Society puts out monograph

THE Society put out its first publication on Singapore’s literary heritage to tie in with the theme of the 1989 Heritage Hunt. Pages From Yesteryear: A Look at the Printed Works of Singapore 1819-1959 features a brief history of the literary contributions of Singapore’s various ethnic groups and 100 plates of mainly book covers, frontispieces and illustrations from the rare books themselves. The rich diversity of early local publishing from the religious to the social and entertaining is captured in this publication. The rare plates alone make the book a must for the collection of the literary-minded as well as those interested in yet another aspect of Singapore’s heritage.

In her essay, librarian-turned writer Lee Geok Boi brings out the similarities in the publishing of the various languages. The same people and presses were handling publications in different languages. Religion spurred the development of publishing and printing in Tamil, English and Malay, while the initial creative inspiration came from outside the country, understandable enough in a migrant population which looked on Singapore only as a transit point.

The book was put together with the help of staff of the National Library which has a valuable collection of Singapore’s early printed works. The National Library, National Archives and Oral History Department were involved in organising the exhibition on Singapore’s literary heritage.

The limited edition - only 1,000 copies have been printed - of Pages of Yesteryear was made possible with sponsorship from Shell Singapore. Members of the Society get a 30 per cent discount off the $29.90 on prepaid orders from Select Book Store, #03-15 Tanglin Shopping Centre, tel. 732-1515. The discount makes this monograph only $20.90.

First-ever Heritage Hunt

THE first-ever Heritage Hunt was one of the main events in the 1988 National Heritage Month. This was a treasure hunt with a difference as participants were asked to hunt for the treasures of Singapore’s past, undiscovered or unacknowledged gems inherited from Singapore’s history. In organising this event, the Society benefitted greatly from the advice of Mr Chen Voon Fee, president of the Heritage of Malaysia Trust which had organised such a hunt in Kuala Lumpur in 1986.

An exhibition of the winning entries and special mentioned entries were exhibited at the National Archives exhibition hall from February 17 to March 2, 1989.

The Hunt was also made possible with the support and help of Mr Kwa Chong Guan and his staff at Oral History Department. The exhibition and catalogue were sponsored by Berger Paints Singapore Pte Ltd and Mobil Oil sponsored the prizes. BG George Yeo kindly consented to give away the prizes.

In Category 1, Buildings and Built Forms, the first prize went to the building at 25 Serangoon Road (recorder Madam Boey Yut Mei). This shop-house at the junction of Campbell Lane and Serangoon Road on the border of Little India was judged as an exceptional example of Singapore’s Peranakan shophouse of the early 1900s. The two-storey shophouse conforms to the scale and streetscape of the urban fabric, while providing a distinctive focal point. The attractively articulated corner facade combines classical motifs, letterings in both English and Chinese, corbels, brackets and other architectural characteristics typical of the period’s multicultural influences.

Where were you on August 9, 1965?

THERE are plans to publish a second monograph, this time on the events of August 9, 1965. This publication is again to be made possible by the generosity of Shell.

The book projected as being based almost entirely on oral history interviews will record the memories of businessmen, civil servants, hawkers, and other ordinary citizens who were affected by the dramatic split on August 9.

The separation of Singapore from Malaysia was the culmination of a particularly acrimonious period in Malaysia-Singapore relations. The book will explore the feelings, thoughts and consequences arising from the announcement of separation from Malaysia from the ordinary man’s point of view.

Interviews are slated to be done in the second half of this year to coincide

* See page 6
* See page 2
The Correspondence of Hoo Ah Kay a.k.a. Wampoo

By Brother Joseph McNally

HOO Ah Kay was one of the most colourful characters of 19th century Singapore. He was born in the village of Whampoa in China in 1816 and came to Singapore with his father in 1830. Their provision shop was named Whampoa after their native village. Eventually the name came to be applied to Ah Kay himself. A bright and enterprising young man, he saw the need, if he was to succeed, to learn the language of the colonials. He set up as a ships' chandler and almost immediately became indispensable as a liaison between the colonials and the immigrant Chinese. By 1836 he was already wealthy enough to present to the colonial government the property on which the Botanical Gardens were laid out.

