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» CONTENTS

Introduction	2	Woodlands after the War	34
Early History	3	The Causeway after the war	
Early records of Kranji and Mandai		Woodlands Road pasar malam	
The Orang Seletar		The Causeway and Woodlands	
Gambier planters in Kranji and Mandai		Checkpoint in the 1960s-1990s	
Catholic Teochew planters and		Mandai Orchid Garden	
St Joseph's Chapel		Singapore Zoo	
Pineapples in Kranji		Shell at Woodlands	
Rubber in Woodlands and		Other factories and industrial estates	
Marsiling Estate			
Quarries in Mandai			
Gateway to Johor	9	Former Villages in Woodlands	42
Kranji Pier		Mandai Catholic Village	
Woodlands Bungalow		Mandai Tekong Village	
Woodlands station and		Kampong Hock Choon	
Woodlands Road in the early 1900s		Kampong Kranji	
Building the Causeway		Kampong Sungei Cina	
Woodlands Road and Marsiling		Kampong Lorong Fatimah	
Road in the 1920s			
The British Naval Base	14	Religious Landmarks of Woodlands	52
and World War II		Masjid An-Nur	
Woodlands and the Singapore		Masjid Yusof Ishak	
Naval Base		The Church of St Anthony of Padua	
Naval depots and residences		Sri Arasakesari Sivan Temple	
in Woodlands		Sri Siva-Krishna Temple	
Woodlands at war		Hong Tho Bilw Temple	
The Battle of Kranji		Shang Di Miao Chai Kong Temple	
Kranji Prisoner-of-War Camp			
Post-war Military Developments	19	Woodlands Today and Tomorrow	59
Kranji War Cemetery and Singapore		New town in Woodlands	
Memorial		From "ghost town" to regional centre	
Kranji State Cemetery		Parks in Woodlands	
KD <i>Malaya</i> in Woodlands		Woodlands in transition	
From naval base to prison to			
waterfront park		Selected Bibliography	65
Rimau Estate and Hawkins Road			
Refugee Camp		Credits	68
Berek Hitam		Suggested Short Trail Routes	69
Khalsa Crescent and View Road		Heritage Trail Map	73

INTRODUCTION



The Causeway, with the view of Woodlands, that links Singapore to Johor Bahru, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

What does Woodlands mean to you? For many Singaporeans, Woodlands is their gateway to Malaysia. Indeed, Woodlands has served as a launchpad to Johor since 1845, when Kranji Road was completed. Back then, people had to take a ferry across the Johor Strait, before the Causeway opened in 1924, paving the way, literally, for road and rail trips to the peninsula.

However, Woodlands is not just a pit-stop for travellers to Malaysia. This northern corner has a rich history of its own and provided a home for many communities. In the 19th century, nomadic Orang Seletar foraged in the waters off Kranji. Meanwhile, the interior was cultivated by Teochew gambier planters.

Gambier plantations gave way to rubber estates in the 20th century and Woodlands' Marsiling area is a reminder of this legacy, being the name of a former rubber plantation. Rural communities such as Mandai Tekong

Village and Kampong Hock Choon also emerged in the wake of the rubber estates.

Woodlands was also an important military site. From 1938 until 1971, the British had a naval base along much of Woodlands' coast. They also blew up the Causeway during World War II, forcing the Japanese to invade via Kranji. Kranji also housed a prisoner-of-war camp and cemetery, which later became the Kranji War Cemetery.

Today, many reminders of Woodlands' past are still visible. These include religious institutions such as Masjid An-Nur, Sri Arasakesari Sivan Temple, the Church of St Anthony of Padua and a 400-metre-long jetty that was once part of a Malaysian naval base. Discover these landmarks and more through the Woodlands Heritage Trail, which charts the development of this northern gateway and the memories of people who call Woodlands "home".

EARLY HISTORY



View of the Johor Strait, 1869

National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

For much of the 19th century, the present Woodlands area was known as “Kranji” or “Mandai”, after the main rivers in the area. The name “Woodlands” only emerged in the late 19th century, when a bungalow with the name Woodlands was built on the northern coast (see page 10). Hence, any account of Woodlands’ past must begin with the history of Kranji and Mandai.

Early records of Kranji and Mandai

The first known record of Kranji comes from an 1820 map by William Farquhar, which showed a waterway called “Kranjee River” (Sungei Kranji). Sungei Kranji (now Kranji Reservoir) was probably named after the Kranji tree, which may have been common along its banks.



Kranji fruit, 2010s

Flora & Fauna Web, National Parks Board, Ang Wee Foong

The Kranji tree (*Dialium indum*) is a native tree that bears sour, plum-like fruit, which is consumed by wild animals and sold in rural markets as *buah asam kranji*. These trees were once common, but demand for their timber, which was used to make masts, rudders and posts, was so high that most Kranji trees in Singapore were harvested by the end of the 19th century.



Kranji tree, 2010s

Flora & Fauna Web, National Parks Board, Ang Wee Foong

The next group to arrive in Kranji and Mandai were Teochew migrants who cultivated gambier, a vine that was prized in the 1800s as a tanning agent. Teochew gambier planters were already present in Singapore when Raffles landed in 1819. Many more arrived later from Riau, Indonesia and converted the island's forests into gambier estates.

By the 1840s, these planters had reached Kranji and Mandai, using rivers there to access the interior, as there were few inland roads then. They established riverside settlements known as *chu kang* (Teochew for "river port") or simply *kang*, where gambier was processed and then shipped to town in boats.

At Sungei Mandai Besar, a settlement called Lau Chu Kang was founded by a man named Lau Lib Keng. Meanwhile, Tan Chu Kang was established at Sungei Mandai Kechil by Tan Kai Soon, a leader of the Ngee Heng Kongsu (a Teochew society that controlled the early gambier trade). Meanwhile, a *kang* named Bokokang was established along Kranji Pulo (now Sungei Pangsu), a tributary of Sungei Kranji. This *kang* was founded by a man with the rare surname Bookoh, a Teochew clan from Raoping county in China's Guangdong Province.



Aerial photograph of the junction of Woodlands Road and Mandai Road, showing the former Bokokang area, 1958
Aerial photographs by the British Royal Air Force between 1940 to 1970s, from a collection held by the National Archives of Singapore. Crown copyright

Catholic Teochew gambier planters and St Joseph's Chapel

In the mid-1840s, most of the early gambier planters moved to Johor to avoid paying rent to the British. In their place, new migrants, including many Catholic Teochews, arrived to cultivate gambier in the north.

Kranji Road, which connected Bukit Timah Road to the Johor Strait, was completed in 1845. This road made it easier for gambier planters to send their harvest to town. It also allowed Father (Fr.) Anatole Mauduit (1817-1858), a Catholic priest, to move into the interior and minister to Catholics living there.

In 1846, Fr. Mauduit built St Joseph's Chapel, Singapore's first Chinese Catholic church, at Bokokang. He resided in this wood-and-attap chapel, where he held Mass and organised religious classes for Catholics living in Kranji. By 1848, there was a small but thriving Catholic Teochew village near the chapel. Unfortunately, in 1851, secret society members attacked and destroyed Catholic-owned plantations all over the island, including Kranji. Seeking a safer location, the villagers moved to Bukit Timah, where they established St Joseph's Church in 1853.



Drawing of St Joseph's Chapel, undated
Courtesy of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore and Paris Foreign Missions Society

Pineapples in Kranji

Gambier settlements such as Tan Chu Kang and Bokokang disappeared or dwindled into obscurity in the late 19th century. Pineapples then replaced gambier as the most important crop in the area.

It is not known when pineapples were first cultivated in Kranji. However, by 1908, there was already a pineapple factory in the area. A pineapple plantation marked as TYE AB can also be found in a 1924 map of Kranji. Two large pineapple canneries were subsequently established off Kranji Road in the 1930s: Lam Huat and Chuang Seng.

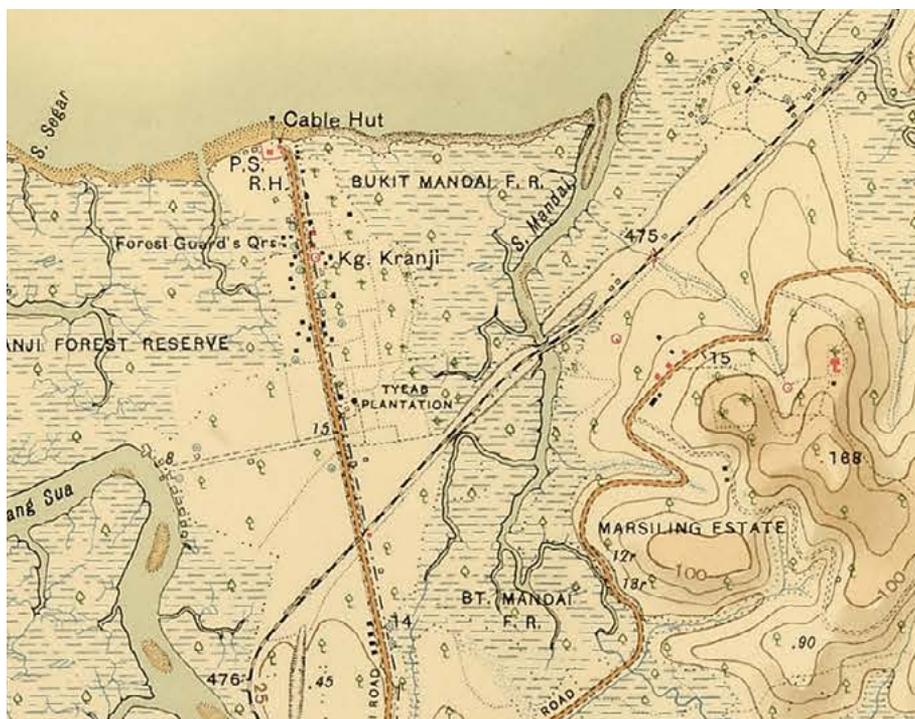
Mydeen Kutty Mydeen (1919-2007), a former headman of Kampong Kranji, recalled these factories:

"Across the road from our village was Lam Huat, which was at that time a pineapple

factory. This was why I named the lane there Jalan Lam Huat [in the 1950s]. Next to the village was another very huge pineapple factory called Chuang Seng."

Mydeen recalled that in the late 1940s, Chinese families at Kranji took shelter in the pineapple factories as they feared that communal violence in Malaya would spill over into Singapore. "I went to Chuan Seng and saw children hiding in pineapple baskets. Both factories were shut," he said. Mydeen then visited every Chinese household in the area to reassure them that they were safe.

These pineapple factories closed by the 1970s. While Jalan Chuang Seng was expunged in the 1990s, Jalan Lam Huat still exists today, but the former factory site is now occupied by Carros Centre.



Map showing TYE AB pineapple plantation off Kranji Road, 1924
Courtesy of The National Archives, United Kingdom



Excursion to Lam Huat pineapple factory, 1951
Bukit Panjang Government School Collection, National Archives of Singapore

Rubber in Woodlands and Marsiling Estate

Rubber became Singapore's most important crop in the early 1900s. Two prominent tycoons who established rubber estates in Woodlands were Teo Eng Hock (1872-1959) and Lim Nee Soon (1879-1936).

Teo's daughter Goh Moh Tet (1914-2011) recalled visiting her father's estate in Woodlands as a child:

"My father used to be quite interested in rubber. He got rubber seeds from the Botanical Gardens. My mother said they used to grow the seeds in wooden boxes until a certain height, then transport it on bullock carts to Woodlands, where my father had land cleared to grow rubber."

Goh also had a bungalow in Woodlands, which the family visited for picnics:



Teo Eng Hock, who owned a rubber estate in Woodlands, 1925-1935
Lee Brothers Studio Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

"We went in a horse carriage from the city to Woodlands. We had a bungalow there, it was like a picnic bungalow. The sea between Singapore and Johore used to be full of crocodiles and when you go down there, you could hear the crocodiles splashing in the water."

