Conference on Our Place in Time

Sponsors Wanted

The Singapore Heritage Society is working with the Substation to organise a two-day conference and week-long exhibition on the theme “Our Place in Time” scheduled for September this year. We are looking for sponsors for this landmark conference. Through the participatory exhibition and the conference, the organisers hope to achieve both a visual and an intellectual reflection on the richness of heritage in Singapore — and on the challenge of extending our heritage under contemporary conditions.

The hope is that there will be some light shed on some basic questions such as “What is heritage?” “What does it mean to view heritage not just in terms of the things that we have inherited from our ancestors?” “How is heritage an active and creative process of conserving and transforming, remembering and reinterpreting? How is heritage communicated to the young?” “How do we deal with the vastness of change in the space of one or two generations?”

The Society is concerned with both the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage as a way of life in all its manifestations as its record of recent activities show. The Substation since its inception in 1990 has been “a home for the arts”, its activities attracting thousands of people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds. The Substation offers a good example of the creative interaction between the traditional and the contemporary in Singapore, allowing space for the classical, the folk and the experimental to thrive.

The aim of this proposed exhibition and conference is to reach out to key organisations and public sectors interested in heritage in one way or another, those involved in the transmission of values as well as those in the arts and research. These include tertiary institutions and research bodies, mass media organisations, and teachers and minders of young people.

However, the aim is not to produce a purely academic affair for about 100 participants but to make it interactive and discursive. The exhibition of “objects of memory” along the lines of a heritage hunt will not only portray the richness and complexity of our heritage and our relation to the living past but also elicit from the owners the meaning these objects have for them.

The installation will aim for visual impact plus allow the viewer to participate in the exhibition, experiencing both the familiar and unfamiliar.

The publication of conference proceedings will also ensure that this latest effort at reflecting on heritage in Singapore will be recorded, serving as a baseline for future discussions.

Dr Kwok Kian-Woon heads the Society’s organising committee for this conference. If you want to help or have any suggestions on sponsors or for the conference, please call him at tel. (65) 772-3176 or 772-3822 or fax. (65) 777-9579.

* See also Art vs Art page 2.

Tribute from the Heritage Board chairman

From left: author Robert Powell, Mobil chairman Robert C. Parker, President William Lim, and at the lectern Heritage Board chairman Lim Chee Onn.

The Chairman of the National Heritage Board, Lim Chee Onn, paid tribute to the efforts of the Singapore Heritage Society to preserve Singapore’s heritage at the launch of the Society’s latest publication, Living Legacy: Singapore’s Architectural Heritage Renewed on 13 December last year.

“Going through the book, one gets the feeling that the official attitude towards building conservation is changing for the better. This increasing interest in retaining, restoring or rebuilding selected buildings of interest must give a tremendous sense of satisfaction to the group of professionals who have laboured mightily over the past many years to preserve what they deem to be Singapore’s living legacy,” he said to guests and members present at the launch at Fort Canning Centre.

The marvel, he said, was how Singapore had succeeded in preserving many worthwhile buildings rather than how many significant buildings had been lost to the wrecker’s ball given the pressing agenda of the early years of nationhood.

* See page 2
Seven get recognition

The Society took the opportunity presented by the launch of Living Legacy to recognise the contribution of seven individuals to the conservation of Singapore's built heritage. In his speech, President William Lim said they were a select few "whose actions and commitment to conservation have undoubtedly gone beyond their normal duties".

The seven who were given tokens of recognition — a copy of Living Legacy — were:

- S. Rajaratnam for his memorable opening speech at the 1984 MIT-Harvard-sponsored international adaptive re-use conference and his foreword in the book Pastel Portraits;
- Lee Kip Lin for his scholarly research and publications, in particular the excellent book, The Singapore House 1819 to 1992;
- Liu Thai Ker for his behind-the-scenes support particularly in the early Eighties;
- Pamela Lee for her outspoken stand at private meetings and in generating studies of conservation projects;
- The late Peter Keys for his passionate plea for conservation in his articles and many letters to the press;
- Dr Goh Poh Seng for his poetic commitment as well as his initiation of the Boat Quay and Singapore River study; and
- Geraldene Lowe for her incredible tours of Chinatown and heritage sites.

