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# SINGAPORE RIVER WALK



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# THE SINGAPORE RIVER WALK: AN INTRODUCTION



*A view of Boat Quay teeming with men at work on the boats parked cheek by jowl at the harbour, with rows of godowns (warehouses) situated along the river bank, 1900s*

The Singapore River was where modern Singapore began as a British trading centre in 1819. In the years that followed, diverse communities from various parts of the world arrived and settled by its banks. Here they built piers and quays, homes and villages, warehouses and factories, places of worship, as well as facilities to serve the needy in their midst.

Today, the Singapore River no longer functions as a harbour for regional trade, but it continues to flow past many landmarks, buildings and neighbourhoods that were integral features of the riverine landscape. The origin and significance of these sites,

as well as the communities who built and shaped them, are charted in the Singapore River Walk, which offers a journey through history via the quays, piers, bridges, religious sites and community spaces that distinguish and define this waterway.

This heritage trail provides an introduction to the history of the Singapore River and a thematic account of the river's landmarks and sites based on their forms, uses and origins. Former residents and past visitors have also shared their vivid and fond memories of the Singapore River and waterfront of old, before its landmark clean-up and transformation in the 1970s-80s.

We hope this booklet will help you see the river in a fresh light and allow you to rediscover its fascinating past as you explore this walking trail developed by the National Heritage Board. Originally

launched in 2004, the refurbishment and enhancement of this trail was made possible by the generous support and adoption of the trail by the American Express Foundation in 2015.



*Singapore River, looking towards Raffles Place, 2016*

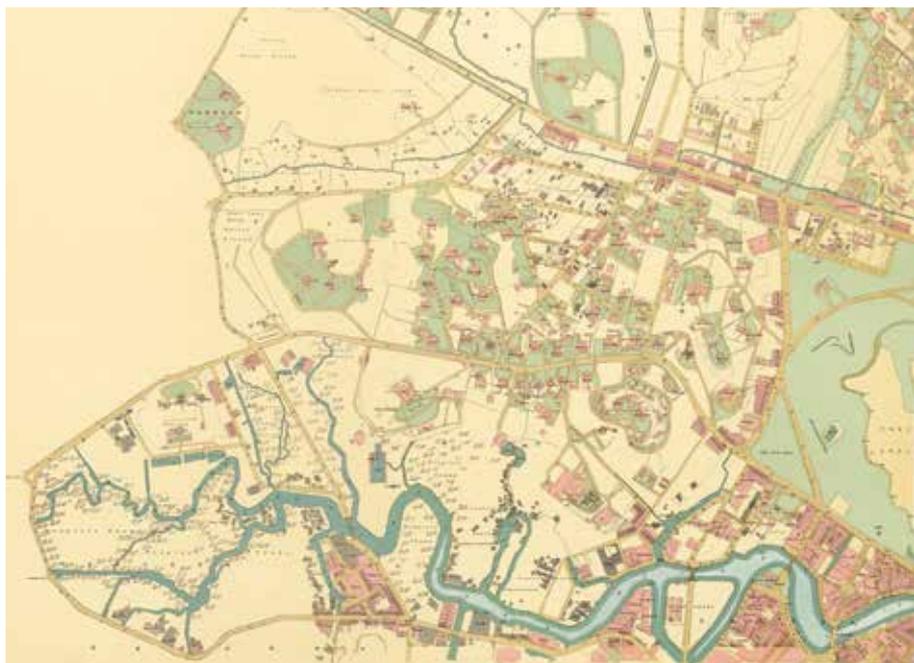
# A HARBOUR OF HISTORY: THE SINGAPORE RIVER THROUGH TIME

The Singapore River runs for about three kilometres from its headwaters near Kim Seng Bridge to its mouth, flowing beneath Anderson Bridge and into Marina Bay. Despite its modest length, it has exerted significant influence over the pulse and progress of the nation.

Located at the crossroads of maritime commerce between South Asia, Europe and East Asia, Singapore was chosen by Sir Stamford Raffles (1781-1826) of the British East India Company in 1819 as an ideal location for a port that would command trade between East and West.



*"Sincapour", an aquatint print showing a view of the Singapore River by the artist aboard French corvette "La Favorite" looking up the river from South Boat Quay, 1830*



*A section of a survey map of Singapore Town with the Singapore River prominently depicted, 1893*



A postcard of the Singapore Roads, 1905

The shallow sea before the waterfront, known as the Singapore Roads (now the Marina South reclaimed area), offered safe anchorage for ships, while the calm waters of the Singapore River provided suitable sites for building quays, jetties and warehouses. From the quays, goods could be unloaded for storage in the warehouses before shipment to their final destination.

The decision to establish Singapore as a British trading port was sealed by a treaty signed by Raffles and local rulers Temenggong Abdul Rahman and Tengku Hussein on 6 February 1819, and marked the beginning of the modern history of this island. Eventually, Singapore developed into the most important outpost of the British Empire in East Asia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Raffles was, however, not the first to recognise the strategic and mercantile potential of the Singapore River.

#### **A 14TH CENTURY PORT AND KINGDOM**

Long before Raffles set foot on Singapore, the area around the Singapore River was the site of a populous and wealthy 14th century Malay kingdom called Temasek (“sea town” in Javanese) or Singapura, with commoners dwelling by the north bank of the river and a royal seat on the hill that is now Fort Canning Park.

According to the *Sejarah Melayu* or “Malay Annals”, a chronicle of the ancient Malay rulers of Singapore, Melaka and Johor, Singapura was founded by Sri Tri Buana (“Lord



Manuscript version of the Malay Annals, 1896; the earliest known version was written in 1612

of the Three Worlds” in Sanskrit). He was a prince from Palembang in Sumatra who left his homeland and eventually landed on the island of Temasek.

Sri Tri Buana, also known as Sang Nila Utama, was drawn to a stretch of sand on the southern shore of the island and was thought to have landed near what is now the Padang near the northern bank of the Singapore River. While hunting in the area, he caught sight of a powerful and majestic beast with a lordly bearing. The creature was identified by his followers as a *singa*, which means “lion” in both Sanskrit and Malay. Interpreting the sighting as a good omen, Sri Tri Buana then decided to establish a kingdom on the island with the name Singapura or “Lion City”.

The ancient rulers of Singapura dwelled on the slopes of Fort Canning Park, which later became known as a royal burial site and was referred to by local Malays as Bukit Larangan or “Forbidden Hill”. The remains of the hill’s ancient buildings were still evident in the 1820s and recorded by observers such as John Crawfurd (1783-1868), Singapore’s second Resident (a post equivalent to governor).



The River and Town of Singapore from Fort Canning, 1860s

## THE SINGAPORE STONE

In the early 1820s, when the British were reclaiming the river's south bank to build what is now Boat Quay and Raffles Place, an ancient sandstone relic called the Singapore Stone was discovered on a headland called Tanjong Singapura or Rocky Point, on the site of the present Fullerton Building. This three metre high sandstone block bore several lines of writing which were believed to date from the 14th century or earlier. Some scholars believe that the writing is Sumatran or old Javanese and that the date of origin of the writing is between the 10th and the 14th centuries although others have differing views on the language and exact time period.

Unfortunately, the stone was blown up by engineers working to expand Fort Fullerton in 1843. A surviving slab of the Singapore Stone is now housed in the National Museum of Singapore. The Singapore Stone was believed to be the rock hurled by Badang, a folk hero of immense strength who served the king of Singapura, during a contest of strength with a foreign champion, as told in the *Sejarah Melayu*.



Photograph of the Singapore Stone with the writing highlighted, 10th-14th centuries

Subsequent development of the hill into Fort Canning by the British in the 1850s obliterated many traces of ancient Singapura, although a set of gold jewellery thought to be of Majapahit origin, comprising armlets and rings, was discovered near the summit in



14th century Javanese-style gold armlet discovered at Fort Canning Park in 1928

1928. This discovery suggests that there were strong trade or political links between ancient Singapura and Java during the 14th century.



Material excavated from Empress Place 1998 excavation, 14th-15th century

The *Sejarah Melayu* records that Sri Tri Buana and his successors developed Singapura into a great port, and that the mouth of the Singapore River during this era was guarded by a chain or moveable boom which may have been used to prevent vessels from entering or leaving the river.

In 1989, ancient earthenware, stone mercury jars, porcelain and coins were discovered beneath Parliament House (now The Arts House at The Old Parliament) along High Street, near the northern bank of the river. Nearby, excavations around Empress Place Building (now the Asian Civilisations Museum) in the 1990s revealed a 14th century stratum of soil that yielded ceramics and coins. The remains of wooden pillars, which may have supported dwellings or piers, have also been found on a site between the riverbank and the Asian Civilisations Museum.



*An aerial view of Empress Place, mid-20th century*

The most recent digs in the area, organised in early 2015 by the National Heritage Board in partnership with the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (NSC-ISEAS), recovered two and a half tonnes of 14th century artefacts including copper and gold coins, Buddhist figurines, porcelain pieces and timber planks that may have been part of a ship.

This wealth of archaeological findings suggest that during the 14th century, the riverbank extending as far back as High Street was a densely inhabited area and a busy trading harbour where manufacturing and commercial activities were widely carried out.

Towards the end of the 14th century, the rulers of Singapura fled the island following a foreign attack and later founded the Melaka Sultanate. The riverside settlement survived, however, and the Singapore River is believed to have served as the station of the Shahbandar (“Lord of the Harbour” in Persian) to the Johor Sultanate, which was founded by the Johor River after the Portuguese captured Melaka in 1511.

This lasted until the early 17th century, when either Acehnese from North Sumatra or Portuguese attacks forced the inhabitants to finally abandon the place. Some two hundred

years or so would pass before the Singapore River regained its historic status as a port of trade and centre of commerce.

### **A TREASURE FROM THE RIVERBANK**

A unique artefact discovered at Empress Place on the north bank of the river in 1998, this lead statue of a male horseman (which is missing the head) is the only one of its kind in the entire region. The statue bears hallmarks of Javanese art from the 14th century Majapahit Empire and offers evidence of strong trade and cultural links between Java and ancient Singapura. This statue is now on display at the National Museum of Singapore.



*Figurine of a rider on a horse excavated from Empress Place site in 1998, c. 14th century*

## AN ARTERY OF COMMERCE: THE RISE OF A GLOBAL PORT OF TRADE



*Shophouses, godowns and twakow vessels along the banks of the Singapore River, 1915*



*Bullock cart along Singapore River, 1900s*

Following the establishment of Singapore as a British entrepôt in 1819, merchants from all over the region flocked to the island, lured by the assurance that they could freely trade without paying custom duties.

In 1822, during Raffles' third and final visit to Singapore, he reported that the population had risen from a few hundred to more than 10,000 and that 2,889 vessels carrying 200,000 tonnes of cargo had visited the port in its first two years. By 1824, the settlement had nearly 800 substantial buildings including 26 brick and tile warehouses and shops on the south bank of the river.

Today, it may be hard to imagine how international maritime trade, which is now carried out at container terminals and docks, was conducted at the Singapore River in the past. Even in the 19th century, the Singapore River was far too narrow and shallow for ocean-faring sailing ships to enter its waters.

Instead, large merchant vessels would cast anchor in the safe and sheltered area of the harbour called the Singapore Roads before transferring their cargo into the holds of smaller flat-bottomed craft called lighters or bumboats, which then ferried the goods to quays, jetties and warehouses by the river and vice versa.

Meanwhile, important commercial hubs such as Raffles Place, Market Street and Fullerton Square emerged in the river's vicinity, providing merchants and bankers alike with places where they could readily meet to exchange news and seize fresh business opportunities. In this way, the Singapore River and its surroundings developed into an artery of international trade for more than 160 years, welcoming captains of ships and commerce from the world's great trading powers, as well as travellers from Europe, China, South Asia, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia who arrived to support their families and make their fortunes.

Singapore's rapid rise as a major port, however, belied the geopolitical uncertainty that plagued the initial years of the settlement. Raffles' decision had met with furious opposition by the Dutch in Batavia (now Jakarta, Indonesia), who challenged the legality of the settlement, as they regarded the island as being within their sphere of influence, and even considered military action against the fledgling port. The British stood their ground, however, as Singapore's strategic value and ideal location were quickly recognised by merchants and pioneers who rapidly established themselves on the island.

Singapore's legal ambiguity was resolved only in 1824 with the signing of an Anglo-Dutch treaty that recognised the rights of the British to operate in Singapore and the Malay Peninsula, while acknowledging Dutch authority south of Singapore and in the Indonesian archipelago.



*"Le Port Interieur, à Singapour" (Interior of the harbour of Singapore), late 1860s. Based on a photograph, this print (wood engraving) shows the bustling river lined with small sailing ships and merchant warehouses filled with goods. It was published in Albert Smith Bickmore's "Travels in the East India Archipelago".*

The Singapore River occupied a central place in the development of modern Singapore as a port, but also served as a natural boundary in Raffles' conception of the town of Singapore. To map out the future and orderly development of the port, Raffles formed in 1822 a committee of merchants and officials who developed what became known as the Raffles Town Plan or Jackson Plan, after Lieutenant Philip Jackson (1802-1879), who drew a detailed map of the town based on the plan.

The town plan reserved the north bank of the river for government buildings and facilities such as a church and town square; a European town just east of this public district; and Arab and Bugis quarters further east in what is now Kampong Gelam. Meanwhile, the south bank of the river was divided into a commercial zone near the river mouth (present day Raffles Place); a "Chinese Campong" north of Raffles Place; and a "Chulia Campong" for Indian boatmen in what later became Kampong Melaka.

However, the needs of commerce defied this plan to some extent as both European as well as Asian merchants preferred to locate their homes and godowns by the riverside. For instance, Scottish trader John Argyle Maxwell (1790-1857) chose to build a mansion on the north bank in 1827-28, although he later leased his building to the government as a court house. The area near Maxwell's house, which survives today as the Old Parliament House, then became a major shipbuilding zone in the mid-19th century.

The rise of steam-powered ships in the mid-19th century prompted the development of New



Section of the "Plan of the Town of Singapore" by Lieutenant Philip Jackson, 1822

Harbour (renamed Keppel Harbour in 1900) at Telok Blangah in 1852, as this area along the southern coast of Singapore (facing Pulau Brani and Sentosa Island) has deeper waters that could accommodate much larger vessels than the river. After 1869, when the Suez Canal opened in Egypt and shortened the maritime route between Europe and Asia, steamships began to arrive in vastly greater numbers.

These developments reduced the importance of the Singapore River as the colony's central port, but the river remained a vital artery in the commerce of Singapore. Keppel Harbour served large, ocean-going freighters while the river continued to attract smaller regional craft bearing Southeast Asian produce as well as ships from China, whose numbers grew steadily from the late 19th century onwards, barring dips caused by the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II (1939-1945).

As recently as 1959, the Singapore River rivalled Keppel Harbour in the volume of goods handled and there was also considerable transshipment of goods between the river and Keppel Harbour, which contributed to the development of better roads, and later, tram and rail links, between the two areas.

### **A HARBOUR AND HOME: COMMUNITIES BY THE RIVER**

Besides serving an economic purpose as a trading harbour, the Singapore River has provided a home for diverse communities throughout its history. When Raffles first arrived in Singapore in 1819, the river's north bank housed a village called Kampong Temenggong (*kampong* means "village" in Malay while Temenggong is a traditional Malay title of nobility) whose residents consisted of Malays and Orang Laut. This village was led by Temenggong Abdul Rahman (d. 1825), the local ruler.

The Orang Laut ("sea people" in Malay) were the indigenous inhabitants of Singapore and the coast of the Malay peninsula. Organised into different *suku* or "tribes", various groups of Orang Laut once dwelled all over the island:

the Orang Seletar lived at the mouth of the Seletar River, the Orang Biduanda Kallang made their home at the Kallang River Basin, while the Orang Sembulun occupied Pulau Samulun off Jurong.

Another group of Orang Laut, known as the Orang Gelam, lived on the Singapore River, where they inhabited boats in the middle of the river that formed a veritable "floating village". These Orang Laut made a living by fishing, selling food to the crews of visiting ships and ferrying people across the river for a fee.

