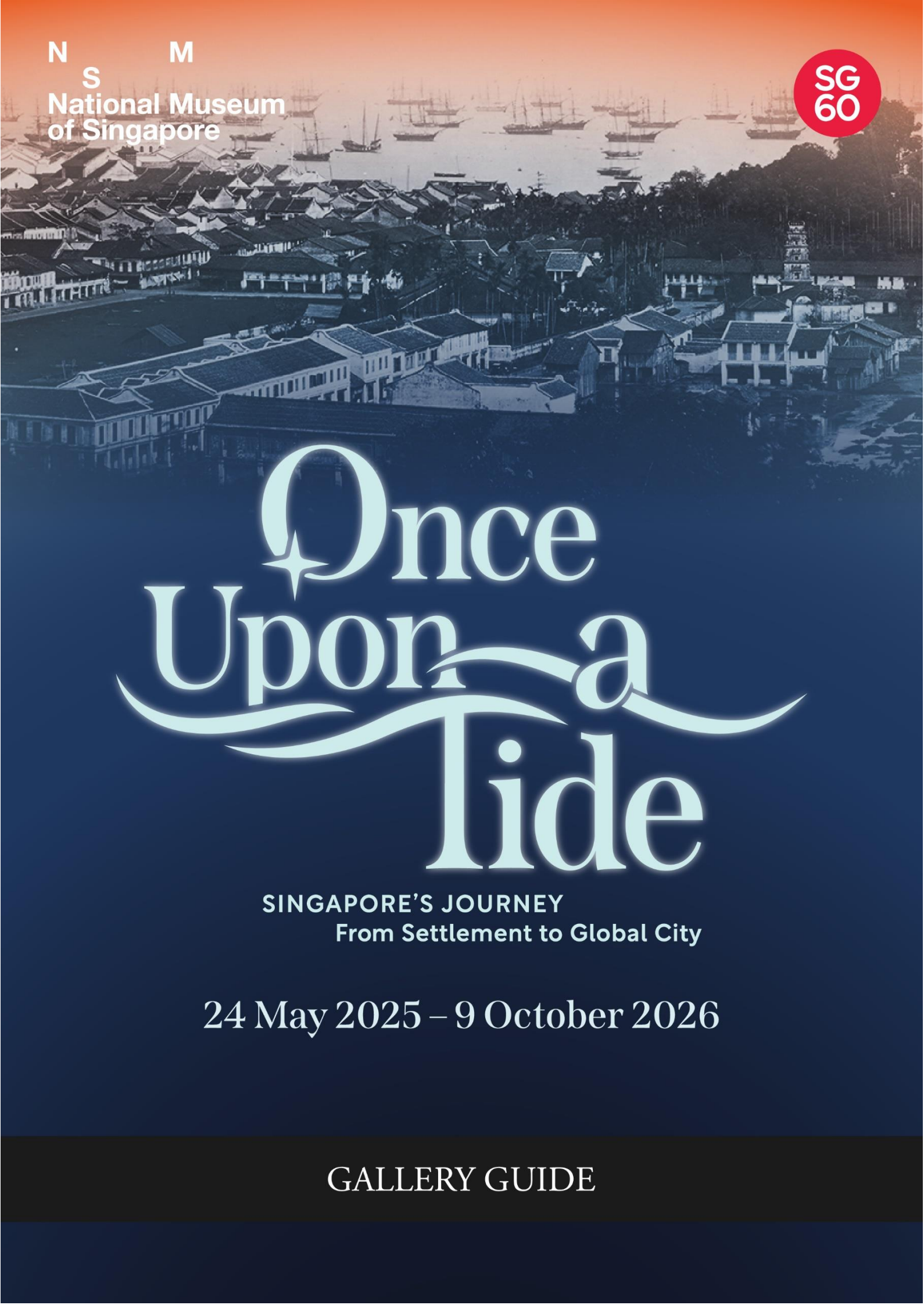


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National Museum
of Singapore

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60



Once Upon a Tide

SINGAPORE'S JOURNEY
From Settlement to Global City

24 May 2025 – 9 October 2026

GALLERY GUIDE

ADVISORY

Some areas in the gallery are dimly lit, and feature video projections and fragile installations.

Please exercise caution when moving through the gallery.

MUSEUM ETIQUETTE

**No food and
drinks**



**No flash
photography**



**Do not touch
artefacts**



**No bulky items. Please carry
backpacks on the front.**



**Please speak
softly**



**Please attend
To children**



0100**Introduction**

Singapore is a modern miracle – an economically successful global city-state that is firmly rooted in its multiculturalism and Asian heritage. How did we arrive at this point, and how have we transformed ourselves and shaped our destiny? And throughout these changes, what has remained distinct to our identity as it continues to be expressed locally and to the world today?

In this special exhibition commemorating the nation's 60th anniversary of independence, we tell the longer story of Singapore's journey – as an island closely connected with the sea that surrounds it, of the river that has defined its identity, and of its people who have built Singapore into what it is today and make waves both on our shores and beyond.

We invite you to join us on this journey, to explore, engage and reflect. As Singapore looks ahead to what the future holds, your responses to the questions posed across the exhibition through your wristbands will help you, and us, chart the way forward.

1000

Chapter 1

Always on the Map

Has Singapore always existed? That depends on how we define “Singapore” and trace its origins. Counting from its independence in 1965, Singapore is a 60-year-old nation state. But what if you considered its longer histories – when it became a Crown colony 158 years ago, or a British East India Company settlement 206 years ago, or a Malay kingdom more than 700 years ago?

The question can be approached by looking at how Singapore has been mapped. Maps and charts show how people find their way to a location, and illustrate how a place can be understood in relation to its surroundings. In this opening display, using historical maps of Asia and Southeast Asia as a starting point, we invite you to hunt for clues of Singapore’s early existence. What names was it known by, and where was it located?

1100

Episode One From Ancient Times

Which is the oldest map to feature Singapore? That depends on how certain we are in associating Singapore with places in a similar region, or which bear similar sounding names. Earliest links could possibly be traced to the 2nd-century Greek astronomer and cartographer Claudius Ptolemy and his mapping of the Malay Peninsula. More definitive appearances of Singapore began emerging in maps produced from European voyages to the East Indies in the 16th century. But the question remains: what was Singapore during this period, and what was known about it at that time?

1101

1.

Linschoten's map of the East Indies

1595

Engraving on paper

2021-00231

Singapore is labelled in this map as "Sincapura" and located on the southernmost tip of the Malay Peninsula, making reference to its Malay name. The map was produced by Jan Huygen van Linschoten, a Dutchman who spent five years in the service of the Archbishop of Goa, which was under Portuguese rule at the time. During his employment, Linschoten obtained information from Portuguese sources on sailing routes in the East Indies, publishing them in his 1596 book *Itinerario* which included this map.

2.

Base of a Chinese export ware dish

Circa Wanli period (1573–1620)

Blue-and-white porcelain

2014-00254

Gift of Ms. Lee Geok Boi

This base of a Chinese export ware dish was reportedly recovered from the Johor Shoal off Bedok at the intersection between the Straits of Singapore and Johor. It was part of a group of similar blue-and-white porcelain sherds dredged

from the Kallang River basin, which collectively point to the location of a *shahbandar* or harbour master in that area during the 16th century.

3.

Photograph of Malay village at Pulau Brani

G. R. Lambert & Co.

Late 19th century

Reproduction print

1995-00575

This photograph shows the extent of the Orang Laut (“sea people” in Malay) settlement at Pulau Brani off the Old Straits of Singapore by the late 19th century. Orang Laut assisted with navigation around the Straits since at least the 16th century, and were likely to have guided the Portuguese, whose sailing instructions for what is today Keppel Harbour were published by Linschoten.

1102

1.

Stone tools found on Pulau Ubin, Singapore

Possibly Hoabinhian to Neolithic period

Possibly basalt

A-0533-A, A-1734, A-1280-A

What do we know of prehistoric Singapore? These stone adzes were collected from a beach near Tanjong Tajam on the far western side of Pulau Ubin. They possibly date to between the Hoabinhian and Neolithic periods (about 3,000 to 5,000 years ago). These prehistoric tools were collected by Major P. D. R. Williams-Hunt in the late 1940s to early 1950s, who was at that time the Acting-Director of Museums for the Federation of Malaya and was involved in archaeological and ethnographic fieldwork in Southeast Asia.

2.

Ptolemy's Eleventh Map of Asia

Published by Laurent Fries in 1525

Wood engraving on paper

XXXX-01901

Claudius Ptolemy was a 2nd-century Greek astronomer famous for his treatise *Geographia*, which documented and illustrated the known world at that time. This map originates from the 16th century and is based on the German publisher Martin Waldseemüller's 1513 edition of *Geographia*. It depicts

what is today Southeast Asia, with the Malay Peninsula identified as “Aurea Chersonese” (or Golden Peninsula), alluding to the reputed riches of the land. At the southern tip is “Sabana Emporium”, a trading post that may have referred to Singapore.

3.

Map of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula by Sebastian Münster

Mid-16th to early 17th century

Hand-coloured engraving on paper

XXXX-01438

The German cartographer Sebastian Münster updated Ptolemy’s *Geographia* with his 1544 *Cosmographia*, of which several editions were published until 1628. This map depicts Sumatra, indicated here as “Taprobana” (a name more associated historically with what is Sri Lanka today), and the Malay Peninsula. A settlement along the southeastern coast of the peninsula is identified as “Cingatola” – this name matches Portuguese translations of Singapore’s Malay name at that time, Singapura, although its location is not at the southernmost tip as we would expect.

1200

Episode Two

At the Crossroads of Asia

Singapore has never existed in isolation. On the contrary, it has always been part of larger, overlapping polities, empires and worlds, and connected to global trade and culture. This was certainly the case within Asia, given Singapore's part in the Chinese trade network since the 14th century and its status as one of the capitals and key port settlements in the Malay world. Such a regional framing of Singapore can be seen in the maps and artefacts presented in this section.

1201

1.

Print of the Mao Kun (茅坤) map

20th century

Paper

XXXX-02140

This map was originally drawn around 1422 based on the accounts of early 15th-century Ming period voyages, particularly those led by the Chinese admiral Zheng He (郑和).

The places associated with Singapore on this map match those identified by Wang Dayuan (汪大渊), a traveller who had sailed a generation before Zheng. In his published account, Wang made references to Singapore – these included Danmaxi (淡马锡), a Chinese rendering of Singapore's ancient name "Temasek", and Longyamen (龙牙门) or Dragon's Teeth Strait, the rock formation that used to overlook the southern waterway of Singapore also known as Batu Berlayar.

2.

Chinese navigational compass

19th century

Wood, brass and glass

2021-00607

On loan from Asian Civilisations Museum

Compasses such as this, with 24 directions for astronomical and terrestrial navigation, were referred to in the Mao Kun (茅坤) map and were commonly used by Chinese sailors from the late 11th to early 12th centuries onwards.

3.

Chinese greenware, stoneware and blue-and-white sherds

Yuan to Ming Dynasty

2015-02147-054, 022, 035 & 040

On loan from Asian Civilisations Museum

These items were excavated from a dense layer of 14th-century artefacts along the banks of the Singapore River in 1998, indicating the presence of a substantial Chinese trade in Singapore at the time.

4.

Katib Celebi's map of Sumatra

Published by Ibrahim Muteferrika in 1732

Hand-coloured engraving on paper

2010-01460

This map was part of *Kitab Cihannuma* (*Book of the View of the World*) by the 17th-century Ottoman scholar Katib Celebi. The vagueness with which Singapore is identified in this map – labelled here as “Singapore” in Ottoman Turkish as occupying the entire southern portion of the Malay Peninsula below the Muar River – suggests the inconsistencies at that time in

pinpointing Singapore's exact geographical scope. This was however in line with early 17th-century European maps, which were likely consulted in the production of this map.

5.

Astrolabe

Around 1700

Copper alloy

1999-01562

On loan from Asian Civilisations Museum

This astrolabe was used in the Islamic world for time-keeping, navigation and surveying. It was made from the workshop of 'Abd al-A'immah in Isfahan, Iran.

1202

1.

**A New Account of the East Indies by Alexander Hamilton
(Volume II)**

1727

Calf leather, paper

2014-01292

In 1703, Singapore was offered as a gift by Sultan Abdul Jalil IV of Johor to the Scottish sea captain Alexander Hamilton. He declined the offer on the basis that the island was not appropriate for him as a private individual, but was more suitable for “a Company to settle a Colony on, lying in the Centre of Trade and being accommodated with good Rivers and safe Harbours, so conveniently situated that all Winds served Shipping both to go out and come into these Rivers”.

2.

**Mannevillette's chart of the Straits of Banca and Malacca
1745**

Engraving on paper

2023-00512

This chart of the Straits of Banca and Malacca was produced by the French hydrographer Jean-Baptiste Nicolas Denis d'Après de Mannevillette as one of 22 charts compiled for the atlas *Le Neptune Oriental*, published in 1745. The atlas was commissioned by the French East India Company, with support from the French Academy of Sciences. Singapore is

indicated on this chart as “I. Panjang”, referencing its common Malay name at that time, Pulau Panjang, and presented here north of Lingga, where the locus of power of Malay rule had shifted to by the middle of the 18th century.

3.

**Sumatrae et Insularum Locorumque Nonnullorum
Circumiancentium Tabula Nova by Jan Jansson Published
by Valk and Schenk**

c.1780

Hand-coloured engraving on paper

XXXX-01631

This map of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula was based on a 17th-century map by Jan Jansson. It is oriented to the east, with north facing the left of the map. Notably, Singapore is identified on the southern tip of the Malay peninsula as “Senasur”, with the Singapore Strait labelled “Nieuwe Straet” (or New Strait).

1300

Episode Three

Charting the Malacca and Singapore Straits

While Singapore's exact geographical identity has been either shifting or not very well understood in earlier maps, the various straits passing through Singapore began to feature distinctly in sea charts of the region by the end of the 18th century as a result of surveying missions and advances in hydrography. It is astounding on hindsight to note how much of Singapore's neighbouring waters were surveyed and known prior to the arrival of Raffles and the East India Company in Singapore in 1819.

1301**Chart of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore by John Thornton****c.1723****Engraving on paper****2018-00074**

This was the earliest English sea chart of the Straits of Malacca (today's Melaka) and Singapore. John Thornton, the official hydrographer of the British East India Company, first published this chart in 1703 in his *English Pilot*, which became the main British reference for navigation in Asian waters. While the island of Singapore itself is not named, the coastline is rendered with reasonable detail and overlaying the island is the identification of the Old Strait of Singapore, attesting to the importance of the waterway between Singapore and today's Sentosa island.

1302

1.

Laurie & Whittle's A Chart of the Straits of Malacca and Sincapore

Published in *The Oriental Pilot, or East India Directory*, in 1799

1794

Calf leather, paper

2018-00081

This 1794 chart of the East Indies depicts the Straits of Malacca (Melaka) as a key passageway connecting with the Straits of Sincapore (Singapore). This is evident in the shipping route traced between the two straits, and the coastal profiles illustrated on the upper right segment of the map. Like the strait, Singapore island is also spelled "Sincapore".

2.

Captain Joseph Huddart's *The Oriental Navigator*

1801

Calf leather, paper

2018-00082

Intended as a companion to *The Oriental Pilot*, this guide was compiled by the British hydrographer Captain Joseph Huddart. It provides sailing instructions for the route between England and China via the East Indies, based on information provided by British East India Company officers,

ship commanders in the country trade, and other navigators. This includes sailing directions through the "Straits of Singapore", including mention of it in relation to "Tanjong Boulus", identified as the southernmost tip of the Malay Peninsula in Johor or what is Tanjung Piai today.

1303

1.

Laurie & Whittle's chart of the South part of the Straits of Malacca

1798

Engraving on paper

2018-00069

This is one of the earliest hydrographic charts dedicated to the southern part of the Straits of Malacca (today's Melaka), where Singapore is located. In this chart, both the Old Strait of Singapore (labelled "Old Straits") and the New Strait of Singapore (labelled "Sincapour or Governor's Straits") are shown, with Singapore island depicted in poor proportion relative to the adjacent islands marked "Salat Booro" and "Tooly", which likely correspond to today's Pulau Ubin and Sentosa respectively.

2.

Photograph of fishing village at Pulau Blakang Mati

c.1950s

Reproduction print

1995-00929-173

Before it was renamed Sentosa in 1970, the island south of Singapore was known as Pulau Blakang Mati. This photograph shows a fishing village located beyond a boardwalk, with small boats docked beside.

1304**William Heather's New Chart of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore****1803****Engraving on paper****2021-00233**

It is remarkable that, by 1803, more than 15 years before the arrival of Raffles on the island, such a detailed coastline of Singapore and its surrounding straits was already in public circulation. In this chart by London publisher and mapmaker William Heather, the "Straits of Sincapore" is featured as a special inset, attesting to its significance at that time. It shows mainland Singapore (indicated as Pulo Panjang, or "Long Island" in Malay), with Tanah Merah identified on the island's east coast with the label "Red Cliffs".

1400

Episode Four

Point of Arrival

The arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles, Major William Farquhar and Captain Daniel Ross of the British East India Company in Singapore at the end of January 1819 signalled the beginning of the company's trading settlement on the island. Based on the first map created following this arrival, which is reproduced for display in this section, it can be observed how Singapore's identity began to be solidified, both in terms of the in-depth surveying and mapping of its coast and harbour, but also with the beginnings of the consistent spelling of its name which remains to this day.

1401**Plan of Singapore Harbour, February 1819****1 May 1819****Reproduction from National Library Board Collection**

Dated 1 May 1819 and published in the *Calcutta Journal*, this is the first printed map of Singapore since the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance in February 1819. It was accompanied by Captain Daniel Ross' account of Singapore's harbour, which he began by announcing, *"Singapore Harbour, situated four miles to the N. N. E. of St. John's Island, in what is commonly called the Sincapore Straits, will afford a safe anchorage to ships in all seasons, and being clear of hidden danger, the approach to it is rendered easy by day or night. Its position is also favourable for commanding the navigation of the Straits, the track which the ships pursue being distant about five miles; and it maybe expected from its proximity to the Malayan Islands and China Seas, that in a short time numerous vessels would resort to it for commercial purposes..."*

1402

1.

Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China by John Crawfurd

1828

Calf leather, paper

2014-00470

John Crawfurd succeeded William Farquhar as the second Resident of Singapore in 1823. His first stop in Singapore was two years earlier, and he described in this account his journey approaching the Singapore Strait into Singapore's harbour as such:

"Jan 19, 1821: 'At twelve o'clock to-day we passed the narrow channel of the Rabbit and Coney, the western entrance of the Straits of Singapore, and soon found ourselves surrounded in every direction by beautiful verdant islands. The sea was smooth, the sky clear, and the whole prospect equally novel and pleasing. From the deck there could be counted between fifty and sixty green and woody islands of various dimensions, and from the mast-head above seventy. I do not believe any part of the world which can afford a prospect, in its way, of superior beauty, and this indeed has been observed and confessed by all voyagers. At six o'clock we anchored in Singapore Roads.'"

2.

View of the Town and Roads of Singapore from the Government Hill

1828

Aquatint after Robert James Elliot

XXXX-01265

This is the first published view of Singapore, featured in Crawford's book and based on a drawing done around 1822 to 1823 by Robert James Elliot, who served as a topographical draughtsman with the Royal Navy. The view is presented from Government Hill (today's Fort Canning Hill), looking seaward with the Singapore River visible in the centre background.

2000

Chapter Two

The River Road

What is the Singapore River's place in our history? Singapore's waters have always played an integral role in the island's journey. As part of Southeast Asian trade routes and the Maritime Silk Road from at least the 14th century, Singapore served as a key port along the primary sea route between eastern Asia and Europe, with known trading settlements along the Singapore River. This ancient maritime legacy influenced Sir Stamford Raffles' decision to establish Singapore as a strategic British seaport in the 19th century.