He became a leader in his community and a trusted friend of the authorities. In 1840, he set up house along the road to Serangoon, which with its magnificent gardens soon became famous. Locals and visitors alike vied with one another for the chance of visiting them. He entertained lavishly both in the Chinese and Western manner and is credited with having been the first Chinese to host a ball for the elite of the colony.

He was appointed Consul for Russia in 1864, for China in 1878, and Japan in 1879. He was the unchallenged leader of the Chinese community. Most of the correspondence discovered in Hongkong dates from this period and prior to his death.

He had sent his son, Ah Yep, to study in England but was solicitous lest he become a WOG (Western Oriented Gentleman). To his horror, what he feared seemed to be happening. Ah Yep began to wear Western clothes and had his pigtail removed. He was promptly banished to Canton by his angry father. There Ah Yep remained until he showed due repentance and reverted to the ways of his ancestors. The lesson was not wasted as is shown by one of the most poignant letters just rediscovered. It describes the death in 1880 of the great Whampoa.

I had known some descendants of Ah Kay to be living in Singapore but not in Hongkong. To my great surprise, I was introduced to one on a visit there in September 1989, right at the beginning of the Heritage Hunt of that year. The name was Vincent Hoo and he was on the faculty of St Joseph's College. He was a man of great erudition and charm.

Learning that I was from Singapore, he asked me if I had heard of Whampoa. I queried jokingly what Singaporean would not have heard of him. He then proceeded to tell me how he was in the direct line of descent and that he had handwritten documents of his great-great grandfather.

I expressed a desire to see them and he warned me that they were not very legible because many of them had been written on both sides. The acidic ink had tended to seep through the paper. Also, he warned that the paper in one of the three ledger books was so fragile that a touch was enough to shatter its delicacy.

He said that he had difficulty reading the English documents in particular but that he could make out the Chinese ones. (Needless to say, for me the problem was reversed!)

When I asked Vincent if he would allow me to photostat the documents so as to return the copies to Singapore, he volunteered instead to allow me to bring the originals back or (in true Mandarin fashion) even to keep them.

The three volumes were a treasure trove of information on every conceivable topic that could occupy a diplomat and businessman of the Singapore of the later 19th century. Indeed, the diplomacy of those days seemed more intent on the quality of bread and the freshness of spinach than on the growing resentment of the Japanese at the encroachment of the Czar's navy in the Pacific.

With the utmost care I got the correspondence back to Singapore and submitted the volumes in time for the Hunt. They won first prize in their section. Characteristically, and in line with the generosity of his great ancestor, Vincent requested that the prize money be given to charity.

Before they can be copied, the documents need to be de-acidified. This required the consent of Vincent before the National Museum could undertake it. He agreed and the process is now underway.

From page 1

Where were you on August 9, 1965?

with the 25th anniversary celebrations. However, the publication of the monograph is tentatively scheduled for the first half of 1991.

The Society is looking for anyone and everyone with a story or episode to contribute to this book: Bus drivers crossing the Causeway daily, people with homes in Johor Baru and who worked in Singapore, those with families and relatives in Peninsular Malaysia, businessmen whose links across the Causeway were intrinsic to their success, those who never doubted that Malaysia and Singapore were one and the same nation. How did the announcement of the split affect them? What passed through their heads when they heard of the split? What preparations did they make? Did they anticipate trouble? Did they feel a conflict of ties?

If you know of anyone with interesting anecdotes, experiences or accounts of what they were doing on August 9 and with a clear memory of their feelings and thoughts of that day, get in touch with:

Irene Lim
C/o Oral History Department
140 Hill Street
Hill Street Building
Singapore 0617
tel. 330-0928
Literary hunt uncovers rare treasures

THREE ledger books belonging to 19th century pioneer Hoo Ah Kay better known to Singaporeans as Whampoa were among the treasures unearthed in the 1989 Heritage Hunt which focused on the literary. Participants were encouraged to search for pre-war printed works.

