

» DISCOVER OUR SHARED HERITAGE

TIONG BAHRU HERITAGE TRAIL







» OUR HERITAGE

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COURTESY OF MANDY LEE

(Left): The newly-launched Seng Poh Road market in 1951. (Right): Streets of Tiong Bahru in the late 1950s.

Tiong Bahru Road today stretches for more than three kilometres from Redhill MRT at its western end to Outram Road on its eastern end. For most Singaporeans, Tiong Bahru is a small, charming and chic housing estate awash with good eateries and eclectic little shops. But there is much more to Tiong Bahru than meets the eye, as this heritage trail and its marked sites show.

The familiar Art Deco buildings we see today were built in the 1930s, when Tiong Bahru estate was developed as one of the first public housing programmes of the Singapore Improvement Trust (the colonial predecessor to the HDB). These 50 or so blocks of low-rise apartments and shophouses were originally meant to house residents from overcrowded parts in Chinatown.

Take a stroll through Tiong Bahru today and spend some time to admire its unique architecture, pleasing layout and experience the charm of its human scale. Tiong Bahru has become one of Singapore's most sought-after residential addresses but it also has a very interesting past. In fact, much of the area around Tiong

Bahru was once dotted by graves.

Did You Know?

Tiong Bahru estate, as well as the grounds of the Singapore General Hospital and a great deal of the land along Tiong Bahru Road all the way to Leng Kee Road, was once part of a sprawling Chinese cemetery.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

It is not clear when the name 'Tiong Bahru' first came into use. The name first appeared in a newspaper report from 13 June 1863 in The Straits Times, which mentioned Tiong Bahru in connection with an assault on one Tan Kung, a grass cutter who lived there. The report, which spelt the place as 'Tiang Bahru', did not clarify whether Tan Kung lived in a village or settlement called Tiong Bahru or in a house along Tiong Bahru Road.

Tiong Bahru Road was first mentioned in The Straits Times on 12 February 1870, in a report on a number of local roads that were 'all but impassable'. The report stated: "The Tiong Bahru road has ceased to be a thoroughfare, and is a hope-



COURTESY OF MANDY LEE

(Left): The 150th Anniversary Founding of Singapore celebrations at Tiong Bahru Community Centre. (Right): On the steps of Tiong Bahru Community Centre.

less quagmire, over which it is useless to attempt to pass with a vehicle of any description." The first appearance of Tiong Bahru Road on a map was in 1913. Before that, the road had been named Burial Ground Road as it led from Outram Road into an area surrounded by numerous Chinese burial grounds.

FROM TEONG LAMA TO TIONG BAHRU

People were probably using the name 'Tiong Bahru' long before it appeared in published sources, going by the etymological roots of the term. 'Tiong Bahru' combines two words: 'Tiong' (冢), meaning 'grave' in the Hokkien dialect, and the Malay word 'bahru' (also spelt 'baru'), which means 'new'. Tiong Bahru would hence be used by locals to refer to a 'new' cemetery as opposed to an old cemetery.

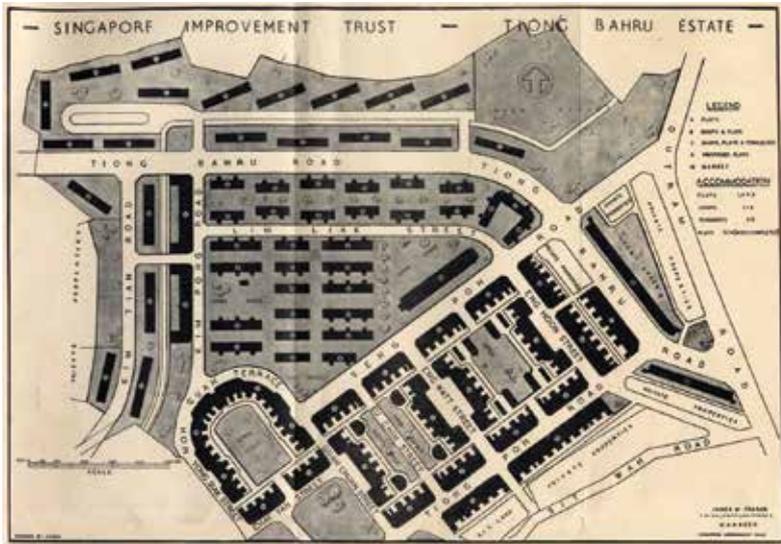
Where was this old cemetery? Teong Lama, literally 'Old Cemetery', was located at what is now the site of the Singapore General Hospital, in the section bordered by College Road, Hospital Drive and Kampong Bahru Drive, which includes the present Accident and Emergency facilities. In 1875, Municipal Engi-

neer WT Carrington, reporting on The Present Burial Grounds Within Three Miles Radius of the Cathedral of Singapore, noted that the Old Chinese Burial Ground, known as 'Teong Lama', was located alongside the road to New Harbour (Keppel Harbour). He reported:

Tang Beng Swee and others are the Trustees. This extensive ground of 29 acres has been closed about 16 years. It is well taken care of. It has its joss houses and priests. The ground is in good order and is on undulating clay and laterite hills.

Carrington went on to add that the new Chinese Burial Ground or 'Teong Baru' had been in use for 16 years (since 1859) and

... was evidently made as an extension of the 'Teong Lama', and like that, it is on undulating hills of clay and laterite. There is plenty of ground to spare for burials for the next ten years. The graves are made five to six feet deep. About 500 bodies per year are buried here.



COURTESY OF NUS GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT

Singapore Improvement Trust map of flats built in Tiong Bahru estate.

At the Henderson Road junction, there was also a rubber plantation and rubber processing factory called the Sungei Batu Rubber Factory, which was managed by a man named Poey Keng Seng, who had a house near the factory. There were also palatial bungalows commissioned by well-known businessman Ong Sam Leong (1857–1918), who built an enormous house in Tiong Bahru in 1905. His son-in-law Puey Yean Chuan did likewise.

The other cluster of buildings, situated at the junction of Outram Road, was first developed around 1905 when Wee Kay Siang (1858–1925), a prominent businessman after whom Kay Siang Road off Tanglin Road was named, built three shophouses along Sit Wah Road. In 1907, See Ewe Boon, a banker who died in 1909, also built shophouses along Sit Wah Road, but nearer to the Outram Road junction. Between 1907 and 1936, other shophouses were added to the area, particularly around Sit Wah Road and Eng Hoon Street, which were once connected to each other as they reached the Outram Road junction. This link was severed when St Matthew's Church was built in 2006. The last of the old buildings from this early period along Eng Hoon Street was torn down in

2008 and replaced by a modern block housing a branch of Hotel 81.

Did You Know?

Ong Sam Leong made a fortune supplying labourers to the phosphate mines of Christmas Island (in the Indian Ocean off Java) and from timber concessions in Pahang. His sons Ong Boon Tat and Ong Peng Hock opened the New World Amusement Park at Jalan Besar.

THE SINGAPORE GENERAL HOSPITAL MOVES IN

What drove Tiong Bahru's transformation from burial ground to residential estate? The catalyst, in this case, was the relocation of the Singapore General Hospital to its present location by Outram Road in 1882. The General Hospital had moved several times before settling at Kandang Kerbau in Bukit Timah Road in 1860. But in 1873, a deadly cholera outbreak forced the hospital to move to temporary premises at Sepoy Lines by Outram Road (Sepoy Lines was where Sepoys, Indian soldiers employed by the British, were formerly housed and stationed). This location, with its



Public buses operating in Tiong Bahru, 1956.

high elevation, was considered superior to Kandang Kerbau's swampy surrounds. Arguing for the General Hospital's relocation, Principal Civil Medical Officer Dr H.L. Randall stated his opinion that the Sepoy Lines offered "the only suitable site convenient to the town where the Hospital and Asylum could be placed, and is a most desirable one; there is plenty of space, the ground is high and dry, admitting of easy drainage, and the situation is open to all the prevailing breezes, and the water supply is plentiful."

The Legislative Council (which advised the British Governor on local laws and policies) clearly agreed with this idea, as it decided to permanently relocate the General Hospital to Sepoy Lines following another cholera outbreak in July 1878. For a time, the hospital was known as the Sepoy Lines Hospital, and even today, many Singaporeans refer to the Singapore General Hospital as *Sipai poh* (Hokkien for 'Sepoy Plains').

The new hospital grounds were ready by 1882, when the sixth incarnation of the Singapore

General Hospital opened at Sepoy Lines. The hospital has remained at this location since. It soon expanded and added a medical college in the vicinity in 1905. Its presence encouraged greater settlement in the area and over the next 40 years, a settlement of mainly wooden and attap huts grew into a village called Kampong Tiong Bahru.

By the 1920s, the growing population of Kampong Tiong Bahru, which was on low-lying land just north of the hospital, was becoming a major cause of concern for the municipal health authorities, who felt that the area around the hospital had become too insanitary. In 1925, Municipal Health Officer Dr P.S. Hunter, who had been requested by the Colonial Secretary to propose an improvement scheme for the area in early 1924, asked the Municipal Commission to take appropriate action. The Municipal Commission, which was responsible for the smooth running of the town area or municipality, then approved an improvement scheme for the area.

On 30 October 1925, the Municipal Commis-



(Left): A street hawker in Tiong Bahru, 1961. (Right): Bird lovers sitting at the former Wah Heng coffee shop, 1984.

sioners were informed that the improvement scheme would entail draining the area, and that the Government would advance the money for this project at 2% interest. The Legislative Council then approved on 1 February 1926 a five-year loan of \$250,000 at 2% interest to the Municipal Commissioners for the purchase and improvement of "land situated near the Lunatic Asylum and Hospital buildings". This land around Tiong Bahru Road, as described by the Municipal Commissioners in 1926, was "an area partly swampy, partly disused graveyard and hills, which is crowded with squatters' huts with hardly any permanent dwellings. This area is mosquito breeding, and the squatters' huts are generally most insanitary and undesirable near a hospital."

TIONG BAHRU BEFORE ITS TRANSFORMATION

Early maps show the Tiong Bahru area to be hilly, with swathes of lowlands and swampy areas in between. The highest points were Pearl's Hill, located off Outram Road, Mount Farquhar and Mount D'Anguilla. Pearl's Hill,

with a height of 52 metres, remains the highest point in the area. Mount Farquhar and Mount D'Anguilla - which peaked at 32.7 metres and 24.6 metres respectively - became the site for the Singapore General Hospital but their names have been lost to history. In the 1880s, both these hills were occupied by military personnel, given their proximity to Sepoy Lines at Pearl's Hill. There was also a gunpowder magazine at Mount D'Anguilla. A small burial ground for Sepoys was located at the south side of Mount Farquhar.

A 1913 map, in which the name 'Tiong Bahru' first appears cartographically, shows Tiong Bahru as the location of a Chinese village at the back of the cemetery grounds, right along a road labelled as Burial Ground Road. This would be roughly where the current Tiong Bahru Road meets the Outram Road junction, with houses and settlements on both sides of Burial Ground Road. By this time, part of the old cemetery, Teong Lama, appears to have been exhumed for the expansion of the General Hospital, namely the construction of its Mater-nity Hospital.



Secretary of State for the Colonies James Griffith visited SIT flats in Tiong Bahru, 1950.

Within a decade, the area around the Outram Road and Tiong Bahru junction would become much more heavily populated. A Town Plan of Singapore dated 1924 shows densely clustered housing around the area, which had been named Kampung Tiong Bahru. Part of the old Chinese Cemetery (Teong Lama) was still visible near the Maternity Hospital, and much of the new Chinese Cemetery (Tiong Bahru) had been exhumed for the building of the Hospital's Medical College and Lunatic Asylum. Even so, the entire area was still dotted with Chinese graveyards.

Describing the area during its redevelopment by the Singapore Improvement Trust, *The Straits Times* of 26 June 1930 observed:

... the land was practically all evil-smelling swamp, several feet below sea-level, with a dirty-looking creek running through it to the Singapore River. There were three fairly large hills on the far side from the main roads, and on these were numerous hovels, filthy and insanitary, occupied by squatters of the pig-breeding and coolie types.

Did You Know?

The patients of the Lunatic Asylum were transferred to a new Mental Hospital in Yio Chu Kang in 1929, which was renamed Woodbridge Hospital in 1951.

A MODEL PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECT

As it happened, the improvement scheme for Kampong Tiong Bahru fell on the lap of the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT). Established in 1920 as a department of the Municipal Commission, SIT grew out of an idea first mooted more than a decade earlier in an editorial of *The Singapore Free Press*. SIT became an independent legal entity when the Singapore Improvement Ordinance was passed in 1927.

SIT's first major housing project was an estate of 118 semi-detached villas known as the Lavender Street Estate, which it completed in 1928. Following this were two large blocks of tenements with 250 rooms each in Kreta Ayer, built in 1930. Meanwhile, in 1927, the Legislative Council had approved a special budget of \$260,000 to



Art Deco-inspired SIT flats in Tiong Bahru, 1950.

acquire 70 acres of land in Tiong Bahru for the Tiong Bahru Improvement Scheme, with the aim of turning the insanitary area into shophouse lots that would relieve congestion in Chinatown.

It took three years, however, before SIT could acquire the land in Tiong Bahru. Even before the acquisition was finalised, the Hokkien Huay Kuan (clan association) proceeded to exhume and remove all graves in the former Teong Lama and Tiong Bahru cemeteries, a task completed by 1930. Meanwhile, SIT levelled and filled some 72 acres of land for the development of Tiong Bahru estate.

To prepare the ground for the new housing estate, nearby hills were cut down and the earth used for filling in the swamps to bring the land up to sea level. This swamp reclamation proved to be a mammoth task as many parts of the estate were between 1.5 metres and two metres below sea level. By the end of 1928, the reclamation was complete and in place of the swamp was a sloping plain which SIT proceeded to develop with provision for facilities and amenities like recreation spaces, children's playgrounds, gardens, a school, a post office and a police station.

Many of the 2,000 residents of Kampong Tiong Bahru, who were regarded as squatters, were offered alternative accommodation in SIT flats to be built at Alexandra Road. As the site preparation continued, some 60-odd old Chinese tombs were discovered, scattered throughout the area. These were exhumed and re-interred at Bukit Brown Chinese Cemetery.

By 1931, roads, drains and culverts (drain pipes) had been built, along with provision for the erection of 900 houses. SIT expected that each of these houses would accommodate 15 persons, giving the estate a total population of some 13,500 people. A 1932 map gives a snapshot of Tiong Bahru estate then; there were very few permanent structures, apart from the shophouses built by private entrepreneurs concentrated along Sit Wah Road and the end of Eng Hoon Street close to the junction with Seng Poh and Outram Roads.

Tiong Bahru may be a highly sought-after address at present, but the original estate got off on a slow start. For five years after the infrastructural works were completed, SIT tried, unsuccessfully, to sell sites to private developers, with the first tender



Cars belonging to tenants of SIT flats in Tiong Bahru, 1959.

notices appearing in the press in July 1931. In April 1936, Lionel Langdon Williams (1907–1941), manager of SIT since 1930, carried out a survey of slums in Singapore and concluded that Tiong Bahru was “ideally situated” for the Trust to tackle slum clearance in Chinatown. Williams argued, quite sensibly, that SIT “should embark on a re-housing scheme before actually tackling the slums”. SIT then proceeded to develop Tiong Bahru into a housing estate to house resettled residents from the Chinatown area.

Did You Know?

SIT manager Lionel Langdon Williams had a house built for himself on the eastern end of Pulau Ubin in the 1930s. The Tudor-style cottage has been conserved and serves as a visitor centre for the Chek Jawa Wetlands. Langdon Williams died in mysterious circumstances; he was found drowned in a stream near Kota Tinggi, Johor.

THE FIRST FLATS IN TIONG BAHRU

The first block of SIT flats in Tiong Bahru was ready in December 1936, and 11 families moved in. This block, currently numbered Block 55, stands at the junction of Tiong Bahru and Tiong Poh Roads (opposite the current Link Hotel) and consisted of 28 flat units and four shops, above which were 14 rooms. The ground floor was taken up by eight flats and two shops each, and there were 10 flats each on the second and third levels. By December 1936, 20 of the 28 flats were occupied. Rather optimistically, SIT declared that the Tiong Bahru flats would house 1,000 people by the end of 1938.

One of the first residents to move into the new Tiong Bahru estate in 1936 was Tan Mok Lee (b. 1924), who lived in Eng Watt Street. According to Tan, there were a lot of empty flats at the time. The area was also surrounded by Chinese villages all the way from Silat Road to Henderson Road. He recalled it was a very peaceful area as there were not many residents, since few could afford the monthly rent of \$25. There were no offices or factories in Tiong Bahru, so most residents worked downtown or in nearby areas.