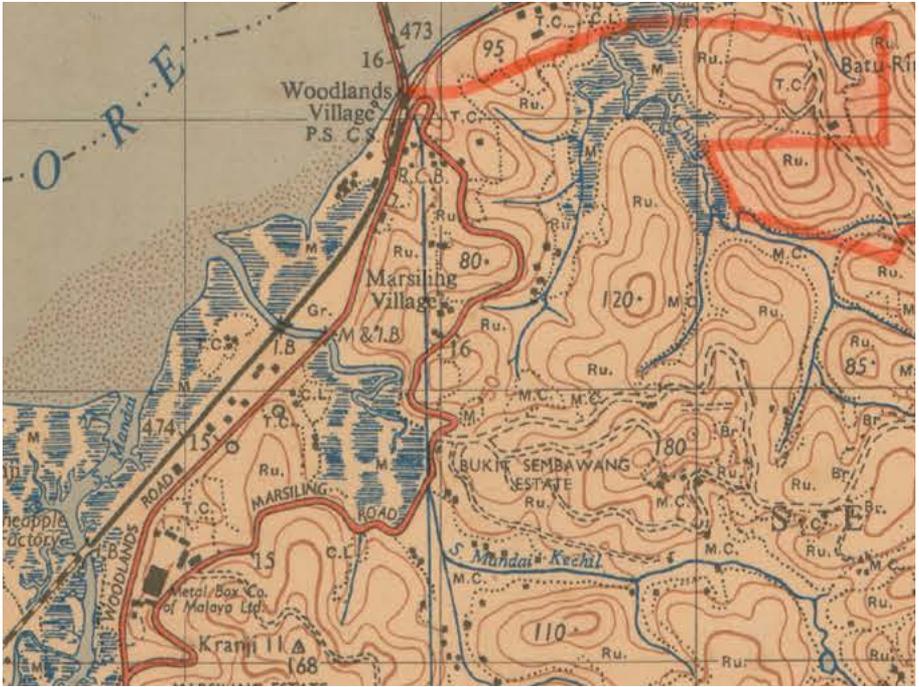
Teo's nephew Lim Nee Soon owned a large plantation in Woodlands which he named Marsiling after Ma Xi, his ancestral village in China. The northern end of Marsiling Estate had a settlement that was named Marsiling Village by the Rural Board in 1949. Marsiling Village was redeveloped into the former Woodlands Town Centre in the 1970s.

Another major rubber company was Bukit Sembawang, which was formed in 1910 and had a large estate in Woodlands. Bukit Sembawang's Woodlands estate was acquired by the government in 1956 and eventually redeveloped into Woodlands New Town.

Rubber estates were common in Woodlands until the 1970s, when the plantations were redeveloped into housing estates. Kamal Abu Serah (b. 1964) recalled a vast estate behind his home at Admiralty Road West:



Lim Nee Soon, owner of Marsiling Estate, 1905
Lim Chong Hsien Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Map showing Marsiling Estate, Marsiling Village and Bukit Sembawang Estate, 1953
Survey Department, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

"There was a rubber plantation behind my quarters. Every morning, I could see rubber tappers going out to tap rubber up to the 1970s. They used carbide lights. My neighbour Dollah Salleh and I would go inside [the estate] to look for rambutans. There was a Chinese village inside. The majority of the area was rubber, but at one place, the whole area had rambutan trees planted like an orchard in rows."

Quarries at Mandai

Mandai consists of hills that are rich in granite, a stone used in building and construction. In the early 1900s, a businessman named TC Loveridge established a quarry in Mandai to extract and sell granite for public works. In 1908, Loveridge also discovered tin at Bukit Mandai and formed a syndicate to mine this deposit. Unfortunately, the tin ran out and the syndicate fell apart by 1910. Loveridge's quarry was then taken over by the colonial government in 1920.

After independence, the largest quarry operators in Mandai were Resources Development Corporation (a state-owned entity) and the Housing & Development Board (HDB). These quarries closed in the 1990s. The former Mandai Quarry was then converted into an Underground Ammunition Facility, which opened in 2008. This subterranean facility uses the former quarry's granite walls and secure location to safely store ammunition.



Quarry at Bukit Mandai, 1937
Courtesy of The National Archives, United Kingdom

GATEWAY TO JOHOR

Woodlands has served as Singapore's gateway to Johor since Kranji Road was completed in 1845. Kranji Road, which was a northern extension of Bukit Timah Road that ended at the Johor Strait, was built by Indian convicts supervised by John Turnbull Thomson.

Kranji Pier

Johor Bahru was founded in 1855 by Johor's ruler Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim as Iskandar Puteri, and renamed Johor Bahru in 1866 by his son Abu Bakar, who became Sultan of Johor in 1886. To visit Johor, travellers would hire boats at Kranji Pier, which stood at the end of Kranji Road. This pier had a poor reputation, however, and *The Straits Times* reported in 1887:

"Visitors to Johore should be reminded of the dangerous state of the pier at Kranjie. Many of the posts are entirely eaten trough by the sea worm. The steps are steep and always slippery, and people are continually slipping and falling on them. More than one European has got a ducking there."

In 1874, a ferry service was launched between Kranji and Johor by the Johore Steam Ferry Boat Company, using a ferry named *Tebrau*. Businessman Rajabali Jumabhoy (1898-1998) recalled taking a ferry to Johor in 1916:

"From Kranji, I took a small ferry to cross the Straits of Johor to the other side. Johor [Bahru] itself looked like a village and it was interesting to cross the boundary between Singapore and Johor halfway. Of course at that time and perhaps even now, some parts of the Straits of Johor were very rough."

Describing Kranji, Jumabhoy said: "The shore was not large, with stones all over. Private fishermen had ferry boats always available, but there was no regular service. However, the ferry was readily available. I can't remember how much, but not more than 10 cents."



Map showing the ferry route from Kranji to Johor Bahru with "Woodlands" referring to a seaside bungalow, 1885 Survey Department, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Woodlands Station, 1907

National Museum of Singapore collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Woodlands bungalow

In the early 1860s, a bungalow was built east of Kranji Pier by Edward John Leveson (1832-1900), an insurance agent and Italy's Consul in Singapore. Named Woodlands, this bungalow had a seaside compound and served as a holiday retreat for Leveson and his associates.

One notable guest was Odoardo Beccari, an Italian naturalist who stayed at Woodlands in 1866 and wrote:

"Of our stay at Singapore I shall merely recall a week passed at Woodlands in a small wooden bungalow which our Consul, Mr Leveson, had built on the Johore Straits, and which he kindly lent to us ... It was surrounded by the then untouched primeval forest. On the sea, always as smooth as glass, a delicious bathing place had been constructed, shut off by a palisade, a necessary precaution against sharks and crocodiles."

In 1885, Woodlands bungalow was acquired by William Hole, an Englishman who became the first European private secretary to Maharajah (later Sultan) Abu Bakar in 1873. In the 1890s, the bungalow was taken over by the authorities for the building of Woodlands Railway Station. The bungalow was demolished in 1909.

Woodlands station and Woodlands Road in the early 1900s

In the late 19th century, traffic and trade between Singapore and Johor grew so much that a railway line was proposed to better connect the two places. Little was done until 1898, when the authorities unveiled plans for a railway to Woodlands. The line began at Tank Road and ended at the site of Woodlands bungalow. Woodlands was chosen at the distance between this site and Johor Bahru was just over 1 kilometre, compared to about 2 kilometres between Kranji Pier and Johor.

The first public train to Woodlands ran on 10 April 1903. Woodlands served as the terminal station, where passengers would disembark and then board a ferry to Johor at a nearby jetty. Woodlands station was initially

accessible only by train, as there were no roads to the station. To remedy this, a new road linking Kranji Road and Woodlands station was completed in 1907, which was named Woodlands Road.

In 1910, a new service called the wagon-ferry was launched. This was a barge-like ferry equipped with a railway track that could carry train carriages. Trains that arrived at Woodlands could continue along this railway track to board the wagon-ferry to cross the strait. At Johor Bahru, the train rolled off the wagon-ferry and continued its journey northward.



Woodlands jetty, 1900s
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Woodlands jetty with a wagon-ferry, 1900s
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Wagon-ferry with train carriages at Johor Bahru, 1920s
Lee Kip Lin Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Building the Causeway

Demand for travel between Singapore and Malaya continued to surge in the 1910s. This led to calls for a land-link to Johor. In 1912-1913, the Federal Malay States (FMS) Railways attempted to build a railway bridge over the Johor Strait. Unfortunately, work halted when World War I broke out in 1914. This project restarted in 1917, but constructing the railway bridge proved to be unfeasible, as steel was too costly and the seabed was too soft to support a bridge.

The solution, proposed by William Eyre Kenny, FMS Director of Public Works, was a rubble causeway, which was cheaper to build. Construction of the Causeway by Topham, Jones & Railton, a British contractor, began in 1919, using granite shipped from Pulau Ubin. Mydeen Kutty Mydeen (1919-2007), who witnessed the construction of the Causeway, recalled:

“They took stones from Singapore and flung them into the area. They also took stones from the Johor side and threw them in that area. Throw, throw, throw – that was the work of the people there until everything was filled up. On the other side, there was a channel which small tongkangs could enter and a bridge that could be lifted up. Whenever a vessel entered, the bridge was raised, and later lowered again.”

The channel that Mydeen referred to was a lock channel at the Causeway’s Johor end. This consisted of a gap through which ships could sail from one side of the Causeway to the other. It had a lift-bridge with a road and railway track, which was raised whenever ships needed to use the channel and lowered to allow road traffic to resume after the vessel had passed.

Haji Mohd Anis bin Tairan (1932-2014) related that in the 1920s, his father hosted Javanese labourers who worked on the Causeway:

“Many people who came from Java were manual labourers, but there were also some who were skilled in building houses or walls and



Raised lift-bridge at the Causeway lock channel, c. 1925
Lee Kip Lin Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

embankments. When the Causeway was being built, granite from Pulau Ubin had to be brought in on tongkangs. This work required a lot of bravery and daring, as it was believed that puaka and penunggu [guardian spirits] would place barriers in people’s way. Hence, not many people wanted to do such work. But those who did carried out their tasks well; if there were accidents, these were due to human errors or carelessness, not to other forces.”

Another folk belief that accompanied the building of the Causeway was that human heads were added to its foundations to appease guardian spirits. As a result, people in some rural areas refused to let their children out of sight or after dark, lest they be abducted for such purposes. Yeo Hong Eng (b. 1946), who grew up near Tanah Merah, noted that such rumours were once rife:

“In early 1920s, the Causeway linking Singapore and Johor was being built. It was believed that to successfully building the Causeway, human lives were to be sacrificed. The rumours took the kampongs by storm. Everybody was on the alert for any eventuality.”

Haji Mohd Anis dismissed such tales, stating: “There were stories of heads being chopped and placed as offerings, but such things did not happen.”

The Causeway was opened to railway traffic on September 1923, and the wagon-ferries ceased operations. The Causeway was then



The completed Causeway, c. 1924
 Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Johor side of the Causeway, early 20th century
 National Museum of Singapore collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board



Men fishing at the Causeway, 1960s
 All rights reserved. Lee Kip Lin and National Library Board, Singapore 2009

officially opened on 28 June 1924, when Johor's Sultan Ibrahim Al-Masyhur presented a golden knife to Governor Sir Laurence Nunns Guillemard, who then cut a silk cord. The guests-of-honour were then driven across the Causeway, which was just over 1 kilometre long and 18 metres wide.

Some fishermen and *kelong* (fish trap) owners living by the Johor Strait were badly affected by the Causeway, which affected the water current in the strait and caused their catch to fall over time. However, the Causeway also provided new opportunities. In 1927, it was reported that many fishermen were reeling in "quite respectable hauls" while sitting or standing on the rocks at the base of the Causeway.

Woodlands Road and Marsiling Road in the 1920s

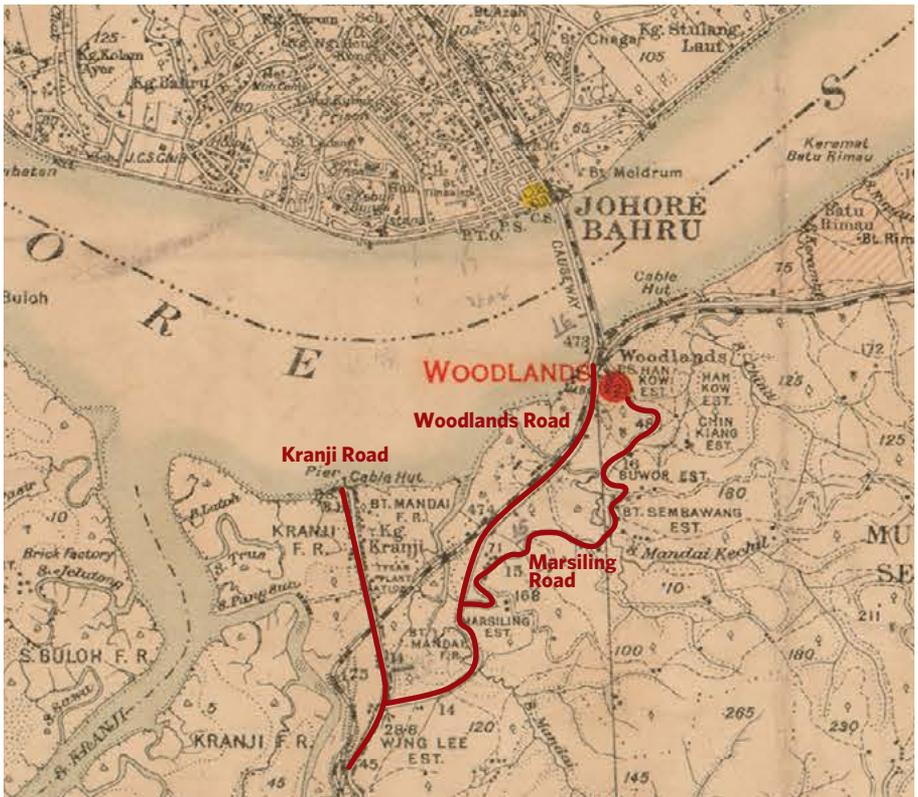
After the Causeway opened, it became apparent that the original Woodlands Road had to be replaced, as it wound through a hilly area and was too narrow. Hence, a new Woodlands Road was built between Kranji Road and the Causeway. This new road, which was straighter and wider, ran parallel to the railway line and was completed in 1927. Thereafter, the older Woodlands Road from 1907 was renamed Marsiling Road, as it ran past Marsiling Estate.