Following Raffles' initial landing at the bank of the Singapore River in 1819, trading activities were concentrated in this area until the mid-20th century. The British recognised the river, its surrounding waters (called the Singapore Roads or Roadstead) and later the harbour as crucial assets for trade, propelling the island's rapid development into a thriving port. The evolution of the river has mirrored Singapore's

transformation over time, from a gritty booming port to today's sparkling tourist destination.

2001

1.

Chinese stoneware jars

14th century

Ceramic

2002-00401, 2002-00404

Referred to as *xiaokouping* (or “small-mouthed bottle” in Chinese), these stoneware jars were found outside the Old Parliament House (now The Arts House) and were common storage vessels for liquids at the time. They were made in China, and may have been used to transport mercury, then probably reused to store items such as wine or lime for betel chewing.

Numerous 14th-century trade goods such as these jars have been unearthed from various excavation sites around the Singapore River, attesting to the dense habitation and trading activities in the area, particularly along its northern bank.

2.

Chinese celadon plate found in Singapore

14th century

Ceramic

A-2140

On loan from Asian Civilisations Museum

3.

**Ming dynasty Chinese vase from the Kallang River basin
1573–1621**

Porcelain

2017-01159

Gift of Geoffrey Ovens

This Ming dynasty vase and other similar blue porcelain sherds were found at the Kallang estuary, suggesting that the primary trade route during the 16th and 17th centuries may have been past the Kallang River rather than the Singapore River. The Kallang and Rochor rivers continued to play an important role in the trade and shipbuilding activities of colonial Singapore.

2002

(Image on the wall)

A market, likely at the upper reaches of the Singapore River

G.R. Lambert & Co.

1890s

Reproduction

2006-01790

2100

Episode One Colonial Entry

On 28 January 1819, a squadron of British East India Company (EIC) ships, led by Stamford Raffles on board the *Indiana*, anchored at St John's Island near mainland Singapore. Accompanied by Major William Farquhar and a musket-bearing sepoy (soldier), Raffles travelled by boat to the banks of the Singapore River to meet with the local chief, Temenggong Abdul Rahman.

The ensuing negotiation for control of the island was inherently unequal, given the EIC's status as a formidable global trading, governance and military entity. After reaching an agreement with the Temenggong, Raffles arranged for Sultan Hussein Shah of Johor to be brought from Riau to Singapore, where the three parties signed the official Treaty of Friendship and Alliance on 6 February 1819.

Having claimed Singapore as a British settlement, the EIC swiftly established a free trade port welcoming surrounding sea traffic and mercantile activity. Farquhar was appointed as

Singapore's first British Resident and Commandant. Under his administration, the Singapore River rapidly transformed into a bustling hub for travellers and traders of all nationalities.

2101

**A painting of the Indiana, which first brought Stamford
Raffles to Singapore**

Undated

Oil on canvas

1993-00275

2102

1.

East India Company officer's sword

1805

Gilt brass, steel, leather, silver, ivory

2018-00685

2.

East India Company flintlock musketoon

1779

Wood, iron, steel, brass

2018-00686

The British East India Company (EIC) was a powerful trading organisation that transported and traded goods globally. Its ships and officers were well armed with weapons, including guns and swords like these, to protect valuable cargo against threats such as pirate raids. Such armaments also served to establish the authority of EIC officials and, when required, intimidate the locals to further the EIC's interests.

3.

View of Boat Quay facing Fort Canning

c.1880s–1890s

Albumen print

2007-50889

The Singapore River was found early on to be the only suitable location near the Singapore Roadstead for boats to

dock safely and transfer cargo. Although ships could not approach directly, the river's proximity to the Roadstead allowed lighter boats like *tongkangs* and *twakows* to transfer cargo between these ships and the warehouses along the riverbanks.

Boat Quay, the widest point of the river, became the initial focus for godown (warehouse) development by prominent early merchants such as Alexander Laurie Johnston, Edward Boustead, Alexander Guthrie, Tan Kim Seng and Tan Tock Seng. Smaller boats called *sampans* also operated here, ferrying passengers and goods across the river. Boat Quay hence earned the nicknames *Tiam Pang Lo Thau* (or "the place to go for sampans" in Hokkien) and *Bu Ye Tian* (or "place of ceaseless activity" in Mandarin).

(Image on the wall)

Singapore River with boat landing place on the right
Vincent Brooks, after Edwin Augustus Porcher
c.1850

Reproduction
XXXX-01267

Text on wall:

"I think [Singapore] remarkably well situated to be a commercial emporium in those seas; I have no doubt that it would very soon rise to great magnitude and importance..."

– Charles Grant, East India Company Chairman, 1821

4.

Daguerreotype of Boat Quay and Singapore River from Government Hill

Alphonse-Eugène-Jules Itier

1844

Silver on copper plate

2005-00445

This daguerreotype is one of the earliest surviving photographs of Singapore showing a view of the commercial centre of Boat Quay from Government Hill (now Fort Canning Hill). Singapore thrived as a transshipment hub where goods were imported and repackaged to be shipped elsewhere for sale – this connectedness with the world also meant that new technologies often arrived at its shores not long after gaining popularity in their places of origin. This daguerreotype was taken just five years after the daguerreotype process was invented.

Daguerreotypes result in one-off positive images that are flipped from left to right. The photograph reproduced on the wall nearby is a corrected view of the original image, representing the orientation of Boat Quay as seen in real life.

5.

A print showing the Singapore River and Presentment Bridge (top) and a Chinese merchant with Malay porters (bottom)

Dunaime, after drawings by Louis Auguste de Sainson

1830

Hand-coloured steel engraving
XXXX-01316

(top) The only way to cross the Singapore River before Presentment Bridge was built in 1823 was by boat. Initially a wooden footbridge with an arch that could be drawn to allow larger vessels to pass, the bridge was replaced multiple times over the years, eventually becoming today's Elgin Bridge.

(bottom) Soon after Singapore was established as a free port, people from around the region were drawn here by the prospects of trade and employment. This print shows people waiting with cargo by the water, perhaps to load it onto a boat.

6.

An Italian postcard of North Boat Quay

Early 20th century

Letterpress halftone print

2001-04435

Gift of Ng Chee Sun

This postcard shows some of the warehouses at Boat Quay, including that of Boustead & Co. on the right of Elgin Bridge. It also advertises the soaps and perfumes of the Italian pharmacists and perfumers Bertelli.

7.

Logbook for the former British East India Company's ship

Charles Grant

1834-1835

Paper

2018-00683

This is the logbook of a former British East Indiaman which was sold to another company, Hyde & Lennox, in 1834. It then arrived in Singapore on 12 April 1834 from Bombay (now Mumbai), India, and departed three days later for China. Its subsequent destinations were St Helena and England. The page titled "Singapore Roads" records various goods loaded onto the ship in Singapore including pepper, betel nut and rattan.

2103**Singapore****John Turnbull Thomson****1851****Oil on canvas****2018-00743****On loan from National Gallery Singapore**

This rare painting depicts vessels from various countries, including imposing East Indiamen from Britain and the Netherlands, a Siamese (Thai) junk, and regional Malay boats. Larger ships would anchor in this area, known as the Singapore Roads or Roadstead, before transferring their cargo to smaller boats capable of navigating the Singapore River for unloading. On the left of the image, warehouses and shophouses line the Singapore River, where goods were stored and traded.

2104

1.

Portrait of Colonel William Farquhar

M. Gauci after John Graham

1830

Lithograph

2018-00495

2.

Presentation Cup to William Farquhar

1823

Silver

2023-00743-001, 002 & 003

The first British Resident and Commandant of Singapore, William Farquhar, was instrumental in developing the early infrastructure needed for Singapore to thrive as a port city. This silver cup was presented to Farquhar on 27 December 1823 by prominent European and Armenian residents of Singapore to express their appreciation towards him prior to his departure from the country.

The list of names inscribed on the cup include pioneering merchants who settled and flourished in Singapore during its early years, many of whom had followed Farquhar from Malacca (now Melaka). The Chinese mercantile community also similarly presented Farquhar with a silver epergne as a parting gift.

3.

**Warehouses by the Singapore River at the south end of
Elgin Bridge**

Maynard Owen Williams

1937

Gelatin silver print

2011-00932

4.

Office buildings and godowns along Collyer Quay

c.1880

Gelatin silver print

XXXX-15803

Collyer Quay was a result of land reclamation in the 1860s, which allowed buildings and godowns to be erected along the quayside, such as those of Guthrie & Co. The early office buildings here were linked to each other by a veranda on the second floor, where peons would use telescopes to look out for and announce the arrival of cargo ships.

5.

Booklet on the history of Guthrie & Co.

1950s

Paper

XXXX-02260

Scottish merchant Alexander Guthrie, one of the signatories to William Farquhar's presentation cup, set up one of the first British trading houses in Singapore in 1821. His company

traded goods from both Britain and the Straits Settlements and served as agents in key fields including shipping, banking and insurance. It later diversified to cover other major industries of the region, including agriculture and mining.

6.

Hoo Ah Kay (Whampoa) with a European visitor at the garden pavilion at Whampoa House

Mid-19th century

Albumen print

1994-04908

In 1840, the prominent Chinese businessman, diplomat and community leader Hoo Ah Kay, popularly known as Whampoa, built a mansion off what is now Serangoon Road. Commonly referred to as Whampoa House, it had beautiful gardens and fruit-tree plantations, as well as an aviary and menagerie. The Whampoa gardens were a famous attraction, which foreign visitors often tried to secure invitations to tour.

7.

View from Arab Street towards the Kallang Basin

1890s

Albumen print

1994-04795

Various local watercraft can be seen here moored at the harbour by the Kallang Basin, including sailing ships, *sampans* and *tongkangs* that were used for transporting cargo such as

timber. Goods such as clay jars and woven baskets are stacked at the wharf area for further transport.

8.

View of Singapore Town from Government Hill

Day and Son, after John Turnbull Thomson

1856

Hand-coloured lithograph

2023-00677

This print shows the ceremony during which the Governor of the Straits Settlements, Lieutenant-Colonel William J. Butterworth, presented a state sword to the Temenggong of Johor Daing Ibrahim on 31 August 1846 in recognition of his efforts to suppress piracy. Townsfolk of all ethnicities are assembled to witness the ceremony in their finest clothes.

9.

View of the town and harbour from Pearl's Hill

John Thomson

1860s

Albumen print

2018-00704-003

The Scottish photographer John Thomson captures the growing prosperity of Singapore in this view of the built environment around Telok Ayer and the busy shipping scene in the background.

10.

“Island of Sumatra” one-*keping* merchant token
Early 19th century
Copper
N-1524-AA

11.
“Island of Sultana” one-*keping* merchant token
c.1820s–1930s
Copper
N-1618

12.
Straits Settlements merchant tokens with fighting cock emblem on obverse and inscription “one *keping*” or sunflower emblem on reverse side
1830s
Copper
N-1523-AS, N-1525-C, N-1526-A

Until the issuance of Straits Settlements coins in 1858, there was no official local currency in Singapore. Spanish dollars were predominantly used, alongside Dutch silver guilders and copper doits, Chinese copper coins, and the British East India Company’s (EIC) copper *keping* or *pice*. The EIC attempted to promote Indian rupees, but their non-decimal nature made conversion to other currencies difficult, rendering them unpopular.

Originally minted as rupee fractions for Sumatra (now a part of Indonesia), EIC *keping* circulated in Singapore and

elsewhere as 1/400th of a Spanish dollar instead. The demand for *keping* for small everyday transactions far exceeded supply, prompting European merchants to mint their own versions based on EIC *keping* and Dutch *doits*, such as the Island of Sumatra token. These unofficial coins featured slight differences to avoid counterfeiting charges.

Nevertheless, the Dutch authorities soon became concerned by the influx of the Island of Sumatra *keping*. In response, British merchants from Singapore and the Malay Peninsula produced tokens inscribed with “Island of Sultana”, a fictitious location that sounded similar to “Sumatra”, claiming that these were not intended for Dutch territories. Tokens which they subsequently issued from the 1830s were further differentiated by a fighting cock on the obverse, reflecting the popularity of cockfighting in the Malay Peninsula.

(On the left)

Signboard of Sino-Europe Enterprises

Undated

Metal, wood

FL-0156

2105

1.

Print titled “Praos Bouguis A La Voile” showing Bugis *padewakang* vessels

Mid-19th century

Louis Le Breton

Reproduction

XXXX-01043-001

2.

Kampong Bugis

c.1900

Albumen print

1993-00291

The British's free trade policy attracted many Bugis people from Sulawesi, Indonesia, to settle in Singapore in 1819. They established Kampong Bugis near the Rochor and Kallang rivers, which became the Bugis' trading base in Singapore.

From June to November annually, Bugis traders would sail the archipelago, acquiring and trading local produce such as sea cucumbers, tortoiseshell, shark fins, bird's nests, rattan, sandalwood, spices and even live parrots. Towards the end of their voyage, they would sell their cargo in Singapore, primarily to Chinese merchants, who stored the goods in godowns along the Singapore River for transshipment. The Bugis would then return to Sulawesi with European and Indian cotton fabrics, Chinese silk, western firearms and Malayan tin.

The Bugis fleet's arrival in Singapore was eagerly anticipated, as its size indicated the trading season's potential. Their

presence was crucial in stimulating inter-island trade and strengthening Singapore's position as a regional trading hub.

(Image on the wall)

Print of a Chinese junk on the Rochor River

1866

After Fedor Jagor

Reproduction

XXXX-01270

2106

1.

Bugis sarong

Early 20th century

Silk, gold wire

2018-00969

On loan from Asian Civilisations Museum

Gift of the City of Delft, Netherlands

2.

Bugis sarong

Early 20th century

Silk

2018-01013

On loan from Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM)

Gift of Mrs A. C. R. van der Mandele-Vermeer

Presented to ACM by the City of Delft, Netherlands

These woven cloths, also known as “sarong Bugis”, were renowned for their durability and quality. Popular in Southeast Asia’s warm climate, they were worn wrapped around the waist or chest. Bugis traders would sell these and return home with threads, allowing the women in their families to weave new sarongs for the next trading season. Their wide-ranging trading activities gave the Bugis access to non-native materials such as silk and a large selection of dyes, enabling them to create more vibrant textiles than other inland weavers.

2107

1.

Dried sea cucumbers from Australia

Sea cucumbers, also known as *tripang* or *beche-de-mer*, were in high demand by the Chinese as a delicacy. Bugis traders collected sea cucumbers from otherwise isolated coastal communities en route to Singapore, venturing as far as New Guinea and Australia to capitalise on this valuable commodity.

2.

Juvenile hawksbill turtle with polished shell

Undated

On loan from Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum

Tortoiseshell, which is mainly from the shell of hawksbill turtles, was another sought-after product traded by the Bugis. Entire turtles like this were also sold in Singapore and used for Chinese medicine or for ornamental display, while their shells were used for making combs and decorative items.

3.

Edible bird's nests with label

1937

On loan from Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum

Another popular commodity among the Chinese, these bird's nests likely originated from Java, Indonesia, and were bought

for the former Raffles Museum's collection at a market in Singapore in 1937. They demonstrate how such items were circulated through the Bugis trade networks in the region.

4.

Portrait of a Malay man with a bird and monkey

John Thompson

1862

Reproduction

2108

Exploiting the Land

The exploitation of natural resources for profit was a significant aspect of the British colonial enterprise. In Singapore and Malaya, vast swathes of primary forest were cleared for settlement, timber extraction, and plantation development. The British imported large numbers of labourers, mainly from southern India and China, to work these plantations. While Singapore successfully cultivated crops such as gambier, pepper and rubber, its main advantage stemmed from its strategic location, enabling it to aggregate, process and re-export products from surrounding regions.

1.

"Rolling Timber through Jungle to River, Straits Settlements Court" in the *Illustrated London News*

18 September 1886

Hand-coloured wood engraving

2008-00183

This engraving was published as part of an article about the economic benefits that could be reaped from the forests of the Straits Settlements. Many of Singapore's forests were cleared during the colonial period. Rivers allowed easier transportation of timber for use or sale by floating the logs to their intended destination.

2.

A gambier and pepper plantation

c.1900

Gelatin silver print
1993-00292

Chinese planters introduced gambier cultivation to Singapore before the British arrived. Used for tanning and dyeing, and in betel nut chewing, gambier was often planted together with pepper, as it provided support and fertiliser for the latter. Driven by high British industrial demand, gambier and pepper plantations proliferated by the 1840s. However, this boom was short-lived as the intensive cultivation gradually exhausted the fertility of the soil.

3.
A coffee plantation
G. R. Lambert & Co.
1890
Albumen print
1995-00579

Many agricultural ventures were tried out in Singapore including the growing of coffee, pineapples, coconuts and spices such as nutmeg. However, most of these were short-lived as the plants were unable to survive due to poor soil fertility, disease and pests, or owing to the lack of sufficient land to achieve economies of scale.

4.
A sago plantation
c.1880s-1890s
G. R. Lambert & Co.
Albumen print
2007-50917

5.

Sago Manufactory, Singapore

Reginald Burroughs Rudyerd

c.1870

Pencil and watercolour on paper

HP-0223

Sago is a starch extracted from the stems of certain tropical palm trees, which grow abundantly in the Indonesian islands and parts of Malaya (now Malaysia). Singapore was an important centre for processing sago starch into flour and pearls, which were in high demand in Europe and India. Rudyerd's painting shows a sago manufactory on the banks of the Singapore River. Many industries processing raw materials required large amounts of water, and were hence situated close to riverbanks.

6.

Tapioca in drying pans at Trafalgar Estate, Seletar

1880s–1890s

Albumen print

1996-00073

Tapioca, another edible starch, is derived from the cassava root and is processed in a similar way to sago to produce flour and pearls. A popular crop among Chinese farmers in Singapore, tapioca cultivation depleted the soil of its nutrients.

7.

A tin dredge in Selangor, Malaya

Undated
Gelatin silver print
1999-02292-011

8.
Workers stacking refined tin ingots at the Straits Trading
Company's smelter at Pulau Brani
Joseph Baylor Roberts
1953
Gelatin silver print
2011-03048

While tin had been mined in the Malay Peninsula for centuries, early smelting methods were inefficient with high wastage. This started to change in the 1880s when the Singapore-based German businessman Herman Muhlinghaus and Scottish merchant James Sword recognised a profitable opportunity in centralised smelting using coal. After encountering issues of inaccessibility and limited facilities with their first smelter by the Perak River, they decided to build new smelting facilities at Pulau Brani, an island within Singapore's New Harbour (now Keppel Harbour) as existing port traffic and facilities made this an ideal location. To realise this plan, they established The Straits Trading Company Limited to smelt, refine and trade tin and other ores and minerals. By the early 20th century, tin had become one of Singapore's most important exports.

9.
Malay men weaving rattan
G. R. Lambert & Co.
c.1880s–1890s
Albumen print
2007-50916

10.
The Cantonese Rattan Industry Association during its
10th anniversary
1919
Gelatin silver print
2011-02062
Gift of the Singapore Rattan Industry Association

Rattan is derived from numerous tropical palm species and requires a lot of water for washing during processing. At the beginning of the 20th century, the rattan processing business in Singapore was dominated by the Cantonese from Guangdong, China. In 1909, 17 rattan workshops formed the Cantonese Rattan Industry Association at 25A Hock Lam Street, close to Boat Quay.

The processed rattan was both exported and used by local craftsmen from various communities, including Malay weavers as seen here.

11.
Indian rubber tapper in Seletar

1900s–1930s
Gelatin silver print
2007-00733

Henry Nicholas Ridley, the first Director of the Singapore Botanic Gardens, is credited with pioneering Malaya's rubber industry through extensive cultivation research and promotion of the South American *Hevea brasiliensis* tree to planters. Ridley also invented the herringbone rubber tapping technique that improved yields and replaced earlier methods which damaged the trees. Here, a tapper is seen creating the typical V-shaped incisions to collect the latex in a cup.