As it turned out, the Tiong Bahru flats were mainly occupied by Chinese “of the clerical class”, rather than those in dire need of housing. For this, SIT was heavily criticised by Tay Lian Teck (d. 1942), President of the Singapore Ratepayers’ Association. Indeed, rents in Tiong Bahru were considered too high and SIT immediately made plans to build more tenements in the Trengganu Street area. Tiong Bahru was affordable, though, for European families, a number of whom had moved into the estate by August 1939.

In 1940, the largest block of Tiong Bahru flats (Block 78, Moh Guan Terrace) was completed. These flats had bomb shelters in the basement. This marked the completion of SIT’s Tiong Bahru Improvement Scheme. By 1941, there were 784 flats, 54 tenements and 33 shops – housing over 6,000 – in Tiong Bahru estate. No new flats were built in the area until the 1950s.

« Want to learn about the air raid shelters of Tiong Bahru and what happened to the estate during World War II? Turn to pg 43 to find out more. »

POST-WAR DEVELOPMENTS

After the Second World War, Singapore faced an acute housing shortage. Soon, unauthorised attap huts were sprouting up in disused and uncleared burial grounds. With housing being accorded the highest priority, SIT embarked on an ambitious public housing programme to relieve overcrowding in the central areas.

In 1954, a further 1,258 flats were added to the northern side of Tiong Bahru. These four-storey blocks stretched from Seng Poh Road northwards towards Tiong Bahru Road and to Boon Tiong Road. These flats were of a different design from their pre-war counterparts. Each block was built on a “open development principle”, which meant that they were each “surrounded by open space such as grass plots and playgrounds served by footpaths”. Each flat had a living room, one or two bedrooms, a kitchen, a bathroom, a water closet and front and rear balconies (on the upper floors). These flats were extremely popular and by the late 1950s, an estimated 17,000 people dwelled in them.

Mrs Linda Koh (b. 1938), who moved into a flat at Moh Guan Terrace in 1942, recalled how, in the 1950s, many flats in Tiong Bahru were used by wealthy Chinese businessmen to house their mistresses, leading locals to refer to Tiong Bahru as Er nai chun (二奶村, literally ‘Mistress village’) or Mei ren wo (美人窝, literally ‘Den of Beauties’). Because of its proximity to the cabarets of Great World Amusement Park at Kim Seng Road, many pipa girls also lodged in Tiong Bahru flats with their majies or minders. According to Mrs Koh, four or five pipa girls would share a unit with a majie. Most of them spoke Cantonese and came from Malaya. They were always beautifully coiffed and made up and dressed elegantly in cheongsam or qipaos (a form-fitting dress popular among Chinese ladies from the 1920s).

Flats in Tiong Bahru were rented out by SIT for a long time. When the first tenants moved in, the rent was \$25 a month. This increased to \$26.50 in 1963, and when the Housing and Development Board (HDB) took over the functions of SIT, they sold the flats for between \$14,500 and \$18,600 each. Today, these 2,042 flats form the heart of Tiong Bahru and are one of the best-preserved low-rise Art Deco style mass public housing projects in the world. Most of these blocks were gazetted as conserved buildings by the Urban Redevelopment Authority on 1 December 2003. Since then, the area has attracted new residents and frequent visitors, many of whom are attracted by the charm of the neighbourhood, its enduring architecture and proximity to the city centre.

Did you know?

The term ‘pipa girls’ was a polite reference to prostitutes and cabaret girls. In ancient China, young girls who had been sold into prostitution were trained to sing while playing the pipa (a kind of Chinese lute) during parties in clubs and brothels frequented by businessmen. They were also taught poetry and the art of conversation. As these girls grew older, the range of entertainment included prostitution and while the pipa was no longer used, the girls were still paid hourly for their company.

THE ORIGIN & DEVELOPMENT OF TIONG BAHRU



Hawkers selling their wares outside Seng Poh Road Market, 1953.

We begin the trail here, at the heart of Tiong Bahru, namely the Market and Food Centre, where for decades, residents, neighbours and people from all over the island have come to shop, dine and take delight in each other's company. The Tiong Bahru Heritage Trail kicks off at this site with a storyboard containing information about the history of Tiong Bahru as well as the Market and Food Centre. The trail then continues around the estate with ten other marked sites that celebrate the landmarks of Tiong Bahru past and present, draw attention to the unique architecture of the neighbourhood, outline its social history and chart the milestones through war and peace of a compact and close urban community.

According to some old residents, two shophouses along Tiong Poh Road were converted into a wet market before the war. This market

immediately became a magnet for itinerant hawkers and vendors of fresh produce. The shophouses were small and only a few stallholders could get space in the market. Most of the other vendors parked themselves outside this market.

After World War II, the hawkers at the wet market in the two shophouses found the space too small and all the stalls moved to an open space at Seng Poh Road. The hawkers built huts with thatched roofs, the roof of the market was made up of palm leaves that were woven together, like a mat, and the lower part was made of a wooden structure. The hawkers would display their goods on wooden tables. The place was still small and unhygienic.

- Interview of Nicholas Tang (1939-2012), courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

Over the next five years, the number of hawkers and vendors increased dramatically and by March 1950, some 200 stallholders were in the midst of setting up a private market on land at Seng Poh Road which they claimed had been given to them by the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT). This claim was refuted by A.P. Rajah (1911-1999), a board member of the Trustees of SIT. In any case, the land had been surfaced with tarmac and neatly fenced in with steel posts and wire at the cost of \$4,000, which had been borne by the hawkers.

In September 1950, the Municipal Commission announced that a new market in Seng Poh Road was close to completion. Its health committee also decided that control of the market be placed in the hands of the Town Cleansing Department for a year following completion. Hawkers would be allowed to pitch for cooked food stalls at the new market. This market was called Seng Poh Road Market and occupied the site of the current Tiong Bahru Market and Food Centre. It was officially opened on 21 January 1951 and was touted by the Municipal Commission as the most up-to-date market in Singapore, with white tiles, red quarries and white mosaic flooring.

One problem with the market, however, was that many hawkers were unhappy with their stall applications. In February 1951, it was reported that one stallholder made a pitch to sell vegetables but was allotted a fruit stall instead, while three parties, who were allotted vegetable stalls, had asked for stalls to sell pork, poultry and sundries. The Municipal Commission was adamant that stall allocations could not be changed. They also warned hawkers selling outside the market to cease operations or risk being evicted by the Health Committee. In July 1951, Seng Poh Road Market was declared a public market.

The initial years of the market were problematic. There were insufficient numbers of stalls for those wanting to sell their food or produce, which led to stallholders setting up their own

pitches outside the market. This led to more issues as hawkers rushed to reserve the best spots for their pitches. To make matters worse, the police conducted regular raids to rid the area of illegal hawkers and stallholders, making marketing a rather harrowing experience. Even so, the high concentration of stalls in Tiong Bahru brought patrons from the surrounding Henderson, Bukit Merah and Alexandra areas, making Seng Poh Road Market popular, crowded and even more congested.

Seng Poh Road Market was a simple wooden structure with zinc pitched roofs. While it kept stallholders and customers away from the elements, it was hot and stuffy. When it first opened, the market had a row of stalls selling fish and pork and another row selling fruits and vegetables. An additional row sold cooked food. Many of the cooked food stallholders had formerly been itinerant hawkers or had moved there from nearby coffee shops. Little had changed at the market over the next 50 years although the roof was replaced.

In 2004, Seng Poh Road Market was shut down for a complete rebuild. Stallholders were relocated to a temporary market at Kim Pong Road. It reopened in 2006 as a two-storey building and was renamed Tiong Bahru Market and Food Centre. The new building was constructed at a cost of \$16.8 million.

The market reminds one of Hongkong - hot, dirty and crammed with perspiring housewives firing away in rapid Cantonese to gesticulating stallholders. You can find anything and everything here, from umbrellas, towels and cute embroidered pyjamas for little girls, georgette blouses for women, to joss-sticks, fresh meat, fish, eggs, mountains of fresh fruit, huge water-melons slung in string bags, to dried and canned goods, and the freshest and most colourful selection of cut flowers I've ever seen in any Singapore market.

- Lee Kok Wah, writing in *The Straits Times*, January 1985, on the Seng Poh Road Market

» OUR HERITAGE

BIRD CORNER & FORMER HU LU TEMPLE

Located at the corner of Seng Poh and Tiong Bahru Road, beside the Link Hotel. To get here from Tiong Bahru Market, walk down Seng Poh Road towards Tiong Bahru Road. When you reach the junction, you will find Nostalgia Hotel on your right and Link Hotel with the bird corner and trail marker just across Tiong Bahru Road.



The gourd-shaped furnace of the former Hu Lu Temple.

The junction of Seng Poh Road and Tiong Bahru Road was one of the most important crossroads in Tiong Bahru. This is where the main arterial road leading from Outram Road into the estate meets Tiong Bahru. This was also where many residents as well as visitors from other parts of Singapore used to gather, to perform religious rituals at a Chinese temple, check out the offerings at a nearby bird shop or enjoy a cup of coffee with friends while listening to the sweet melodies of their feathered companions.

Many locals would remember the site of this first marker as the location of a very popular

bird corner. But the origin of this bird corner actually lies across the road, on a small plot of land now occupied by the Nostalgia Hotel where there used to be a very popular pet bird shop. The owner of this shop hung many bird-cages containing songbirds outside his premises and this myriad of sounds and colours attracted many tourists and curious onlookers, making the area very lively and crowded.

The hustle and bustle of the pet bird shop drew the notice of the owner of Wah Heng, a traditional coffee shop on the ground floor of the row of flats that now houses the Link Hotel. Sometime in the early 1980s, the owner of

Wah Heng, seeing how the birdcages attracted high traffic across the road, erected a metal structure outside his coffeeshop to allow bird owners to hang their birdcages while they sipped coffee and chit-chatted nearby. This was an astute move as many bird owners made a beeline for the coffeeshop to show off their birds, and enjoy their calls and songs, while having coffee or snacks with friends at the same time. Before long, the sight of so many birdcages and the cacophony of birdsong drew much attention from locals and tourists who would congregate at the corner to soak in the atmosphere or just to gawk. One of the bird enthusiasts was a Dutch reporter living in Singapore, G. van Bladel, who wrote articles about the corner in several Dutch newspapers. Bladel, who had a friend working in the Dutch airline KLM, managed to convince the company to hold bird-singing contests on Christmas Day, and the airline even provided the hooks and number plates on the structure for the cages. The well-known American jazz flautist Herbie Mann (1930–2003) also made a special trip to this corner in 1984 to play his flute to the accompaniment of the birdsongs.

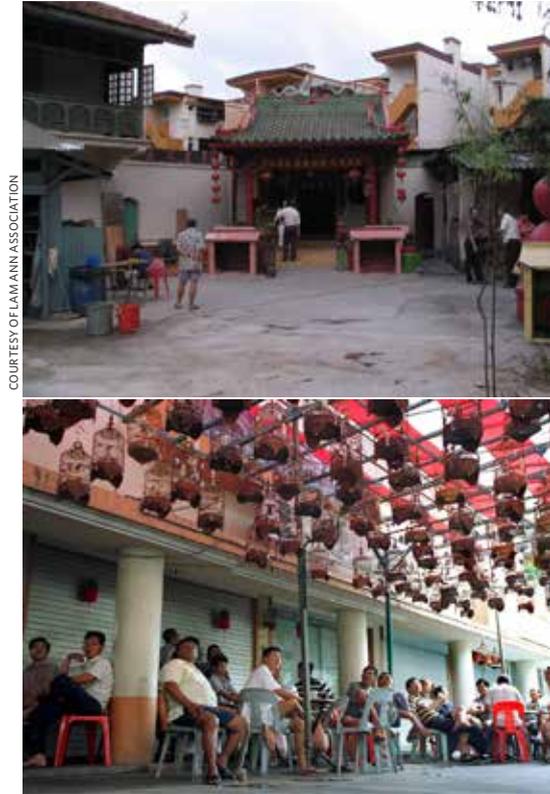
In 2003, when renovations were carried out to convert the former SIT flats into the Link Hotel, the original bird corner was closed. In 2008, the owners of the hotel decided to reopen the structure for hanging birdcages.

Did You Know?

Tiong Bahru residents used to refer to the two blocks of flats that now form the Link Hotel as Hong oak (红屋) or 'Red Flats' as their exteriors were painted in red.

FORMER HU LU TEMPLE

Just beside the pet bird shop across the road was another major landmark of Tiong Bahru. This was an old Chinese temple known popularly as Hu Lu Miao (葫芦庙) or literally, 'Gourd Temple'. This odd name was the result of a bright red gourd-shaped furnace that was used for burning joss paper located just outside the temple. The actual name of the temple was Weizhen Miao (威镇庙), literally the Temple of Awe.



(Top): Front of the former Hu Lu Temple. (Above): The famous bird singing corner at Tiong Bahru Road.

Some old residents believe that the temple had been standing since the early 1800s but the building was most likely constructed sometime around 1918, according to its caretaker who told a visitor in 2006 that the temple was almost 90 years old. According to two old stone tablets in the former temple, the temple was founded in 1909 and expanded in 1918 by migrants from Nan'an, a county in Fujian province, China, and dedicated to their patron deity Guangze Zunwang. The inscriptions on the tablets also noted that the temple was located in a taro garden and the land had been provided by Lim Chwee Chian (1864–1923), a respected merchant and chairman of the Ee Hoe Hean Club for wealthy businessmen at Bukit Pasoh Road.

The Hu Lu Temple was frequented by many residents of the area as well as people from other parts of Singapore. This Temple was sold by its owners and demolished in 2006 to make way for the Nostalgia Hotel that now occupies its site.

In front of the deities, statues of Tai Xiong Lou Guan (太上老君), a Taoist deity, stood on the right hand side, while Choi Sun (财神, God of Wealth) stood on the left. There were two other statues. One of them was Da Ye (大爷伯), a slim figurine with a beard, his tongue sticking out and wearing a hat made of sack cloth. The worshippers would offer wet opium (bought from the temple) on his tongue. The other statue, Yi Ye (二爷伯) was fat and plump. The worshippers offered opium to both Da Ye and Yi Ye as a form of giving thanks if they win lottery with the numbers they asked for. In those days, people betted with zhap tee kee (十二支) as there was not 4-D. Under the table of the main deity was a statue of a bak fu (拜白虎, white tiger). Worshippers would offer a piece of lard that was put onto the tiger get rid of xiao ren (小人, enemies).

- Interview of Nicholas Tang (1939–2012), courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

ENTERTAINMENT IN TIONG BAHRU

From Streetside Stories to the Silver Screen

Hobbies such as fishing or keeping songbirds were very popular in the past, as there were few organised recreational activities or mass entertainment options then. Before World War II, Tiong Bahru did not have any community organisation or civic body, so residents would find their own means of recreation. The sports-minded would trudge across to a big field by the Medical College of the Singapore General Hospital to play football or fly kites, while those seeking more sedentary pleasures might hike to Great World Amusement Park where the young were entertained by parlour games and the mature by the salacious offerings of Great World's Flamingo Night Club.

Did You Know?

Great World Amusement Park, where many residents of Tiong Bahru and other nearby neighbourhoods would once go for a range of entertainment options, was located between Kim Seng Road and Zion Road, at the site of the present Great World City building. Besides Great World, Singaporeans once frequented two other popular amusement parks: New World at Jalan Besar and Happy World (later Gay World) at Geylang Road.

Some of the itinerant hawkers in Tiong Bahru also provided entertainment for the residents. Nicholas Tang (1939–2012) recalled a hawker called Ah Song who sold preserved mango on skewers. Ah Song would station himself near Eng Hoon Street from noon till about 6 pm and many neighbourhood kids would gather around him to buy his mango skewers and to listen to his stories. Tang particularly remembered Ah Song's exciting renditions of Chinese literary classics like *The Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin*.

Writing in 1953, a Tiong Bahru resident going by the pen name of 'Public Minded' complained in the Singapore Free Press newspaper that while Tiong Bahru had a public market, a community centre and would soon have a school, it had no theatre. Up till that time, the only form of mass entertainment was rented movies screened by the Tiong Bahru Community Centre in a vacant lot near the Community Centre. 'Patrons' were charged 10 cents a movie and this proved very popular with residents. Mandy Lee (b. 1944), who has lived in Tiong Bahru since birth, recalled how all the kids in the area looked forward to these screenings, but less so for the movies than the fact that a large number of hawkers would gather in the square to sell goodies like ice balls (frozen confections flavoured with syrup), kacang puteh (assorted nuts and pulses) and sliced fruit skewered on a stick, all for five cents each. She also remembered a stall offering a game of chance called tikam tikam. For five cents, a player got a chance to pick a ticket which was then matched with a number depicting a prize. Lee recalled that if you got two red tickets, the tikam tikam man would give you free kacang puteh.



The former King's Theatre along Kim Tian Road, 1983.