The recipients or their representatives were present to receive their tokens.

Art vs Art

The Society's first collaboration with the Substation — Art vs Art — proved so fruitful that it is pooling resources again, this time more focussed on the theme of heritage. The collaboration in September last year arose because the Society was also thinking of a conference on the arts and heritage at that time and it was decided to combine its efforts with those of the Substation.

The Art vs Art conference opened by pioneer artist Liu Kang turned out to be a major conference, attracting key participants in the arts scene such as the National Arts Council and artists as well as critics and academics. There was also wide press coverage of the papers and discussions, some very heated.

The two-day conference covered a wide range of basic issues which got people thinking in new directions although the conference which aimed to diagnose the state of art in Singapore did not often discuss art. Instead discussion ranged from arts funding to politics and economics.

Tribute from the Heritage Board chairman

* Continued from page 1

"This," he said, "is not an apology for what has not been done but rather a statement of what is reality and fact."

Elaborating on the reality, he said: "There was simply no time to rearrange the furniture in the sitting room while pressing matters have to be attended to in the kitchen. Indeed on quite a number of occasions there were fires in the kitchen that had to be put out promptly. In the 60s and 70s it was not surprising that conservation did not feature highly, if at all, in our national agenda."

He warned, however, that conservation was not enough. The acid test really was whether the buildings could be maintained and put to good use. "For unless this is so, what is a conservationist's pride today will be a derelict building ripe for demolition 20 years down the road. Hence the selection of buildings for conservation has to be undertaken realistically and cannot be a passing fancy."

"Life must be brought back to the building in such a way that it makes commercial sense for the building to be used either in the original manner for which it was built or in some compatible and creative way. Only if a building is successfully used will it be maintained well. In this way it will remain a source of pride both to the owners as well as to the community." (For the text of Mr Lim Chee Onn's speech see page 6.)

The publication of this fourth book by the Society, authored by Robert Powell, a National University of Singapore School of Architecture lecturer, was made possible by a grant of $140,000 from its sole sponsor, Mobil, a company which itself has a long history in Singapore. Last year it celebrated its 100 years in Singapore. The company started selling fuel products in 1893 at 10 Robinson's Quay.

Speaking at the launch, the chairman of Mobil Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd, Mr Robert C. Parker said: "Mobil has made contributions to publications which capture Singapore architectural heritage like Pastel Portraits and Coleman's Singapore. In this our centennial year in Singapore, we are again pleased to be associated with the quality publication we are launching today. I believe it will contribute to the preservation of our legacy."

He recalled that 10 years ago, Mobil sponsored an exhibition of historical paintings, prints and postcards at the National Museum called Singapore Rediscovered, a visual documentation of early Singapore which was also shown at Sentosa and several community centres.

"It marked," he said, "the first time that a private company took a public stand on the need for judicious landmarks preservation in Singapore."

Mobil has not only helped sponsor publications on heritage such as Living Legacy and Coleman's Singapore, it also sponsored several annual heritage hunts organised by the Society over the years.

The President of the Society William Lim thanked Mobil for its continued support of urban conservation and heritage in Singapore and of the Society's activities. He also thanked the author Robert Powell, the designers Koh Hui Hui and Jeanie Goh, the two photographers Albert K.S.Lim and Luca InverniZZa Tettoni, and the project coordinator Goh Eck Kheng, for their collective efforts in producing a marvellous book.

* For the text of the President's speech see page 11.
Phuket conservationists hear about Singapore’s experience

The Society shared Singapore’s experience on conserving shophouses with conservationists in Phuket. The invitation from the Governor-General of Phuket was to speak at a seminar and work study on the Conservation of Old Sino-Portuguese Buildings in the Old Town Centre of Phuket.

The talk and slide show by the President William Lim was made possible by the presence of a simultaneous interpreter since the participants were mostly Thai. He spoke on the role of the different agencies of change including that of the Heritage Society as well as the conflicting priorities of heritage conservation.

There was also the need for appropriate legislation to give clout to conservationists as well as a machinery for compensating affected tenants. The rules and regulations had to be enforceable with an agency established to handle implementation.