Altogether, 19 people submitted entries. The winning entries were exhibited at the National Archives exhibition hall in Hill Street together with some of the rare publications in the South-east Asia Collection of the National Library.

The exhibition was opened by Mr Mah Bow Tan, Minister of State, Communications and Information, and Trade and Industry. In his opening address, Mr Mah highlighted the importance of knowing our past, saying that the past provides us with “the anchor, with that sense of identity, of knowing who we are, that makes us different and Singaporean”.

Also on display were the Peranakan literature collections of two private collectors, Mr Ong Bok Lin and Mrs Mah Beng Guan.

The 10-day exhibition was the culmination of the 1989 Heritage Hunt in conjunction with Heritage Week from October 30 to November 5. The Hunt was a Cultural Foundation project sponsored by Mobil Oil Singapore Pte Ltd.

There were three categories: Category 1 was for works printed or published in Singapore, or works on Singapore published outside Singapore before 1945. Category 2 was for non-book format publications of historical and/or literary merit. Category 3 was for unpublished manuscripts, diaries, journals and other works with literary merit.

The assessors were: Dr S. Gopinathan, Acting Head of Department of Comparative Studies, Institute of Education, Mrs Peggy Hochstadt, Chief Librarian, National University of Singapore, Mr V.T. Arasu, Editor, Tamil Murasu, Dr Liaw Yock Fung, Senior Lecturer of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore, Dr Tan Wee Kiat, Director, Singapore Botanic Gardens, Mr Kwa Chong Guan, Director, National Museum/Oral History Department, Mrs Hedwig Anuar, former director, National Library.

There were nine winners in Category 1. The first prize of $500 went to Tamil Variradiva Aarachi by A. C. Suppiah. This book on ways to reform the Tamil script was by a prominent Singapore Tamil reformist leader and trader. The reforms were eventually implemented by the Singapore Government and the government of Tamil Nadu. The book was submitted by Mr M. P. Srinivasan.

The second prize of $300 went to Panton Dondong Sayang Baba Baba, book of pantons published and printed by Koh & Company in Singapore in 1915-16. The three volumes submitted by Mr Tan Geok Koon complement two volumes in the collection of the National Library to make up the five volumes in the original set.

Special Mention and a prize of $100 also went to the following:
- Chirita Duwa-kalaka submitted by Mr Tan Ban Huat.
- Automobile Guide of Malaya submitted by Mr Yeo Choon Seng.

Consolation prizes of $50 also went to Mr Srinivasan for a set of Tamil books printed between 1916 and 1942; Mr Goh Eck Kheng for Straits Produce; and Mrs Geraldene-Lowe Ismail for two catalogues: American Express-Dutch East Indies, Indo-China, Malaya, Siam 1932-1933, and Airport of Singapore Opening, 1937.

In Category 2 the first prize of $500 went to a pre-war advertisement booklet published by Eng Ann Tong, makers of Tiger Medical Hall products. It was submitted by Mr Yeo Choon Seng.

The second prize of $300 went for a poster for a Robinson’s Catalogue circa 1900. It was submitted by Mrs Geraldene Lowe-Ismail.

Third prize of $100 was for concert programmes of the 50-strong Syonan Symphony Orchestra submitted by Mr Alex S. Abishegunadan.

Consolation prizes of $50 went to Mrs Geraldene Lowe-Ismail for a 1920 poster of the Medical Office, Air Raid Precautions (2) 1938 submitted by Mr Hardial Singh and a 1943 Court Subpoena/Affidavit submitted by Mr Teh Thye Beng.

In Category 3 the first prize of $500 went to Hoo Ah Kay’s correspondence. There were no second or third prizes but a consolation prize of $50 was awarded for a collection of Tamil songs and sermon notes circa 1922-32. It was submitted by Bishop T. R. Doraisamy.