In July 1953, cinema operator Shaw Organisation announced plans to build the new air-conditioned King's Theatre in nearby Kim Tian Road, which it estimated would accommodate 1,000 patrons. Located a short distance away from the junction where Kim Tian Road joins Moh Guan Terrace, the cinema was later sold to the Eng Wah Group, a rival cinema chain. The cinema flourished during the heyday of the movies – the 1960s and 1970s when the local film industry was booming and popular celebrities would make appearances at the theatre – and often screened what were termed 'second-run' movies and Taiwanese tear-jerkers and romantic films. In those days, popular movies would premiere in the big cinemas in town such as Lido, Orchard or Cathay; these were first-runs. Thereafter, the same movies would move to the smaller cinemas located on the outskirts of the city, such as King's Theatre. Third-run movies were screened in small village cinemas.

There was a King's Theatre, which screened second-run movies. The cheapest movie session was at 9 am on weekends. It cost fifty cents for a seat downstairs while a dollar to three for a seat upstairs. There was only about five to six rows of the one dollar seats which was nearer to the screen. The cinema had fewer screening times compared to big cinemas like Cathay. There were only three sessions on weekdays and four sessions on weekends. In the long run, the cinema was losing money and hence was closed down...

King's Theatre was a small theatre (like a school hall but with a slope) with floors which could take a few hundred people. It was not a fantastic theatre but convenient. Due to its small seating capacity, it could not afford to screen first-run movies. Even if they did show first-runs, no one would be willing to pay the same price to watch at King's Theatre. Instead, they would go to Cathay cinema where it was better and more comfortable. King's Theatre had fewer screening times compared to Cathay. Screening time was 1 pm, 4 pm and 7 pm. 7 o'clock was more popular. If a show is very popular, there would be midnight screenings.

- Richard Woon (b. 1938), a long-time resident of Tiong Bahru. Interview courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

As with all popular gathering places, a sub-economy grew up around King's Theatre. Numerous itinerant hawkers and vendors set up shop daily around the Theatre, especially at night. Mrs Jambu, who has lived in the Kim Tian area since the 1980s, recalled the kacang puteh and ting-ting candy sellers outside King's Theatre. Many of the old-time stallholders at the Tiong Bahru Market and Food Centre started out as itinerant hawkers outside King's Theatre or along Kim Tian Road. In February 1984, it was announced that the cinema would be closed, demolished and replaced with a 10-storey office-cum-residential complex. Eng Wah Organisation which owned King's Theatre sold the land to Lum Chang Construction for \$9.9 million.

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GRAVES OF TAN TOCK SENG, CHUA SEAH NEO & WUING NEO

Located at a hillock facing Outram Road. To reach this site, walk down Tiong Bahru Road until you reach a zebra crossing. Cross over to Outram Road and walk on in the direction of Etonhouse Pre-School until you see an overhead pedestrian bridge. The graves and marker are slightly up the slope to the right.



(Left): Portrait of Singapore pioneer Tan Tock Seng. (Right): His grave site along Outram Road.

Tan Tock Seng (陈笃生) was one of Singapore's most important early pioneers. Born in 1798 in Malacca, he moved to Singapore in 1819 at the age of 21, shortly after the British arrived. Starting out by selling fruits, vegetables and poultry, he soon put together enough capital to set up a shop at Boat Quay. Tan, who was Hokkien, learnt to speak English and got on well with the European traders. He entered into a partnership with John Horrocks Whitehead (1810-1846), a prominent trader from the firm of Shaw, Whitehead & Co, and it was largely due to their joint speculation in land that Tan became immensely wealthy.

Tan owned large tracts of land, including more than 20 hectares at the site of the former Tanjong Pagar Railway Station. He also owned another plot of land that stretched from Connaught Drive to High Street and up to Tank Road. Tan and his brother Tan Oo Long also owned a nutmeg plantation. Tan's close connections with the local community made him a natural leader and his tact and ability to resolve disputes among the Chinese endeared him to the British.

In 1844, seeing the plight of the locals on the island, Tan contributed \$7,000 towards the construction of a Chinese Pauper's Hospital

on top of Pearl's Hill which was to take care of the "diseased of all nations". Construction of the hospital took three years but after it was completed, it stood empty for two more years due to a lack of funds to equip the hospital and employ staff. In 1849, the first patients were admitted to the hospital. The hospital moved to premises located at the junction of Serangoon Road and Balestier Road in 1861. In 1903, this tract of land was acquired and the hospital moved yet again, to its current location off Moulmein Road.

Tan Tock Seng died in 1850 and was buried in an unknown location. Indeed, a newspaper report documenting his funeral simply stated that his cortege journeyed to a 'burial place'. Tan Tock Seng was survived by his wife Lee Seo Neo (1807-1877). The land where the tombs are now located was acquired by Tan Tock Seng's son, Tan Kim Ching (1829-1892), in 1877, and this was where the younger Tan chose to bury his wife, Chua Seah Neo, when she died in 1882. It was quite possible that at this time, Kim Ching made the decision to exhume his father's remains and re-inter them at the same Outram Road site, right next to his own wife's tomb. Tan Kim Ching's daughter-in-law, Wuing Neo, was also buried here when she died in 1882.

In 1969, the tombs were threatened with exhumation when the government widened Outram Road to cope with increased traffic. Appeals from Tan Tock Seng's descendants to safeguard the tombs were successful. But in the 1980s, the tombs were forgotten, until they were 'rediscovered' in 1989. Since then, descendants of Tan Tock Seng have been tending to the tomb and a major sprucing up of the site was carried out in 2009.

Did you know?

Tan Tock Seng was the first Asian in Singapore to be made a Justice of the Peace. With Tan's ability to negotiate and settle disputes amongst various Chinese dialect groups and secret societies at that time, the British was able to bring about law and order in Singapore.

FORMER GONGSHANG SCHOOL

The road up the slope to Tan Tock Seng's grave used to lead up to a well-known Chinese-medium school – the Chinese Industrial and Commercial Continuation School (南洋工商补习学校) which was established at rented quarters in Tanjong Pagar Road in 1920. The school, known as Kong Shan (Gongshang) for short, catered to the needs of young Chinese migrants who were unable to continue their earlier education. In 1926, the school's management committee decided to build its own premises and established a building fund committee, which was headed by well-known businessman, Lim Loh (1851-1929), father of war hero Lim Bo Seng (1909-1944).

During this time, Tan Kwee Wah (1880-1927), a great-grandson of Tan Tock Seng, was prepared to sell a 7,200 square metre plot of land by Outram Road on which his ancestor's graves were located to the school at a 50% discount, in accordance with Tan Tock Seng's philanthropic wishes. Construction took slightly over three years, during which the graves were left undisturbed. On 8 June 1930, Gongshang's new premises were ready. During the Japanese Occupation, the students and teachers went into hiding as they had been active in raising funds for the anti-Japanese movement. The school reopened shortly after the end of the Japanese Occupation, on 1 October 1945, and within a year, its student population reached 2,600. There were 26 morning classes and 16 afternoon classes.

The school had a mini zoo and a model aeroplane that was very popular with the students, most of whom had never travelled by air. Gongshang continued to be an important and popular school right up to the 1970s when – like all other Chinese-medium schools – enrolment dwindled. By 1980, the school only had 967 students, and by the time the Ministry of Education took over management of Gongshang in 1985, only 105 students remained. The school was transformed into an English-medium school, officially renamed Gongshang Primary School and relocated to Tampines where it continues to flourish. The old Gongshang school buildings were demolished in 1988 and the land has yet to be redeveloped.

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THE OUTRAM PRECINCT

Located near the entrance of the former Institute of Health. From the grave of Tan Tock Seng, retrace your steps down Outram Road towards the Central Expressway (CTE). You will pass Etonhouse Pre-School on your left before reaching the marker near the front of the former Institute of Health.



Grand opening of Outram Park Complex, the Housing Board's biggest public housing cum shopping project in 1970.

Early geographers and town planners of Singapore saw the Singapore River as a valley between two high points: Fort Canning and Pearl's Hill, and thus named two roads on either bank of the river, River Valley Road. Naturally, this proved rather confusing. In 1858, the Municipal Commission decided to rename the former River Valley Road that leads towards New Bridge Road by the foot of Pearl's Hill. Specifically, the stretch from the junction of Kim Seng Road towards Upper Cross Street was renamed Havelock Road, while the stretch from the junction of Kim Seng Road to New Bridge Road was renamed Outram Road. This

was done to honour the two British heroes of the Indian Mutiny: Lieutenant-General James Outram (1803-1863) and Lieutenant-General Henry Havelock (1795-1857), who had put down the Indian Mutiny the year before.

This hilly area near the junction of Jalan Bukit Merah and Outram Road had long been a military area. It was first settled when the 35th Regiment of the Madras Native Infantry built their barracks at this junction in 1827. Members of this regiment were Sepoys – Indian soldiers employed by the East India Company – and the area became known as

Sepoy Lines. The Sepoys occupied this area till the 1860s when they moved to Tanglin Barracks where the Dempsey Road and Dempsey Hill eateries are now located. In 1873, the Singapore General Hospital relocated to Sepoy Lines. As the Sepoys had by this time relocated to Tanglin Barracks and to Fort Canning, the hospital was able to use the buildings that previously housed the troops.

Did you know?

The Indian Mutiny, also known as the Great Rebellion, was a major uprising by Sepoys, soldiers under the employ of the East India Company, who were unhappy with British practices and policies that were insensitive to their religions and customs.

INSTITUTE OF HEALTH & CORONER'S COURT

The Institute of Health (IOH) was a joint venture between the Government, the University of Malaya and the City Council of Singapore (the successor to the Municipal Council following the designation of Singapore's status as a city from 1951). Opened on 23 April 1958, the IOH Building on Outram Road housed the headquarters of the School Medical and Dental Services, the University of Malaya's Department of Social Medicine and Public Health, and the City Council's Maternity and Child Welfare Centre.

The Institute provided training not only in public health and sanitary inspection, but courses were also held for health visitors (inspectors) and district nurses. The British Government provided \$1.5 million of the \$2 million required for its establishment while the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) provided equipment and books and training for nurses.

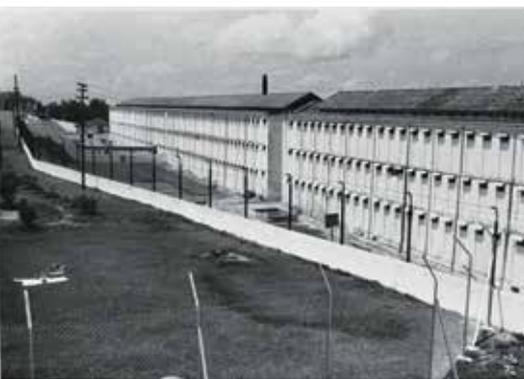
Almost as soon as it was opened, the IOH became one of two centres for the administration of anti-poliomyelitis vaccinations for children under the age of 10 (the other being the Singapore Youth Sports Centre in Kallang). Many Singaporean parents and children would



(Top): A view of the front entrance of the Coroner's Court. (Above): Then Minister for Health Yong Nyuk Lin visits the former Institute of Health.

remember queuing up for hours at the Institute, waiting for their polio shots to be administered. The rush for these vaccinations was so great that the Institute was forced to use some of its premises to contain the crowd, especially in rainy weather. The IOH moved to new premises within the grounds of the Singapore General Hospital in 1992 and the old building has been leased out to private enterprises.

Beside the former IOH building, along Outram Road, stands the former Coroner's Court. Singapore's first Coroner, Andrew Farquhar (1802-1829), was appointed on 20 December 1827. Until 1848, the Coroner conducted his grisly enquiries in the premises of the Medical Department of the General Hospital. Later, a small room was made available for the Coroner at the Police Court in South Bridge Road. On 1 May 1928, a proper, purpose-built Coroner's Court was completed at the Police Court building. Later, in 1954, plans were announced



(Top & above): The former Outram Prison in the early 1960s.

to move the Coroner's Court closer to the mortuary of the Singapore General Hospital. This new court was completed in September 1956 and opened at the foot of Outram Hill. It functioned as Singapore's Coroner's Court until 1975 when the court shifted to the main Subordinate Courts complex in nearby Have-lock Road in 1975. Today, the former Coroner's Court building is leased out to a private school.

OUTRAM PRISON & OUTRAM PARK COMPLEX

Currently an empty plot along Outram Road between Chin Swee Road and Outram Park

MRT, this was where a civilian prison was built at the foot of Pearl's Hill in 1847. Designed by John Turnbull Thompson (1821-1884) and built by Captain Charles Edward Faber (after whom Mount Faber was named), the jail was built to confine "prisoners in Revenue cases (debtors), and [all] prisoners imprisoned for non-payment of a fine." Not surprisingly, it was named Pearl's Hill Prison. In 1882, a criminal prison, known as HM (His or Her Majesty's) Criminal Jail - for those convicted of more serious crimes - was built right next to the civil prison. The entire complex was renamed Outram Prison and was Singapore's main penal facility till 1936 when Changi Prison was opened. Even so, Outram Prison remained a prison facility until 1968 when it was demolished to make way for a public housing complex known as Outram Park Complex. This was the first large scale Urban Renewal project south of the Singapore River.

Outram Park Complex was considered a modern mixed-use complex at that time and featured apartments built atop podium blocks that housed shops and offices. It was advertised by the Housing and Development Board (HDB) as a "first class modern shopping complex" completely laid with mosaic tiles and "provided with escalators, lifts, multi-storey covered car parks, steel roller doors and many other facilities." Its courtyards were "attractively laid out with flower/fish ponds, fountains and a concourse."

The complex had a good reputation as a shopping centre. One of its most important tenants was the Hong Kong-based Chancellor Department Store which opened its first overseas store in Singapore in 1970 at Outram Park Complex. The doyenne of Singapore's bridal dress couture, Sylvia Kho (b. 1917), also had two bridal boutiques here. Other well-known shops of the 1970s and 1980s included Kimberley Department Company, Lucky Stores, Phoenix Emporium, Kwang Sia Records, Bata Shoes, Rainbow Sports, Bali Café, Outram Restaurant, Gomez Curry, Hock Hwa Hin Furniture, and Outram Modern Supermarket. The Overseas Union Bank even opened a branch at Outram Park. The complex was demolished in 2003 for redevelopment.

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MONKEY GOD TEMPLE

Located at 44 Eng Hoon Street. From the former Institute of Health, cross back to Tiong Bahru Road through two traffic lights, then turn into Tiong Poh Road on the left. Eng Hoon Street is the first road on the left and the temple faces the corner. The marker is right opposite the temple.



Devotees paying respects at the Monkey God Temple.

The Tiong Bahru Qi Tian Gong (齐天宫), more popularly known as the Tiong Bahru Monkey God Temple, was founded in 1920 in a small attap hut located within a taro garden just across Eng Hoon Street. It moved to its current location in 1938.

Initially, the temple operated from rented premises but in 1985, the trustees of the Temple acquired ownership of the shophouse and it underwent a major renovation in 1992-1993. The Temple is dedicated to Sun Wu Kong (孙悟空), the Monkey King from Wu Chen-en's classic 16th century fable, Journey to the West. At this temple, you can see more than ten statues of the Monkey God, the oldest of which is almost a century old. The trustees of

this Temple claim that this was the very first temple in Singapore dedicated to the worship of the Monkey God. There are currently over 40 other temples in Singapore where the Monkey God is worshipped.

The whole basis of monkey worship is found in the 100 chapters of Journey to the West where the monkey represents human caprice and genius. He claimed for himself the title Qitian Dasheng, meaning 'Great Sage, equal of Heaven', and ended up as a god in the classic tale. On the day of the Monkey God's birthday, which takes place on the 16th day of the 8th lunar month, believers stream in for help and the ritual begins. Mediums go into a trance during which new idols, new altars



Hua Bee Restaurant (left) and Hup Seng provision shop (right) were some of the oldest operating shops found in the estate. Hup Seng has since ceased operations in May 2013.

and even new offices are blessed for luck. The medium is whipped, slashed with knives, pierced with lard-smearing spears and climbs ladders of swords to prove that his body has been “possessed” by the real Monkey God before dishing out his blessings. In full Monkey regalia, the medium begins swaying his head, twitching his fingers, and jerking his legs, all the while seated on his blood red ‘Dragon Chair’. Prayers and offerings are made to the gods, notably the Jade Emperor; and Kuan Yin (the Goddess of Mercy) who picked Monkey for the journey to the west and is the only deity able to control him. It is believed that the Monkey God is almighty, resourceful, mercurial, brave and vigorous and can tell between truth and falsehood easily.

SHOPHOUSES IN TIONG BAHRU

The Monkey God temple is not an uncommon instance of a Chinese temple housed in a shophouse. More typically, the shop units on the ground floor of each apartment block at Tiong Bahru, especially at the corners, would be occupied by businesses that cater to the immediate daily needs of the residents such as coffee shops and provision shops.

Nicholas Tang (1939–2012), a long-time resident of the area, once recalled that coffee shops sprouted at the corners of many blocks, as did itinerant hawkers selling foods of all

sorts outside these coffee shops. Some of the coffee shops in Tiong Bahru, such as Hua Bee located at Moh Guan Terrace, had been around since the 1940s. There were a few shops at the junction of Tiong Poh Road selling sundry goods and daily necessities and a small wet market located at the two converted shophouses at Tiong Poh Road, which was also a common meeting place for residents to trade news and information, especially during the war.