Conservation also had to make economic sense to make it attractive to everyone including the government. Unlike the situation in most Western countries, Singapore does not give any subsidies or tax concessions of any kind to conservationists. However, the government does provide the improvements in the services and infrastructure facilities as well the landscaping of streets and backlanes of areas that are conserved. Wherever possible, streets are made into pedestrian malls and traffic-free zones.

The President reported that the response of the Thai participants was very enthusiastic and what he found particularly interesting were the walks in Phuket’s old town centre. Many of the buildings bore a remarkable similarity to the archi-ecture of the old trading towns such as Malacca and Singapore — or what historians call the coastal trade culture.

Heritage walks

Committee member Geraldene Lowe led four interesting heritage walks in recent months which were well-supported. Sixty people showed up for the early morning walk for charity on the first day of Thai-pusam in January. The walk was followed by a roti prata breakfast.

In February there were two walks. Taking advantage of the opening of the Istana for the Lunar New Year, there was a walk in the Istana grounds. This was well-supported being the first day of the Lunar New Year. There was another walk a few days later on Sunday which was better supported. This Sunday morning walk was from Blair Road through Bukit Pasoh on to Keong Siak Street.

Nearly two weeks later, 20 people turned up for the Chap Goh Mei walk which was appropriately enough again in Chinatown but this time the four-hour walk included a dinner of Hakka specialties at the Moi Kong Hakka Restaurant in Murray Street. After a good meal, the walk continued through Ann Siang Hill with visits to two special Chap Goh Mei festivities along Telok Ayer Street.

Contemporary Values papers

The papers presented at the closed door forum and open discussion on Heritage and Contemporary Values held jointly by the Singapore Heritage Society and the Institute of Policy Studies have been published and the booklet is now on sale at leading bookstores. It is edited by Arun Mahizhnan of the IPS and published by Times Academic Press.

Dr Kwok Kian-Woon, Mok Wei Wei, Russel Heng and Dr Gwee Yee Hean presented the papers. The booklet also contains excerpts of the public discussion that followed the papers. They cover the problem of tradition in contemporary Singapore, acquisition and communication of value systems, and the search for visual identity.
Hari Raya at Aziza's

If you do not know how to tie a sarong or weave a ketupat casing, then you missed your chance to learn at Aziza's. The Lifestyle and Cultural Committee under YP Chee organised another makan sedap at this Malay restaurant in Emerald Hill last year. Some 40 people turned up for an evening of good Malay food and a lesson in how to tie a sarong and keep it tied. Volunteers tried their hand at it after being shown how. A kompang group entertained with their rousing rhythmic drumming and just in case you forgot your first lesson in how to make a ketupat casing at the first Hari Raya evening the year before, you got a second chance to get it right.

In December the Indian Night at Annalakshmi with cultural entertainment by the Kala Mandir was very well-received too, and YP Chee's committee is thinking of making this and the Malay Cultural Evening part of the Society's annual calendar of events. Those who came for the evening had a taste of Indian vegetarian food and entertainment of traditional Indian music and a talk and demonstration on Indian dance and how to appreciate it.

A third Malay Cultural Evening was held in April, again at Aziza's.

Historical geographers to meet in 1995

Historical geographers will meet in Singapore next year for a Pre-Conference Symposium from June 28-30, and the theme will be Landscape and Identity although papers on all aspects of historical geography are welcome. Those wishing to present papers should submit abstracts by 30 September 1994. The Symposium will also include field trips to various parts of Singapore that are of historical and cultural interest.

The Pre-Conference is a curtain-raiser for the Ninth International Conference of Historical Geographers to be held in Perth with focus on the theme of cultural heritage. Negotiations are ongoing for the publication of a post-conference volume through the auspices of Curtin University's Centre for Cultural Heritage Studies. The deadline for submission of abstracts is also September 30. The conference dates are 3-7 July 1995.

All correspondence on the West Australian component of the conference should be addressed to: International Historical Geography Conference, School of Social Sciences, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth, Western Australia, 6001. Fax. (619) 351-3166.

All correspondence about the Singapore component of the conference should be addressed to: International Conference of Historical Geographers (Pre-Conference Symposium), c/o Department of Geography, National University of Singapore, 10 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore 0511. Fax. (65) 777-3091. E-mail: GEOYSA @ NUSVM.
English heritage societies

In the last issue, Roots profiled some English heritage bodies. We have more profiles in this issue. The information was collected by President William Lim and Vice-President Kwa Chong Guan on a British Council-sponsored trip in 1992.