12.
Indian workers carrying latex on a rubber plantation
1928
Gelatin silver print
1995-03541

Wake up by dawn and carry the pails of rubber milk
Have to struggle and tap 100 rubber trees
We labourers face a gruelling task and are left famished
If the work is not done, they will thrash us to the ground...
 - Tamil folk song from Malayan plantations, translation adapted from Shanthini Pillai (2013)

By the 1920s, rubber overtook tin as Singapore's most important export, with the majority of the labourers working

on Malayan rubber plantations being South Indians. They migrated here under either the indentured labour or *kangany* system, where their employers or recruiters held near absolute power, often resulting in harsh working conditions and exploitation.

13.

Rubber being dried and stored at a factory in Singapore

Early to mid-20th century

Gelatin silver print

XXXX-00215

14.

Workers of Goodyear Orient Company transferring bales of rubber sheets

Joseph Baylor Roberts

1952

Gelatin silver print

2011-03049

In the early 20th century, much of the rubber that came to Singapore from smallholdings was of poor quality and preparation. The rubber mills and smokehouses here would reprocess the imported rubber to a higher standard before it was sold, thus adding to its value.

Singapore also served as a central market where rubber growers could connect with agents and sell their rubber to the rest of the world. By offering economies of scale and

maintaining standards for the assurance of buyers, Singapore established itself as the premier rubber market of the world. By the 1930s, most of Southeast Asia's rubber – comprising over 75 per cent of world production – was sold from Singapore.

15.

**Rubber export coupon for the Federated Malay States
1922–1941**

Paper

2000-01035

With rubber planting rapidly gaining popularity in this region, many rubber trees reached maturity in the 1910s to 1920s, leading to overproduction and declining prices. To protect the industry, the British imposed restrictions on rubber exports from 1922, issuing coupons to Malayan rubber plantation owners for limited amounts of rubber exports.

16.

Ribbed smoked sheet of rubber

c.1940s–1970s

Rubber

2007-55107

Rubber was largely exported as either latex crepe or smoked sheets of various grades, classified based on their appearance, purity, durability and elasticity. Ribbed smoked sheets can be processed into various other rubber goods, such as tyres, footwear and hoses.

17.

Rubber tapping knife

c.1940s–1970s

Wood, metal

2007-55070

18.

Rubber tapping cups

Undated

Ceramic

2001-06645, 2001-06650

2200

Episode Two

Singapore : Crossroads of the World

While Singapore was undoubtedly a busy port during the first half of the 19th century, it was the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 that sealed its position as the crossroads between the East and West. Within the following year, the value of trade in Singapore increased by more than 80 per cent.

The Suez route considerably shortened journeys between Europe and Asia as ships could now bypass the Cape of Good Hope by sailing through Egypt. This shift made steamships more popular than sailing vessels for Asia-Europe journeys, as the latter incurred fees to be towed through the canal. The development of New Harbour served to accommodate the increasing numbers of larger vessels in Singapore and provide services such as coaling and ship repair. At the same time, the Singapore River remained an important site for the loading and unloading of goods, particularly of bulky raw items such as rice and rubber.

At the same time, the Singapore River remained an important site for the loading and unloading of goods, particularly of bulky raw items such as rice and rubber.

2201

1.

**Schedule for Stoomvaart Maatschappij Nederland and
Rotterdamsche Lloyd steamship departures from
Batavia (now Jakarta) to Holland (now the Netherlands)
via Singapore and the Suez Canal**

1924

Paper

2000-07217

Singapore, beyond just being well-connected, was an important stopover port for routes between most parts of Asia and Europe for both cargo and passenger ships.

2.

**Photographs of steamships passing through the Suez
Canal**

Circa early 20th century

Rotogravure

2014-00171-006 & 008

**Raffles Hotel Museum Collection donated by CapitaLand
Limited**

The idea of a canal across the Isthmus of Suez dated back to Roman times. However, it was French diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps who finally helped to realise this vision by securing favourable concessions from Egyptian authorities in 1854 to construct the canal. Work commenced in 1859, and the Suez Canal officially opened a decade later, reaching its full eight-metre depth by 1871.

The canal significantly reduced travel time for steamships between Europe and Asia, becoming a popular route that bypassed the African coastline. Within three years of the canal's opening, the total tonnage of ships arriving in Singapore increased by over 40 per cent, which in turn significantly boosted trade.

3.

Illustration showing Singapore as the centre of the British Empire in satirical magazine *Straits Produce*, Vol. 1-3

2 July 1923

Paper

2007-00856

This illustration shows Brittania, the female warrior personification of Britain, charting the British Empire's influence with a compass centred on Singapore, which came to be seen as the jewel in the crown of the empire.

Stereoviews were an early form of photographic three-dimensional (3D) technology, where two nearly identical photographs were intended to be viewed through a stereoscope to give the illusion of depth. Try out the interactive stereoscopes nearby!

4.

A stereoview of Cavenagh Bridge with the text "Singapore: The 'Cross Roads' of the World - The Great Eastern Trading Port of the Straits Settlements, British Malaya"

Late 19th to early 20th century

Keystone View Company
Gelatin silver prints mounted on card
2008-02273

This stereoview shows Cavenagh Bridge, which connected the government quarter on the north bank of the Singapore River to Commercial Square (today's Raffles Place) on the south bank and was built in 1869 by Indian convict labourers. The caption on the stereoview references Singapore's position as a crossroads for trade between East and West.

5.
A stereoview of Boat Quay teeming with *tongkangs*
c.1901
Underwood & Underwood Publishers
Albumen prints mounted on card
2008-02277

(Background image)
A ship passing through the Suez Canal
Late 19th century
Reproduction
XXXX-15174-043

(Image on the wall)
A view of Telok Ayer Basin
Maynard Owen Williams
1937
Reproduction
2011-00945

2202

1.

Postcard titled "Erection of the New Harbour, Singapore"

1880s

Collotype

1995-03677

By the 1840s, it became evident that a larger port was needed as the Singapore River and Roadstead could not support the increasing steamship traffic. In 1848, Admiral Henry Keppel surveyed the waters around what is now Keppel Bay, recommending the development of New Harbour. He wrote of its advantageous deep waters:

"In the [Singapore Roads], a ship's bottom becomes more foul than in any known anchorage in these seas; perhaps from the near proximity to the bottom. This is not the case in New Harbour, through which there is always a tide running..."

New Harbour was progressively developed by private entities, most notably the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company from the 1860s. It was renamed Keppel Harbour in 1900 in honour of Henry Keppel's contributions.

2.

King's Dock at Keppel Harbour

Early to mid-20th century

Gelatin silver print

XXXX-13759

The King's Dock was the second largest dock in the world when it was built in 1913 and the largest one east of the Suez Canal.

3.

Cargo being transferred at a wharf at Keppel Harbour

Early to mid-20th century

Gelatin silver print

XXXX-13764

4.

***Report on The Harbour of Singapore* presented by the
President of the Board of Trade to Parliament**

May 1929

Paper

2010-01477

This report on the functioning and requirements of Singapore's harbour includes an illustration of the layout of Keppel Harbour, showing its location in relation to the Singapore River and the Singapore Roads. It explains that ships typically used the harbour's wharves when carrying manufactured goods on eastward journeys but anchored at the Roads, where they did not have to pay port charges, for raw material transshipment on westward voyages.

5.

**Postcard of a ship discharging coal and coolies carrying it
to the dock**

Undated

Collotype

1999-02596

6.

Postcard showing coolies loading coal onto a liner at Tanjong Pagar Docks

c.1900

Collotype

1995-01598

7.

Illustration of Chinese coolies carrying coal to ships at night in *The Graphic*

1876

Wood engraving

XXXX-01279

In the 19th century, Singapore was the only regional port with extensive coaling facilities and was considered one of the best-equipped in the world. Nevertheless, the work was labour-intensive, with coolies carrying heavy coal baskets suspended from a thick bamboo pole between coaling ships, storage sheds, and steamships requiring refuelling.

8.

The P&O wharf at Keppel Harbour

Early 20th century

Letterpress halftone print

1994-05599

In 1852, the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) became the first steamship company to move its operations to New Harbour, where it built its own wharf with coaling facilities and godowns, as its larger ships required the deeper water for berthing. This also evidenced

the importance of Singapore in the company's shipping network.

9.

Illustration of the steamer *Travancore* taking in cargo at Singapore, in the *Illustrated London News* 1873

Wood engraving

XXXX-01405

The *Travancore* was one of the steamships in the P&O fleet, which travelled between England and Asia, stopping at Bombay (now Mumbai), Calcutta (now Kolkata), Penang, Singapore and Hong Kong.

(Image on the wall)

Workers unloading cargo at Boat Quay

c.1950s

Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill

Reproduction

XXXX-16577

2203

Journeying Across the Seas

Many people were involved in making ship travel and sea trade possible, particularly the seamen who worked on the ships.

1.

Illustration of Chinese passengers travelling from Singapore to Hong Kong in *The Graphic* 1885

**Hand-coloured wood engraving
2007-00832**

This print shows different Chinese migrants travelling by junk from Singapore to Hong Kong, some of whom might be returning home after a period of work in Singapore. Most of them are likely to be labourers, and their living and sleeping conditions on the open deck can be seen at the bottom of the print. Featured at the top is a banker, as well as a cook and doctor who may have been working on board.

2.

Illustration titled “Sketches at the Strangers’ Home for Asiatics, Africans, and South Sea Islanders” in the *Illustrated London News* 1890

**Lithograph
2007-00821**

The Strangers’ Home for Asiatics, Africans, and South Sea Islanders in London provided temporary shelter for travellers, primarily foreign sailors, from the various British colonies

while they looked for employment on ships returning East. These sketches show some of the diverse residents passing through the Home, including a sailor from Singapore.

3.

List of ships of the Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPM)

c.1930s

Paper

2000-07212

KPM was a one of the largest shipping companies in the early 20th century. It connected the Southeast Asian region with Australia, China, South Africa and the Netherlands. Singapore is mentioned numerous times as a location where the ships were sold upon decommissioning from KPM.

4.

Postcard of the Boustead Institute in Singapore

c.1910

Wilson & Co. Photographers

Collotype

2008-01121

A few institutions in Singapore offered lodging, meals and recreational facilities to sailors, including the Sailors' Home from 1851, the Sailors' Rest from 1882 and the Boustead Institute from 1892. The latter was named after Edward Boustead, a wealthy merchant who bequeathed a sum of money to build a hostel for seamen, as he felt that they were instrumental to Singapore's trade and prosperity.

5.

Seaman identification cards of Lee Chin Chai, Wong King Kwong and Chang Choo

Mid-20th century

Paper

XXXX-02425, XXXX-02422, XXXX-02424, 2003-00262

These identification cards indicate the seamen's department and basic information about them.

Steamship crews were typically organised in three departments – deck, engine and stewards. Deck crew were involved in lookout, steering, cleaning, maintenance of non-machinery components, and loading and unloading. Engine crew operated and maintained machinery and, in a coal-powered steamship, also stoked the boilers. Stewards staffed the crew and passengers, looking after their rooms, food and other basic needs.

(Overhead)

Street signs from around the Singapore River

20th century

Metal

2010-00320, 2010-00334, 2010-00357, 2010-00290, 2010-00337, 2010-00313, 2010-00343 & 2010-00284

2204

Working on the Docks and Quays

The extensive trading activities taking place at the Singapore River and New Harbour (subsequently Keppel Harbour) demanded huge numbers of labourers who were essential for loading and unloading goods and transporting them to and from warehouses.

1.

Photograph of B. Govindasamy Chettiar and members of the Indian Labour Company at the harbour

c.1920s–1930s

Reproduction

Courtesy of Mythili S. L. Perumal

B. Govindasamy Chettiar ran the Indian Labour Company, which served as the main contractor of the Singapore Harbour Board (later the Port of Singapore Authority and now PSA International). The company provided most of the labourers needed at the docks, employing both Indian and Chinese workers.

2.

Scroll and scroll case presented to B. Govindasamy Chettiar on his appointment as Justice of the Peace of the Straits Settlements

1938

Fabric, silver

On loan from Mythili S. L. Perumal

This scroll was presented at a congratulatory tea party thrown by eminent businessmen on the occasion of B.

Govindasamy Chettiar's appointment as a Justice of the Peace of the Straits Settlements. It commends his magnanimous nature and highlights that he made "no distinction either in caste or creed", treating all fairly and even showing appreciation towards Islamic formalities despite being Hindu himself.

3.

Singapore Harbour Board identity card of coolie Phee Yue Chiang

1940

Paper

2000-00010

4.

Coolies at a dock in Singapore

G.R. Lambert & Co.

1885

Albumen print

2023-00675

5.

Workers unloading cargo from a lighter to a lorry at Boat Quay

c.1950s

Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill

Gelatin silver print

XXXX-16577

2205

1.

Working in Unity

Loke Hong Seng

1964, printed in 2015

Inkjet print on paper

2016-00731

2.

Loading and Unloading in a Team of Three

Loke Hong Seng

1971, printed in 2015

Inkjet print on paper

2016-00736

These photographs by Singaporean photographer Loke Hong Seng capture how labourers worked together to load and unload cargo by the Singapore River. The workers on the right are loading rubber bales at Clarke Quay while those on the left are transferring rice sacks at Boat Quay.

2206

1.

Cushion used by coolies

Mid-20th century

Jute

2000-07260

Such cushions, worn around the neck, served as back or shoulder protection for coolies carrying heavy loads, particularly rough crates with sharp edges that could otherwise cause injury. The photograph above, *Working in Unity*, shows a labourer using a similar cushion.

2.

Hooks used for picking up or moving rice sacks

1950s–1970s

Wood, metal

2016-00583

Gift of Neo Kim Teah

These hooks belonged to Neo Kim Teah, who arrived in Singapore as a child in the 1930s and worked as a coolie between the 1950s and 1970s. His duties included unloading rice gunny sacks from boats at the Singapore River and transporting them to godowns. These tools, used in pairs to manoeuvre heavy sacks, were crucial for the process. Workers across the supply chain relied on them, from lightermen on their boats to coolies loading lorries, and godown workers storing the sacks.

(Images on the wall, from right)

**Workers loading sacks by the Singapore River and using
hooks to arrange them on a lorry**

1966

Reproduction

**Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy
of National Archives of Singapore**

A view of Boat Quay from Elgin Bridge

Maynard Owen Williams

1937

Reproduction

2011-00943

2300

Episode Three

Mail and Tourism

For over a century, ships were the primary means of sending mail to and from Singapore before airmail became more accessible from the 1930s onwards. As the main form of communication with overseas family, friends and business partners at the time, mail provided people with a crucial link to the world. It was also how most international news came to Singapore, particularly until the 1860s when the telegraph network was established.

Prior to the advent of steamships, letters and news from places such as Britain, India and China took months to arrive by sea. However, by 1845, steamships were delivering letters to Singapore monthly, significantly improving the speed of communication.

The convenience and reliability of steamships also led to greater demand for recreational travel from wealthy individuals keen to explore “exotic” destinations. Many mail

and cargo ships soon began to accommodate international tourists, with Singapore as one of the stopovers.

2301

1.

East Asiatic Co Passenger Service travel poster featuring sea connections through Singapore

1930s

Edmond Bille

Offset lithograph

2017-00880

This poster traces the route of the passenger and cargo ship *Jutlandia* from Copenhagen in Denmark to Bangkok in Thailand, via the Suez Canal, Sri Lanka and the Straits Settlements, where Singapore was a key port. The vessel was operated by the East Asiatic Company (EAC), founded in Copenhagen by Hans Niels Andersen in 1897. Having established himself in Bangkok, Andersen pioneered trade routes between Denmark and Asia. The EAC became famous for launching the *Selandia*, the world's first large diesel-powered ship, in 1912.

2.

Dutch map showing a mail shipping route through Keppel Harbour at Singapore

c.1920s–1930s

Paper

2007-50832

3.

Print showing views on and off a P&O steamship travelling to Bombay (now Mumbai, India) and China with a stop in Singapore from the *Illustrated London News*

c.1886

Hand-coloured wood engraving

2007-00822

While primarily a cargo ship, this Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) steamship also carried sacks of mail that were sorted on board. The ship's mail route covered Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai. In 1853, the frequency of P&O mail packets increased to twice a month. After the opening of the Suez Canal, Singapore became a mail distribution centre for the whole of Southeast Asia and beyond.

4.

Print showing the scene outside the Hotel de l'Europe at Esplanade upon the arrival of a European mail ship

Hugo Vilfred Pedersen

1902

Hand-coloured lithograph

XXXX-01420

This print by Danish artist Hugo Pedersen depicts the excitement at the Hotel de l'Europe upon the arrival of a mail ship, with people falling over themselves to get to the mail. The arrival of mail ships was signalled from the flagstaff on Government Hill (now Fort Canning Hill), with a red flag indicating mail from Europe and a yellow one mail from China. If a mail ship arrived at night, it was signalled by the firing of

a gun. Ships would remain in Singapore for at least 48 hours to allow people to collect and post their mail.

5.

Envelope for mail sent from Hong Kong to Singapore

1864

Paper

1996-01045

Mail was sent for various reasons including keeping in touch with friends and family, business correspondence, requesting for or sending of money, and sharing of souvenir images such as postcards. Those who were unable to read or write would dictate their letters to a scribe.

6.

Postcard of a German mail steamer at Borneo Wharf, Keppel Harbour

1907

Collotype

2011-02896

7.

Postcard of a German mail steamer at Keppel Harbour

1906

Collotype

2014-00217

Raffles Hotel Museum Collection donated by CapitaLand Limited

Although Singapore had been a port of call for German ships since the opening of the Suez Canal, merchants in East Asia required more reliable and frequent shipping services. In response, the German government contracted the Norddeutscher Lloyd shipping company in 1885 to operate the state-subsidised Imperial Mail Steamer Service. These postcards featuring images of German mail steamers were sent as mail from Singapore in the 1900s.

8.

Postcard of Commercial Square sent from Singapore to England

1906

Collotype

1999-02580

9.

Envelope for mail sent from Tamil Nadu, India to Singapore

c.1909

Paper

1999-00580-001

10.

Envelope for mail, likely business correspondence, sent from Singapore to Tamil Nadu, India

1933

Paper

1999-00590

(Image on the wall)

A Chinese streetside scribe

Julius Friend

1934

Reproduction

2011-00927

2302

1.

“Tropical Holland, The Archipelago of Eternal Summer: Information for travellers to the Dutch East Indies” issued by the Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPM) shipping company

1925

Paper

2000-07219

The Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) were a popular destination for Western travellers to the “Far East”. Singapore was an important base for such tourism as most itineraries passed through the country.

2.

Violinist Robert “Juice” Wilson’s briefcase

c.1930s

Leather, metal

2014-00190-001

Raffles Hotel Museum Collection

Donated by CapitaLand Limited

Wilson, a talented violinist from San Francisco, USA, travelled to Asia as a member of the orchestra of the passenger liner *SS President Garfield* in the early 1930s. The many luggage tags represent some of his past destinations, before the briefcase was donated to the Raffles Hotel in Singapore.

3.

Logbook of the Around the World Cruise on the Cunard White Star, Ltd. RMS *Franconia*

7 January to 29 May 1936

Paper, metal

2014-00002

Raffles Hotel Museum Collection

Donated by CapitaLand Limited

This passenger logbook documented a round-trip cruise from New York that circled the globe, stopping at South America, South Africa, India, Southeast Asia (including Singapore), China and Japan. Designed as both guide and journal, it allowed passengers to add brochures, photographs and personal notes of their journey.

4.

