THE PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

by William S W Lim

Dear Members and Friends:

Welcome to this our first issue of the Singapore Heritage Society newsletter. We have further reason to celebrate as this is also the first anniversary of the birth of the Society.

Happily, we may look back with pride on our first year’s accomplishments — seven organized lecture meetings and walkabouts, and one major conference, to summarize briefly. Our membership has increased from a Permanent Committee of 15 to a current total of 100 members (ordinary, associate and corporate).

At present we look forward with confidence to another year of exciting activities, to our continued growth as an organization, and to our continued efforts to preserve and increase awareness of Singapore’s rich and venerable past.

I would like to draw your attention to the logo which now appears on the Society’s stationery. The tree is a traditional symbol of life, knowledge and wisdom. Just as the tree draws its nourishment from the earth through a complex system of roots in order to achieve full flowering and fruiting, so does the nation sustain and nourish itself toward new development through the strength of its historical and cultural foundations. The dots suggest the breadth of concerns the Society intends to address in its definition of “heritage” — including the built and natural environments, the arts and humanities, lifestyles, even food and film.

Singapore is a young nation, whose roots are multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural. Since independence its national identity has been consciously fostered and developed. At times this may still appear fragile. However, the strength of our national identity is firmly based on our collective cultural histories and their effective transmutation within the context of unity in diversity. To quote from our Constitution: “From the beginning of its history, its people have been willing to blend into the formation of that culture the best elements from their ethnic origins, with factors from a bountiful environment and ideas from the world at large.”

A realistic appraisal of the possible directions toward future changes in our nation can best be established through deeper understanding of ourselves and our past. We need to consciously preserve, restore and record images and events to heighten our awareness of our rich and varied past. The better we understand ourselves, the more confident we can be in collectively striving toward a better future.

In the last two decades, much of the understanding of the Government, a private ad-hoc committee was formed to collaborate with the Aga Khan programme of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to plan an International Seminar on Adaptive Re-use of Old Buildings. This was held in Singapore in May, 1984. For the occasion, the book Pastel Portraits, Singapore’s Architectural Heritage was published.

Annual General Meeting, 9th July

Don’t miss the Society’s first AGM on Saturday, 9th July at 2:30 p.m. at the Raffles Hotel. In addition to a brief formal agenda, Isha Sharpe will give a half-hour slide-presentation on the Raffles. Following Ms Sharpe, there will be some unusual entertainment in the form of a docudrama set at the Raffles Hotel by the Italian film-maker Paolo Marussig.

This meeting will mark the first birthday of the Singapore Heritage Society, so plan to come and celebrate with us.

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ment will fulfill its announced intention to preserve these areas already designated for conservation. Many buildings and other environmental areas, however, such as Joo Chiat Road are privately owned and have not yet been designated for conservation. There is a distinct danger that these buildings may be pulled down for redevelopment. Urgent attention is necessary to introduce appropriate legislation to prevent this from happening.

We take courage from the recent plans presented by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) to revitalize the civic and cultural district and conserve a large section of the old city. They are inviting participation in the decision-making process by both the public and private sectors. The Society has formed an ad hoc committee to respond to the URA proposal. (See details and summary of the SHS recommendations on p.7 of the Newsletter.)

Within this larger context, the Singapore Heritage Society hopes to make its contribution towards a better awareness and understanding of our heritage. Since the Society’s formation one year ago in April 1987, our goal has been to provide meaningful linkages of the past to present day conditions in order to further strengthen our collective efforts, public and private, towards the continuous development of our national cultural identity. As stated in our Constitution, the Society is made up of professional people, scholars, academics and others with a special knowledge in various relevant disciplines. We propose to study and disseminate among the general public an appreciation of our ecology, our built-environment and our way of life in its various spiritual and physical manifestations.

As a new organization with understandably limited resources, our perceived role and activities for the first years are by necessity modest and hopefully realizable. With a multi-disciplinary membership of many personally committed individuals, we see ourselves performing an effective function utilizing the combined strengths of our members to complement the efforts presently undertaken by others.

We are in the process now of establishing good working relationships and sponsoring joint programmes with both public agencies and private groups. Our efforts are concentrated on the “software” aspect of conservation; that is the people involved, the users and the community, to which we add the vital element of loving care in the process of conserving historical buildings and environmental areas.