As the population of Tiong Bahru increased, so too did the variety of shops in the area. There was, Tang recalled, a sports shop owned by a Sikh family, and also a bakery selling cakes. At the end of Block 55 (#01-57) was Guan Hin (源兴) provision shop, which retained the look and feel of the 1950s until it ceased operations 2012. Guan Hin was started by Ng Heng Lin (b. 1930), who came to Singapore at the age of 18 with his second elder brother, with help from a tontine investment scheme (a kind of annuity in which the last surviving investor receives the accumulated capital) and an interest-free loan from a relative. In 1962, Ng married Tan Koy Eng who became his indispensable assistant. Up till its closure, the old-style provision shop had floor-to-ceiling wall shelves with sliding glass doors, an Art Deco writing desk, a vintage Smith electric clock and even a non-working rotary Bakelite telephone. According to the Ngs, only the ceiling fan and the refrig-



erator had been replaced due to wear and tear. The shop's original 'door', which was made of wooden planks, had also been replaced by a set of collapsible metal gates.

Another old-style provision shop in Tiong Bahru was Hup Seng (合成) which was also established in 1955, a few months after Guan Hin. Its proprietor was Goh Chwee (b. 1937), whom faithful customers address informally as 'Ah Chwee'. Goh started out by helping in his father's provision shop in Tanjong Pagar and in 1955, aged 18, decided to start his own shop in Tiong Bahru. Paying a rent of \$41.85 a month, he took over the shop space in 1965.

Other shops along the main Tiong Bahru Road – along the same stretch as Guan Hin – included an old bicycle shop where rickshaws and trishaws used to be repaired and serviced; an old shop selling charcoal; a Chinese medical hall; a dental clinic; and even a pawnshop. At Seng Poh Road, the other major thoroughfare through the estate, were several other shops, many catering to the middle-class tastes of residents.

It was a strange phenomenon to see that every corner shop was a coffee shop or a provision shop except the one at the corner of Seng Poh Road and Eng Hoon Street. I recall that it was run by an English-educated shopkeeper who

had a wife who was always heavily made-up with Elizabeth Arden cosmetics, bright red lipstick and dressed in a tight-fitting frock. Her husband sold sweets in big glass jars and office stationery. Next door was Kamy, the only music shop that sold cartridges, cassettes and single-records. It was here that I bought my first cartridge The Carpenters album. Further down Seng Poh Road was Majid and Yuen Cheong Provision Shop. Majid was Indian and the only shop selling fabrics such as Swiss Voile and was popular with Tai-Tais who came in chauffeur-driven Chevrolets; the Flamingo Night Club hostesses in Great World; and the ladies who walked to the Seng Poh Road Wet Market. There was also a ladies hair-perm saloon and a dress-making shop on that street. If I am not wrong, Roland Chow, the famous hair stylist, first started as a small saloon at Seng Poh Road. In terms of medical facilities, there was a Kwa Clinic – perhaps one of two clinics on Seng Poh Road.

– Peter Chan (b. 1954).

In the period after the war, Tiong Bahru was very popular with itinerant vendors of goods and services. Chan May Chun and her family moved to Tiong Bahru in 1952. Her father, who was in the rubber reprocessing business, rented a flat at Block 53 Lim Liak Street for his family. Chan remembered that every day, vendors of different goods would come along, calling out and advertising their wares. In particular, she recalled the itinerant barber, the purveyor of cloth and materials, and an Indian glazier who would do simple window repairs and frame pictures or photographs. These vendors would carry their wares with them in baskets and move from block to block, yelling out offers. Chan also remembered a particularly skilful newspaper vendor who could throw newspapers with pinpoint accuracy to the front doors of subscribers, all the way up to the third and fourth levels.

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THE ARCHITECTURE OF TIONG BAHRU

Location: Junction of Eng Watt Street, Sit Wah Road and Tiong Poh Road. From the Monkey God Temple, continue up Tiong Poh Road until you reach the next road on the left, which is Sit Wah Road. The marker is nearby on the left.



Pre-war SIT flats designed in the Streamline Moderne style, 1952.

The Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) was formed in 1920 to help the Municipal Commission deal with the housing shortage and squalid living conditions prevalent then in Singapore. In its initial years, SIT could do little as it was a mere department within the Commission and lacked the budget and powers to acquire land and develop it. It was only in 1927 that it became a separate entity under the Singapore Improvement Ordinance. Even so, it needed the help of the colonial government to finance its various development schemes.

Tiong Bahru was SIT's third and largest housing project after two smaller developments at Lavender Street and Kreta Ayer. The Trust had to clear some 2,000 squatters, and acquire and level some 72 acres of land. SIT had initially planned to simply lay the foundation of the site and sell the property to private developers to finance and build the flats needed. This plan failed because when the site was ready in 1931, Singapore was in the grip of a recession and SIT tried, without success, to sell the land by tender over the next five years. It was only in 1936 that the Trust decided to embark on developing the property itself.

TIONG BAHRU'S PRE-WAR FLATS: STREAMLINE MODERNE IN THE TROPICS

Architect Alfred G. Church was entrusted with the design of Tiong Bahru between 1936 and 1941. His pre-war designs were a modified form of a style called Streamline Moderne, which was a late development of the Art Deco movement. Inspired largely by technology and the speed of modern travel, buildings were designed to look like automobiles, trains, ocean liners and aeroplanes, complete with the sweeping, streamlined and aerodynamic lines that were so characteristic of these forms of transport.

Unlike earlier incarnations of Art Deco, practitioners of Streamline Moderne abandoned lavish and ostentatious decoration in favour of simple and functional lines that reflected the buildings' connection with the machine age. Elements of Streamline Moderne were: clean, curved shapes and rounded corners; long horizontal and vertical lines; inclusion of the occasional nautical element (e.g. porthole windows and stainless steel railings); simple uncluttered lines; bands of windows; flat roofs; racing stripes to simulate speed and motion; and glass blocks and group windows.

Although Streamline Moderne was popular in large-scale public buildings such as libraries, railway stations and airports, it was not commonly deployed in housing projects, much less public housing projects. In 2003, the Urban Redevelopment Authority gazetted 20 blocks of the pre-war flats for conservation so that the area can continue to evolve with the assurance that its unique architecture will be kept.

The use of curved corners and cantilevered shades gives the buildings a modern, pleasing appearance. Try spotting the elements of the Streamline Moderne style in the buildings of Tiong Bahru as you walk around.

Did You Know?

Blocks 81 and 82 along Tiong Poh Road were known to early residents as 'airplane flats' because they appeared, from a distance, like the wings of an airplane.



Block 81 along Tiong Poh Road is also known to resemble an airship.

Did You Know?

Another unique design feature of Tiong Bahru's flats is the use of brick work on some of the balconies. These fair-faced (unpainted) facing bricks are laid out in pleasing patterns of darker and lighter bricks. You can see these at blocks 57, 82 and 76.

Did you know that Tiong Bahru had window and door frames that were imported all the way from England, from the famous Crittall Manufacturing Company? These were glazed in unique green-coloured glass that could cut out the tropical glare and heat.

THE SINGAPORE GENERAL HOSPITAL CONNECTION

Did you know that this corner of Tiong Bahru was once closely connected, both physically and socially, with the Singapore General Hospital? In fact, until the late 1980s when the Central Expressway (CTE) was built, it was possible to walk or drive into the General Hospital's premises from Sit Wah Road and Eng Hoon Street. Because of this connection, some flats on Seng Poh Road were let out as quarters for hospital staff.

This segment of Tiong Bahru soon became a mini hub, with a number of shops and eateries catering for people working at the Hospital as well as those visiting patients there. It was, for example, very common to see nurses and doctors from the Hospital eating at one of the many coffee shops in Tiong Bahru at lunch time. Yong Guan Coffeeshop, located close to the junction of Tiong Poh Road and Eng Hoon Street, was particularly crowded with doctors and nurses at lunch time. Tiong Bahru's connection with the Hospital was severed in 1991 with the opening of the Central Expressway (CTE) which cut through Sit Wah Road and Eng Hoon Street, thus isolating Tiong Bahru Estate from the hilly terrain that once gave it its name.

The Singapore General Hospital started out in a wooden shed along the Singapore River in 1821 as a medical centre to cater to the European soldiers and seafarers transiting in Singapore. This wooden structure did not last long and by 1827 had so deteriorated that it collapsed. It was rebuilt and renamed the Singapore Infirmary in 1828. By the 1830s, the structure was once again threatening to collapse and the Infirmary was also riddled with staffing problems. The authorities then resolved to build a more permanent structure at Pearl's Hill. This building was completed in 1845. Slightly more than a decade later, the hospital was once again forced to move when the site at Pearl's Hill was required for military installations.

The new hospital was built in the Kandang Kerbau district, where the Land Transport Authority Headquarters is now located. This

facility opened in 1860 and had a gynaecological ward. However, the area around Kandang Kerbau (literally 'buffalo pen' in Malay) was swampy and mosquito-ridden. In 1873, a cholera outbreak claimed the lives of several patients in the hospital and the facility had to move once again. This time, it moved to the hillocks of Sepoy Lines where it was housed in some old military buildings. The Municipal Commission, after being urged to keep the hospital at its new location, decided to build a new hospital at Sepoy Lines. This was the kernel of the current Singapore General Hospital and it opened in 1882. It was substantially rebuilt and reopened on 29 March 1926. Most historians consider this date to mark the start of the hospital's modern history. Of the three blocks that were built in 1926 – Bowyer, Stanley and Norris – only the Bowyer Block, with its clock tower, remains. It was gazetted as a national monument in 2009.

In the vicinity of Tiong Bahru Estate, across Tiong Poh Road there is a popular coffee shop named Yong Guan (永光). It is still popular today and is frequented by staff of Singapore General Hospital. There are a few popular stalls in the coffee shop, a wonton mee stall managed by two ma jies (妈姐) – one of them was known as Say Jie (四姐) in Cantonese. The other popular stall was a guan cheong (灌肠), these guan cheong is home-made hence the taste is unique and fresh. Another popular stall is the Hainanese Cha Chai Fan (海南杂菜饭). The coffee shop is most crowded during lunch hours as doctors and nurses will eat there.

- Interview of Nicholas Tang (1939-2012), courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

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TIONG BAHRU COMMUNITY CENTRE

Location: 67A Eu Chin Street. From Tiong Poh Road, cross over to Seng Poh Road and walk towards Guan Chuan Street and you will find the marker



Guests at the opening of Tiong Bahru Community Centre, 1951.

Although the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) saw Tiong Bahru as a mass public housing project that would alleviate the overcrowding problem in Chinatown, this did not actually happen. Rents in Tiong Bahru, averaging \$18 to \$25 a month for an apartment, were just too unaffordable for the masses. Many residents in Chinatown were paying between \$3 and \$6 per month in rental, and those renting cubicles paid much less. As a result, Tiong Bahru quickly became a residential estate for the affluent and professional classes. Most people who moved to Tiong Bahru were either civil servants or businessmen who appreciated the

neighbourhood's proximity to town and its modern amenities like flushing toilets. This rather sophisticated tenant mix naturally had an impact on the community and social life of the area.

Ch'ng Jit Koon (b. 1934), elected Member of Parliament for Tiong Bahru from 1968 till 1991 and Minister of State for Community Development from 1984 to 1991, used to live at 14 Yong Siak Street. He remembered that Tiong Bahru was a middle-class area where many English-educated people lived. There were many Peranakans living in Tiong Bahru before the war and right after it. However, many of them

started moving out to Katong and other areas in the late 1940s, and Tiong Bahru acquired more Cantonese, Hokkien and Hakka residents. The number of Europeans and Eurasians who lived in Tiong Bahru also began to dwindle during this period as the community became increasingly Chinese-dominated. Another old resident, Peter Chan (b. 1954), recalled that for some reason, the Cantonese were dominant in Eng Hoon Street where he lived, although the rest of the estate was populated mainly by Hokkiens and Teochews.

SINGAPORE'S VERY FIRST COMMUNITY CENTRE

The idea of setting up a organisation to organise activities for the community emerged among Tiong Bahru's residents shortly after the war. In July 1948, Lau Yew Hock, a prominent member of the Tiong Bahru community and Secretary of the Singapore Chinese Importers and Exporters Association, proposed the establishment of a community centre. The Singapore Free Press reported on 26 July 1948 that at a meeting held at the Outram Road Church Hall, residents unanimously resolved that "a community centre is most desirable to further the moral, cultural, physical and advancement of the residents of Tiong Bahru."

An Interim Working Committee chaired by Lau was formed, with K.C. George as Vice-Chairman, Ong Soon Ann as Secretary, and Tann Hock Seng as Treasurer. Other Committee members were Chong Low Wing, Gwee Ah Sye, C.S. Woon, Kee Yew Chye and Tan Siow Hee. A month later, a blueprint for "a system of local self-government for a mixed community" was prepared for the approval of the approximately 10,000 people living in the Tiong Bahru SIT Estate. Among other things, the Tiong Bahru Community Centre was to be established to "train its members to be useful and responsible citizens by: (a) promoting friendship among themselves, irrespective of race or creed; (b) promoting the physical, intellectual, social and moral development of its members; and (c) teaching or interesting its members in the pursuit of some vocation." The Community Centre also planned to run its own magazine, library and canteen, and went on to announce

plans for its own premises and an open-air cinema when funds and other support could be raised. It also sought permission from SIT to take over a vacant field in front of Guan Chuan Street to use as a football field.

However, these plans did not take off until a few years later, in March 1951, when Duncan Robertson, the Progressive Party's Municipal Commissioner for South Ward, convened a public meeting at Seng Poh Road Market to revive the idea of establishing a community centre. More than 500 residents attended the meeting. SIT encouraged tenants to form a community centre by providing the use of shop premises as a meeting place for a nominal rent.

Did You Know?

The original Tiong Bahru Community Centre at Eu Chin Street in 1951 was in fact a converted stand-alone air-raid shelter. It is still there today.

TIONG BAHRU COMMUNITY CENTRE FROM 1951-1960

In July 1951, a community centre building was established at Eu Chin Street at the cost of \$20,000 and was officially opened by Duncan Robertson on 8 July 1951 in front of some 500 guests and residents. Most of the money for the renovation had been loaned to the Centre by its President, Teo Seng Bee, a businessman. The Community Centre proved very popular and within six weeks of its opening, 13,000 members had signed up. The Centre was very active, organising regular film shows, weekend dances and entertainment for its members and residents. It even obtained permission to run a \$10,000 lottery for its members and established a Youth Section in the Centre. It also proposed setting up a vigilante corps to patrol the area.

The vigilante corps idea was adopted with the sanction of the police and went into operation in February 1953. Tan Mok Lee (b. 1924) was a prime mover behind the idea to establish the Tiong Bahru Vigilante Corps. He proposed that such an organisation could be set up to prevent "outsiders" from coming into the Tiong Bahru area to create trouble since there

were many gangsters living and operating in the surrounding areas. Members of the Corps worked on a roster system. Volunteers would go to the Community Centre thrice a week to help although the more active ones were there every night. Three or four persons would make up a patrol led by a leader to cover a particular area. As an officer, Tan supervised a group whose members were each armed with a baton and torch. They were not allowed to arrest anyone, but to report trouble-makers to the police. They were attired in white shirts and dark blue trousers, and senior officers wore regulation leather shoes and a peak cap. Tan held the rank of Assistant Commander, while the Commander was a police officer. When the People's Action Party came to power in 1959, the Vigilante Corps was absorbed into the Police Force.

In 1955, the first general elections were held in Singapore and Tiong Bahru was designated as one of the 25 electoral divisions. A total of three candidates contested the ward and the Democratic Party's William Tan narrowly defeated Foo Few Ting of the Progressive Party to become Tiong Bahru's first Assemblyman.

In May 1956, the Community Centre was de-registered by the Registrar of Societies as it was allegedly used "for unlawful purposes" and for objects "incompatible with the peace and good order of the Colony." Among other things, the Centre was reputed to be a recruiting ground for political parties and a hangout for gamblers who played mahjong and tried their hand at the slot machines.

In April 1957, Tiong Bahru Community Centre reopened with a new, re-organised committee. It started off by organising lessons for underprivileged children and introduced dress-making and cookery classes. Control of the Community Centre was returned to the residents of Tiong Bahru in November 1958 who managed it with an interim committee headed by Tiong Bahru's Assemblyman, William Tan. In the 1959 general elections for a Singapore under self-rule, the People's Action Party's (PAP's) Lee Teck Him was elected Assemblyman for Tiong Bahru. Lee served two terms as Assemblyman and Member of Parliament.

In 1968, long-time Tiong Bahru resident Ch'ng Jit Koon was returned unopposed as Member of Parliament for Tiong Bahru.