According to Wa Hakim, an Orang Laut villager who was present when Raffles landed:

*"At the time when Tuan Raffles came, there were under one hundred small houses and huts at the mouth of the river... about thirty families of Orang Laut also lived in boats a little way up the Singapore River at the wide part. About half the Orang Laut lived ashore and half in boats [...] There were a few Malays who lived nearby, their huts facing the sea."*

The Temenggong and his entourage moved to Telok Blangah in the 1820s, although many from the Orang Laut community remained at the Singapore River until the 1840s.



*"Environs de Sincapour", a print depicting the Temenggong's kampong in front of Mount Faber, based on a sketch by Lauvergne, 1837*

As trade boomed and people from all over the region arrived in Singapore to conduct business and make a living, the river became a choice location for establishing offices and commercial spaces, which often doubled as homes for merchants and their families as well.

As a result, various settlements and communities sprang up along the river and its vicinity in the years that followed its establishment as a British port. Enterprising pioneer merchants such as Alexander Guthrie (1796-1865), Edward Boustead (1800-1888), Tan Kim Seng (1805-1864) and Alexander Laurie Johnston (1782-1850) built their houses and godowns right by the riverbank at Boat Quay and North Boat Quay.



*An ancestor portrait of wealthy philanthropist Tan Kim Seng, mid-19th century*



*The Guthrie and Co. offices at Collyer Quay, established by Alexander Guthrie to deal with import of British manufactures and Straits produce, as well as insurance, 1897*

As demand for residences, commercial space and warehousing facilities grew, new centres of trade further upriver such as Clarke Quay and Robertson Quay were earmarked for development. Meanwhile, Raffles Place and Collyer Quay emerged as major hubs of commerce and became the base and home of many bankers and financiers, including Chettiers from South India who lived and worked in premises called *kittangi* (“warehouse shops” in Tamil) along Market Street.



*Interior of the 49 Market Street kittangi in 1960, with a traditional set-up similar to that of the late 1800s*



*A Chettiar moneylender's tin box containing postal stationery and assorted items, c. 1950s-1960s*

Further up the river, across present-day Clarke Quay, settlers from the Malay Archipelago, drawn by the opportunities here, arrived to establish Kampong Melaka. This area later grew into a bustling neighbourhood of shops, warehouses and markets.

This side of the Singapore River, between Coleman Bridge and Clemenceau Bridge, also retains a number of sites that serve as reminders of the religious, cultural and social practices of the people who once made the river their home and place of work. For

instance, Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka stands as Singapore's oldest surviving place of worship; Tan Si Chong Su Temple continues to serve as a shrine for the Tan clan; and the former Thong Chai Medical Institution is a testament to the spirit of charity that pervaded the river's pioneering communities.

### OF LANDINGS AND LANDMARKS: THE RIVER'S QUAYS, PIERS AND BRIDGES

Shortly after modern Singapore was founded, hundreds, and later thousands, of people from all over the region and beyond flocked to Singapore to trade, work and seek their fortunes. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, most people arrived here via the sea on European clippers, Chinese junks, Arab dhows, Sumatran prows and other seafaring craft. For many of these travellers and sojourners, Collyer Quay and its long waterfront of imposing commercial buildings and piers offered their first glimpse of the harbour and what would be for many, their new home.

For much of the history of modern Singapore until the river was cleaned up in the early 1980s, life along the Singapore River was centred around its quays, piers and bridges – public structures and landmarks that served



*Lightermen moving their twakows loaded with commodities along the Singapore River, 1969*

as vital landing points, linkways and places for work, as well as rest and recreation.

After setting foot on dry land at Johnston's Pier (or Clifford Pier from 1933), many new arrivals would have headed over to Boat Quay to find their kinsmen or business associates, or seek work. As they stood or walked along the river, they would have seen hundreds of lighters – vessels known as *twakows* in Hokkien and Teochew or *tongkangs* in Malay – jostling for space in the river, while armies of coolies and stevedores (dockworkers) toiled to unload bales of merchandise into riverside shops and warehouses.



*Print titled "Entrée de la rivière de Singapour" (Mouth of the Singapore River), mid-19th century*

Dr S.K. Chan (b. 1930), a doctor who grew up in High Street near the Singapore River, has vivid recollections of her childhood days by the river and shared:

*"There were a lot of coolies – the men who carry goods, the labourers. At that stretch of the river, there were godowns. They had to go down to the jongs [bumboats] and bring the goods up, and they only had a plank from the river – a wooden plank from the shore to the boat. So they'd go carry and then put the goods in the godown, and the place was very dusty, very filthy, and most of the godowns are usually only for storage, except on the top floor. It was very dirty. It was the most dirty river I had ever seen – smelly! Later the Prime Minister gave a prize to the people who cleaned up the place."*



*View of a lighter worker on his boat, with the muddy Singapore River in the background, 1983*

After a long day of labour, many of the coolies and lightermen who worked by the river would have spent their leisure hours on bridges such as Read Bridge and Coleman Bridge to enjoy an evening drink of toddy (palm wine) or listen to traditional storytellers. Today, these historic bridges continue to serve as vital connectors and distinctive landmarks that add to the richness of the urban environment. A number of these bridges have also been designated pedestrian-only structures, so that people can safely cross the river while enjoying striking views of the cityscape.

Beyond Boat Quay, past Coleman Bridge, lie the former warehouses and factories of

Clarke Quay, which emerged as an important commercial centre in the late 19th century. During the 1990s, this segment of the river was revitalised and launched as a modern leisure and lifestyle zone.

Clarke Quay's historic godowns and other buildings such as The Cannery and River House were restored and now function as dining and entertainment establishments that serve a new generation of visitors. Further upriver, Robertson Quay, formerly an industrial enclave of engineering firms and boatyards, has undergone a transformation to become a peaceful mixed use neighbourhood with housing, eateries, hotels and arts facilities.

However, some former riverine landmarks and scenes no longer exist. Pulau Saigon, a small island that once divided the river between Clarke Quay and Robertson Quay, has given way to land reclamation and the needs of urban redevelopment. The lighters that once plied the river and were familiar sights until the early 1980s are also things of the past, as is the infamous stench that was a hallmark of the river, especially during low tides when the muddy and polluted riverbed became exposed to the air.



*"At Work" by Lim Tze Peng depicts the Singapore River bustling with activity against a backdrop of godowns and warehouses, 1980-83*

## **A RIVER TRANSFORMED: CREATING A CLEAN AND FRESH WATERWAY**

The commerce that dominated the Singapore River for much of its modern history did not come without an environmental cost. Even in the 19th century, pollution, silting and overcrowding were problems that affected navigation and public health. Thousands of vessels used the river daily (as many as 6,100 craft were found to have entered and left the river during a three-day period in 1899) and the waterway amassed waste discharged from these craft, as well as those from nearby homes and industries. Outbreaks of cholera and diarrhoea in the 1890s were attributed by the municipality to the “insanitary state of the Singapore River”.

In 1898, a Singapore River Commission was formed to tackle pollution and overcrowding. The commission’s recommendations to improve the riverbanks, organise regular dredging and raise the bridges were never implemented however, due to budgetary constraints. Financial restrictions similarly hampered an effort by a Singapore River Working Party in 1955 to address congestion

and pollution by deepening the river, raising the bridges and rebuilding its walls.

Real change and a clean river would only come in the decades that followed Singapore’s independence in 1965. Trade and commerce remained key economic pillars of independent Singapore, but the young island-nation also sought to develop itself as a major manufacturing base and international financial centre. To attract global investments and talents in these fields, the city, as well as the river that ran through it, had to be transformed into a clean and healthy environment.



*Tanjong Pagar Docks built in the 1860s, which were upgraded over time to eventually become a container port, 1890s*



*Tanjong Pagar Port, c. 1980s*

In 1972, Singapore opened its first container port terminal at Tanjong Pagar at the site of the Tanjong Pagar Docks and became the first country in Southeast Asia to build such a facility. The advance of containerisation in the years that followed resulted in a revolution in trade and logistics that contributed to the decline of the river's traditional role as a commercial hub. This decline had already started in 1968 when much of the lighter trade was diverted from the river to new port facilities at Telok Ayer Basin.

In 1977, Singapore's founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (1923-2015) declared that the clean-up of the Singapore River was a national priority and should be achieved within a decade. "It should be a way of life to keep the water clean, to keep every stream, every culvert, every rivulet, free from unnecessary pollution," he stated on 27 February 1977. He added: "In ten years let us have fishing in the Singapore River and fishing in the Kallang River – it can be done."

Led by the then Ministry of the Environment, the clean-up of the Singapore River involved extensive dredging to remove tonnes of mud and debris from the banks and riverbed. To prevent further pollution of the river, boatyards, squatter dwellings, unlicensed hawkers, backyard industries and other potential pollution-causing activities were also relocated from the riverbanks.



*View of Boat Quay before the clean-up, mid-20th century*

Former street hawkers and vendors were moved to modern food centres and markets at Boat Quay, Empress Place and Chinatown with proper cleaning and waste disposal facilities. Homes in new Housing & Development Board (HDB) flats were found for thousands of people who had to move to make way for a cleaner river.

On 1 September 1983, the river's traditional lighter trade, which had also contributed to the pollution of the river through garbage and oil spills, was relocated to Pasir Panjang, and eventually moved to Penjuru Lighter Terminal in Jurong in 2008. The departure of the lighters, although mourned by many given their defining presence on the river, was deemed crucial to the goal of turning the Singapore River into a clean and pleasant environment for people who worked in the city.



*By 1984, the river was deemed clean enough to organise a mass swim, in which 400 people participated, including Major Fong Sip Chee, then Minister of State (Culture) and Ho Kah Leong, then Parliamentary Secretary (Education), 15 May 1984*



*Shophouses along Boat Quay before restoration, 1988*

At long last, on 2 September 1987, a decade after he had issued his challenge, Prime Minister Lee was able to declare with pride: "Now, for the first time, since the founding of Singapore, these rivers are clean again. New recreational amenities on and by the Marina and the rivers offer a new way of life for the people. It is something Singaporeans can be proud of."

Many Singaporeans have fond memories of the Singapore River even before its clean-up. One of them is Chia Hearn Kok, a retired teacher who grew up near Boat Quay and had this memory to share:

*"Living at the junction of Canton Street and Circular Road in 1949 at the age of nine, I always looked forward to the first three and middle three days of the lunar month because that was when the tide of the Singapore River was at its highest between 10 am and 12 noon. That was the time you would find me joining the many boys playing in the flooded streets and swimming in the Singapore River. We would be in our short pants - no swimming trunks as we could not afford them - and bare-bodied. A distinct feature of our swimming style was that our heads were always above water because of the stench from the animal and human wastes and the rubbish.*

*One of our favourite antics was to catch a ride on the Elgin Bridge on the heavily loaded tongkangs that plied the river by climbing onto the rubber*

*tyres on its sides. At the Elgin Bridge, the braver of the boys would dive while the less brave would jump down when the 'all-clear' shout was given. We would then return by clinging to another tongkang moving in the opposite direction. Those were carefree, sweet and innocent days!"*

In the years that followed its clean-up, additional efforts were carried out to transform the riverine landscape into an attractive destination and district. In 1999, a six-kilometre long riverfront pedestrian promenade was completed, allowing pedestrians to walk unhindered along much of the riverside. Historic bridges such as Ord, Read, and Cavenagh Bridges were restored and new pedestrian bridges such as Alkaff Bridge, Robertson Bridge and Jiak Kim Bridge were built to improve access between the riverbanks in the Robertson Quay area. New landing points were also created for the bumboats that would now ferry tourists and sightseers for pleasure cruises along the river.

By the turn of the 21st century, the Singapore River was finally transformed into a scenic, pedestrian-friendly waterway that flowed past modern skyscrapers as well as monuments from Singapore's colonial past. The old *twakows*, along with the labourers and craftsmen who lived and worked by the quays, are but memories today.

However, many of the old shophouses, godowns, and other landmarks that grace the riverbanks have survived and undergone extensive restoration to serve a new generation of Singaporeans and tourists as modern shops, restaurants, galleries and hotels.

Today, the Singapore River no longer empties into the open sea but into Marina Bay, an estuarine basin that was formed in the 1970s when parts of the old seafront, including the former Singapore Roads, were reclaimed to create new parcels of land on which the city could expand.

In 2008, the Marina Barrage, a massive dam that keeps seawater out of the Marina and Kallang Basins, was completed. This facility has transformed the entire bay into a freshwater reservoir that contributes to Singapore's growing water needs. Through its catchment area that collects rainwater from the city's drains and canals, and empties into Marina Reservoir, the river continues to serve as an artery that supports and sustains life in the Lion City, and a place where visitors can chart Singapore's development into a global centre for commerce.



*Boat Quay, 2016*



*The Marina Barrage dam, 2016*



*Social spaces at the Marina Barrage, 2016*

# POINTS OF ARRIVAL: THE QUAYS OF THE SINGAPORE RIVER

In the decades that followed the British's arrival to Singapore, the once muddy banks of the Singapore River were steadily tamed and transformed into firm embankments or quays where goods could be easily transferred between cargo boats and riverside godowns and shophouses. Today, many of these quays have been preserved and restored as spaces for modern commerce, recreation and the arts.

## BOAT QUAY

In 1819, Boat Quay was a vast mangrove swamp that was prone to flooding during high tides. As a result, Raffles had initially envisioned that the port in Singapore would be

located along the coastline north of the river, which ran towards what is now Kampong Gelam. However, this shoreline proved to be unsuitable and unsafe as a landing site for vessels as it was too exposed to the open sea and tidal fluctuations.

When Raffles returned to Singapore for the third and final time between October 1822 and June 1823, he was convinced by William Farquhar (1774-1839), whom he had appointed Singapore's first Resident, as well as pioneering merchants such as Alexander Guthrie, that the Singapore River was a far superior site as well as the mercantile community's preferred place for developing a port.



*Portrait of Sir Stamford Raffles by John Adamson, after an 1817 painting by George Francis Joseph, 1912*



*Portrait of William Farquhar, 19th century*



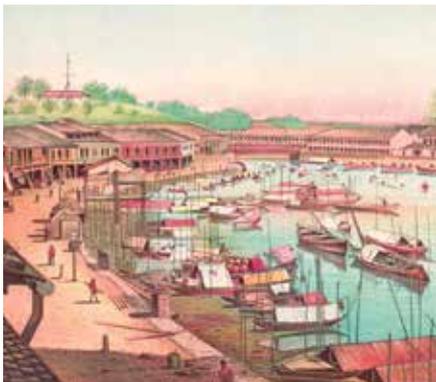
Map of Singapore by Brockhaus showing the bulging curve of the Singapore River, known as the “belly of the carp”, 1894

To realise this plan, the south bank of the river had to be made suitable for buildings and other structures such as jetties and quays. Thus, Singapore’s first land reclamation project was launched in 1822. Earth from a nearby hillock, on what is now Raffles Place, was used to fill in the swampy riverbank to create firm land and a long embankment on which buildings such as godowns and shops could be constructed.

After it was reclaimed, the river’s south bank became known as Boat Quay and was soon occupied by rows of godowns, shops and houses as merchants sought premises and homes with good views and ready access to the river.

Boat Quay faces a part of the river that forms a wide crescent just before the river mouth; this stretch was popularly known as the “belly of the carp” because of its resemblance to a fish associated with good fortune by the Chinese. Locals also referred to Boat Quay as *tiam pang lo thau*, (“*sampan* landing place” in Hokkien, with *sampan* referring to small boats) or *bu ye tian*, (“place of ceaseless activity” in Mandarin).

Sheltered from storms and rough seas, Boat Quay provided a safe and convenient site for the storage and distribution of regional merchandise. Silk, tea and valuable spices such as cloves, nutmeg, and pepper were among the top commodities sought in colonial Singapore’s early years, and the island offered an ideal meeting point for traders from East Asia, South Asia and Europe, who could unload their cargo at this harbour and pick up other goods for their journeys home.



View of the Singapore River, South Boat Quay and Fort Canning Hill, 1886

Marine and forest produce from Southeast Asia such as tortoiseshell, sea cucumbers, seaweed, gambier (a plant extract used for tanning leather), gutta-percha (a valuable tree latex), timber, fragrant sandalwood, ebony, rattan, ivory and dragon's blood (a plant resin used for varnish, medicine and incense) were among the main products traded during the early decades of the port, as were opium and firearms.