During its first year, the Society organized a variety of lectures and workshops on matters of preservation, as well as walking tours through places of historical interest. We conducted a conference of major importance and overwhelming success, the SHS ethnic minorities workshop entitled “Unity in Diversity” which met at the Sheraton Towers on Sunday, March 6, 1988. Already in various stages of planning are three more major events scheduled for 1988: a film festival on conservation and ecology, a local arts, crafts and trades workshop, and a heritage hunt.

In order to carry out these recommended programmes, however, we shall need adequate membership response as well as financial support for specific programmes. Our target is to have about 400 Ordinary and Associate members and 80-100 Corporate members. We heartily welcome more active participation by our members who have the time, energy, ideas and experience required to further our mission. Together, we hope we will continue to make a modest yet meaningful contribution to our people and our nation.

Thank you for your continued support.

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**COMING ATTRACTIONS:**

**FOUR MAJOR EVENTS PLANNED FOR 1988-89**

**Arts and Crafts Workshop**

A full-day Arts and Crafts workshop will feature lectures and demonstrations in Singapore’s traditional skills and handicrafts. About a dozen representatives from the arts and crafts community will display their work in wood carving and gold leafing, bronze casting, pottery, stained glass, embroidery and patchwork, basketry, matwork, silverware, batik, Indian flower decoration, and jewellery.

Other highlights of the day’s events are currently under consideration: an organized competition, a running slide show/film show on craft conservation, and a registry containing information about the craftsmen themselves with the aim of ensuring the survival of their unique craft. Also the sub-committee is discussing the possibility of inviting conservation-minded representatives of the arts and crafts from Malaysia or Japan to share their experience with us.

Suggestions for the names of individual craftspeople to be asked to participate in the Workshop and volunteers to help the sub-committee are welcome. Contact the SHS office at 7485180, mornings only.

**Film Festival**

A celebration of Singapore’s historic values in culture and conservation through the medium of film will be held over a 5-day period. Combining both education and entertainment, the programme will present films relating to a particular issue of conservation, documentaries on conservation, historical films made locally, and short animated films.

Workshops and seminars, an opening night “splash” at a major cinema, and other events are being planned over a long weekend to accommodate a wider audience.

Sources of the films will be mainly the embassies, the major cinema archives of feature films, and the international conservation organizations which produce documentaries.

Interested volunteers should contact the sub-committee chairman Geoffrey Malone at his office 2728833.

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**Heritage Hunt**

This year’s SHS contribution to Heritage Week (8th to 15th September) will be a month-long hunt for “finds” large and small that figure in Singapore’s heritage. This event is modelled after the successful hunt organized by the Heritage of Malaysia Trust in Kuala Lumpur.

Armed with camera, pen and paper, participants will go in search of little known objects or places of historical importance. They will be asked to identify their discovery and record it on film and/or in a written description. Targets for this tour of discovery include buildings of private ownership, details of buildings (e.g., a hidden staircase or wall carving), historical aspects of the landscape (e.g., trees or benches) or other places where events of historical significance occurred. The rules of the game will be spelled out clearly on the entry form.

A panel of experts will be appointed to assess the submissions and determine the best discoveries. Prizes will be awarded and a public exhibition of significant contributions will be mounted. Hopefully these will provide the material for a publication.
Conservation and Tourism in the Asia Pacific Region
13 June 1987,
Silks Lounge, Scotts Shopping Centre

This lecture was given by Mr Robertson E Collins, Chairman of the International Committee on Cultural Tourism and the International Council on Monuments and Sites, Paris. He is currently working as consultant in conservation and tourism to the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board.

In defining conservation, Mr Collins emphasized the importance of preventing exploitation, as well as destruction. Items of conservation value must not be locked up or kept from the public. Since the travel industry is a vital source of funds for conservation work, it is not sensible to conserve without allowing tourism.

In defining heritage, he pointed out that it is an accumulation of daily details, as well as larger traditions which build up over time in the memory. It includes ethics, food, medicine, manners, the way we greet, the way we love, marry and bury one another.

In a light moment, he said that cultural heritage is what gives “class” to the tourism industry; and the tourism industry is what gives heritage its “sex appeal” – a kind of Rogers & Astaire dancing partnership.

