ; literally : " Temple of Thanksgiving ") is located on a small hilltop at Chwee Chian Road , off Pasir Panjang Road , on Singapore 's southern coast . The Buddhist temple was built as a memorial to those who lost their lives during the Battle of Pasir Panjang in 1942 , villagers as well as Allied and Japanese soldiers . The temple 's first abbot , Sumangalo , an American Theravadin monk , was the first Westerner to be appointed abbot of a Buddhist temple in Singapore .

Following a major development project which began in 2003 , Poh Ern Shih became the first religious building in the country to incorporate both eco -friendly and elderly -friendly features . Together with its partner , the Buddhist Fellowship , the temple conducts programmes such as Dharma talks , Sutta discussions and meditation courses in Chinese and English for the Buddhist community .

= = History = =

Poh Ern Shih is located on the top of Chwee Chian Hill , off Pasir Panjang Road , on Singapore 's southern coast . Facing the hilltop is Bukit Chandu (' Opium Hill ' in Malay) , where the British East India Company had an opium factory to process raw opium from the Golden Triangle for sale to China and South East Asia in the 19th century . To protect its military facilities in the vicinity , the British colonial government placed heavy artillery guns on Chwee Chian Hill before the onset of the Second World War , in anticipation of seaborne attacks by the Japanese off the coast of Pasir Panjang .

During the Battle of Pasir Panjang , Bukit Chandu was the last bastion of the 1st and 2nd Battalion Malay Regiment who , together with the 2nd Loyals Regiment , defended the western and southern parts of Singapore from 8 ? 14 February 1942 . Despite running low on ammunition and food , the Malay Regiments put up strong resistance , inflicting a heavy toll on the Japanese invaders . Outnumbered , the defenders were finally overrun and massacred by reinforced Japanese forces . A Malay officer , Second Lieutenant Adnan Bin Saidi , was captured alive and tortured by the Japanese , before being executed . The story of his heroism became well known throughout Singapore .

= = = Founder Lee Choon Seng = = =

Based on the concept of liberating the spirits of the soldiers and civilians who were sacrificed during the Japanese invasion in World War II , the temple of Poh Ern Shih was constructed on the site of the bloodshed on Chwee Chian Hill . It was established in 1954 as a modest single storey temple by philanthropist Lee Choon Seng (1888 ? 1966) , as one of the few Chinese Mahayana temples in Singapore dedicated to the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva .

Lee was born in Yong Choon county , Fujian province , in China . He joined his father in Negri Sembilan in his youth , before moving to Singapore to set up his own property business . He was very successful , and achieved positions of leadership in the local Chinese community . He was widely known as one of the co -founders of the Oversea -Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC) , and was its acting chairman during the Japanese Occupation . As one of the early Buddhist pioneers , Lee was also involved in the foundation of the Buddhist Publications Circulation Centre in 1933 , and the Singapore Buddhist Lodge (???????) in 1934 .

= = = First Western abbot = = =

Venerable Sumangalo (1903 ? 1963) was born as Robert Stuart Clifton in Birmingham , Alabama in the United States in 1903 . After receiving his Doctorate in Literature , he lectured on Buddhism in the United States before moving to Asia to further his study of Buddhism . In 1957 , he joined the Theravada Order in Laos and received the monastic name Sumangalo , meaning " very auspicious " .

. He then left for Malaya and later visited Singapore on a Dharma tour in late 1959 with another American Buddhist monk , Venerable Susiddhi . Through his efforts , a number of Youth Circles and Sunday schools were set up locally .

In January 1959 he was offered the honorary abbotship of Poh Ern Shih , thus becoming the first Westerner to be the abbot of a Buddhist temple in Singapore . While in Singapore , he assisted Pitt Chin Hui in her translation of the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sutra from Chinese to English . He returned to Malaya and spent his later years at Penang Buddhist Association , where most of his Dharma lectures were held . His lectures were later compiled in English and Chinese and are still freely distributed . Venerable Sumangalo died on 6 February 1963 and was cremated in Penang .

= = = Female Buddhist pioneer = = =

Pitt Chin Hui (1906 ? 1981) was born to a wealthy family in Guangzhou , China . She was the youngest child of the family , and was taken by her mother to Penang to receive her early education . In 1924 , she sat for the Senior Cambridge Examination , and while waiting for the examination results she became an English teacher at the Fujian Girls ' School . In 1927 , she left for further studies at the Zhongshan University in Guangzhou . However , she terminated her tertiary studies and returned to Penang when her mother became seriously ill . While in Penang , she attended Dharma lectures by Venerable Taixu and his disciple , Venerable Cihang , at the Kek Lok Si Temple . Pitt subsequently became one of Cihang 's disciples , and studied under him . She was responsible for setting up the Maha Bodhi School in Penang and Singapore (1946) , to promote Buddhist education to the young . Along with her school duties , Pitt was also an active voluntary worker in the Buddhist community .