Postcard titled "Landing of rice by Chinese coolies at Boat Quay", 1916

European craft arrived bearing cotton goods, ironware, gunpowder, liquor and other Western provisions, while Chinese junks sailed to Singapore laden with items such as earthenware, rice, pork, vermicelli, dried fruits, joss sticks, camphor (used as incense) and medicine. From the late 19th century, cash crops and raw materials from Malaya and the surrounding archipelago such as rubber, tin, sago, coconut copra and sugar rose in importance.

### THE BOATS OF BOAT QUAY

Hundreds of lighters once thronged Boat Quay as they ferried goods between the riverbank godowns and larger ships anchored off the harbour. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries until 1983, rows of lighters were a familiar sight as they moored at Boat Quay for their goods to be transported to warehouses by teams of lightermen.

Although the term *tongkang* is often used to refer to all lighters, in the past it referred mainly to the larger lighters usually manned by Indian boatmen for travelling across



Cargo being unloaded from a freighter to Chinese twakows, 1920s-40s

islands. Smaller lighters, typically operated by Hokkien or Teochew lightermen, were known as *twakows*. Before the 1930s, when motorised lighters started to appear, lighters were equipped with sails for passage on the open sea. In the shallow waters of the river, lightermen used long poles called punts to propel and manoeuvre the craft into position by the quays.

During the 19th century, the lighter trade was dominated by boatmen of South Indian Muslim origin known as Chulias. These boatmen were recruited from Penang or the east coast of South India for their nautical skills in manning coastal vessels, notably the bulkier *tongkangs* that required careful handling.

After 1867, however, when Singapore became a Crown Colony ruled directly from London rather than Kolkata, India, the Indian lightermen gradually lost their dominance. During this period, many European merchants shifted their operations from the river to New (later Keppel) Harbour at Telok Blangah, which did not require the use of lighters to transfer cargo. Meanwhile, Chinese lightermen, who operated the smaller, more manoeuvrable *twakows*, took over the riverine trade and largely displaced the Indian boatmen and their larger *tongkangs* by the early 20th century.

Traditionally, *twakows* owned by Teochew boatmen had red "eyes" painted on their front ends while Hokkien-owned boats had green "eyes". These "eyes" were believed by boatmen to help their lighters "see" their way,

especially when the vessels were plying the open sea between the river and ships anchored offshore. However, they also had a practical function which was to allow boatmen to tell, when the water level reached the “eyes”, that a boat was fully laden.

Jenny Lum, who grew up near Boat Quay in the 1960s, recalled scenes from the riverside during her childhood:

*“As my dad was a spice and rice merchant, we lived in Synagogue Street shophouses, now all demolished. He owned one of the warehouses along the Boat Quay area. When the goods arrived in a big tongkang, the head of the coolies, called the ‘Kepala’, [would] put a long wooden plank against the tongkang and the coolies, one by one, [would] walk up the plank with a piece of cloth over their shoulder (to cushion them) and carry down one gunny sack at a time on their shoulder. They were being paid by the number of sacks cleared.”*

In the 19th century, shipyards were based on the river’s north bank across Boat Quay, where there was a lane called Hallpike Street, after Stephen Hallpike, a blacksmith who owned one of these facilities.



Empress Place Food Centre, 1976



Boat Quay Food Centre along Singapore River, next to Bank of China Building, 1976



View of hawkker stalls along Singapore River, 1970

Later, the area bordered by the river, North Bridge Road and High Street was redeveloped into Singapore’s new Parliament House complex that opened in October 1999. There were also two other popular riverside food centres at Empress Place and along Boat Quay – one in front of the Empress Place Building and the other by the Bank of China building. These provided cheap and affordable food for city workers from 1973 until they were closed in 1993.

For Soundara Rajan (b. 1928), a leader in Singapore’s Telugu Indian community, the riverside eateries form part of his memories of the city in the 1950s. He shared this memory with the National Archives of Singapore:

*“There were a lot of hawkers around. Even at midnight, one could buy foodstuffs from these hawkers. They were a common sight and their absence can be felt now. Boat Quay – both sides of the river, especially near the Cavenagh Bridge, the one near Empress Place – there were a lot of food stalls and hawkker stalls.”*

The traditional riverine trade with its *twakows*, gangways and lightermen ceased in 1983 following the clean-up of the river. The historical pre-war shophouses that lined Boat Quay were conserved in 1989 and the old, crumbling river wall was reconstructed and strengthened in 1992. Boat Quay was then transformed into a modern recreation zone with shops, eateries and scenic riverside promenades.



*Boat Quay, 2016*

### CLARKE QUAY

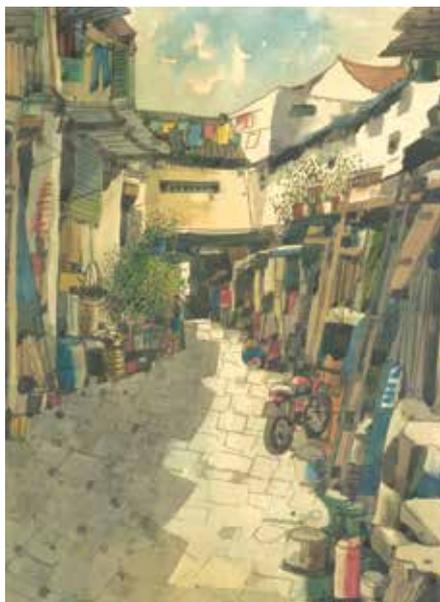
Clarke Quay was a relatively undeveloped neighbourhood in the early 19th century, and was primarily used as a distribution point for fresh water. As the area was located close to Fort Canning Park, which had a freshwater spring, an aqueduct was constructed between the hill and a water tank near the junction of Hill Street and River Valley Road in the 1820s. This tank supplied water to visiting ships until the 1830s when the spring dried up following the digging of private wells at the foot of the hill.

Clarke Quay, which was named in 1889 or earlier, originally referred to a small public quay on the north bank of the Singapore River between Read and Ord Bridges. Two roads in the area, formerly named East Street and West Street, were collectively renamed Clarke Street in 1896.

Both Clarke Quay and Clarke Street were named after Sir Andrew Clarke (1824-1902), Governor of the Straits Settlements between 1873 and 1875. Clarke was instrumental in the signing of the Pangkor Treaty of 1874 which resulted in the introduction of a British Resident in Perak and paved the way for indirect British rule of other Malayan states.

Locally, Clarke won the support of both Chinese and European merchants for new regulations for passenger ships, which helped to curb earlier cases of coolie abuse.

In the past, Hokkiens referred to Clarke Street as *gi hok kong si au*, meaning "behind the *gi hok kongsi*" (kongsi refers to a clan or self-help



*A back lane at Clarke Quay, 1978*

organisation). Clarke Quay was also known to locals as *cha chun tau* (“jetty for firewood boats” in Hokkien) as a nearby pier was widely used by *tongkangs* bearing firewood from Indonesia.



*A tongkang laden with logs, mid-20th century*

## RIVER HOUSE

A major historical landmark at Clarke Quay is the two-storey River House, which is also the oldest surviving building at Clarke Quay. River House was built in the 1880s by Tan Yeok Nee (1827-1902), a prominent Teochew pepper and gambier merchant, and was known as *Lian Yi Xuan* in Mandarin.

Designed according to a southern Chinese architectural style, River House later became a clanhouse and godown for gambier and other commodities, before it was restored in 1993. The building features a spacious interior with open verandahs as well as a distinctive tiled roof with an upturned ridge and decorated with dragon-fish, cranes and Chinese unicorns.

River House is one of only two surviving traditional Chinese-style dwellings remaining in Singapore – the other is a Teochew-style mansion also built by Tan Yeok Nee along Penang Road in 1882 and gazetted as a National Monument in 1974.



*Gambier, William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings, 1803-1818*



*River House, 1993*



*Diners in front of the River House, which became the Forbidden City restaurant cum bar, 1993-1999*

## NORTH BOAT QUAY AND HONG LIM QUAY

Today, Clarke Quay refers broadly to the area between Coleman Bridge and Clemenceau Bridge. In the past, however, the north bank of the river between Empress Place and Read Bridge was known as North Boat Quay, while the south bank of the river, across Clarke Quay, was known as Hong Lim Quay, after Cheang Hong Lim (1841-1893), a wealthy landowner and philanthropist who donated land for Dunman Green (later renamed Hong Lim Green and today Hong Lim Park) in 1876.

Lee Kim Nam, who grew up at Clarke Quay in the 1960s, shared this memory of the neighbourhood:

*“Last time, my family lived in what is currently known as Clarke Quay. I remember the street in the evening was bustling with life. And there were street peddlers selling all kind of things from noodles to dumplings. The noodles seller would knock their bamboo making ‘ko ko’ noises. And we would shout out to them our orders from upstairs and lower a basket tied to a rope with money. And they would put our order in the basket and we pulled our food up.”*



Shophouses at North Boat Quay, early-mid 20th century

Recalling his childhood at North Boat Quay, where he was born, surgeon Dr Tan Ser Kiat (b. 1946) told the National Archives:

*“My father was a part-seaman, part-labourer. Some of the time, he worked as a seaman on many of these tongkangs that plied the Singapore River. In between, he worked as a labourer. My mother was a full-time housewife until 1956, when we moved from North Boat Quay to Geylang... My earliest recollection was that from time to time, my father, when he was home or free, he used to take me, especially early in the morning, to walk across the [Coleman] bridge... We crossed the bridge to the old Ellenborough Market very early in the morning for bak kut teh [pork rib soup]. There were no such things as seats. It was all benches. You had to squat on the bench to eat your rice and drink your bowl of pork rib soup.”*



A view of the Ellenborough Fish Market beside the Singapore River, 1953

## READ STREET AND TAN TYE PLACE

Read Street, which runs perpendicular to Clarke Street, was named in 1896 after William Henry Macleod Read (1819-1909), a prominent merchant and member of Singapore’s Legislative Council. Previously, the road was known as North Street and South Street.

An old Hokkien name for Read Street, *ong ke sua kha thih chio pi* or “beside the iron foundry at the fort of Fort Canning Hill”, referred to nearby industrial facilities owned by Howarth, Erskine & Co., a major engineering firm. The firm had a rubber warehouse at Clarke Quay in 1891, which was later converted into a pineapple processing and canning factory.

Today the former pineapple factory has been restored and reused as a retail and lifestyle centre called The Cannery. Nearby, Tan Tye Place was also the site of a pineapple factory owned by a timber merchant called Tan Tye (1839-1898), who sold canned pineapples under the Hin Choon and Istana brands.



*A pineapple canning factory in Singapore, 1915*



*Pineapple canning was a very successful early manufacturing industry in early 20th century Singapore, 1952*



*A view of Read Street with pre-war houses and a roadside lavatory visible, 1970s*

Tan Wee Him (b. 1948), a former journalist, remembers that there used to be a public toilet right in the middle of Read Street in the past. He shared with the National Archives:

*"In the middle of Read Street, there was a public toilet built in the old colonial days. And if I may recall from history, that was the first public toilet built by the colonial government. And I remember that they had a funny way of declaring that toilet open, when they invited the governor then to do his thing. And that's how they declared [the] public toilet open."*

The north end of Clarke Quay, near the junction of River Valley Road and Clemenceau Avenue just north of the present Liang Court complex, was formerly occupied by municipal stores and workshops established in the



*The Cannery, 2016*

1870s. The municipality used these facilities to store and process granite for building and repairing roads. The granite was obtained from quarries in Pulau Ubin and sent to the stores via *tongkangs*. The site came under the City Council when Singapore was declared a city in 1951 and the Municipal Commission was reconstituted into the City Council.

In the late 1960s, part of the site was redeveloped into the Economic Development Board (EDB) building, which housed Singapore's fledgling semiconductor industry as well as the EDB's Light Industries Services workshop that provided training for workers in Singapore's light industries from 1966. The six-storey building also housed the headquarters of the Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research (SISIR) when it became a statutory board independent from the EDB in 1973, until it moved to Science Park in 1987.

The historic shophouses and Anglo-Oriental godowns bordered by River Valley Road, Tan Tye Place, Clarke Quay and North Boat Quay were conserved in 1989. This entire area

then became known as Clarke Quay and was transformed in the 1990s into a recreational and lifestyle district with restaurants, shops, and entertainment outlets occupying the restored warehouses and riverside buildings.



*Goh Keng Swee, then Minister of Finance, opening the Light Industries Services Unit, 1964*



*Clarke Quay, 2015*

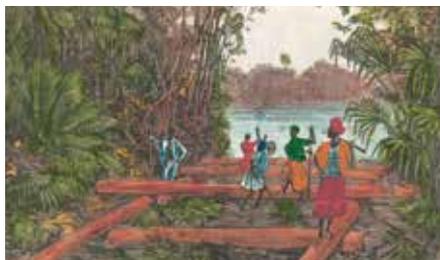
## ROBERTSON QUAY

Located upriver from Clemenceau Bridge, Robertson Quay was probably named after Dr Thomas Murray Robertson (1860-1931), a City Coroner, Medical College lecturer and Municipal Commissioner who lived in the Leonie Hill area off River Valley Road. Dr Robertson's father, John Hutchinson Robertson (1829-1896), was also a prominent physician, Municipal Commissioner and magistrate.

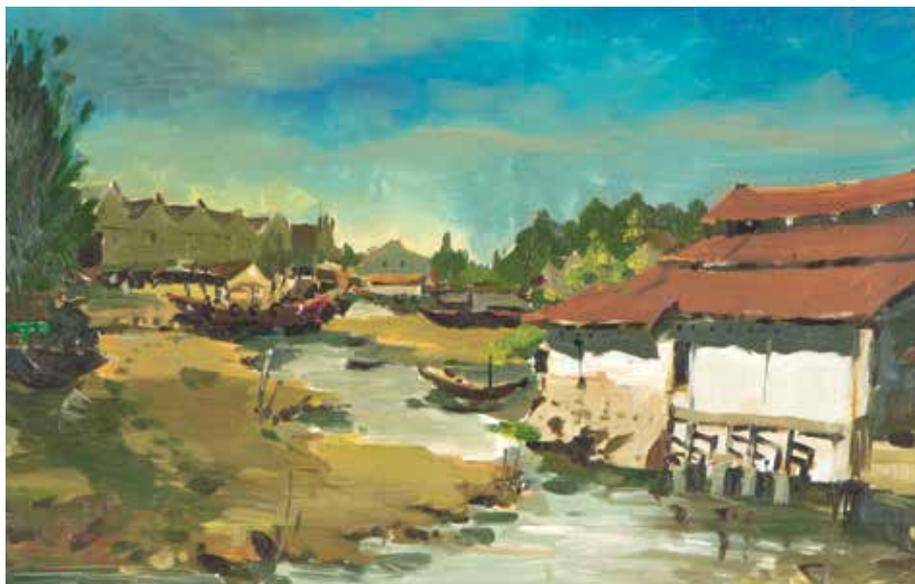
The name "Robertson Quay" has existed since the turn of the 20th century, when this stretch of the Singapore River began to fill up with warehouses, boatyards, depots and mills. The area between the present Pulau Saigon Bridge and Alkaff Bridge (around present-day Nanson Road) was then a settlement established in the 1860s called Kampong Martin, which was home to Chinese fishermen and boatbuilders who lived in attap-roofed houses until the village was destroyed by fire in 1916. West of Kampong Martin was another settlement of wooden huts called Kampong Pukat (after a Malay fishing net), which survived until the early 1980s.

Robertson Quay was the operating centre of many boatyards, where the lighters that plied the river were built and repaired. Justice Choor Singh (1911-2009), a former Supreme Court judge, recounted his memories of this stretch of the river to the National Archives:

*"In the upper reaches of the Singapore River, there was shipbuilding going on. By shipbuilding, I mean the construction of these Chinese twakows. They were actually constructed on the banks of the river. After they were ready, they were floated down to the sea. Right up to Kim Seng Bridge in Kim Seng Road, that is the area where there was a lot of construction work going on, building these twakows."*



*"Rolling Timber through Jungle to River, Straits Settlements Court", a wood engraving published in the Illustrated London News, 1886*



*"Old Robertson Quay" by Ong Kim Seng, 1966*



*UE Square, 2016*

Meanwhile, the area around Damar Road (now expunged) and Merbau Road was once dominated by the workshops and warehouses of United Engineers. Still in existence, this engineering firm was formed in 1912 by the merger of Riley, Hargreaves & Co. and Howarth, Erskine & Co. The firm was responsible for the building of landmarks such as the former Supreme Court and OCBC Centre. United Engineers' former facilities by River Valley Road ceased operations in 1953 when the company moved to Kampong Bahru. The company's site was redeveloped into the UE Square complex in 1995.