***The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* by Isabella L. Bird**

1883

Paper

2010-01682

Unusually for the time, *The Golden Chersonese* (which references an ancient name for the Malay Peninsula) was written by an adventurous female travel writer who explored multiple continents, often independently. Bird's vivid account of Singapore begins, "It is hot – so hot! – but not stifling, and all the rich-flavoured, coloured fruits of the tropics are here".

5.

A Cruise Through Eastern Seas: Being a Traveller's Guide to the Principal Objects of Interest in the Far East by A. G. Plate

1906

Paper

2014-00039

Raffles Hotel Museum Collection

Donated by CapitaLand Limited

With the rising popularity of long-distance travel by cruise ship in the early 20th century, guidebooks such as this proliferated, providing information to prospective tourists from Europe and the United States. This guide includes a chapter on Singapore.

6.

Memograms of a World Cruise by Flora and Martin DeMuth

c.1931–1932

Paper

2014-00046

Raffles Hotel Museum Collection

Donated by CapitaLand Limited

These collected memograms, combining infographics, illustrations and writing, capture the experiences of two artists on board the *Empress of Britain* ocean liner during its first world cruise from 1931 to 1932. Reproduced for passengers and intended as souvenirs, they include

calendars of activities on board and facts about each destination.

7.

A Trip Around the World by George Moerlein

1886

Paper

2009-01630

Travelogues flourished in the 19th century as wealthy travellers shared their experiences. In this book, the American author George Moerlein explains that he undertook a round-the-world trip “for the double purpose of viewing the scenery and improving [his] health”. While Moerlein comments that Singapore’s climate was “remarkably healthy”, he also laments the many pests, including lizards, ants and mosquitoes, that troubled him at the Hotel de l’Europe.

8.

Commemorative cigarette case presented to Master Attendant C. Q. G. Crauford by Czarevitch Nicholas of Russia

1891

Gilt silver, cabochon sapphire, diamond

2022-00363

In 1891, Czarevitch Nicholas II visited Singapore as part of a grand tour from Gatchina, near St. Petersburg, to Vladivostok to inaugurate the building works of the Eastern Section of the Trans-Siberian Railway. During his stay here, he presented this

case to Master Attendant C. Q. G. Crauford, who played a vital role in managing shipping and promoting trade.

(Image on the wall)

A mail ship departing from New Harbour (later Keppel Harbour)

C. J. Kleingrothe

1907

Reproduction

XXXX-14796-004

2400

Episode Four

Waterfront Transformations

The Singapore River and its waterfront underwent dramatic transformations throughout the 20th century, mirroring the country's rapid development and changing economic priorities. In the early 1900s, the river was a bustling trade artery crowded with bumboats, its banks lined with shophouses and godowns. By the middle of the century, taller buildings of offices, banks and hotels began appearing, alongside Singapore's growing financial and tourism sectors.

The 1970s were the start of significant changes to the waterfront as part of urban renewal efforts. In 1977, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew launched a massive ten-year clean-up operation of the river, phasing out or relocating bumboats, street hawkers, squatters, and pollution-intensive industries such as pig farming.

By the 1990s, the Singapore River had been transformed into a vibrant lifestyle and tourism destination. Historic areas like Boat Quay and Clarke Quay were rejuvenated, with old

shophouses converted into restaurants, bars and entertainment venues. New developments such as Marina Bay and the Esplanade further altered the waterfront, creating a globally recognisable cityscape and skyline.

2401

1.

The River Mouth, Singapore

Katherine Kay-Mouat

c.1930

Lithograph

2010-01547-010

2.

View of Singapore waterfront

Katherine Kay-Mouat

c.1930

Lithograph

2010-01547-012

3.

The Harbour, Singapore

Katherine Kay-Mouat

c.1930

Lithograph

2010-01547-015

These waterfront views are from a collection of 14 lithographs by a female artist, Katherine Kay-Mouat, who resided in Singapore from 1921 to 1935. They capture the sea approach to Singapore, and the two primary trading locations – the Singapore River and Keppel Harbour.

4.

The Singapore waterfront from the break-water

Lee Sow Lim

1963

Gelatin silver print

2006-00076

Local photographer Lee Sow Lim captured this panoramic scene of the major buildings at Collyer Quay in 1963, just before the rapid development of the area as a financial hub in the 1970s. Many of the iconic buildings seen here have since been replaced by modern skyscrapers, including Shell House (now Collyer Quay Centre), Ocean Building (now Ocean Financial Centre) and the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank Building (now 21 Collyer Quay).

(Background image)

Aerial view of the Singapore River

c.1970

Reproduction

2008-04096

(Images on the wall, from left)

Panoramic view of Boat Quay

Early 1900s

Reproduction

1999-00369-005

Singapore River
Late 19th to early 20th century
Reproduction
2000-06806
Gift of Ms Ng Chee Sun

2402

Fresh Waters, New Beginnings

Video (3 mins 42 secs)

Take a trip through the Singapore River's extraordinary transformation from a functional, working waterway into a pleasant leisure destination, prompted by a challenge and directive issued by Singapore's former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1977 to clean up the then filthy river within ten years.

Archival materials courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore, from:

Ministry of Culture Fonds

Mediacorp Pte Ltd

Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection

Housing and Development Board Fonds

(Image on the wall)

Wrecks of old lighters being cleared from the Singapore River

1977

Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission

2403***Singapore Panorama*****Stephen Wiltshire****20 July 2014****Pencil and ink on paper****2015-00155**

British artist Stephen Wiltshire created this panorama entirely from memory after a single hour-long helicopter ride over Singapore. Despite this being his first visit to the country, he masterfully captured the cityscape, particularly the Singapore River and Marina Bay with its iconic skyline.

An artist on the autism spectrum, Wiltshire's work not only showcases his extraordinary talent but also increased awareness of autism while raising funds for the Autism Resource Centre and the President's Challenge through print sales.

3000

Chapter Three

Expanding Horizons

How much has Singapore grown? Singapore's land area has increased by about 25 per cent since it was established as a British East India Company (EIC) settlement in 1819, growing from 578 to 736 square kilometres through land reclamation. For a tiny island dealing constantly with land scarcity, such physical expansion has widened the possibilities of development and reshaped our relationship with the sea.

This began during the island's early days as an EIC settlement, with reclamation taking place at the Singapore River, and continuing throughout its colonial period with the waterfront spanning Telok Ayer to Kallang. However, it was only in the post-independence era after 1965 that Singapore's reclamation efforts grew substantially in terms of land area added. Throughout this journey of reshaping its physical identity, the key question that remains – more pertinent now than ever – is how Singapore's land can be best used in the present and in the future.

3100

Episode One Surveying Early Singapore

How much of Singapore's waters, coasts and interiors were known and recorded in 1819? As the British East India Company (EIC) developed the port settlement surrounding the Singapore River, it also commissioned early surveys in the decades following 1819 that charted the harbour, coastline and topography of the island. These surveys were first conducted by EIC officers and later by government-appointed superintendents of public works and surveyors. Information gathered and charted from these surveys was instrumental to the early planning of the town, and part of a larger colonial attempt to exercise control over Singapore's land and surrounding seas, even if at the expense of the local population.

3101

1.

***Singapore Harbours and Roads with the Adjacent Channels*
1827, with additions in 1845**

Lithograph on paper

XXXX-01999

In 1827, Captain Daniel Ross of the Bombay Marine, who had accompanied Raffles to Singapore in 1819, engaged in an official survey of the Singapore Straits. This British Admiralty chart, published in 1845, was based upon Ross' survey and includes updates from the further surveys conducted by government surveyor John Turnbull Thomson in 1842. This chart shows detailed soundings, submarine contours, reefs, mud banks and areas of dry sand at low water levels along the southern coast of Singapore, and southern islands such as Pulau Brani and Blakang Mati (present-day Sentosa).

2.

***Map of the Island of Singapore and Its Dependencies*
1898**

Hand-coloured lithograph

XXXX-02085

This detailed map of Singapore shows the extent of development by the end of the 19th century, with main roads drawn in red stretching across the island, and plans for railway lines indicated in orange – this would be introduced five years later in 1903. The areas shaded in green indicate forests set aside as reserves, following the

1883 report by Nathaniel Cantley, superintendent of the Singapore Botanic Gardens, on the depletion of primary forests in Singapore. This map was owned by Brigadier General Arthur Dorward, commander of troops of the Straits Settlements from 1903 to 1905, evincing the importance of this map from a military perspective.

3102

Unterbrochene Straßenmessung auf Singapore (Interrupted Road Surveying in Singapore)

After Heinrich Leutemann

c.1865

Hand-coloured engraving on paper

2000-06610

George Dromgold Coleman arrived in Singapore in 1822, and was the architect of several early buildings in the fledgling settlement. He conducted the first topographical survey in Singapore in 1829, before he was subsequently appointed the first Government Superintendent of Public Works in 1833. This print from an 1865 issue of an illustrated German broadsheet *Die Gartenlaube* presents a dramatic scene in 1835 when Coleman and his local assistants were attacked by a tiger while laying out a new road through a low swampy part of the jungle. The tiger is depicted as crashing into Coleman's theodolite – a piece of surveying equipment used to measure angles vertically and horizontally.

3103

1.

Plan of the British Settlement of Singapore by Capt. Franklin and Lieut. Jackson, and Plan of the Town of Singapore by Lieut. Jackson

Published in 1828

Engraving on paper

XXXX-02072

Captain James Franklin of the British East India Company's 1st Bengal Calvary produced the first map accurately tracing the outline of Singapore in 1822. In the same year, Lieutenant Philip Jackson of the Bengal Artillery, in his role as assistant engineer and surveyor of public lands, put together a town plan of Singapore based on Sir Stamford Raffles' instructions to the town planning committee that he had convened. The plan laid out Raffles' vision for an orderly settlement with clearly assigned areas for different ethnic communities.

2.

Letter from Sir Stamford Raffles to the town planning committee

4 November 1822

Ink on paper

XXXX-02674-002

"Gentlemen, -The extent of the native population which has already accumulated at Singapore and the rapidity with which it daily increases, render it expedient that in providing for its

accommodation a timely attention should be paid to its future regulation, with reference to the circumstances of the place and peculiar character and institutions of the several classes of inhabitants of which the society will be composed."

This is the opening line from the first page of the letter written by Sir Stamford Raffles to Captain Charles Edward Davis, Samuel George Bonham and Alexander Laurie Johnston. These men were members of a committee appointed by Raffles in 1823 to oversee the implementation of his town plan for Singapore. He argued that these plans were necessary as he envisioned Singapore to be a place of "magnitude and importance". The most significant features of Raffles' plans were the allocation of land for government and commercial use, along with the development of enclaves which segregated the population according to ethnicity and, in some cases, province.

3.

Letter from Raffles to A. L. Johnston

May 1823

Ink on paper

XXXX-02481

"I am sorry to discover that you are going on with a brick building in a very objectionable part of your compound, that I am compelled to stop your progress in it."

This short letter from Sir Stamford Raffles takes Alexander Laurie Johnston to task for erecting a brick building in his compound. Johnston was one of the early settlers of Singapore and founder of the trading company A. L. Johnston and Co. in 1820. He was also a close confidant of Raffles, who appointed him as one of the members of the town planning committee in October 1822. Since the beginning of 1823, Raffles was preoccupied with implementing his town plan, and Johnston's planned construction probably ran counter to Raffles' plans. However, it is not known whether Johnston ceased construction of the building after their proposed meeting.

3104

1.

Sketch of the Island of Singapore

Published in 1830

Hand-coloured engraving on paper

2014-00111

Gift of Capitaland

This sketch of the island of Singapore, which was published in Lady Sophia Raffles' *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, follows closely from Captain Franklin's 1822 plan, but includes more details on vegetation along the island's coastlines and hills near the harbour. There is also an expanded view of the Straits of Singapore.

2.

Plan of the Town of Singapore by J. T. Thomson

1843

Lithograph with hand colouring

XXXX-02115

This is the earliest known map printed in Singapore. It was drawn based on a survey by government surveyor John Turnbull Thomson in 1843, showing the expansion of the town towards the interior, the construction of roads, and the slopes and heights of the numerous hills that dotted the island. The map notes that Singapore's population had reached 50,000 by this point. This map was owned by Captain James Best of the Madras Engineers, who was in Singapore in

1843 and had at the time proposed military fortifications for the town and harbour.

3105

1.

Angus Sutherland's travel desk with ink stand and seal

Late 19th century

Wood, leather, glass, metal

2021-01169-001 to 005, 006, 092 & 093

This travel desk belonged to Angus Sutherland, a colonial surveyor in Singapore from 1890 to 1894. Prior to his appointment in Singapore, Sutherland was based in Cyprus for six years, where he had mapped the Mediterranean island with Lord Kitchener, a British army officer and colonial administrator best known for his appearance on World War One recruitment posters. Kitchener presented him with this travel desk when he left his post in Cyprus in 1886.

In Singapore, Sutherland resided at Beach Road where he also trained surveyors at a school which Colonial Engineer Henry McCallum had suggested setting up to meet the growing demand for surveyors as the colony developed. As a start, the school was intended to have 20 students who would be taught theory in the morning, including subjects such as plotting and computing, before embarking on fieldwork in the afternoon.

2.

Cabinet photograph of Angus Sutherland and family

Late 19th century

Albumen print mounted on card

2021-01169-023

3.

Longitude of Penang, Straits Settlements Determined by Means of Telegraphic Signals Exchanged with Singapore, by Cmdr. A. M. Field and Lieut. W. H. D. Margesson and Angus Sutherland

1894

Paper

2021-01169-073

Sutherland was involved in this publication by the British Admiralty's Hydrographic Department, in his capacity as Colonial Instructor in Surveying. Contained in this copy of the publication is a memo from the British War Office thanking Sutherland for making this report available for their reference through the Stationery Office.

4.

Forms, Tables and Coefficients for use in the Astronomical Observatory Singapore, computed and arranged by Angus Sutherland

1893

Paper

2021-01169-013

5.

Letter from Lord Kitchener to Angus Sutherland

28 August 1883

Ink on paper

2021-01169-024

In this letter, Lord Kitchener shares that he has been offered charge of a reconnaissance survey of the Gulf of Arabia and the Dead Sea in November and December of 1883. It is addressed to Sutherland, inviting him to join in his surveying party.

6.

Pamphlet for Sutherland's Protractor published by C. F. Casella & Co.

Early 20th century

Paper

2021-01169-060

Sutherland designed a special type of protractor for use in surveying work. Named after him, this protractor was to be used in conjunction with angular instruments such that the survey could be drawn on the tracing paper attached to it at the actual place of observation.

7.

Ghat tracer with case

P. Orr & Sons

Circa early 20th century

Wood, metal

XXXX-09114-001 & 002

A ghat tracer is used in topographical surveying for setting out a grade contour to locate points on a given gradient when surveying a hill or road, or to measure the angle of a slope.

3200

Episode Two

Flattening and Expanding

While we often think of land reclamation as a contemporary practice, it has been employed in Singapore since the 19th century, beginning with the reclamation of the south bank of the Singapore River in 1822. In the 1870s, Singapore embarked on its first major land reclamation project with Telok Ayer Bay. As part of this flattening and expanding exercise, the surrounding hills were levelled to expand the coastline beyond Telok Ayer Street, which once faced the sea. Much of that land is occupied by the Central Business District today.

Subsequent projects during Singapore's colonial period included the reclamation of the Kallang Basin and the waterfront at Beach Road. While the extension of coastlines added useful land for development, this involved in some cases the displacement of indigenous communities and biodiversity.

“There is a story about how Mr. Raffles and Colonel Farquhar together debated the best way to enlarge the Settlement ... Then it occurred to Mr. Raffles that the small hill near Tanjong Singapura might be broken up and the earth used for banking on the near side of the river ... The next day men under the orders of Mr. Raffles and Mr. Farquhar came round calling for Chinese, Malay and Indian labourers, and some two or three hundred labourers were paid one rupee per head per day to dig and carry the earth.

- Munshi Abdullah, *The Hikayat Abdullah*, first published in 1849

3201

1.

Letter from Sir Stamford Raffles to the town planning committee

4 November 1822

Ink on paper

XXXX-02674-005

"The necessity of draining the ground on the south west side of the river, is no less indispensable for the health of the Settlement than for securing the foundations of whatever permanent buildings may be erected thereon, and it is intended to proceed on the operation of least delay practicable."

While Sir Stamford Raffles had originally instructed the north bank of the Singapore River to be set aside wholly for commercial activity, this was not practical and led to a major disagreement with the Resident, William Farquhar. In this extract from Raffles' instructions to the town planning committee, he admits the importance of using the south bank, which could be stabilised by first draining the ground. Later, Raffles would make plans for reclaiming the land by levelling the hill near the river mouth, and in so doing raise the south bank and fill in the marsh. This would subsequently form the area known today as Raffles Place, Singapore's historic commercial area.

2.

View of the Singapore River with Jackson Bridge and Government Hill

Sigismond Himely, after an 1830 drawing by François-Edmond Pâris

1835

Aquatint

XXXX-01263

In 1819, the south bank of the Singapore River was low-lying marsh prone to flooding and unsuitable for docking. In 1822, approximately 300 coolies were involved in levelling a hill near the current location of Battery Road to build an embankment along the river's edge, forming what is present-day Boat Quay. It was from that embankment that this view of the river in 1830 was taken, and it is evident that by that time the quay had become used for docking smaller vessels.

This print titled *Sincapour* is based on the original drawing by François-Edmond Pâris. He was the artist aboard the French corvette *La Favorite* captained by Cyrille Laplace, during the Singapore stopover of its around-the-world expedition in August 1830. Visible in the background is Presentment Bridge, the first bridge built across the Singapore River by Lieutenant Philip Jackson in 1823.

3202

1.

View of Telok Ayer Basin from Mount Palmer

John Thomson

1862–1865

Albumen print

2001-02535

This photograph presents Telok Ayer Basin prior to its reclamation, with several boats docked along the bay. It was taken from Mount Palmer which, by the 1870s, was considered for removal as it was obstructing access to town. Parts of the hill would be blasted to make way and provide landfill for the reclamation of Telok Ayer.

2.

Reclamation of Telok Ayer Bay

Early 1880s

Albumen print

1995-01566

This photograph depicts the reclamation of Telok Ayer Bay, which began in 1879 to create more land to link the existing commercial district located closer to the Singapore River with that of the New Harbour at Tanjong Pagar. To do so, the hills in the vicinity – Mount Erskine, Mount Palmer and Mount Wallich – were levelled to extend the shore at Telok Ayer by 42 acres (approximately 0.17 square kilometres). This

reclaimed area now comprises much of Singapore's Central Business District, including Cecil Street and Robinson Road.

3.

View of Singapore

1880s

Albumen print

2018-00692

This photograph documents a further development of the reclamation of Telok Ayer Bay. What is visible here is a newly paved Cecil Street on the reclaimed land, which has clearly extended the coastline.

4.

Construction of the New Telok Ayer Market

c.1890

Albumen print

2007-50642

The Telok Ayer Market's trademark octagonal building was first built in 1825. Initially a fish market, it was rebuilt in 1833 by George Dromgold Coleman when the original structure was considered unsafe. Coleman's building was demolished as part of the land reclamation of Telok Ayer Bay that began in 1879. This photograph shows the construction of the new Telok Ayer Market, which was built by James MacRitchie and opened in 1890. It was the first market built by the Municipal

Commission, using filigreed cast and wrought iron imported from Glasgow.

3203

Plan of Singapore

1910

Colour lithograph

2007-00842

A second reclamation at Telok Ayer was proposed in 1899 to extend the harbour beyond Raffles Quay. This was to accommodate the significant rise in shipping – although New Harbour (renamed Keppel Harbour in 1900) catered for this, many smaller vessels still preferred to dock at the Singapore River area. This town plan shows the area set aside for this second reclamation, indicating an expansion of 83 acres (approximately 0.34 square kilometres). This reclamation was riddled with problems and was only completed in 1932.

3204

1.

