

PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

July / August 2019



art
history
culture
people

Interested in learning about FOM programmes?

Join us for coffee & programme information at our

Open Morning & Monday Morning Lecture

Behind the scenes -

A plan to save Balestier Road

**By Kelvin Ang,
Director, Conservation Management,
Urban Redevelopment Authority**



Monday, 2 September 2019

10:00am – 12:30pm

Lecture begins at 11am

Asian Civilisations Museum

Ngee Ann Auditorium

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555

Sign up for a season or a reason!

FOM's vibrant activity groups and museum docents will be on hand at our Open Morning 2019 to help you decide how you want to get involved with FOM. Whether it is Asian history, travel, art, or culture, come and chat with our knowledgeable and dedicated volunteers, and discover how things are always better with like-minded friends.

Friends of the Museums (Singapore) is a volunteer, non-profit society devoted to offering guiding services and financial support to Singapore's museums. It also arranges and delivers a broad range of programmes that provide members as well as the community at large with information about Asia's history, culture and art.



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President's Letter

Dear Friends,

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines a volunteer as “a person who does something, especially for other people or for an organisation, willingly and without being forced or paid to do it”. Over the years, FOM volunteers have earned the reputation of being some of the most dedicated volunteers in Singapore. They retain a sense of humility and understand that it is not about how we contribute or what roles we take up, it is about giving back. Sue Sismondo is one such inspirational volunteer. She has been quietly giving back as an FOM volunteer for 35 years and was recognised with the Salome de Decker award this year. Amanda Jaffe tells Sue’s story on page 30.

The Volunteer Appreciation Morning (VAM) was held on 30 April to celebrate all FOM volunteers. About 244 members signed up to attend, with 141 eligible for award pins.

The 35-year pin awarded to Sue Sismondo was a first for FOM, so the VAM team went all out to create a memorable experience. Read all about it in the article written by Cécile Collineau and enjoy the lovely pictures of the day taken by Jo Wick and Chong Yit Peng.

The Public Information Meeting or PIM, held on 16 May, saw a substantial increase in attendees. Each training team enthusiastically wooed the prospective trainees to their programme. Learn about the upcoming docent training sessions in this edition of the magazine.

For those remaining in Singapore during the school holidays, do consider taking a tour of the URA/FOM Heritage Trails with an FOM docent and discover the heritage schools located in the greater Chinatown area, some of which started in shophouses. The Malay Heritage Centre’s docent training ended in June and the newly graduated docents are ready to take you on a tour of the galleries. If you are fascinated by the fusion of art, history and fashion, do not miss the *Guo Pei: Chinese Art and Culture* exhibition at the ACM. The *Packaging Matters* exhibition at the National Museum of Singapore is engaging for both children and adults alike.

From Singapore to Singaporean: The Bicentennial Experience at Fort Canning Park is an exhibition that explores Singapore’s 700-year history and is free to the public. Do visit or volunteer for this once in a 200-year event by following the link created especially for FOM members. The link for volunteering can be found on the FOM home page at www.fom.sg

If you are looking for book recommendations for summer reading, you may want to do what I do, check out the Book Group page on FOM’s website to see lists of what our members are reading. I especially enjoy the book reviews posted there. Book lovers may be interested in joining one of the many FOM book groups listed on the page. They meet at a variety of times and days to suit the convenience of members.

If you are travelling home or will be on vacation, remember to carry your FOM40 bag and take a photo of yourself with the bag. Post the picture on Instagram or Facebook with the #FOMCelebrates for the chance to win a prize.

As Singapore celebrates another birthday, I wish you all a very happy National Day!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Garima".

Garima G Lalwani
FOM President 2019

Singapore Lim See Tai Chong Soo Kiu Leong Tong

Family Self-Management Association

By Gisella Harrold

This building with the extraordinary name of Singapore Lim See Tai Chong Soo Kiu Leong Tong Family Self-Management Association is a little gem and a great example of how much history a 90-year-old building can hold.

It was founded in 1928 by members of the Lim clan as an ancestral hall, clan association and temple. The large marble plaque to the left of the entrance gives a detailed list of names and contributions. Four members are mentioned as having made large contributions towards the building: Lim Loh, Lim Kim Tian, Lim Keng Lian and Lim Peng Siang. The ground floor is for the ancestor worship of anyone related to the Lim family (in Mandarin the name would be Lin), while the first floor houses a temple.

The history of ancestor worship has its roots as far back as the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) and even today it is an important part of Chinese tradition. Essentially this practice lays down the rules, duties and responsibilities appropriate to one's position in life as well as in death and if we look after our ancestors, the ancestors will look after us.

Entering the large hall after passing the door guardians to the left and right, one is greeted by an altar in front of hundreds of ancestral tablets. They are usually inscribed with the details of the deceased and some believe that the spirit of the deceased resides in the tablets.

Two of the more elaborate tablets, which can be found behind the second altar, are of particular interest since they are closely related to Singapore's legendary war hero Lim Bo Seng. These two tablets belong to his father Lim Loh and his fifth wife who returned to Singapore in 1918 after many years in Australia. Lim Loh, a fascinating personality in his own right, came from Fujian Province in China and became fabulously rich. He owned a contractor business, a brick factory and some rubber plantations and was responsible for the building of some of Singapore's iconic buildings, such as the Victoria Memorial Hall and the Hong San See Temple in Mohamed Sultan Road.

If you venture further into the ancestors' hall you will find 14 tiles depicting stories from the 'Twenty-four Filial Exemplars' a classical text from the time of the Yuan Dynasty



The entrance to the building



The temple on the second floor dedicated to the goddess Mazu

(1260-1368). All the stories feature Confucian moral values, which fit perfectly into the concept of ancestor worship.

Once you are back in the main hall, proceed to the next level. Here you will find the temple dedicated to Mazu, the Goddess of the Sea (she is the main deity at Thian Hock Keng Temple in Telok Ayer Street). Why would she be in this temple? This is because Mazu is believed to have been a historical person who lived in Fujian in the 10th century and whose name was Lin Moniang. The Lims believe that she is an ancestor, so she is revered as the 'grand-aunt' of the Lim clan. The altar and the figures are not of great quality, but if you step out onto the terrace overlooking the Jade Emperor's altar and turn around, you will find some beautifully preserved Peranakan tiles. These tiles were shipped to Singapore mainly from Europe to decorate the walls of shophouses and temples because they were not only beautiful but also robust enough to withstand the tropical climate. Many had art deco and floral motifs in bold Peranakan colours. Today there is a huge collectors' market for these tiles.

If you proceed to the next level, the rooftop, you are rewarded with a grand view over the Tanjong Pagar area – one of the many treats Singapore's buildings have in store for a 'city explorer'.

If you would like to find out more about the building and Tanjong Pagar, join one of the many tours FOM/URA offers on Fridays and Saturdays. For more information and to sign up, visit www.fom.sg public events and look for FOM/URA Chinatown Heritage.



The beautiful original Peranakan tiles

Gisella Harrold has lived in Singapore for over 20 years and has been an active FOM member for the last 10 years. She is currently the coordinator of FOM-Curio.

All photos by the author



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Welcome PASSAGE

President's Letter 1

Features

Singapore Lim See Tai Chong Soo Kiu Leong Tong <i>by Gisella Harrold</i>	2
Sketchbook: Singapore, Past and Present <i>by Yusoff Abdul Latiff</i>	4
ArteFact: The Boar's Head Tureen <i>by Caroline Carfantan</i>	6
Museum Watch: China National Silk Museum, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China <i>by Patricia Bjaaland Welch</i>	7
The Otters of Singapore <i>by Jo Wright</i>	8
The NUS Baba House <i>by the Baba House Outreach Team</i>	10
The Unforgotten: St Andrew's Cathedral Honours the Dead <i>by Tim Clark</i>	12
A Last Look at Pearl Bank Apartments <i>by Jerome Lim</i>	14
The Sublime Universe of Guo Pei <i>by Isabella Olcer</i>	16
Chinatown Past and Present <i>by Heather Muirhead</i>	18
Haw Par Villa: One of a Kind <i>by Amanda Berlowe Jaffe</i>	20
Going, Going, Gone – The Tiger Balm Building <i>by Jerome Lim</i>	22
Horses in Singapore <i>by Caroline Carfantan</i>	24
Explore Singapore! Quiz	26

FOM Reports

FOM's Public Information Meeting <i>by Millie Phuah</i>	25
Volunteer Appreciation Morning <i>by Cécile Collineau</i>	28
The 2019 Salome de Decker Award <i>by Amanda Berlowe Jaffe</i>	30

FOM Member Activities

Japanese Docents	30
Coordinators Contact List	31

Museum Information and Exhibitions

Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM)	32
Gillman Barracks	32
NTU CCA	32
Indian Heritage Centre (IHC)	32
Malay Heritage Centre (MHC)	32
National Museum of Singapore (NMS)	32
NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts	33
Peranakan Museum (TPM)	33
Singapore Art Museum (SAM)	33
STPI	33
Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall	33

On the Cover: The 'Palace Flower' dress, overlaid with hundreds of silk peonies, image courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

FOM is a volunteer, non-profit society dedicated to providing volunteer guides and financial support to Singapore's museums and cultural institutions and to delivering programmes to enhance the community's knowledge of Asia's history, culture and art.

FOM is an Associate Member of the World Federation of Friends of the Museums.

FOM member privileges include free admission to NHB museums (excluding special exhibitions); access to FOM programmes including docent training, lectures, study tours, volunteer opportunities; a subscription to the FOM magazine, *PASSAGE*, and discounts at selected retail outlets, theatres and restaurants. Membership in FOM ranges from \$30 (senior) - \$120 (family) depending on category of membership.

For more information about FOM, visit our website www.fom.sg or contact the FOM office.

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FOM is not responsible for statements expressed in the signed articles and interviews.

Singapore, Past and Present

By Yusoff Abdul Latiff

In the early 1950s Haji Saim bin Said came to Singapore from Melaka to become a policeman. During colonial times, all policemen were entitled to quarters located near police stations. However, Haji Saim wanted to be different from the other *Mat Kampau* (the nickname for junior police officers who came mainly from Melaka). He saved enough of his salary to buy an 11,500 square foot plot of land for \$3,000 in Siglap in 1956 and engaged skilled carpenters to build a stately kampong house (Sketch 1) without using a single nail. These craftsmen employed the traditional *tanggam* and *pasak* (wooden joinery and peg) method.



During Singapore's post-independence years, all wooden houses, no matter how beautifully crafted, were declared temporary structures. The occupants could repair, but not rebuild them as wooden houses. As a result, many descendants of the original landowners in Siglap, Bedok, Kembangan and elsewhere, had to sell their land. However, Haji Saim's daughter Puan Jamaliah Katan and her husband Abu Bakar, were so sentimental about what they had been bequeathed, that in 1988 they decided to redevelop the property in Jalan Ulu Siglap into majestic three-storey terrace houses (Sketch 2). One unit was sold, the other mortgaged to finance the construction, and the last was to live in.