Many Asian countries already recognize the importance of conservation and are investing generous sums in it. India, for example, has lavished great care on the Taj Mahal and intends raising about US$25 billion to clean up the Ganges. Indonesia has allocated about US$17 million to conservation tourism projects. These countries are beginning not only to appreciate their cultural inheritance – which seems common enough all over the world today – but to wish to conserve it with care and excellence.

Finally, Mr Collins affirmed that people get the quality of tourism they allow. Thus it is essential that local residents participate in the process of management and development. The best tourism development benefits all.

Visit to Bronze Foundry
23 June 1987, Old Tampines Road

Brother Joseph McNally introduced SHS members to the group of four elderly craftsmen who operate a bronze foundry located at the end of Paya Lebar airport runway. The foundry produces joss stick urns, candle holders and a variety of other traditional Taoist and Buddhist artifacts by the traditional “lost wax” method. These hand-made works were noticeably finer than those commonly found in shopping centres, which are mass-produced by machine and usually imported.

SHS Members witnessed a demonstration of the ancient lost wax process of bronze casting, by which hot molten bronze is poured into the cavity left by an object such as a candle stick moulded in wax which has been burnt out or “lost” by heating in a furnace. The resultant casting is then cooled, broken out of its clay or plaster shell, the rough edges are sanded and the object polished to a glowing finish.

The craftsmen, who were eager to share their knowledge with the group, said that in Singapore they were the last surviving craftsmen to practise this method and that there were likely to be no heirs to carry on their work.

The Role of Festivals in Cultural Heritage and Life Style
25 July 1987,
National Museum Theatre

In observance of “Heritage Week”, organized annually by the National Archives, the Oral History Department, the National Museum and the National Library, the Society sponsored a lecture by Tan Sri Lee Siew Meng. Apart from his long term career in the Civil Service, this widely respected septuagenarian was for 30 years president of the China Society, a much sought-after speaker and writer on Chinese art and culture.

Our festivals, “inherited” from Singapore’s melting pot of cultures, he said, are more than merely occasions for celebration. Deepavali, Hari Raya Puasa, Chinese New Year and the myriad other festivals have the power to shape our lives for good so long as we retain an awareness and understanding of their original meaning and purpose.

He went on to give detailed descriptions of the various practices associated with the festivals, indicating how they serve to instill virtues and praiseworthy behaviour, such as strengthening family and social ties, encouraging thrift, honesty, social order and so forth. “What is important today,” he concluded, “is the moral message behind these festivals which many have either forgotten or not understood. Without these messages we cannot keep our heritage and develop a style of life that is consonant with that heritage.”

Memories of St Joseph’s Institution, 1846 – 1957
29 August 1987, Raffles Hotel

On the eve of his retirement from the Institution, Mr Francis Browne shared with us some of his warm memories of St Joseph’s Institution, as well as the considerable research on the Catholic Mission and the school that form the contents of his recently published book.

His research covered not only Singaporean and Malaysian sources, but also archives of the De La Salle Brothers and the Paris Foreign Missions in France and Italy. One of his principal sources was a recently published translation of the letters of Father Beurel, who was also instrumental in establishing what is now the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd.

The talk focused on the dynamism and perseverance of Fr Beurel. Against all odds, he managed to set up the school in 1852 in an attic-covered building with the help of three Brothers, one of whom he had personally petitioned for in Paris.

There was no way then of foreseeing the beauty of the future building which would ultimately grace Bras Basah Road. Surprisingly, it was another priest with no formal training as an architect who gave the final form to the architecture of St Joseph’s – Fr Najin. He also designed the Chapel of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus which is now a national monument.

Following the lecture, Mr Brown conducted a tour of the school premises. There was a feeling of reassurance that, unlike other school buildings which have disappeared without a trace, this one would endure.

Heritage Preservation – A Malaysian Experience
28 November 1987 in the Regency Room, Raffles Hotel

This slide-talk on Malaysia’s efforts towards heritage preservation was presented by Mr Chen Voon Fee, founder member of the Heritage of Malaysia
SPOTLIGHT FALLS
ON MINORITIES AT
SHS CONFERENCE

Attention focused on Singapore’s lesser-known minorities at the Singapore Heritage Society’s day-long Workshop, aptly entitled “Unity in Diversity”. Meeting at the Sheraton Towers on Sunday, 6 March 1988, the Workshop provided a rare opportunity for Singaporeans to look underneath the “Chinese-Malay-Indian-Other” umbrella and see a multitude of little-known communities of people. In their own right each has made significant and distinctive contributions towards the development and cultural enrichment of Singapore.