Coming activities
- **Sunday 9 September**, 8 am - 10 am, Botanic Gardens
  Heritage-nature walk at the Botanical Gardens. The walk will cover the history of the Gardens, folklore, medicinal and other aspects of plants. Free to members but donations to Malayani Nature Society welcome.
- **Saturday, September 22**, 1 pm at Marina Bay Golf and Country Club (Marina South)
- **Saturday, December 1**, 7.30 pm, Peranakan Place
  Fashion and heritage plus dinner. Contact Allister Lim at 224-0984. Cost: $45.
- **Saturday, March 16 1991**, 7.30 pm, Venue to be fixed
  Music and culture. Cost: $45.

More details will be available nearer the dates from the activity co-ordinators, Y P Chee (tel 339-7633) or Ms Cheong Ying Ying (tel 321-6504).
Covent of the Holy Infant Jesus complex in the news

The Covent of the Holy Infant Jesus complex in Victoria Street came into the news at the beginning of the year. The Urban Redevelopment Authority decided to put the building up for public tender. Concerned people such as the Society and the CHIJ old girls association expressed fears that the privatisation of the conservation project may result in a destruction of the attractive ambiance of the site as the successful tenderer attempted to recover his costs.

As an expression of this concern, the committee met several times and eventually came up with a letter of appeal to the Minister of National Development, Mr S. Dhanabalan, into whose portfolio the URA falls.

Below is the text of the letter sent to Mr Dhanabalan:

"On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Singapore Heritage Society, we wish to express our deep concern of the mooted plans for the CHIJ complex announced recently by your ministry.

In our opinion, the CHIJ complex is a unique treasure of Singapore's environmental heritage. In particular, we refer to the chapel, Caldwell House and the courtyard as well as the general scale and ambiance of the whole complex. Furthermore, this complex is also located within the designated Civic and Cultural District and in close proximity to the National Museum, Library and art gallery.

In our opinion, the conceptual guidelines for the adaptive re-use of this complex should be governed by three important criteria. Firstly, the usage should primarily be for cultural and civic purposes. Any commercial elements should be small and properly controlled as supporting facilities. Secondly, the scale of the development should generally be maintained, notwithstanding that the classroom blocks may be substantially modified or even rebuilt. Car parks should be minimised and if possible totally avoided. Thirdly, the complex should be accessible for the enjoyment and relaxation of the general public. This is particularly important in relation to the courtyard, the chapel and Caldwell House.

We strongly feel that privatisation of this complex will have considerable difficulty in achieving the necessary objectives. One possibility, therefore, is to establish a private foundation with the express purpose of conserving and managing the CHIJ complex. The foundation could be funded by private foundations and enterprises as a community project - perhaps with matching grants from the government.

Press reports and discussions suggest that there is some support for CHIJ to be preserved for cultural and civic rather than commercial uses. It will be useful to more accurately assess public support and commitment for this course of action. The Heritage Society together with other heritage-minded Singaporeans is prepared to undertake an exercise to collect signatures of our citizens who would like CHIJ to be preserved for cultural and civic uses. The Heritage Society's executive committee would like to meet your or your representatives to discuss the usefulness of such an exercise before launching it as well as to explore feasible options to maximise the enhancement of this very special heritage building complex for the enjoyment of our citizens and future generations."
Films on conservation

THE Society which had been keen to put together a mini-festival of films on conservation took the opportunity to tag onto the third Singapore Film Festival to run a programme of films on conservation.

Five films on various aspects of conservation were screened at the Goethe-Institut. *Stop the Bulldozer* from the United Kingdom was a 40-minute film on the reconstruction of Frankfurt’s city centre and the make-over of the Musee d’Orsay from the Gare d’Orsay, a disused railway station. The film also dealt with the role of conservationists. Screening was courtesy of the British Council.