Historic Scotland

The Government body which protects Scotland’s built heritage and helps everyone to see and enjoy it. It has a staff of 600 from custodians to archaeologists and other specialists.

Activities:
- Cares for 330 properties and opens them to the public;
- Acquires properties where necessary to save them for the future;
- Restores properties;
- Gives protection to historically significant buildings to safeguard them against damage and demolition;
- Checks that protected buildings are not unnecessarily damaged by development or the elements;
- Assists financially and technically the work of bodies dedicated to conservation such as the Scottish Civic Trust.

Funding:
Government and membership subscriptions.

Scottish Civic Trust

An independent group which acts as a catalyst and collaborator. Its basic aim is to initiate conservation action and then leave others to take over, maintaining support where necessary.

Activities:
- Advises and assists in the saving and re-use of more than 500 listed buildings of architectural or historic interest;
- Urban regeneration by encouraging new uses for sound buildings which have lost their original uses;
- Education;
- Helps assess planning applications in order to influence decisions on proposals affecting listed buildings and conservation areas;
- Administers awards of the English Civic Trust.

Funding:
Grants from both government and local authorities for the most part, donations and subscriptions.

National Trust for Scotland

A charity supported by membership with the purpose of protecting and caring for the landscape and its heritage buildings.

Activities:
- Cares for more than 100 properties including 100,000 acres of countryside. It is involved not only with buildings but also with flora and fauna and communities;
- Educational projects such as school quizzes and storytelling.

Funding:
Mostly donations, bequests, subscription income, investment income and government grants.

Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust Ltd

A registered charity with an endowment from the Hampshire County Council, its main objective is to purchase, repair and where appropriate sell, historic buildings for the benefit of the county and country. It works on the principle of revolving its money. On each project they aim to recover their money with profit and reuse the sale proceeds to work on the next project.

Funding:
Profit from sale of project, original endowment, grants and donations.

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

A charitable society founded to repair rather than to restore ancient buildings. The idea is not to renew totally but to mend with skill and minimum loss of fabric and character. Restoration means work intended to return old buildings to a perfect state. Over the years it has developed expertise on various aspects of the maintenance and preservation of old buildings.

Activities:
- Consults with government and local authorities on listed buildings and other conservation matters;
- Advises on problems of old buildings;
- Investigates cases of threatened buildings. This follows from the statutory duty imposed on local authorities to notify the Society of any application to demolish/develop listed buildings;
- Reports on historic areas and advises on designation of areas;
- Arranges courses on treatment and repair of old buildings;
- Publishes materials on care of old buildings;
- Administers scholarships for the study of traditional methods of repairs;
- Maintains an index of threatened houses and gives information to members who may wish to purchase.

Funding:
Mostly donations, bequests, subscription income, investment income and government grants.

Hampshire Historic Buildings Bureau

A part of the County Planning Department, the fundamental aim of the bureau is to assist in successful conservation work. It is able to call on experience and assistance within other departments of the County Council.

Activities:
- Advises owners of historic buildings on the best means to repair and conserve their buildings;
- Advises and assists in the salvaging and supply of traditional building materials;
- Encourages and promotes historic building conservation and environmental education and awareness through publications, exhibitions and lectures.
'Given the fires conservation is...'

This is the full text of the speech by the chairman of the Heritage Board, Mr Lim Chee Onn, at the launch of Living Legacy.

"Going through the book, one gets the feeling that the official attitude towards building conservation is changing for the better. This increasing interest in retaining, restoring or rebuilding selected buildings of interest must give a tremendous sense of satisfaction to the group of professionals who have laboured mightily over the past many years to preserve what they deem to be Singapore's living legacy. In this respect, the efforts of the Singapore Heritage Society are both significant and laudable.

It is a marvel that we have succeeded in preserving the many buildings in and around the older parts of the city and established residential areas. It is not a question of how many significant buildings have been lost to the wrecker's ball over the past three decades of our development, but rather how fortunate we are in being able to retain buildings with architectural merit apart from those identified as national monuments. This is not an apology for what has not been done but rather a statement of what is reality and fact.