The Guest of Honour for the occasion was His Excellency, Mr. David Marshall, currently Singapore’s Ambassador to France, Spain and Portugal. In his opening remarks, Mr. Marshall drew attention to the fact that he, too, represents a small minority – the Iraqi-Jewish – and that his own election as Singapore’s first Chief Minister was a supreme example of racial integration.

Mr Rafiq Junahboy gave the welcoming address for the Executive Committee of the Singapore Heritage Society, followed by remarks from Mr William Hui for the Workshop Organizing Committee; and finally the Workshop itself was introduced by Dr John Clammer, Chairman of the Workshop Organizing Committee.

Immediately after the formal opening ceremony, The New Rainbow Puppet Show (Chye Sin Hong Troup), Singapore’s oldest and most authentic marionette troupe, began its performance of a three-hour traditional opera in the Hakka dialect. Everyone was invited to walk freely in and out of the performance during breaks between workshops. The puppeteers would not be offended; after all the most important audience would be the gods, not human beings!

17 minority groups in all presented talks and exhibitions about their histories, customs and religions in an informal and discursive atmosphere. Participants, numbering approximately 150, were encouraged to wander from one workshop to another. Three workshops ran simultaneously in the morning and two workshops, in the afternoon. Most groups also displayed exhibits of photographs, costumes and other traditional artifacts to give the participants a better understanding and more vivid impression of their cultures.

In the morning workshop devoted to four Indian communities, Mrs Suna Kanga and Mrs Roskan Mistri together presented a paper on their community, the Parsis, followers of one of the world’s oldest religions, Zoroastrianism. Although the Parsis originate from a province in South Iran, today their majority lives in Bombay. As early as 1829 the Parsis began settling here and today they number about 100, many of whom are notable personalities in the business and industrial communities.

Mr Amerali Abdeali presented a paper on the Dawoodi Bohras, Muslims of the Shia Ismaili Taiebi faith. In Singapore it is a close knit community of about 180 households, who are easily distinguished from other Muslims in their dress code and culinary habits. The Bohras came to Singapore as traders in the days of Raffles and have stayed on to distinguish themselves in all fields.

Mrs Amina Junabhoy represented the Khojas, one of some 72 Muslim Indian sects. Two groups of about ten families each have settled in Singapore. Both the Aga Khan Khojas and the Isna Asheri Khojas are established mostly in the business community. The Khojas are a powerful cultural group, 100% literate, she said, and they are proud of the equal status their women enjoy.

Speaking on behalf of the Sindhis, Mr J G Advani said that the history of the community in the Far East is about 130 years old. The Sindhis have grown from the days of barter trading in the 1850’s, to the opening of proper shops on High Street and North Bridge Road in the 1870’s, to a formal Sindhi Merchants Association established in 1921— with a membership today of over 450.

Distinctive as each of these four “Indian” groups are, they share a common entrepreneurial spirit; their members are prosperous and active in community and service work; and they have made their mark on Singapore’s economic, political, and social scenes.

Meanwhile, another workshop comprising the Arabs, the Chinese Muslims and the Persian Muslims was in full swing. Speaking on behalf of the Arab
community, Miss Lim Lu Sia, an NUS honours graduate who last year completed a thesis on the Arabs in Singapore, said that they had originated from a district on the southern coast of Arabia called Hadramant.

Historically, these were wealthy and prominent people who had engaged very extensively in the system of “wakaf”, or charitable endowments. To maintain their Arab identity, the institution of marriage was used, and even today arranged marriages between cousins still exist. Miss Lim noted further that it is becoming increasingly more difficult to differentiate between the practices of the Arabs and those of the Malays, as the Arabs have incorporated Malay customs into their lifestyle.

Representing the Chinese Muslims, Miss Maria Ma called attention to the two distinct groups of Chinese Muslims in Singapore — those who converted to Islam as a result of their own religious convictions, and those who were already Muslim when they arrived in Singapore. The latter group of Chinese Muslims, to which she belonged, was known as Uighurs in China and had been classified as a race by Dr Sun Yat-sen when he became President of the Republic of China. There are presently three families of this origin living in Singapore.