***Map of Singapore Town Shewing Building Allotments & Registered Numbers of Crown Leases* by H. E. McCallum**

1881

Lithograph with ink on paper

2018-00084

This map of Singapore town was produced by Acting Colonial Engineer Henry Edward McCallum in 1881 and drawn by Thambo Peter. It features a highly detailed topography and building allotment of Singapore town from Tanjong Pagar on

the left to Kallang on the right. Owned by the Collector of Land Revenues and Registrar of Deeds, Hancock Thomas Haughton, this map shows the plans for the use of the land to be reclaimed along the Telok Ayer Basin. From what are likely his own hand-drawn additions, there can be seen some roads that were to be built, such as one originally printed as “Robinson Quay” which Haughton has corrected in ink to “Robinson Road” – the road name which remains today.

2.

Specimens of *Barnea manilensis* (originally recorded as *Pholas mammillae*) collected from Telok Ayer

November 1900

On loan from Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum

These mollusc specimens were collected at Telok Ayer by the Raffles Museum likely between the 1870s and the 1900s, and provide a sense of the marine biodiversity of Telok Ayer Bay around the time of its reclamation. The *Barnea manilensis* bivalves, commonly known as piddocks, used to be found in soft rocks and clay-filled habitats at Telok Ayer but are now scarce.

3.

Foot of Mount Palmer

G.R. Lambert & Co.

1880s

Reproduction

1993-00285-025

4.

Road to New Harbour

G.R. Lambert & Co.

1880s

Reproduction

1994-04912

With the reclamation of Telok Ayer, there was a change in the coastal environment and the relocation of nearby settlements.

3205

1.

Singapore Town and City

1938

Colour lithograph

XXXX-02137-004

In the 1930s, the colonial government in Singapore embarked on the reclamation of the Kallang Basin and Beach Road. Kallang Basin was set aside for the construction of the Kallang Airport, opened in 1937, while the expanded Beach Road area was intended to create a new waterfront. The latter was realised only in the 1950s with the building of the Merdeka Bridge and the reclamation of the Esplanade into Queen Elizabeth Park (present-day Esplanade Park).

This 1938 map shows the plans for both projects, which would be the last major reclamation projects conducted by the colonial government. The Kallang Basin reclamation was heralded by the government for rehabilitating a mangrove area that was regarded as useless, but this impacted the Orang Laut coastal settlers there, including the Orang Biduanda Kallang.

2.

Opening ceremony of Kallang Airport

1937

Reproduction

Courtesy of Mythili S. L. Perumal

3.

Opening ceremony of Kallang Airport

1937

Gelatin silver print

2000-00881

The Kallang Airport was opened on 12 June 1937 by the Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Shenton Thomas. The top photograph depicts the opening ceremony, with B. Govindasamy Chettiar, the proprietor of the Indian Labour Company, seated with Sir Shenton.

4.

Aerial photograph of the Kallang Airport airfield

October 1946

Gelatin silver print

1998-00609

Gift of Mr Owen Ellison

This aerial photograph of the Kallang Airport airfield was taken by Cecil Owen Ellison of the Royal Air Force. Opened in 1937, the Kallang Airport was the first purpose-built civilian aerodrome in Singapore. Situated on reclaimed land around the Kallang Basin, the airport was designed to serve both land and sea planes. It ceased operations in 1955 following the opening of the new Paya Lebar Airport.

5.
The Singapore waterfront
Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill
c.1950s
Gelatin silver print
XXXX-13602

Taken by Carl A. Gibson-Hill, then-curator and later director of the Raffles Museum, this photograph shows an aeroplane shortly after taking off from Kallang Airport. The Fullerton Building can be seen on the horizon, along with some boats docked by the waterfront.

3206**Demolition of the National Stadium, from Project 37****Chow Chee Yong****2010****Polaroid photograph****2012-00133**

After Kallang Airport ceased operations in 1955, the reclaimed area occupied by the airfield was subsequently set aside as the site for the new National Stadium, which opened in 1973. The stadium hosted three Southeast Asian (SEA) Games, memorable sporting events such as the Malaysia Cup football tournament, and multiple National Day Parades. During its demolition in 2010, photographer Chow Chee Yong documented the process and captured the stadium's final moments.

3207**Map of Singapore City****September 1958****Colour lithograph****2018-00085**

The extent of Singapore's reclamation works during the colonial period – from Telok Ayer to the Beach Road waterfront and the Kallang Airport airfield – and, along with it, the increased urban development of downtown Singapore, are summed up in this large map of the city centre published in 1958 by the Singapore Chinese Booksellers Association.

3208**1.****Aerial photograph of the Singapore waterfront****1947****Gelatin silver print****1998-00612****Gift of Mr Owen Ellison**

While some reclamation along Beach Road had started in the 1840s, the major reclamation project that created the waterfront which we are familiar with today took place from the 1930s. Despite disruption by World War Two, part of the project was completed by the time this photograph was taken. Shot by Cecil Owen Ellison of the Royal Air Force, it presents a clear view of the extensions of the shoreline from the

Esplanade to Beach Road and Kallang. The entrance to the Stamford River can be seen here, with the rest of the river converted into a covered canal.

2.

View of Singapore waterfront

Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill

Late 1940s to early 1950s

Gelatin silver print

XXXX-16356

This photograph by Carl A. Gibson-Hill captures a close-to-sea-level view of the Singapore waterfront. It was most likely taken from Tanjong Rhu, which was partly reclaimed by the Japanese during World War Two, using largely Dutch prisoners of war for labour. This view shows sailing barges carrying timber at the waterfront, with the Cathay Building and the 7th Storey Hotel in the background.

3.

Photograph album presented to George Lowe as a souvenir of his visit to Singapore

1953

Gelatin silver prints

2017-01039

The Beach Road and Esplanade reclamation was fully completed with the opening of the Queen Elizabeth Walk on 30 May 1953, the Coronation Day of Queen Elizabeth II. The newly revamped promenade is featured in this album which

was presented later that year as a souvenir to George Lowe, a member of the 1953 British Mount Everest expedition together with Sir Edmund Hillary, who reached its summit on 29 May. Lowe was in Singapore with Sir Hillary to give a lecture to schoolchildren.

4.

Shell in Singapore publication

1970

Paper

2023-01310

Gift of Mdm Kwek Ping Cheng and Ng Ching Huei

Pulau Bukom, located off Singapore's western coast, has been used since the late 19th century by what is today the oil company Shell. This two-page spread from Shell's 1970 publication shows the extent of land reclamation that had since taken place on the island.

3300

Episode Three **Breaking New Ground**

Further reclamation took place under the post-independence government, with 138 square kilometres of land added between 1965 and 2015. This included the “Great Reclamation” of the East Coast – from which arose the Marine Parade housing estate, East Coast Park, and the East Coast Parkway – and the reclamation of Marina Bay to expand the city centre.

The scale of these projects reflected the rapid development of Singapore during this period and the increasing demands that this placed on a tiny island. Recognising the costs and limits of reclamation, this section considers more holistically how land can be optimised– a perennial question central to Singapore’s survival and success today and in the future.

3301**Physiographic map of Singapore from Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's Istana office****Early 1970s****Paper****2022-00596****Gift of the Prime Minister's Office**

This physiographic map of Singapore by the Planning Department was used in Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's office at the Istana in the 1970s. As part of the Ministry of National Development that oversaw national land use and planning, the Planning Department (which has since merged into the Urban Redevelopment Authority) was responsible for managing master plans and coordinating the physical development of Singapore. This map marks out areas of recent reclamation, including both the West Coast and the East Coast, as well as those proposed for future reclamation, such as Marina Bay.

3302**Singapore Concept Plan Map B****1971****Paper****2015-02025**

The Concept Plan (now known as the Long-Term Plan) is a strategic land use and transportation plan that guides Singapore's development. Reviewed every ten years, it is intended to ensure that there is sufficient land to meet long-

term population and economic growth needs while providing a good quality living environment. This map is taken from Singapore's first Concept Plan of 1971 which was drafted to address the infrastructural needs of the new nation, with key transport systems outlined such as the proposed Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) routes and the upcoming Changi Airport to be built on reclaimed land.

3303**Berita Singapura: Nation on the Move****1965**

Source: Ministry of Culture, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

This Berita Singapura newsreel footage provides an overview of various development projects taking place in Singapore in 1965. This includes the reclamation of Kallang for the provision of public housing, the widening of roads to ease traffic congestion, and the building of railway lines towards Jurong.

3304

1.

Mechanical tide gauge

c.1985

Wood, metal, paper

2013-00650

Used to measure water levels, this mechanical tide gauge belonged to United Surveyors, a company that conducts hydrographic surveys for port development, jetty construction, dredging works, reclamation works and exploration works.

2.

Marine Parade in the Past

Lim Kwong Ling

1970s

Reproduction from National Gallery Singapore Collection

2019-00010

Gift of Lim Kwong Ling & Family

Marine Parade was Singapore's first public housing estate built entirely on reclaimed land. The reclamation of the East Coast began in 1966 and, by the end of 1973, the first phase of the Marine Parade estate development had been completed. This photograph by Singapore photographer Lim Kwong Ling shows the estate in its early days of development. It was fully completed by 1976, replete with communal

facilities such as hawker centres, schools, a post office and a library.

3.

Postcard of beachgoers at East Coast Park

1970s

Paper

2008-04004

Postcard of East Coast Park swimming lagoon

Roland Quek

Mid-1970s

Paper

2008-04929

Postcard of Marine Parade housing estate

1983

Paper

2008-04604

The development of the Marine Parade housing estate in the 1970s was complemented by the construction of East Coast Park, whose first phase began in 1972 in tandem with ongoing land reclamation works along the coastline. In 1974, the government announced plans to develop East Coast Park into a beach resort with holiday chalets and sports, recreational and dining facilities. A swimming lagoon was completed at the park in 1976. Today, East Coast Park remains a popular destination for sports and recreation.

3305**Skyline of Singapore in 1976****Lai Kui Fang****1977****Oil on canvas****2007-01093****On loan from Istana Art Collection**

This panoramic painting of the Singapore skyline by artist Lai Kui Fang emphasises with rich and vibrant detail how the city centre has grown in density and height within the nation's first decade of independence. Singapore's development is presented as a work in progress, with the early stages of the reclamation of Marina Bay depicted in the background for the creation of Marina Centre.

3306**Marina Square Piling and Construction****Lai Kui Fang****1980****Oil on canvas****2007-01094****On loan from Istana Art Collection**

While Lai Kui Fang's adjacent panoramic view of the Singapore skyline gives us a distant peek into the reclamation of Marina Bay, this painting takes us to ground level to witness in person the construction work occurring on that

reclaimed land at Marina City. Within a few years, the Marina Square shopping mall and several hotels opened on this site.

3400

Episode Four

Shifting Sands

Singapore's land reclamation activities over the years have supported the nation's development and infrastructure needs. In reclaiming land to support its growth, Singapore has sought to develop and adopt more sustainable approaches to doing so.

Local artist Sim Chi Yin's photographic series *Shifting Sands*, documents the role that sand plays in land reclamation. A selection from her series is presented here, highlighting Singapore's ongoing plans in reclaiming land and building the Tuas Port, an automated, intelligent and sustainable container port expected to be the world's largest when it is completed in the 2040s. The importance of ensuring a sustainable approach has driven the pursuit of research-based innovative solutions at Tuas Port and more broadly in Singapore's future developments.

3401

1.

Shifting Sands #5

Sim Chi Yin

March 2017

Inkjet on cotton rag paper

2023-00186

This photograph shows construction material – possibly “manufactured sand” which is crushed granite – on a barge coming into Singapore’s east coast. Singapore has embraced research and development in exploring sustainable approaches to land reclamation. For instance, an ongoing reclamation project at Pulau Tekong is adopting the use of a polder – a low-lying tract of land constructed using a dike and a network of drains and water pumping systems – to significantly reduce the amount of sand required.

2.

Shifting Sands #9

Sim Chi Yin

April 2017

Inkjet on cotton rag paper

2023-00189

The Tuas Port is slated to become the world’s largest container terminal in a single location when it is completed in the 2040s, and will be built on partially reclaimed land. In this photograph, fresh parcels of artificial land are being consolidated at the Tuas reclamation site, where various sustainable sources of sand are being used. This includes

marine clay as well as earth excavated from Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) tunnelling works.

3.

Shifting Sands #17

Sim Chi Yin

March 2017

Inkjet on cotton rag paper

2023-00193

4.

Shifting Sands #18

Sim Chi Yin

March 2017

Inkjet on cotton rag paper

2023-00194

Caissons are watertight structures of reinforced concrete used in the building of sea walls required for land reclamation. These two photographs depict the process of casting giant caissons at the Caisson Casting Yard in Tuas. Each caisson, the size of a 10-storey block, takes about one week to be constructed, requiring 800 workers working round the clock on 12-hour shifts. This on-site prefabrication of caisson walls reduces waste and improves quality control.

5.

Shifting Sands #2

Sim Chi Yin

March 2017

Inkjet on cotton rag paper

2023-0018

Shifting Sands #4**Sim Chi Yin****February 2017****Inkjet on cotton rag paper****2023-00185**

These aerial photographs provide a bird's-eye view of the reclamation works at Tuas. On top of existing sustainable sources such as marine clay and earth excavated from MRT tunnelling, other alternatives are being considered, such as the repurposing of landfill waste from the Semakau Landfill by mixing it with cement.

3402

Moving House: A Story of the Singapore Turf Club and Redevelopment in Singapore

Land reclamation is one of several options in optimising land use in Singapore. Redevelopment and urban renewal are also concurrently pursued, where land use is reviewed and reprioritised to ensure its best use in the broader interest of the people. This display and video looks at the example of the Singapore Turf Club and its storied history interwoven with that of Singapore's redevelopment.

1.

Postcard titled "The Race Course, Singapore"

Early 20th century

Paper

1995-03683

2.

Chinese export silver mug

1875

Silver

On loan from Singapore Turf Club

The Singapore Sporting Club, predecessor to the Singapore Turf Club, was founded in 1842. This was a milestone in land use at that time, with recreational space being set aside amid what was a largely commercial settlement. One of the races held at Farrer Park was the Celestial Plate, which was presented by the Chinese residents of Singapore. This silver mug was a souvenir from the 1875 edition of the race.

3.

Postcard of aerial view of Bukit Timah Turf Club

c.1950s

Paper

2001-04391

4.

Postcard of Singapore Turf Club at Bukit Timah

c.1970s

Paper

2008-03914

The Singapore Sporting Club was renamed the Singapore Turf Club in 1924. In 1927, the Turf Club sold its Farrer Park premises to the Singapore Improvement Trust (predecessor to the Housing and Development Board), which developed the area for some of Singapore's early public housing. The club purchased a former plantation in Bukit Timah and built a new race course there, which opened in 1933. Designed by Swan and MacLaren, it boasted a three-storey grandstand and expanded facilities and capacity.

5.

Singapore Derby trophy

1988

Silver gilt, marbled stone

On loan from Singapore Turf Club

The popular Singapore Derby race was held at the Singapore Sporting Club from 1880 to 1910. It was revived in 1959 at the Bukit Timah premises until the track's closure in 1999.

6.

Singapore Turf Club brochure

Late 1990s

Paper

On loan from Singapore Turf Club

7.

Singapore Turf Club Transitlink Card Collector's Pack

1999

Paper

On loan from Singapore Turf Club

In 1999, the Singapore Turf Club relocated to a new premises in Kranji, following an announcement in 1993 that the Bukit Timah site was earmarked for residential development. More recently in early 2024, the government stated its plans to build a Bukit Timah public housing project on this site – a first in the estate in almost 40 years, with the potential to provide up to 20,000 homes.

8.

Singapore Gold Cup

2013

Silver gilt, wood

On loan from Singapore Turf Club

The Singapore Turf Club's last race, the Grand Singapore Gold Cup, was held on 5 October 2024. The site at Kranji has been slated for housing developments and other uses as part of Singapore's larger redevelopment plans.

4000

Chapter Four

Flows of People

Who built Singapore and made it into what it is today? To answer this is to acknowledge local communities who were already here in the 19th century, as well as the diverse waves of people who arrived from around the world to these shores, and the descendants of those who settled here.

Singapore's location at the crossroads of global trade routes and its relative prosperity attracted people from all walks of life seeking better opportunities. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, many arrived via sea routes at either Johnston's Pier or Keppel Harbour. While some had travelled here in luxury first-class cabins, the majority were steerage or deck passengers who brought little with them beyond a few clothes and their hopes for a better future. Regardless of status, the newcomers contributed their labour, skills and dreams towards developing the country and keeping it running and progressing.

The stories of the first-generation migrants presented here span from the 19th century to the present. These individuals have, through their everyday lives and work, collectively shaped Singapore's unique physical landscape and multicultural social identity.

4100

Episode One

An Early Multicultural Population

Right from the 19th century, following the establishment of a British trading post here, accounts of Singapore often remarked on its diverse population rubbing shoulders at the busy port.

The English explorer and writer Isabella L. Bird wrote of Singapore in 1883: "The city is ablaze with color and motley with costume... Every Oriental costume from the Levant to China floats through the streets – robes of silk, satin, brocade, and white muslin... Parsees in spotless white, Jews and Arabs in dark rich silks; Klings in Turkey red and white; Bombay merchants in great white turbans... Malays in red sarongs, Sikhs in pure white Madras muslin... and Chinamen of all classes, from the coolie in his blue or brown cotton, to the wealthy merchant in his frothy silk crepe and rich brocade..."*

The diversity of 19th and early 20th century Singapore was also documented through photography and art, although these

works often exhibit an Orientalist perspective and exoticise the people they depict.

**The terms "Klings" and "Chinamen" in this quotation refer to the South Indians and the Chinese respectively, but are generally considered offensive today and not used by the National Museum outside of historical documents.*

4101

Arrivals and Departures

Video (3 mins 38 secs)

Through archival footage and personal accounts, this video offers glimpses of the journeys of seafaring travellers, capturing moments of their arrival at and departure from Singapore.

Interviews courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

Images from the National Museum of Singapore Collection

Archival footage licensed courtesy of:

- The Penn Museum
- Huntley Film Archives
- Periscope Film

The travel trunks and chests that accompanied early immigrants on their journeys to Singapore were often the only mementos that they had of their homeland. Many would keep these in their homes for decades after their arrival, using them to store their personal belongings.

1.

Travelling bag

Early 20th century

Leather, metal

2000-07311

The label inside this bag indicates that it was used by a Mr Koh Ah Kow on his trip to Penang on the SS *Kedah*, a Straits Steamship Company vessel. The company was established in 1890 as a joint venture between the British firm Mansfield & Company and Singapore-based Straits Chinese merchants Tan Jiak Kim, Tan Keong Saik, and Lee Cheng Yan. In its early years, the company specialised in the transportation of tin ore and cash crops along the west coast of the Malay Peninsula as well as the provision of passage for migrant labourers from China to the region.

2.

Jones Brothers & Co travelling trunk with bolts

Late 19th to early 20th century

Steel

2014-00292

Gift of Mrs Kum Kew Wells

3.

Travelling trunk with runners

1930s

Steel

FL-0159

Many travelling trunks from the late 19th to early 20th century were made of wood or steel, with strong locks to survive rough handling over long journeys on ships as well as rail and road travel. The sturdiest trunks were waterproof and had protrusions such as bolts or runners on top for

protection when other pieces of luggage were stacked on them.

4.

Travelling trunk

Early 20th century

Steel

2002-00996

Gift of Seah Yee Chuan

5.

Travelling trunk

Early 20th century

Steel

1994-00654

Gift of Fok Kwok Onn

These two trunks belonged to women who used them when travelling to Singapore and as storage for their personal belongings afterwards. Many Chinese and Indian women came to Singapore in the early 20th century upon marriage to men who had migrated here earlier.

6.