We are a young nation with limited land with no natural resources. Priority and attention must be and have been given to the pressing agenda of creating the best environment to help Singaporeans earn a decent living. There will be no more of a Singapore to speak of if we have not succeeded in creating a cohesive nation with excellent infrastructure and a viable framework for economic, social and political development.

There was simply no time to rearrange the furniture in the sitting room while pressing matters have to be attended to in the kitchen. Indeed on quite a number of occasions there were files in the kitchen that had to be put out promptly. In the 60s and 70s it was not surprising that conservation did not feature highly, if at all, in our national agenda. All our efforts were directed at issues that mattered most. If would have been disastrous if it were not so. We have acted sensibly and today can afford the luxury to stop and stare, and indeed gather to launch a book on building conservation.

Even today much larger countries with all the necessary ingredients for development are going along the same road of balancing conservation with economic development. With their vast resources these countries too have adopted a balanced approach of conserving and preserving what are necessary and doing away with what are peripheral. Despite their long history and tradition, huge countries such as China and India have decided that it will be unwise to keep every building with some reputed link with the past.

To do so will require whole new cities and towns to be developed to accommodate their developmental needs. They are approaching conservation sensibly and selectively even with their huge land masses and resources. So in comparison we have done the sensible thing and decided to rearrange the furniture in the sitting room only after we are certain that all is well in the kitchen.

Today's launch of the book Living Legacy is a clear indication that those who have cried from their hearts that conservation must not be neglected have been heard. Their persistence and perseverance have borne fruit to the delight of many. However, the test does not lie in how many building we keep or preserve.

The acid test lies in how well these buildings will be maintained and put to good use over the next 10 to 20 years. For unless this is so, what is a conservationist's pride today will be a derelict building ripe for demolition 20 years down the road. Hence the selection of buildings for conservation has to be undertaken realistically and cannot be a passing fancy.

Life must be brought back to the building in such a way that it makes commercial sense for the building to be used either in the original manner for which it was built or in some compatible and creative way. Only if a building is successfully used will it be maintained well. In this way it will remain a source of pride both to the owners as well as to the community.

Through its work, the Singapore Heritage Society can continue to generate interest in conservation. The book Living Legacy and others like it can help immensely in generating and maintaining such interest."
Living Legacy, Singapore's Architectural Heritage Renewed

By Robert Powell


$70 at Select Books. (20% discount to members on proof of membership)

Living Legacy is a 216-page hardcover coffee table book in full colour. It is written by architect and National University of Singapore lecturer Robert Powell with photography by Albert Lim K.S. and Luca Invermizzi Tettoni. The publication was sponsored by Mobil as part of its centennial celebrations.

Living Legacy is a logical sequel to Pastel Portraits, produced 10 years ago, which beautifully captured Singapore's architectural heritage at a time when the fate of many of these pre-war buildings was uncertain. Pastel Portraits was published in 1984 in conjunction with an international conference on Adaptive Reuse of Old Buildings held in Singapore. This first book was made possible by a contribution from Mobil.

Over the last decade since the launch of Pastel Portraits, conservation has taken a great leap forward. Living Legacy chronicles the hesitant beginnings, the pioneering efforts of individuals, the public support and the gradual awareness of the need to preserve a fast-disappearing heritage.

Between 1983 and 1993, many fine old structures were gazetted as national monuments and underwent the process of conservation. Many more were privately restored and serve as the gracious homes of these far-sighted lovers of tradition. Living Legacy gives readers a peek into some of these homes, and historical buildings: "black and white" bungalows, homely shophouses, stately historical buildings in Chinatown, Boat Quay, Little India, Kampong Glam, and Goodwood Hill among others.

Throughout the author's emphasis lies not merely in the fact of conservation, but the authenticity it achieves, the intangible essence it manages to retain. Author Robert Powell's message is clear: The built heritage of our country reflects far more than trends and fashions in architecture. It is a complex cultural fabric consisting of the intricately interwoven strands of our multiracial society. Each building that remains standing is part of that fabric which links us to our diverse past, a part of our country's living legacy.
‘Vanishing’ kilns may not vanish

The fate of two kilns in Jurong may yet hang in the balance. Two kilns located at Lorong Tawas may still be preserved for posterity as part of a green belt for Jurong. If so, they will be two survivors out of more than 11 before the war.