In 1960, former air raid shelters located in the quadrangle bordered by Tiong Poh Road, Guan Chuan Street, Seng Poh Road and Eng Watt Street were converted for use as the Community Centre's administrative offices, library and classrooms. The revamped Community Centre was officially re-opened by Kenneth M. Byrne (1913-1990), Minister for Labour and Law, in October 1960. By this time, the People's Association (PA) had been formed and management of Tiong Bahru Community Centre, like all others in Singapore, was transferred from the Department of Social Welfare to the PA.

Did You Know?

One early idea by the Community Centre that did not pass muster with the community was a proposal to set up a "death house" – a hospice where the dying could spend their last days. The death house proposal died an early death after howls of protest from residents in the Kim Pong Road area where the facility was supposed to be situated.

THE PERANAKAN LEGACY IN TIONG BAHRU

Some of the earliest immigrants to Singapore after the British arrived in 1819 were Peranakan merchants from Malacca, one of the most important ports and trading centres in South-east Asia since the 1400s. Chinese migration to Southeast Asia came in two major waves, the first in the 15th and 16th centuries, and the second, in the 19th century. Many of the first-wave migrants settled and married local wives (most of whom were Malay, Indian or even Eurasian). The children of these mixed marriages were bi-cultural, adopting Chinese and Confucian practices, but speaking a mix of Malay and Hokkien. The womenfolk also adopted traditional Malay dress. These were the Peranakans who, through their mastery of the English language, rose to positions of power and influence in the Straits of Malacca.

By the time Raffles arrived in Singapore in 1819,

Malacca's best days were over. Many vessels were by-passing Malacca and anchoring in other ports located in the lucrative, spice-rich islands of modern-day Indonesia. Many Peranakan Chinese merchants, anxious to expand their trade networks, and encouraged by Major William Farquhar (1774-1839), Singapore's first Resident and for many years, as well as Resident and Commandant of Malacca, settled in Singapore.

SEE HOOD KEE AND HIS FAMILY

As noted earlier, the area around Tiong Bahru was first used as a cemetery by the Hokkien Peranakans in 1828. The cemetery had been established for the Hokkien community by See Hood Kee (1793-1847), the most important Hokkien Peranakan leader at this time, and the wealthiest Hokkien leader in Singapore. See was connected to another wealthy Malacca Hokkien trader, Tan Tock Seng (1798-1850), through the marriage of his fourth son, See Moh Guan (d. 1879), to Tan's niece, Tan Im Neo.

Many roads in Tiong Bahru are named after members of See's family and other notable Chinese businessmen. Indeed, it was See Hood Kee's great-grandson, See Teong Wah (1886-1940) who, as Municipal Commissioner, first proposed naming street names to commemorate individuals who had given land to the government for a public purpose. After this idea was approved, a number of names he proposed were those of his forebears and business associates. Among them were See Eng Watt (1826-1884), eldest son of See Hood Kee, and See Moh Guan, Eng Watt's younger brother. Eng Watt's son, Ewe Boon (1859-1909), and grandson, Teong Wah (1886-1940), were both prominent traders and community leaders. See Hood Kee was commemorated with having Hood Kee Street named after him. However, this street, which used to run parallel to Kim Ching Street, was taken away with the construction of the Seng Poh Road Market.

OTHER PERSONALITIES REMEMBERED THROUGH TIONG BAHRU'S STREETS

- **See Boon Tiong** (1807-1888) was born in Malacca and lived in Singapore between 1825 and 1848. He was a wealthy merchant, tapioca planter and a close friend of the Scottish trader Alexander Laurie Johnston (1783-1850), after whom the former Johnston's Pier was named. He was also involved in mining in Pahang, Trengganu, Kelantan, Patani and Singora. See is best remembered as one of the principal founders of the Keng Teck Huay, a Hokkien Peranakan association established at Telok Ayer Street in 1831.

- **Tan Chay Yan** (1871-1916) was a rubber industry pioneer. Born in Malacca, he was the eldest son of Tan Teck Guan, and a grandson of Tan Tock Seng. Tan's family was wealthy, owning large tracts of land, and operating trading companies and plantations growing mostly tapioca. After completing his secondary education at the Malacca High School, Tan went to England to further his studies and there met Henry Nicholas Ridley (1855-1856), who later became Director of the Botanic Gardens in Singapore and a champion of the Malayan rubber industry. With encouragement from his friend Dr Lim Boon Keng (1869-1957), Tan obtained nine rubber seedlings from Ridley in 1895 and planted them on a 43-acre site at Bukit Lintang near Malacca - this was the first Malayan rubber plantation. Tan was also active in public affairs, serving as a member of the Malacca Municipal Council and as a committee member of the Singapore Straits Chinese British Association. The original Chay Yan Street has been replaced by the construction of Seng Poh Road Market and the current location of Chay Yan Street was designated in the 1950s.

- **Koh Eng Hoon** (1823-1880) was a Malacca-born merchant, the son of Koh Kee Oot and grandson of Koh Teck Hin. The Koh family had settled in Malacca for almost two centuries. Koh Eng Hoon came to Singapore in 1840, aged 17, in search of new opportunities and started work as a shop assistant at Boustead & Company. He was later promoted to cashier but after five years with the firm, he left to

establish his own company, the Benefit Society. He had large dealings with the Bugis traders and also acted as a commission agent. When he died in 1880, he left behind many properties in Singapore and Malacca. Unfortunately, his sons, San Tee and San Chun, were less capable than their father and by 1891, Chop Soon Bee, the company he founded, was bankrupt.

- **See Eng Watt** (1826–1884) was a Malacca-born merchant, second son of See Hood Kee. He was admitted to his father's partnership of Boon Tiong and Co in 1846. The younger See founded Eng Wat, Moh Guan & Bros Co in 1859 with ships plying between Singapore and Xiamen. He was a Chinese pioneer in the shipping line. He was also one of the founders of a Chinese free school known as Chui Eng Si E in Amoy Street. A Hokkien community leader, he died in 1884.

- **Seah Eu Chin** (1805–1883) was a China-born Teochew businessman who came to Singapore in 1823. He established a mercantile business and owned a large gambier plantation that stretched from Irwell Bank Road (off River Valley Road) to Bukit Timah Road and Thomson Road. A member of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and a Justice of the Peace, Seah founded the Ngee Ann Kongsi along with 30 other community leaders in 1830. Seah was one of the wealthiest Chinese merchants of his time.

- **So Guan Chuan** was a member of the first committee of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce formed in February 1837. He was also a founding member of the Keng Teck Huay, and he contributed generously to the building funds for the construction of the Thian Hock Keng Temple in Telok Ayer Street and even served as the Temple's general manager in the 1840s.

- **Lee Keng Kiat** (1851–1917) was born in Malacca and was the son of Lee Quee Lim. He was educated in Penang and came to Singapore after graduation to work, joining the Straits Steamship Co as a sub-Manager. He contributed much to the Straits-born Chinese community. Lee Keng Kiat had two sons: Lee Chin Tuan and Lee Chin Huk. Lee established a steamship business in the 1870s but it went bust in the

1890s. He was a cousin of Lee Choon Guan.

- **Kim Cheng Street** was formerly named Kim Ching Street, in honour of **Tan Kim Ching** (1829–1892). Tan was the eldest son of pioneering businessman, Tan Tock Seng. Born with a keen business mind which was sharpened by working with his father, Tan started Chop Chin Seng which dealt with rice. He owned rice mills as far as Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) and Siam (Thailand). Tan was also instrumental in establishing the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, and moved into shipping as well. After his father died, he inherited the mantle as leader of Singapore's Chinese community. In 1865, he was made Justice of the Peace, and in 1888, became a Municipal Commissioner. He co-founded the Tan Si Chong Su Temple at Magazine Road with Tan Beng Swee in 1878.

- **Low Kim Pong** (1837–1909) was born in Fujian, China and came to Singapore in 1858. He started a small medical shop, Chop Ban San and later Chop Hock Nam, which eventually became one of the largest Chinese medical halls. He also dealt in private banking. Committed to social services, he was a member of the Chinese Advisory Board, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Royal Society of Arts. Among other things, Low helped establish the Siong Lim Temple (now a national monument) in Kim Keat Road in 1902.

- **Tan Kim Tian** was a Baba from Malacca. He started life as a comprador or local intermediary in the European firm of Paterson Simons & Company, and later went into business on his own, establishing Tan Kim Tian and Son Steamship Company, the first local Chinese shipping company to build and buy steamships. Capitalising on the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Tan and his son, Beng Wan, set up the company in 1871 and made a fortune.

- **Lim Liak** (alias Lim Leack) was a tin miner, tapioca planter and ship owner in the 1850s. Lim Liak Street was named in 1941 on completion of the Tiong Bahru housing estate. The street did not originally appear on the master plan for Tiong Bahru. Lim was the proprietor of Leack, Chin Seng and Co and Chop Hiap

Chin. He came from China to Malaya in 1825. He started his business in tin-mining and later moved to Singapore and started his shipping business. A public spirited man, he was much respected in the Chinese community. He died at the age of 71.

- **See Moh Guan** (d. 1879) was born in Malacca and was the fourth son of See Hood Kee. He was in the pepper and gambier business. In 1879, he assumed chairmanship of the Tiong Bahru Heng San Teng temple, taking over from his father who had passed away that year. Moh Guan Terrace is named after him.

- **Lim Peng Nguan** (1833–1879) was one of the earliest gambier and pepper planters in Singapore. He married Teo Choon Lian, daughter of a famous businessman and community leader, Teo Lee. His son, Lim Nee Soon (1879–1936) became one of the most important rubber and pineapple tycoons in Singapore as well as a major philanthropist.

- **Khoo Tiong Poh** (1830–1892) was a Hokkien merchant who came to Singapore aged 22 from China. His first business venture was Chop Tiong Ho. In 1874, he set up Bun Hin & Co and went into the shipping business and was also engaged in the ship chandlery business under Ann Bee & Co. In 1888, he obtained a Manchu title conferred by the Emperor of China as an expression of political and economic affiliation.

- **Tan Seng Poh** (1830–1879) was a Teochew merchant who was born in Perak. His father, Tan Ah Hun, was from Zhaonan and became the wealthy Kapitan China of Perak. His eldest and second sisters married Seah Eu Chin with whom he had close business ties. Tan later became the head of an opium farm and part of the Great Opium Syndicate alongside tycoons Cheang Hong Lim (1841–1893) and Tan Yeok Nee (1827–1902)). He was made a Justice of the Peace and Honorary Magistrate in 1872. He lived in a huge mansion he built in what is now Loke Yew Street.

- **Sit Wah Road** is named after well-known local contractor Sit Wah or See Wah (of Chop See Wah fame).

- **Tan Yong Siak** (1835–1914) was a Teochew merchant and contemporary of Seah Liang Seah (1850–1925). Born in Zhao'an, China, in 1835, he came to Singapore at a young age. He first worked as an apprentice before becoming manager of Chop Ban Seng. In 1863, he founded Chop Yong Hak Seng at 49 Circular Road and Ban Seng Soon at 71 Boat Quay in 1879, both dealing in Siamese rice, rattan and rubber. He was a founding member of The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce. He was a charitable man and a highly-respected arbitrator.

PRE-WAR SCHOOLS IN TIONG BAHRU

The original masterplan for Tiong Bahru did not include a school for its residents. This could have been due to the fact that there were already several established schools in the area. Outram School, a government English school established at what is now the site of the Outram MRT Station in 1906, was a major feeder school for the elite Raffles Institution while several other Chinese-medium schools dotted the areas surrounding Tiong Bahru.

Quite possibly the oldest and nearest school to Tiong Bahru was Chiang Teck (Zhangde) School which was founded in 1923 on a plot of land adjacent to a Chinese cemetery on Silat Road (now part of Jalan Bukit Merah). It was located in a small rented building with only four classrooms and a teacher's hostel. The school building was destroyed during the Japanese Occupation, and a much larger, sturdier building was constructed after the war. Due to falling enrolment, the Trustees of the School decided to shut it down in 1981. However, when the Government built a new school on the premises of the old Chiang Teck School in 1985, it was decided that the school would be renamed Zhangde Primary School, in honour of the founders, teachers and benefactors of the old Chiang Teck School. Zhangde Primary School took in students from several other schools that had closed down: Kai Min School, Outram Primary School, and later, Silat Primary School.

Kai Min School was founded through the amalgamation of two schools – Chuen Min (Quan

Min 全民) School and Kai Kok (Jiegu 介谷) Public School – in 1961. Chuen Min School was founded by Liu Jinming in 1930 at 333 Tiong Bahru Road. It was a small school with only five classes in 1949. Kai Kok Public School was founded by Li Qinghu in 1936 and was located at the top of Beo Lane, a former road at Bukit Ho Swee. In 1961, Kai Kok School burnt down in the great Bukit Ho Swee Fire and her students had to be temporarily housed at Outram School. Not long after this, it was decided that Kai Kok School would merge with Chuen Min School as the latter had a dwindling enrolment. The new school was named Kai Min (Jiemin 介民) School which was a combination of the names of the predecessor schools. Kai Min School closed down in 1980 and her students were absorbed by the new Zhangde Primary School. The Kai Min name was resurrected in 1985 when a new Jiemin Primary School was opened in Yishun.

Did you know?

The former site of Chuen Min School (now Kai Min School) at 333 Tiong Bahru Road is roughly where Tiong Bahru Plaza is currently located.

POST-WAR SCHOOLS

In the post-war era, two schools were built in Tiong Bahru. The first was Tiong Bahru Primary School, an English-medium school at the junction of Peng Nguan Street and Chay Yan Street. Residents of Tiong Bahru, led by the management committee of their Community Centre, had been appealing to the authorities for more amenities. In 1949, the Government announced that \$250,000 had been set aside for the building of a school in Tiong Bahru. In September 1952, Teo Seng Bee, President of the Community Centre, told residents that the authorities promised that a new school would be built. Students who registered for the 1953 academic year were initially posted to Havelock Primary School while the school was being built. In July 1953, seven classes from Havelock Primary School were transferred to the newly-built Tiong Bahru Primary School.

James Koh Cher Siang (b. 1946), who later became a Permanent Secretary and Chairman of the Housing & Development Board, was one

of the first batch of students at Tiong Bahru Primary School. He recalled how he had initially been sent to Havelock Primary School, but later moved to the “new school right in the heart of Tiong Bahru”. Tan Peng Ann (b. 1948), who entered the school in 1955, recalled that the principal was an English schoolmaster named William Folly. The school itself, according to Tan, was an L-shaped building.

On the longer side of the L is a double-storey classroom type building. On the shorter side of the L is the administrative part of the building which is a one level building. Of course, we had a little tuckshop ... a reasonably large school field where we can run around and play games like hantam bola [a local form of dodge ball]...

**- Interview of Tan Peng Ann (b. 1948),
courtesy of Oral History Centre, National
Archives of Singapore**

Loh Siew Yean, another former pupil who studied there between 1964 and 1969, remembered with great fondness the laksa (spicy noodle soup) served at the tuckshop which cost only 10 cents a bowl, and a very kind-hearted school watchman, Hassan, who used to invite him to his home on the school grounds. This school continued taking in students till 1990 when it was closed due to falling enrolment. It has since been demolished.

Another important school established in Tiong Bahru after the war was Seng Poh Government Chinese Primary School located at the junction of Seng Poh Road and Tiong Bahru Road (more properly on Zion Road). This school, which was initially housed in two temporary buildings, took in its first batch of students in January 1956. It was the first of the Government-controlled Chinese Primary Schools to be established and had, in its first year, expected to enrol some 680 pupils. This school proved popular with the Chinese community living in and around Tiong Bahru. It continued as a Chinese-medium school with both primary and secondary classes till 1981 when it was converted into an English-medium school. Like most schools in the vicinity, the Seng Poh Road School faced falling enrolment and was finally closed in 1987. The school building has since been demolished.

» OUR HERITAGE

SENG POH GARDEN & DANCING GIRL SCULPTURE

Location: corner of Moh Guan Terrace and Seng Poh Road. From Eu Chin Street, retrace your steps until you reach the junction of Seng Poh Road and Moh Guan Terrace. Seng Poh Garden and the marker are at the corner of these two roads.



The landscaped Seng Poh Garden and Dancing Girl sculpture at Seng Poh Road.

While Tiong Bahru was planned with plenty of green spaces between its blocks, there were no initial plans for a landscaped recreational garden. For a time, the area near the Community Centre at Eu Chin Street had, in the 1960s, been planted with various plants and shrubs in the manner of a garden, but it was only in 1972 that a landscaped garden at Seng Poh Road was planned.

The space where Seng Poh Garden is now located was an open grassy area which residents used for their morning exercise and gatherings. Returning to his old estate, Member of

Parliament for Tiong Bahru and former resident Ch'ng Jit Koon (b. 1934) was anxious that the estate's green spaces be given greater prominence. To this end, he asked Sarawak-born sculptor Lim Nang Seng (1916–1987) – who had already established himself as a leading sculptor in Singapore – to do something “as soon as possible”.