Travelling trunk

Early 20th century

Steel

XXXX-09517

This trunk likely belonged to a well-travelled Dutchman named Schoggers. He may have been quite wealthy as his

trunk lid displays stickers from various European hotels and the inside contains a long list of clothing that he had given to a tailor in Surabaya, Indonesia, in 1928, including a pantaloon (or trousers) and jackets.

7.

Travel chest

1900

Leather, brass

1992-00441-001

8.

Travel chest

Undated

Wood

2000-07279

9.

Travelling trunk with remnants of newspaper lining

Undated

Steel

1996-00002

Gift of Goh Kuan Leong

10.

Rattan suitcase

Early 20th century

Rattan

1995-02511

Gift of Yee Koon Seng

11.
Travel chest
c.1930s
Bamboo
XXXX-09233

These travel chests, trunk and suitcase were used by migrants from China to Singapore, and are suggestive of the different social classes of these migrants. While wooden chests and plain steel trunks would have been available at affordable prices, more ornate trunks, such as those with leather components, and the ornamented bamboo chest would have cost considerably more. The rattan suitcase was likely owned by a businessman as the purpose of early suitcases was literally to carry suits.

Many migrants, particularly those of the labouring class, had few possessions, typically packing merely a few sets of clothes, bedding and food for the journey. This display shows some of the items which such migrants may have brought with them and the documents they would have obtained during the immigration process.

4102

1.

Indian blanket know as khes

2.

Rice for the journey

Travellers with the cheapest tickets had to cook their own meals.

3.

Straw mat for sleeping on

4.

Shirt from Chaozhou in eastern Guangdong, China

1920s

Linen

G-1067

5.

Chinese playing cards

Undated

Paper

XXXX-08936

Until the mid 20th century, one of the few forms of entertainment for steerage passengers on ship journeys was playing cards that some of them brought along.

6.

**Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company
(P&O) luggage label**

Early 20th century

Paper

2008-01117

7.

**Certificate of Admission to Singapore for rickshaw puller
Sim Ah Pong from Fujian, China**

1938

Paper

XXXX-02623

8.

**Landing permit for Ho Ngan Njoen arriving in Singapore
from Indonesia**

11 March 1940

Reproduction

2002-01018

Gift of Mr Chong Kim Hua

9.

**Certificate of Registration issued by the Chinese
Consulate in Singapore for amah Au Chooi Hee from
Guangdong, China**

1950s

Paper

1994-05027

Gift of Yap Kam Chung

Like their counterparts today, travellers of the past had to obtain immigration clearance before entering Singapore. From 1928, the colonial government introduced regulations to control immigration, and from 1933, new immigrants had to pay a fee to obtain a landing permit. This had to be exchanged for a Certificate of Admission after a month. Ethnic Chinese immigrants also had to register with the Consulate General of the Republic of China in Singapore to receive a registration certificate.

10.

Indian five-rupee note

1930s–1940s

Paper

NA-0058

11.

Chinese five-yuan note

1935

Paper

NA-0149

12.

Straits Settlements five-dollar note

1916

Paper

1998-00376

13.

George V Indian rupee

1917

Silver

N-0052

14.

Yuan Shikai Chinese dollar

1914

Silver

N-0032-A

15.

Edward VII Straits Settlements dollar

1908

Silver

N-0007-A

There were various currencies in circulation in colonial Singapore, and migrants would have brought some of their home currency for initial use until they found jobs here.

4103

These images depict some of the diversity of early Singapore. Even before the British established a trading post in 1819, there were already Malays, Orang Laut (or “sea people” in Malay) and some Chinese residents here, although the size and diversity of the population increased rapidly from that time.

1.

Photograph of Orang Laut coin divers

Maynard Owen Williams

1937

Paper

2011-00946

The Orang Laut were seafaring people who lived on their boats and included groups for whom the rivers of Singapore were their ancestral homes. As Singapore transformed into a busy port from the 19th century, the Orang Laut also adapted, and some of them found ways to use their swimming prowess to earn money, the currency needed for survival in the changing world. For example, Orang Laut boys would canoe out to sea to meet steamships and dive for coins thrown by the passengers. Some even performed tricks such as smoking a cigar while diving or playing a paddle-and-ball game against the side of the ship to entertain the passengers.

2.

A view of the P&O wharf and local people in Singapore

Joseph Eduard Adolf Spier

c.1920s

Offset lithograph

2007-50835

This print by the Dutch cartoonist Jo Spier shows people engaged in a variety of activities at Keppel Harbour. Spier uses different skin tones to indicate the ethnicities of these highly-stylised characters.

3.

A page from Journal Des Voyages titled "Ethnography of the Far East: Types of Singapore", with illustrations reproduced from sketches by Christian Wilhelm Allers

1913

Hand-coloured lithograph

2017-00664

This page from a French magazine about the people of Singapore depicts (clockwise from top) a young boy working at the port, an elderly Malay shellfish fisherman, two young Malay boys chatting in the sun and an Indian police officer.

4.

***Carte de visite* portraits**

August Sachtler

1860s

Albumen print

2017-01033-002 & 004, 2018-00702-005, 006 & 008

Many Europeans wanted to capture the “types” of people living in Singapore through photographs, often intentionally posed to enhance their appearance of exoticism. The *carte de visite* (meaning “visiting card” in French) photograph format allowed European residents and tourists to use these as calling cards, send them home to friends and family, or keep and display them as souvenirs. These portraits therefore show a slice of the diversity of people living in Singapore as seen through, and photographed for, the European gaze.

5.

***Carte de visite* portrait**

Henry Schuren

1874

Albumen print

2020-00588

Some *carte de visite* portraits such as this more intimate one of a child with his *amah* or servant were likely taken as a keepsake for the family.

6.

Postcard titled “Types of natives, Singapore”

G. R. Lambert & Co.

19th century

Paper

2011-02853

This postcard shows a collage of studio and street photographs taken in Singapore with people of different ethnicities.

7.

A Malay family

Early 20th century

Gelatin silver print

XXXX-15375

8.

A Straits Chinese family

1910s

Gelatin silver print

2015-00736

Gift of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee

On loan from The Peranakan Museum

9.

An Indian family

G. R. Lambert & Co.

c.1890

Paper

2001-03515

4200

Episode Two **Building a City**

Much of the infrastructure of post-1819 Singapore was built on the backs of migrant labourers from India and China, some of whom had arrived by choice while others were brought in as indentured labourers or convicts. The heaviest, most physically demanding works such as repairing roads, building bridges and quarrying stone were mainly undertaken by Indian convicts, particularly between 1825 and 1873.

While the earlier migrants were primarily men, the 1920s to 1930s saw an influx of female migrants such as the Samsui women, who arrived from China during this period and were a common sight at construction sites even up to the 1970s.

The lives of these early migrants were often difficult, with long working hours, backbreaking toil and cramped, unsanitary shared living quarters. Yet they persevered, driven by the promise of better wages than in their homelands and the hope of improving their families' lives.

4201**Diorama depicting a coolie room from the 1900s****Mar Edjawan, Elmer Gernale and Arthur Concepcion****c.1983****Wood, metal****2020-00340**

In densely-populated areas such as Chinatown, living quarters colloquially known as “coolie keng” were built, with rooms that were subdivided into many sleeping cubicles made of multi-tiered wooden bunks. Labourers would rent a single cubicle costing between \$1.50 to \$4.50 a month or even share it with someone who worked alternate shifts. This diorama reveals many details of the coolies’ lives, who are seen here to be resting, eating or smoking opium. Opium helped to ease both the physical and mental pains that labourers faced, but addiction could eventually cost them their jobs and living quarters.

4202

1.

Postcard of Samsui women having a meal

Undated

Paper

XXXX-12939

2.

Chinese coolies having a meal

c.1900

Paper

2001-05153

Early migrant labourers generally lived frugally on meagre wages, sending much of their earnings to their families back home. Consequently, their meals were simple, consisting primarily of rice accompanied by condiments such as pickled vegetables. A popular dish among the Chinese coolies, especially those working around the Singapore River, was *bak kut teh* (literally “meat bone tea” in Hokkien), which they believed would help them to maintain their strength and health. *Bak kut teh* has since become an iconic and popular Singaporean dish.

3.

Group of Indian and Chinese labourers

Attributed to August Sachtler

c.1870

Albumen print

1994-05110

This group of labourers are probably excavating a quarry. The Indian *mandore* (overseer) to the left of the image is dressed in white and holds a large umbrella, while the European overseer, also in white, sits in a horse-drawn carriage on the far right. By comparison, most of the labourers wear only a loincloth or sarong and are barefoot. Children are also seen working alongside the men.

4.

Photograph of workers involved in the construction of Ocean Building

1920s–1930s

Reproduction

1994-00114

These Chinese, Malay, Indian and Indonesian labourers and British engineers built the second Ocean Building at Collyer Quay using the latest construction techniques at that time, replacing the earlier 1864 structure. Here, the workers are seen posing at the roof of the building with its distinctive tower.

4203

1.

Postcard titled "Road Rolling by Bullocks, Singapore"

1905

Paper

1991-00494

2.

Postcard titled "Road Repairing, Singapore"

c.1910

Paper

1991-00435

3.

Samsui women working at a construction yard

1938–1939

Gelatin silver print

2007-50928-067, 068 & 069

Found in an album belonging to a Royal Air Force pilot who served in Singapore, these photographs were collectively labelled as "Concrete Lizzies", a British term for the Samsui women who worked as construction labourers.

Samsui women were so called because most of them came from the Sanshui (*Samsui* in Cantonese) district of modern-day Guangdong in China. They were recognisable by their folded red headscarves, which protected them from heat and dust, while also making them more visible at construction sites to reduce the likelihood of accidents. Their sandals were

usually made of rubber from disused tyres as seen in these photographs.

4.

Souvenir magazine published for the anniversaries of five construction-related workers' unions and Chinese pioneer Lu Pan's birthday

1960

Paper

2008-01393

These pages detail the work processes and the difficult, often dangerous, working conditions of workers at sawmills and brick-making factories in the mid-20th century. Although technology had advanced by then, heavy manual labour was still required. The photograph captions convey bitterness towards the fact that the workers worked long hours but were poorly paid, while their bosses profited from their labour.

4204**Set of clothing worn by a Chinese coolie****Mid-20th century****Fabric****1995-01556-001 & 002**

Coolies (labourers) generally wore practical, hardy clothing in dark shades of blue that did not stain easily. The open-front shirt allowed them to wear it open or closed. This shirt has a zipped inner pocket to store small items such as money.

A labourer's hat**c.1950****Bamboo****XXXX-09892****On loan from Asian Civilisations Museum**

Made of plaited bamboo, such hats were commonly worn by labourers who worked long hours under the elements.

4205

1.

Brick-making mould

Late 19th century

Wood, iron

2000-08305

This brick-making mould was used by a 19th-century Malabari (a term referring to people from the southwestern coast of India) Muslim immigrant in Singapore. The top of the mould is lined with iron to reduce wear from repeated scraping to remove excess clay. Bricks were handmade using sand or water to prevent clay from sticking to moulds in sand-moulding or slop-moulding methods respectively. Both methods required coordination with a team of workers, speed, strength, and significant skill on the moulder's part to produce well-shaped bricks that did not crack upon firing.

2.

Handmade brick from the Bras Basah Indian convict jail

c.1853

Clay

2005-01160

This brick, inscribed with "AD 1853", would have been made by Indian convict labourers, who were ordered by the colonial authorities to build their own jail at Bras Basah between 1841 and 1860. The first Indian convicts were sent to Singapore in 1825 and were initially housed in temporary sheds that loosely formed a *kampung* (or "village" in Malay). Convicts

were categorised into different classes, and good conduct over a period of time could help them rise up the classes, with those in higher levels being given greater privileges and lighter jobs.

4206

Loh Ah Kwai shares about her work and hardships as a Samsui woman.

Interview courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore (NAS)

Images from the National Museum of Singapore Collection and courtesy of

Mr Tee Hong Seng, San Ming Enterprises (NMS Collection)

National Archives of Singapore

Kouo Shang-Wei Collection, NAS

Singapore Tourist Promotion Board Collection, NAS

Ronni Pinsler Collection, NAS

S. V. Shanmugam explains how he became a stevedore with the Singapore Harbour Board.

Interview courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore (NAS)

Images from the National Museum of Singapore Collection and courtesy of

Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, NAS

Wan Hong Cheong describes brick-making processes at the factories where he worked

Interview courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore (NAS)

Images from the National Museum of Singapore Collection and courtesy of Mr Lim Lam San (NMS Collection) Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, NAS

(Image on the wall)

**Samsui woman fetching water at a construction site
1978**

Reproduction

Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission.

4300

Episode Three

Traversing the City

Early migrants who were willing to operate labour-intensive forms of transport helped to make the 19th-century town convenient to get around. Gharries (horse-drawn carriages) and rickshaws were the primary modes of land transport at the time. Rickshaws were the most affordable and easily available choice for many commuters, and were even hired by businessmen and hawkers to transport their goods. Trams were introduced in the late 19th century and public buses only in the early 20th century.

These various options contributed to an increasingly connected and robust local transport system, supporting business and commercial activities as well as facilitating day-to-day commutes as the city developed and expanded.

4301**A bus driver's uniform from the Singapore Traction Company****Circa mid-20th century****Fabric****G-0657-A & B****Bus driver's badge from the Singapore Traction Company****1930–1945****Metal****1995-06232**

The earliest buses in Singapore were small unlicensed seven-seaters nicknamed “mosquito buses” which were mostly run by immigrants from Fujian, China. After the British-owned Singapore Traction Company (STC) was established in 1925, it dominated the operations of trolley buses and motor buses in the city centre during the pre-war years, pushing the mosquito buses to the outskirts. However, the Japanese Occupation caused heavy losses to STC's vehicles and, by the 1960s, it was struggling to survive. The company eventually closed down in 1971 with other bus companies taking over its vehicle fleet.

4302

1.

Gharries and rickshaws at Cavenagh Bridge by the Singapore River

G. R. Lambert & Co.

c.1890

Albumen print

2007-50908

2.

A gharry with a Malay driver and European passengers

Late 19th century

Albumen print

XXXX-15174-069

Most gharry drivers were Malay or Indian, while their passengers were primarily Europeans.

3.

A rickshaw puller with his passengers

Early 20th century

Gelatin silver print

2008-01120

4.

An elderly rickshaw puller resting by the roadside

1938-1939

Gelatin silver print

2007-50928-182

The rickshaw pullers in Singapore mainly came from southern China. They played an important role in providing an affordable means of transport especially around the town areas, but this notoriously difficult job took a heavy toll on their bodies. As such, most rickshaw pullers only worked for five to seven years before returning to China, and many turned to opium in the meantime to cope with the physical suffering.

5.

Print of a collapsed rickshaw puller on a Singapore street

Hugo Vilfred Pedersen

1908

Colour lithograph

XXXX-01425

This print is from Hugo Vilfred Pedersen's book, *Door den Oost-Indischen Archipel* ("Through the East Indian Archipelago"), a sketch-journal of the artist's five-year journey through the region. Pedersen's portrayals are often sympathetic, as in this print where the collapsed rickshaw puller can be seen to be rather elderly with a hard-worn body and bare feet. Rickshaw pullers often went barefoot as the alternative was to use rubber sandals made from strips of old tyres, which were uncomfortable to run in and stuck to the tarred roads in hot weather.

6.

“The Rikisha Coolie” from *Straits Produce*, Vol. 3

1 April 1925

Reproduction

2007-00856

This poem is from *Straits Produce*, a satirical magazine targeted mainly at European migrants in the Straits Settlements, including Singapore. It critiques the behaviour of European rickshaw passengers while describing the hard conditions of a rickshaw puller’s life.

7.

Trishaw rider Lian Leng Kim’s licence

1951

Paper

1997-02922

8.

Trishaw licence armband from the Singapore Municipal Commission

1947

Metal, leather

2008-06076

Gift of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCCI)

Although the earliest trishaws or “pedal rickshaws” plied Singapore’s streets from 1914, they only became more common after the Japanese Occupation, when there was a scarcity of petrol for motor vehicles coupled with the banning of rickshaws by the colonial authorities on humanitarian

grounds in 1947. Also operated mainly by Chinese immigrants, the trishaw was faster and commanded higher fares, but was less manoeuvrable than the rickshaw.

9.

A trishaw rider and passenger

1960s

Reproduction

RAFSA Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

10.

Bus ticket

1960s

Paper

1995-00223

Gift of Mr Maurice Kayser

11.

Ticket punch used by a bus conductor

c.1940s–1970s

Metal

2007-55078

Before fare card and automated tap card systems, commuters had to buy physical tickets for bus rides. Until the 1980s, bus conductors issued tickets and collected fares. They would punch out the bus stop number at which passengers boarded to track the distance travelled and prevent the ticket from being reused.

4303

Lee Soon Pah provides an overview of his career with the Singapore Traction Company

Interview courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore (NAS)

Images from the National Museum of Singapore Collection and courtesy of

F. W. York Collection, NAS

P. Klassen Collection, NAS

The Theatre Practice Collection, NAS

Liu Tuan Li explains how he became a rickshaw puller and the difficulties he faced

Video licensed courtesy of Mediacorp Pte Ltd

Subbiah Bullikutte Naidu recounts his experiences as a bullock cart owner and driver

Interview courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

Images from the National Museum of Singapore Collection

(Image on the wall)

Driver of a jumbo bus

1974

Reproduction

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4400

Episode Four

Protecting the people

Singapore today has developed a reputation for safety and order. Its police force was established very early in 1820, shortly after it became a British trading post. By the mid-19th century, the force employed over a hundred policemen, comprising primarily Malays and Indians. The Singapore Volunteer Corps (SVC), originally formed by European immigrants as the Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps, supplemented internal security.

Although the SVC, which evolved into the People's Defence Force after Singapore's independence in 1965, afforded a credible defence force based on volunteerism, it had its limitations. As such, National Service was introduced in 1967 to rapidly expand Singapore's defence capabilities through compulsory male conscription.

Another crucial aspect of Singapore's urban defence is fire protection. The city's early wooden structures and thatched roofs were highly flammable, making firefighters essential in

safeguarding the city as large fires were common even until the 1960s. The first Singapore Fire Brigade was established in the late 19th century by European estate owners, which later became a formalised professional brigade. Today, its successor the Singapore Civil Defence Force has a broader mandate of providing rescue and emergency medical services alongside firefighting.

4401

For much of its early history, Singapore's police force was understaffed and under-resourced. It hence struggled to control rising crime rates and secret society influence. One of the solutions was the establishment of the Sikh Police Contingent at Pearl's Hill, Chinatown, in 1881. Sikhs, who originate from Punjab, India, were chosen as they were considered to be loyal and trustworthy by the colonial government. The contingent was tasked with maintaining peace and handling incidents relating to public order disruptions, as well as certain overseas assignments.

1.

Straits Settlements Police swagger stick belonging to PC Lall Singh

1930s–1940s

Wood, metal

2023-00487

Gift of Atma Singh

Swagger sticks provided an appearance of authority even when an officer was in off-duty clothing and were an accompaniment to formal dress uniforms.

2.

Photograph of Sikh Police Contingent with temple officials at the Silat Road Sikh Temple (then commonly known as the Police Gurdwara)

2 December 1931

Paper

2000-03698

The first Police Gurdwara was located near the Sikh Police Contingent's barracks. However, as the community felt the need for a larger place of worship with attached accommodation for newly arrived Sikh migrants, a plot of land at Silat Road was selected for building the new gurdwara and lodging house for its location near the harbour and railway station. Completed in 1924, the new Police Gurdwara, called the Silat Road Sikh Temple, was built primarily from funds raised by Sikh members of the police force in Singapore and Malaya.

3.