According to Mr Reza Namazie, there are about 25 Persian Muslims in Singapore today. He defined “Persian” as a Muslim of Persian, or Iranian origin and said that it was difficult to obtain records of early Persians in Singapore, because some had been classified as Indians. Mr. Namazie spoke of Farsi as being the language commonly used in his community in the past. Now very few young people can speak Farsi as they prefer to communicate in English.

The third workshop of the morning brought together three more groups, each in numbers but rich in heritage: the Syrian Christians, Jews and Armenians. Of the Syrian Christians, Mr. George Abraham said that they originally came from Kerala state in India and that the first, a Mr I N Benjamin, settled in Singapore in 1912.

Actually there are two Syrian Christian communities in Singapore: the Orthodox Syrian Christians numbering about 300, and the Mar Thomas congregation totalling over 500. However, both communities share the same traditions, such as the custom of arranged marriage, and they tend to be engaged in professions such as civil service, medicine, law and education. St. Thomas Secondary School was established by the Syrian Christians in 1955.

The segment on the Jews was led by Mr Charles Simon with comments by Mr Marshall which further enriched the discussion. Participants were told that the first Jew came to Singapore from Baghdad as early as 1830. The first synagogue was built in 1841 near Boat Quay and another, which remains standing today, was constructed on Waterloo Street in 1878.

Throughout their history in Singapore, the Jews have maintained friendly relations with the Arab population, as well as the Chinese, Malay and Indian. Although their community has dwindled from 2500 before World War II to about 250 members today, their contribution towards Singapore’s development far outweighs their numbers. Mostly they have been prominent in the professional community as brokers, diamond merchants and lawyers.

Mr Simon gave a brief biographical sketch of arguably the most prominent Singapore Jew, Mr David Marshall. Called to the bar in 1937, Mr Marshall rose to become a brilliant criminal lawyer, campaigning for “the underdog, the underprivileged and the unrepresented.” During the War, he was a member of the Singapore Volunteer Corps and had been imprisoned by the Japanese for more than three years in Hokkaido. He subsequently became Singapore’s first Chief Minister and now serves as Ambassador to France, Spain and Portugal.

The Armenians were represented by Mr Leon Palian, an expatriate Armenian civil engineer. Although it was the Armenians who were responsible for some of the oldest buildings still standing in Singapore, at present just over two dozen Armenians reside in Singapore, less than 10 of whom are Singaporean. The eldest member of the community, 81-year-old Mr. Mackie Martin was present at the gathering. He gave an historical account of the Armenians, whose native country is now part of Russia.

After the break for lunch, the conference dispersed into two workshops whose focus was on the smaller minorities under the larger Malay and Chinese headings. Discussion on the Bawean community was led by Mrs Geraldine Lowe-Ismail, whose husband’s
family is from the small island off the coast of Java.

Mrs Lowe-Ismail and Madam Ripiah Badrun gave an account of the more important facets of Baweanese life, such as the "pondok" or communal house which used to be the focus of Baweanese life. In the 1950's there were as many as 150 of these in Singapore. Today, however, the "pondok" has all but disappeared in the wake of urban development and resettlement. Still the Baweanese community spirit seems to remain undiminished.

The Minang Malays, who originated from Sumatra, were represented by Mr Marah Hoesin Salim. Among the most interesting customs of the group is that of matriarchal lineage. In Mr Salim's view, many of their traditions have been diluted and the Minang in Singapore are not very much different from the other Malays.

Pak Haji Sukaimi, on the day for the Javanese, gave a careful demonstration of the traditional art of making the "Meringkai janur", a decorative arrangement using coconut leaves. The "janur" graced the stage during the opening ceremonies and formed the decorative centrepiece for the entire conference.

Simultaneously with the workshop on the Malay minorities, another afternoon workshop concentrated on four Chinese minorities - the Hainanese, the Foochow, the Hakka and the Shanghainese. Dr Thomas T W Tan presented a paper on the two main types of Chinese rituals, rites of passage and calendrical rituals, commonly celebrated by all the dialect groups in Singapore.

He went on to say that once language and occupation separated these different Chinese groups. These distinctions are now becoming more and more blurred, however, as people move away from their traditional strongholds and into the mainstream of Chinese society.