### **ALKAFF QUAY AND EARLE QUAY**

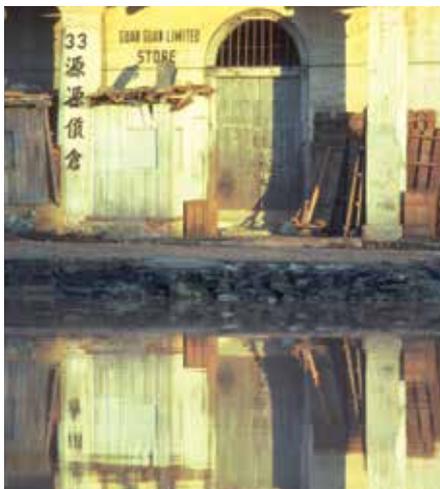
On the south side of the river, two major wharves, Alkaff Quay and Earle Quay, were established in the early 20th century. Earle Quay was named after Thomas Edward Earle, a member of the Legislative Council and manager of the Straits Steamship Company, in 1907. In the same year, Alkaff Quay, a warehouse facility with 17 godowns that once occupied the south bank of the river across Robertson Quay, was named after Syed Sheikh Alkaff (1839-1910), an Arab merchant whose

family achieved prominence in Singapore as landowners and philanthropists. Both quays were redeveloped in the 1990s and the area is now linked to Robertson Quay via Alkaff Bridge.

In the 1990s, Robertson Quay was converted into a housing and recreational zone with a more tranquil and relaxed atmosphere compared to Boat Quay and Clarke Quay. A number of surviving godowns at Robertson Quay were also restored as facilities for the visual and performing arts. One example is the KC Arts Centre, which comprises two connected double-storey pre-war warehouses at Merbau Road and opened in 2001 as the home of the Singapore Repertory Theatre.



*Lorries at the wharf at Alkaff Quay next to a twakow, with godowns in the background, 1980*



*A godown at Earle Quay, 1980*



*Robertson Quay, 2016*

### SPACES FOR THE ARTS

Another theatre company, TheatreWorks, operates in a former rice warehouse once owned by the Bank of China. In September 2005, the warehouse was converted into an arts and performance space that can be used as a gallery, cinema or theatre. Meanwhile, the Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI) is based in a restored 19th century riverside warehouse with a Georgian-style façade by Caseen Street.

Established in 2002 under the guidance of American master printer Kenneth E. Tyler (b. 1931), STPI is a non-profit body dedicated to developing contemporary art using print and

paper. STPI houses galleries, a paper mill and workshops where artists can work using diverse materials and methods.



*Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI), 2016*



*TheatreWorks, 2016*



*A lithography workshop at STPI, 2016*

# COMMERCE ON THE WATERFRONT

Various centres of commerce sprung up around the Singapore River as Singapore emerged as a major trading destination in the 19th century. The colony's traders and merchants, having occupied nearly all available stretches of the riverbank at Boat Quay, then expanded to the nearby waterfront following the creation of Collyer Quay, which to this day forms part of the island's financial district.

Meanwhile, nearby Raffles Place was already a thriving centre for mercantile activity since modern Singapore's earliest days, and along with Change Alley, served as Singapore's leading shopping and retail destination until the 1970s.

## COLLYER QUAY

Collyer Quay was originally a natural beach along the rear of the commercial buildings and warehouses facing Raffles Place – hence

its old name was *tho kho au* (Hokkien for “behind the godowns”). However, as the entrepôt boomed in the mid-19th century and the Singapore River became increasingly congested with boat traffic, the authorities sought to expand the commercial quarter southwards beyond the river along the waterfront. Between 1861 and 1864, the original shore was reclaimed and the sea was held at bay by a long protective seawall, behind which a road and new buildings could be built.

Named Collyer Quay after its designer George Chancellor Collyer (1814-1897), chief engineer of the Straits Settlements, this development sparked a transformation of Singapore's waterfront. Earlier, traders had preferred to base their offices and godowns by the river, from which they could unload goods at nearby piers.



Office buildings and godowns along Collyer Quay, c. 1880s

The building of Collyer Quay provided merchants with direct access to the sea and, by 1866, the quay was occupied by a row of shophouses and offices with a continuous second-storey, from which merchants and clerks armed with telescopes could keep a look-out for newly arriving ships. In the 1880s, the foreshore south of Collyer Quay was also reclaimed to form a new road and embankment named Raffles Quay, part of which was renamed Shenton Way in 1951 after Sir Shenton Thomas (1879-1962), Governor from 1934 to 1946.

During the early 20th century, new commercial buildings emerged along Collyer Quay, forming a striking skyline often compared to the famous Bund in Shanghai, China. These grand neoclassical buildings included the Hongkong & Shanghai Bank (1925), Union (later Maritime) Building (1925), Ocean Building (1923) and Alkaff Arcade (1909). Alkaff Arcade was perhaps the most striking structure along Collyer Quay as it was designed in an Indo-Saracenic style with onion domes and decorated arches. Developed by the Alkaffs, Alkaff Arcade was the island's first indoor shopping centre and offered a covered walkway between Raffles Place and Collyer Quay.

In the 1970s, modern skyscrapers replaced most of Collyer Quay's grand old edifices, save the Fullerton Building and the 18-storey Asia Insurance Building (now Ascott Raffles Place), which was Southeast Asia's tallest building at 82 metres when it was completed in 1955. This early skyscraper was designed by Ng Keng Siang (1907-1967), Singapore's first overseas-trained architect, in a tropical Art Deco style, with a scalloped crown on its apex and pronounced horizontal ledges that provided shade while indicating the height of each storey. This building was conserved in 2007 and now houses service apartments.

Meanwhile, the imposing neoclassical Fullerton Building was completed in 1928 and housed the General Post Office until 1996, after which it was converted into a hotel. The building occupies the site of the former Fort



*The Arcade, c. 1910*



*Ocean Building, 1930*



*The Union Building and the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank Building, c. 1925*



*The Collyer Quay waterfront showing the Asia Insurance Building, Ocean Building and Alkaff Arcade, c. 1960s-70s*



*The Arcade, 2016*



## CLIFFORD PIER

Opened in 1933 as the main gateway for travellers to Singapore, Clifford Pier replaced an older structure called Johnston's Pier, which was built in 1856 across Fullerton Square and named after pioneer merchant

Alexander Laurie Johnston. Clifford Pier was named after Hugh Clifford (1866-1941), Governor of the Straits Settlements in 1927-29, despite objections by many local merchants who much preferred the old name.



*Portrait of British merchant Alexander Laurie Johnston, mid-late 19th century*

Clifford Pier was designed by Frank Dorrington Ward (1885-1972), chief architect of the Public Works Department, who also designed the former Supreme Court Building, Kallang Airport terminal and the Hill Street Police Station. The pier is secured to the seabed by ferro-concrete piles and features a spacious column-free passenger hall with Art Deco detailing such as ribbon-like reinforced concrete arched trusses on the roof and a "sun-ray" shaped entrance arch. In 1975-76, Clifford Pier was extended to provide a covered decking, a larger landing deck and a promenade.



*Portrait of Sir Hugh Clifford by Anatole Shister, 1928*



*Johnston's Pier, early 20th century*



*Family at Clifford Pier, 1937*



*Clifford Pier, c. 1970*

Both Johnston's Pier and Clifford Pier had red beacons that indicated their locations at night, so they were referred to as *lampu merah* ("red lamp" in Malay) or *hoang tang mah thow* by the Cantonese and *ang theng beh thow* in Hokkien – both dialect terms meaning "red lamp jetty". The piers also lent their name to Collyer Quay, which acquired the Hokkien name of *ang teng lor* or "red lamp road".

James Seah (b. 1949), a retired civil servant who frequented the area in the 1970s, shared this memory of Clifford Pier:

*"Clifford Pier was known as 'Red Lamp Pier' (红灯码头) among Singaporeans in the early days. I remember the first time I accompanied my friend's family at Clifford Pier for her to send off to board a passenger ship to Hong Kong. The pier was very crowded with passengers by ship to countries all over the world. The only way to board the passenger liners was by sampans that reached in about 10-20 minutes and a few dollars charged per person each trip. As limited guests were allowed to board the ships to bid farewell, the well-wishers would depart at Clifford Pier."*

In the 1960s and 1970s, Clifford Pier was a destination in its own right for people who wanted to enjoy scenic views of the sea and waterfront. Magdalene Boon shared this memory from the 1960s:

*"Sitting on a bench at Clifford Pier, watching the embarking and disembarking of human flotsam and jetsam, from the ever-busy sampans and motor launches, was the highlight of the week for me. I love[d] the smell of the sea, and listening to all the 'foreign tongues' wagging, accompanied by the frantic hand gestures, never failed to amaze me as to how people communicate."*

Given the high number of people who visited the area, it was not surprising that many enterprising hawkers and vendors set up stalls along Collyer Quay and by Clifford Pier to provide refreshments and snacks. Jit Lim Edward is one former visitor who remembers the affordable roadside food and drinks stalls:

*"When I was a teenager in the 1960s, my friends and I used to roam around the Clifford Pier area in the evening. We would patronise the drinks stalls set up every evening along the roadside of Collyer Quay and adjacent to Clifford Pier. Coffee was cheap at 10 cents a cup and the vendor would collect payment after consumption. Indian hawkers with baskets of prawn crackers would move along the roadside and offer them for sale. With Singapore's independence and the phasing out of roadside hawkers, these al fresco cafes disappeared."*

### SCENES FROM THE PAST

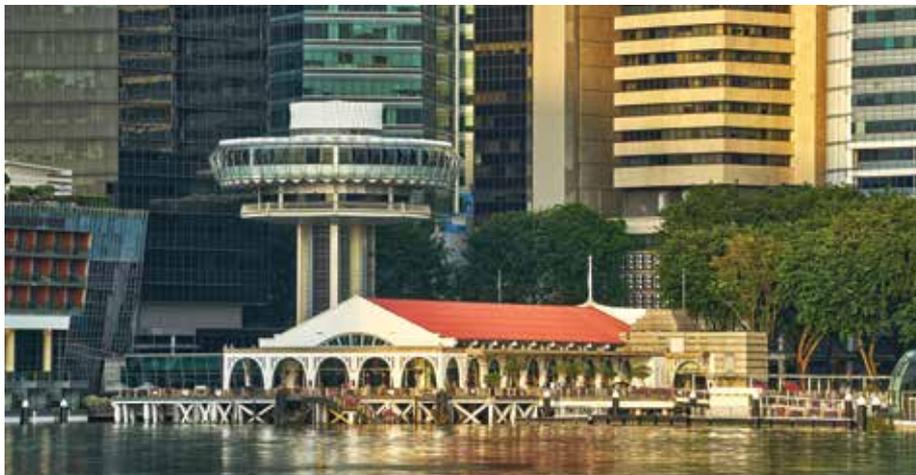
Until the late 20th century, the waterfront around Clifford Pier was abuzz with bumboats, ferries, *tongkangs*, *twakows*, *sampans* and other harbour vessels that bore both cargo and travellers.

However, on special occasions such as New Year's Day, the river would teem with *koleks* (small and fast Malay boats) and other traditional craft as villagers from Pasir Panjang and the Southern Islands such as Pulau Seking and Pulau Semakau gathered for a regatta including entertainment such as marine stunts and sea games. This colourful annual tradition continued until the 1970s when many of the Southern Islands were converted into petrochemical or industrial sites and their inhabitants relocated to the mainland.



*New Year's Regatta at Clifford Pier, mid-20th century*

One individual who recalled this regatta tradition is Haji Sukaimi bin Ibrahim (b. 1920), who shared with the National Archives:



Clifford Pier, 2016

*“As I recall, every 1 January, to celebrate the New Year, a regatta was held off Clifford Pier. That was where the Malay villages from Pasir Panjang, Pulau Seraya, Tanjong Kling, Pulau Bukom, Pulau Seking and Pulau Semakau sent sampans and sailboats to race with each other. I remember that the koleks would race from the pier to a rock which is no longer around due to the building of Benjamin Sheares’ Bridge. They would go around the rock and come back to the starting point. There was also a tongkang to which a long, slippery bamboo pole was attached. At the end of the pole, which was about five metres long and well-greased, there was a flag. The participants had to ascend the slippery pole to reach the flag, upon which they would win a prize. This was in 1933 or 1934 and the races went on until the war approached.”*



*Celebration along Clifford Pier to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation, June 1953*

Thousands of travellers and sailors had set foot in Singapore at Clifford Pier, having transferred from ocean-going vessels

anchored offshore to smaller ferries or even sampans. Many Singaporeans would also recall taking bumboats from Clifford Pier to visit the southern islands such as St John’s Island and Kusu Island, until this service was transferred to Marina South Pier in 2006.

Today, it is no longer possible to make offshore trips from Clifford Pier because the pier’s access to the sea has been obstructed with the opening of the Marina Barrage and the subsequent transformation of Marina Bay into a freshwater reservoir in 2008.

## CUSTOMS HOUSE

Although Singapore was and remains a free port of trade, the authorities still have a role to play in regulating commerce, which includes preventing the import of illegal items or dutiable goods such as tobacco and alcohol. These were the functions of this striking waterfront building, which once served as a look-out point from which staff of the Singapore Customs’ Harbour Division kept watch over the Singapore Strait between Telok Ayer and Tanjong Rhu for maritime smugglers.

One of the largest divisions of the Customs Department with about 300 staff, the Harbour Division was responsible for preventing ship-to-shore smuggling of dutiable goods as well



*Seized opium and morphine being put on display at Customs House, 1972*

as prohibited items such as narcotics. Customs officers would launch speedy motorboats from a pier below the building to intercept suspicious craft. The division also operated motor launches that patrolled the harbour waters and Singapore's coastline to prevent the illegal landing of contraband goods.

Geraldine Lowe-Ismail, a veteran tour guide, had the privilege of visiting Customs House during her childhood. She shared:

*"My mother worked in Special Branch Police in the 1950-60s and we had friends in various branches of Police and Customs - so we had a chance to visit the old Customs House. I remember some of them telling stories of how they had to be watchful, as many sampans would glide into Clifford Pier in the dead of night with special cargo - hot items were opium and girls!"*

Built in 1969 in a modern architectural style that emphasised simplicity and function, Customs House straddles an L-shaped pier and features a 23-metre high watchtower that looks out towards the Singapore Strait.

The building presents an elegant façade with bow tie-shaped protruding panels and umbrella-like pavilions at the end of the pier. The watchtower's original butterfly fascia boards, beams and windows panels have been retained. Customs House, conserved in 2007, is now connected to Clifford Pier via a pedestrian promenade.

This building should not be confused with the former Customs House at Maxwell Road, which was the headquarters of the Singapore Customs from 1932 until 1989. Today, the building at Maxwell Road is known as Maxwell Chambers.



*Customs House, 2016*

## RAFFLES PLACE

The heart of Singapore's financial district and a bustling hub for international commerce, Raffles Place was also one of the first places in modern Singapore to be developed. In the initial years of modern Singapore, this area was a muddy mangrove swamp prone to tidal flooding, and dotted with a few small hills on which stood ramshackle Chinese settlements.

To create firm land on which warehouses and other commercial facilities could be built, Sir Stamford Raffles launched a project to fill in this swampy land on the south bank of the Singapore River using earth from a small hill nearby. This reclamation project took place in the 1820s and created a firm embankment that became Boat Quay, while the hilly area that was levelled and built upon became known as Commercial Square.

For local tradesmen, Commercial Square became the place where the mercantile community gathered to hear the latest news, exchange gossip or scandal, and conduct

business. Enterprising merchants soon built offices, residences and godowns around the square. Captains and officers from visiting ships also frequented Commercial Square to visit the newsroom of *The Straits Times* newspaper in the 1850s, where they could obtain maps and information on commodity prices and other vital news.

Several wells were dug at Commercial Square in the mid-19th century to provide water for putting out fires, which occurred frequently then. Horse auctions were also held periodically at the square until 1886.