Descriptive Roll of Colony of Singapore Pensioner Lall Singh

29 June 1948

Reproduction

2023-00490

Gift of Atma Singh

Lall Singh arrived in Singapore in 1931 to join the Sikh Police Contingent. During his service as a Police Constable, Singh

assisted with transporting prisoners between Singapore, Hong Kong and Christmas Island by steamer.

4.

Request letter to the Police Commissioner for forwarding of pension to Singapore

10 April 1948

Paper

2023-00496

Gift of Atma Singh

After World War Two, the Sikh Police Contingent was disbanded due to high attrition rates. Its members were given a ticket home to India, three months of paid leave and, subsequently, a pension sent to their local address. Singh took the trip to India but returned to Singapore, requesting in this letter for his pension to be sent to a Singapore address after he had decided, as many other migrants did, to settle down here with his family.

5.

Photograph of the first People's Defence Force Non-Commissioned Officers orientation course at PDF Training Centre, Maju Camp

1968

Paper

2021-01170

Gift of Mr Seet Ah Bah

The People's Defence Force (PDF) was established in 1965 as a part-time paramilitary defence force. Driven by volunteers, it was intended as a reserve combat unit to supplement the regular Singapore Army. Since the PDF was derived from the earlier Singapore Volunteer Corps, it was operational even before the conscription-based National Service was implemented in 1967.

4402

1.

**Set of World War Two medals awarded to PC Lall Singh
1939–1945**

Metal, fabric

2023-00488

Gift of Atma Singh

During the Japanese Occupation, Lall Singh continued serving as a Police Constable. Although it is not known what other roles Singh may have played during World War Two, this array of medals suggests that he likely acted commendably.

2.

Police rattle with folding handle

Late 19th century

Wood, lead

XXXX-10989

On loan from Asian Civilisations Museum

Wooden rattles like this were used by policemen in the 19th century to raise the alarm and call for help. When swung quickly, the rattle's wooden tongue snaps against the gearwheel to produce a loud noise. Such rattles could even be used as a makeshift weapon in a pinch as they were weighted with lead to make them easier to swing. By the 20th century, rattles were replaced by whistles which were lighter to carry and could be heard from further distances.

3.

"The History of a Banishee" by J. H. Tyte from *Straits Produce*, Vol. 7

1928-1929

Paper

2007-00858

4.

Photograph of two Chinese immigrants banished from Singapore

1908

Glass lantern slide

2009-03481

Banishment was used by the British administration to remove undesirable persons from Singapore. It was principally applied to China-born immigrants who were headmen in secret societies or involved in politically subversive activities. The rare photograph on the right shows mugshots of banishees Tan Hong Chu and Sim Hay, while the illustrated story next to it published in the satirical magazine *Straits Produce* presents a tongue-in-cheek take on how some Chinese immigrants may have landed themselves in trouble.

5.

A Singapore Volunteer Corps soldier with his motorcycle c.1910s

Print from glass plate negative

XXXX-14493

6.

Roll of Honour of Members of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, World War II 1939–1945

c.1945

Paper, leather

1995-01964

Singapore Volunteer Corps Captain's cap with badge

c.1890

Fabric, leather, metal

1996-01941

The badge on the Singapore Volunteer Corps (SVC) cap in the showcase on the right features the motto “In Oriente Primus”, meaning “First in the East”, as the SVC was the first of its kind in the region. It was established in 1854 by European residents to assist the police in response to the Hokkien-Teochew Riots that year. Despite being ineligible to volunteer their service until years later, the Chinese, Arab, Chetty Melaka and Malay communities donated funds for the corps to purchase guns in 1889. A Chinese company and a Eurasian company were added in 1901, a Malay company in 1910, and a Scottish company in 1922.

Some of the major events that the SVC assisted in include the Sepoy Mutiny of 1915, the defence of key installations during the Japanese invasion in World War Two, the training of recruits from 1954 to 1956 under the National Service Ordinance, and installation defence during the Konfrontasi period of the 1960s.

4403

Atma Singh, the son of a Straits Settlements policeman from the Sikh Contingent, shares about his father's work and legacy

Special thanks to Mr Atma Singh

Chan Chon Hoe, who grew up in the 1910s to 1920s, recalls how early firefighters operated

Interview courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

Images from the National Museum of Singapore Collection and reprinted with permission from

The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited

Sir Alexander Oppenheim, a mathematics professor and lance bombardier in the Singapore Royal Artillery (Volunteer), recounts how he became a prisoner of war

Interview courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore (NAS)

Images from the National Museum of Singapore Collection and courtesy of

Allan and Shane Riley – Sons of Albert Riley RAMC (NMS Collection)

National Archives of Singapore

Raffles College Collection, NAS

Quah We Ho Collection, NAS

Patrick Klassen Collection, NAS

The National Heritage Board, despite all reasonable efforts, has been unable to trace/identify the copyright owners of this image. We invite the rightful owners to make contact.

(Image on the wall)

Police cadets at the Police Training School in Singapore

Reproduction

Singapore Police Force Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

4404**1.****Firefighters in front of a fire station****c.1906****Paper****1995-00597**

Fire was a constant hazard to the early wood and attap buildings in Singapore. Before 1869, fires were attended to by various groups such as the police, soldiers, or even convicts. Singapore's first firefighters included notable estate owners of the time, who volunteered to form a brigade in 1869. However, this brigade only lasted 15 years and a professional service under the banner of the Singapore Fire Brigade was established in 1888.

2.**Button from the Singapore Fire Brigade****Early 20th century****Metal****1999-02734-003**

This button features a lion in front of a coconut palm tree, an old symbol for Singapore that was adopted by the Singapore Fire Brigade as its logo. A version of the symbol was also used in the badges of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, and subsequently for the coat of arms for the City of Singapore in 1948.

3.

Button from the Singapore Fire Brigade

Undated

Metal

2000-03207

This button shows a version of a popular design used by fire brigades in various parts of the world – a helmet above crossed axes, representing a firefighter's tools.

4.

Photographs of a major fire outbreak and rescue work at Geylang

1933

Paper

2003-00434

These photographs show firefighters working fearlessly to put out the fire at pioneering businessman Tan Kah Kee's rubber and soap factory in Geylang. The *Malaya Tribune* reported that "by the gallant co-operation of the European and Asiatic members of the Singapore Fire Brigade the blaze was subdued" and nearby buildings were saved despite the initial "huge tongues of flame [that] leapt over a hundred feet into the air, and the dense columns of black smoke", which did not stop the firefighters from getting close to the burning buildings to put them out.

4405**A police constable's uniform****Early to mid-20th century****Fabric****1996-01806-001 & 002****Straits Settlements police belt****Late 19th century****Leather, metal****2009-02270**

Police constables in Singapore patrolled in khaki uniforms adapted with shorts for its tropical climate until the 1960s. The elite Sikh Contingent, established in the 1880s, required recruits to be at least 175 centimetres tall with a minimum chest measurement of 96.5 centimetres.

4500

Episode Five

Caring for others

Those who came to Singapore in search of a better life sometimes chose, or found themselves in, care-related occupations that improved the lives of others. Many of them were women who supported other women, such as amahs who did domestic chores and took care of children, and midwives who looked after maternal health.

One group of amahs were the majie (meaning “mother and sister” in Chinese) – women from Guangdong, China who underwent the sor hei (or “combing up”) ceremony where they would plait their hair or tie it into a bun, and take a vow of celibacy. In Singapore, they developed a reputation for being loyal and hardworking, with many remaining with the same family for decades. There were also Malay and Indian domestic workers, who were more commonly known as ayahs.

Today, migrant domestic workers from various Asian countries continue to form an important pillar of the nation’s

workforce by supporting Singapore's families and their caregiving needs, particularly for households where all the adults are working full-time.

4501

1.

Poem titled "Jean's Amah" in the satirical magazine *Straits Produce*, Vol. 4-6

1925-1927

Reproduction

2007-00857

2.

Postcard of Chinese *amahs* with their employers' children

c.1905

Paper

1996-02687

3.

Majie Leong Kun Toh's comb

Mid-20th century

Wood

2017-00898

Gift of Dr Mark Lu

4.

Majie Leong Kun Toh's hair clip

Mid-20th century

Plastic

2017-00899

Gift of Dr Mark Lu

Majie Leong Kun Toh had undergone the *sor hei* ceremony to become a "self-combing woman", taking a vow of celibacy.

She joined the Lu family in 1936 and worked for them until her passing in 1987, except during the Japanese Occupation when she was separated from them. The family remembers her to be an excellent cook. Leong's clothes can also be seen here on the mannequin.

5.

Majie Sister Mei with Si Jing's first son Ping Wai

1954

Paper

2002-00863-092

Gift of Wu Sijing

6.

Majie Sister Cui with Si Jing's second son Hooe Wai on his second birthday

1959

Paper

2002-00863-095

Gift of Wu Sijing

These majies were employed by Si Jing (pen name of Ng Soo Lui), a prolific Singapore-born writer, and her husband Huang Da Li, to look after their children. Both *majies* are seen wearing black-and-white samfoos.

4502**Majie Leong Kun Toh's samfoo top and trousers****Mid-20th century****Cotton, silk****2017-00889, 2017-00895****Gift of Dr Mark Lu**

The majority of the female domestic workers in early- to mid-20th-century Singapore were *amahs* and *majies* who had left their homes in Guangdong, China, to escape poverty and labouring in the fields after the decline of the region's silk industry. Most of them wore simple black-and-white samfoos by which they came to be recognised.

Read about *majie* Leong's story in the nearby showcase where her comb and hair clip are on display.

Traditional Chinese patchwork baby carrier**c.1950s****Fabric****1999-01370****Gift of Ms Lilian Lee**

Such handmade carriers, also known as *mei tai* (literally "carrying strap" in Cantonese), were used by women to carry babies while keeping their hands free. The carrier's straps were traditionally twisted together rather than tied to allow for quick and easy adjustments during the day.

4503

1.

Photograph of midwife trainees including Ong Lee Tin with Dr Benjamin Sheares

1940s

Paper

2018-00726

Gift of Mr Leong Kwai Wah

This photograph shows a group of trainee midwives at Kandang Kerbau Hospital (known today as KK Women's and Children's Hospital) under Dr Benjamin Sheares (seated, fourth from the left). Sheares was renowned in the field of obstetrics and gynaecology, and later became Singapore's second President. One of the women, Ong Lee Tin (second row, far right), was registered as a midwife during the Japanese Occupation.

2.

Midwife Ong Lee Tin's name card

1960s

Paper

2018-00719

Gift of Mr Leong Kwai Wah

3.
Midwife Ong Lee Tin's logbook
1945-1959
Paper
2018-00724
Gift of Mr Leong Kwai Wah

Ong Lee Tin was a midwife with the State Clinic at Havelock Road. She assisted with deliveries at the clinic but also had private delivery and confinement clients. She kept detailed records of the cases she attended to in her logbook.

As women increasingly chose to deliver their babies in hospitals, demand for the services of private midwives declined. Rather than moving to a hospital, Ong opted to remain with the State Clinic as a nurse, where she worked until her retirement around 1990.

4504

Ainon bte Mohd Yasin, a traditional Malay masseuse (tukang urut), shares how she entered the profession

Interview courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

Images from the National Museum of Singapore Collection and courtesy of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen

Huang Yuerong recounts how she became a majie in Singapore and what her work involved

Video licensed courtesy of Mediacorp Pte Ltd

Ouyang Huanyan describes her experiences of working as a majie for the families of Tan Kah Kee and Lee Kuan Yew

Video licensed courtesy of Mediacorp Pte Ltd

Vandana Aggarwal shares her research about Kunnuck Mistree, a convict labourer who worked as a hospital dresser

Video courtesy of National Library Singapore, from “A Convict Who Became a Singapore Pioneer”, Stories from BiblioAsia, 19 May 2022

(Image on the wall)

Amahs with European children

1930

Reproduction

Mrs J. A. Bennett Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

4600

Episode Six

Contemporary Experiences of Migrants

Migration into Singapore continues today, with over 40 per cent of its population in recent years born overseas, including the approximately 22,000 people who take up citizenship each year. Singapore's survival now, as in the past, depends upon remaining open to migrants and the diverse skills and perspectives that they bring. These individuals continue to play vital roles in our community and economy across a range of industries.

While each generation of migrants has faced unique challenges, many core experiences of past migrants are echoed in those of their counterparts today, such as the dreams and hardships of starting a new life in a foreign country, far away from family and friends. Take a glimpse into the lives of some more recent migrants who have arrived in and contributed to Singapore, while considering your own thoughts about migration and the "foreigners" who are an integral part of our society.

4601

1.

Chiselling

Chua Tiag Ming

c.1960s–1970s

Paper

2011-02237

2.

Built from the Ground Up, A Layer at a Time

Loke Hong Seng

1970, printed in 2015

Paper

2016-00738

These photographs capture the tough physical labour and cooperation that go into building the enormous structures that are part and parcel of our modern lives. The images also capture the element of risk that accompanies such jobs, especially when working at height, even with the better equipment and more extensive safety regulations in place today.

In Loke's photograph, the workers are standing on the rooftop of a Housing and Development Board (HDB) building, working on the construction of an estate in Toa Payoh New Town, the first satellite town entirely developed by the HDB and which gained international recognition as an effective public housing model.

3.

Photographs from the Foreign Worker Housing series

Edwin Koo

2020

Inkjet print from digital file

2022-01035-027 & 012

Singapore's workforce continues to be heavily dependent on overseas labourers. In this series, the Singaporean photographer Edwin Koo documented various migrant workers' housing arrangements in Singapore during the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Their dormitories were often crowded and had poor sanitation, which led to outbreaks of COVID-19 among the residents.

Early clusters detected in such dormitories and other high-risk settings such as nursing homes led to a nation-wide "circuit breaker" lockdown from 7 April to 1 June 2020. However, even after the lockdown was lifted and restrictions were loosened for the wider community, migrant workers continued to be confined to their dormitories and work sites, with their mobile phones being the only means of staying connected with the outside world.

As awareness about the workers' plight and undesirable living conditions grew, many in Singapore called for foreign workers to be treated better. Improvements were subsequently made, with stricter regulations on cleanliness, food and housing standards, as well as more spacious government-built dormitories in the works.

4.

Khau Jie in her one-room rental flat in Chinatown" from the Ma Jie series

Charmaine Poh

2016

Inkjet print on Sihl Baryta paper

2022-00020

5.

"Wah Jie outside her home" from the *Ma Jie* series

Charmaine Poh

2016

Inkjet print on Sihl Baryta paper

2022-00039

These photographs capture moments in the lives of retired *majies* Khau Jie and Wah Jie, living alone in one-room rental flats in Chinatown. They were part of the wave of female migrants who came to Singapore from Guangdong, China during the early to mid-20th century, and earned a living as domestic workers for themselves and their families back home. Often fiercely independent, many *majies* would retire once they became too old to contribute to their employers' households, either moving back to their ancestral village in China, or to old folks' homes or such rental flats in Singapore. Many kept in touch with their former employers and charges through letters, telephone calls and visits.

6.

Photograph of domestic worker Sugiyani Waryomiharjo with her daughter, Rola, at home in her village in Indonesia from *The Long Road Home* series

Sim Chi Yin

2007

Inkjet print on cotton rag

2021-00685

7.

Photograph of Indonesian domestic worker Sri Indarsih Darsan arriving at Changi Airport for her flight home to Yogyakarta, Indonesia, from *The Long Road Home* series

Sim Chi Yin

2007

Inkjet print on cotton rag

2021-00683

Many of the women today who take up overseas jobs as domestic workers are mothers hoping to provide a better life for their children. It is ironic that their work takes them away from their families, with their own children growing apart from them and sometimes even facing neglect, while they care for their employers' children.

Although some domestic workers remain overseas for long durations to secure higher earnings, others choose to return home once they feel able to improve their family's standard of living. For example, Sri Indarsih Darsan worked in Singapore for six and a half years, returning home once she

could afford to renovate her family's house. Sugiyani Waryomiharjo, on the other hand, tried to spend as much time as she could with her daughter, Rola, in between stints overseas in order to pay off her family's debts.

8.

Photographs from the *Angels of Mercy* series

Bob Lee

2020

Inkjet print from digital file

2022-01028-029 & 004

This photographic series captures the daily work of nurses in Singapore during the challenging COVID-19 pandemic, when they had to take on vastly increased workloads while wearing layers of uncomfortable personal protective equipment and face the constant risk of infection. Approximately one-third of the nurses who work in Singapore are migrants from countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, Myanmar, India and China. For those with families overseas, it was doubly challenging to be away from loved ones for a prolonged period, with travel severely restricted or even impossible in some cases during the pandemic.

4602

Calvin Karuniawan Widjaja, a Chinese Indonesian who grew up in Singapore and underwent National Service, reflects on how this shaped his outlook

Special thanks to Mr Calvin Karuniawan Widjaja

Fazley Elahi Rubel, a migrant worker, recalls his early experiences and challenges in Singapore

Video licensed courtesy of Mediacorp Pte Ltd

Li Chanzhi, a former majie, offers insight into her life after retirement

Video licensed courtesy of Mediacorp Pte Ltd

Mohar Khan, a migrant construction worker, recites his poem Stay at Home about workers' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic

Video licensed courtesy of Mediacorp Pte Ltd

Robina “Bhing” Navato, a volunteer and former migrant domestic worker in Singapore, shares insights through her poetry

Special thanks to Ms Robina “Bhing” Navato

Woo Yum Sum shares about her life after retirement as a Samsui woman

Video courtesy of Students of Diploma in Mass
Communication, School of Business, Republic Polytechnic

5000

Chapter Five

Making Waves

Throughout its history, Singapore has consistently punched above its weight as a tiny island. As the exhibition has shown up to this point, this sterling track record is attributable to how it has been historically connected to the wider world, with the Singapore River as its central artery of trade, commerce and culture. Singapore has also consistently sought to expand its physical horizons despite its small size, and in its openness, welcomed flows of people who have built Singapore and made it what it is today.

Yet, the Singapore story is one that is characterised by its post-independence growth and development. In this final section, we explore how Singapore as a global city-state, with Singaporeans as cosmopolitan citizens, has impacted the world, making waves regionally and internationally.

5001**Singapore flag flown on Mount Everest****25 May 1998****Rayon****2001-06103**

This flag was flown atop Mount Everest on 25 May 1998, marking the first successful ascent of the tallest mountain in the world by a Singapore team. At 8.30 a.m. Singapore time, two members of the Singapore Everest team – Edwin Siew and Khoo Swee Chiow – climbed the 8,848-metre-tall mountain, exemplifying Singapore's indomitable spirit in scaling global heights.

5100**Episode One**
The International Stage

Singapore has been recognised as a leader in diplomacy and as a reliable and secure venue for holding key events of regional and global importance.

5101

1.

**Hoisting of the Singapore flag at the United Nations,
1965**

1995

Paper

2010-01524-023

On 21 September 1965, the Singapore flag was hoisted for the first time in front of the United Nations building in New York. This marked the day that Singapore joined the United Nations, just over a month after it gained independence on 9 August.

2.

Lee Kuan Yew and the Commonwealth by Alex Josey

1969

Paper

2007-52593

This book was written by the political journalist and biographer Alex Josey. It describes the events surrounding the 17th meeting of the Commonwealth of Nations held in London from 7 to 15 January 1969, including the proceedings of the meeting. In particular, it focuses on the part played by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, featuring a record of his speeches delivered during the conference. The book also highlights the coverage and commentaries of these events by the international press.

3.

Great Zimbabwe Commonwealth silver trophy

1991

Metal

2022-00403

Gift of Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong's Office

4.

The Commonwealth Heads of Delegation attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Singapore

14 January 1971

Reproduction

Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Less than a month after joining the United Nations, Singapore became the Commonwealth's 22nd member on 15 October 1965. In January 1971, Singapore hosted the first Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. As then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew explained, "For a newly independent country, it provided links to a network of governments whose institutions were similar and whose leaders and officials shared a common background." Significantly, the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles was issued at the conclusion of this meeting, charting the identity, values and goals of the Commonwealth.