10 Rose Lane (Sketch 3), off Tanjong Katong Road, is where I was born. My maternal grandfather, Abdul Samad Thamby, was the manager of the British-owned New Singapore Iceworks in Sungei Road and bought the house in the 1930s. Many of these tropical bungalows sprang up along Tanjong Katong Road and alleys such as Rose Lane. They were unique with their immense concrete stilts, thick wooden floors, solid brick walls and modern tiled roofs. The all-round, floor-to-ceiling windows, wide open verandas, high ceilings and void spaces beneath the floor provided perfect ventilation for tropical living. Between the main house and floor-level kitchen annex at the rear was an open area with an air-well. My late grandfather managed to hide the four wheels of his Austin Seven in the ceiling of the house during the Japanese occupation to prevent the car from being confiscated by the Japanese soldiers. Today, almost all these houses have been demolished. They should have been given conservation status to reflect the true heritage of Tanjong Katong.

In 1942, hundreds of farmers were allocated an acre of land each to plant tapioca for the starving wartime population. My late father, Haji A Latiff Kassim, was given land at Lot 29, Malay Farm (now known as Kampung Ubi) and built a typical kampong house (Sketch 4). We had fruit trees such as guava, rambutan, jackfruit and soursop, as well as a profusion of herbals and vegetables, with chickens and ducks roaming freely. Diagonally across the road was a clear stream teeming with eels and freshwater fish such as *sepat* and *keli*, as well as freshwater shellfish. In the mid-1970s, after the family had lived in the house for 26 years, it had to make way for redevelopment. The present site of that kampong house is now where Block 31 Eunus Crescent is.

Sketch 5 shows the house in Opera Estate where I have lived since 1976. Built in 1957, the house was old and needed repairs, which as a DIY person, I effected, both

internally and externally. I also provided the contractor with detailed drawings for constructing the kampong-style porch and landscaped the miniscule garden with herbals, flowering plants and dwarf fruit trees.



Yusoff Abdul Latiff is a retired teacher who now indulges in painting watercolours with a focus on intricate Peranakan houses, colourful landscapes and detailed portraits.

The Boar's Head Tureen

By Caroline Carfantan

The 18th century Chinese boar's-head tureen at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) is quite eye-catching. Many visitors find it disturbing and even grotesque, so it's hard to imagine that for its original European owner, this tureen was then an elegant display of self-worth. *Trompe l'oeils* ceramics of game animals implied not only wealth but also aristocratic status.

In European courts, the tradition of displaying dining centrepieces dates back to the Middle Ages. At first, real animals were presented on a board, later, when sugar imports from the Canaries became cheaper, they were modelled from sugar. Copies of fruit, animals and other motifs were increasingly used for what was known as the *Service à la Française* – when all dishes are laid on the table at the same time. Later, sugar models were replaced by complete dining sets made of porcelain or faïence (tin-glazed earthenware) by those who could afford them. These sets were optical illusions known as *trompe l'oeils*. They were not simply utilitarian containers to keep the dishes warm, but a sign of social status. Their aim was to astonish and entertain the guests.

The fashion of modelling naturalistically shaped vessels made of ceramics was probably triggered in Meissen, Germany, by Johann Joachim Kaendler in 1734. Kaendler is believed to have based his designs on imported Asian teapot models as well as on living animals. Only after animal-shaped porcelain from Meissen appeared on aristocratic tables did faïence manufactories in Europe include them in their production range. Design similarities between the different manufactories are most likely linked to the fact that skilled workers and decorators such as Adam Friedrich von Löwenfinck and Johann Gottfried Becker had fled Meissen to work in other manufactories including Fulda, Germany, or Strasbourg, France. They were instrumental in the rapid spread of shapes, patterns and know-how.

The idea of a boar's head tureen design is attributed to Jean Guillaume Lanz from the Hannong factory in Strasbourg. From 1740 to 1760, realistic-looking tureens and covered dishes were the specialty of this faïence manufactory.

But where did the idea of a boar's head tureen come from? In the 18th century game hunting was highly regulated. This was the sport that revealed one's social position while demonstrating one's shooting and riding skills. According to Samuel Wittner, "The hunting practice by the court has justifiably been described as a sublimated form of



This boar's head is from Paul Hannong's manufactory in Strasbourg



This boar's head tureen is from Niderviller, France. What made these pieces revolutionary at the time, was the purple (pourpre in French) glaze for the tongue and mouth, a process developed by Paul Hannong

warfare...". Game hunting was the privilege of the nobility, the boar the most dangerous animal to hunt, the realistic looking tureen the trophy piece of the *service à la française*.

One famous order fulfilled by the Hannong manufactory was for Clemens August, Augsburg's prince-bishop, for his hunting castle in Clemenstwerth. It comprised more than 400 pieces including 120 naturalistically shaped tureens in animal and vegetable form. As there were other wealthy customers, many European manufacturers – Niderviller in France, Hoecht and Schrezheim in Germany, Kiel in Denmark, Hollitsch in Hungary, Chelsea in England and Rato in Portugal – included these tureens in their portfolios.

Customers were also looking east and trusted the East India companies with orders for boar's head tureens. Records from the Dutch East India Company state that 25 boar's heads were ordered in 1763 and 19 the following year. They also highlight that the Dutch company was concerned with profits for these animal dishes. Chinese tureens were not only large but also expensive, not the best combination for cargo optimisation and the highest profit per volume.

The design of these tureens was probably incomprehensible to Asian potters. While the Strasbourg 'original' with its extraordinarily life-like naturalism looks as if the boar has just been beheaded, the Chinese 'copy' in the ACM has lost all realism in translation. It is neither gruesome nor menacing. The Chinese decorator even embellished it with a touch of yellow eyeshadow. Perhaps the next time you look at it, you will see the tureen as it was 250 years ago – the highlight of the dinner table.

Caroline Carfantan is a member of the SEA Ceramic Society and with the boar's head tureen, rediscovered the beauty of Strasbourg ceramics.

Boar's head images courtesy of Musées de la Ville de Strasbourg, M Bertola

China National Silk Museum, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch

China's National Silk Museum is no single building but an estate housing a variety of structures that surround a classic Hangzhou landscaped garden.¹ As one of China's two most important textile conservatories and research centres, it houses not only research, conservation and sericulture galleries, but also a number of visitors' galleries featuring traditional Chinese fashions and textiles. Here is a true textile lover's paradise.

The Hangzhou Museum together with its sister museum (the Suzhou Silk Museum in Jiangsu) were founded in the 1990s when pre-Song dynasty textiles began to be found amongst the tomb artefacts



The main entrance of the China Silk Museum in Hangzhou

discovered during China's construction boom. It takes special expertise to handle textiles that have lain underground in sealed chambers for a thousand or more years. FOM members who will remember the Asian Civilisations Museum's special exhibition on *Famensi* in 2014 will remember hearing that what appeared to be more than 700 layers of silk was found among the Tang treasures hidden in a secret underground chamber. Feng Zhao in his most recent book² revealed that they had to sit in cold storage for 15 years before researchers could begin to peel the layers apart (note the word 'begin'; only a few layers have been separated and examined to date).

The Chinese have led the way in sericulture and silk production since at least the Neolithic Era (5000 BCE). We have pottery shards showing silkworm patterns as well as carvings, and even a cut cocoon discovered by archaeologists dating to the Yangshao Culture, circa 3500-3000 BCE (in



A beautiful piece of Tang Dynasty (618-907) Samite silk with standing lions. Samite is the name given to luxurious and heavy woven silk fabrics



This Liao Dynasty textile (907-1125) features roundels encasing four eagles. Facing bird and animal motifs are amongst the oldest textile designs found in Central Asia, which were adopted by the Chinese

the collection of the Palace Museum, Taipei). Recently, archaeologists found what they now believe to be China's earliest carving depicting silkworms, a boar's tusk carving found in Henan province that dates back 5,000 years.³ ACM's small Han Dynasty bronze silkworm is young by comparison.

According to a plaque in the museum, the most popular legend of the origin of mulberry and silkworm cultivation in China is the tale of a horse who wanted to marry a woman, but when her father refused to let the marriage take place and killed the horse instead, its pelt wrapped itself around the woman and fled with her, transforming her into a silkworm.

The ancient Greeks referred to the place where *serikos* or silk was made as Seres and silk strands of Chinese origin have been found throughout Central Asia, especially the region around Balkh and Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan, evidence of a thriving overland Silk Road as early as 500 BCE. The history of silk's journey along the Silk Road can be followed in the museum's Silk Road Gallery. A display of looms follows the development of the loom in China, while another gallery focuses on imperial insignia and court robes, but if it's the story of the history of Chinese textiles, you have several more galleries to choose from.

One of my favourite galleries depicts the various types of Chinese silk – silk tabby (*juan*), damask on tabby (*qi*), twill damask (*ling*), plain gauze (*sha*), gauze (*guo*), polychrome woven silk (*jin*), satin and satin damask (*duan*), tapestry weave (*kesi*), etc. followed by another range of display windows that focus on the individual embroidery stitches. You'll also learn that the original silk garments of China were plain white silk, used as burial shrouds, perhaps with the hope that the deceased would emerge like a silkworm into a new life beyond the cocoon-like shroud.

Patricia Bjaaland Welch's own Chinese textile collection remains, in her own words, 'unfocused' and ranges from an imperial gauze robe to rural children's protective caps.

All photographs by the author

¹ The website is www.chinasilkmuseum.com

² Feng, *Chinese Silk and the Silk Road*. Royal Collins Publishing Group, 2018.

³ Xinhuanet, 2019-04-24

The Otters of Singapore

By Jo Wright



Pups stay close to the adults for the first few weeks

Singapore is probably the only country in the world where you can see otters in broad daylight, right in the very heart of the city. Search the internet and you can find documentaries narrated by Sir David Attenborough, amongst others, with captivating footage of otters swimming in the Singapore River, rolling in the sand on the shores of Marina Reservoir and even parading their pups in Pasir Ris Park.



Adult otters closely monitor the pups' first foray into the water

Singapore is home to two different species of otter: the Asian small-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinerus*) and the smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*). This can be considered quite a coup considering that otter numbers worldwide are on a steep decline and the status of both species is listed as "vulnerable" by the *International Union for Conservation of Nature*. Smooth-coated otters in particular, are now thriving in Singapore and their importance in this country cannot be overstated.

Asian small-clawed otters are the smallest of all the otter species and weigh around 3-5kg with an overall length of less than one metre. They are generally nocturnal, very secretive and today are found in the wild in this country only on Pulau Ubin and Pulau Tekong.

Smooth-coated otters are their larger cousins, with adults weighing 7-11kg and around 1.2 metres in length from nose to tip of tail. They are found in family groups along the waterways and coasts of Singapore and are so visible partly because they are active during daylight hours – quite unusual for this species. Their diet consists mainly of fish, but those living along the coast will also happily eat prawns.

There were almost certainly otters in this part of the world 200 years ago. There is a painting of an otter in the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings, kept at the National Museum of Singapore, although it is not entirely clear if it's a smooth-coated or small-clawed otter. These watercolours were commissioned when Farquhar was British Resident and Commandant of Melaka between 1803 and 1818 and they showcase just some of the flora and fauna of the Malay peninsula at that time.