One half-hour German film, *A Difficult Heritage*, examined how conservation is encouraged through city-wide competitions and government incentives to reconstruct old buildings. Another half-hour German film on the arts, *Porcelain - A Material of the Past with a Future*, traced the influence of Chinese porcelain on European craftsmen and collectors. Screening was courtesy of the Goethe-Institut.

*Reconstruction of Istana Tengku Long*, a half-hour Malaysian film describes the dismantling and reconstruction of this historic istana built in 1879. Badan Warisan Malaysia assisted with the screening.

*Central Institute for Restoration*, a short Italian filmlet, focuses on the role of Italy’s Central Institution for Restoration in preserving the treasures of Italian art. The Embassy of the Republic of Italy assisted with this screening.

Messrs Geoff Malone and Philip Cheah were responsible for putting together the series of films.

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The Eastern Hotel — R.I.P.

Below is the text of an article which was published in Berita Akitek, the newsletter of the Malaysian Institute of Architects, under the headline “The Eastern Hotel - R.I.P.”

The overnight demolition and destruction of the Eastern Hotel building, which has withstood the ravages of war and time and which has been proposed for gazetting for preservation, is grossly irresponsible act. Even the manner in which it was carried out, with or without approval being given by City Hall, is inexcusable and must not be condoned.

The developer knowing that the penalty under current legislation was ridiculously small, acted most irresponsibly by destroying one of K.L.’s oldest buildings in unseeming (sic) haste. The action becomes even more incredulous (sic) since the development company is being managed by a prominent professional town planner, who of all people is supposed to be sensitive to the issue of conservation and preservation. In the proposed multi-million dollar project, surely it would not have been too much for the planner and the architects concerned to relocate or to replan the layout and accommodate the preservation of this building. In any case we are not even sure that Kuala Lumpur is able to cope with or benefit from another mega project within the heart of the already congested city.

Preservation and conservation are and will always be highly sensitive and emotional issues. But no excuse is sufficient for irresponsible action and we strongly urge the government and its relevant ministries to take the necessary action to gazette all other similar buildings identified for preservation. This will ensure that our history is preserved for the future generation.

The Society’s response

*Congratulations on your strong statement regarding the demolition of the Eastern Hotel by the developer. In the last couple of years, developers in Singapore have also indiscriminately demolished many buildings of historical value.*

*The Singapore Heritage Society fully supports your recommendation to urge the government and its relevant ministries to take the necessary action to gazette all other similar buildings identified for preservation.*

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Heritage clubs in schools

START them young was the aim behind an idea which came up during the year - heritage clubs in schools. The creation of such clubs perhaps as an integral part of history clubs would help to raise awareness of the physical heritage of history.

Connecting the past with the present by generating an active interest in the physical evidence of history would also help to bring history alive to students. All too often students think of history as rote learning, memorising dates and names which have little to do with their present-day lives.

As part of its activities, a heritage club could organise talks, visits to places with heritage and historical value as well as work on projects to highlight society as well as members’ links with the past.

If you think you can contribute to moving this project along, do get in touch with the Society at tel. 235-3113.

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Reprint of Pastel Portraits

MEMBERS who are interested in Singapore’s architectural heritage should not lose this opportunity to lay their hands on a copy of *Pastel Portraits: Singapore’s Architectural Heritage*, also at a discount. This definitive book has just been reprinted by Select Book Store. Selling for $60, the book is available to members of the Society only at a special discount of 20 per cent.

The book was originally published by the Singapore Coordinating Committee, which in 1983 got together to plan an international seminar on Adaptive Re-Use of Old Buildings. The committee also decided that the seminar which was held in 1984 in Singapore, was the perfect opportunity to produce a record of Singapore’s architectural heritage.

The book is richly illustrated with photographs by R. Ian Lloyd and Ian C. Stewart which bring out the beauty in Singapore’s pre-war architecture.
First-ever Heritage Hunt

Other popular architectural features of the day included a clay-tiled roof, stained glass fanlights, French wooden shutters, and lime-mortar plastered walls of load-bearing local bricks. The five-footway is colonnaded and provides a good frontage for the coffee shop downstairs.