The renaming of these roads caused some confusion among the public, who were not sure where Bukit Timah Road ended and Woodlands Road began. As a result, the Rural Board met in 1929 to address this problem and decided "to split Bukit Timah Road into two sections, the first section up to Bukit Panjang village [the present junction with Bukit Panjang Road] being called Bukit Timah Road, and the remaining stretching up to the Causeway being called Woodlands Road."

The opening of the Causeway opened up opportunities for people on both sides of the Johor Strait. For Mydeen Kutty Mydeen, who worked as an office boy in the Singapore Naval Base before the war, it provided a path to education:

"After knocking off at 4 pm, I would go study in Johor. There was no other place then. It was too far to go to Singapore town. In Johor Bahru, there was a school called English College near Tebrau ... I was then residing in the Western Depot of the Royal Navy quarters. So after work, I would ride my bicycle across to Johor."

"Many people who used the Causeway were from Johor who were working in Woodlands, in particular the naval base area. Some used horse carriages, others used bullock carts. But there were also people who still took sampans across, entering Singapore via Lorong Fatimah. Most of these people were not heading to Singapore town, which was very far. They were going to the naval base and Sembawang and vice versa."



Map showing Kranji Road, the new Woodlands Road that was completed in 1927 and Marsiling Road (the old Woodlands Road), 1938

Survey Department, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

THE BRITISH NAVAL BASE AND WORLD WAR II

Woodlands became an area of military significance from the 1920s. One reason was because the Causeway formed a strategic connection between Singapore and Malaya. Woodlands also became part of a British naval base that stretched from Sembawang in the east to parts of northern Woodlands.

Woodlands and the Singapore Naval Base

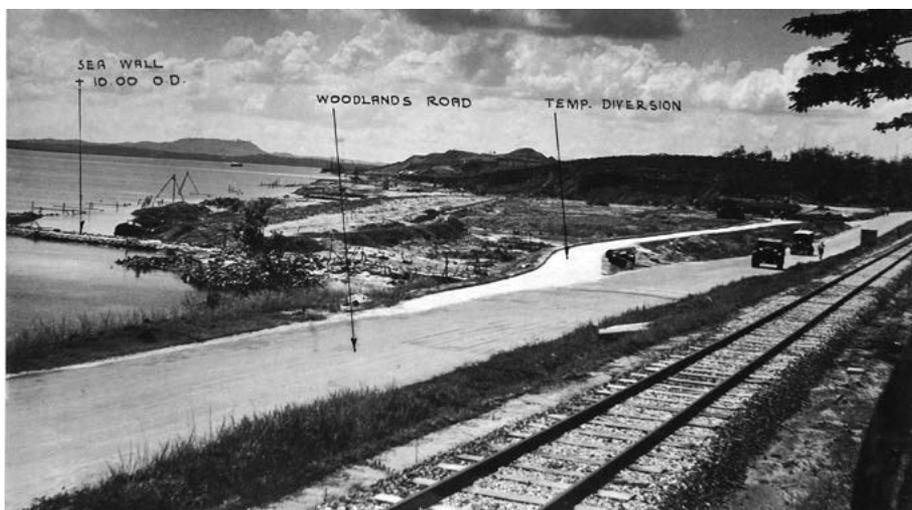
After World War I ended, Britain mulled over the idea of a new naval base to defend its empire in the Far East. In 1921, the British Admiralty (which commanded the Royal Navy) chose Singapore as the site of its new naval base.

In 1922, the Admiralty decided to build the naval base in Sembawang, where key facilities such as the dockyard and naval barracks were

located. The naval base also included parts of Woodlands. Hence, Admiralty Road was built in the 1920s to connect the Sembawang end of the base to Woodlands and the Causeway. There was even a railway line that ran parallel to Admiralty Road, which allowed materials to be delivered by train from Woodlands station to various parts of the naval base.



Train at the naval base's Armament Depot, 1930
Courtesy of The National Archives, United Kingdom



Construction of the naval base's Torpedo Depot at Admiralty Road West (then labelled as Woodlands Road) with a railway running parallel to the road, 1940
Courtesy of The National Archives, United Kingdom

Naval depots and residences in Woodlands

Woodlands had two major depots that were part of the naval base. The Torpedo Depot was located east of Sungei Cina and used to store torpedoes. Another depot was the Royal Navy Armament Depot, which was located along Rimau Road and Attap Valley Road. Ammunitions such as shells and mines were stored there.

These depots, which had their own jetties, were located far away from the dockyard, as they handled explosive materials. The Armament Depot, in particular, was located in an area with hills and buffer zones, which isolated it from other parts of the base. This depot consisted of several magazines (ammunition storage sites) made using a method called “cut and cover”: the magazines, which had reinforced concrete walls and roofs, were placed into the ground and covered by a thick layer of earth to form a small hill. This helped to hide the magazines and protected them from aerial bombings.



View of the Causeway from the Woodlands end of the naval base, 1923-1924

Courtesy of The National Archives, United Kingdom



Torpedo Depot jetty, 1941

Courtesy of The National Archives, United Kingdom

Another important depot was Senoko Oil Fuel Depot off Admiralty Road West. This depot, which is a restricted site today, had storage tanks that could hold nearly half a million tons of oil. The tanks were arranged in groups of four, with each cluster surrounded by a raised bund that formed a “saucer” to contain spilled oil in the event that a tank was damaged.

The naval base was officially opened on 14 February 1938 by Governor Sir Shenton Thomas. Officially, it was called HM Naval Base, Singapore, but it was also referred to as Sembawang Naval Base or Singapore Naval Base. The base’s main residential areas were in Sembawang, but it also had smaller residential areas in Woodlands, which was known as the Western Depot.

The Western Depot had black-and-white houses, so-called for their whitewashed walls and dark timber beams, which were built for European staff at Ratus Road, Dahan Road, Kloof Road, Hawkins Road and Fraser Road. Meanwhile, Asian workers resided in quarters near Torpedo Depot, Woodfield Road (off Attap Valley Road) and Fraser Road.

Some roads in the area were named after physical features or landmarks, for instance, Dahan Road (“tree branch” in Malay), Rimau Road (after the nearby Bukit Rimau), Kloof Road (“ravine” in Afrikaans) and Woodfield Road (after a former rubber estate owned by a Swede named Oskar Olsen). Others were named after naval officers: Hawkins Road was named after Admiral Sir John Hawkins, while Fraser Road was named after Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser.



Western Depot coolies' quarters, 1937

Courtesy of The National Archives, United Kingdom

Woodlands at war

Despite its completion, the naval base failed to prevent the Japanese from attacking Singapore during World War II. The British lacked aircraft, and as such, they could do little when Japanese planes bombed the naval base in December 1941. Some bombs hit Senoko Oil Fuel Depot, causing massive fires. With Japanese forces amassing across the Johor Strait by early 1942, the naval base was evacuated at the end of January and played no further role in Singapore's defence.

Meanwhile, Woodlands and Kranji became the frontline of the war as the Japanese prepared to invade Singapore in early 1942. Allied forces in Malaya had fought valiantly but were forced to withdraw towards Johor Bahru. By the end of January 1942, most Allied troops had retreated to Singapore via the Causeway.



Naval base oil tanks on fire, 1942
Courtesy of Australian War Memorial



Fire at the naval base after a Japanese raid, 1942
Courtesy of Imperial War Museum

The last Allied soldiers marched across the Causeway on 31 January 1942. The Causeway was then blown up by Indian sappers, creating a 20-metre gap. This was done to prevent the Japanese from entering Singapore via the Causeway.

Charles Donald Lee of the Australian 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion witnessed this sight:

"We saw the blowing up of the Causeway. Just before that, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders marched right across in terrific form, with their bagpipes blowing. And then five or ten minutes later, the Causeway was blown and the rubber went up about 300 feet into the air. It was a fantastic sight in mid-morning."



Breach in the Causeway made by the British on 31 January, 1942
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Australian Infantry Force gunners overlooking the Causeway, 1942
Courtesy of Australian War Memorial

The Battle of Kranji

With the Causeway blown up, the Japanese had to invade Singapore by crossing the Johor Strait in boats. The invasion began on the night of 8 February 1942, when Japanese troops attempted to land between Lim Chu Kang and Sarimbun. This area was defended by the 22nd Australian Brigade and local volunteers from a unit called Dalforce.

The defenders repelled the first wave of landings, but they were soon overwhelmed by sheer numbers and the speed at which the Japanese crossed the Johor Strait and vanished into the mangroves. Despite offering stiff resistance, the Allies were forced to retreat with heavy losses.

Meanwhile, the 27th Australian Brigade was positioned in Woodlands, with the 2/26th Battalion of the Australian Infantry Force defending the area east of Sungei Kranji. On the night of 9 February 1942, this stretch became a second frontline when the Japanese attempted to cross the Johor Strait to reach Kranji.

At first, the defenders held off Japanese troops with machine guns and artillery. Lieutenant AB Watchorn also led a unit to blow up an oil depot at Woodlands. The burning oil flowed down Sungei Mandai Kechil into the Kranji coast, killing so many invaders that the Japanese nearly called off their assault.



Japanese troops landing on Singapore's shores, 1942
Singapore Tourist Promotion Board Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Unfortunately, Allied commanders, fearing encirclement, ordered a withdrawal to Bukit Panjang and Mandai. This conceded Woodlands to the Japanese, who then erected a timber bridge over the Causeway's gap to allow their vehicles to enter Singapore.



Japanese soldiers crossing the Causeway into Singapore, 1942
Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Japanese tanks approaching the Causeway, 1942
Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, State Library of Victoria

Kranji Prisoner-of-War Camp

The 2/26th Battalion of the Australian Infantry Force, which defended Woodlands, had their field headquarters on a hill south of the junction of Kranji and Woodlands Roads. This location remained an important military site during the Japanese Occupation and after the war.

After the Japanese had conquered Singapore, the field headquarters in Kranji was initially used as a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp for Indian soldiers. In 1944, the Japanese converted it into a field hospital for Allied POWs called Kranji Camp. The camp's residents were sick and injured POWs from Changi as well as POWs who had worked on the Siam-Burma Death Railway.

Former POW Alexander Cyril "Lex" Arthurson wrote this description of Kranji Camp:

"Woodlands Kranji Camp was established on 28 May 1944 ... The new site was previously a hospital for sick Indian POWs and was at the 13½ milestone on the main road and 2½ miles south of the Causeway. Johore Bahru, across the Straits, was plainly visible as were parts of the Sultan's palace and the square tower of the municipal buildings."

Another account comes from former POW Geoffrey Bingham:

"The camp was a mass of huts built between the rows of rubber trees There was ground which had been turned into excellent vegetable gardens, and beyond these a small piggery for the Japanese. Indian prisoners of war had occupied the camp prior to us, and being Hindus, had not killed the cats, which had the effect of keeping the vermin down. Someone counted ninety-three cats in the first week. They came to us with a trust that was pathetic and sadly misplaced. The ruling price of cats was nine dollars, of rats three dollars, and of dogs fifteen dollars. Within a fortnight, eighty-three cats had been eaten."

As indicated by Bingham, the prisoners were often short of food and other supplies. Those who perished were buried on a hill east of the

camp. Former POW Samuel Sinnott Purvis later wrote:

"Kranji turned out to be the worst camp of them all. Strange though it may seem; it was also the nicest in which to bury our dead colleagues. We buried them on top of a hill and our bugler played 'The Last Post'. He was poised right on the crest of the hill. It was lovely and tranquil to stand and listen to his rendering. That scene always stands out in my mind. Whenever I hear a bugle playing - the tears well up in my eyes and I weep a silent prayer for those poor souls for whom the bugle played."