Fast forward to the 1960s and otters had all but disappeared from Singapore. The waterways had become too polluted and anoxic to sustain the food chains on which otters depend. In addition, land reclamation and other building works were disturbing the waterways and coastlines where otters would otherwise live.

In the 1970s the government started a huge clean-up of the nation's waterways. Factories along the Singapore River were moved, port facilities shifted further westwards, people living on the river itself were rehoused and new reservoirs built. By the end of the century, the major land reclamation projects were coming to an end and the waterways of Singapore were once again sparkling and full of life.



Otters enjoy each others company - even when napping



Cyclists giving way to a family of otters crossing the path around Marina Reservoir

In 1998 two smooth-coated otters were spotted in Sungei Buloh, in the north of the island. It's likely that they swam across the strait from Johor, escaping the same conditions which had led to the otters' demise in Singapore in the 1960s.

Those otters thrived in the mangrove-forested nature reserve and before long, pups appeared. With time, other otters were spotted around Singapore and in 2014 a pair took up residence in Bishan Park, where they had a litter of three pups. This was the start of the famous "Bishan family of otters". The following year they moved down the Kallang River and into Marina Reservoir. This family still live in this patch of Singapore and is quite possibly one of the most closely documented and most-photographed group of wild otters in the world.



"OK, if you've taken the shot then I can get on with breakfast!"

Today over 10 families of smooth-coated otters, with around 70-80 individuals live in and around the main island of Singapore and they are a sure-fire hit with people who come across them. What is it about otters that makes them so very captivating, apart from being photogenic and Instagrammable?

Smooth-coated otters are social animals and generally live in family groups, with just one breeding pair, the alpha male and female, who mate for life. The alpha female gives birth to between two to five pups, who are born blind and quite helpless, dependent on mother's milk for the first few weeks of life.

The entire family helps to raise the new pups; they have to be taught how to swim and catch food for themselves. This teamwork extends to beyond raising the little ones. They often work together when hunting, herding fish into the shallows for easy capture. They will often groom each other

and are very tactile with each other. When they nap during the day, they nearly always stay close together, cuddling each other and often making sure they are touching at least one other otter. These activities are highly visible as many of the otter families in Singapore raise their families in urban spaces such as inland reservoirs, in canals and rivers and alongside park connectors.

Beyond being photogenic and great for tourists, otters are incredibly important from the environmental point of view and are regarded as a keystone species. For otters to thrive, the waterways have to be clean enough and oxygenated enough to support their entire food chain. In Singapore many of the water bodies in which the otters live also happen to be our reservoirs, so it's good to know that what is good for otters is also good for us!

How best to see the smooth-coated otters of Singapore? It's easiest to see them early in the morning and late afternoon, when they come out to feed in the waterways and along the coasts. Perhaps the best places to look out for them are around the shores of Marina Reservoir, along the banks of the Singapore River, at Jurong Lake Gardens and even the Singapore Botanic Gardens.

How to behave when you see otters? However cuddly they look, it's important to remember that they are wild animals and top apex predators. NParks guidelines suggest keeping a distance of at least five metres from them and double that distance if pups are present. Like any parents, otters with pups can be very protective of their youngsters. Keep your dog on a leash, switch off the flash from your camera, move slowly, keep your voices down and the otters will most likely remain unperturbed by your presence.

It's worth noting that both species of otters found in Singapore are protected by law. It's illegal to trap, harm or kill otters, or even own one as a pet. One of the greatest threats to otters in Southeast Asia is the pet trade, so be aware that those cute videos of captive small-clawed otters on social media can mean that otters in the wild pay a terrible price.

You can find out more of the activities of the smooth-coated otters of Singapore by following both the OtterWatch and the Ottercity pages on Facebook.

Jo Wright has been a docent with FOM for over 10 years and has been otterly entranced by *Lutrogale perspicillata* for quite some time.

All photos by the author

The NUS Baba House

From the Past to the Present

By the Baba House Outreach Team

Nestled within Tanjong Pagar, in the heart of the historical district of Blair Plain, is a heritage house situated along a row of buildings popularly known as “Peranakan Townhouses”. Marked by its idiosyncratic bright blue exterior, the NUS Baba House at 157 Neil Road is a National University of Singapore (NUS) conservation project that has been mobilised as a Straits Chinese house-museum. Underscored by its impetus for research and study in a range of disciplines, the house-museum also offers programmes such as the newly launched *Saturdays at the NUS Baba House*, and the weekday Heritage Tours that aim to engage with audiences, revealing not only the house’s interiors, but its various connections to history, heritage and culture.

Having been identified as an example of a colonial period dwelling worthy of investigation and conservation, the NUS Baba House encompasses a rich history at the intersections of the personal histories of a family, the provenance of its objects, and the parallels to Peranakan communities in the early 20th century in general. Built around 1895, the story of 157 Neil Road and

its connection with the Wee family, descendants of shipping tycoon Wee Bin, began in 1910 when they acquired it. In the decades since, the house has seen continuous development as it evolved to meet the needs of its occupants, thus also reflecting the changing times. Wee Lin, one of the surviving family members, has a clear memory from when he was still in primary school, that a back lane was constructed behind the house.



Laundry blue exterior of the NUS Baba House

This addition to the house and the others in this row, was part of comprehensive plans drawn up by the Singapore Improvement Trust to address housing-related health and hygiene problems. As a result, their kitchen was moved from an adjoining unit at 20 Everton Road to the house, where it remains as one of the displays.

There are many more examples of the ways in which changes in the area, personal memories and the everyday needs of the family constitute new layers woven into the complex tapestry of the NUS Baba House. Accordingly, 30 years after the house was vacated by the last generation of occupants in the 1980s, the introduction of the conservation project required an ‘interpretative’ aspect in addition to its ‘restorative’ elements. This was undertaken by NUS in 2007,



Reception hall of 157 Neil Road, featuring the altar to the household deity at the centre

in partnership with founding donor Ms Agnes Tan Kim Lwi (in memory of her late father Tun Tan Cheng Lock), the Wee family, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS), as well as the honorary curator, Peter Lee. Through this partnership, a set of architects, conservators and social historians were brought together to reconstruct the various rooms. Informed by their respective areas of understanding and expertise, the project’s various experts focused on presenting the house as typifying the material and domestic culture of Straits Chinese communities in the early 20th century.

On the interpretative front, the curatorial strategies not only present the house as a restored building, but also ensure that its contents tell a comprehensive story about its inhabitants. That story is situated within a complex matrix of relationships that include urban history, migration, economic contingencies, the neighbourhood, and so on. Therefore, in early 2008, an acquisitions policy was drafted to assemble a world-class collection of objects and materials that would form a substantial resource for the study of Peranakan culture, history and society as a whole. In addition to those from the Wee family, artefacts



Phoenix and peony ceramic applique above the cantilever roof



Gallery impression of Glossaries of the Straits Chinese Homemaking



Kitchen moved over from 20 Everton Road, with access to the back lane

came from various donors, notably other prominent Peranakan families. The comprehensive collection includes lacquerware such as everyday utensils, electrical appliances, books, clothing and textiles such as batik with their decorative elements, as well as a substantial assemblage of portraits and paintings. Together, they provide a glimpse into what life for a Peranakan family might have looked like nearly 100 years ago.

As an architectural heritage monument, the restoration of the house was also a cornerstone effort that defined its conceptual foundations. It is truly in the restoration works that the 'then' of the house has been transported to the 'now'. To achieve this, the collaboration between the NUS Baba House and the URA, alongside the NUS Department of Architecture, endeavoured to accommodate, document and experiment with the various materials and techniques that went into the building's original construction. The result can be clearly seen in the house's beautiful interiors: an abundance of ornate decorative features adorns the house, with its gilded ceiling corbels, intricately carved *piaktu* (restored inset wall cabinets) and ceramic applique embellishing the cantilevered roofs. In particular, the current shade of blue that the house is known for these days is the result of a technical analysis done of the building's paint scheme, revealing that laundry blue had been added to the lime wash that was used to paint 157 Neil Road in its heyday.

NUS Baba House is also a "pedagogical facility for teaching", says curator Foo Su Ling. Students of history and architecture enter its doors and are enriched by the diverse perspectives the house offers through academic talks, conservation workshops and more. For instance, talks and workshops on the use of lime during conservation work on the house's walls have been



Recessed cabinets (*piaktu*) built into the walls

held regularly, in conjunction with the URA's Architectural Heritage Season.

Conferences on the Peranakan Chinese have also been initiated, culminating in two publications that are now crucial contributions to the evolving discussion on Peranakan heritage. An exhibition gallery on the third floor now takes the place of what used to function as a bedroom. Here, artists and practitioners have been invited to present their works in response to the discourses emerging from the house. The current exhibition, *Glossaries of the Straits Chinese Homemaking*, draws elements from similar past projects in proposing new ways of understanding the Straits Chinese heritage as one of continuous cultural negotiations.



Books in the Straits Chinese collection, stored in the rear bedroom

157 Neil Road was once home to a Peranakan family and its current status as a heritage house attempts to maintain respect for its former function as a home. In so doing, its fertile history is not lost to the processes of institutionalisation, but manifests in the placement and choices of objects, and the retention of the house's physical look to recreate a genuine domestic environment. To this day, the NUS Baba House continues to situate itself firmly as part of the wider Peranakan and neighbourhood communities, evoking memories from former residents and telling the story of 157 Neil Road from past to present.

To find out more about the NUS Baba House and its curatorial strategies, artefacts, and conservation efforts, please refer to our publications, *NUS Baba House: Architecture and Artefacts of a Straits Chinese Home* and *Peranakan Chinese in a Globalizing Southeast Asia*.

All images taken by Olivia Kwok for the NUS Baba House

The Unforgotten: St Andrew's Cathedral Honours the Dead

By Tim Clark

In England, a typical church or cathedral would be surrounded by gravestones. Important people would be buried under the floor or in sepulchres inside the church; the greatest honour being accorded to those placed closest to the altar. No one, however, was buried in or around St Andrew's Cathedral at 11 St Andrew's Road, Singapore.

St Andrew's remembrance

The generous plot of land designated by Raffles for the building of a church, which he didn't live to see, was never intended as a cemetery and it is crediting Raffles with more vision than he deserves to assume that he anticipated the need for a car park.

Singapore's first Christian burials took place on the slope of Fort Canning, where outdoor theatre is now held. The remains have long since been exhumed but the tombstones can still be seen along the bordering wall – Protestants on the south side, Catholics facing them from the north. Most are weathered and hard to decipher. Fortunately, the memorial plaques in the cathedral are more accessible and offer a fascinating insight into the lives and deaths of the Anglican Christian community.

Reminders that life was often short

There are some sad reminders of the precariousness of life in the tropics where disease and pestilence were rife and

medical knowledge and facilities were primitive. Children, even those from privileged families, were particularly vulnerable. Raffles himself had five children, four of whom died as infants and the only child to survive him died as a teenager. His first wife is buried in Java and he died in England in 1826 on the last day of his 44th year. The lancet stained-glass window behind the altar bears the family crest of Raffles to commemorate his contribution to Singapore.