Commercial Square was renamed Raffles Place in 1858 to honour Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of modern Singapore. Tamils called it *kidangu theruvu* ("street of the godowns" in Tamil). During the 19th century, the square was also known as *hue hng kak* ("flower garden square" in Hokkien) as there was a garden planted with flowers and trees at the centre of the square, which was enclosed with wooden railings and surrounded by a road and various commercial buildings, banks and the telegraph office.



Painting of Raffles Place by A. L. Watson, 1905

Before Collyer Quay was built, godowns on the seaward side of Raffles Place had piers at their rears that allowed merchants to load and unload goods directly from the shore into their warehouses. These premises often doubled as residences, with living quarters on the upper floor. One of the most prominent pioneer merchants in the area was Alexander Laurie Johnston, who built his home and offices on a site near the river mouth nicknamed *tanjong tangkap* (“catching point” in Malay) as it allowed him to “catch” incoming vessels for business as soon as they arrived at the harbour.

## GEMMILL'S FOUNTAIN



*The Gemmill Fountain in Raffles Square, early 1900s*



*Gemmill Fountain, 2016*

The first public drinking fountain on the island was erected at Raffles Place in 1864 by Singapore's first auctioneer John Gemmill, after whom Gemmill Lane off Club Street was named. Gemmill's Fountain was a marble structure with a lion's head from which water spouts. It was later taken down and placed in a municipal store until 1923, when the fountain was placed at the front of the Victoria Memorial Hall. In 1967, the fountain was moved to the National Museum and later repaired. Since 2010, Gemmill's Fountain has been installed at the outdoor terrace of the National Museum of Singapore.

## FROM BANKING TO SHOPPING

A new group of grand commercial buildings rose up around Raffles Place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as Singapore emerged as a major global port and trading hub between East and West. These included the Chartered Bank, which stood on the present site of the Standard Chartered Bank from 1915 until



*The United Overseas Bank (UOB) Building, 1970s-80s*

1981; the Mercantile Bank along D'Almeida Street, which was built in 1930 and demolished for the building of Raffles Place MRT in 1990; and the United Overseas Bank at Bonham Street (redeveloped into UOB Centre in 1992).

Raffles Place was also a popular shopping district in the past. John Little Department Store, founded in 1845, had its store at Raffles Place until the 1980s, when the building was replaced by Shell Tower (now Singapore Land Tower). Meanwhile, the site of One Raffles Place today was once the flagship store of Robinsons, a well-known department store that started in 1858 and operated at Raffles Place from 1891 until 1972, when the premises were destroyed by a massive fire that killed nine people. Other once-familiar retailers at Raffles Place included GC De Silva (a jeweller), Gian Singh (a fine textiles merchant) and a popular snack shop called Honeyland Milk Bar.



*Raffles Place, with John Little & Co seen on the left, c. 1890*



Robinsons Department Store, 1950s-1970s



Shoppers using subway connecting the Robinsons' department store to the underground car park at Raffles Place, 1965



"Closing down" sale at Gian Singh and Co Ltd in Raffles Place, 1963

Victor Chew (b. 1929), an architect who worked in the area in the 1960s, described the Raffles Place of old to the National Archives:

*"Raffles Place was the centre of the European businesses. But there was one non-English shop there, very well-known, called Gian Singh. He sold sporting goods. It was a sports shop, but later on he sold other things. It was opposite Robinsons, on the other side of the square. At the corner where John Little was, at Battery Road, there was the only so-called soda fountain shop or ice cream parlour. It was owned by a Mr Tan and it was called Honeyland Milk Bar. He sold curry puffs, cream puffs, little dainty cakes and he was different from the others in that he had milkshakes. I'm talking about the mid-1950s and 1960s... It was a place where we English-speaking workers like clerks and professionals converged during lunchtime. Most of the offices were just around there, all the banks were around there."*

Another individual who recalls the area is Paul Kuah, who shared:

*"I remember my siblings used to bring me down to Raffles Place in the 1960s to shop at Robinsons and John Little. In those days, it was always a high point in my life and I recall the old Chartered Bank building [today 6 Battery Road] with the friendly Sikh security guard standing outside during the day, and by night, he would sleep on his charpoy (a light bed) in front of the bank's door. After shopping, we would walk by Empress Place and I can remember the boats that used to congest the Singapore River and the foul smell that emanated from the river that gave the place a unique character."*



Raffles Place Park, 1960s



Raffles Place, 2016

In the early 20th century, the former garden at the centre of Raffles Place was converted into a car park, but in 1964-65, the car park was moved underground and the centre of Raffles Place became a public park once more. The entire square was converted into a pedestrian zone in 1972, and Raffles Place remains a green oasis and open space, with entrances to the underground MRT station that recall the façades of John Little's former premises in the area.

### BANK OF CHINA BUILDING



*The Bank of China Building at Battery Road, c. 1950s*

*New Bank of China building, 2016*



*Lion sculptures by Italian sculptor Rodolfo Nolli at Bank of China building, 1954*

Completed in 1953 and located between Boat Quay and Raffles Place along Flint Street, the Bank of China building was one of Singapore's earliest skyscrapers and a towering landmark over the Singapore River and Raffles Place until the 1970s, when newer and taller structures emerged. The Bank of China started operations in Singapore in 1936 at Cecil Street and moved to this building at Battery Road in 1954.

The distinctive white building has 18 storeys and was the first facility in Singapore to feature central air-conditioning. It was designed by the architectural firm of Palmer & Turner, which based the building's look on early American skyscrapers and used grooved stuccoed surfaces that simulate masonry.

The two stone lions that guard the entrance of the building facing Battery Road were carved by Italian sculptor Cavalieri Rodolfo Nolli. Sleek, streamlined windows cover the middle reaches of the building while grills in Chinese geometric designs provide ventilation at the topmost floors. In 1999, a new 37-storey tower was built next to the original Bank of China building, with both buildings sharing a common podium.

### CHANGE ALLEY

The Raffles Place of the past featured retailers such as Robinsons and John Little, which were well-known upmarket shops that catered to Westernised tastes with imported merchandise. Many locals, as well as budget-conscious tourists and visiting sailors, preferred to patronise the nearby Change Alley, where a vast array of goods was sold by enterprising salesmen at sundry stalls which, unlike the big department stores, were open to bargaining.



*Shoppers in Change Alley, a narrow lane with shops offering everything from clothes, batik cloth, bags, brief cases, watches, toys, fishing accessories to handicrafts and other souvenirs, c.1950s*



Moneychangers at Change Alley, 1960

*Change Alley was a den of thieves! The one thing about Change Alley was that you had to know how to bargain. Everybody goes there, being prepared to use every device they know to bargain. And in fact that was like a sport; you could either get a very good bargain or you could be cheated – that's the way it was [...] And of course, the perennial problem: watch your pockets! Pickpockets in crowded places like that."*



Change Alley, 1989



Change Alley Aerial Plaza along the Collyer Quay waterfront, c. 1974

Change Alley, which links Raffles Place to Collyer Quay, was named in 1890 after Change (or Exchange) Alley in London, a narrow lane where stockbrokers traditionally gathered. Previously, it was referred to as Spottiswoode Alley, after an adjacent compound owned by the trading firm of William Spottiswoode & Co.



A lion dance at Change Alley Aerial Plaza to celebrate Chinese New Year, 19 February 1977

From the 1940s to 1989, when the old Change Alley was finally closed, this walkway was a major bazaar filled with moneychangers, souvenir shops, tailors, jewellers and other retailers who catered to local shoppers as well as foreign visitors seeking a bargain.

Architect Victor Chew, who worked at Raffles Place in the 1960s, offers a vivid account of old Change Alley:

*"Change Alley was where everything on earth that you think you want for your everyday needs, you would be sure to find there, whether you want to buy a fountain pen or an umbrella or shoes – it had everything there. It was very stuffy and hot and every stall hung all their goods outside and pushed it out into the alley. It was very difficult to walk; you had to slowly push your way through, but that was where we local people would do our shopping."*



Change Alley, 2016

In 1973, a pedestrian crossing between Clifford Pier and Raffles Place was built so that the public could cross Collyer Quay without having to brave the road's heavy traffic. Named Change Alley Aerial Plaza, this was the first overhead bridge in Singapore to have escalators and air-conditioning, and included several retail units which were later occupied by some of Change Alley's shopkeepers and moneychangers. The overpass is connected to a modern-style 12-storey tower block, conserved in 2007, which houses a revolving restaurant and public lookout deck.

### MARKET STREET

Market Street near Raffles Place is one of the oldest roads in Singapore. Its name came about because the original Telok Ayer Market used to stand on its southern end in the 1820s. This changed in 1879, when the market, now known as Lau Pa Sat and gazetted a National Monument in 1973, moved to its present site along Cross Street.

Market Street and the nearby Chulia Street once formed a significant enclave for the South Asian community in Singapore. From the early 19th century until the late 1970s, many migrants from South Asia settled in this area and established trading firms, retail shops and eateries.

Chulia Street was originally named Kling Street, as migrants from South India were then known as men from the kingdom of Kalinga or Orang Kling. However, the term later acquired a derogatory "association with convicts from India" and the road's name was formally

changed to Chulia Street in 1921. From the 1950s to the 1970s, many shops owned by Indian Muslims from Gujarat as well as Teochew dried seafood traders were located at Chulia Street.

Market Street was especially known for its high concentration of *kittangi* or "warehouse shops" owned by Chettiars, which led to Market Street acquiring the Tamil name of *chetty theruvu* ("Chettie's street" in Tamil). Hokkiens referred to Market Street as *tiong kui* or "central street" and there used to be many Hokkien importers and exporters based in the area.

The Chettiar community originated from the Sivagangai and Pudukottai districts of Tamil Nadu in South India, and established themselves as merchant bankers who were vital sources of working capital for many small and medium businesses. Individual Chettiars lived and worked in the *kittangi*, where they met their clients while seated by a small chest and safe along a narrow hallway.



Chettiar money lenders at Market Street, 1975



A Chettiar moneylender's list of doubtful debts, c. 1930s



Chulia Street, 1930s-50s



Market Street, 1970s

There were once up to seven *kittangi* along Market Street housing more than 300 Chettiar firms, but this dwindled to five *kittangi* with about 100 firms by 1975. The Sri Thendayuthapani Temple at Tank Road was built by the Chettiars in 1859 and this National Monument is the celebrated end point for the annual Thaipusam street procession. The Sri Layan Sithi Vinayagar Temple, completed in 1925 at Keong Saik Road in Chinatown, is another Hindu temple built and administered by the Chettiar community.



Telok Ayer Market, c. 1870

### MALACCA STREET AND D'ALMEIDA STREET

Malacca Street and D'Almeida Street, which connect Market Street to Finlayson Green, share links with Singapore's historic Portuguese community. Malacca Street was once known as *lau pa sat khau* in Hokkien, meaning "mouth of the old market", as the original Telok Ayer Market (popularly known as *lau pa sat* or "old market" in Hokkien) stood close by. The road has existed since the 1830s and was named after Melaka, which formed the British Straits Settlements together with Singapore and Penang from 1826 to 1946.



Interior of Telok Ayer Market, c. 1930

Malacca Street was the site of the former Nunes Building, which was completed in 1937 by the Portuguese Mission in Singapore using funds obtained by the sale of the land on which

the former Supreme Court was built in 1939. Named after Don Jose da Costa Nunes (1880-1976), a Portuguese cardinal, the building housed the Portuguese consulate as well as several law firms.



Lau Pa Sat, 2016



Malacca Street, 1927

The exterior of this four-storey building featured sculptured panels and finishings by Italian sculptor Nolli who also worked on the former Supreme Court, Elgin Bridge and Tanjong Pagar Railway Station. The Nunes Building was demolished in the late 1980s.

The law firm of Lee and Lee, founded by Lee Kuan Yew (Prime Minister of Singapore from 1959-1990), his wife Kwa Geok Choo (1920-2010) and brother Lee Kim Yew (1926-2003), was originally based at 10-B Malacca Street from 1955 to 1969. Prior to this, Lee Kuan Yew worked for the law firm of Laycock and Ong, which was also located at Malacca Street.

D'Almeida Street was named in 1866 after a Portuguese pioneer in Singapore, Dr Jose D'Almeida (1784-1850), who was a surgeon

with a practice at Raffles Place and the first Consul-General of Portugal to the Straits Settlements. D'Almeida was also a noted horticulturalist who attempted to cultivate sugar cane, coffee, cotton and coconut, and a founding member of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society in 1837. The Chinese referred to the street as *tho kho le long kwan*, meaning "the auction rooms by the godowns", as the auction rooms of Powell and Crane were located here.



Italian sculptor Rodolfo Nolli with his work, 1930



Stone rubbing inscription of the memorial plaque of Sir Jose D'Almeida bricked into the walls of Fort Canning Park, 1850



Junction of Malacca Street and D'Almeida Street, 2016

## WHAMPOA'S ICE HOUSE

Over at Clarke Quay, one notable commercial landmark is the Ice House of Whampoa near the junction of Hill Street and River Valley Road. Whampoa (1816-1880), also known as Hoo Ah Kay, was a Cantonese merchant from the district of Huangpu (romanised as Whampoa) whose businesses included a shipchandlery (which supplied food and other necessities to ships) and a bakery.

A notable community leader, Whampoa was the first Chinese member of Singapore's Legislative Council in 1869, and also served as Consul for Russia, China and Japan. In 1840, he built a large mansion with extensive gardens, including a mini-zoo, aviaries and ponds, along Serangoon Road, which became known as Whampoa House. After Whampoa's death, his house was taken over by Seah Liang Seah (1850-1925), a businessman who renamed it Bendemeer House. The house survived until the 1960s, when it was demolished for new housing developments.

Whampoa's Ice House was built in 1854 as part of a joint venture with nutmeg planter Gilbert Angus (1815-1887) to import ice from Boston, USA. However, the business failed as local demand for ice had been overestimated.

The original building, which had Victorian wrought-iron balustrades, was later occupied in 1904 by the rubber company of Tan Kah Kee (1874-1961) and eventually demolished in 1981 for the widening of River Valley Road. The present structure is a replica.



*Hoo Ah Kay (Whampoa), c. 1850s*



*Whampoa's Ice House, 2016*

# SUPPORTING CONNECTIONS: THE BRIDGES OF THE SINGAPORE RIVER



*Elgin Bridge, 1930s*

The first recorded bridge across the river was an unnamed wooden structure built some time after the British arrived, at the site of the present Elgin Bridge. Before that, people wanting to cross the river had to rely on enterprising boatmen who provided ferry services for a fee.

In the initial decades of modern Singapore, the only bridges across the river were structures on the sites of the present Elgin Bridge and Coleman Bridge. However, as more godowns, shophouses, and other developments sprang up on both sides of the river and further upstream in the mid to late 19th century, new bridges were erected at various stretches

of the Singapore River to make it safe and convenient for people, livestock and vehicles to cross the waterway. Since then, more than 12 bridges have spanned the river to allow foot and wheeled traffic to cross over at various points.



*Sampans ferrying passengers across the Singapore River, mid-20th century*

## CAVENAGH BRIDGE

Linking Empress Place and the financial district of Raffles Place, Cavenagh Bridge was completed in 1869 and is the oldest bridge spanning the Singapore River to survive in its original form. Before it was built, the most convenient means of crossing the mouth of the river, between the government offices on the north bank and the commercial area on the south bank, was to pay a fare to a boatman or walk on a temporary wooden footbridge built in 1863-64 that ended at Bonham Street.



*View of Cavenagh Bridge, c. 1890*

Cavenagh Bridge was originally to be named Edinburgh Bridge in honour of the Duke of Edinburgh who visited Singapore in 1869. However, Governor Harry St George Ord (1819-1885) was persuaded to instead name the bridge after William Orfeur Cavenagh (1820-1891), the last British India-appointed Governor of the Straits Settlements.

Cavenagh's tenure lasted from 1859 to 1867, when Singapore became a Crown Colony ruled directly from London. He was a governor who was firm but fair and adopted a consultative approach to governance, which made him

popular with the mercantile community, the press and the leaders of the Chinese community. During his tenure, Cavenagh oversaw the development of numerous military and civic structures including Fort Canning, Town Hall (now Victoria Theatre), St Andrew's Cathedral, Elgin Bridge and Collyer Quay.