According to architect William Lim, who is helping to prepare a master plan for Jurong, the two kilns can be kept by the simple expedient of making them part of a park. The plan is now being studied by the Jurong Town Corporation.

A third kiln which comes under the purview of the Jurong Town Corporation, the Sam Mui Kwang dragon kiln in Jalan Hwi Yoh, Ang Mo Kio, is on the verge of being closed. The Chua family has been served the quit notice.

However in March, pots were still being made, and the dragon kiln being fired. Meanwhile, clearing of the area around it is going on apace, the hill behind has been levelled, and now part of the kiln floods occasionally. There are plans to do an exhibition of pots fired in the dragon kiln before it closes. The exhibition and sale of works is expected to be in September or October.

Meanwhile, sponsors are wanted for a book on the kiln. It comprises an oral history account by the kiln founder Chua Eng Cheow and pictures of the kiln’s operations, some of which are reproduced here. Photographs are by Ho Keen Fii. For more information call Goh Eck Kheng tel. 734-4579.

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Chinese Syonan out

The Chinese edition of Syonan: Singapore Under the Japanese was launched in the foyer of the National Museum in early December last year. Speaking at the launch, Dr Ker Sin Tze, the Minister of State, Ministry of Information and the Arts, said that the Japanese Occupation was the first taste of war for the people of Singapore. What made the book valuable was that it enabled those who had not gone through the war to relive it through the oral history interviews and photographs contained in it. "It is not the intention to stir up emotions but to remind ourselves not to take our peace and prosperity for granted." He was happy to note the role played by the Society, the Oral History Department and the National Archives in preserving this period of history. The book was a collective memory of the Occupation experiences of the different ethnic communities as well as the Allied soldiers, and this Chinese edition would give Chinese-educated readers a chance to empathise with all who had suffered. "It will certainly encourage a better understanding and foster closer cohesiveness among the different ethnic communities."

"Despite repeated attempts by the Syonan military government to divide the different ethnic groups the actual experiences of the war make us realise that the different ethnic groups had been in the same boat then. More so for now and in the future, we will always be in the same boat," he pointed out. He congratulated the Society for making this possible. Also present was another guest of honour, Dr Lau Wai Har, who recounted her experiences of the Occupation to the 40 or so invited guests and press present. Following the launch there was a tea reception. Copies of the book were also on sale. Two thousand copies have been printed, half in the army canvas edition and half in the student's edition.

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Orchard Holdings not the sponsor

Please note that regretfully Orchard Holdings is not the sponsor of the Chinese edition of Syonan: Singapore Under the Japanese although this sponsorship statement has been printed in the book. This was apparently the result of a miscommunication.

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20 per cent off books for members

Members can get a 20 per cent discount on the Society's publications if they show proof of membership to the distributor, Select Books at Tanglin Shopping Centre #03-15, Tel. 732-1515. The Society has four books to its credit: Syonan: Singapore Under the Japanese 1942-1945 ($24), in English and Chinese editions. Pages of Yesterday ($29.90), and Living Legacy ($70). Prices given here are before the discount.

The Chinese edition of Syonan: Singapore Under the Japanese is being distributed by Shing Lee Book Distributors but copies are available from Chinese bookshops such as Popular Book Store and Shanghai Book Company, both at Bras Basah Complex. There are no special discounts for Society members unless the purchase is made through the Society. Please get in touch with the Secretary (tel. 472-6938) if you are interested in bulk purchases.

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新加坡传统文化协会小资料

| 创立：1987年4月。 |
| 宗旨：从事文化遗产的保育和研究，通过各项活动和出版，让有志者参与工作，有兴趣者从中得益，从而提高国人对文化遗产的注意和认识。 |
| 要负责人：会长：林少伟，副会长：柯宗元。 |

1. 百多名会员来自不同文化背景，代表不同社群，包括大学讲师、学校教师、公务员、专业人士、工人和银行家。 
2. 主要来自会员的会费，个别活动的捐款和赞助费，和销售刊物所得。
3. 希望有对传统文化有兴趣的各界人士加入。

The Society attracted much attention from readers of Lianhe Zaobao when this feature on the Society appeared in March. The phone was kept ringing by readers who wanted to know more about the Society and its activities.
Shades of the Shaolin Temple! Pugilists under Kung Fu master Tan Chang Sin took to the floor of the Warehouse Disco at River View during the Chinese Cultural Evening last year after the AGM at the end of June. And the Chinese opera stars came too, as did a palmist and the feng shui man. In another corner, a Chinese calligrapher wrote good luck messages on fans, and book collectors got a chance to buy *Singapore Then and Now*, a collection of annotated photographs showing changes in the cityscape, at a discount.