Memorial to Colonel Ronald MacPherson (1817-1869) architect of the cathedral, buried in Bukit Timah cemetery



The D'Almeida family's double tragedy

Child mortality

The origins and treatment of most diseases were a mystery in the 19th century. Peranakan children were given necklaces to wear as talismans to protect them from illness, but a tiger's tooth necklace would not discourage a mosquito carrying malaria or dengue fever. And no one even knew that mosquitos carried disease in those days. So although we don't know what caused the death of two daughters of the D'Almeida family within a month of each other in 1855, we can speculate that they may both have been bitten by a mosquito.



The plaque commemorating the death of William Smith who was buried at sea

Lost at sea

Adding to the dangers of living in the tropics was the high risk of perishing at sea. Before the Suez Canal opened in 1869, ships had to endure the perilous voyage around Africa. The only son of William Smith, Headmaster of the school that became known as Raffles Institute, died

on such a voyage in 1847. His plaque would have originally been placed in the neo-classical St Andrews Church, which was demolished to be replaced by the present neo-gothic cathedral. Another tablet moved from the old church commemorates the death of a naval officer who was buried at sea off the coast of Borneo.

Casualties of World War II

The library in the north transept is dedicated to the memory of the archdeacon, Graham White, who died in Changi prison during the Japanese occupation of Singapore (1942 – 1945). The library contains a book with the names of 27,000 casualties of World War II. And in the north aisle of the cathedral there are plaques commemorating the names of members of the Malayan civil service and Australian nurses who died in the conflict. There are also colourful plaques to represent two of the many ships sunk around Singapore. The battleship *Prince of Wales* and battlecruiser *Repulse* were sunk off the east coast of Malaya in 1941 with the loss of 840 lives. The silver candlesticks and altar cross were presented to the cathedral in their memory.

Killed in action during World War I

Only one plaque commemorates a casualty of the war in Europe from 1914-18: Lt Percy Gold of the Scots Guards. But there are four tablets dedicated to those killed in Singapore in a mutiny that occurred during the same period. The mutiny in 1915 was allegedly sparked by the rumour that an Indian regiment would soon be sent to Europe to fight against the Turks. Being mainly Muslim, they objected to this and attacked their officers, killing 17 in the process. Ironically, in reality these troops were destined to be sent to Hong Kong where they would have enjoyed a peaceful life.

Among some 40 killed in this tragic uprising was one very unlucky sailor named Anscombe. He was a stoker on a naval ship. When the mutiny broke out, he was ordered to put down his shovel and take up arms, to which he was no doubt unaccustomed. When he was subsequently killed, a brass plaque was dedicated exclusively to him (in the north aisle – a high tribute to someone of such lowly station).

The Great and the Good

Most of the lives honoured in the cathedral were short by today's standards. Very few lived beyond the age of 60. Of these, it is worth mentioning two whose long lives



Indian convict construction workers, image courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

contributed greatly to the benefit of Singapore. Reverend William Gomes was born in Ceylon and devoted his life to spreading the gospel in this region and to translating the prayer book and several hymns into Chinese, Dayak and Malay. He passed away in 1902 aged 75. Another man who achieved longevity was William Read CMG, who played a key role in transferring control of the settlements from India to become an independent Crown Colony in 1867. He died in London in 1909 aged 91.

The Cathedral: a monument to many lives

The building itself is a memorial to many people who contributed to its construction. First, the Scottish merchants who donated funds to build the original church, which they named after Scotland's patron saint, St Andrew, because, as the Scottish say, "He who pays the piper calls the tune."

Then there was the architect, Colonel MacPherson, who is commemorated by the stained-glass window above the main west entrance showing the four evangelists as well as a column outside. His right-hand man, Major McNair, was also a part-time architect who designed Empress Place and the Istana. He was almost killed when a rope broke as he personally fixed the cross on top of the spire.

The governor of the Straits Settlements at the time construction began on the cathedral was Major General Butterworth. Sadly, he died in England before he could see the building completed. However, he is commemorated by an elaborate tablet in the south aisle, and by a lancet window behind the altar displaying his family crest.

These were men of many talents: army officers who earned distinction by playing a multitude of roles in Singapore's development. But what of the unsung heroes who labored on the cathedral's construction? They were convicts from India who formed the labour force for all public buildings until 1873. Despite their low status they were well treated and highly regarded for their skills and industry, which they no doubt thrived on once they earned their freedom and became absorbed into the community.



Tribute to C F Anscombe, a stoker killed during the mutiny

Tim Clark is a semi-retired university lecturer and volunteer guide at several museums.

Unless otherwise noted, photos by the author

A Last Look at Pearl Bank Apartments

A Celebrated Modern Chinatown Landmark

By Jerome Lim



The block offered great views - this is from one of the penthouses

The time has come to bid farewell to Pearl Bank Apartments, that cylinder-shaped apartment block that sticks, like the proverbial sore thumb, out of the southern slope of Pearl's Hill. Touted as Southeast Asia's tallest residential building during its construction, the block is thought of as a marvel of modern design and architectural innovation, in spite of a rather unpretentious appearance. Emptied of its residents, the block now awaits its eventual demolition. It was sold in February 2018 as part of a wave of collective sales that threatens to rid Singapore of its modern, post-independence architectural icons. CapitalLand, the developer behind the purchase of the property, aims to replace the block with a new development that will have close to 800 units, compared to Pearl Bank Apartments' original 288 units.

The construction of Pearl Bank Apartments came as part of a post-independence urban renewal effort, one that involved the sale of land to private firms for development. In Pearl Bank's case, the aim was to provide high-density housing for the middle classes. The project was to have been completed in 1974 with construction having started in the middle of 1970, but it ran into several difficulties. A shortage of construction materials and labour, as well as several fatal worksite accidents, saw to the project's two-year delay.

The problems did not end with the project's completion in 1976. The developer, Hock Seng Enterprises, ran into

financial difficulties and was placed into receivership in August 1978. This prompted the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) to step in. All eight of the block's penthouses were bought by the URA in 1979 for resale to civil servants and statutory board officers. The prices offered for the spacious 4,000+ square foot penthouses (the area included a 1,000 square foot roof terrace) were \$214,000 for the intermediate units and \$217,000 for the corner unit – a steal even at the prices of the day.

The 38-storey apartment block also had problems with its lifts, post completion. For over a month in 1978, only two of the lifts were in working order. Another incident that



A view of the block taken from the former Pearls Centre



The inside of the circle



A view from the top

involved the lifts occurred later in November 1986. A metal chain of one of the lifts fell a hundred metres and crashed through the top of the lift's cabin. It was quite fortunate that there was no one using that lift when the late-night incident occurred. The building also developed a host of other problems as it aged. In its later years, it has also taken on an increasingly worn and tired appearance. Even so, it was still one to marvel at and one that excited many in the photographic community – particularly owing to its unusual and quite photogenic form.

Uniquely shaped, the block stands on a C-shaped plan with a slit that runs down the cylinder and provides light and ventilation. The inside of this cee is where the complex and quite creative nature of the building's layout becomes apparent, as does its charm. Common corridors line the inside of the circle, providing correspondence across the entrances of the split-level apartments and also to each apartment's secondary exits via staircases. These staircases are appended to the inner curve and provide breaks in its shape – as does a common staircase shaft that serves as an emergency escape. The apartments are a joy in themselves, each woven into the neighbouring unit across the different levels – much like interlocking pieces of a three-dimensional puzzle and providing a joyous mix of two, three and four-bedroom apartments.



A perspective of the apartment block's unique design

The voices that have been lent in support of conserving the building, and also other post-independence architectural icons such as People's Park Complex and Golden Mile Complex, are many. These buildings, even if not for their architectural merit, represent a coming of age for the local architectural community and a breaking away from the colonial mould. Several proposals were tabled for the conservation of Pearl Bank Apartments, including one made by one of the project's lead architects, Mr Tan Cheng Siong, and another that was made by the Management Corporation Strata Title Council. However, both proved impractical.

The sentiments in regard to conservation are not necessarily shared by all. For the developer, the site's central location and the views it has on offer, mean that its development potential cannot be ignored. A few among the block's long-term residents would have also welcomed the opportunity to cash in. This was especially so for those occupying the lower floor units, which over the years became increasingly less pleasant to live in. Choked pipes and an ever-present stench emanating from the rubbish disposal system, were some of their problems.

Architectural or historical perspectives aside, there is much less reason for the person-on-the-street to have any sentiment towards the loss of the apartment block. There certainly would have been much less of an opportunity for people to interact with or even get close enough to appreciate the building, quite unlike the old National Library, the National Theatre or the old National Stadium, all of which have remained in many people's memories.

Plans announced by CapitaLand in mid-May confirm that nothing more than the memory of Pearl Bank Apartments will be retained. 'One Pearl Bank', the new development, will feature two curved 39-storey towers connected at the roof by bridges. Due to be completed in 2023, the development will also appear much less stark and a lot more 'green' – in keeping with current trends in vertical greenery. Despite being prettier in appearance and a breath of fresh air, it will take a lot more than that for One Pearl Bank to reach the heights that Pearl Bank Apartments had as an architectural and photographic icon.



The block's apartments were laid out across several levels and were woven into each other much like interlocking pieces of a 3D puzzle

Jerome Lim blogs on *The Long and Winding Road* (www.thelongandwindingroad.wordpress.com) about his impressions and experiences of life.

All photos by the author

The Sublime Universe of Guo Pei

Chinese Art and Couture at the Asian Civilisations Museum

By Isabella Olcer

Against the grim backdrop of the Cultural Revolution in China, a grandmother whispered bed-time stories to her granddaughter. She spoke of the imperial elegance of a bygone era, fantasies in silk and satin, rich embroideries of luscious flowers, fluttering butterflies and shades of delicate pinks and vibrant yellows. In the little girl's grey universe the coarse cotton Mao suit was the norm, having fashionable attire was a criminal offence, so these sartorial descriptions were the stuff of dreams. She would fall asleep imagining the smoothness of silk and flowers made of thread, but would have to wait till she was 16 before she saw an embroidered dress for the first time. The girl's name is Guo Pei and to this day she is still chasing those elusive images of beauty and opulence.



The majestic embroidered cape of bright yellow silk worn by Rihanna

Guo Pei's story is one of perseverance and passion and also of modern China transforming itself and reconnecting with its past. Today Guo Pei is a globally famous, game-changing designer whose runway shows, mesmerising visual feasts of high fashion at the Paris Haute Couture Calendar, are highly anticipated. Her masterpieces combine the beauty of China's dynastic past as seen in the traditional craftsmanship and its historical elements, with a personal, contemporary perspective. As a designer she draws inspiration from her cultural heritage and is also concerned with reviving it, reimagining it, taking it to new heights, and passing it on. Her aspirations overlap with the Asian Civilisations Museum's (ACM) overarching vision, which is to cultivate an understanding of heritage cultures. An

exhibition of Guo Pei's work, consisting of fantastical gowns encrusted with Swarovski crystals and sequins, embroidered with golden dragons, phoenixes and thousands of flowers, is here to open the *Season of Chinese Art* at the ACM. Multiple pieces are displayed in three sections: Gold is the Color of my Soul, China and the World, and Treasured



The Chinese blue and white porcelain dress

Heirlooms, with the majestic embroidered cape of bright yellow silk that Rihanna wore to the Met Gala in 2015 setting the tone. Already well-known in fashion circles, Guo Pei was catapulted into global Instagram fame.

