

Standing the Test of Time

Old Post Office Buildings

By Prue Harrison

Jalan Kayu's former post office; photo courtesy of Ian Selbie

I love old buildings, especially those whose purpose has changed, yet there they languish, begging the question, "What was I"?

To discover what secrets the old white, colonial building on the corner of Jalan Kayu and Yio Chu Kang Roads holds wasn't easy. Its last occupant was a kindergarten, before that, a preparatory school. It stands there still, while all around has been razed or rebuilt.

Originally this not particularly attractive, but practical, building was a post office. Mr John Dyer, in a 2007 interview for the Jalan Kayu Trail blog by Pei Hwa Secondary School students, recalls it being one between 1965 and 1969. Long before Mr Dyer's time, it was a post office belonging to the British armed forces, serving the military and locals in what was then an area of pig farms and army dwellings.

The old Mandai Post Office building, a charming little colonial structure on the corner of Upper Thomson and Mandai Roads, is more pleasing to the eye. Perhaps that is why it still stands. The postmaster's family lived in the airy rooms upstairs while he served the needs of Nee Soon Village from the ground floor offices. The former Telecommunication Authority of Singapore ran the building as a post office from 1982 to 1992, as evidenced by the distinctive orange and white letterbox that remains embedded in the crumbling front walls. In 2003, the Urban Redevelopment Authority proposed turning it into a Visitor Centre to showcase the area's natural and socio-cultural history. A local restaurateur proposed an eatery for casual fine dining or a wine bar. These proposals have yet to materialise and today it stands empty, the white balcony arches and walls fading to a greenish-grey.



Mandai Road post office; photo courtesy of Jerome Lim

The Killiney Road Post Office stands in fully restored glory, its ground floor still housing a post office, while the remainder has been transformed into a fashionable café bar with music, alfresco dining and all-day breakfasts on Sundays. Despite



Killiney Road post office and café; photo courtesy of Ian Selbie

being called the KPO Café Bar, this does not stand for Killiney Post Office, but for the three roads it sits at the junction of—Killiney, Penang and Oxley.

This brings us to the original General Post Office Building, or Fullerton Building, opened in 1927 by Sir Hugh Clifford, Governor of the Straits Settlements and British High Commissioner in Malaya from 1927 until 1930. He suggested the building be named after Robert Fullerton, the first governor of the Straits Settlements (1826-1829).

Ending its service for Singapore Post in 1996, The Fullerton Building was gazetted as a conservation building in 1997. Now, even more glorious than in its post office days, it is the Fullerton Hotel. The General Post Office Gallery on the ground floor was retained during the restoration, as stipulated by the URA, and is now divided into bays containing a bar, a restaurant and the hotel foyer.



The Fullerton Building in 1920; photo courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

Prue Harrison has lived close to Jalan Kayu for eighteen years, spotting old buildings as she drives around Singapore. She wishes she could draw, but writes instead.