As Ch'ng's commission was urgent, Lim chose an abstract form depicting a girl doing a sort of joyful harvest dance. He sculpted the 1.2-metre high sculpture in a car park in Orchard Road and finished it within two weeks. Made of

concrete, the sculpture cost less than \$2,000 at the time. The Dancing Girl sculpture was unveiled by then Minister for Interior and Defence Lim Kim San (1916–2006). The sculpture drew mixed reactions. Some residents loved it while others thought it too abstract, saying that it looked more like a swan about to take flight. Lim Nang Seng was not upset by these comments, saying that since swans were auspicious birds, it was fine if residents thought that it brought prosperity to the estate. The Garden underwent a \$250,000 renovation lasting six months in 2007.

Did You Know?

Lim Nang Seng shot to fame when he took part in Singapore's first sculpture exhibition – Sculpture '67 – and was invited to be part of a committee to design Singapore's first coin issue in 1967. He is best known as the sculptor of the Merlion, using a blueprint designed by Kwan Sai Kheong (1920–1981), then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Singapore. The Merlion at the Esplanade was unveiled in 1972, the same year Seng Poh Garden was opened.

ARTISTS & ARTISTES IN TIONG BAHRU

Tiong Bahru has been sometimes referred to as the Hollywood of Singapore. This was not because any movies were made there, but rather because its modernist Art Deco architecture gave it a certain glamour, just like Hollywood. At the same time, a number of well-known literary and artistic personalities have lived in the estate. One of the most famous of these was Yu Dafu 郁达夫 (1896–1945) a Chinese writer and poet. Yu was born in Fuyang in China's Zhejiang province and came to Singapore in 1938 after a colourful

and controversial career in China. His book, *Chenlun 沉沦*, which was published in Japan in 1921, shocked Chinese literary circles with its frank depictions of themes of sex and homosexuality. Yu, who came to Singapore to work as the literary editor for the Chinese daily, *Sin Chew Jit Poh 新洲日报*, lived at the former 54 Eng Hoon Street. Because of his anti-Japanese propaganda, Yu was wanted by the Japanese Imperial Army. When the Japanese invaded Singapore in 1942, he fled to Sumatra where he started a brewery. He was arrested by the *Kempeitai* (Japanese secret police) in 1945 and executed.

Huang Pao Fang 黄葆芳 (1912–1989) was another major artistic figure who came to Singapore from China and lived in Tiong Bahru. Born in Fujian, China, Huang graduated from the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts and very soon proved himself to be a multi-talented artist and furniture designer. In 1937, he came to Singapore to establish the Mei Tong Furniture Design Co with Liu Kang (1911–2004), another China-born artist who was a major figure in the Nanyang or South Seas style. When Huang retired from furniture designing in 1977, he spent most of his time on Chinese ink painting, specialising in landscape, flowers and fruits. He was particularly well-known for his Chinese-style depictions of local fruits like rambutans, mangosteens, durians and bananas. Huang, who lived in Tiong Bahru during the war years, was elected President of the Society of Chinese Artists in 1978. In 1986, the left-handed artist became the first Singapore artist to hold a one-man exhibition in China at the invitation of China's Association for the Advancement of International Friendship.

Heng Kim Ching (1924–1998), better known by his stage name of Wang Sar, was also a Tiong



Modern Trend Photo Studio which dates back to the 1970s is one of the many known photography studios in Tiong Bahru.

Bahru resident, having lived in a flat at Eng Hoon Street. Wang Sar was one half of a highly successful comedic team of Wang Sar and Ye Fong or Ah Pui and Ah San (The Fat one and the Skinny one). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the duo entertained generations of Singaporeans with their stand-up skits which centred around a hilarious mix of banter in Teochew, Hokkien, Cantonese, Malay and English. Wang Sar based his character on Lao Fu Zi 老夫子 or Old Master Q (a comic character created by the famous Hongkong-based manhua artist Alfonso Wong (b. 1924) 王家禧 in 1962). Wang Sar was modelled after and dressed like Lao Fu Zi (who was tall and thin) while his side-kick Ye Fong was modelled on Big Potato 大蕃薯 (who was fat and short).

FROM PHOTOGRAPHY TO FASHION AND MUSIC

Tiong Bahru was also home to a number of well-known photography studios run by famous photographers. Of particular note was Tiong Bahru Studio, located at No 1 Tiong Bahru Road. This famous studio started life as the Melbourne Studio, because its owner Du Xiang Wah had studied in Melbourne. Du then wanted to give up the studio and was persuaded by Wu Peng Seng 吴秉城 (1913–2008) to sell it to Wu and his partner Lee Lim 李林 (1931–1989). Before long, Wu and Lee turned the studio around and attracted an extensive and prestigious clientele.

During those days, many photography lovers would visit the Tiong Bahru Studio to develop photos, share photography tips or just chit-chat. Inexperienced photographers would visit the studio to learn and ask for tips from the experienced photographers. As Tiong Bahru Studio was well-known for its speed, good technique and quality photo developing, even the British who loved black and white photos frequented the studio. Advertisement photos were developed there as the quality was good and photos were developed in a short time.

- Lo Gong Wa, who worked at Tiong Bahru Studio in the 1960s. Interview with Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

Beyond commercial photography, Lee Lim and Wu Peng Seng were artistic master photographers and both won the Cultural Medallion for photography in 1987 and 1990 respectively.

Sylvia Kho (b. 1917) was the daughter of a well-known businessman named Wong Hin. From a young age, she discovered that she had a talent for sewing and designing. After marrying Kho Hock Chio in Indonesia, she enrolled in a Dutch school specialising in all kinds of craft-making and dressmaking. In 1947, after travelling to Holland, France and America to learn her craft, Kho returned to Singapore and established a bridal salon at Seng Poh Road,



Home-grown talents: Comedic duo Wang Sar and Ye Fong (left) performing at a variety show in 1967. The Quests (right) were a popular band that started from Tiong Bahru.

making her one of Singapore's earliest women entrepreneurs. Kho soon established herself as the island's leading bridal dress designer and her business expanded to four boutiques, at Orchard Towers, Katong Shopping Centre and two at Outram Park (to which she moved from Tiong Bahru in the early 1970s). Kho retired in 1997 after a fall. In 2002, she donated a collection of gowns from her shop to raise funds for the St Luke's Hospital for the Elderly.

Did You Know?

A silk wedding gown by Sylvia Kho is part of the National Museum of Singapore's Fashion Gallery.

Another well-known designer and hairdresser who started out in Seng Poh Road was Shanghai-born Roland Chow (1926–2012). Arriving in Singapore in 1951 from Ipoh, Paris-trained Chow soon established himself as Singapore's leading hairstylist and fashion tsar. In 1959 The Straits Times even christened him Singapore's Christian Dior. Chow started life as a school-teacher but gave that up for fashion and hairdressing. He went to Paris where he studied under Francois Magnien, President of the l'Ecole de Coiffure de Paris, and later also with Vidal Sassoon and Roger Valery. Chow later moved his salon and boutique to a shop-house in Orchard Road, near Killiney Road,

and then later to Orchard Point. From the mid 1950s right up till the 1990s, Chow was a great fashion arbiter and style maestro. He retired from designing and hairdressing to focus on writing and travelling in the 1990s, penning a regular column for the Chinese daily, Lianhe Zao Bao. He died of pneumonia in 2012.

One of Singapore's most popular home-grown bands, The Quests, had their start in Tiong Bahru as well. The original quartet who formed The Quests – Jap Chong (b. 1943), Raymond Leong, Henry Chua (b. 1947) and Lim Wee Guan (b. 1946) – got together in 1960 as a group of teenagers to do covers of British and American pop songs. In 1961, The Quests – all neighbours in Tiong Bahru – was born, with Jap Chong on lead vocals and rhythm guitar, Leong on lead guitar, Chua on bass guitar and Lim on drums. The group gave its first paid performance at the St Andrew's Mission Hospital in 1961. Throughout the 1960s, the band was popular, even though its members changed. It was Reggie Verghese (b. 1947, formerly of The Checkmates) who gave the group its distinctive sound. The group disbanded in 1970.

» OUR HERITAGE

THE HORSE-SHOE BLOCK

Location: Block 78 Moh Guan Terrace. Walk down Seng Poh Road to Guan Chuan Street, then turn right into Moh Guan Terrace and you will see the marker in front of Block 78 Moh Guan Terrace.



Block 78, Moh Guan Terrace is uniquely shaped in a horse-shoe.

These distinctive curved 'horse-shoe' shaped flats at Moh Guan Terrace and Guan Chuan Street were built between 1939 and 1940. Block 78 is the largest block of flats in Tiong Bahru and is unique for two reasons. First, this single block of flats actually straddles both Moh Guan Terrace and Guan Chuan Street; and second, the section on Guan Chuan Street features a purpose-built air raid shelter, the first to be included in a public housing project.

The earliest air raid shelters in Singapore were built sometime between 1936 and 1937 in Bukit Tunggul in Novena. At the time, there were no further plans to build more of such shelters because the outbreak of war in Singapore was considered a distant possibility. However, when war broke out in Europe in 1939, members of the public began urging the government to build more air raid shelters. The government was generally reluctant to do so because most of Singapore's buildings were built on low

flat land close to the water table. This meant that the building of underground bunkers and shelters would be difficult and expensive. The government then encouraged people to build their own air raid shelters and offered plans for such shelters. Commercial concerns like the Alexandra Brick Factory also advertised their products for use in such shelters.

On 28 June 1939, SIT announced that a new housing scheme at Guan Chuan Street would include “a basement floor” that would be used as a covered play area, but which could, in times of emergency “readily be converted into an effective air raid shelter.” This air raid shelter is significant because it is the only public housing building to have been built with the shelter as part of its design. According to Nicholas Tang (1939–2012) who lived in the Tiong Bahru estate as a child, the entrance to the shelter was located at 41 and 43 Guan Chuan Street, in front of a coffee shop then owned by a man named Yeo Swee Hong. Once an air raid siren was sounded, the two doors to the shelter would open and a ladder at each doorway led into the shelter.

Like many of the other blocks in Tiong Bahru, the ground floor of Block 78 is a mix of residences and shops. One of the oldest coffee shops in Tiong Bahru, Hua Bee, is located at the base of the block where Moh Guan Terrace meets Guan Chuan Street. This coffee shop was started sometime in the 1940s and was established by the uncle of its last operator, Tony Tiang, who ran the coffee shop on behalf of his cousin who inherited the premises from his father. As far as Tiang could remember, the coffee shop only served drinks, bread, eggs and fishball noodles. It was one of the few coffee shops in Singapore that served coffee with a slice of butter in the cup. The fishball stall owner is called Ong Ngah (Hokkien for ‘baby’). This coffee shop was the set for Eric Khoo’s 1995 movie, *Mee Pok Man*.

Did You Know?

These flats, now under conservation, were often referred to as Tiong Bahru Gor Lau (‘five-storey flat in Tiong Bahru’ in Hokkien) referring to the fact that this is the only five-storey SIT blocks in Tiong Bahru and the highest in Singapore when built.

It was a common practice of old-time coffee shops to enhance the aroma of their coffee by frying the beans with butter, as the quality of their coffee beans was often poor. Many patrons would also add a slab of butter into their coffee for a richer, creamier alternative to milk.

COFFEE SHOPS AND RESTAURANTS IN TIONG BAHRU

As mentioned earlier, food stalls and coffee shops were among the first businesses to be established in Tiong Bahru. Most of these coffee shops offered modest fare like ‘mixed rice’ (rice with a choice of meat or vegetable side dishes), chye tau kway (fried radish cake), yong tau foo (stuffed beancurd), fried kway teow (flat noodles), and other local staples. Tan Han (b. 1948), though not a resident of Tiong Bahru, frequently went to the estate for supper with friends from Rediffusion (a once-popular cable-transmitted radio station offering programmes in Chinese dialects), which included a resident of Eng Watt Street. Tan particularly remembered a corner coffee shop on Eng Watt Street which sold delicious yong tau foo. It was considered quite expensive, as three pieces cost 20 cents. Similar shops in town would charge 30 cents for three pieces, but almost everywhere else, three pieces would only cost 10 cents. This, Tan said, was because Tiong Bahru was considered an upmarket area.

In the 1940s, there was only one restaurant in Eng Hoon Street, called the Coral Restaurant. Located at a corner of a shophouse, the restaurant had a seating capacity of 8 to 10 tables (depending on how squeezed the setting was).

The Coral Restaurant was a popular venue for wedding banquets.

During those days, wedding banquets were usually not held in famous restaurants as it was more costly. A wedding banquet at Coral Restaurant in the 1960s cost about \$40-\$50 a table whereas it would cost \$90 a table at famous restaurants like the Lido Restaurant (music, singing and suckling pig) at Scotts Road. A table at restaurants at Great World like Wing Chun Yuan or Diamond Restaurant would cost \$45. Most people would choose to host wedding banquets and baby showers at restaurants like Coral Restaurant as the servings of food were bigger.

- Interview of Nicholas Tang (1939-2012), courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

The bigger the servings, the more attractive a restaurant, as old-time tradition demanded that there be left-over food. If diners walked away with food left on the table, it was a signal that they had more than enough to eat and that their hosts had been generous. Since all the food had already been paid for, this was not regarded as wastage. Hosts of these large banquets typically brought two big pots to the restaurant to collect the left-over food – one for 'dry food' and the other for food with soup or gravy.

The leftover food brought home would be heated up the next day and distributed among friends and neighbours. Sometimes, salted vegetables would be added to the leftovers. As a few dishes of dry food were poured into a pot (and the same done for those with gravy), the mixture is called Yi Pan Wuo (一品锅). In fact the full name for this dish is known as Kim Long Wong Tie Lou Kim Nan Yi Pan Wou (乾隆皇帝下江南一品锅).

- Interview of Nicholas Tang (1939-2012), courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

Leftovers that were not collected by the host would be sold by the restaurant staff to Chinatown hawkers who in turn sold them

to their customers. Poorer quality leftovers were collected as swill in tin bins which would be collected by pig farmers from the neighbouring area. Chan May Chun, a former resident, recalled that the woman who collected the swill would give her family either a piece of pork or 30 eggs as a token of appreciation around Chinese New Year.

Beyond coffee shops and restaurants, there were numerous itinerant hawkers selling food of all sorts. These hawkers would normally station their carts or baskets outside coffee shops or main junctions, under some shade so that they could attract customers. The more enterprising hawkers would send out agents to collect orders and deliver food to the doorstep of the customer. Some older folk might also remember the characteristic daily rhythms of the kok-kok mee seller. This noodle vendor would carry his food in two baskets strung on a long pole which he balanced on his shoulders. His young assistant would go from block to block with a stick and a small piece of bamboo which he struck to attract the attention of residents. Like an expert percussionist, this young boy struck a hypnotic 'kok kok' rhythm that attracted everyone:

I will never forget the sound of the kok-kok mee seller's assistant. It had a very attractive sound and rhythm and all of us would rush to the balcony to place our orders. Because we lived on the third floor, it was a hassle to go all the way down to get our noodles so we had a system of 'rope and basket'. We lowered a basket to the ground floor with our order and money in it and back came the noodles which we slowly pulled up to our floor. After we finished, this young boy, who must have had a phenomenal memory, returned to collect the bowls, spoons and chopsticks which we dutifully lowered back down to him. It was convenient and fun. Actually, everyone in Tiong Bahru did the same thing, and you could buy almost any kind of food from these hawkers – noodles, curry puff, even nonya kueh-kueh – and in almost all cases, the food was absolutely delicious!

- Chia Kee Bow (b. 1939)

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PRE-WAR AIR RAID SHELTER

Location: Block 78 Moh Guan Terrace. The air raid shelter can be accessed from the carpark compound of Block 78. Enter the carpark from Chay Yan Street. The air raid shelter can be found on your right.



Interior of the pre-war air raid shelter at Block 78.

TIONG BAHRU DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The British Empire went to war when Great Britain declared war against Nazi Germany in 1939. Immediately, plans were made to prepare various parts of the British Empire for war, with buildings being equipped with bomb shelters, fire-fighting equipment and residents trained as air raid precaution wardens, firemen and home guard units. The situation was no different in Singapore. In 1940, a series of plans were drawn up to convert motor garages at the rear of the flats in Seng Poh Road into bomb shelters, and for the 'play pavilions' at the rear of Block 78 to be adapted for use as first aid posts.

Block 78 on Moh Guan Terrace, which was built in 1939, included a 1,500 sq metre bomb

shelter, the only public housing building to have been so equipped. This shelter, which can hold some 1600 persons, was infrequently used during the war as Tiong Bahru was not the main target of Japanese bombing. Indeed, many war-time residents speculated stray bombs fell in Tiong Bahru only because Japanese bombers missed their main target - the Singapore General Hospital.