The sumptuous world of couture and its finest output have found their way to museum exhibitions, especially during the last ten years when fashion has become...well, fashionable! Guo Pei has been invited to show her work in many museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Victoria and the SCAD Museum of Fashion. The ACM's exhibition is different in that it sets up an interesting discourse by juxtaposing Guo Pei's masterworks with Chinese art pieces from its own galleries, thereby making these pieces points of reference for contemplating how she has reimagined Chinese aesthetics.

The comparison often illustrates Guo Pei's inspiration, such as the phantasmagorical Chinese porcelain dress. This is literally what the spectre of porcelain would wear, with its sculptural charger-like protrusions and the most refined shimmering blue and white decorations. At other times the connection is direct, as seen in the two dresses that were inspired by the ACM's Peranakan artworks, which Guo Pei saw in Paris in 2010. They are being displayed for the first time and an intricate traditional cloud collar that could rival any parure is a sight not to be missed. The exhibition provides an opportunity to discover the recurring historical themes and the more subtle sensibilities of a contemporary designer, making this an amazing exhibition for the fashion savvy as well as art-lovers.

Guo Pei has often been asked about the difference

between a runway show and a museum exhibition of her work. She emphasises that she loves both, but has a certain affinity with a museum setting as this enables a deeper appreciation of her work and a closer observation of the amazing details she puts into her creations. For her, details are wisdom: they are what touch us when we look at an artist's work, what make us human. In fact, at her Rose Studio in Beijing and Paris she and her huge team of embroiderers spend enormous amounts of time, months and sometimes years, to create each masterpiece, lavishly enriched with beautiful details. Unsurprisingly, when she talks about this effort, she often uses words such as 'love' and 'passion', which are essential for such intense dedication. "Time is life," she says, "it takes time to give life to my designs" and she believes that the time she invests makes them timeless and worthy of future generations. The ultimate fruit of this love is the magnificent gold dress that took an astounding 50,000 hours to be completed in genuine gold thread. She says she was driven by her insatiable desire to make the "the most beautiful dress in the world", and recognises that it was a crazy endeavor, but unhesitatingly adds that, "the most beautiful dress in the world is still to be made, tomorrow". Don't miss this strapless, larger than life wonder of a crinoline skirt and its amazing scalloped trailing hem.

Today Guo Pei has the freedom to satisfy most of her artistic whims, but this was not always the case. The financial structure of couture houses is as delicate as are their products; their sine qua non is one of excellent craftsmanship and absolute luxury, which means they cannot employ economies of scale and the mechanisation that enables other industries



The magnificent gold dress (Da jin) that took 50,000 hours to complete in genuine gold thread

to be profitable. It took decades, clever strategies and many outstanding, but wearable, dresses for Guo Pei to build the successful business that backs her up today as an artist. She achieved a balance between dresses that made her clients happy and creations that appealed to her artistic soul. This exhibition displays items of her artistic pursuit and are not necessarily wearable items of clothing, although most have been worn on the runway at some point. So when you go, check out the elaborately embroidered jumpsuit with dragon's wings coming out of each side, and the 'Palace Flower' dress overlaid with hundreds of silk peonies (a photo of this dress is on the cover), as well as the beautifully decorated wedding gowns inspired by traditional dresses, which serve as models in her studio and have been borrowed by celebrities such as Angelababy to wear on their special day.

In today's world, inspiration comes from many sources and as a modern designer, Guo Pei is sensitive to outside influences. The body of her work has traces of couture's classical era of the 50s, grand opera costumes, Gothic fairy tales and inspiration from many aspects of western architecture. However, as she herself says, Chinese culture is in her blood and is definitely her design language. This multicultural blend is very much at home in the ACM. Her designs are both traditional and contemporary; she is influenced by the West but has a clear Asian identity and thus challenges popular perceptions. She contradicts prejudiced associations about Chinese products and creates fashion influences from outside the set Euro-American centres.

In today's world, just like inspiration, change comes from different places. It comes here from a gracious Chinese woman, pretty and petite, modest and natural, whose dedication to perfection is fearless and whose depictions of feminine beauty and elegance are utterly enchanting. Discovering this beautiful world is an extraordinary experience and a treat. Go to the ACM and enter the sublime universe of Guo Pei.

Isabella Olcer has always loved fashion but the fashion designers she used to read about have been replaced by Indian gods and Chinese emperors since she became an ACM docent.



Guo Pei with two of her contemporary interpretations of Peranakan wedding garments, image courtesy of Russel Wong Photo

Unless otherwise noted, all images courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum

Chinatown Past and Present

By Heather Muirhead

Right from its beginnings, Singapore's Chinatown was not inhabited solely by the Chinese. The thriving port city was flooded with ethnic groups from all over Asia and further afield. This is evident today in the different religious buildings constructed along the shoreline of the old Telok Ayer Bay. These have become 'National Monuments' and many people don't realise that there are more located along Telok Ayer Street than on any other street in Singapore.



Telok Ayer Bay in 1856, from a painting by Percy Carpenter. Courtesy of the artist Yip Yew Chong

Today's Chinatown is divided into four distinct precincts; each has a different atmosphere and its own historical stories. Telok Ayer (or bay water), the oldest of these, is where the first migrants and traders landed to seek their fortunes and to start a new life in this distant country. They came on sailing ships and after many weeks at sea, tossed about in cramped and dangerous

conditions, they wanted to give thanks for their safe arrival on these shores. Small shrines and joss houses were set up for this purpose and were later replaced by the religious buildings we see today.

After the Plan of the Town of Singapore, drawn up by Raffles and Jackson in 1822, was formulated, shophouses began to be built. Roads were laid out and constructed mainly by Indian convict labourers. On the hills surrounding the bay, the jungle was being stripped back for nutmeg and clove plantations. The British wanted to break the Dutch control of the lucrative spice trade.

In the Raffles Town Plan this area was named *Chinese Kampong* and here the Chinese were in the majority, but soon other ethnic groups started to move in as well. Cross and Upper Cross Streets for example, came to be known as *Kampong Susu*. This was where Indians from the Coromandel Coast of Tamil Nadu in Southeast India traded their goods and sold cow's milk (*susu* in Malay).



Religious buildings along Telok Ayer Bay



Kreta Ayer in the 1930s, photo courtesy of John Simmer

The town expanded towards the Singapore River and divided into separate areas for the Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew and Hakka dialect speakers to live. Many of these streets were no-go areas for people from a different dialect group and were controlled by secret societies.

Kreta Ayer (cart water) is the area that tourists today think of as Chinatown. It developed as the town spread and was inhabited mostly by Cantonese speakers. As more and more Chinese arrived, the living conditions deteriorated dramatically. Rooms in the shophouses were divided into smaller and smaller cubicles and diseases spread rapidly. The wealthier among the community wanted to move away and up into the hills, which were by now being subdivided after the plantations had failed in the 1850s, owing to nutmeg canker disease. On the hills, one could catch healthy breezes from the sea. This is when Bukit Pasoh (hill of pots) started to be developed and shophouses with elaborate façades were built from 1890 onwards. Chinese gentlemen's clubs for the millionaires and clan associations for the average population were established here.

The original shophouses in Telok Ayer and Kreta Ayer were built back to back, with no rear exits. To try and solve the unhygienic conditions that this caused, around 1910 the colonial government started a campaign to create back lanes between the houses. In established areas, this meant losing

about a third of the property and created discontent among the house owners. All new constructions had to incorporate a back lane and from the 1920s, spiral staircases were also introduced for ease of night-soil (human waste) collection and as fire escapes.



Spiral Staircases

The fourth area of Tanjong Pagar (cape of stakes) developed for a different reason. The original port in the Singapore River became overcrowded and could not cope with the burgeoning trade. A new port needed to be built and the urgency of this was exacerbated by the change from sailing ships to steam ships in the middle of the 19th century. The New Harbour (later renamed Keppel Harbour) was located at the end of Tanjong Pagar Road, which became a busy thoroughfare between the port and the godowns or warehouses alongside the Singapore River. All manner of vehicles rushed up and down: rickshaws, hand-pulled carts, bullock carts, pedestrians, horse-drawn vehicles and later steam, followed by electric, trams. A branch railway line was constructed between Keppel Harbour and Tank Road, but was dismantled after a few years and is now our first 'green corridor', Duxton Plain Park.



Vanda Miss Joaquim orchid

Other communities established themselves in this area. The Parsis bought Mount Palmer to establish the Parsi burial ground and build the Parsee Lodge. It was here that Agnes Joaquim of the Armenian community produced the first hybrid orchid, later to become Singapore's iconic national flower. Some of the earliest Indians to arrive came with the

British as members of the East India Company's private army and were known as Sepoys. Their barracks or cantonment was also located in this area.

In the 1960s the Singapore government invited the United Nations to send advisors to help with planning the development and reconstruction of the city. The priority at that time was to solve the problems of an acute housing shortage and unhygienic conditions. That led to the temporary shelving of the recommendation to not destroy the identity and architecture of the old areas. The first Concept Plan of 1971 was drawn up to guide the development of Singapore's future land use. Much of the old precinct of Kreta Ayer was demolished for urban renewal. However, by the 1980s it was realised that in this rush to modernise, there was disquiet among the people because of the rapid

erasing of the past. In 1986 the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) drew up a Conservation Master Plan with the crucial task of conserving what remained of Singapore's built heritage. To show the owners what was possible, 32 shophouses in Tanjong Pagar were identified for restoration. One of these was the first pilot project undertaken by the URA as a show house. Detailed investigations were carried out to ensure that the 3R principles of Maximum Retention, Sensitive Restoration and Careful Repair were carried out. This building is now the Tea Chapter at 9 Neil Road. Conservation is a time-consuming and costly undertaking. However, the owners of the buildings could see the value in keeping the authentic structure in place while enabling the building to gain a new lease of economic life. How lucky we are that so many of these buildings were retained and are now classified in the over 7,100 conserved buildings in Singapore.



Conserved buildings beneath modern high-rises

The old shoreline of Telok Ayer Bay disappeared with the levelling of Mounts Erskine and Wallich and the land reclamation that took place in the 1880s. The sea and the ships have receded into the distance. The Chinatown we see today still contains glimpses of the past, but in order to appreciate the contributions made by all the different communities who came here long ago, we need to look between the cracks of this modern city to see the sacrifices made, the hard labour involved, the money donated by philanthropists and the lives lived by ordinary citizens, during the establishment of this unique and diverse part of the city.

URA/FOM Chinatown Heritage Trails are held on Friday and Saturday mornings from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon. Tours are free but registration is required. www.eventbrite.sg. Search Heritage Trails.

Heather Muirhead is the coordinator of the URA/FOM Chinatown Heritage Trails

All photos by the author except where otherwise noted

Haw Par Villa: One of a Kind

By Amanda Berlowe Jaffe

To enter Haw Par Villa is to enter another dimension. Meandering pathways lead you among vibrantly coloured statues that depict Chinese myths and cautionary tales. Fantastical creatures greet you as you turn a corner while big band music plays over crackling speakers mounted on poles. There is nothing else like Haw Par Villa in Singapore or, for that matter, the world.