Cavenagh Bridge was designed by George Chancellor Collyer, chief engineer of the Straits Settlements, and consulting engineer Rowland Mason Ordish (1824-1886). The structure, one of the first suspension bridges in the region, was constructed using steel made by engineering firm P&W MacLellan in Glasgow, Scotland. Known in Hokkien as *hai ki thih tiau kio* ("iron suspension bridge by the sea shore"), the bridge was too low for vessels to pass under during high tides, so some vessels had to wait for the tide to fall before they could pass under it.



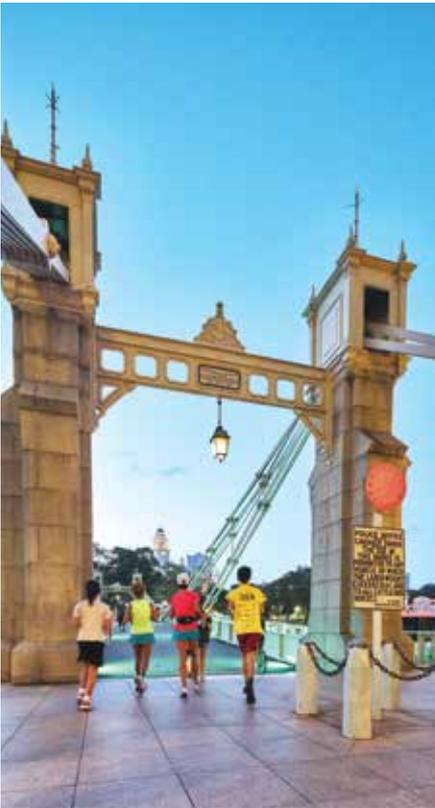
*Aerial view of Cavenagh Bridge, showing the former Marine Police Station at Empress Place, c. 1950*

Cavenagh Bridge was a well-used bridge and even supported a tram line until 1910, when the nearby Anderson Bridge was completed to relieve congestion on the older bridge. It was then converted into a footbridge, a purpose it still serves today. From 1924 to 1973, the Empress Place end of the bridge was the site of the Marine Police headquarters, a two-storey facility next to the bridge. Thereafter, the Marine Police building was replaced by a popular outdoor eatery called the Empress Place Food Centre, which operated until the early 1990s.

Cavenagh Bridge underwent a restoration and facelift in 1987, after the Singapore River was cleaned up. An old police notice barring livestock (horses and cattle) and vehicles exceeding 3 cwt. (hundredweight) or 152 kg still stands on each end of the bridge.



*Cavenagh Bridge, 2015*



*Cavenagh Bridge with notice board visible, 2016*

## ANDERSON BRIDGE

Built in 1910 to relieve Cavenagh Bridge from increasingly heavy traffic, Anderson Bridge was named after Sir John Anderson (1858-1918), Governor of the Straits Settlements from 1904 until 1911. The bridge consists of a four-lane carriageway that runs between steel arches with supporting steel ribs linking two rusticated archways and a fluted pier at each end, as well as adjoining footpaths which allow pedestrians to use the bridge.



*Portrait of Sir John Anderson by William Orpen, 1913*

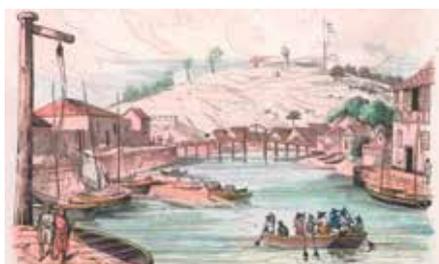
Standing right beside Anderson Bridge is The Fullerton Waterboat House. This small but striking Art Deco building was completed in 1949 and served as the headquarters of Hammer and Company, a firm that supplied drinking water to visiting ships via a pier below the building. When Hammer closed in 1960, the Singapore Harbour Board (now Port of Singapore Authority) took over the building until 1990. The building was conserved in 2002 and now houses a viewing platform and restaurants.



*Anderson Bridge, 2016*



Sketch showing Thomson and Elgin Bridges, 1865



View of Singapore River, Presentment Bridge and Government Hill, 1830

## ELGIN BRIDGE

Elgin Bridge stands on the site of the oldest bridge across the Singapore River, a nameless structure that was built after the British arrived. In 1823, the original bridge was replaced by assistant engineer Lieutenant Philip Jackson who designed a wooden drawbridge that could be raised to allow boats to pass under it. Known as Jackson's Bridge, this was the only bridge to span the river until the first Coleman Bridge was built in 1840.

Jackson's Bridge was also referred to as Monkey Bridge or Presentment Bridge, as numerous presentments (formal petitions) by Singapore's Grand Jury were made to the government for it to be replaced or converted from a footbridge to a carriageway in the 1830s-40s.

It had to be regularly repaired and was upgraded in the mid-1830s to accommodate carriages. Jackson's Bridge was eventually torn down and replaced in 1844 by a wooden footbridge, which was widened in 1847 to

accommodate carriages. This new structure was named Thomson's Bridge, after pioneering architect and surveyor John Turnbull Thomson (1821-1884), who oversaw its construction.

However, Thomson's Bridge could not cope with rising traffic levels over the years and had to be replaced in 1862 by an iron structure named after the eighth Earl of Elgin, James Bruce (1811-1863), Governor General of British India from 1862-63. Lord Elgin was the British Commissioner and Plenipotentiary of China who was in Singapore during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. He was instrumental in diverting vessels and troops under his command to help quell the mutiny. Elgin Bridge was widened and strengthened in 1886 to permit the passage of trams.



Postcard showing the first Elgin Bridge, 1920-26



Bicycles and a trishaw crossing the Elgin Bridge, early 20th century



Elgin Bridge with its cast-iron lamps lit up at night, 2015

The original Elgin Bridge was dismantled in 1926 and replaced by a new bridge completed in 1929, which survives today. The structure of this bridge features graceful high arches and slender hanging columns. On both ends, there are cast-iron lamps and roundels or medallions featuring a lion, which were designed by Italian sculptor Cavalieri Rodolfo Nolli.

In Hokkien, Elgin Bridge was known as *thih tiau kio* or “iron suspension bridge”. The adjoining North and South Bridge Roads were so named in the 19th century as they were connected by this bridge. In 1992, two underpasses were built below the bridge to give pedestrians safe passage across North and South Bridge Roads.

## COLEMAN BRIDGE



The former Coleman's House at Coleman Street, c. 1950s

Coleman Bridge was first built in 1840. It was named after George Dromgold Coleman (1795–1844), an Irish architect and land surveyor who was appointed Superintendent of Public Works and Superintendent of Convicts in 1833. Apart from designing the first Coleman Bridge, Coleman was responsible for many of the finest buildings in early modern Singapore including National Monuments like Armenian Church (1835), Caldwell House at the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (1840–41) and the house of John Argyle Maxwell (now The Arts House at The Old Parliament) (1827).



Postcard of New Bridge Road, c. 1910

Coleman Bridge connected Hill Street with a road that became known as New Bridge Road, as Coleman Bridge was the second or “new” bridge across the river after Jackson's Bridge. It served not only as a means to cross the river but also as a source of revenue for the authorities, as nearby land could be sold at higher prices.



*View of New Bridge Road on Coleman Bridge, early 20th century*

The original Coleman Bridge, a wooden structure with nine openings, was replaced in 1865 by another wooden bridge officially named Canning Bridge. This bridge lasted just 20 years before it was replaced in 1883-86 by a cast-iron and steel bridge with shallow arches and three lanes. This new bridge was also initially referred to as Canning Bridge but the old name stuck.

The most recent reconstruction, which took place between 1986 and 1990, replaced the 19th century bridge with a wider dual carriageway equipped with pedestrian sidewalks and underpasses linking Clarke and Boat Quays. The present bridge retains various architectural details of the 1886 bridge, which was distinguished by graceful shallow arches, decorative columns, old gas lamp stands and iron balustrades or railings with Victorian motifs.



*Coleman Bridge, 2015*

### READ BRIDGE

Completed in 1889, this bridge was named after William Henry Macleod Read (1819-1909), a prominent businessman and public personality who was invited to lay the first cylinder for the bridge's foundation in 1887. Read Bridge replaced an earlier wooden structure from 1863 called Merchant Bridge, which was too low to allow river boats to pass under it.



*Portrait of William Henry Macleod Read by James Sant, c. 1875*



*Read Bridge, c. 1908*

Merchant Bridge, which linked Clarke Quay with Hong Lim Quay on the south bank of the Singapore River, was so called as both ends of the bridge were populated by numerous merchant warehouses. It was also referred to as Tok Seng's Bridge, after Tan Tok Seng (1798-

1850), a prominent merchant and philanthropist who built the Chinese Pauper's Hospital (later Tan Tock Seng Hospital) at Pearl's Hill in 1844. Tan owned several shophouses on a nearby road called Tocksing Street, which was later renamed Ellenborough Street.



Photograph of a painting of Tan Tock Seng, undated

Read arrived in Singapore from England in 1841 to join the trading firm of pioneer merchant Alexander Laurie Johnston. He soon became active in public life and was a keen supporter of Singapore's transfer from the control of British India to become a Crown Colony of its own.

Apart from serving as a magistrate and Justice of the Peace, Read was elected treasurer of the Singapore Library in 1844, served as chairman of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce and became the first unofficial (non-executive) member of the Legislative Council formed in 1867 after Singapore was made a Crown Colony. Read left Singapore in 1887 and

thereafter wrote a book about his experiences titled *Play and Politics: Recollections of Malaya by an Old Resident*.

Residents of the area called the bridge Malacca Bridge or *kam kong ma lah kah kio* ("Kampong Melaka Bridge" in Hokkien), as it was located close to a settlement called Kampong Melaka. The southern end of Read Bridge (as well as the surrounding Clarke Quay area) used to be known as *cha chun tau* ("firewood boat jetty" in Hokkien), after a jetty for boats that carried firewood from Indonesia to shops in the area. Two Teochew opera houses were based in the vicinity, while the bridge became a gathering site for labourers and boatmen who would listen to Teochew storytellers in the evening.



Storytelling along the Singapore River, 1960

Tan Wee Him (b. 1948), a former journalist, recalled such scenes at Read Bridge in the past to the National Archives:

*"You'd find over Read Bridge in the evening a lot of storytellers. It was a very unique way of telling stories. Of course, the majority of the people there were very poor, old people. In the daytime, they could be coolies who carried all those sacks of rice and rubber bales. And in the evening, their only pastime was to sit down on short wooden stools and listen to storytellers. Now, this storyteller would come with his soapbox, put a small kerosene-lit lamp on his soapbox. And he himself would be sitting on another wooden stool. He would take out his storybook and start reading stories. And people would come, sitting around him on their own stools or sometimes with a few stools supplied by the storyteller. They sat down there and listened to his story, and after that they put coins into the soapbox in front of him."*



Read Bridge, 2016

The original Read Bridge had to be rebuilt in 1931 as its low position was hindering river traffic. In 1991, it was extensively repaired and converted into a pedestrian bridge as part of a master plan to beautify and upgrade the bridges of the Singapore River. A plain concrete bridge with little decorative ornamentation, Read Bridge now links Clarke Quay and Merchant Road.

### ORD BRIDGE



Portrait of Sir Harry St George Ord by John Edgar Williams, 1875

Ord Bridge replaced an earlier footbridge that had been built in the early 1860s and closed by 1884. It was known as ABC Bridge or Ordnance Bridge, as it linked River Valley Road to Magazine Road, where ammunition for troops was once stored. Another nickname for the structure was *chay keo*, meaning "green bridge" in Hokkien, due to its original paintwork.

A simple steel structure with ornamental balustrades and girders, Ord Bridge was built in 1886 and declared opened by Governor

Sir Frederick Aloysius Weld (1823-1891). It was named after Sir Harry St George Ord (1819-1885), the first Governor of the Straits Settlements from 1867 until 1873 after Singapore became a British Crown Colony under direct rule from London.



Ord Bridge, 1974

Ord sought to stamp out carelessness, inefficiency and corruption in the colonial administration, but he was not a popular governor as his personality was abrasive and he did not consult the community about his plans. He was accused of extravagance for building the Government House (now the Istana) off Orchard Road to replace rented quarters ill-befitting a colonial Governor. To tackle abuses in the coolie trade that had led to inhumane treatment and kidnapping of newly arrived coolies, he introduced a Chinese Coolie Immigration Bill in 1873.

## ORD ROAD

The north end of Ord Bridge formerly led to River Valley Road via a small lane named Ord Road. This road was lined by many toddy shops as late as the 1970s, and Ord Bridge thus acquired the nickname Toddy Bridge, after the palm liquor which was a cheap and popular alcoholic beverage for the less well-off.

The toddy shops near Ord Bridge form part of former journalist Tan Wee Him's recollections of the area:

*"At the other end of Ord Bridge you had a small toddy stall. Toddy stalls were run by the colonial government then, and they sold cheap fermented coconut drinks, which taste like alcohol. And this was actually a cheap luxury for a lot of poor people who wanted a drink and to forget their agony. But they also created a lot of nuisance, because after drinking – I remember a glass of fermented toddy cost about 20 cents then – some of these people would have more than just a glass and when they had one too many, you would find them drunk, loitering around the whole area. Some of them would lie flat on the road; so it became a traffic nuisance. And if you drove to that area, you had to manoeuvre your car away from bodies on the road."*

The site of Ord Road is now occupied by Liang Court, a commercial complex that opened in 1984. This entire area, now part of the Clarke Quay precinct, was formerly known as North Kampong Melaka, as it was an extension of Kampong Melaka.



*A toddy drawer climbing a coconut tree, early 20th century*



*Ord Bridge with Liang Court seen in the background, 2016*



*The naming of Clemenceau Avenue by visiting French Prime Minister Georges Benjamin Clemenceau, 1920s*

### **CLEMENCEAU BRIDGE**

Built between 1938 and 1940, Clemenceau Bridge was named after Georges Benjamin Clemenceau (1841-1929), a French prime minister who visited Singapore in 1920. Clemenceau was premier of France from 1906-09 and 1917-20, and nicknamed *Le Tigre* ("The Tiger" in French) for his ferocious resistance to Germany during World War I (1914-1918).

During his visit to Singapore, Clemenceau was present for the laying of the foundation stone of the Cenotaph, a war memorial at the Esplanade that honours soldiers from Singapore during wartime, by Sir Laurence Nunns Guillemard (1862-1951), Governor of the Straits Settlements from 1919-27. He also turned the first sod of earth to ceremonially launch the construction of Clemenceau Avenue, which was built to link Tank Road and Orchard Road to Bukit Timah Road. Singapore was the first city in the world to name a major road after Clemenceau.

The first bridge in Singapore to feature web girders, the original Clemenceau Bridge was nearly 100 metres long and 19 metres wide. It replaced an earlier structure built in the 1890s named Pulau Saigon Bridge. Clemenceau

Bridge formed part of a scheme to create a new arterial highway starting from Clemenceau Avenue and ending at Keppel Road.

Another nearby bridge, built in 1890 and also called Pulau Saigon Bridge (or Butcher Bridge after a nearby former abattoir), continued to function as a footbridge between Pulau Saigon and Merbau Road until it was dismantled in 1986 during the construction of the Central Expressway (CTE) tunnels under the Singapore River. The original Clemenceau Bridge was also demolished in 1989 during the building of the CTE and a wider bridge took its place in 1991. A new Pulau Saigon Bridge further upriver, linking Saiboo Road and Havelock Road, was later built in 1997.



*Clemenceau Bridge, 2016*

## PULAU SAIGON

Pulau Saigon was a small, wedge-shaped island in the middle of the Singapore River between Clarke Quay and Robertson Quay, facing Magazine Road. The name arose as the island was believed to have once served as a storage area for produce from Indochina. Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) in Vietnam was opened to foreign trade after 1860. Merchants based in the area, such as Cheang Hong Lim and Tan Kim Ching, were known to have owned rice mills in Saigon.

The island was first marked on an 1878 map that showed it as a settlement called Kampong Saigon. Consisting of huts on stilts, the settlement had an unsavoury reputation as a stronghold of thieves, vagabonds, and smugglers, which prompted the authorities to build a police station in the 1870s on the riverbank between Ord Bridge and Magazine Road facing the island.



*The upper reaches of the Singapore River and Pulau Saigon, c. 1890*

In 1871, the authorities acquired the island from its owner Whampoa for use as a storage area. In 1884, land reclamation work enlarged the island, which became the site of warehouses, sago mills, a municipal waste incinerator, abattoirs and even a railway depot in the early 20th century.