Dr. Yap Mui Teng, speaking for the Hainanese, said that this group makes up the fifth largest Chinese dialect group in Singapore. The Hainanese speak a dialect most other Chinese do not understand, and it used to be that they were mainly cooks, waiters, confectioners and seamen, but with increasing educational levels, they have moved away from these typical occupations. One thing most people continue to associate with the Hainanese is their famous chicken rice!

Madam Tian Swee Geok then provided insight into the Foochows who are said to own 70% of the coffee shops in Singapore. These days, however, Foochow parents encourage their children to take up other occupations which offer a broader range of opportunities.

The Hakka came from Henan to Singapore as early as 1819 and seem to have concentrated mainly in the pawning-brokering trade, according to Madam Daphine Chua. 95% of local pawnshops are Hakka owned, as are 79% of herbal Chinese medicine shops. The Hakka are known to be a lazy, Madam Chua said, as well as thrifty and quick to fight.

The Shanghainese make up 0.79% of Singapore's total population, said Miss Lucy Cheong, speaking for the last group of minorities. Many of them speak Cantonese and marry into Cantonese families. The Shanghainese are well noted for their dress-making skills. Nowadays it is the elder generation of ladies who maintain the trade, as the younger find dress-making not so profitable.

All agreed that the workshops were informative and that it was a most successful event. Some felt it unfortunate, however, that the workshops were conducted simultaneously so that by selecting one group they had to miss others. Many expressed the wish that the Workshop might be repeated and that other minority groups might be invited to participate in a "Part II" session at some future date, such was the interest and enthusiasm generated by the conference.

More cultural treats were in store for those who opted to join in the buffet luncheon. Diners were able to savour several ethnic dishes considered to be specialties of some of the representative groups, such as the Paris' lamb curry called "Dhanak", the Hakka yam dish known as "Beans of Abacus", and the Armenian brinjal dish "kaku", as well as other local favourites.

Entertainment provided by local musical groups added spice to the lunch menu. The Jurong Police Boys Club sang and clapped their enthusiasm through "Gikir Barat", a song originating in Kelantan. A relatively new group of jazz musicians known as "Flame of the Forest" performed original compositions, mixing piano with traditional Eastern instruments in some very haunting melodies.

Popular local singing duo Jacintha and her father Alex Abishengadjen paid tribute to Mr Marshall with a rendition of "I Love Paris". This was followed by a resounding "Happy Birthday" from the audience as the lights dimmed and the cake and candles appeared in celebration of Mr Marshall's 80th birthday.

Another musical group, the Nanyang Community Guild Chinese Orchestra, performed traditional Chinese compositions at the close of the workshop sessions. More ethnic variety to complement the talks, a Javanese traditional dance, the "Kuda Kepang" concluded the day's entertainment. Four dancers, two young men and two young women, dressed in styled wayang costume, danced astride wooden horses to the accompaniment of traditional Javanese musical instruments.

On a more serious note, the Workshop ended with inter-religious blessings offered by leaders from the different local faiths. The prayers were led by Maulvi M H Bahubali (Islam), Ven Chow Koon Thra Panamadhavides (Buddhism), V. Rama Krishnan (Hinduism), Dr Anne Johnson (Christianity), Gyan Bikar Singh (Sikhism), Rabbi Isaac Benzakim (Judaism), and Ervd Behram R Vakil (Parsism). Each one prayed for peace and solidarity among the different racial and religious groups not only of Singapore but of the world as a whole - a fitting end to the day in which Singaporeans celebrated their "unity in diversity".

Note: For those who were unable to attend the Workshop, you will be interested to know that the Executive Committee is discussing publication of the papers and talks given during the Workshops.


Geraldene Lowe-Ismail, the Society met at the Sri Mariamman Temple on South Bridge Road to begin their tour of Chinatown. From the Pagoda Street of tailors, the group passed through a lodging house, turned opium den, for indentured labourers from China. The tour included a visit to the “slave market” on Trengganu Street, the new underground market, to Kreta Ayer Road and the cobbler famous for the stylistic variety of his shoes – everything from Kung Fu and Chinese Opera to Scottish dancing and Western Ballet. Other traditional tradespeople visited were paper model makers, calligraphers, those who specialize in the lion heads for the lionhead dance and cooks who prepare the delicious homemade soya bean milk. On Club Street, members watched the mahjong players at the Cantonese Club and then went on to the bakery on China Street.