POWs from Kranji Camp, 1945
Courtesy of Australian War Memorial



Ex-POWs on the Causeway, 1945
Nederlands Instituut Voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (NIOD) collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

POST-WAR MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

Woodlands continued to be an important military area after World War II. On 5 September 1945, the British destroyer HMS *Rotherham* arrived at the naval base to receive the surrender of Japan's naval forces. To honour this event, the base's Woodlands Gate, located at the western end of Admiralty Road West near the Causeway, was renamed Rotherham Gate.



Location of former Rotherham Gate at Admiralty Road West, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

The Woodlands side of the naval base also became a home to various military institutions and communities. These included the former KD *Malaya* off Admiralty Road West as well as quarters built for naval policemen, firemen and their families. Meanwhile, Kranji became the site of a war cemetery and a memorial, both of which continue to be major military landmarks today.

Kranji War Cemetery and Singapore Memorial

Kranji Camp, where the Allied POWs were interred during the Occupation, was closed when the war ended. The camp's cemetery, which occupied a hill near the junction of Woodlands and Kranji Roads, was then renamed the Singapore Allied Military Cemetery.

In 1946, this cemetery was chosen by the UK's Imperial War Graves Commission as the site of a permanent war cemetery for those who

died defending Singapore and Malaya. Many soldiers had died without a grave. To honour these individuals, British architect Colin St Clair Oakes designed a memorial where their names would be inscribed and on display.

Singapore Memorial, situated within the cemetery, was unveiled on 2 March 1957 by Governor Sir Robert Black. This memorial, on which more than 24,000 names are inscribed, stands on the top of a hill overlooking Kranji War Cemetery, a burial site for more than 4,460 soldiers.

Kranji War Cemetery is currently maintained by the UK-based Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), which takes care of more than 23,000 war cemeteries and memorials worldwide. Today, annual memorial services are held at Kranji War Cemetery on Remembrance Day on 11 November and on ANZAC Day on 25 April.



War cemetery at Kranji, 1948
Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, State Library of Victoria



Governor Sir Robert Black at the unveiling of Singapore Memorial, 1957
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

FEATURES OF KRANJI WAR CEMETERY

Kranji War Cemetery, which is located off Woodlands Road, consists of three sections: the main Kranji War Cemetery, Singapore Memorial and Kranji Military Cemetery.

Kranji War Cemetery

This cemetery contains 4,461 graves of Commonwealth soldiers who died defending Singapore and Malaya. At its entrance, there is a forecourt with a Stone of Remembrance bearing the words “Their name liveth for evermore”. This altar-like stone, which is installed in every CWGC war cemetery, was designed by the British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens as a display of solidity and gravitas.

The forecourt leads to two stone-clad entranceway shelters, which have octagonal wall screens that resemble the *bagua* (a Chinese symbol). The left shelter holds a register book listing the names and locations of those buried in the cemetery. The right shelter has a bench for visitors to rest and contemplate the site.



Stone-clad shelters with octagonal wall screens, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Beyond the entranceway is a central avenue with graves on each side. Each grave is marked by a headstone made from Portland Stone, a soft limestone on which inscriptions can be engraved. Headstones are used instead of crosses to honour each soldier irrespective of their religion. Each stone bears the deceased's name, rank and service number, and an

emblem of their unit or country. It may also bear a personal inscription or religious symbol. The youngest soldier buried there is Lance Naik Papayya, who died in 1946 from wounds received during the war, aged 16.

Some of the headstones have no name, as more than 850 burials remain unidentified. There is also a Chinese Memorial in Plot 44 for the collective remains of 69 Chinese Commonwealth soldiers killed by the Japanese in February 1942. The graves of Muslim soldiers are also arranged to face the holy city of Mecca.

Singapore Memorial

The cemetery's central avenue leads up to a Cross of Remembrance. Found in all CWGC cemeteries, this cross features a bronze longsword to reflect the site's military significance.

The Cross of Remembrance stands before Singapore Memorial, a wing-like edifice with a 22-m tall central pylon that recalls the tail-fin of a propeller plane. Viewed from the air, the Memorial resembles the silhouette of a World War II warplane. The Memorial has 12 stone walls, on which are inscribed the names of more than 24,000 soldiers with no known graves. Those honoured here include members of the Malay Regiment, who died during the Battle of Bukit Chandu in February 1942.



Aerial view of Kranji War Cemetery, showing the “wings” and fin-like central pylon of Singapore Memorial, 1960-1962

All rights reserved. Sons of David “Danny” Daniel

Surrounding the main edifice are smaller memorials. To the east stands Singapore Civil Hospital Grave Memorial, which honours 107 soldiers who were buried in a mass grave at the present Singapore General Hospital. At the western end there is a Singapore (Unmaintainable Graves) Memorial, which honours more than 250 war casualties whose graves could not be moved on religious grounds. There is also a Singapore Cremation Memorial, which bears the names of almost 800 Indian soldiers whose remains were cremated.

Kranji Military Cemetery

Located to the west of Kranji War Cemetery, Kranji Military Cemetery was established in 1975 to hold 1,422 graves of servicemen

and their families that were formerly at Pasir Panjang and Ulu Pandan. It also has a Gurkha Garden of Remembrance for the ashes of mainly stillborn infants of Gurkha servicemen.



Families of combatants who perished during World War II, at the Singapore Memorial, 1957
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Singapore Memorial and Kranji War Cemetery, 1957
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Christopher Leong (b. 1974), Senior Head Gardener of Kranji War Cemetery since 2018, is responsible for keeping the cemetery grounds in prime condition. Unlike a normal park, the cemetery's landscape has to be maintained in its original condition over time. Leong explained:

"Here, the scenery and landscape cannot change, and the grass level has to be of a certain height.

This is difficult as the cemetery is on a slope – most CWGC sites are on flat ground – so the soil and plants keep getting washed down after a thunderstorm. Hence, we have to keep topping up the soil and replacing the grass."

In 2020, when Singapore underwent a lockdown to battle the COVID-19 virus, the cemetery had to be closed and became overgrown with weeds. Leong recalled:



Kranji War Cemetery, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

"During the lock-down, the whole place became like a jungle. The weeds were covering the gravestones as my gardeners could not come to work for six months. Later, we had to manually remove the weeds. We do not use any herbicides, as this will cause the grass to die."

Leong's team also maintains the headstones, washing off dirt and algae from the surfaces. He explained:

"When we wash the headstone, we do not use chemicals such as detergents or bleach. With these chemicals, the stone will deteriorate. We have to manually clean the stones with water and soft brushes. It's harder work but we can then maintain the stone for many more years."

Leong added that the cemetery was a familiar landmark from his childhood:

"I used to live in Mandai and this place was my weekend playground. On Sunday mornings, my father would bring me here to play and catch spiders. After that, we would go for breakfast before going home."

Kranji State Cemetery

Near the entrance of Kranji War Cemetery lies the Kranji State Cemetery, a burial site established in 1970 by the Singapore government. Modelled after Arlington National Cemetery in the USA, where prominent Americans are buried, this cemetery is reserved for individuals "who have made important contributions to national progress."

Two former Presidents of Singapore are buried at Kranji State Cemetery: Yusof Ishak and Benjamin Sheares. Yusof Ishak (1910-1970), a former newspaper editor, served as Singapore's Yang di-Pertuan Negara (Head of State) from 1959-1965 and first President from 1965-1970. He was the first dignitary to be buried here. Benjamin Sheares (1907-1981), a gynaecologist and surgeon, was Singapore's second President from 1971-1981. Singapore's other former Presidents were not buried here as their families chose to cremate them after their deaths.



Yusuf Ishak's grave in Kranji State Cemetery, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



Benjamin Sheares' grave in Kranji State Cemetery, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

KD Malaya in Woodlands

Located off Admiralty Road West, *KD Malaya* (KD stands for *Kapal DiRaja* or “Royal Ship” in Malay) was the headquarters of the Royal Malaysian Navy until the early 1980s. This facility has its origins in a Straits Settlements Naval Volunteer Reserve (SSNVR) established in 1934 with 200 Malay sailors and two vessels, *HMS Panglima* and *HMS Laburnum*.

The British then augmented the SSNVR in 1939 with a professional Malay Section of the Royal Navy. Numbering nearly 800 men by 1942, this force was based at *HMS Pelandok*, a barracks located within Singapore Naval Base. It was disbanded in 1947 due to financial constraints.

In 1948, a new Malayan Naval Force, which included many members of the former Malay Section, was established to help defend Malaya against communist insurgents. The recruits were initially based in *HMS Test*, a frigate, but in 1949, they were allocated quarters at a hilly site in Woodlands that was earlier occupied by a Royal Air Force Wireless Station.

The Malayan Naval Force was renamed the Royal Malayan Navy in 1952 to recognise their contributions in the effort to combat the communists. Meanwhile, their quarters in Woodlands were redeveloped into a full-fledged headquarters with barracks, a parade ground and sports fields. Known as the Royal Malayan Naval Barracks or *HMS Malaya*, this headquarters was completed in the mid-1950s and described as “the most modern naval barracks in the British Commonwealth – if not the world.”

Flats for junior officers were also built in Woodlands in the 1950s and 1960s. Rudy Zahiruddin bin Mohamed Omar (b. 1978), a long-time Woodlands resident, recalled visiting these flats as a boy. He shared:

“At Woodlands Street 13, there used to be Royal Malaysian Navy flats. There was a mama shop there, and I used to go there as a boy to buy kueh, and I could pay in ringgit. After the Malaysian navy left, it became rental flats called Marsiling Apartments.”



Ceremonial parade at *HMS Malaya* (later *KD Malaya*), 1956
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Flats at Woodlands for junior Royal Malayan naval officers, 1956
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

After the Federation of Malaya became independent in 1957, HMS *Malaya* was transferred to the Federation in 1958. It was then renamed KD *Malaya* in 1961. Singaporean naval volunteers also served at KD *Malaya* between 1963 and 1965, when Singapore was part of Malaysia. They included female volunteers in the Singapore Women's Auxiliary Naval Service (SWANS), who manned radar stations and communications systems. After Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965, these volunteers were reformed into the Singapore Naval Volunteer Force in 1966.



Singapore Women's Auxiliary Naval Service (SWANS) volunteers at KD *Malaya*, 1963
Iris Han Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



SWANS volunteers manning communications systems at KD *Malaya*, 1963
Iris Han Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Kamal Abu Serah (b. 1964), who resided near KD *Malaya* in the 1960s and 1970s, remembers the place well. He recalled:

"Sometimes they organised events and it was like an open house. I would follow my parents there. Later, when I shifted to Khalsa Crescent in 1980, KD Malaya was still under the Royal Malaysian Navy. Every day at 6pm, there was a flag-lowering ceremony. I would be playing sepak

takraw with my neighbours, but when the sentry blew the whistle at 6pm, we would stop playing out of respect while they lowered the flag and waited until the whistle was sounded again."

Recruits as well as families from KD *Malaya* were a common sight in Woodlands then. Kamal added:

"Many children from KD Malaya would go to school in Johor Bahru in three-tonners [military lorries], which were specially modified with steps in the centre for the kids. It was a common sight to see the Malaysian 3-tonners transporting students between Woodlands and JB."

"It was also a common sight to see the KD Malaya recruits, who would go to Johor Bahru or hang around Woodlands Town Centre when they booked out. You could recognise them by their short hair and white long-sleeved shirts - you knew these were KD Malaya recruits."

From naval base to prison to waterfront park

In the early 1980s, Malaysia opened a new naval base in Lumut, Perak, which was also named KD *Malaya*. The Woodlands base remained in Malaysian hands but was converted into a training and service station. Malaysia then closed this facility in 1997 and transferred the land to Singapore.

The former KD *Malaya* was then converted into Admiralty West Prison, which began operations in 2000. This prison housed pre-release inmates, meaning those who had less than a year remaining before their release. It closed in 2018.

Most of the former KD *Malaya* was demolished in 2021. However, its former administration block has been retained and will form part of the future development of the site. This block was completed by the Public Works Department in 1953 and features an Art Deco-inspired design, with a central three-storey tower flanked by two symmetrical wings. The building also features elements suited for the tropics such as timber louvred vents and windows.

The administration block's second storey has open corridors that serve as a viewing gallery to the former parade square below. In front of the block, there is a prominent stone rubble wall and twin stairways, which have also been retained as they add to the grandeur of the main block.

Another part of the former *KD Malaya* that has been retained is the former Malaysian Base Jetty built in 1966. This 400-metre-long jetty was used for official events such as the commissioning of new ships.