The two Pulau Saigon Bridges connected the island to the riverbanks. The part of the Singapore River that flowed past the western



*"Map of the Town and Environs of Singapore" by Sir William Cleaver Francis Robinson showing the location of Pulau Saigon along the Singapore River, 1878*

side of Pulau Saigon was filled in during the early 1970s, thereby linking the island to the former Alkaff and Earle Quays. In the 1990s, Pulau Saigon was fully reclaimed and joined to Magazine Road on the south bank of the road.



*Pulau Saigon Bridge, 1974*



*Merchant Square, where Pulau Saigon used to be located, 2016*

John Miksic (b. 1946), an archaeologist with the National University of Singapore, excavated Pulau Saigon in 1989. He recounted to the National Archives:

*"[Pulau Saigon] was just next to Liang Court. They were excavating for the CTE then and filling it, because one part of it, of the Singapore River, which used to go around the island, had already been filled in earlier. But the south tributary was still there and was still partly an island in 1989. So there were lots of artefacts being revealed... It was an important site when the city started expanding up the river. It was a dumping ground, it was the site of a garbage incinerator, it had a slaughterhouse on it - a lot of warehouses were on it. It was also a storage area. It was a place where ships loaded and unloaded. We picked up lots and lots of fragments and artefacts... It was a way of documenting the lives of the early settlers of Singapore that we would never have otherwise known about from historical sources."*

## ALKAFF BRIDGE

Designed to recall the shape of a traditional tongkang and spanning 55 metres, Alkaff Bridge was built in 1997 and named after Alkaff Quay. The Alkaffs were a family of Arabs from Yemen who arrived in Singapore in 1852 and became prominent landowners, merchants and philanthropists.

Other landmarks built by the Alkaffs include Alkaff Arcade, a striking Moorish-style building at Collyer Quay that stood from 1909 to 1978; Alkaff Mansion on Telok Blangah Hill; and Alkaff Gardens off MacPherson Road, which was opened to the public in 1929. The Alkaffs were also active in building mosques and contributed to the building of the Alkaff Kampong Melayu Mosque (also known as the Alkaff Mosque) at Jalan Abdul Manan (a former road off Jalan Eunus) in 1932. The mosque later relocated to Bedok Reservoir Road in 1994. Another legacy of the family is the Alkaff Upper Serangoon Mosque, which was built in 1932 and gazetted as a National Monument in 2014.



*Alkaff Gardens, early-mid 20th century*



*The Alkaff Mansion at Telok Blangah Green, 1960s-80s*

Alkaff Bridge is a steel-tube structure weighing 230 tons and was originally painted in battleship grey. In 2003-04, the bridge was repainted as a Singapore Art Bridge by Philippine artist Pacita Abad (1946-2004), who was then doing a residency at the nearby Singapore Tyler Print Institute. To transform the bridge into a colourful outdoor sculpture that reflected her passion for life, Abad used 52 different colours and more than 900 litres of paint to create a unique, eye-catching structure with vibrant patterns and playful circles that complement the bridge's curvaceous lines.

Located upstream of Alkaff Bridge are Pulau Saigon Bridge, Robertson Bridge, Jiak Kim Bridge (pedestrian bridges built in 1997, 1998 and 1999 respectively) and Kim Seng Bridge, which was first built in 1862 and reconstructed in 1951. Kim Seng Bridge was named after Tan Kim Seng (1805-1864), a Melaka-born merchant and philanthropist, while Jiak Kim Bridge was named after Tan Jiak Kim (1859-1917), a grandson of Tan Kim Seng who was a prominent businessman and Legislative Council member.



*Photograph of Tan Jiak Kim, c. 1900*



*Postcard showing the Tan Kim Seng Fountain at Battery Road, c. 1900*



*Alkaff Bridge, 2015*

# CENTRES OF COMMUNITY, SERVICE AND DEVOTION

Despite being far away from their homelands, matters of faith and moments of devotion were never far from the minds of Singapore's pioneers, be they traders from South Asia or merchants from China. A number of temples and mosques were established near the river in the 19th century. Some of these places of worship have remained at their original sites to this day, while one religious facility has made a unique move to become Singapore's only underground mosque.

The riverside communities that sprung up around these worship spaces, such as Kampong Melaka, have also changed over time as the landscape evolved and new settlers arrived. The growing needs and struggles of the people were later recognised by community leaders. For instance, workers who toiled on and by the river would find relief

from their pains and ailments when a clinic opened in 1867 that provided free medical care to the poor and needy.

## KAMPONG MELAKA

This area on the south bank of the Singapore River between New Bridge Road and Pulau Saigon was originally marked out by Sir Stamford Raffles as a "Chulia Campong" for Indian Muslims from the Coromandel Coast who worked as boatmen.

However, it was soon occupied by Malay traders and fishermen from Melaka who had accepted an invitation by William Farquhar (who was Commandant of Melaka from 1803-1818) to move to the newly established port of Singapore, where they commanded high wages and good prices for their merchandise. Some followers of the local ruler Temenggong Abdul Rahman also moved to Kampong Melaka in the 1820s.



*A section of an 1893 survey map showing the location of Kampong Melaka*

### MUNSHI ABDULLAH'S HOME

Kampong Melaka was originally a swampy area that flooded during high tides, so the first dwellings there were mostly bamboo or wooden huts built on stilts above the water. In the 1840s, the swamp was partially filled in and converted into solid land for buildings. It was around this time that Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797-1854) built a house for his family at Kampong Melaka.

Also known as Munshi Abdullah, he was a Melaka-born scholar, teacher and scribe who chronicled early 19th century Melaka and Singapore in his book *Hikayat Abdullah*, which was completed in Kampong Melaka in 1843. Unfortunately, a huge fire broke out at Kampong Melaka in 1849 which razed more than 200 houses and led to the destruction of Abdullah's priceless collection of Malay manuscripts.



*The Last Will and Testament of Munshi Abdullah, 1854*



*Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, 19th century*

### A NEIGHBOURHOOD OF WAREHOUSES, THEATRES AND MARKETS

In the late 19th century, Kampong Melaka developed into a thriving commercial area with shophouses and godowns along roads such as Angus, Cumming, Fisher, Keng Cheow, Omar and Solomon Streets.



*A loaded trishaw at the intersection of Angus Street and Cumming Street, 1978*

Recalling the former village, Angus and Cumming Streets were referred to by the Hokkiens as *kam kong ma la kak* or "Kampong Melaka". Merchant Road, which runs between Clemenceau Avenue and Eu Tong Sen Street, was formerly known as *sin koi khau hi hng hoi* or "the theatre street at the mouth of the new street", as many Chinese opera or *wayang* ("theatrical show" in Malay) theatres were based along this road.



*Chinese wayang opera stage near Ellenborough Market by G R Lambert & Company, 1890s*

One notable development in the area that became a major community landmark was the Ellenborough Market, which was completed in 1845 and named after Lord Ellenborough (1790-1871), Governor-General of British India in 1841-1844. Locals called the market *pasar*

*baru* in Malay and *sin pa sat* in Hokkien. These terms both mean “new market”, to distinguish Ellenborough Market from Telok Ayer Market, which was the *lau pa sat* or “old market”. New Market Road, which formerly linked Havelock Road to Ellenborough Market, was known in Hokkien as *kam kong ma lak kah sin pa sat koi* or “new market street in Kampong Melaka”.



*Postcard of Ellenborough Market, c.1910*

The original Ellenborough Market was designed by Captain Charles Edward Faber of the Madras Engineers, but Faber’s grandiose neo-classical structure was much criticised for its technical flaws which resulted in cracks and caused it to sink into the soft riverside ground. The market was subsequently enlarged in 1899 using a cast-iron structure taken from the 1897 Edinburgh Exhibition in Scotland.



*A fish auction at Ellenborough Market, 1952*



*A view of Tew Chew Street with crates and baskets from the morning market, 1978*

Ellenborough Market was famous for its fresh and salted seafood, and dominated by Teochew fish merchants and auctioneers, which gave rise to the names of the nearby Fish Street (now expunged) and Tew Chew Street. In 1968, Ellenborough Market was gutted by a fire and its fish merchants thereafter moved to Jurong Fishing Port. However, the area continued to be a home for the community as new public housing blocks with a market and hawker centre were built by the HDB on the former market’s site in the 1970s.

There were other historic buildings that once stood in the vicinity of Ellenborough Market. One of these was a small but stately double-storey that was built along New Bridge Road in 1873 as a police station. In 1935, the force moved to the newly opened Hill Street Police Station and the former station was renamed the Silver Jubilee Building and used by the Social Welfare Department.



*Then headquarters of the Social Welfare Department (now The Arts House at The Old Parliament) decorated to mark the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, 1953*

Next to Ellenborough Market, there was also a large triangular block of elaborate two-storey shophouses collectively known as the Ellenborough Buildings, which were built between 1845 and 1847 by architect John Turnbull Thomson for Tan Tock Seng. Ellenborough Street, which ran between the market and Tan’s shophouses, was formerly called Tocksing Street, after Tan. The Ellenborough Buildings survived until the 1990s when Clarke Quay MRT was built on the site.

The historic sections of the former Kampong Melaka, namely the area bounded by Magazine Road, Solomon Street, Cumming Street, Angus

Street and Fisher Street, were conserved in 1992. The area's conserved two- and three-storey shophouses, mainly built in the Early and Art Deco styles, and old warehouses were restored and refurbished as retail, dining or entertainment outlets.

### MASJID OMAR KAMPONG MELAKA

Islam as a faith spread to the Malay Archipelago from the 13th century and resulted in the building of *masjid* (Malay for “mosques”) and *surau* (“prayer halls” in Malay) in towns and villages around the region. Early mosques in Singapore were simple timber structures distinguished by a pyramidal roof with multiple tiers. During the colonial era, brick mosques were built and some of these buildings, such as the Sultan Mosque at Kampong Gelam, incorporated an onion-shaped dome reminiscent of Persian architecture.



*Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka, c. 1950s*

This evolution in local mosque design can be seen in Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka, the first mosque and place of worship built in Singapore. The original mosque was established in 1820 at the southern end of Kampong Melaka. The area then became a



*View of Singapore River with the minaret of Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka, or Melaka Mosque, seen near the left bank of the river, 1987*

social hub for the Malay community as well as Muslims originating from India, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

The mosque was built by and named after a Yemeni-Arab merchant named Syed Sharif Omar bin Ali Aljunied (1792-1852), who arrived in Singapore from Palembang in Sumatra shortly after Raffles founded the port. The Aljunieds were to become major landowners and philanthropists who shared much of their wealth with the community at large. Syed Sharif Omar also built the original Masjid Bencoolen at Bencoolen Street in 1845 which was later redeveloped into a multi-storey mixed use complex incorporating new mosque facilities in 2001-2004.

As the population grew, the original timber mosque at Kampong Melaka was rebuilt in 1855 by Syed Abdullah bin Omar Aljunied, the son of Syed Sharif Omar. The new building was a sturdier and larger brick hall linked by a



*Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka, 2015*

paved road to the surrounding neighbourhood. It was built in the Melakan style, with a two-tier pyramidal tiled roof. This structure remained until the 1980s, when a major reconstruction of the mosque took place. A 28m high minaret with a small roof dome was added to the mosque entrance in 1985. Today, the mosque provides a space for worship for about 1,000 people, mostly workers from nearby shops and offices.

A small street called Omar Road once led to the mosque from Havelock Road, but this road, already named in an 1857 map, was expunged in the 1980s. The Chinese called Omar Road *kam kong mak la kah sam pai yang teng hang* (“Kampong Melaka praying temple [mosque] lane” in Hokkien).

Keng Cheow Street, which survives, was named after Tan Keng Cheow (1907-1972), a Hokkien businessman who ran a shipchandlery (which supplied food and other essentials to visiting ships) at Market Street, a sago factory



*A traditional Chinese music group practising at a Tua Peh Kong temple along Omar Road, c. 1970s*



*Keng Cheow Street, 1986*

off River Valley Road and a steam laundry in the Stevens Road area in 1880. The Hokkiens called the road *kam kong ma lah kah sam pai yang teng au* (“behind the praying pavilion in Kampong Melaka”).

## MASJID MOULANA MOHAMED ALI



*Entrance to Masjid Moulana Mohamed Ali, 2016*

Located in the basement of UOB Plaza, Masjid Moulana Mohamed Ali is the only mosque in Singapore to be built underground. This mosque has its origins in two shophouses along Market Street, which were purchased in 1953 and 1955 by three leaders of the Indian Muslim community - Mohamed Javad Namazie, Haji Mohamed Khan and M M Wahab - to provide a convenient place of worship for fellow Muslims working in the central business district.

The mosque was named after Moulana Mohamed Ali (1878-1931), a highly regarded Indian Muslim scholar, journalist, poet and politician who was a delegate at the 1931

Roundtable Conference in London to seek independence for India. He died shortly after the conference and was buried, according to his wishes, at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

In the early 1980s, the Market Street area was earmarked for urban redevelopment. To ensure that the area would continue to have a place where Muslims could gather and pray, the mosque's trustees reached an agreement in 1982 with United Overseas Bank, which had acquired the surrounding land, to build a mosque in the bank's future premises.

There was initially some disquiet among the Muslim community owing to the underground location, but it was felt that maintaining a place of worship for the community in this part of the city was more important than the location of the mosque.

The new Masjid Moulana Mohamed Ali, which has room for 800 worshippers, was completed in 1994. During its construction, the community met for prayers at the Chulia Mosque along South Bridge Road.

### TAN SI CHONG SU TEMPLE

This small but intricate temple once faced the Singapore River and Pulau Saigon, and was surrounded by godowns and traditional shophouses. The temple was built between 1876 and 1883 at the north end of Kampong Melaka as an ancestral temple for the Tan clan. It is also known as Po Chiak Keng, with *po chiak* meaning "to protect the innocent" and *keng* meaning "temple" in Hokkien. Between 1889 and 1949, the left wing of the temple also housed a boys' school called Po Chiak School.

Two prominent Hokkien leaders from the local Chinese community were key supporters of the temple: Tan Kim Ching (1829-1892) and Tan Beng Swee (1838-1884). Tan Kim Ching, the eldest son of Tan Tock Seng, was an influential businessman and philanthropist as well as Singapore's Consul-General to the Kingdom of Siam while Tan Beng Swee was a son of merchant and philanthropist Tan Kim Seng. Tan Beng Swee, who was also a Justice of the Peace, took over his father's businesses, which were based in nearby warehouses by the river.



The Tan Si Chong Su Temple at Magazine Road, c. 1950s



*Close-up of roof mosaics showing flowers, a dragon and a phoenix, 2016*

Other well-known members of the Tan clan included Tan Cheng Lock (1883-1960), former Finance Minister of Malaysia; Tan Siew Sin (1916-1988), a founder of the Malayan Chinese Association; and Tan Chin Tuan (1908-2005), co-founder of the Overseas-Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC).

The architecture of the Tan Si Chong Su Temple follows the traditional Hokkien style characterised by graceful curved roof ridges. A blazing pearl symbolising celestial power decorates the ridge of the pitched and gabled roof, which is finished with Chinese glazed tiles and supported by hardwood trusses.

On the vertical surfaces of the roof are colourful ceramic mosaics of dancing dragons, phoenixes and flowers. Two door gods, Shen Tu and Yu Lei, and a pair of stone lions guard the side entrance doors to the temple, which is supported by granite columns bearing dragon motifs. The main doorway at the centre, which is usually closed except during festive occasions, is adorned with a pair of colourful dragons. On the side of the temple stands a pagoda-shaped marble incense burner with lively scenes from Chinese legends.

The rear hall of the temple building houses the ancestral tablets and worship hall of the Tan clan. The central hall is dedicated to the patron



*Interior of Tan Si Chong Su Temple, early 20th century*



*Prayer ceremony at the Tan Si Chong Su Temple, 2016*

deity Tan Seng Ong (“Chen Sheng Wang” in Hanyu Pinyin), a Tang Dynasty general who was successful in battle and benevolent to the people. The altar to Tan Seng Ong is flanked by two columns with sculptured phoenix motifs, which are said to be unique among Singapore temples. The main hall also houses an altar for Da Bo Gong, a folk deity revered by seamen for protection at sea.