Mrs Sng Poh Yoke, president of the Chinese Opera Society, talked about Chinese opera and Chinese opera costumes which gave those present an appreciation of the strength and discipline it took to keep a complicated headdress on, support a heavy sequin-encrusted dress and yet move gracefully and seemingly effortlessly.

She illustrated her talk with live models to demonstrate how the costumes were worn, and the costumes she had brought for display were glittering works of a seamstress’ art. Every inch was hand-stitched painstakingly, and each took several months to complete at the cost of thousands of dollars.

Food for the body was not neglected and there was a lavish spread for members and their friends and family.

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Calligrapher Lee Kim Guan dashing off good luck messages on paper fans.

“Best dressed” Satri, Santima and Jack Sim.

Mrs Sng Poh Yoke (behind) shows off one of the gorgeous sequinned costumes.

Australian artist Helen Playford (centre) who specialises in early Singapore scenes exhibited and sold some of her works.

Kung fu master Tan Chang Sin (centre) ‘protects’ Marc Thalmann (behind).
A few words about the Society

This was the address given by the President William Lim at the launch of Living Legacy.

On this memorable occasion, I would like to take this opportunity to say a few words about the Society. The Singapore Heritage Society was formed in 1987. The Society aims to identify and foster our heritage from the past so as to transmit it to future generations. The Society would propose to study and disseminate amongst the general public an appreciation of our ecology, built environment and way of life in its various spiritual and physical manifestations.

To date, the major activities of the Society include several heritage hunts and workshops as well as an exhibition on 15th February 1992 in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. The Society has also published two other books. They are Pages from Yesteryear: A Look at the Printed Works of Singapore, 1819-1945, published in 1989, and Syman: Singapore Under the Japanese, 1942-1945 published in 1992. The Chinese edition of Syman was published early in December and the Japanese edition will be available soon.

On the financial side, the income of the Society depends mainly on three sources of income:
- subscriptions from members and corporate members;
- donations and sponsorship for specific programmes;
- royalties from the sale of our publications.

At present, the Society is working on three programmes for the coming year. The first is to organise a workshop tentatively entitled Heritage: History and Memory to be held some time later next year. The second is to publish a series of booklets on various aspects of our multi-ethnic cultural heritage. It is envisaged that these booklets will be affordable to schoolchildren as well as the general public.

The third is to organise social events in response to the major cultural festivals for a better understanding of local customs and traditions. However, in order for the Society to carry out these activities successfully, more funding and the active participation of members and friends are needed.

In recent years, the attitude and perception of the Singapore authorities towards conservation has changed dramatically. In the early years after independence in 1965, conservation was considered irrelevant and even anti-development as modernisation was equated with the revitalisation and redevelopment of the central area of the old city. In the process, many irreplaceable historically important buildings of the old city were destroyed.

In the late Seventies, official circles grudgingly adopted a policy of tokenism in conservatism. Examples include the partial restoration of Cappage Road and the proposed conservation of a small area of Chinatown. The idea of conservation was tolerated, but its importance to our cultural heritage was not yet understood or fully appreciated.

Since the late Eighties, to the delight of many Singaporeans and the surprise of many conservationists abroad, the authorities finally made a firm commitment to conservation. A comprehensive conservation programme is being implemented. In the next few years, many areas will be successfully restored and renewed for adaptive re-use by both the public and private sectors. Singapore will then achieve the necessary critical mass to provide a meaningful visual record of its historical built-environment. Singapore will soon become a fine example of conservation for East and Southeast Asia.

However, the process of this change did not come easily. There were many painful moments and disappointments, as yet another beautiful building or whole streets was demolished or tendered to the highest bidder. Numerous individuals in both the public and private sector did what they could to draw attention to the need to conserve - often at the risk of incurring official disapproval.