Peter Chan (b. 1954), whose grandfather Chan Chun Wing was a volunteer air raid precaution marshal in Tiong Bahru, recalled that there had only been a single dry-run of evacuation to the shelter before the onset of war: "My grandfather said people nearby did use the shelter when the sirens went off, but those were mostly false alarms. It was actually hardly used."

Even so, old-time residents remember at least two bombs that landed in the Estate. Chia Kee Bow (b. 1939) – whose family moved to Tiong Bahru from Pasir Panjang in 1943 – distinctly recalled one bomb that landed exactly in a back lane in Eng Watt Street, right between two blocks of flats, bursting a water main and sending water gushing up to the second floor of the block. Linda Koh (b. 1938), who lived in Moh Guan Terrace, remembered a bomb dropping very close to her apartment.

In 1940, when the likelihood of war grew ever closer, the flats at Tiong Bahru were all painted in camouflage colours, and additional make-shift bomb shelters were built beneath the staircases of each block. At the same time, some of the five-foot ways had double-plank walls filled with sand to provide additional shelter. Out in the open spaces, the roofless U-shaped concrete structures provided additional shelter.

When the Japanese started their assault on Singapore, Tiong Bahru became the refuge of numerous residents who fled their bombed-out homes in other parts of the island. Gayle Chia (b. 1938), whose family had a compound house in Pasir Panjang, recalled that her whole family evacuated to Tiong Bahru after bombs dropped around their home in Pasir Panjang. Rooming initially with some distant relatives in a flat in Eng Watt Street, the Chia family then found another flat at 4B Yong Siak Street where they remained till 1946.

During the Sook Ching (which means ‘to cleanse’ or ‘to purify’) exercise to eliminate anti-Japanese elements, residents of Tiong

Bahru were ordered to assemble at the vacant land on which Tiong Bahru Market and Food Centre now stands. The actual screening took place at a coffee shop in the row of shophouses next to present day Block 55. According to artist Huang Pao Fang (1912–1989) who also used to live in Tiong Bahru, this coffee shop was commandeered for screening and all its contents had been emptied out. The screening began in the evening and those who were ‘cleared’ were given a stamp which allowed them to move in and out of Tiong Bahru freely.

It can be said that not many from Tiong Bahru ... perished after the screening. It was said that the screening officer was more compassionate. When he found out that those who did not pass the screening would be executed by the firing squad, he decided not to pick out too many people.

- Interview of Huang Pao Fang (1912–1989), courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

British prisoners-of-war (POWs) were made to clear the night soil and refuse in the estate, but sympathetic residents slipped the POWs food and cigarettes when the Japanese guards were not watching. Chia Kee Bow (b. 1939) remembered how, each morning, British POWs would be assembled at an open field and then assigned a work detail. Many of them were not more than skin and bones. Vice – gambling dens and brothels – also flourished behind the walls of the respectable Art Deco buildings in Tiong Bahru during this time.



We made friends with the sentry, three or four from that particular spot. You know why? These chaps were sportsmen, and then they used to come, when they are off duty, they come to Tiong Bahru. We used to play football in the little field, between Eng Hoon Street and Eng Watt Street, a little open air field, we played football there. So they used to come and join us, we became friends. So whenever they are on duty at the sentry post, and whenever we walked past from Outram Road to go to Great World opposite there, they will laugh at us and we didn't have to bow.

- Tan Wee Eng (1919-2001), on the Japanese soldiers despatched to secure and guard Tiong Bahru. Interview courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

Even though they were living in flats, many residents took to cultivating their own vegetables and raising poultry for food. Chia Kee Bow (b. 1939-), who was a young boy when his family was living in Tiong Bahru during the war, recalled how each family would stake out a small plot in the empty land in front of his Yong Siak Street apartment and plant yam and tapioca. His sister, Gayle Chia (b. 1938), remembered how the neighbours in their block cooperated to keep a small pig which they reared and eventually sold.

There used to be a playground behind my house. Residents fenced up the playground and turned it into their little gardens. They did so by staking claims to the fenced plots. There, they grew tapioca, etc. Some kept poultry.

- Ch'ng Jit Koon (b. 1934), a Tiong Bahru resident who used to live at 14 Yong Siak Street and was later elected Member of Parliament for Tiong Bahru. Interview courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

Those who could not find an empty plot of land near their home went slightly further afield. Ng Pang Chwee (b. 1926), whose family lived on Boon Tiong Road, remembered how he trudged to a small hill behind King's Theatre in Kim Tian Road where he planted tapioca near a disused

cemetery. His family also built their own air raid shelter near his home which had a wooden roof topped with a thick layer of soil.

By the end of the war, the estate was fairly badly damaged by bombing, and many of the roads had to be re-paved. Furthermore, all the open spaces around Tiong Bahru were used for tapioca and yam cultivation, and many squatters had erected attap huts and sheds wherever they could find an empty plot of land. By this time, a lot of Javanese - labourers brought in by the Japanese from Indonesia - had settled in the area. They were extremely poor and lived in squalid conditions. Mrs Linda Koh (b. 1938), who lived in Moh Guan Terrace, recalled how many of these Javanese occupied the bomb shelter in Guan Chuan Street. They had no food or water and were reduced to catching and eating rats and cockroaches. Chia Kee Bow (b. 1939) also remembered how these poor Javanese workers would use scoops made from tin cans to collect water from the drains to drink and 'harvest' water from the small metal containers that protected the public water taps.

The SIT authorities and the Municipal Commission had to work hard to restore Tiong Bahru to its pre-war condition. This was a mammoth task especially since so many buildings throughout Singapore had been damaged by bombing, pillaging and neglect. The enactment of the Rent Control Ordinance in 1947 ensured that landlords were not allowed to increase rentals of pre-war tenements thereby protecting existing tenants of Tiong Bahru who feared that they would have to be evicted if they could no longer afford rentals.

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DESIGN OF TIONG BAHRU FLATS

Location: Lim Liak Street. From Moh Guan Terrace, walk down Kim Pong Road until you reach Lim Liak Street on your right. Walk into Lim Liak Street and you will find the marker is in front of Block 33.



Hundreds of shophouse hunters queuing up to apply for shophouses in Seng Poh Road at SIT office in Tiong Bahru, 1950.

After the Second World War, SIT built several blocks of four-storey flats between 1948 and 1954, which can be seen around Lim Liak Road and along Seng Poh Road northwards toward Tiong Bahru Road and Boon Tiong Road. The design of these post-war flats in Tiong Bahru was done by SIT's Senior Architect Lincoln Page and Robert FN Kan, the first locally-born person to be appointed assistant architect and town planner in SIT. Page and Kan favoured the International Style of design which was inspired by mechanical simplicity and structure. One important characteristic of the International Style is the use of boxes to carve

out the interior space of the building. Lines are clean and simple, giving the building a modern yet functional look.

The International Style emerged in the 1920s as a reaction against historicism (a theory that each period of history has its own unique beliefs and values and can only be understood in its historical context) and the ostentatious decorative aspects of the Art Deco movement. Among its leading practitioners were Le Corbusier (1887–1965), Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) and Walter Gropius (1883–1969). Like the pre-war Streamline Moderne,

practitioners of the International Style adopted a machine aesthetic, which emphasised abstract, undecorated surfaces reminiscent of machines, and the edict that form follows function. Their designs, which favoured heavy use of concrete, steel and glass, were boxier than the pre-war flats and presented a stark, almost austere, aesthetic that critics have labelled as “ugly”, “sterile” and even “inhuman”. However, Page and Kan avoided a completely boxed design for these blocks by infusing the external staircases with luscious curved landings and round portholes, reminiscent of the older flats in the estate.

TAILORED TO THE TROPICS

Although the SIT architects were deeply influenced by Western architectural styles like Streamline Moderne and the International Style, they were also very sensitive to local conditions and modified their designs accordingly. For a start, the architects were very aware that they were designing flats for the tropics where intense heat and tropical rainstorms are common hazards. Taking a leaf from the highly successful shophouse style, the SIT architects retained several familiar features in their modernist designs. Some of these architectural elements were:

Five-foot Ways

The five-foot way was introduced to Singapore by Sir Stamford Raffles (1781-1826), the founder of modern Singapore. Since then, the five footway has become a distinctive feature of Singapore architecture. By setting back the ground floor entrance and rooms of each apartment by five feet or more, a passageway running the length of the building is created. This allows pedestrians to walk from one end of a block to another in sheltered comfort, away from sun and rain. Five-foot ways were a regular feature of early shophouses and were adapted for use in the Tiong Bahru flats.

Back Lanes

Back lanes were introduced into Singapore’s residential areas following a report by Dr WJ Simpson in 1908 in which he argued that overcrowding in the city area and the overcrowding of homes were the two primary causes of disease and death. He then proposed that overcrowding might be dealt with by mandating the erection of houses with back lanes. In his report to the Municipal Commission, Simpson recommended that as a general principle, “houses constituting each section of a block shall have at their rear a lane not less than 15 feet, and not more than 20 feet wide for the purpose of



*Tiong Bahru estate
near sunset.*

scavenging and drainage.” This proposal was adopted and passed by the Municipal Commission as an amendment to the Improvement and Municipal Ordinances. Simpson’s reference to “scavenging” refers to access for night soil carriers who use the back lane to collect night soil (human waste). You can see a well-maintained and well-used network of back lanes even though the residents of Tiong Bahru Estate had, from the start, enjoyed modern flush toilets in their apartments.

The Shophouse

The shophouse was an early form of building popular in Singapore and many parts of South-east Asia. Typically, shophouses are two or three storeys high and are built in a terrace, with several units adjoining each other. As its name suggests, the shophouse serves a dual purpose. The ground floor is typically used for business – whether it is a shop, office or eatery

– while the second or third floor (if it exists) is used as the residence of the business owner. What is interesting about the Tiong Bahru flats, especially those built before the war, is the attempt by the architects to strategically incorporate shops on the ground floors of the apartment blocks. These shop units are located at strategic corners and are interspersed between residential units. The incorporation of these shop spaces not only encourages the establishment of neighbourhood businesses – which makes it convenient for residents – but also capitalises on these shops as natural gathering areas and points of community interaction.

Spiral Staircases

Another feature adopted from the shophouse is the spiral staircase at the rear of the apartment block. These staircases provided an alternative access and a fire escape for dwellers of shophouses. Spiral staircases are a medieval



Unique architectural features of Tiong Bahru's SIT flats.



European invention, used mainly as a defence mechanism in fortifications. Those attacking a tower would find it more difficult to use their swords if they were right-handed whereas the defenders could more readily wield their weapons to overcome the enemy. Such staircases became popular even in peace time as they were aesthetically pleasing and saved space, reducing the footprint required for the stairs. The SIT architects chose to retain these spiral staircases as an element of familiarity for dwellers of the Tiong Bahru flats.

Kitchen Airwell

One common design feature of shophouses is the location of the kitchen on the second floor of the shophouse. However, instead of boxing the kitchen in with the rest of the house, the kitchen is located in a protruding portion of the apartment, thus allowing the cooking fumes to escape naturally through the airwell created by

this configuration. When two abutting households cook, they can literally see into each other's kitchen. This familiar feature is replicated in the flats at Tiong Bahru.

The [kitchens] were such that you can actually speak to your neighbour. There's an airwell and you can talk to your neighbour across it and then with a little bamboo pole you can pass goodies across.

- Tan Peng Ann (b. 1948), an old resident of Tiong Bahru. Interview courtesy of Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore



» OUR HERITAGE

FOOD HERITAGE OF TIONG BAHRU FOOD CENTRE

The storyboard at Lim Liak Street marks the end of the Tiong Bahru trail and brings visitors full circle, being right next to the Tiong Bahru Market and Food Centre. We hope you have enjoyed learning about the history of Tiong Bahru and its diverse communities. Now that you have explored the trail, why not grab a bite and some refreshment from the famous food stalls at the market? Tiong Bahru has quite possibly the highest concentration of 'old' hawker stalls in any estate in Singapore. Featured below are some of the stalls, vendors and coffee shops who have been in business in the Tiong Bahru area for over 30 years.

STALLS IN TIONG BAHRU MARKET & HAWKER CENTRE

Koh Brothers' Pig Organ Soup (#02-29), since the 1950s

This stall is operated by Koh Kee Teo (aged 75). He started at the stall, along with his younger brother when he was only 17 years old. This would mean that the stall has been around for close to 60 years. Koh's younger brother has retired due to ill health.

The stall was started in the early 1950s by Tan Tua Tow, the late brother-in-law of the Koh brothers. Originally, they were itinerant hawkers based around Eng Watt Street, and it was not till the 1960s that they moved into the former Seng Poh Road Market. Koh Kee Teo himself was born in China and came to Singapore at the age of 9. At the age of 10, he worked as a rubber-tapper in Johor. He later returned to Singapore and worked briefly at a shop in Bras Basah Road before helping his brother-in-law

with the pig organ stall. Back in the 1950s, life was very tough and the young Koh had to work from 7 am to 6 pm and earned only \$10 a day.

Even though it had no competition, the stall was not doing well and Tan left its running to his two brothers-in-law and went off to try his hand at other businesses. It was only then that it became known as Koh Brothers. With the retirement of his brother, Koh is now assisted by his son, but is unsure if his son will continue after he retires. His legs are weak and he now needs to sit on a bar stool to dish out his famous pork offal soup and pig's intestines stuffed with glutinous rice (probably the last stall to offer this typically Teochew dish). According to Koh, the taste of his food has



changed especially since the authorities no longer allow for the sale of pig lungs and pig blood. He is particularly proud of the secret recipe he used in the preparation of the pig blood which he says greatly enhances the robustness and taste of his offerings.

***Teck Seng Soya Bean Milk
(#02-69), since the 1950s***

This stall was established by the late Loh Ang Bin, father of its current owner, Loh Teck Seng (aged 56). The elder Loh started out as an itinerant hawker on Seng Poh Road sometime in the 1950s. The younger Loh took over the business from his father in 1985 and is now assisted by his wife Tan Chia Imm (aged 56). Loh remembers how in the early years, business at the market was poor and people who wanted to buy take-away food had to bring along their own containers. When plastic bags became more widely used for packing food, their business improved. Their stall in the old Tiong Bahru Market was situated next to a wanton noodle stall and this made it very hot and stuffy to operate.

***33 Café
(#02-33), since the 1950s***

33 Café was started by the mother-in-law of Soh Kim Choo, its current owner. Soh, who is 83 years old, started working at the stall in the 1960s after giving birth to her ninth child. She is assisted by her son, Tan Beng Teck, and daughter, Tan Beng Lay, who have been helping out at the stall since they were very young. Like many other coffee stalls, 33 Café started as an itinerant stall in the Tiong Bahru area in the 1950s. The Tan family grew up in Tiong Bahru and all the children went to schools in the neighbourhood. The stall was already located

in the old Seng Poh Road Market when Soh started helping her mother-in-law, who had bound feet (an old practice whereby the feet of young girls are tightly bound to increase their desirability). From its earliest days, 33 Café's main customers were the stall holders in the market itself. Orders for drinks would be taken and delivered in big enamel cups. In the early days, water for hot drinks was boiled using firewood and coconut husks as these were free or cheaply available. Later, the stall switched to using kerosene and then gas. When 33 Café relocated to its present stall, Soh discarded their old self-made wooden signboard but this was picked up by a new shop that opened in Tiong Bahru and used as part of its decor. Soh recalled that in the old days, she and a few stall holders would gamble with a piece of pork as their prize. The losers would have to pay their share for the pork. It was their way of getting some meat without having to pay too much and to avoid cash wagers as this was illegal.



**Tiong Bahru Fried Kway Teow
(#02-11), since 1953**

This stall was established by Tay Soo Lan who started out in 1953 in a coffee shop in Kampong Bahru. In 1958, Tay became an itinerant hawker in the Telok Ayer area but later moved to King's Theatre at Kim Tian Road, where he sold kway teow (fried flat noodles) from a push cart. It was only in 1968 that he moved permanently into the old Seng Poh Road Market. Tay, who has always only sold fried kway teow, learned to cook this dish from a retiring itinerant hawker for a small fee. Tay's fried kway teow has a distinct taste. Unlike more common types of fried kway teow, Tay's is lighter-coloured and drier. Today, aged 83, Tay is still sprightly and agile, but is content to manage the stall, take orders and serve the food. He has passed on his frying ladle to his daughter, Tay Li Hua, who has mastered the recipe from her father. Tay laments the fact that the quality of the noodles and kway teow is not as good as those that were handmade in the past, and that health-conscious customers – who prefer vegetable oil to lard – will not get to savour the real taste of his speciality. Also, the cockles – which are obtained from a registered supplier – are not as fresh as those he used to prepare himself.



**Tiong Bahru Hokkien Prawn Mee
(#02-50), since 1951**

This stall proudly proclaims its date of founding as 1951, making it 61 years old. It was established by one Mr Tan, who came from China and sold Hokkien Prawn Noodles from a pushcart in Tiong Bahru for 30 cents a bowl. Tan passed the business to his son Tan Kay Woo to run. The younger Tan got his brother-in-law, Soh Chuan Siew, to run the business on his behalf. Soh, who was himself an itinerant hawker for some years, began working full-time at the stall 15 years ago. He is assisted by his wife Ng Lan Hiang.