Before this jetty was built, the Malaysian Navy used a pre-war structure called Ruthenia Jetty, which was named after RFA *Ruthenia*, an oil storage ship. After the Malaysian Base Jetty opened, Ruthenia Jetty became disused and derelict. Jerome Lim (b. 1965), who often visited the area in the 1970s, recalled that it became a popular spot for fishermen:

"The naval base was opened up in the early 1970s. The first thing that comes to mind was the old Ruthenia oil jetty, which was still there in the 1970s. My dad used to drive us there – at that time, Admiralty Road was the main road towards

Marsiling from Sembawang. This narrow road used to run by the coast and it was very quiet because not many people went there. The jetty was in a very bad condition with missing planks. You had to be very careful because it was very high above the water. There were lots of gaps and when you looked down, it was very scary. But it was a place where many people would go for fishing and crabbing."

Today, the remains of the former Ruthenia Jetty can still be seen from the Woodlands waterfront at very low tides. Meanwhile, the former Malaysian Base Jetty is now part of Woodlands Waterfront Park (see page 63).



Ruthenia Jetty at Malaysia's Woodlands Naval Base, 1964
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Former Malaysian Base Jetty, which is now part of the Woodlands Waterfront Park, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Rimau Estate and Hawkins Road Refugee Camp

Apart from KD *Malaya*, there were other military communities in Woodlands. Off Admiralty Road West, there was a residential area for European naval base staff known as Rimau Estate, which had houses along a side lane called Hawkins Road. Richard Hale (b. 1937) resided at Rimau Estate in 1947-1948, when his father was posted to Singapore. He recalled:



House in Rimau Estate, 1947-1948
Courtesy of Richard Hale



Surrounding scrubland of Rimau Estate, 1947-1948
Courtesy of Richard Hale



View of the Johor Strait from Rimau Estate, 1947-1948
Courtesy of Richard Hale

"We stayed in one house at the beginning of the road, and there were about 13 other houses further along, smaller houses lived in by various people from the dockyard ... What I remember about the garden was that we had a kebun [gardener], and my mother and the kebun had a constant battle over the lawn in front of the house - she wanted to keep it just with grass but with shrubs and trees round the edges. He thought it better to have shrubs all over it. We also had two amahs [domestic helpers] who had their own quarters at the back."

"Behind the house was scrubland with a lot of thorny bushes. And after rain, there were a lot of shallow puddles, which for a small boy was great fun because it was all slippery and sloshy. When I came back from there, my mother nearly had a fit! She said, "You have no idea what things you might be picking up, like hookworm." Flipflops hadn't been invented yet."

Shopping trips across the Causeway were frequent, as Hale shared:

"My mother used to go to the market in Johor Bahru because that was the closest place to go. She would just get in the car and drive across the Causeway. There was no immigration then. We used the NAAFI in the base for tinned goods, but for fresh vegetables, fruit and fish, we went to the markets in Johor Bahru. There was one occasion which went down in family history: we went past a lorry filled with durians. My mother went "urgh!", but the amah turned around and said, "Mem, I like!""

In the 1970s, after the naval base had closed, the houses at Hawkins Road were used to house Vietnamese refugees who arrived in Singapore after the Vietnam War ended in 1975. The refugees were initially housed at St John's Island, but in 1978, Hawkins Road was converted into a camp for refugees who were awaiting resettlement in other countries.

Hawkins Road Refugee Camp had as many as 3,000 residents in the early 1980s. The refugees were not permitted to work, but could visit places such as Mount Faber, Jurong Bird Park and Chong Pang Village, where they

enjoyed the sights or purchased items they needed. The camp closed in 1996 when the last 99 refugees were repatriated to Vietnam. The houses were later demolished and Hawkins Road was expunged.



Hawkins Road Refugee Camp, 1986
Registered Tourist Guides Association of Singapore Collection,
courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Berek Hitam

East of Rimau Estate was Fraser Road, which led to an area known as Berek Hitam (“Black Barracks” in Malay). Kamal Abu Serah was a long-time resident of these barracks, which housed the families of naval base firemen. Describing the area, he said:

“As a kid, we stayed at the fire brigade barracks at Admiralty Road West, opposite Attap Valley Road, across the road from the present Micron factory. It was a wooden barracks with terraces. We called the place Berek Hitam or “Black Barracks” because of its dark colour. I think these were the only wooden quarters in the naval base.”

“Each terrace had 9-10 units. My address was Block 146, Room 2. Dollah Salleh [a famous Malaysian footballer and coach] was my neighbour at Room 3. Each unit had just one hall and one bedroom; the kitchen and toilet were outside, also arranged like barracks side by side.”

As a child, Kamal explored the area between Woodlands and Sembawang. He shared:

“I used to walk to Sungei Senoko to catch mussels. Last time, there were a lot of mussels and tilapia. We would bring a kerosene can, pour water in it

and cook the mussels on the spot. Opposite Fraser Road was Ratus Road, which had black-and-white bungalows. I remember playing slides at Ratus Road as it was a very hilly area.”

Berek Hitam was destroyed by fire in 1980, which rendered its 60 residents homeless. Kamal recalled that day:

“On 14 February 1980, one of the wooden barracks caught fire. My block was not affected but was close by. I was on the way to school and saw fire and smoke, so I got down from the bus and walked all the way back home. Later, my family and some other families shifted to Torpedo at Khalsa Crescent. We stayed there for a short while because my father then bought a flat at Marsiling Drive.”

Khalsa Crescent and View Road

Khalsa Crescent, where Kamal’s family briefly resided in 1980, was a side road opposite the former *KD Malaya*. In 1950, seven residential blocks were built here to house Asian staff of the naval base and their families.

The area was called Torpedo Depot Lines or simply Torpedo, as it was located near the base’s Torpedo Depot. However, residents also referred to it as Khalsa Crescent, after the road that ran between the blocks. *Khalsa* means “pure” in Punjabi and is also a term used to refer to the Sikh community, which made up the majority of Khalsa Crescent’s residents in the 1950s.



Khalsa Crescent quarters, 1950
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of
National Archives of Singapore



Sadar Atma Singh (front row, second from left), his son Chanan Singh (in Boy Scout's uniform, front row, third from right) and members of the Naval Base policemen (then known as Additional Police Constables), 1934
 Courtesy of Balwyndarjeet Singh s/o Chanan Singh



Khalsa Crescent's Sikh community, 1955
 Courtesy of Balwyndarjeet Singh s/o Chanan Singh

Most of the Sikhs who resided at Khalsa Crescent were members of the Naval Police Force. Before the war, these policemen resided at Canberra Road, where they established a gurdwara (Sikh temple) in 1940. After the war, this gurdwara shifted to Attap Valley Road in 1948, as many Sikh policemen were then residing in quarters there. The policemen and their families then moved to Khalsa Crescent in 1950.

Goody Amarjeet Kaur d/o Chanan Singh, whose grandfather Sardar Atma Singh and father Chanan Singh were both members of the Naval Police Force, spent her early years at Khalsa Crescent. She shared:

"I was born in Khalsa Crescent in 1952. My address was at Block 1, Room 30, HM Naval Base, Singapore 27. Room 30 was on the upper floor and there was a long common corridor.

There were so many children around and we used to play hide-and-seek or police-and-thief in the grounds. We would hide in our neighbours' homes."

According to Goody, most families at Khalsa Crescent then were Sikhs: "We had a Khalsa temple next door. It was situated close to an Indian mama shop." This shop sold snacks and sundry items to the residents. Goody added: "There was a rations lorry which used to come by, and my mother Bachan Kour would buy groceries and other items from it."

In the late 1950s, the Sikh policemen moved to View Road, a hilly lane off Admiralty Road West. There, they resided in a three-storey building originally known as Rimau Complex or Rimau Offices. This E-shaped building was built in 1941 as a Maritime Operations



Rimau Offices under construction, 1941
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Command Centre. The Japanese then used it as to coordinate coastal defences. Its rooftop has a watchtower that offered an unobstructed view of the Johor Strait. The grounds also has a bombproof office that could withstand artillery shells.

After the British converted Rimau Complex into barracks, many Sikh families moved there. Their gurdwara also shifted to View Road in 1959. This temple, officially known as Gurdwara Sahib Naval Police, was used by Sikh policemen as well as firemen working in the naval base until 1972, when it closed and its assets were transferred to Sembawang Sikh Temple (now Yishun Sikh Temple).

After the Sikh policemen moved to View Road in the late 1950s, Khalsa Crescent was occupied by other families living and working in the naval base. Among them was the family of Juneta Ideriyani, who shared:

"My late father Ideriyani bin HM Ideriess joined the Naval Police Force in 1958. Our first home in the naval base was Rimau at View Road. But in 1959, we moved to Block 5 at Torpedo. Blocks 5 and 6 were for the Naval Police Force: Block 5 was the married quarters while Block 6 was the singles' quarters. Cooking was done in the very rooms that we slept and spent our time in. We had to get our water supply downstairs, and the bathrooms were also downstairs. When my father was promoted to an officer, in early 1962, we moved to Bermuda Road."



Juneta Ideriyani with her mother and other families at Torpedo, 1959-1962
Courtesy of Juneta Ideriyani



Juneta Ideriyani and her mother at Torpedo, behind them is the KD Malaya playing field, 1959-1962
Courtesy of Juneta Ideriyani

In the 1960s, Khalsa Crescent also became home to people who worked at Torpedo Depot. One of them was the family of Adam bin Mohamed Amin (b. 1953), who shared:

"In 1960, my family moved to Khalsa Crescent and we stayed here until 1970. My father was working in Torpedo Depot. He took care of the stores, where there were bombs, torpedoes, bullets and other ammunition used in the warships. Whenever the ships arrived, they would be restocked with this ammunition and my father had to make the necessary arrangements."

"I had the chance to go into the stores in 1969, because my friends and I worked as temporary workers with a contractor assigned to facilitate the British withdrawal. We had to pack the ammunition into crates and carry them up into the ships."

Adam's family resided at Block 1, Khalsa Crescent, Rooms 23 and 24. "We had two rooms because my family was large," he explained. "There were nine siblings. Each unit was just one room with a verandah in front."

Around the blocks were places where children played various games: "At the end of Block 2 and in front of Block 3, there was a badminton and *sepak takraw* court. Whenever there were Thomas Cup tournaments, we would have our own badminton competitions there. We also played football on a field next to Block 6 or at KD *Malaya's* football field, which was next to Khalsa Crescent. My elder brother Mohd Ali was captain of the Torpedo football team. I played midfield."



Children playing at Block 1 Khalsa Crescent, 1969
Courtesy of Adam bin Mohamed Amin



Torpedo residents at the Shell Woodlands jetty, 1971
Courtesy of Adam bin Mohamed Amin



Torpedo football team from Khalsa Crescent, 1960s
Courtesy of Adam bin Mohamed Amin
(front row, second from left)

Adam and his friends also spent much time at the Woodlands waterfront: "The Shell jetty near Sungei Cina was our "swimming pool". On Sundays, we would swim around the jetty. Before going home, we would collect some mussels and crabs, boil them at the jetty and eat right there."

Adam said: "We used to climb up to play on the roof and watch the Royal Malaysian Navy parades. My parents also had a small rooftop garden with curry and pandan trees."

Another family who maintained a rooftop garden was that of Lee Keen Man (b. 1951), who resided at Block 2, Room 6 from 1953-1970. He shared:

"My mother bred pigeons on the rooftop. We enjoyed their eggs and sometimes slaughtered them to fry the pigeons Hong Kong style. The eggs are translucent and jelly-like but had firm yolks. We loved the eggs and so did my Malay neighbours."

"My father, Lee Wai, first joined the Royal Navy in Shanghai in the 1930s as a teenager in the ship engine room. He was later transferred to Hong Kong and was posted to Singapore in 1950 as a fitter who was in charge of repairing torpedoes. He was subsequently promoted as a team leader overseeing a team of six and also head of the fire brigade in Torpedo Depot. I used to see him writing a report every night. It was a struggle as he had not much English knowledge, but he still presented a report the next day. Our proudest



Lee Keen Man's mother Ng Moi with his nephew Cheng Yam San on the rooftop of Block 2, Khalsa Crescent, 1960s
Courtesy of Cheng Yam San

moment was when his British boss visited us to pay a courtesy call. My father and a few colleagues were also invited to his boss's house which was at Kloof Road or Ratus Road."



Ng Moi with her pigeons, 1960s
Courtesy of Cheng Yam San

After the British withdrew from Singapore in 1971, Khalsa Crescent was converted into a Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC). The DRC was then converted into a prison in 2005 and finally closed in 2009.