The second prize in this category went to the building at 291 River Valley Road, a turn-of-the-century Peranakan house. Originally the residence of Mr Ang Beng Guan, recorder Tan Ban Huat’s maternal grandfather, it is now the Missions to Seamen club house. This was one of the first examples of how old buildings could be re-adapted for new uses. Although much of the interior has been re-arranged, the eye-catching facade of the house has been retained.

The third prize went to another turn-of-the-century building, this time in the style of grand houses used to accommodate military officers. The building at Bukit Timah, 7 Royal Road, Alexandra Park, is also historically significant as the residence of Lieutenant-General Edward Victor Martin, which was besieged by the mutinous 5th Light Infantry in 1915.

The regiment which lacked good leadership and discipline had befriended some German prisoners they were guarding. The prisoners fanned the resentment of the soldiers against their British superiors and incited them to mutiny. Many innocent lives were lost as a result and officialdom was shocked into realising that danger could come from within.

Recorder Tng Kim Bock read of the incident in Singapore Mutiny, and was led to the discovery of the house. In Category 2, Natural Environment, Mr Peter Ng Kee Lin took the first prize with his discovery of two indigenous species of freshwater crabs that reside in Singapore’s hill streams and catchment waters. The two species — Johnson’s Freshwater Crab (Imengardia johnsoni) and the Singaporean Freshwater Crab (Johora singaporense) — are most commonly found in Bukit Timah Hill but also occasionally in scattered forested and relatively undisturbed localities throughout Singapore.

The second prize in the Natural Environment category highlighted a disappearing edible fruit tree, the Butterfruit Tree (Diospyros philippinensis). A native of the Philippines, this tree was common in villages and gardens in Malaya and Singapore from the early 1800s but has become a rarity these days.

Two good specimens still thrive one in the grounds of the Bishop’s House next to the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd; the other, estimated to be 100 years old, is in the front garden of the tiny San Wah Hotel in Bend- coolen Street. The tree was planted when 36 Bendcoolen Street was a private residence.

In the third category, Personalities, the first prize was awarded to recorder Lee Ming Cherk who submitted an oral history account of Ho Sum Tin (1855-1942), a prominent Chinese businessman, community leader and philanthropist who came to Singapore at the turn of the century from Sam Sui, Guangdong Province. He established himself as both a provision shop merchant and as a Chinese physician.

As one of the founding members of the Sam Sui Association, he was instrumental in establishing the new premises at Hai San Street and creating a reading room there. The aim was to help raise the literacy of association members and also to further the revolutionary cause of Dr Sun Yat Sen.

He helped form the Tung Men Hui or Alliance Association in opposition to the Manchu dynasty. Although extremely unpopular with his neighbours, he managed to house many revolutionaries who fled China to seek refuge in Singapore.

The second prize went to the tomb of Tan Tock Seng discovered by Mrs Geraldene Lowe-Ismail. The grave, one of the few still remaining on the inaccessible slope embankment of Outram Road, Tiong Bahru, belonging to one of Singapore’s most famous immigrants, is hardly distinguishable from the weeds and overgrowth and there is no plaque or other sign of recognition.

Born in Malacca in 1798, Tan Tock Seng came to Singapore in 1819 and worked hard selling vegetables. In 1844 he built a paupers hospital on Pearl’s Hill. This hospital was moved to Balestier Plain and finally to Moulmein Road where it continues to bear his name.

The third prize went to Mr Tan Ban Huat for his account of Ang Beng Guan, the recorder’s grandfather. The history of Ang Beng Guan is typical of the Peranakan, the locally-born Straits Chinese, a distinct group from the recent immigrant communities from China. From the 1920s, the family lived at 291 River Valley Road. Ang received an English education at Raffles Institution and devoted his working life to a Dutch shipping company, Rotterdam Lloyds. His two sisters and his mother were among the pioneers of Singapore’s nonya kueh industry. They operated a thriving nonya kueh industry from their home kitchen and achieved financial independence popularising the kueh.