**Kim Fa Fish Ball Minced Meat Noodle
(#02-65), since the 1950s**

This stall started life as a push cart along Seng Poh Road in the 1950s. Its founder is the father-in-law of the present owner, Jenny Ong. It moved into Seng Poh Road Market some time in the 1960s. Fish ball and minced meat noodles have always been their speciality.

**Hwa Feng Wonton Noodle
(#02-24), since the 1950s**

Hwa Feng started out as an itinerant stall in "the swampy part of Tiong Bahru" in the 1950s. It was set up by the late Leong Yip Bong, father of its present owner, Leong Wing Kit (aged 52). The younger Leong – who had been helping his father since he was 7 years old – took over the running of the stall when his father passed away in 1987. He is currently assisted by his wife, Wee Siew Kuan.

**Original Tiong Bahru Golden Pig & Roasted
(#02-08), since the 1950s**

Established in the 1950s by Chan Siew Tin (aged 93), the stall started as an itinerant push cart. In the morning, the cart would be parked next to the old Seng Poh Road Market, and in the afternoon, move to the coffee shop at Eng Hoon Street. Later, Chan moved into the Seng Poh Road Market permanently and sold cooked roasted meat. At the time, he did not offer any rice or noodles with his meats since he did not operate a food stall. Later, he converted the stall into a food stall. It is currently run by his son, Chan Pak Seng (aged 63) and the younger Chan's wife, Wee Ling Kue (aged 62).

**Tian Tian Dessert House
(#02-15), since the 1950s**

Tian Tian Dessert House was started by the late Cheng Hua Kim sometime in the early 1950s. His son, Cheng Seng Kuan, who arrived in Singapore in 1956 at the age of nine, remembered that his father was already selling desserts from a push cart outside the old King's Theatre at Kim Tian Road. The elder Cheng started out helping another dessert vendor before striking out on his own. He used to follow opera troupes around so he could sell desserts to the opera audience. In the early days, all desserts were sold warm, rather than cold. Cheng Seng Kuan started working full-time for his father in the early 1960s but left for about 13 years to work elsewhere. In 1981, he returned to help his father man the stall when the elder Cheng's health began to deteriorate. Sometime in the 1970s, the stall moved into the Seng Poh Road Market and has remained there since. Cheng is currently assisted by his daughter, Cheng Gek Noi and her husband, Wong Weng Kwai.

**Jian Bo Shui Kueh
(#02-05), since 1956**

This is probably the most famous chwee kueh (steamed rice cake) stall in Singapore. It is now one of several such stalls at the market. Jian Bo continues to be managed by Madam Tan and her elder sister Tan Guat Lye. The stall, which is reputed to be 57 years old, was

extremely popular when they were in the old Seng Poh Road Market prior to its renovation. The chwee kueh is noted for its bounciness and succulence while the accompanying chye poh (preserved radish) is slowly cooked to perfection with a generous doses of sesame seeds and other 'secret ingredients'.

**Ruyi Vegetarian Food
(#02-26), since 1950**

This vegetarian stall was started in 1950 by Zhou Mu Qun (周慕群) upon the advice of a shifu (a religious teacher). It was located at the old Seng Poh Road Market and is currently run by Leong Lai Yen (aged 77) and her brother Leong Lai Kit (aged 75), both of whom are Zhou's children.

**Harriann's Delights
(#02-25), since the 1950s**

Harriann's started out in the 1950s when Chia Nguk Eng (aged 83) sold glutinous rice as an itinerant hawker in the Tiong Bahru area. After Chia retired in 1999, her son, Harry Tan (aged 64), took over the stall and ran it with his wife, Annie Lim (aged 61). The stall initially had no name so Harry decided to combine his first name with that of his wife to form Harriann's Delights. When Harry took over the stall, he added Peranakan kueh to its fare. He had learnt how to make these delicacies from his Peranakan paternal grandmother.

**Liang Liang Garden
(#02-75), since the 1950s**

This dessert stall was started as an itinerant stall by the big drain along Kim Tian Road by Tan Yew Chye who is 78 years old. He retired in 1996 and handed over the business to his son, Tan Kay Mong, and his daughter-in-law, Lily Tan. The elder Tan started the stall in the 1950s which required very little capital since sweet potatoes grew in his backyard. Most desserts in the early days were very simple - ginkgo nuts, cheng tng (a sweet soup made from longan, barley, agar and lotus seeds), green bean soup, red bean soup, pulut hitam (a dessert of black glutinous rice and coconut cream), tao suan (split green bean soup with dough fritters) and sweet potato soup. Dessert vendors did not sell drinks.





The Tiong Bahru Market and Food Centre which reopened in 2006.



***Fried Oyster, Oyster Omelette,
Chee Cheong Fun***
(#02-61), since the 1950s

This stall was established some time in the 1950s as an itinerant stall outside King's Theatre on Kim Tian Road. The founder was the late father-in-law of the current owner, Tan Leng. For the last 20 years or so, she has been assisted in running the stall by her brother, Tan Hung Theng. The Tans did not always sell chee cheong fun (steamed rice noodle rolls). This was added to their offerings when they were at the temporary market, and chwee kueh (steamed rice cakes) was added when they moved into the newly-renovated Tiong Bahru Market. They decided to add greater variety to their offerings as business has slowed in recent years. In the past, they opened from 6 pm to 1 am, and from 4 am to 11 am, but this is no longer possible. Tan Hung Theng recalls that in the past, the oysters used in their omelettes were much smaller as the hawkers had to catch the oysters themselves. Tan Leng's husband used to be responsible for securing enough oysters for their daily needs.

Hwa Yuen Porridge
(#02-74), since 1958

This stall was founded by Yip Swee Wah as an itinerant stall in Kim Pong Road in 1958. He opted to sell porridge from the start because he found that it was not difficult to cook and he could turn a small profit from it. The stall is currently run by Yip's son, Clement, who took over in 1996. Clement is assisted by his wife Veronica.

Tiong Bahru Lee Hong Kee Cantonese Roasted
(#02-60), since the 1960s

This stall started as a roadside stall in Kim Tian Road in 1963. It moved to another site within Tiong Bahru when the area was resettled and in 1968 started operating as a stall in the old Seng Poh Road Market. The stall was founded by the father-in-law of Yong Sai Mui, the current owner (aged 67). Initially, the stall offered a variety of cooked dishes (zi-char) and also sold pau. However, when the older chefs and cooks retired, they could not find replacements and decided to concentrate on roasted meats instead.

163 Fish and Chicken Porridge
(#02-40), since the 1960s

This stall was started by the late Ng Poh Tong some time in the 1960s at the old Seng Poh Road Market. From the start, Ng decided to focus on selling fish and chicken porridge because no one else was selling these dishes in Tiong Bahru. The stall was passed on to Ng Siew Kee (aged 52), son of the founder. The younger Ng started helping his father in 1992 and took over the stall in 1997. His wife Karen Lee began helping out at the stall about 10 years ago. The late Ng was very particular about food preparation and told his son that he should always keep things simple and slice the fish by hand and to attend to all the preparations personally.

Tiong Bahru Pau

(#02-18/19), since the 1960s

Tiong Bahru Pau was started by the late Sam Yat, father of the current owner, Sam Chee Kiong (aged 53). The elder Sam started out as an itinerant hawker selling pau (steamed buns with various fillings) supplied by others. Later, he worked in a Chinese restaurant and learnt how to make pau there. Initially, the hawker stall was located on Seng Poh Road where the current market and food centre is sited. Sometime in 1965 or 1966, the elder Sam bid successfully for a stall in the old Seng Poh Road Market and thus ended his itinerant hawking days. At first, business was not very good but by the mid 1970s, they became much better known and business improved tremendously. In the mid 1980s, Tiong Bahru Pau began to expand. It now has six outlets, including its main branch on Outram Road. Sam does not see much competition from any of the traditional pau makers in the Tiong Bahru area but feels that his main competition comes from the new delis, bakeries and cafes which serve up less traditional fare that younger customers like.

Lau Chen Carrot Cake and Poh Piah

(#02-83), since the 1960s

Lau Chen Carrot Cake & Poh Piah was established by Tan Jwee Hong (now 88 years old) and his wife, Tan Chor Hoong (80 years old). They started out as itinerant hawkers, with a push cart, selling pisang goreng (fried banana fritters) and mee jiang kueh (peanut pancake) around Tiong Bahru. It was only in the 1960s when they successfully obtained a stall in the old Seng Poh Road Market that they switched to selling carrot cake and popiah (springrolls) so as to avoid competing directly with two of their friends who were already selling pisang goreng there. Tan retired from running the stall in 2007 after suffering a stroke that left him partially paralysed. The couple live at Kim Cheng Street and their stall is currently run by their daughter-in-law, Tan Gek Kee. Their only son died some years ago. The Tans lament the loss of the old market where they said business was much better, especially since it opened late into the night.



Tiong Bahru Mian Jian Kueh

(#02-34), since the 1960s

This stall was started in the 1960s by the late Teng Soon Hong as an itinerant stall in the Tiong Bahru area. Later, it moved to the old Seng Poh Road Market. Teng had learnt the art of making mian jian kueh or mee jiang kueh (peanut pancake) from another vendor. When Teng retired, he passed on the business to his son-in-law, Kua Lee Chew who revolutionised the business. Trained in electrical and mechanical work, Kua built his own machines to roast and grind the peanuts. He also improvised a flour mixer for use in his stall. In the early days, the peanuts were roasted using charcoal. Today, the stall is run by Kua's son, Raymond Kua (aged 46). Raymond had been helping his father at the stall since his days at Tiong Bahru Primary School. He still uses the machines designed and built by his father and prepares all the traditional fillings – peanuts, coconut and red bean – himself. The only filling he obtains from an external supplier is cheese. In the early years, mian jian kueh was sold and packed in newspapers. Later, brown paper bags were used and today, plastic bags are favoured.



**No. 250 Long Ji Soya Bean Curd
(#02-63), since 1973**

This stall was established in 1973 by Puan Jooi Eng and his wife Ng Sai Hiang. Puan was originally working at a butcher's stall in the old Seng Poh Road Market when he decided to apply for one of the vacant stalls in a quiet corner of the market which was not very popular with customers. Puan had learnt the art of making soya bean curd and drink from a friend of his father. Initially, Puan helped his father's friend sell soya bean curd and drinks from a motorcycle with a side-car, before settling into his stall in 1973. This is one of only three soya bean curd/drink stalls in the market today. Puan laments the fact that the market is now very quiet by the late afternoon. In the old days, crowds would throng the food stalls till late at night and he had many more customers than he has now. He has no immediate succession plans.



**Teochew Kueh
(#02-02), since 1974**

Founded by Poon Lan Eng (aged 89) in 1974, this stall started in the old Seng Poh Road Market. Poon, who had come to Singapore from Swatow, China in the 1950s, decided to concentrate on Teochew kueh (traditional pastries) as this was something she had learnt to make in her hometown. She subsequently added ang ku kueh (literally 'red tortoise cake', a pastry made from sticky glutinous rice flour) to provide greater variety since it was difficult to survive by selling Teochew kueh alone. In the early years, Poon had very little competition but in the 1990s, another stall selling similar fare moved into the market from Chinatown. The stall is currently operated by her daughter, Alice Law (aged 57), who took over in the late 1980s.

**Hong Heng Fried Sotong Prawn Mee
(#02-01), since the 1970s**

This stall was started by the late Cheng How Boo in the 1970s. Initially, he sold beancurd as an itinerant hawker in the Tiong Bahru area but moved into the Seng Poh Road Market in the 1970s. When he retired, his son took over the business and switched to selling fried sotong (cuttlefish) and prawn mee instead. The current owner, Cheng Kong Eng (aged 75), took over the stall from her brother in the mid 1980s when he retired and his children did not want to take over the business. Her son Lim Kian Tong has been managing the stall since it returned to the food centre following the 2006 renovations.

**Hui Ji Fishball Noodle & Yong Tau Foo
(#02-44), since the 1970s**

This stall was established in the 1970s in the old Seng Poh Road Market. Its owner, Ah Hui and his wife, Mary (both in their 60s) decided on this business as they knew how to prepare these foods. As they had always made their own fishballs, the fish meat could also be used for the yong tau foo (stuffed beancurd).



FAMOUS FOOD STALLS AND COFFEE SHOPS OUTSIDE TIONG BAHRU MARKET & FOOD CENTRE

Hua Bee

(Blk 78 Moh Guan Terrace), since the 1940s

Hua Bee is one of the oldest coffee shops in Tiong Bahru, having started operations some time in the 1940s. It was established by the uncle of its last operator, Tony Tiang. Tiang managed the coffee shop on behalf of his cousin, who inherited the shop from his father, the original owner. As far as Tiang could remember, the coffee shop only served drinks, bread, eggs and fishball noodles. It was one of the few coffee shops in Singapore that served coffee with a slice of butter in it before it closed in June 2013. The fishball stall owner is called Ong Ngah (Hokkien for 'baby'). This coffee shop was the set for Eric Khoo's 1995 movie, *Mee Pok Man*.





Ah Chiang's Porridge
(Blk 65, #01-38, Tiong Poh Road),
since 1970s

Ah Chiang's takes its name from its long-time operator, Cher Kee Chiang (aged 65), but it was started by a Mr Yu, uncle of his wife, Wong Yit Lian (aged 63). The stall started in 1968 at a corner coffee shop in Yong Siak Street but moved to its present location in 1972. Initially, the stall sold noodles but then switched to porridge. Cher took over the business from his wife's uncle in 1991 and sold it in 2005 to the current owner, Chin Koon Ruey. Chin was later joined by Eddie Tan. Cher continues to help out at the shop daily, making sure that all the dishes are freshly prepared from 4 am onwards. Since selling the business, the porridge stall grew to occupy the entire coffee shop. Cher remembers Singaporeans from all walks of life coming to enjoy his porridge, including the late Professor Chao Tze Cheng (1934–2000), a renowned forensic pathologist, and prominent banker Wee Cho Yaw (b. 1928).

Cheng's Delicacies
(27 Yong Siak Street), since the 1980s

This stall is one of the 'youngest' in the neighbourhood. Established in the mid-1980s by the husband and wife team of Cheng Mook Boon and Lim Toi Ang, the stall, specialising in Hainanese home-style cooking has, for the past 30 years been a fixture at Yong Siak Street. Initially, Cheng had bought the shop with the intention of setting up a coffee shop but Lim's cooked food proved so popular with customers that he abandoned that idea to focus on Hainanese dishes instead. Their specialties include savoury pumpkin pie, steamed tapioca, and Hainanese-style duck. The pumpkin pie is an all-time favourite and customers are encouraged to pre-order to avoid disappointment. Their daughter, Dawn, quit her job to help out at the stall as business picked up and more help was needed.

Loo's Hainanese Curry Rice
(57 Eng Hoon Street, #01-88), since 1946

This is possibly the oldest continuously operating food stall in Tiong Bahru, having been established in 1946 on Tian Lye Street, Tanjong Pagar before moving to Telok Blangah and eventually ending up in Tiong Bahru 22 years ago. Loo's Hainanese Curry Rice was established by the late Loo Niat Tan, father of its current owner, Loo Kia Chee (53 years old) who has been helping out at the stall since he was 20 years old. The elder Loo learned how to prepare Hainanese curry rice from his brother-in-law who operated a stall in the former Gay World in the pre-war days and also worked as a cook for Peranakan families (which explains the Peranakan influence in the dishes they serve). The fare served consists of the four classic Hainanese curry rice dishes: pork chop, curry chicken, chap chye (mixed vegetables stew) and kong bak (braised pork belly).

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» AREA MAP OF

TIONG BAHRU HERITAGE TRAIL

- 01 THE ORIGIN & DEVELOPMENT OF TIONG BAHRU
- 02 BIRD CORNER & FORMER HU LU TEMPLE
- 03 GRAVES OF TAN TOCK SENG, CHUA SEAH NEO & WUING YE HO
- 04 THE OUTRAM PRECINCT
- 05 MONKEY GOD TEMPLE
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- 07 TIONG BAHRU COMMUNITY CENTRE
- 08 SENG POH GARDEN & DANCING GIRL SCULPTURE
- 09 THE HORSE-SHOE BLOCK
- 10 DESIGN OF TIONG BAHRU FLATS



MARKED HERITAGE SITE



TRAIL ROUTE



CONSERVATION BUILDINGS





The Tiong Bahru Heritage Trail is part of the National Heritage Board's ongoing efforts to document and present the history and social memories of places in Singapore that many may not be aware of. Jointly presented by the National Heritage Board, Tiong Bahru Community Centre Management Committee and Youth Executive Committee, we hope this trail will bring back fond memories for those who have worked, lived or played in the area and serve as a useful source of information for new residents and visitors.



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