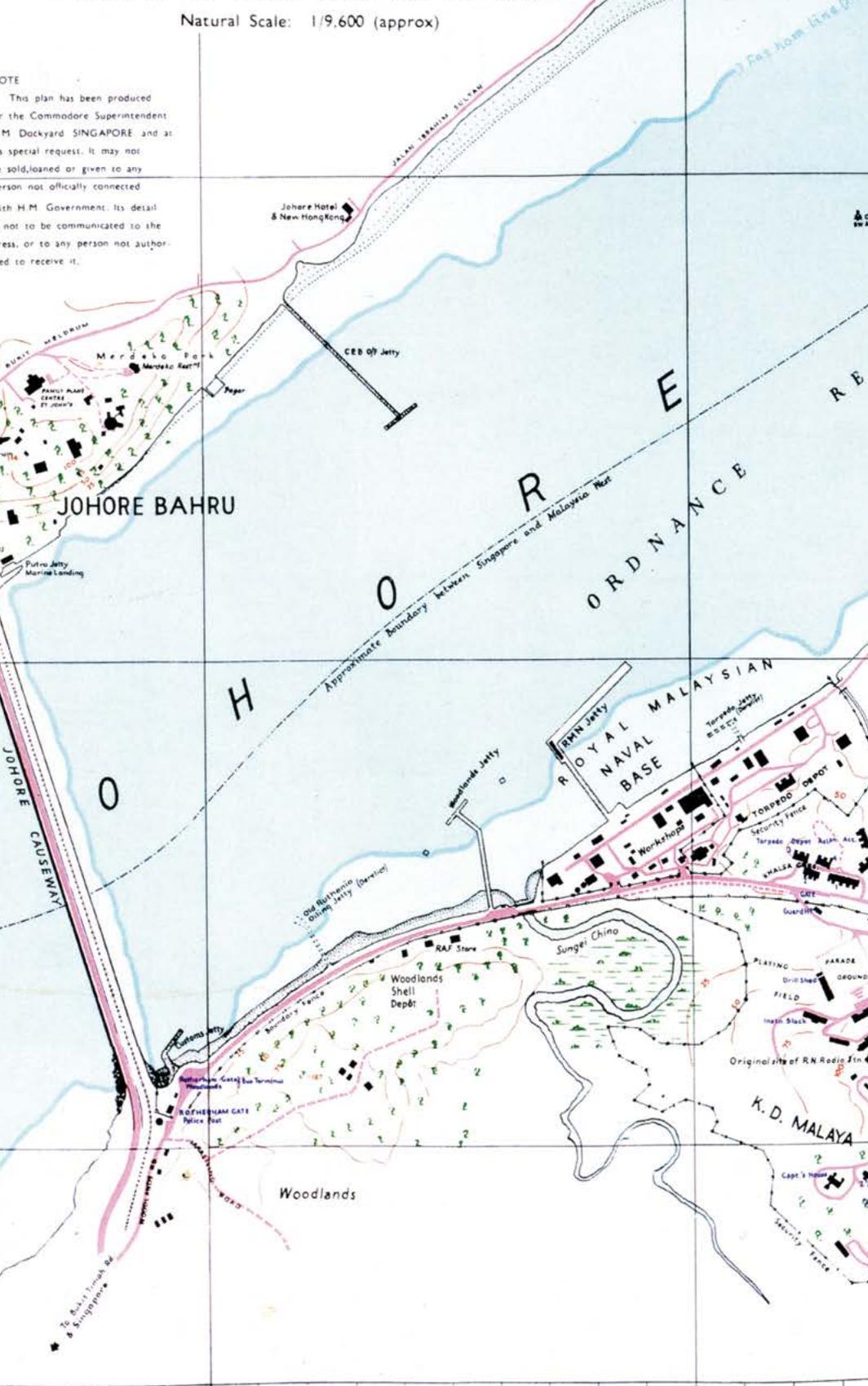
Meanwhile, the View Road barracks were converted into View Road Secondary Mental Hospital in 1973. This facility helped to relieve the overcrowded Woodbridge Hospital, which was then at Yio Chu Kang Road. It closed in 2001 and the site is currently vacant.

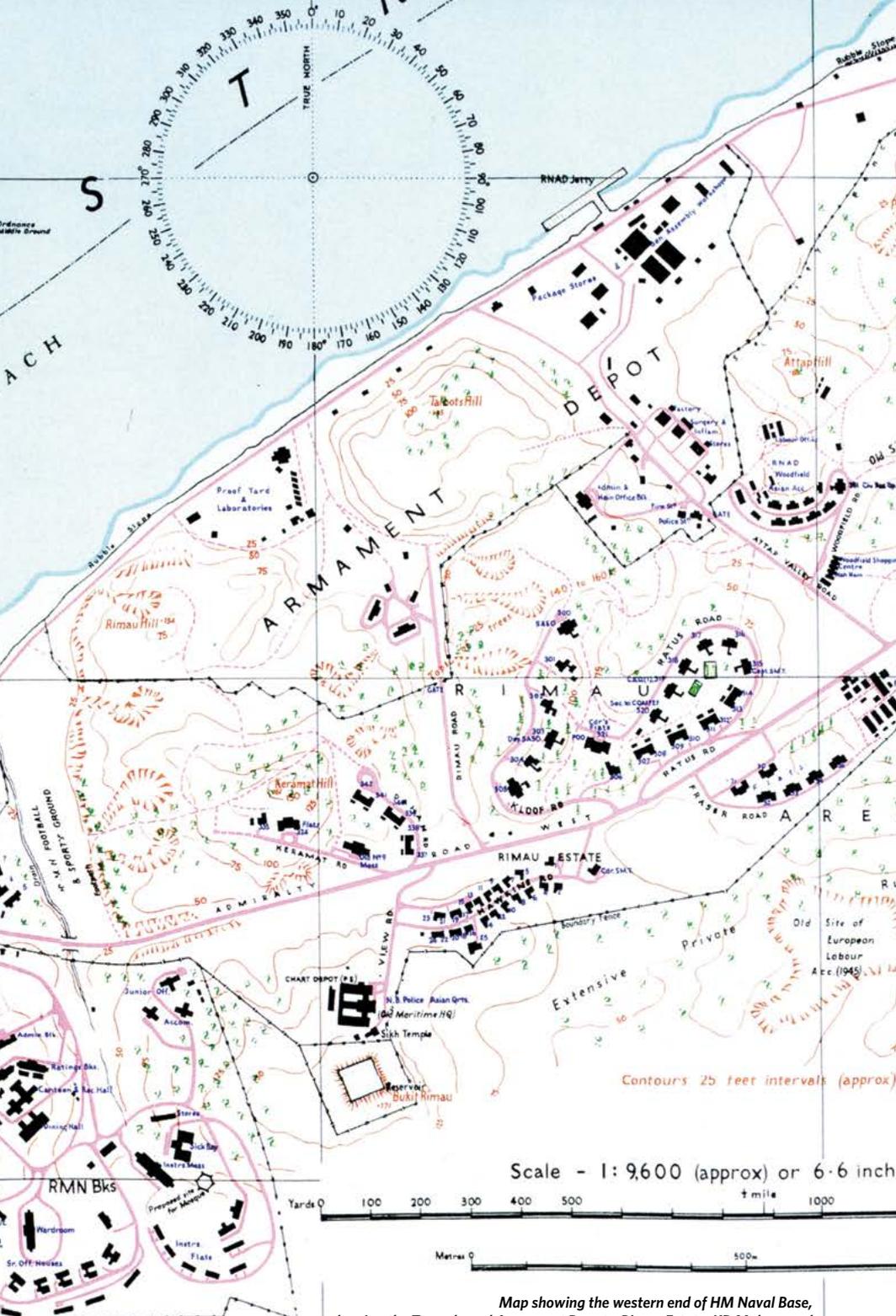
In the late 1990s, many of the former naval base sites along Admiralty Road West were redeveloped. Most of the former Armament Depot, including 24 black-and-white bungalows and flats at Ratus Road and Kloof Road, were demolished. These roads were expunged and are now the site of the Micron semiconductor complex. The only remaining black-and-white bungalows in the area are three houses at Dahan Road, next to Keramat Road.



Gathering of former Khalsa Crescent residents organised by NHB, URA and Singapore Prison Service, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

NOTE
This plan has been produced for the Commodore Superintendent of the Dockyard SINGAPORE and at a special request. It may not be sold, loaned or given to any person not officially connected with the H.M. Government. Its details are not to be communicated to the press, or to any person not authorized to receive it.





Map showing the western end of HM Naval Base, showing the Torpedo and Armament Depots, Rimau Estate, KD Malaya and various jetties, 1968
 Courtesy of Marcus Ng

WOODLANDS AFTER THE WAR

After the war, Woodlands resumed its well-trodden role as Singapore's gateway to Johor. The Causeway reopened in 1945 and was later widened to accommodate growing traffic between Singapore and the Malay Peninsula. Other post-war developments included the establishment of new industries along Woodlands Road, which provided jobs to residents. Meanwhile, Mandai Orchid Garden and Singapore Zoo drew people to explore Woodlands beyond the Causeway.

The Causeway after the war

After the war ended, the Causeway was reopened to the public on 15 September 1945. One difference was that the pre-war lock channel (which allowed ships to pass through) became disused and was eventually sealed up in the early 1950s. Meanwhile, in 1948, the

railway line that ran through Woodlands and the Causeway came under a new Malayan Railway Administration, which was later renamed Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM).

Traffic on the Causeway surged after the war, as thousands of vehicles crossed the strait daily, with even greater numbers during holidays and festive seasons. Traffic jams were already a familiar sight in the 1950s. The only period that was free of congestion was during the early hours of the morning.

Jessica Bong (b. 1952), who grew up in Kampong Hock Choon in Woodlands, recalled that her family would carry vegetables to Johor Bahru during these hours. She shared:

"In the 1960s, we sold our vegetables in Johor Bahru. My father or older siblings would cycle across the Causeway and head to Jalan Wong Ah



The Causeway prior to its expansions, 1950s

National Museum of Singapore collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board



Green bus on the Causeway, 1956
F W York Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Woodlands Custom Checkpoint, c. 1950
National Museum of Singapore collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Fook to sell our vegetables to wholesalers there. They went early in the morning at 2-3 am when traffic was light. We sold vegetables like brinjals and chye sim [Chinese flowering cabbage]."

The Causeway was also plied by bus operators such as Green Bus Company, which was set up in the 1930s. After the war, Green Bus faced new competitors such as Singapore-Johore Express, which began ferrying passengers in 1947. This company is still in operation, whereas Green Bus merged with other operators in the 1970s to form Singapore Bus Service (SBS), which still runs service 170 between Queen Street and Johor Bahru.

Woodlands Road pasar malam

As bus passengers grew in number in the late 1950s, small stalls were set up near the Causeway that sold souvenirs and fruit to the passengers. By 1960, these stalls had grown into a weekly pasar malam (Malay for "night market") that attracted thousands of shoppers every Saturday.

The Woodlands Road pasar malam consisted of stalls which sold goods ranging from toys and cosmetics to clothes and furniture, often at cheaper prices compared to city shops. There were also stalls selling food such as *satay* (barbecued marinated meat) and noodles. Hence, the pasar malam attracted crowds from both sides of the strait. Some bargain hunters from Johor even wore tattered clothes so that they could change into their newly bought attire and return home without paying custom duties.

In the early 1960s, the authorities cracked down on the pasar malam to tackle congestion and duty evasion. Eventually, the stalls relocated to a new site at Woodlands Road further from the Causeway in 1963. The night market remained popular after this move but closed in 1978 after the government stopped issuing licenses to pasar malam stallholders.



Hawker stall at Woodlands, 1963
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew during a visit to the Woodlands Road pasar malam, 1963
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Anthony Tan (b. 1943), a former resident of Mandai Tekong Village, recalled this pasar malam. He said:

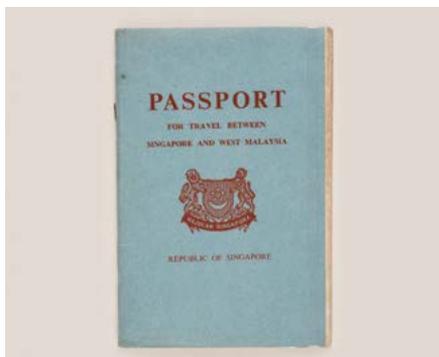
"In the 1950s and 1960s, at the main Woodlands Road, there used to be a pasar malam every Saturday. Many people from Johor Bahru came down to buy goods. There were more than a thousand stalls selling clothes, shoes, appliances, toys, foodstuff, everything - it was very lively! The market was held at different locations each day, but at Woodlands it was on Saturday. It was along Woodlands Road after the Metalbox factory until about the Shell facility and Customs. There were also some shops near the Customs, where Malaysian lorries would stop to rest. When the market was open, the whole road would be congested, and it was a single track road back then."

The Causeway and Woodlands Checkpoint in the 1960s-1990s

Today, passports are needed to travel between Singapore and Malaysia. This was not the case before Singapore's independence in 1965, when people could cross the Causeway freely without passports. The only checks then were for dutiable goods such as certain food items and textiles, or security screenings during the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960).