One of Haw Par Villa's many fantastical creatures

Recently reopened after a brief closure for renovations, Haw Par Villa is a site steeped in nostalgia in a country focused on progress. *Time Out Singapore* lists it among 15 attractions Singaporeans never go to, yet in 2014, when the Singapore Tourism Board commemorated 50 years of tourism, over 13,000 people attended its first two-weekend event, *Reliving Haw Par Villa*.

Also known as Tiger Balm Gardens, Haw Par Villa was the vision of Aw Boon Haw (whose name translates into Gentle Tiger). Boon Haw and his brother, Aw Boon Par, (Gentle Leopard) were Burmese Chinese brothers who developed (some say perfected) Tiger Balm, a cure-all for



"Ox-Head", guarding the gate to the Ten Courts of Hell

ailments from rheumatism to insect bites. Boon Par focused on production while Boon Haw successfully promoted Tiger Balm products throughout Southeast Asia. By 1926, they had opened a Singapore factory and moved their families to the island.

Although Singapore was Tiger Balm's leading production centre, Boon Haw built a mansion in Hong Kong for his second wife (he had four), completed in 1935. He also constructed a garden behind the mansion and opened it to the public, filling it with sculpture, pavilions and pagodas that presented moral tales based on Daoist philosophy, Confucian principles, and Buddhist beliefs.

Boon Haw subsequently built a comparable home – Haw Par Villa -- for Boon Par in Singapore. The house, completed in 1937, was unique in Singapore – a large cylinder surrounded by six smaller ones, each topped with a concrete dome. As in Hong Kong, he created a public garden filled with statues, grottoes and displays depicting tales of Chinese myths and morality. Boon Par lived there only briefly, fleeing to Burma ahead of the Japanese invasion. He died there in 1944. Japanese soldiers occupied the house during the war. When Boon Haw reached Singapore after the war, he found the house vandalised and tore it down. He never rebuilt it; instead, he focused on rebuilding and expanding the gardens. In all, Boon Haw spent approximately 15 years building the Singapore gardens, right up to his death in 1954.

Boon Haw had hired Chinese artisans to build his Hong Kong gardens and brought them to Singapore. These artisans, in turn, oversaw the work of apprentices. There were no blueprints. The content came directly from Boon Haw, who periodically visited Singapore. While here, he inspected the gardens each morning and met with foremen to discuss the next steps.

During the peak years from 1949-1953, over 80 artisans worked on Haw Par Villa's displays. The figures and scenes that filled the gardens were initially shaped using reinforced steel, then covered in concrete. Before the concrete dried, wire mesh was used to create a more accurate shape. The lead artisans then worked a layer of plaster to create each statue's



"Horse-Face", standing guard at the Ten Courts of Hell



The Monkey God mid-battle

ultimate form. A final coat of papier mâché and embellishments such as glass and mirrors were added, followed by painted details. Given post-war shortages, much of the material came from the grounds themselves or nearby, including from the demolished mansion.

Some of the artisans who created the Singapore gardens stayed on to maintain them. Teo Veoh Seng, who started at Haw Par Villa as a 13-year-old apprentice, retired from full-time work in 2017, after almost 70 years. He continues to train two apprentices. A documentary about Mr Teo and Haw Par Villa, *The Last Artisan*, premiered at last year's Singapore International Film Festival. I encourage you to seek it out when next shown here.

Haw Par Villa is a little rough around the edges in some spots, but this may reflect the sheer amount of statuary it contains. The exhibit that seems stamped on the memory of every Singaporean who visited as a child – and also every travel blogger -- is the *Ten Courts of Hell*. A group of figures vividly depicts gruesome punishments for misdeeds ranging from the misuse of books to corruption, as the dead travel through hell en route to reincarnation. The emphasis is on gore, with the apparent intention of making a strong impression. Indeed, the impression may linger subliminally after you leave the exhibit. On recent visits, the aforementioned music playing throughout the gardens included such tunes as *I Don't Stand a Ghost of a Chance with You*, *Let's Face the Music and Dance*, and – in a wonderful, if unintentional nod to the exhibit's reincarnation theme – *Happy Days are Here Again*.



Haw Par Villa's entrance gate in the late 1950s, with a clear view of the ocean, photo courtesy of John Simmer



Haw Par Villa's entrance arch, as it appears today

See the *Ten Courts of Hell*, but there is so much more. The displays of *Virtues and Vices* also depict the importance of living a moral life, minus the gore and with greater quality and detail. In the grottoes and statues of *Journey to the West*, you'll see the tale of a holy monk and his disciples, who encounter the deceptively charming Spider Spirits on their journey to obtain Buddhist scriptures. Then there are the intricately detailed statues of the *Battle of the Yellow River*,

putting you amid a harrowing battle, complete with wires that show the path of magical weapons flying through the air.

Between these and other displays, you'll also find (among others) blue crustaceans, battling rabbits and rats, a human-headed crab, Buddhas, manic pandas, Aw family memorials and a dutiful woman nursing her toothless mother-in-law out of filial piety.

After Boon Haw's death, his nephew added *International Corners* with items such as a miniature Statue of Liberty. The gardens then remained essentially unchanged for years. The Singapore government acquired the land in 1985 and the Aw family donated the statues on condition that the Haw Par name and family memorials be retained. In 1988, the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (predecessor to today's Singapore Tourism Board) leased the gardens for development as a theme park. Haw Par Villa reopened in 1990 as Haw Par Villa Dragon World, with fewer statues, larger grounds, two rides (including a boat ride through the *Ten Courts of Hell* inside a 60-metre-long dragon) and, for the first time, an entry fee. Attendance declined sharply and Haw Par Villa was eventually restored to its original vision.

Other management companies followed. Since 2015, Haw Par Villa has been managed by Journeys, a Singapore-based, heritage-focused travel company. While Journeys offers tours for a fee, general admission to Haw Par Villa is free, as Boon Haw intended. Journeys' future plans include *Hell's Museum*, which will present various views of death and the afterlife as a background to the *Ten Courts of Hell*, and the Rise of Asia Museum, which will address Asia's global economic re-emergence.

Defining Haw Par Villa isn't easy. It's the vision of one of Southeast Asia's early corporate titans and philanthropists. It's the work of artisans. It's also one of a kind. The Hong Kong gardens have been torn down, and while there are other sites in Asia that depict Buddhist visions of hell, they don't have Haw Par Villa's range of features. It may be a cultural park, a nostalgia trip, or a theme park – or all of these. See Haw Par Villa on its own terms and decide for yourself. You will find it at 262 Pasir Panjang Road.

Amanda Berlowe Jaffe arrived in Singapore in December 2018. She brought with her a deep interest in the history and culture of Singapore and neighbouring countries.

Unless otherwise noted, all photos by the author

Going, Going, Gone – The Tiger Balm Building

At the Corner of Short Street and Selegie Road

By Jerome Lim



The Tiger Balm Medical Hall along Selegie Road, 1930s. Image courtesy of the National Archives Singapore



The Muslim community in Singapore hold a parade to welcome the return of the British, circa 1945. Image © Imperial War Museum (SE 5096)

The former Tiger Balm Building, which long marked the corner of Short Street and Selegie Road, is no more. Topped once by an image of a tiger as a mark of its association with the Haw Par Brothers famous cure-all ointment, it has been demolished to allow a luxury car “vending machine” to take its place.

Uniquely shaped because of the isosceles-trapezoid plot of land that it was built on, the building appeared in the 1930s as Eng Aun Tong’s The Tiger Balm Medical Hall. This can be seen in several photographs that were taken of it from the era, including a rather iconic image that was captured in 1941 by legendary LIFE Magazine photographer Carl Mydans. The photograph made its way into the magazine’s 21 July edition that same year, captioned “Singapore’s most picturesque millionaire sells his patent medicine under a clock tower” in a feature titled, “Singapore is a Modern City of Self-Made Millionaires”.

The “picturesque millionaire” referred to was none other than Mr Aw Boon Haw – the man largely responsible for Tiger Balm’s and the Haw Par Brothers’ success and whose ‘picturesque’ side must have been the tiger-striped car he drove, some ‘illicit’ enterprises – as the feature alleges and definitely Tiger Balm Garden or Haw Par Villa.

The Tiger Balm Clock-Tower Building – as it was

apparently referred to in its early days – had its tower minimised through the addition of a fourth level sometime in the 1960s. This came at a time when the building housed a branch of the Chung Khiaw Bank, having been repurposed as the bank’s second Singapore branch. Chung Khiaw Bank was another of Aw Boon Haw’s ventures, a “small man’s bank” that he established for the purpose of granting access to financing to those in the lower income groups.

In the days when the Tiger Balm Medical Hall operated on the ground floor, the building’s two upper floor ‘flats’ were rented out. Its occupants included Narayanswamy & Sons, then the sole distributor of Mysore Sandal Soap, and the Butterfly Permanent Wave (salon). At the time of this writing, the only plans that have been identified for the building are those related to the addition of cubicles on its second floor in 1937. This was drawn up and submitted by Chan Yee Lim on behalf of Haw Par Brothers Ltd. While it may be possible that Chan had also been the building’s architect, the information contained on the plans with respect to this are not conclusive.

Chan, who had worked for architectural firms such as Booty and Edwards and J B Westerhout, was then already on his own and was quite established. He came over from Hong Kong in 1888, before qualifying as an architect in 1915



The former Tiger Balm Building in 2010

and his body of work included Catholic High School (222 Queen Street) and the Carmelite Convent at Bukit Teresa. A prominent member of the congregation at the Church of the Sacred Heart in Tank Road, one of Chan's eight children, Monsignor Francis Chan, was appointed as the Roman



The building just before its demolition



The building in 2015 - then used by the Tea Culture Academy

Catholic Diocese of Penang's first bishop, serving from 1955 to 1967.

It is also interesting that around the same time the Tiger Balm Building was erected, plans for the site adjacent to the building were also made. The plans were for an 856-seat cinema, the Tiger Theatre. Separated from the Tiger Balm Building by a back lane, the proposed cinema – even if its name may have suggested an association – had no connection with the adjacent building or the business it housed. Designed by Frank W Brewer for Peter Chong, the proposal was rejected by the Municipal Commissioners on the grounds that there was no provision made for parking.

The tiger that topped the building was a familiar sight until the late 1970s when it was replaced by the United Overseas Bank (UOB) logo. UOB acquired a majority interest in the bank in 1971/72 with Chung Khiaw Bank retaining its name until it was fully absorbed by UOB in 1999.

Among the businesses housed in the building in recent times were the offices and a small food court of Banquet Holdings Pte Ltd (an operator of halal food courts that has since gone under). A string of food and beverage outlets also made brief appearances, including the Tea Culture Academy and Rayz Bistro.

The proposed development of a 12-storey entertainment hub, named '10 Square' threatened the building with demolition as far back as 2009. Autobahn Motors, the site's owner, was behind that proposal. Autobahn now aims to put up a 20-deck "vending machine" named Ten Square, along the lines of another that it already operates in Jalan Kilang – but without its shape or capacity. Based on information at the site, it should be completed by early 2020.