A tour of Little India, also conducted by Ms. Lowe-Ismail, covered the Serangoon Road-area markets for spice, yoghurt, gold, and the thieves’ market for metals. By special request, the Jalan Besar area was explored with emphasis on its unique architecture. Ms. Lowe-Ismail pointed out little known wooden house built on stilts in the Malay style and hidden behind the old Bowen mosque. The tour finished with a sampling of traditional trades on Sungei Road.

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**SHS RECOMMENDATIONS TO URA DRAFT MASTER PLAN FOR THE CIVIC AND CULTURAL DISTRICT**

In early April the URA issued a draft master plan for the civic and cultural district of Singapore. Attendees to this, an exhibition of drawings, photographs and a scale model of the area marked for revitalization was held on 9 April. On the occasion of the opening, Mr. Ngiam Tong Dow, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Development invited the general public’s participation and consultation in the planning process.

In response to this invitation, the SHS formed an ad-hoc committee composed of Rafiq Junaidi, William Hui, Lisa Sharp, Joseph McNally, Gordon Benton, Geoffrey Malone, Kwa Chong Guan, Mok Wei Wei and Tan Teck Kim, and chaired by our President, Mr. William Lim. The committee felt strongly that here was an area where the multi-disciplinary approach of the Society could make a valuable contribution.

The ten-member working group held a number of lively informal discussions after visiting the exhibition. The views of the group and interested others were consolidated into a presentation document. Individual written contributions were then attached in annexes to the main body of the document, and the final product was sent to the Ministry of National Development on 7th of May.

Taking a broad view with special importance given to culture and history, the SHS recommendations place emphasis on the user of the environment, the need for a variety of open spaces and the user’s spontaneous interaction. Specific recommendations were made in the following areas: Istana Park, Fort Canning Park, Bras Basah Park, Heritage Trails, the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus. It was agreed that the District should have its own distinctive character and identity different from the other urban areas.

Representatives of the SHS working committee then had a very successful dialogue session with the Ministry on 28 May.
ROOTS, the Singapore Heritage Society newsletter, is published by the Singapore Heritage Society, 180 Paya Lebar Road, #05-04, Yi Guan Factory Building, Singapore 1440, and distributed by post to members only. Editorial material should be sent to the attention of Bonnie Tinsley, Editor.

The Society is an independent organization whose aims are to identify and foster the rich legacy handed down by Singapore's pioneers and their progenitors. It studies and disseminates among the general public an appreciation of our ecology, our built-environment and our way of life in its various spiritual and physical manifestations. The Society acts to promote active interest in the cultural life and history of Singapore, and to initiate action on research, evaluation, documentation, publication, collection, display, preservation and restoration of skills and items of historical interest.

Executive Committee Members
Mr William S W Lim, President
Brother Joseph McNally, Vice President
Mr William Hui, Honorary Secretary
Mr Rafiq Jumabhoy, Honorary Treasurer
Mr Goh Chong Hiang, Committee Member
Mr Arun Mahiznan, Committee Member

Mr Kwa Chong Guan, Committee Member
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CAN WE SAVE THE DRAGON?

Members of the SHS Executive Committee recently paid a visit to the San Mui Kiang pottery works, located in Jalan Hwa Yeh, off Ang Mo Kio Avenue 3, an area soon to be cleared for public housing. Believed to be the last working kiln of its kind in Singapore, the “dragon kiln” measures some 50 metres long and its humped and curving chambers resemble the shape of a dragon, with a chimney “tail” on one end and the firebox “head” at the other.

Mr Chua Eng Cheow built the kiln when he came to Singapore from Guangdong in 1936. Ever since that time it has been a family enterprise using traditional wood-fire methods to produce flower pots and water jars, mainly for export.

Appeals have been made to preserve the kiln as a family working tradition and a craft industry with historical value. SHS members and anyone interested in saving this “made in Singapore” original are encouraged to see the pottery works and its quiet country setting.

INSIDE

REPORT ON THE SINGAPORE HERITAGE SOCIETY MINORITIES WORKSHOP, UNITY IN DIVERSITY, HELD 6 MARCH 1988 AT THE SHERATON TOWERS, pp. 4-6