In 1963, Singapore merged with Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak to form the Federation of Malaysia. However, the merger was short-lived and Singapore separated from Malaysia on 9 August 1965. Despite this, there were initially no passport requirements and travellers from both countries only had to show their identity cards to cross the Causeway.

Full immigration controls were implemented on both ends of the Causeway in 1967 and since then, every traveller from either side had to carry a passport. To facilitate travel for people who regularly commuted between Singapore and West Malaysia, Singapore also introduced Restricted Passports in 1967. However, such passports were no longer issued after 1 January 1999.



Singapore Restricted Passport, 1967
National Museum of Singapore collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board



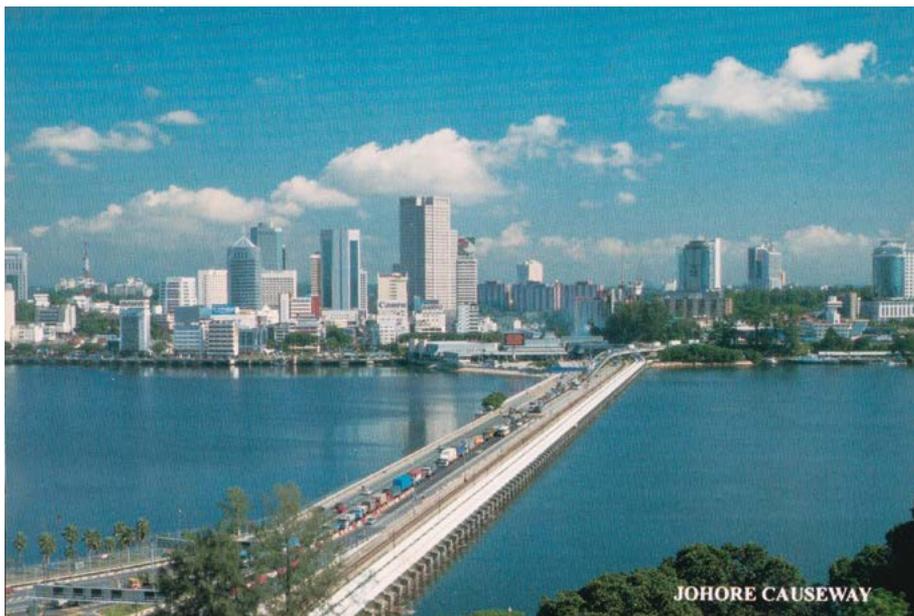
Woodlands Customs Checkpoint, 1966
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

The need to apply for passports, as well as long queues for immigration and customs checks, failed to discourage people from crossing the Causeway in the 1960s. To tackle congestion, the Causeway's roadway was widened in 1964 from 8 metres to 9 metres and a raised footpath was provided for pedestrians.

This widening of the roadway did little to address congestions. By 1972, about 18,000 vehicles were crossing the Causeway daily. By then, the need for a wider Causeway was apparent, and work began on the Singapore side in 1974. The expanded Causeway, with a 23.5-metre-wide six-lane roadway, was completed in 1976. Singapore then opened a bigger Woodlands Checkpoint in 1977 to cope with rising traffic volumes. This new checkpoint consisted of two buildings: one for cargo vehicles, and the other for passenger traffic.



New Woodlands Checkpoint, 1977
The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission



The Causeway, c. 1970s
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Sofea @ Noraini Abdul Rahman (b. 1965) worked at this checkpoint as a Woman Customs Officer in the 1980s. She shared:

"I worked with the Customs and Excise Department from 1984 until 1988 and I was posted to Woodlands twice, in 1986 and 1988. Our job was to check travellers for contraband such as cigarettes and alcohol, as well as drugs. We had our own dog unit, so whenever we suspected that there was contraband, we would bring out the dogs to check. We had to check the cars manually – once a car even ran over my toes by accident. Luckily, my shoes were quite thick and protected me."

Recalling the checkpoint in the 1980s, Sofea added:

"Woodlands Checkpoint was already very busy then. There were many Malaysian workers who came over to Singapore to work in the morning. There were also cargo lorries with chickens and pigs. These would come in early in the morning – and the smell! The way we checked these vehicles was very different from today. Now it's very high tech. Last time, we had to climb up each lorry and open the canvas to inspect the goods."

Sofea's colleague at Woodlands Checkpoint, Chandran Kandiah (b. 1949), also recalled:

"In 1976, I was posted to Woodlands Checkpoint as the Assistant Superintendent of Customs. At that time, many people were trying to smuggle drugs into Singapore. Once, one of my officers called me, as he had stopped a pirate taxi and felt that the passengers ought to be checked. One of them indeed had drugs on him, about 600g of heroin, hidden under his trouser legs. I immediately arrested him and arranged to have him charged in court."

Chandran later became the commanding officer of Customs at Woodlands Checkpoint in 1991. He recalled how he handled the introduction of the Goods and Service Tax (GST) in 1994:

"I had to come up with a plan for implementing GST payments at Woodlands Checkpoint. We

were worried that it would cause long traffic jams, especially at the cargo side. So we came up with the idea of having enclosed booths for the officers, with cameras and computer terminals at the platform. The drivers did not have to get off their lorries to clear their permits. Instead, they could do it directly at the platform. We also implemented the new electronic TradeNet system, so nobody had to actually physically pay GST at the checkpoint. So come GST day, everybody was waiting to see what would happen at Woodlands, to see if there would be a jam. Nothing happened. The system was so good that clearance was quick and efficient. The Minister for Finance came to see the situation himself when he heard that there was no jam. He did not believe it! I was awarded the National Day Public Administration Medal for having ensured the successful implementation of GST collection at the Woodlands Checkpoint."

Mandai Orchid Garden

After the war, Mandai Road, which was earlier known more for farms and quarries, evolved into a recreational destination. The first attraction in the area was Mandai Orchid Garden, which was established by John Laycock (1887-1960), a lawyer and orchid cultivator who developed popular new hybrids such as *Arachnis* Maggie Oei. To house his growing orchid collection, Laycock acquired land in Mandai in 1950, where he opened Mandai Orchid Garden in 1951.

After Laycock's death, his daughter Amy and her husband John Ede developed the garden into a major exporter of cut flowers. The garden had two sections: one grew flowers for export, while the other displayed rare and special orchids. It also had a Water Garden with ornamental plants growing next to a natural stream.

The garden won many awards for its orchids in the 1960s and 1970s. Its success also encouraged farmers in Mandai to grow orchids instead of raising pigs. This helped to boost their income as pork prices were falling during that period. By 1980, Mandai was among the most important orchid-growing areas in Singapore.



John Laycock, 1950s
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of
National Archives of Singapore



*Tien Suharto, Indonesia's First Lady, and John Ede at
Mandai Orchid Garden, 1974*
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of
National Archives of Singapore

In the 1990s, the orchid sector suffered a decline, as many farms had to make way for redevelopment. Mandai Orchid Garden was later sold in 2003 and the new owners renovated the garden and added new facilities such as a café and an arts-and-craft centre. The garden closed in 2011 and its land is now undergoing redevelopment as Bird Paradise, a new wildlife attraction next to Singapore Zoo.

Singapore Zoo

Bird Paradise is the newest addition to a family of attractions that began as Singapore Zoo. Located at the end of Mandai Lake Road, the zoo was the brainchild of Dr Ong Swee Law, then chairman of PUB. In 1968, Ong suggested the idea of setting up a zoo to provide a recreational and educational facility for Singaporeans.

The Singapore Zoological Gardens, a public company formed to run the zoo, was then established in 1971, with Ong as chairman. Singapore Zoo was officially opened by then Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Dr Goh Keng Swee on 27 June 1973. Unlike most other zoos then, it featured an “open zoo” concept with uncaged enclosures that resemble the animals’ natural habitats.

By November 1974, Singapore Zoo had welcomed its millionth visitor. It grew to become a top attraction in Singapore for both



Entrance to the Singapore Zoo, 1980s
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

locals and tourists. One of its most famous offerings was *Breakfast with an Orang Utan*, which was launched in 1982 and featured Ah Meng, a female orang-utan who became the zoo's icon.

The next major milestone for the zoo was the opening of the Night Safari, the world's first nocturnal wildlife park, in 1994. River Safari (renamed River Wonders in 2021), a showcase of freshwater habitats, subsequently opened in 2014. Today, the zoo has more than 4,200 animals from over 300 species. In the near future, two new wildlife parks will open next to the zoo: Bird Paradise (which will replace Jurong Bird Park) and Rainforest Wild (a rainforest adventure park).

Shell at Woodlands

Today, Woodlands is home to various industries that manufacture items such as furniture and food products. This industrial legacy dates back to the early 20th century, when pineapple canneries operated at Kranji Road.



Shell's Woodlands oil depot, viewed from the railway track near Kampong Mandai Kechil, 1989
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Shell's lubricants plant in Woodlands North, 1963
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

One of the first multinational companies to have a presence at Woodlands was Shell. In 1930, Shell opened an oil depot at Woodlands Road consisting of tanks that stored petrol and kerosene, which were transferred from a jetty near the Causeway. In 1962, Shell also opened a lubricants plant in Woodlands North, which produced more than 120 types of lubricants used in vehicles and machinery.

Long-time Woodlands resident Kamal Abu Serah worked at this lubricants plant in the 1980s. He recalled:

"I was working part-time at the Shell refinery in the 1980s while waiting for my O-level results. The site is now vacant. The ship comes to the Shell jetty with raw oil and the factory then refined it. After refining, they filled the oil into tins, packed the tins into a pallet and shipped it out to the Shell stations. My job was in the production line: filling the tin, closing the cap and placing it into the pallet."

Shell's Woodlands depot closed in 1991 when the company opened a new facility in Jurong. The site now houses a semiconductor factory owned by GlobalFoundries. Meanwhile, the lubricants plant closed in 2017 when Shell opened a new factory in Tuas.

Other factories and industrial estates

Another prominent Woodlands factory was owned by Metal Box, a British company that produced cans and other food packaging. Opened in 1951, the Metal Box factory could produce 75 million cans a year and supplied nearby customers such as pineapple canneries in Kranji and Johor.

One of Metal Box's customers was Union Pte Ltd, a beverage factory which opened off Woodlands Road in 1969 to produce soft drinks such as Pepsi, Mirinda and Schweppes. This factory closed in 1974 but its building (566 Woodlands Road) still exists and houses other businesses including a restaurant. Meanwhile, the Metal Box factory closed in the late 1990s and was later demolished.

Another former Woodlands factory was Federal Chemical Industries, located south of the old Woodlands Town Centre. This factory opened in 1964 and manufactured MSG (monosodium glutamate, a flavour enhancer) under the brand Vesop. This factory was demolished in the 1990s and is now part of Woodlands Wafer Fab Park.



President Yusof Ishak visiting the Metal Box factory, 1967
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Union Pte Ltd factory, 1969
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Vesop vegetable gourmet powder, 1950s
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

In the 1960s, Jurong Town Corporation (JTC) began to develop the Senoko and Sungei Kadut industrial estates. Senoko was formerly a swampy area within the former naval base, which was taken over by JTC ahead of Britain's military withdrawal from Singapore.

By 1971, Senoko's swamps had been reclaimed and converted into an industrial area for marine, metalworking, and later, food manufacturing companies. Today, Senoko is known for food companies such as Tee Yih Jia, Thong Siek, Kikkoman, Bee Cheng Hiang and Yakult. To provide energy for these industries, Senoko Power Station opened in 1977 as Singapore's fifth and largest power plant. Next to it is Senoko Waste-to-Energy Plant, which opened in 1992 to process municipal waste into ash while producing electricity.

In 1966, the Sungei Kadut area in Kranji was converted into an estate for sawmills and woodworking factories, which relocated here to reduce noise and pollution in other parts of Singapore. Over the years, as more companies established themselves in Sungei Kadut, this area became known for its furniture factories. To support this sector, JTC opened the International Furniture Centre at Sungei Kadut Loop in 2007 and JTC Furniture Hub (now trendspace) in 2018. In the future, Sungei Kadut and Senoko will form part of a Northern Agri-Tech and Food Corridor that encompasses Sungei Kadut Eco-District, Woodlands Regional Centre, Woodlands North and Senoko Food Zone.



Senoko Power Station, 1986
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

FORMER VILLAGES IN WOODLANDS

In the past, Woodlands was home to many traditional communities. Along its shore were coastal villages which faced the Johor Strait. Further inland, Mandai and Marsiling offered a livelihood to settlers who established thriving farmsteads. While these settlements no longer exist, their legacy remains in local landmarks and community institutions such as The Church of St Anthony of Padua, Hong Tho Bilw Temple and Masjid An-Nur.