5.

ASEAN Achievement Millenium Award 2001 presented to

Mr Lee Kuan Yew

10 September 2001

Crystal (lead glass)

2021-00770

On loan from the Malay Heritage Centre

Gift of Lee Hsien Loong

Singapore was a founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which was started in 1967 to promote economic, social and cultural cooperation in the region. The ASEAN Business Forum emerged from this platform as an association of private ASEAN businesses. In 2001, the forum presented this ASEAN Achievement Millenium Award to then Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, in recognition of his leading role in Singapore's transformation and his contributions to ASEAN.

6.

Inaugural Youth Olympic Games torch

2010

Aluminium and polymers

NAS2011-00091-001

Singapore was the host of the inaugural Youth Olympic Games in 2010. It successfully won the bid to host the games in 2008, coming ahead of ten other cities that were interested in doing so. This torch, which travelled from Greece to

Singapore via 2,400 torchbearers across five cities, was used for the opening ceremony.

7.

Pair of North Korea-United States 2018 Summit security passes

2018

Plastic

2018-01191-001 & 002

Gift of Singapore Police Force

On 12 June 2018, Singapore hosted the historic meeting between American president Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, where both leaders vowed to establish new relations between Washington and Pyongyang. Singapore was chosen as the venue because of its track record for security management and experience in hosting high-level international events. These passes were issued to the security officers who were assigned to the delegations.

5200

Episode Two **Heart Work**

In times of global health crises and natural disasters, Singapore has made an impact locally and internationally in caring for those affected, including through humanitarian efforts.

5201

1.

Courage Star

2003

Silver

2004-00487

Gift of National Healthcare Group

A total of 1,715 of these “Courage Star” silver medals were presented in 2003 to recipients of the Courage Award (now known as the Healthcare Humanity Awards) – healthcare workers in Singapore who had tended directly to severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) patients, a majority of whom were from Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Through their brave frontline efforts, these healthcare workers helped with the local and, in turn, global control of the SARS epidemic.

2.

Vials previously containing the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, administered to (left) the first Singaporean recipient on 30 December 2020, and (right) then Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong on 29 January 2021

Glass, metal, paper

2021-00775, 2021-00776

Gift of Ministry of Health

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world in 2020, the first vaccine to be approved for use in Singapore was that by Pfizer-BioNTech, with the first dose administered to a Singaporean on 30 December 2020. During this period,

Singapore actively lent a hand to its neighbours, taking the cue from then Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's call for countries to forge partnerships under what he termed "vaccine multilateralism" in June 2020 during the Global Vaccine Summit.

Since then, Singapore has donated over 100,000 doses of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine to Batam and the Riau Islands (KEPRI) in Indonesia, 100,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine to Brunei, and around 100,000 doses of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines to Johor. It also donated \$7.9 million worth of medical supplies to an ASEAN reserve, as part of its support for ASEAN's collective effort to prepare for future public health emergencies.

3.

Armband with Singapore flag worn by Dr Ang Seng Bin during the Singapore Armed Forces' Operation Flying Eagle Tsunami Relief Operation; Tsunami Relief Operation 2004 Medal

2004

Silver, cloth

Gift of Dr Ang Seng Bin

On 26 December 2004, a 9.0-magnitude earthquake occurred off the coast of Sumatra, triggering several tsunamis which killed at least at least 225,000 people across several countries.

Dr Ang Seng Bin was on holiday in Penang when the tsunami destroyed a nearby village.

As a civilian volunteer, he was deployed with fellow medical professionals to Banda Aceh, Indonesia, attending to more than 300 patients a day.

4.

Singapore Combat Engineers Commemorative Medal for Tsunami Relief Operation

2005

Metal

2023-00507

Gift of Chow Chung Ping

3SG Chow Chung Ping was presented this commemorative medal for his contribution under the Singapore Combat Engineers for Operation Flying Eagle. A formation under the Singapore Armed Forces, the Singapore Combat Engineers played a key role in Meulaboh, Indonesia, where 3SG Chow was deployed, in building temporary landing sites to reopen the town to receiving supplies by sea.

5300**Episode Three
Daring to Innovate**

As Singapore embarked on rapid industrialisation from the 1960s, a spirit of innovation prevailed with domestic research and development efforts having a wider regional and global reach.

5301

1.

Iron and Steel Mill

Tan Lip Seng

1970

Chromogenic Print

2008-00163

This photograph of the National Iron and Steel Mill by Singapore photographer Tan Lip Seng was used as the cover of the 1975 book published by the then Ministry of Science and Technology titled *Science and technology for 2 Million*. The publication emphasised the importance of embracing science and technology in the progress of Singapore as a young city-state. To this end, Tan's cover photograph conveys the fiery drive for innovation as inextricably linked to industry and progress.

2.

Exterior and interior views of Shell Refinery on Pulau Bukom

David Tay

1960s

Gelatin silver prints

2005-00673, 2005-00680

Gift of Verena Tay

On 26 July 1961, the multinational oil and gas company Shell opened Singapore's first oil refinery on Pulau Bukom, a

milestone in Singapore's journey to becoming a major regional petrochemical hub. These photographs by Singapore photographer David Tay, who ran Westlake Photo Services in Tanjong Katong between 1953 and 1978, documented early views of both the exterior and interior of the refinery, emphasising their state-of-the-art facilities.

3.

Hon Sui Sen's Fairchild watch

1975

Metal, plastic

2021-01187-001

Gift of the Hon Family

4.

Fairchild collar pins

1980s

Metal

2022-00005, 2022-00006, 2022-00007

Fairchild Singapore was a pioneering semiconductor company acquired by National Semiconductor in 1987. Since then, Singapore has become a global hub for semiconductor manufacturing, accounting for ten per cent of all chips produced internationally, and 20 per cent of the global production of semiconductor manufacturing equipment. This golden digital electronic watch was presented to Mr Hon Sui Sen, Singapore's then Minister for Finance, at the official opening of the Fairchild Singapore's second factory at Toa Payoh on 5 August 1975.

5.

Postcard titled “Singapore Science Park”

1980s

Paper

2008-05123

First opened in 1984, the Singapore Science Park was part of Jurong Town Corporation’s (now known as JTC Corporation) plan to build a science complex to promote industrial growth through research and development. Tax incentives and grants were offered to attract global technology companies.

6.

Creative Technology Sound Blaster 16 sound card

1995

Fibreglass, silicon, copper

2024-00387

Gift of Linus Quah Teng Koon

Singaporean electronics brand Creative Technology is best known for introducing in 1989 the Sound Blaster, a sound card that made it possible for personal computers (PCs) to generate realistic audio. Today, more than 100 million Sound Blasters are installed in the world’s PCs, making Creative Technology a global leader in PC entertainment. It was the first Singapore company to be listed on the Nasdaq, alongside other global giants such as Microsoft Corporation and Apple Inc.

5302**Infrared Fever Screening System (IFss)****2003****Metal, glass, plastic****Gift of the Defence Science and Technology Agency**

The Infrared Fever Screening System (IFss) was invented by a team led by Singapore's Defence Science and Technology Agency (DSTA) to screen large numbers of people to detect fever, one of the key symptoms of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) during its outbreak in 2003.

In just 36 hours, the DSTA team adapted a military thermal imager and co-developed a prototype with ST Electronics. Within a week, the IFss went live at Changi Airport, helping to reduce the manpower needed to check travellers' temperatures by two-thirds, and accelerating the speed at which potential SARS cases could be isolated.

Named among the best inventions of 2003 by *Time* magazine, the IFss sparked interest globally as the world's first infrared-based system for mass temperature screenings. Today, such systems are commonly used for screenings at venues with high human traffic.

5400

Episode Four

From Local to Global

While language and food have been distinctive markers of local Singaporean identity, they have increasingly gained recognition grown in stature and popularity worldwide. Today, Singlish – or Singaporean English – is represented in the Oxford English Dictionary, and Singapore's hawker food culture has been inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

5401

1.

Poster for Talking Cock: The Movie

2002

Paper

2007-056689

Talking Cock: The Movie was written, produced and directed by Joyceln Woo and Colin Goh. Following the success of the website of the same title, the comedy comprised four sketches delivered in Singlish. It premiered at the Singapore International Film Festival in 2002, and was screened in France the following year at the Festival du Film Asiatique de Deauville.

2.

"Makan & Masak with Microsoft 2004" paper bag

2004

Paper

2009-02796

This paper bag, made in a style popular in mid-20th-century Singapore, was produced for a client appreciation event titled "Makan & Masak", organised by multinational corporation Microsoft's Singapore office. The title makes reference to the Malay words for "eating" and "playing" that have made their way into the Singlish lexicon, while the reverse side of the bag features the words "thank you" in Singapore's national

languages Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil. English, Chinese and Tamil.

3.

Singlish Perpetual Calendar

Donn Koh

2013

Paper, metal

This Singlish Perpetual Calendar was designed by Donn Koh as part of “Great Singapore Souvenirs”, a series of merchandise commissioned by the National Heritage Board. Inspired by lunar almanac calendars commonly used in Chinese households in Singapore, this calendar served as a contemporary guide to one’s day through the use of Singlish terms.

4.

Singapore A to Z fridge magnets

Supermama

2023

Metal, plastic

2025-00007

This is a selection from a series of magnets designed by Singapore design firm Supermama. Conceived as a light-hearted A to Z series of Singlish words, these magnets show how Singlish has uniquely combined various languages and cultures to become what it is today, a local and global language.

5.
Promotional materials produced by the National Heritage Board supporting Singapore's bid for inscribing hawker culture to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity
2020
Paper

6.
\$2-coin commemorating hawker culture in Singapore
2021
Nickel-plated zinc

Singapore's hawker culture achieved global recognition when it was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on 16 December 2020. These promotional materials produced by the National Heritage Board supported Singapore's bid in creative ways, such as the ubiquitous tissue packet used commonly for reserving tables at hawker centres, and leaflets depicting the distinctly multicultural flavour of Singapore's hawker cuisine. The commemorative coin, designed and issued by the Singapore Mint, pays tribute to the culinary skills of the hawkers, Singapore's multicultural society, and how hawker centres serve as community dining spaces for all.

7.

The Cooking of Singapore by Chris Yeo and Joyce Jue

1993

Paper

2010-02593

Born in Hong Kong and raised and educated in Singapore, chef and restaurateur Chris Yeo opened Straits Café in San Francisco in 1987, introducing many Americans to Singapore cuisine. In 1993, he wrote this book with Joyce Jue, a native of San Francisco's Chinatown and specialist in Chinese and Southeast Asian cooking.

8.

Postcard titled "Singapore Local Food"

1980s

Paper

2008-05450

This postcard introduces to an international audience some of Singapore's local food delicacies – fried Hokkien *mee*, *bak kut teh*, satay and *mee rebus* – as recommended by the celebrated cookbook writer, Mrs Leong Yee Soo, known for her 1977 book *Singapore Cooking*.

5500

Episode Five

Wave Makers

Singaporeans past and present have made their mark on the world in their own ways. Beyond being recognised on the regional and international stage, they have made a difference by being pioneers in their respective fields, leading through their excellence, and paving the way for other Singaporeans to blaze their own paths globally.

These two walls showcase some of the significant artefacts that have been contributed to our Collecting Contemporary Singapore initiative. They place the spotlight on some Singaporeans who have made waves in the world, and recognise their success in fields that have often been the road less trodden, from sport to music to fashion.

**Are there stories or objects that could contribute to this showcase of extraordinary Singaporeans making waves in the world? As part of our Collecting Contemporary Singapore initiative, we invite you to get in touch with us via the QR code below.*

5501**Maximilian Maeder's Paris Olympics race bib****2024****Synthetic materials****2024-01040****Gift of Maximilian Maeder**

Kitefoiling, which uses wind power from a kite to pull the rider along, is a relatively new sport, making its debut in the Paris Summer Olympic Games in 2024. Maximilian Maeder is Singapore's first international kitefoiling champion and, in 2024, became the youngest individual Olympic sailing medallist in the world at 17 years old. He wore this race bib during the final of his bronze-medal performance in Paris on Singapore's National Day, 9 August 2024.

5502**Yip Pin Xiu's gold medal from the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games****2008****Gold-plated silver, jade****On loan from Yip Pin Xiu**

Singaporean swimmer Yip Pin Xiu won the country's first-ever Paralympic gold at the 2008 Paralympic Games held in Beijing. On 15 September 2008, she finished the fastest in the 50-metre backstroke (S3) final, having earlier broken the world record during the heats with a timing of 57.92 seconds. Yip, who has been wheelchair bound since the age of 13, has since become a five-time Paralympic champion, and currently

holds the world record in two events. Her inspiring journey and success have lit the path for others to follow in her steps.

5503

One Fine Day

1968

Tan Lip Seng

Colour print from Kodachrome and the Kodalith film montage

2008-00161

Tan Lip Seng was a local photographer who pioneered colour photography techniques in Singapore in the 1960s, using montaged colour transparency slides to produce photographic prints with exceptional depth and impact. He was admitted as a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society in 1970 and, in the following year, became the first Singaporean to be awarded a gold medal by the International Federation of Photographic Art.

5504

1.

Margaret Leng Tan's Jaymar toy piano

1960s

Wood, plastic, high-carbon steel

On loan from Margaret Leng Tan

2.

Becoming Margaret Leng Tan

Low Lai Chow (author), Dan Quah (illustrator)

2023 Paper

Singaporean musician Margaret Leng Tan pioneered the art of playing the toy piano. This is Tan's first-ever toy piano, which she bought in 1993 at a thrift shop in New York City's East Village for US\$45. It was used that same year for her debut on the instrument in her John Cage *In Memoriam* Concert (as seen above), held at Lincoln Center in New York City, where she played Cage's 1948 *Suite for Toy Piano*. This kickstarted her toy piano career and specialisation as the world's first toy piano virtuoso, which she continues to be best known for today. Tan's success in transforming a toy into a legitimate musical instrument forms an important part of her legacy.

5505

Loh Kean Yew's Li Ning jersey

2021

Synthetic materials

2023-01245

Gift of Loh Kean Yew

Loh Kean Yew is the first Singaporean shuttler to win the BWF World Championships. This jersey was issued to him for his historic victory in the men's singles finals at the 2021 Championships in Spain. Loh, who was ranked world No. 22, attained a surprise win against India's world No. 14, Srikanth

Kidambi. Incredibly, this feat was accomplished despite Loh having sprained his ankle during the quarter-finals.

5506

Choo Hoey conducting an orchestra at the Radio and Television Building in Brussels

1950s–1960s

Gelatin silver print

1996-00829

Gift of Choo Hoey

Singaporean conductor Choo Hoey was the first Asian to conduct a European national orchestra when he led the Belgian National Orchestra in 1958 at the age of 24. Choo went on to become the founding Musical Director of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO). The SSO is today regarded as one of the best in the world.

5507

Shayna Ng's Storm Marvel-S bowling ball

2021

Resin

2024-00011

Gift of Shayna Ng

Singaporean bowler Shayna Ng has held the record for the women's singles six-game series at the World Tenpin Bowling Championships since 2011. In 2015, she won Singapore's first gold medal at the World Bowling Women's Championships in Abu Dhabi. Ng used this bowling ball to win gold in the

women's singles event at the 2021 International Bowling Federation (IBF) Super World Championship in Dubai.

5508

Gold medal won by Remy Ong at the 2006 WTBA World Tenpin Bowling Championships

2006

Metal and nylon

2024-00013

Gift of Remy Ong

Remy Ong has held the record for the men's singles six-game series at the World Tenpin Bowling Championships since 2006, when he won this gold medal in Busan along with the all-events title. As Singapore's leading bowler on the international circuit at that time, he also captained the Singapore men's bowling team during the 2002 Asian Games in Busan, where he won three gold medals in the men's singles, trios and masters events.

5509

Terry Hee and Jessica Tan's Li Ning jerseys

2022

Synthetic materials

2023-00601, 2023-00600

Gift of Terry Hee and Jessica Tan

Terry Hee and Jessica Tan are the first Singaporeans to win gold in the badminton mixed doubles event at the Commonwealth Games. On 8 August 2022 in Birmingham,

the husband-and-wife pair beat England's Marcus Ellis and Lauren Smith in the individual mixed doubles final, after having defeated Malaysia's top-seeded pair of Tan Kian Meng and Lai Pei Jing in the semi-finals the day before.

5510

Programme booklet for *Emily of Emerald Hill*

1986

Paper

2014-01145-001

On loan from The Peranakan Museum

Gift of Stella Kon

Singapore playwright Stella Kon's *Emily of Emerald Hill* was the first Singapore theatre play to be invited to perform in an international arts festival. A programme sponsored by multinational corporation Shell was held in 1986 to raise funds for sending lead actress Margaret Chan and a theatre crew to represent Singapore later that year at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

5511

Self Portrait

Chng Seok Tin

1989

Drypoint and monotype

GI-0216

On loan from National Gallery Singapore

Chng Seok Tin was the first Singaporean artist to have her work exhibited at the United Nations headquarters in New York City, where she presented 35 of her works in 2005. Titled *Self Portrait*, Chng created this work after an accident in 1988 left her almost entirely blind.

5512

Joseph Schooling's autographed Mizuno GX Sonic III swimming shorts

2016

Nylon and Lycra

2024-00077

Gift of Joseph Schooling

Joseph Schooling is Singapore's first Olympic gold medallist. Wearing these swimming shorts at the finals of the men's 100-metre butterfly event at the Summer Olympics Games in Rio de Janeiro on 12 August 2016, Schooling emerged the fastest at 50.39 seconds, setting new national, Asian and Olympic records.

5513

"Changing of the Guard" evening dress

Benny Ong

c.1980s

Tafetta, velvet

2007-52542

Gift of Benny Ong

Benny Ong was the first Singaporean fashion designer to establish his brand in London. A year after graduating in 1974, Ong presented his debut collection at the London Designer Collections Exhibition. By the 1980s, Ong dressed many global high-profile clients, including the late Diana, Princess of Wales. This two-piece ensemble was inspired by the ceremonial dress worn by the King's Guard at Buckingham Palace.

5514

Shanti Pereira's autographed Nike Air Zoom Maxfly shoes

2023

Synthetic materials, foam, carbon fibre, rubber

2023-01416

Gift of Shanti Pereira

Singaporean athlete Shanti Pereira clinched Singapore's first athletics gold medal since 1974 at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou on 2 October 2023, where she won the women's 200-metre final wearing this pair of running spikes. Just five weeks earlier, she had become the first Singaporean to reach the semi-finals of the Athletics World Championships.

5515

12 Storeys film poster

1997

Paper

2007-56691

Eric Khoo's feature film *12 Storeys* was the first Singaporean film to be screened at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival in 1997. Khoo sparked a revival in independent filmmaking in Singapore from the 1990s, paving the way for other local films to be presented on the international stage, with Boo Junfeng's *Sandcastle* screening at Critics' Week at Cannes in 2010, and Anthony Chen's *Ilo Ilo* being the first Singaporean feature film to win the Caméra d'Or award at Cannes in 2013.

6000

Conclusion

What does the future hold, and what paths will Singapore take?

As this exhibition has shown, it is crucial that Singapore continues to adapt, innovate, and stay competitive and connected, while celebrating our diversity, protecting our unique culture and sense of belonging, and ensuring opportunities for all. With the land and seas that we have, it is increasingly urgent that we chart our path ahead in a sustainable way, caring responsibly for our environment for present generations and those to come.

Our future depends very much on how well we balance these different needs. Reflecting on Singapore's journey thus far, we have good reason to be hopeful. Despite our small size and regardless of regional and international developments, Singapore has always found a way to survive and indeed thrive.

Singapore's story continues to be written, and the aspirations you have cast help to express hope and articulate a larger

vision of what that future could look like. Thank you for joining us and being part of this journey!