Originally, the temple stood right by the river, a position regarded as fortuitous based on fengshui or Chinese geomancy principles. However, in 1989, the river was diverted during the building of the Central Expressway (CTE) tunnels and Pulau Saigon was later fully reclaimed and linked to the south bank. As a result, the temple’s current location stands a little distance from the riverbank. It was gazetted a National Monument in 1974.



*Magazine Road, 2016*

Magazine Road, along which the temple is located, was so named as it once led to a storehouse for gunpowder and ammunition. The Hokkien name for Magazine Road was *tan seng ong koi* (“Tan Seng Ong street”), in reference to the Tan clan’s temple and patron deity along the road.

### LENG HIANG TUA AND OTHER CHINESE TEMPLES

For many of the people who lived and worked at the quays, the temples and informal shrines that were established at various locations along the river once served as sites for religious offerings, petitions and rituals.



*A small shrine found at Boat Quay with two statues of the Laughing Buddha outside, 1981*

Some of these religious facilities were simple structures of timber with zinc roofs, such as Leong Yuen Temple, a shrine at North Boat Quay dedicated to various deities including Yu Huang (the Jade Emperor). Another former temple, Xiu De Shan Tang, was established at North Boat Quay in 1916. This Teochew temple, which also provided traditional medical treatment for a nominal fee, moved to Bedok in the 1980s.

Perhaps the most important temple at the quays was a Teochew shrine called Leng Hiang Tua, which was located at a Clarke Quay godown facing the river. The origin of this temple is said to stem from a statue of the Chinese deity Tua Pek Kong (literally “Grand Old Man” in Hokkien) found by boys playing in a former duck farm on the site of the River Valley Swimming Complex. An altar for the statue was then created under Ord Bridge, which drew devotees seeking lucky numbers for betting. This makeshift shrine grew in reputation until a merchant offered part of his godown as the site for a proper temple.



*A celebration at the Leng Hiang Tua Temple, c. 1970s*



Devotee at Leng Hiang Tua temple with a statue of Hiang Tian Siong Tay, a Taoist deity, c. 1970s

Leng Hiang Tua was well-known for a very charismatic medium called “Ah Hui”. The temple housed an altar to Tua Pek Kong, a deity to whom many overseas Chinese prayed for fortune and protection from harm, as well as altars to Tua Ya Peh, a god of the underworld, and a girl who was said to have become a celestial being after dying at a young age.

When the Clarke Quay area was redeveloped, the altars were moved to Lei Yin Temple at Bukit Merah View. In the 1970s, the area around the temple was the scene of colourful festivities during major religious festivals, when several nights of Teochew *wayang* performances, puppet shows and dinners for hundreds of guests were held by the riverside.



Teochew opera performance by the Singapore River at Clarke Quay, 1980

## FORMER THONG CHAI MEDICAL INSTITUTION

Long ago, when coolies and boatmen who toiled at the Singapore River fell ill, they would head to the Thong Chai Medical Institution to seek the medical advice and treatment of *sinseh* or traditional Chinese physicians.



Former Thong Chai Medical Institution, 2016

One of the few surviving examples of secular Chinese architecture in Singapore, the Thong Chai building was completed in 1892. The medical institution, then known as Thong Chai Yee Say, was founded earlier in 1867 by seven Hokkien and Cantonese merchants who sought to provide free medical treatment to the poor. Gan Eng Seng (1844-1899), a prominent Hokkien businessman and philanthropist, was a major benefactor and trustee of Thong Chai Yee Say.

*Thong Chai* comes from two Cantonese terms – *thong* meaning “equal treatment for all” and *chai* meaning “to help or relieve”. Yee Say means “Medical Society” in Cantonese. Thong Chai Yee Say originally operated from a shophouse in Upper Pickering Street, and was the first place in Singapore where Chinese medical treatment was freely available.



Portrait of Gan Eng Seng, undated

During the 1890s, the institution appealed for public funds to purchase a property that would generate rental income to sustain the provision of free medical treatment. Their efforts drew the attention of Governor Sir Cecil Clementi Smith (1840-1916), who granted Thong Chai a plot of land at the south end of Kampong Melaka in 1886, along what was then Wayang Street.



*Chinese doctor tending to patient at Thong Chai Medical Institution, 1890s*

The clinic, renamed Thong Chai Medical Institution, then moved to Wayang Street, where it operated from a two-storey courtyard building designed in a Cantonese style known as *zhu tong wu* (“bamboo house” in Chinese). Like a bamboo, the longish building is segmented and arranged along a central axis, with four halls separated by three inner courtyards.



*Close-up of cloudlike or “cat-crawling” pattern on roof, 2016*

The pitch roof, thought to be unique in Singapore, consists of green-glazed tiles capped with an ornamented ridge frieze where Chinese scenes are depicted using brightly painted reliefs. Two distinctive gable-end walls flank the roof with a cloudlike or “cat-crawling” pattern. The third courtyard was formerly used by the clinic’s physicians to sun and dry medicinal herbs used in traditional remedies.



*Current Thong Chai building, 2016*

Apart from dispensing medical advice and treatment, the building served as a venue for public meetings as well as a temporary base for the Chinese Chamber of Commerce from its founding in 1906 until it moved to Hill Street in 1911.

In 1960, there were plans to demolish the building, as the management wanted to expand the facility in order to better serve the residents and workers of Telok Ayer (Chinatown) and Boat Quay. This was averted when the building was gazetted as a National Monument in 1973 and the medical institution then moved to a new ten storey Thong Chai Building at Chin Swee Road in 1976. The building underwent an extensive restoration in 1999 to repair its structure and restore worn details.

### **PERFORMANCES AT WAYANG STREET**

Wayang Street probably received its name as it used to be the location of many Chinese opera or *wayang* theatres, which were highly popular forms of entertainment before the era of cinemas and television.



*The Heng Seng Peng and Heng Wai Sun Chinese opera theatre halls along Eu Tong Sen Street, c. 1920*

Popular *wayang* theatres built in the late 19th century along the street included *Heng Wai Sun* (“to celebrate peace” in Cantonese) which specialised in Cantonese opera, and *Heng Seng Peng* (“to celebrate China’s modernisation” in Cantonese) where Beijing and Hokkien operas were performed. The site of these former theatres is now occupied by People’s Park Centre, built in 1976 as one of Singapore’s earliest shopping centres.

Part of Wayang Street was renamed Eu Tong Sen Street in 1919 after Eu Tong Sen (1877-1941), a prominent tin and rubber tycoon. In 1927, Eu built a *wayang* theatre along this road called *Tin Yien Tai Moh Toi* (“heavenly performance grand theatre” in



*People’s Park Centre, 2016*

Cantonese), which was later converted into a cinema and survives today as the Majestic Theatre. The part of Wayang Street that remained was renamed Eu Tong Sen Street in 1987.



*Cinema ticket from Majestic theatre, 1940s-60s*



*The Majestic Theatre and Nam Tin Building (now Yue Hwa Building) on Eu Tong Sen Street, 1950s*



*Majestic Theatre, 2016*

In the past, Wayang Street was known in Cantonese as *thung chai yi yun kai* or “Thong Chai Hospital street”. It was also called *pak khei lun tui min hei yun kai* in Cantonese and *pek ki lin tui bin hi hng koi* in Hokkien, both meaning “theatre street opposite the Chinese Protectorate”.

The headquarters of the Chinese Protectorate was based nearby at Havelock Road, in a building completed in 1930 that later became the Ministry of Labour Building but now serves as the Family Justice Courts and has been gazetted a National Monument.

Established in 1877, the Chinese Protectorate oversaw matters of concern in the Chinese community, such as the administration of newly arrived migrant labourers to prevent abuses, suppression of secret societies and trafficking of female victims of slavery and prostitution. The first Protector of the Chinese was William Pickering (1840-1907), after whom Pickering Street (formerly Macao Street) was named in 1925.



*Postcard of the Chinese Protectorate, 1907*



*Family Justice Courts, 2016*

## DALHOUSIE OBELISK

Lord James Andrew Broun Ramsay (1812-1860), the Marquis of Dalhousie and Governor-General of India from 1848 to 1856, visited Singapore in February 1850. To mark the occasion, prominent members of the local mercantile community including Seah Eu Chin (1805-1883), Tan Kim Seng, and Dr Robert Little (1819-1888) raised funds to build an obelisk in the Marquis' honour and declare their belief in the economic benefits of free trade, or as they put it, "the wisdom of liberating commerce from all restraints".

Lord Dalhousie's visit aroused much expectation of administrative changes that would help sustain Singapore's position as an international port. However, little tangible change resulted from the occasion, other than the construction of the obelisk. The obelisk was originally erected next to Dalhousie Pier, which was located at the mouth of the Singapore River, opposite the site of the present Merlion Park.

However, following land reclamation work for the expansion of the Padang and the construction of New Esplanade Road (renamed Connaught Drive in 1907) in the late 1880s, the obelisk was moved to a location near the site of the present Cenotaph at Esplanade Park. In 1891, it was shifted again, this time to its present position near the Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, which is close to the spot where the Marquis had landed.

Architect and surveyor John Turnbull Thomson, who designed the obelisk, was inspired by another obelisk called Cleopatra's Needle that is located by the Thames Embankment in London. Originally of Egyptian and Near Eastern origin, obelisks were placed before ancient temples as symbols of the sun god Ra. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, obelisks were popular in Britain as landmarks and war memorials.



*Photograph of the Dalhousie Obelisk, late 19th century*

# ART BY THE RIVER

The founder of modern Singapore, Sir Stamford Raffles, is memorialised as a statue beside Empress Place, at a site believed to be his original landing spot on the riverbank. This statue of Raffles was cast in 1972 and is a polymarble replica of an earlier bronze sculpture by Thomas Woolner that now stands before Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall.



*Polymarble replica of the statue of Sir Stamford Raffles sculpted by Thomas Woolner, located at his approximate landing spot, 2016*

Raffles is, however, not the only pioneer to have a statue in his honour by the riverbank. On both sides of the river, visitors will find *People of the River*, a series of specially commissioned, larger-than-life sculptures in bronze by the Singapore Tourism Board, which celebrate the countless individuals who toiled and traded to build the city as well as vanished facets of life by the river.

## PEOPLE OF THE RIVER

### FIRST GENERATION BY CHONG FAH CHONG



Across Cavenagh Bridge, in the direction of the Fullerton Building, one will find a charming sculpture by local sculptor and Cultural Medallion Winner Chong Fah Chong (b. 1946) on the left side of the bridge, which recreates the once-common scene of young boys leaping with carefree abandon into the river.

### THE RIVER MERCHANTS BY AW TEE HONG



On the south bank, in front of Maybank Tower, artist Aw Tee Hong (b. 1932) created a sculpture depicting Scotsman Alexander Laurie Johnstone in conversation with a Chinese trader and a Malay chief. Nearby, coolies load

goods onto a bullock cart. This artwork marks the spot where Johnston, who arrived in Singapore in 1819 or 1820 and left in 1841, once had his house and godowns until the premises were demolished in 1848.

### FISHING AT SINGAPORE RIVER

BY CHERN LIAN SHAN



At the northern end of Boat Quay, between Elgin Bridge and Coleman Bridge, is a snapshot from the past, cast in bronze by Chern Lian Shan (b. 1953). A schoolboy, clad in a singlet and shorts, contemplates the waters below him, rod in hand, while a faithful dog sleeps by his side. Fishing was once a popular activity but by the 1970s, pollution had turned the river into a lifeless waterway. Only after the river was cleaned up in the 1980s did aquatic life return.

### KUCINTA CATS



On the south end of Cavenagh Bridge, tucked in a corner near its base, is a trio of bronze cats known as *Kucinta*, a portmanteau of the Malay words for "cat" (*kucing*) and "love" (*cinta*). The *Kucinta* is a breed of cat said to have its origins in the native drain cats of Singapore.

This claim is disputed, however, as purebred *Kucinta* cats bear little resemblance to the strays that roam local streets and which come in all sizes and colours.

### BIRD BY FERNANDO BOTERO



Upstream from *The River Merchants*, before the UOB Plaza, is a bronze artwork in a form of a large, rotund bird. Made by Colombian artist Fernando Botero (b. 1932) in his typically sensual, voluminous style, *Bird* symbolises the desire for peace, serenity, joy and optimism.

### HOMAGE TO NEWTON BY SALVADOR DALI



Located at the UOB Plaza, there is another bronze artwork by surrealist artist Salvador Dali (1904-1989) entitled *Homage to Newton*. The artwork pays tribute to the 17th century discovery of the law of gravity through a depiction of the legend of Sir Isaac Newton's "eureka" moment triggered by a falling apple.

## TRIBUTES TO FAMOUS VISITORS: FRIENDS TO OUR SHORES

Along the riverbank near Cavenagh Bridge one will also find “Friends to Our Shores” markers honouring notable foreign leaders and personalities who have visited or enjoyed close links with Singapore. These are installed by the National Heritage Board.

### Joseph Conrad

- Installed outside the Fullerton Hotel in 2004, this marker commemorates the Polish-born writer Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski (1857-1924), whose travels to Singapore and Southeast Asia inspired classic novels such as *Lord Jim*.



**Ho Chi Minh** - Unveiled in May 2008, this marker and bronze bust honours the father of modern Vietnam, Nguyen Sinh Cung or Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969), who visited Singapore in May 1930 and January 1933.



**Deng Xiaoping** - Mounted in 2010 to celebrate 20 years of diplomatic relations between Singapore and China, this marker depicts Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), who launched economic reforms that led to China's global prominence and was the first senior leader from China to visit Singapore in 1978.



**Jawaharlal Nehru** - Unveiled in 2011, this marker commemorates India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), who made three visits to Singapore and described it as a “great cosmopolitan city” where “Asian unity is forged”.



### Dr José Rizal

- Installed in 2008, this marker commemorates Filipino nationalist and polymath José Rizal (1861-1896), who visited Singapore five times. He is widely considered to be one of the greatest heroes of the Philippines.



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**Oral history interviews**

Dr John Miksic

Dr S.K. Chan

Dr Tan Ser Kiat

Haji Sukaimi bin Ibrahim

Justice Choor Singh

Soundara Rajan

Tan Wee Him

Victor Chew

**Singapore Memory Project contributors**

Chia Hearn Kock

Geraldine Lowe-Ismail

James Seah

Jenny Lum

Jit Lim Edward

Lee Kim Nam

Magdalene Boon

Paul Kuah

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**>> PROJECT TEAM**

Josephine Sin  
Ruchi Mittal  
Lawrence Low

**>> PRIMARY RESEARCHER AND COPYEDITOR**

Marcus Ng

**>> DESIGNER**

2EZ Asia Pte Ltd

**>> PHOTOGRAPHER**

Alex Heng

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PUBLISHED BY NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD IN  
OCTOBER 2016

# LEGEND FOR HERITAGE SITES



**Alkaff Bridge**



**Boat Quay**



**Cavenagh Bridge**



**Clarke Quay**



**Collyer Quay**



**Coleman  
Bridge**



**Elgin Bridge**



**Former Thong  
Chai Medical  
Institution**



**Masjid Omar  
Kampong  
Melaka**



**Ord Bridge**



**Raffles Place**



**Read Bridge**



**Robertson  
Quay**



**Tan Si Chong  
Su Temple**



**Change Alley**



**Clemenceau  
Bridge**



**Clifford Pier**



**Customs House**



**Market  
Street**



**Masjid Moulana  
Mohamed Ali**



**River House**



**The Cannery**



**Whampoa's  
Ice House**

 <b>MRT</b>	 <b>Bus Stop</b>	 <b>River Taxi</b>
 <b>Roads</b>	 <b>Prominent Sites</b>	
 <b>Parks</b>	 <b>Heritage Sites</b>	
 <b>River</b>	 <b>Marked Sites</b>	
 <b>Walkways</b>		





*Roadside hawkers along the Singapore River, 1970*

The Singapore River Walk takes you on a journey from Collyer Quay to Robertson Quay, focusing on the contributions of the river towards Singapore's mercantile development through the various communities who lived and worked by the river, as well as the spectacular architecture and social history of the bridges that criss-cross the river, facilitating the movement of people and goods across the river at various junctures. The Singapore River Walk is adopted by American Express.

For more information, visit [Roots.sg](http://Roots.sg)

Supported by



Collyer Quay waterfront, 1960s