Jerome Lim blogs on The Long and Winding Road (www.thelongandwindingroad.wordpress.com) about his impressions and experiences of life.

Photos by the author unless otherwise noted

Horses in Singapore

By Caroline Carfantan

Although not native to Southeast Asia, horses have been present in the region for at least two millennia. We have evidence of their early presence in the region through carvings on the walls of the ninth century temple of Borobudur as well as in the Asian Civilisations Museum with the winged mount of the enigmatic Headless Horseman. Horses came to this part of the world on trading ships alongside goods, people and ideas from as far away as Europe, Arabia, India and on rare occasions, also China. There is evidence that throughout its history China did not allow their export. Horses were far too valuable in combat or as marks of rank and prestige, and unlike other valuable but prohibited goods, they were not easily smuggled onto a junk.

Horses were not only used in warfare or to carry burdens but to race for sport and entertainment. The first recorded races in England took place in the ninth century. In 1711 Queen Anne founded the Ascot Racecourse. In Singapore, horse-racing became a formal sport in 1842, when William Henry Macleod Read, a Scottish merchant, created the Singapore Sporting Club, known today as the Singapore Turf Club.

Today, 175 years later, almost every Friday evening and Sunday afternoon young horses compete on the turf of the Kranji racetrack. In 2006, the races had royal spectators when her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II witnessed the Queen Elizabeth II Cup, a race named in her honour during her first visit in 1972.

Generally, racehorses start competing at the age of two or three. Their professional career is short-lived and ends when they are six to seven years old. What future do they have when you know that their life expectancy is 25 years or more? The less fortunate end up at the slaughterhouse (this situation is the same around the world) ... as maintaining a horse is expensive and even more so in the Singapore climate. The lucky ones are either retired or used for breeding in Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand or start a new career as a school or livery horse in Singapore. This 'professional conversion' does not happen overnight. An ex-racehorse takes an average of one and a half months to adapt to its new stable, new environment and feed. The daily routine and expectations also are quite different. Horses are by instinct flight animals. This is a winning quality on a racetrack, but somewhat suboptimal in a dressage arena with an amateur rider where galloping at a crazy speed is



Laughing Gravy winning his first competition with Rolando Gonzales. Photo courtesy of Cara Grimshaw Photography

no longer the priority. The horses have to learn to work in collected paces, master dressage movements and for the most talented ones, to jump fences. This re-training in general takes between three to nine months and should be done by/ with the help of a professional.

In Singapore, there are several clubs and trained coaches who work with former racehorses. One of them is Anthony Lowry, General Manager of the Bukit Timah Saddle Club (BTSC). In recent years the club has 'adopted' many former racehorses. Why adopted? Because they change ownership often for a symbolic sum. Anthony insists that experienced riders should only consider livery adoption and that all racehorses at BTSC were selected based on their character and aptitudes.

A promising former racehorse is Laughing Gravy, also known as LG. As a racehorse, LG was a big-time winner. His earnings amounted to S\$671,877. Rolando Gonzalez Valdez, a certified coach and trainer in Singapore, adopted him a year ago. For Rolando the re-training process requires as much know-how as patience. LG's future already looks promising. At the end of 2018, he won his first show-jumping competition. Nothing sensational in comparison to his prior wins, but it was certainly a jump into his new life (apologies for the horsy pun).

Caroline Carfantan, an FOM docent, is passionate about horses, as is her daughter. They enjoy riding in the wee hours before the heat sets in.

FOM's Public Information Meeting

By Millie Phuah



The PIM Team – OHOs and co-heads



Inhabiting the NMS canyon again

We held our annual Public Information Meeting (PIM) on 16 May. As usual, all the museums offering training programmes during the next 12 months were out in full force. Each was represented by beautifully decorated tables and manned by enthusiastic docents, mostly newly minted ones. We welcomed about 100 attendees keen to find out more about FOM's docent training programmes and were very happy to note that a significant proportion of the audience was new to FOM, a potential pool of new members we could induct into the FOM fold.

This September, we have programmes at the Asian Civilisations Museum, Indian Heritage Centre, National Museum of Singapore (NMS) and after a couple of years break, at STPI as well. Those who can't make it for September or prefer a shorter course can sign up for the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall or the FOM-URA Chinatown Trails.

The co-heads put on a fine presentation and the Overall Heads of Training (OHOs), Millie Phuah and Sarah Lever, shared details about FOM training, then showed a video about how much fun and enriching it is. Apart from running the annual PIM, OHOs support co-heads of training at all the museums and trails. They also organise Foundation Days, when trainees come together to share presentations.

FOM President Garima Lalwani addressed the meeting, which was held in the basement theatre of NMS. She provided healthy docent guiding statistics, which were very

encouraging to hear, both for current docents and those still deciding on taking the first step.

The next few months will be busy ones for the various co-heads of training. Online applicants will be interviewed and schedules, speakers and training details finalised, with help from the training teams already in place.

So if you have always wanted to be a docent, acquire the knowledge you've always wanted to have and pick up valuable speaking skills along the way, apply at www.fom.sg and come join the vibrant FOM docent community.



Signing up for the best thing you ever did for yourself

Millie Phuah is into her second year as Co-Overall Head of Training and is a docent at the National Museum, Malay Heritage Centre, Indian Heritage Centre and the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall.



SYSNMH docents dressed as Sun Yat Sen and his Singapore friends, as seen in the iconic photo behind them



The FOM council supporting the PIM event

Explore Singapore! Quiz

Enter this quiz to win a free ES! tour. The first three entries with the highest number of correct answers will win an ES! tour of their choice.

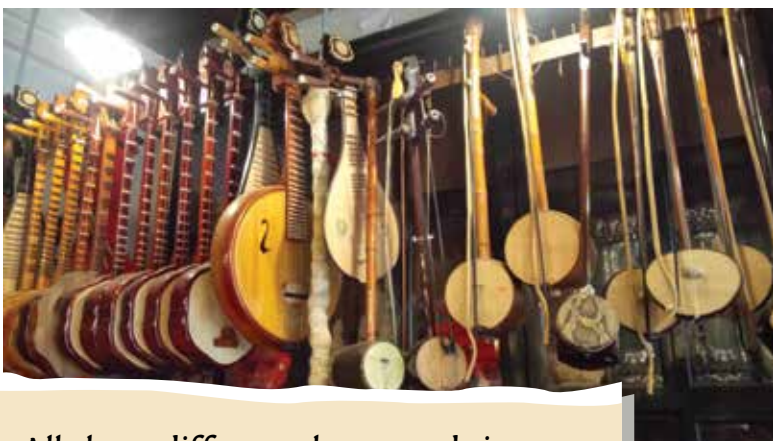
Email your answers to: fom_es@yahoo.com by 15 August.



1. These cows are grazing in which area of Singapore?



2. What takes place in this tunnel?



3. All these different shapes and sizes are used in which art form?



4. Some say this is the scariest place in Singapore. Where is it?



5. Something delicious is brewing in these huge pots. What is it?



6. Atop which building do you get this view?



7. A wealthy man built this Chinese mansion. Who was it?



9. These strange building shapes represent what?



8. We all know who this man is, but where is this window found?

Explore Singapore! is taking a short break over the summer period, but look out for our next tour, which will be on 29 August.



Volunteer Appreciation

By Cécile

As Freddy Mercury would say: "It's a kind of magic". Indeed, one wonders how FOM volunteers have continuously, for more than 40 years, contributed their time and efforts to the world of culture and museums in Singapore. In order to recognise their dedication, Jyoti Ramesh and her enthusiastic team organised the Volunteer Appreciation Morning on 30 April at Hard Rock Café. The dress code was Rock n' Roll: super cool costumes (think leather jackets and electric guitars) greatly contributed to the palpably joyous atmosphere. It felt as if we were all ready to attend an AC/DC concert.

Our guest of honour, Ms Chang Hwee Nee, CEO of the National Heritage Board, thanked FOM volunteers and reinforced the organisation's importance to the cultural life of Singapore. FOM president Garima Lalwani also congratulated the volunteers. In her own words, "We sign up - We show up - We deliver:". Indeed we do.

139 volunteers were officially rewarded that morning. Congratulations to all. Sue Sismondo received her 35-year pin, Oi Leng Gumpert, 25 years, Elaine Cheong and Jasmine Chaturvedi, 20 years, Neena Ramaswami and Cécile Collineau, 15 years. The space on this page is unfortunately too small to list the recipients of the 10-year pin (18 awardees), five-year (34 awardees) and three-year pins (81 awardees), but your efforts are appreciated nonetheless. Special thanks to Diana Loo, who worked intensively for the past two months to compile and update the list of volunteers. This year we hoped to have included everyone who deserved a pin.





ciation Morning

Collineau

The new FOM website puts the updating of the volunteer profile firmly in the hands of the volunteers themselves, so we would like to encourage all FOM members to put in accurate and up-to-date information as soon as possible. Simply log on to your profile on the FOM website, click on 'Edit volunteer' and complete and amend if necessary.

All in good fun, we had a costume competition. Heather Muirhead, Darlene Kasten, Joanna Boot and Michelle Hertz, you definitely looked the part! It was also a time to exchange personalised 'love notes' from one member to another and thereby recognise a job well done. Last but not least, the Salome de Decker award was awarded to Sue Sismondo (see the next article).

Volunteering is at the core of FOM. It is our mission to the public and we do this through the large number of hours our docents guide in the various museums in Singapore. But volunteering is also key to ensuring our internal organisation is run properly. It is truly heartening to see so many dedicated hands. Every little bit of help counts, so feel free to contribute if you haven't had a chance yet. The added bonus is of course to be part of a fun team, as you can see from the photos taken at the Hard Rock Café.

Garima rounded off the morning with these words: "Volunteers rock. FOM volunteers rock harder". I couldn't agree more.

Cécile Collineau is the coordinator of FOM's current six book groups. She secretly listens to Bon Jovi when no one is around.



The 2019 Salome de Decker Award

By Amanda Berlowe Jaffe

This year's winner of the Salome de Decker Award is Sue Sismondo. Following her move to Singapore from New York in 1982, Sue sought to continue her prior engagement in arts and cultural activities. She joined FOM soon after, enticed by its lectures and study groups. Since then, there hasn't been a year where she hasn't been involved as a member and active volunteer.

The Salome de Decker Award recognises FOM volunteers who quietly and positively contribute their time and skills. Sue's long service to FOM and Singapore's cultural community captures the award's essence. Her early participation in FOM's Architecture Study Group and as a speaker in the FOM Lecture Series eventually led to leadership roles in those activities. This in turn, led to organising several National Museum exhibitions, including editing and designing the exhibition catalogues and related materials. Sue simultaneously became involved in the FOM council, serving as president from 1988-1989. She then joined FOM's advisory committee, eventually chairing the registration committee that in 2004 established FOM as a registered society in Singapore. This committee drafted the organisation's constitution and bylaws. Sue has served not only as an STPI docent, but also as the STPI Coordinator for ten years (until 2016) and has been instrumental in training many FOM docents. She is also a docent at the Heritage Conservation Centre (HCC), which preserves and protects Singapore's National Collection, much of which is housed in the nine museums that FOM supports.