Five other submissions received special mention. They were:

- Singapore Railway Station in Tanjong Pagar (recorder: Mrs Ilza Sharp), Prinsep Street finds (recorder: Mrs Geraldene Lowe-Ismail), Site of Joachim House and Garden of Mt Narcis (recorder: Mrs Geraldene Lowe-Ismail); Smallest House (recorder: Mrs Geraldene Lowe-Ismail), and Raffles Coins (recorder: Mrs Yolanda P. Danker).

The Assessors

Mr Chen Voon See, architect and president of the Heritage of Malaysia Trust, Mr William Kim, architect, Dr Leo Tan, Director, Singapore Science Centre, Ms Ilza Sharp, author and public relations officer, Malaysian Nature Society, Dr Tan Wei Kiat, Director, Singapore Botanic Garden, Mr A.R. Jumabhoy, Managing Director, Scotts Holdings Pte Ltd, Mr Kwa Chong Guan, Director, National Museum and Oral History Department, and Brother Joseph McNally, Director of La Salle College of Art.
A SUB-COMMITTEE on archaeology under Dr John Miksic of the History Department of the National University of Singapore is to be formed. Dr Miksic, an archaeologist and historian specialising in South-east Asian history was the man involved in the successful excavations of Fort Canning in recent years.

In his proposal outlining the aims of the sub-committee, Dr Miksic pointed out that "the Singapore public has a low opinion of the possibility that archaeology can contribute to our knowledge of Singapore's history". While excavations at Fort Canning and Duxton Hill have partially alleviated this perception, the general feeling is that Singapore is too developed to afford many sites suitable for systematic research.

Contends Dr Miksic: "This is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If one does not search for sites, then they will not be forthcoming. Some of us who have been involved in archaeological research believe that archaeology has significant potential for adding new knowledge of Singapore's past. No organised programme for archaeological research in Singapore yet exists. The Singapore Heritage Society is one of the organisations which should be capable of placing this endeavour on a more secure footing."

What actually is archaeology in Singapore's context? According to Dr Miksic, it can be defined as "the systematic search for material evidence of man's past activities and the analysis of these remains. By analysis is meant drawing inferences regarding the patterns inherent in man's activities, the factors which shape these patterns and the relations between human culture and material objects."

"Most people think of archaeology as simply going out to dig for old things buried in the ground or under water. This quest will always form the core of archaeological research, but it is not the sole means by which archaeological data can be acquired. Many things can be learned from observing remnants of past human activity brought to light by other means. Archaeologists often conduct reconnaissance surveys to observe the distribution of artifacts on the surface of the ground. Construction projects often reveal strata containing evidence of past periods. Materials uncovered in this way cannot give information as precise as those excavated systematically, but they are still valuable as historical sources if their excavation is properly observed and recorded."

An appreciable segment of the Singapore public is interested in the results of archaeological research in the country. Numerous individuals called or visited the National Museum and the Fort Canning and Duxton Plain excavations.

Since no permanent archaeological institution or body exists in Singapore said Dr Miksic in his proposal, there is no focus to archaeological work and much potentially valuable information which the public might be able to contribute does not reach relevant individuals. An Archaeological Working Group in the Society could act as a focal point for all individuals who are interested in participating in archaeological research, or who have information of potential value to archaeologists.

The goals of the group would be:
* To act as a forum for discussion of how Singaporean archaeology might be developed;
* To receive and compile information from the public regarding possible archaeological sites and discoveries in Singapore;
* To compile a register of individuals who would be interested in participating in archaeological research in Singapore;
* To plan archaeological research projects in accordance with relevant Singapore laws;
* To raise funds for archaeological research projects;
* To organise field trips to sites of archaeological interest in the region.