In December 1959 , Pitt embarked on the task of translating the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sutra from Chinese to English at Poh Ern Shih , so that it would be accessible to the English @-@ educated . Venerable Sumangalo assisted Pitt in her translation tasks , as well as offering suggestions for improving the English version . In 1964 , Pitt was awarded the Public Service Star ? BBM (Bintang Bakti Masharakat) ? by Encik Yusof bin Ishak , the First President of the Republic of Singapore . In 1973 , she was appointed as Justice of the Peace by the Second President Dr. Benjamin Henry Sheares . Pitt Chin Hui was also a Vice @-@ President of the World Fellowship of Buddhists . She died in 1981 while on a trip in India .

= = Building design = =

To allow for expansion , the old premises were demolished . Reconstruction began in 2003 , and the office wing was completed in April 2007 , in phase 1 of the project . The new six @-@ storey building was designed by Lee Coo , who is also the architect behind the Venerable Hong Choon Memorial Hall of the Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Temple . Occupying a 46 @,@ 938 @-@ square @-@ foot (4 @,@ 360 @.@ 7 m2) freehold site , the new Poh Ern Shih is an architectural synthesis of classical features combined with modern eco @-@ friendly technology .

= = = Civic consciousness = = =

Conscious that a large percentage of its devotees were in their 60s , the Honorary President / Director of Poh Ern Shih , Lee Boon Siong , a retired lawyer , grandson of the temple 's founder , and its chief architect , strove to ensure that the temple was accessible to the elderly and those who use wheelchairs . A gentle driveway stretches from the gates to the upper levels of the temple , and every storey of the building has level flooring . The lavatory cubicles are fitted with easily reached " call @-@ for @-@ help " buttons , and the doors are designed so that they can be unlocked from the outside in the case of emergency .

= = = Eco @-@ friendly features = = =

The temple takes advantage of Singapore 's abundant sunlight by having three different kinds of solar energy cells on its rooftop . They are the poly @-@ crystalline silicon solar array , mono @-@ crystalline silicon solar array and amorphous silicon solar array . Poh Ern Shih 's water is heated by its solar panels , and its night lighting is powered by electricity converted from solar energy , With its breezy location , wind generators have also been erected to convert wind activity into electricity .

The rainwater which falls on Poh Ern Shih is collected from surface run @-@ offs and rain gutters and used to irrigate the temple grounds , as well as to generate electricity used for charging the batteries of in @-@ house motorised wheelchairs . The electricity is produced by water from the highest floor of the temple passing through hydroelectric @-@ generators . A purification system is also being installed , so that the collected rainwater can be filtered and made potable .

In line with the aim to make use of renewable resources , the furniture in Poh Ern Shih for its resident monastics is made from bamboo . Bamboo is considered to one of the most ecologically friendly materials for use in home furnishing and flooring , because it can be harvested without felling the entire tree . There is therefore no need for replanting , and the bamboo is allowed to regain its full height again over about five years , ready to be harvested again .

The second phase of the temple was completed in late 2008 , featuring a new Main Ksitigarbha Prayer Hall as well as a Guanyin Meditation Hall with lapis lazuli statues and a 7 @-@ storey stupa .

= = The temple today = =

To reinvigorate itself and attract younger blood , Poh Ern Shih entered into a partnership with the Buddhist Fellowship , a non @-@ sectarian Buddhist organisation known locally for its revolutionary projects and activities intended to ensure that the Dharma is propagated in contemporary language and form . The Fellowship ? whose more than 2 @,@ 000 members are mainly English @-@ speaking professionals , mostly under 45 years of age ? initially rented space at Eton House in Paya Lebar . Lee Boon Siong contacted the Fellowship 's President , Angie Monksfield , a Chinese Singaporean married to an English Catholic , offering use of the temple premises . In early 2007 , Angie took up the offer after the rent for Eton House was raised by 57 per cent ? a sum which was difficult for the fellowship to afford . The rent charged by the temple is the same as that which the Fellowship was paying before the increase demanded by its previous landlord .

The Fellowship moved into its 4 @,@ 000 square feet (370 m2) of space in Poh Ern Shih on 29 May 2007 . The event was marked by an opening ceremony attended by Khaw Boon Wan , Minister for Health , and the Fellowship 's two spiritual patrons , Ajahn Brahm and Venerable Kwang Sheng , Abbot of Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Temple . The group conducts programmes such as Dharma talks , Sutta discussions and meditation courses led by visiting Sangha and notable lay Buddhist teachers such as Piya Tan , Dr. Ang Beng Choo and Prof. Tan Hun Tong and many more . The temple is open to the public daily , and admission is free .