I wish to put on record my personal appreciation of a selected few whose actions and commitment towards conservation have undoubtedly gone beyond their normal duties. They include S. Rajaratnam for his memorable opening speech at the 1984 MIT-Harvard-sponsored international adaptive re-use conference and his foreword in the book Pastel Portraits: Lee Kip Lin for his scholarly research and publications in particular the excellent book The Singapore House 1819 to 1992; Liu Thai Ker for his behind-the-scenes support particularly in the early Eighties; Pamela Lee for her outspoken stand at private meetings and in generating studies of conservation projects; the late Peter Keys for his passionate plea for conservation in his many letters to the press and articles; Dr Goh Poh Seng for his poetic commitments as well as his initiation of the Boat Quay and Singapore River study; and Geraldine Lowe for her incredible tours of Chinatown and heritage sites.

Now a charity

The Controller of Income Tax has approved the Society’s application for registration as a charity in a letter dated 29 November 1993. The Society is now a charitable institution registered under the Charities Act with effect from 24 November 1993. The advantage of being a recognised charity is that the Society’s income is now tax exempt subject to the condition that the charity must use at least 80 per cent of its net income received in the year preceding the year of assessment towards charities or charitable projects within Singapore. Where a charitable institution fails to apply 80 per cent of its net income for charitable purposes, the portion that is not so applied will be subject to tax.

However, the Society’s honorary accountants, Price Waterhouse clarified that donations made by the public are still not tax-deductible, that is, the Society cannot issue certificates of tax exemption to donors, unless the Society applies for the status of an “Institution of Public Character”. The Society will probably make such an application in the near future.
AGM coming up — and dinner too?

The AGM this year will be in June again but up to press time, the date and venue have not been confirmed. Since this is not an election year, there will be no election of officials. Following the presentation of accounts, the minutes of the last AGM, and the clearing up of whatever else surfaces, members and their family can get down to the other business of the evening which is the cultural evening being organised by Y.P. Chee's Lifestyle and Cultural Committee — the Peranakan evening, and it promises to be fun for all as always.

The evening will most likely be in *aku kah lau*, one of the puliaal bungalow houses now found mostly in the East Coast of Singapore, and the food and entertainment will aim to give participants an insight into Straits Chinese culture. So look out for more information in your mail.

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**SHS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND RENEWAL FORM**

I wish to join the Singapore Heritage Society as (tick appropriate box below):

- [ ] Ordinary member
  (Singapore citizens/permanent residents aged over 21 only, annual subscription S$50.00)

- [ ] Associate member
  (all others over 21 and resident in Singapore, no voting rights, not eligible for office, annual subscription S$50.00)

- [ ] Corporate member
  (all organisations, no voting rights, not eligible for office, invited as observers to meetings, annual subscription S$1000.00)

Name: Mr/Mrs/Ms

Organisation: (corporate members)

Address:

Telephone: (Home) (Office)

I enclose my cheque for $ No made out to the Singapore Heritage Society. (Due to shortage of space, a detailed application form for membership will follow shortly.)

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**RENEWAL OF SUBSCRIPTION**

I enclose a cheque for S$50.00 in renewal of my subscription.

Date: Signature:

(Please note that those who joined between April and October 1994 will need to have their subscription renewed by 30th April 1995.)

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**Diary:**

- Keep an eye out for information on a trip to Tanjung Pinang possibly in September. This is to be organised by Marc Thallmann.
- Hanoi Symposium in October/November this year on conservation.

**Brief history of Roots**

It has been decided that Roots should have a running number and that the Society will try to put out two issues a year in May and November. So starting with the first issue which appeared in 1988 the numbering will be:

- No. 1 November 1988;
- No. 2 September 1990;
- No. 3 May 1991;
- No. 4 November 1993;
- No. 5 May 1992;
- No. 6, May 1993.

This makes the present issue No. 7 May 1994. We hope to have another issue in November.

**Membership card in the works**

The committee is looking into the printing of membership cards so that members can identify themselves for discounts as well as at the Society's functions. Committee members, especially those with much contact with other agencies, organisations and mass media organisations will also get cards identifying them as office-bearers.