Anyone with comments, or an interest in joining can get in touch with:
Lucille Yap
140 Hill Street, Singapore 0617
tel: 330-0920

Vanishing Foods and Crafts Fair

ABOUT 40 different types of foods and crafts were featured at this one-day fair held at St Joseph's Institution on June 24. The average age of many participants was over 50. Among the crafts featured were the making of Malay, Chinese and Indian wedding decorations, joss-stick figurines, masks, lanterns, Chinese funeral papercraft, siliam kebay and beadwork.

The foods included exotic dishes of the different communities rarely seen these days as well as demonstrations of how spices were mixed and traditional kueh made.

The fair was put together by a sub-committee chaired by Mrs Loubnan Jumabby. In conjunction with the fair, there was a forum to discuss the fute of the vanishing crafts. There were plans for publication of a book on these vanishing crafts, but the project has been shelved because of a lack of sponsors.
In remembrance of things past

By Lee Geok Boi

ONE of the joys of travel in Europe is the way the visitor is linked with the country's past. This link is not just visually in buildings, streets and atmosphere but also in the form of words. A plaque on the wall of a modern house in London documents the site of a house in which Charles Dickens lived when he was working on a certain book. Another on a wall along a Parisian street highlights the spot where the last French patriot fell at the end of World War II. The first bottle of eau de Cologne was reputedly concocted in house no. 711 in Cologne, as famous for its spectacular cathedral as for its toilet water, a fact remembered by a plaque on that famous street.

Much of Singapore's cityscape has changed beyond recognition. No longer can we see Whampoa's mansion and its spacious grounds in Serangoon Road. On the site stands a block of Housing Board flats. Dr Lim Boon Keng's house stood at the corner of Grange and Paterson roads until it was knocked down to make way for a condominium. Tan Tock Seng's charity hospital was first built on Pearl's Hill, itself named after Captain Pearl.

It would be a fitting project for the Singapore Heritage Society to awaken awareness of our historical heritage by highlighting historic spots on the island. Such plaques as those I spotted in Europe would go some way to generate in people the awareness that names and events in history books are more than mere names and descriptions, that these personages and events do have physical settings, that a piece of ground or a building has a past which can speak to us.

As a society project for the 25th anniversary of Singapore's independence, nothing could do a better job of spreading heritage awareness and literally bringing it to the doorsteps of ordinary citizens. What better way too to highlight the existence and work of the Heritage Society? Suitable winners of the Society's Heritage Hunts could be remembered in the same manner instead of letting the discoveries moulder in old newspaper clippings.

The project would require not only a list of interesting personages and events to be highlighted and a short text to be written for each selection, but also a knowledge of the sites where such plaques could be put up.

Financing for the project could be by way of donations from descendants of the highlighted individuals or from commercial sponsors who should, however, agree to the idea that an acknowledgement to their generosity should not turn the plaques into advertising billboards. Perhaps residents of the buildings where the plaques are to be put up could themselves contribute to the simple brass plaques which would bring forth hitherto hidden historical associations.

Members meet at AGM

MORE than 20 members of the society met at its Annual General Meeting on May 29 and after the lively exchange of views were enthusiastic that there should be more meetings. It was proposed that such meetings be held quarterly on an informal basis.

The programme sub-committee is also to look into making activities and functions more meaningful to its members. (See page 3.)

The meeting held at Silks Lounge at Scotts was chaired by president William Lim. He summarised the activities of 1989-1990. He mentioned the Society's feedback to the Urban Redevelopment Authority on the Draft Master Plan for the Urban Waterfronts at Marina Bay and Kallang Basin. This was followed up with a dialogue session with the Minister for National Development, Mr S. Dhanabalan.

He also highlighted the Society's submission on the proposed Walkway Systems and Facilities to the Public Works Department in March this year, as well as another on the CIHJ complex.

There were no elections as the committee's two-year term of office still had another year to run. The meeting which started at 5.30 pm ended at 8 pm and members adjourned for dinner.