Sue's continuing involvement has been motivated by her deep belief in FOM's mission and all it offers its members. She also deeply appreciates the extraordinary learning



Sue Sismondo, 2019 winner of the Salome de Decker Award, with FOM president Garima Lalwani

opportunities, memorable friendships, and opportunities to contribute to her community that FOM has given her in return. FOM, she adds, has increased her confidence in communicating and managing diverse communities. While Sue loves Singapore's lush tropical gardens, some of her favourite Singapore places are – not surprisingly – the indoor environs of the HCC, with its behind-the-scenes conservation work, and STPI, for the extraordinary work of its visiting artists.

FOM is grateful to Sue for her many years of service and looks forward to many more!

Japanese Docents

This is the second time I have moved to Singapore. I first came here with my family in 2005 and fell in love with Singapore's thriving spirit, diverse culture and its exceptional architecture. I became a Japanese docent (JD) in 2010 and started guiding visitors at NMS, ACM and TPM until I had to move to Hong Kong in 2016. Throughout this journey, visitors took a keen interest in my guided tours, which encouraged me to continue as a JD member for over five years.

Since there were no Japanese tour guide programmes in the museums in Hong Kong, I was pining for the good old days in Singapore. I believe guided tours are essential for visitors to interpret the significant stories behind each exhibit. Not only that, but the in-depth information adds to the visitor experience, making it a valuable and memorable visit.

As soon as I was informed about my second move to Singapore, I was thrilled to know that I could work with the JD community again. Now that I've re-joined the JDs, I am glad to see familiar faces and people I look up to as I continue to build on my skills. I am also extremely thankful for all the tour guide materials compiled by the past JD members now



The new Japanese docents who joined in April 2019

that they have been passed down to the current JD members. In fact, this year marks the 200-year anniversary of Stamford Raffles' first landing in Singapore. I am looking forward to continuing the JD legacy by guiding more NMS visitors.

Hikari Katsuno, Japanese docent trainee

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Museum Information and Exhibitions

Asian Civilisations Museum

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555
Tel: 6332 7798
www.acm.org.sg



Opening hours:
Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm
Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm

FOM guided tours:
Mon to Fri 11:00 am, 2:00 pm and 3:30 pm, Fri 7:00 pm (English)
Mon to Fri 10:30 am and every second Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)
First Wed of the month 11:30am (Korean)
Second Thursday of the month 11:30 (Spanish)
Third Thursday of the month 11:30 (French)

Understanding Asia through Singapore

The new and renovated galleries at the ACM use Singapore's history as a port city as a means of understanding the interconnections among Asian cultures and between Asia and the world.

Guo Pei: Chinese Art and Couture (through 15 September)

ACM presents the living legacy of Chinese design and tradition by juxtaposing 29 embroidered masterworks by Guo Pei, China's foremost couturière, with 20 ornate masterpieces from the museum's collection. The exhibition bridges ideas of cross-cultural identity, shared history and dignified beauty behind art and fashion.

Special FOM guided tours for Guo Pei: Chinese Art and Couture

Mon to Fri 11:30 am, 1:30 and 3:00 pm; Sat and Sun 11:30 am and 1:30 pm (English)
Wed 10:30 am (Mandarin)
Every 2nd and 4th Tuesday 10:30 am (Korean)

Gillman Barracks

9 Lock Road, Singapore 108937
www.gillmanbarracks.com



A cluster of 11 contemporary art galleries and the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Gillman Barracks features an ever-changing selection of contemporary art exhibitions.

Opening hours: Tues to Sun – Refer to individual gallery pages on-line for opening hours
Closed Mondays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours:
Sat 4:00 pm: Art & History Tour
Sat. 5:00 pm: History and Heritage Tour
To register please visit www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com

NTU CCA

Siah Armajani: Spaces for the Public. Spaces for Democracy. (20 July – 3 November)

Considered a leading figure in public art, Iranian-born artist Siah Armajani merges architecture and conceptual art in his sculptures, drawings, and public installations. Informed by democratic ideologies and inspired by American vernacular architecture, his works include gathering spaces for communality, emphasizing the "nobility of usefulness." His

highly acclaimed public art and architectural projects have included bridges, gardens, and outdoor structures that have been commissioned and presented worldwide.

Indian Heritage Centre

5 Campbell Lane, Singapore 209924
www.indianheritage.org.sg



Open Tuesday to Sunday & public holidays. Closed on Mondays.
Tues to Thurs 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, Fri & Sat 10:00 am to 8:00 pm
Sundays & public holidays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

FOM guided tours: Tues-Fri 12:00 pm for the permanent galleries 2:00 pm on Wed and Fri for the special exhibitions Tamil tours (FOM) 11:30am on the first Friday of each month for the special exhibition

The Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) celebrates the history and heritage of the Indian diaspora in Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. From early contacts between the Indian subcontinent and this region, the culture and social history of the community after the arrival of the British, through to the early stirrings of nationalism and political identity, and the contributions of Singapore's Indian community – the five galleries take visitors on a fascinating journey through the Indian diaspora. Located in Singapore's colourful and vibrant Little India precinct, the centre opened in May 2015 and is our only purpose-built museum.

Malay Heritage Centre

85 Sultan Gate, Singapore 198501
Tel: 6391 0450
www.malayheritage.org.sg



Opening hours:
Tues to Sun 10:00 am – 6:00 pm (last admission 5:30 pm), closed on Mondays
FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri 11:00 am; Sat: 2:00 pm (Subject to availability. Please call ahead to confirm the availability of a docent).

The Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) provides wonderful cultural exposure and learning opportunities for visitors of all ages and interests. Situated amidst the Istana Kampong Gelam, Gedung Kuning and the surrounding Kampong Gelam precinct, the Centre acts as a vital heritage institution for the Malay community in Singapore. Through its exhibits, programmes and activities, the Centre hopes to honour the past while providing a means for present-day expression.

National Museum of Singapore

93 Stamford Road, Singapore 178897
Tel: 6332 3659
www.nationalmuseum.sg



Opening hours:
Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm

FOM guided tours:
Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (English)
Mon to Fri 10:30 am and every first Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)

The Singapore History Gallery

In celebration of 50 years of independence, this gallery has been refreshed with updated stories and content on Singapore's

Museum Information and Exhibitions

history, capturing the nation's defining moments, challenges and achievements from its earliest beginnings 700 years ago to the independent, modern city-state it is today.

Packaging Matters: Singapore's Food Packaging Story from the early 20th century (through 15 September)

This exhibition explores the world of food packaging in Singapore, from the early bottling and canning factories in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, to the light industries of the 1960s–70s when food was manufactured in factories. Drawing from the museum's rich artefact collections, Packaging Matters traces the development of packaging technologies and features compelling stories from pioneers.

NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

University Cultural Centre
50 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore
119279

Tel: 6516 8817

www.museum.nus.edu.sg



Free admission

Opening hours:

Tues to Sat 10:00 am – 6:00 pm, Closed on Sundays and Public Holidays,

Monday: Visits by appointment for schools/faculties only.

"... You Have To Lose Your Way To Find Yourself In The Right Place"

(through 15 December)

This exhibition presents the works of Singapore-based French artist, Gilles Massot. It includes a selection of photographs, videos, sketches and writings from the 1980s to the present and explores the artist's evolving negotiations with place and the shaping of self-identity through his work as a photo-journalist travelling across Asia, his involvement in a changing contemporary art scene, and his expatriate status.

NUS Baba House

157 Neil Road, Singapore 088883

Tel: 6227 5731

www.babahouse.nus.edu.sg

English heritage tours: Tues - Fri, 10:00 am; Mandarin Heritage Tour: First Monday of each month, 10am;

Self-Guided Visits: Every Sat, 1.30pm/2.15pm/3.15pm/4.00pm

To register, please visit babahouse.nus.edu.sg/visit/plan-your-visit

For enquiries, please email babahouse@nus.edu.sg

Now conceived as a heritage house facilitating research, appreciation and reflection of Straits Chinese history and culture, the NUS Baba House was built around 1895 and was once the ancestral home of a Peranakan Chinese family. During the one-hour tour, guests will be introduced to the history and architectural features of the house, and experience visiting a Straits Chinese family home in a 1920s setting, furnished with heirlooms from its previous owners and other donors.

The Peranakan Museum

39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941

Tel: 6332 7591

www.peranakanmuseum.sg



This intimate museum possesses one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of Peranakan objects.

Galleries on three floors illustrate the cultural traditions and the distinctive visual arts of the Peranakans. The museum is currently closed to prepare for its next phase of development.

Singapore Art Museum

71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 189555

Tel: 6332 3222

www.singaporeartmuseum.sg



The Singapore Art Museum focuses on international contemporary art practices, specialising in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

The main building of the Singapore Art Museum (located along 71 Bras Basah Road) is currently closed to prepare it for its next phase of development.

STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery

41 Robertson Quay, Singapore

238236

Tel: 6336 3663

www.stpi.com.sg



Opening hours:

Mon to Fri: 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Sat: 9:00 am – 6:00 pm

Closed Sundays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours: Thurs 11:30 am, Sat 2:00 pm

Please refer to STPI's website at www.stpi.com.sg for STPI's public programmes and Japanese, Mandarin and special evening tours.

STPI is a dynamic creative workshop and contemporary art gallery based in Singapore. Established in 2002, STPI is a not-for-profit organisation committed to promoting artistic experimentation in the mediums of print and paper and has become one of the most cutting-edge destinations for contemporary art in Asia.

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874

Tel: 6256 7377

www.wanqingyuan.org.sg



Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, Closed on Mondays

FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri 2:00 pm (English)

FOM Special exhibition guided tours: 10:30am on Fridays in English

Between the Lines – The Chinese Cartoon Revolution (through 7 July)

This exhibition examines the links between the 1911 revolution in China and the emergence of Chinese cartoons in Singapore.

Free general admission to all NHB museums for FOM members and one guest.



Gain a finer appreciation for the rich histories of Asian modern and contemporary art

The MA Asian Art Histories at LASALLE is the world's first taught Masters programme to focus on Asian modern and contemporary art histories.

The Programme gives you the opportunity to undertake original research in largely underexplored fields, investigate recently emerged artists and study art historical developments in the region, thereby contributing to current discourse and scholarship in the field. The theoretical learning will be complemented by field trips to museums and galleries as well as an overseas study trip. A number of research grants are also available to students and alumni.

The Programme has a diverse international student body that includes lawyers, teachers, art collectors, doctors, curators, museum docents and artists. Our graduates have gone on to become successful curators, researchers, academics, writers, art consultants and art gallerists who have shaped the field in significant ways.

Image: MA Asian Art Histories students discuss Vertical Submarine Chinese illiterati 非文人 (2017) which explores conflicting notions of Chinese identity in literature, and intellectual and cultural theory.

January 2020 Intake (full & part-time) now open for applications.

For more information and to apply online:

- Email admissions@lasalle.edu.sg
- Call 6496 5111 for programme consultation



www.lasalle.edu.sg/programmes/postgraduate/ma-asian-art-histories



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