Mandai Catholic Village

Established in the late 1920s off Mandai Road, this village has a unique history. Its inhabitants originated from Pek Nay, a Catholic Teochew village in China's Guangdong Province. In 1927, when civil war broke out, Pek Nay was attacked by communist forces, forcing the villagers to flee their homes. Many boarded ships at Swatow to escape the war.

In 1928, hundreds of Catholic Teochews from Pek Nay arrived in Singapore, where they were cared for by Fr. Stephen Lee (1896-1956), parish priest of the Church of Saints Peter and Paul, as well as prominent Catholic Teochews such as Paul Lee Kheng Guan, Lee Kheng Seng and Wee Cheng Soon. Many of these refugees

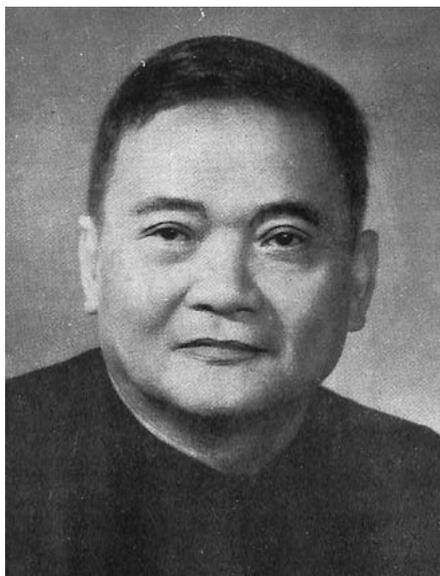
continued to Melaka but an estimated 20 families remained as they had nowhere else to go. They were eventually granted land in Mandai, where they established farms to grow pineapples and vegetables.

This settlement became known as Hong Kah Sua, Teochew for "Catholic Village". In 1933, Fr. Lee, with help from Paul Lee, built a chapel in the village, which was dedicated to Anthony of Padua, a Portuguese-Franciscan saint devoted to the poor and lost. Fr. Lee also opened a school, which became Cheng Chi Primary School in 1932. The main road through the village was later named Stephen Lee Road to honour him.

Mathias Lee (b. 1932), Paul Lee's grandson, recalls visiting the village with his grandfather in the 1950s. He shared:



Chapel of St Anthony of Padua, 1950s
Courtesy of Cyprian Lim



Fr. Stephen Lee, 1950s-1960s
Courtesy of Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore

"When I was seven to eight years old, I would follow my grandpa about once a month to Mandai. In those days, the road to Mandai was not a highway – it was a two-lane road. To get into the village, there was a very bumpy dirt path and you had to go up a rather steep entrance. All I did there was run around, but it was an adventure. The houses were not crowded together; they had adequate land to grow fruits like rambutans and durians, and rear chicken."

"We usually went to Lau Koo's [granduncle's] house. It was a very traditional attap house with a main hall with two chairs and a table in the centre. My grandfather, being the leader of the kampong, would sit there and the villagers would come to pay respect and some would give him eggs and fruits."



Sports Day at Cheng Chi School in the Mandai Catholic Village, 1950s- 1960s
Courtesy of Cyprian Lim

Maria Theresa Lee Hui Eng (b. 1932), a former resident, shared these memories of the village:

"I was born in the Mandai Catholic Village. Originally our house was located along Mandai Road, but during the war, my parents moved further in to be safe. My house was at 216E Stephen Lee Road."

Describing the area in the 1950s, Lee said: "Last time, Mandai Road was very windy and had very dense forests all around. As kids, when we went through the area, it was scariest to be the first and the last in the line. There were many snakes and also monkeys."

Lee first studied at Cheng Chi School, but later attended St Nicholas' Girls School at

Victoria Street. Describing the daily commute, she said: "Way before sunrise, we took a bus from Mandai to Queen Street and then ran to Victoria Street. We had to be at the bus-stop by 6.30am. It was a 30-minute walk to the bus-stop to catch the No. 3 Green Bus for an hour-long ride." After completing her studies, Lee returned to Cheng Chi School as a teacher until 1970.

The village's population grew to several hundred after the war. The old chapel become too small. As a result, their parish priest Fr. Joachim Teng (1911-1994) selected a new site at 12-J Stephen Lee Road, where a new and larger Church of St Anthony of Padua was built and completed in 1960.

Henry Cordeiro (b. 1956), who resides in Serangoon Gardens, has fond memories of this church as he was married there in 1990. He shared:

"My wife Anna Tan is Teochew and her family lived opposite the zoo in Mandai at Stephen Lee Road. Her grandmother was among the original folk who were resettled there. They were formerly pig farmers, but later grew orchids as it brought in better income."



Church of St Anthony of Padua in Mandai, 1965
Courtesy of Henry Cordeiro



Interior of The Church of St Anthony of Padua, 1990
Courtesy of Henry Cordeiro

By 1976, St Anthony's Church of Padua had more than 1,400 parishioners, who also included residents of Woodlands New Town. To cater to these Catholics, the church organised catechism (religious learning) classes in Marsiling and even held Mass at a void deck in Block 6 until end-1982. The church also chartered buses to bring Catholic residents to Mandai for services.

Fr. John Khoo (b. 1940), parish priest of the church from 1982-2002, recalled his time at Mandai:

"At that time, Mandai was still a very rural area and the villagers were not very well-off. The children had to help in the farms, so church services were often held very late, after everyone had completed their work. After services, I often played football with the children on a piece of land next to the church which I had turned into a football field."

Fr. Khoo encouraged the community to regard the church as their second home: "The Parish House [priest's residence] was always open and people could come any time. We had indoor games like carrom. I also got teachers from outside the parish to teach English and Maths for free."

This effort to promote English education received a mixed response. "The parents were a bit angry with me because I concentrated on English education," Fr. Khoo revealed. "They needed help in the farms and were afraid that the boys would leave. I told the parents, this will help you one day if you are resettled."

The Mandai Catholic Village was taken over by the government in the early 1990s. Most of the villagers were resettled in flats, and Fr. Khoo helped to build a new Church of St Anthony of Padua at Woodlands Avenue 1, which opened in 1994 (see page 54).

Mandai Tekong Village

Mandai Tekong Village was named after a nearby rubber estate owned by a company called Mandai Tekong. Located north of Mandai Road, the village was known for its vegetables, orchids and fishponds. It had a community centre at the junction of Lorong Gambas and Lorong Lada Merah, which operated from 1963 until 1985. There were also two schools - Sin Hwa Chinese School and Chung Yee Public School - which were active until the mid-1980s.

Anthony Tan (b. 1943) was a resident of Mandai Tekong Village until the 1980s. He shared these memories:

"Mandai Tekong was a very rural and remote village in the Mandai area, all the way to Sembawang in the east and Woodlands in the west. There were 50-60 households. They were farmers who reared chicken and ducks, and also grew vegetables and fruit trees."

"My parents moved there around 1940. During the war, they dug bomb shelters in a hill near the house. When the Japanese came, they wanted to apprehend people for questioning. My father was taken, supposedly as a guide, but he managed to escape and come back."

Describing Mandai Road in the 1960s, Tan said: "There were sundry shops along Mandai Road. In the morning, there were stalls selling fish, vegetables and kueh, which closed by noon. The shops sold sundry items, toiletries and canned goods. Those of us who needed pig feed and other goods would go to these shops."

Pigs raised by Tan's family produced waste that was used to feed fish in their ponds: "We had ponds where we raised *lian yu* (grass



Opening of Mandai Tekong Village Community Centre, 1963
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, National Archives of Singapore

carp) and *song yu* (bighead carp). There were also ponds for *tor sah* (catfish) and *loy her* (snakehead), which were wild. Each year, we could get \$100-200 by selling the fish."

Attending classes at Cheng Chi School was an ordeal. Tan recalled: "It took almost an hour to reach the school and many stray dogs would come after us. I was very reluctant to attend school then as it was tough. When it rained, it was all wet and muddy. We didn't have uniforms or schoolbags - my mother would sew together coarse bags that were used to store flour to hold my books."

Tan's family were Catholics who attended St Anthony's Church. He shared: "Every year during St Anthony's Feast Day, there was a big festival during which people would slaughter pigs and poultry for a feast. Otherwise, we hardly ate pork."

The residents of Mandai Tekong Village were resettled in the early 1980s, and the present Seletar Expressway (SLE) runs through part of the former village. The name of the village survives at Woodlands Avenue 5 in a neighbourhood park called Mandai Tekong Park.



Villagers at a fishpond in Mandai Tekong Village, 1970s
Courtesy of Anthony Tan Mui Hua and Cyprian Lim

Kampong Hock Choon

Kampong Hock Choon ("Fuchun", which means "prosperous spring" in Mandarin) was a large rural community established before the war in the present Woodlands Avenue 3 area. The main road through the village, which was originally a side road branching off Marsiling Road, was named Hock Choon Road in 1955. In 1962, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew opened Hock Choon Community Centre at Lorong Chikar, which became the first rural community centre to provide veterinary and agricultural services in addition to social and recreational facilities. The village also had a school called Nan Chiaw Public School, which was active until 1980.

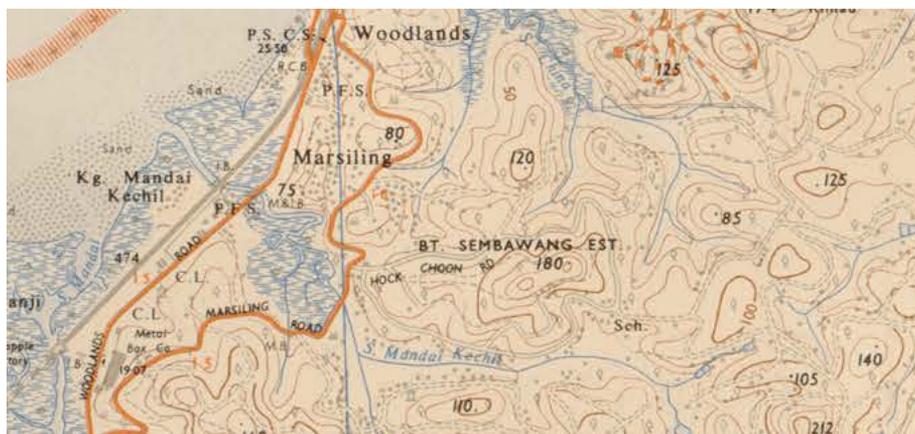
According to former resident Oh Kian Tee, who was born in the 1970s, most of the villagers originated from Anxi county in China's Fujian province. He said:

"As a boy, I resided in the northern part of Singapore in a village called Fuchun near Marsiling. In Malay, it was called Kampong Hock Choon. Our village was the first to have a rural community centre opened by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1962. Near the community centre, there were several sundry shops and a primary school. One well-known shop was owned by Yang Pi Shi, who was also our village head. He passed away at the age of 108."

Oh recalled how Yang helped his fellow villagers: "Mr Yang helped to mediate between

villagers who had disagreements. He also had an Austin car and often drove women to the hospital to give birth. Our village was very far from Kandang Kerbau Hospital, so it was very difficult to reach the hospital without a car. Mr Yang also helped to drive villagers who were very ill to the hospital."

Oh also recalled how his mother went as far as Johor Bahru to hawk her vegetables: "Around 1963 to 1964, my mother would sell her vegetables at the old Wong Ah Fook market in Johor Bahru, as she obtained a better price there compared to Marsiling. Some villagers cycled or rode motorcycles, but my mother walked and carried up to 100 *kati* [60 kilograms] of vegetables across the Causeway. She walked about five kilometres from our village to Johor Bahru."



Map showing Hock Choon Road, 1961
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.



Then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his son Lee Hsien Loong at Hock Choon Community Centre, 1963
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Hock Choon Community Centre, 1963
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

The family of another former villager, Jessica Bong (b. 1952), also grew vegetables. In 1977, her father Bong Fu was the first and only farmer in Singapore to successfully grow king-sized cabbages, which were very difficult to cultivate locally. She explained:

“Not many people were growing cabbages then, as it took time. It was not like chye sim which needs just a month. My father obtained seeds from Melaka, as my mother had relatives there who recommended this strain of cabbage. My family were the only ones who could grow these huge cabbages. It was a source of pride for my



Bong Fu with his cabbages, 1978
Courtesy of Jessica Bong



Jessica Bong (second from left) with her sisters, dressed for working in the field, 1960s
Courtesy of Jessica Bong

father, as the newspapers and people from the Primary Production Department came to see our farm and cabbages.”

Bong and her siblings did their share of work in the farm. She recalled: “We wore rubber boots to work in the fields. Our shirts had long sleeves and we wore hats, as we wanted to keep our skin healthy and not get tanned. We also wore long pants to avoid insect bites and thorns. We spent six to seven hours in the farm every day after school: watering, fertilising, weeding, removing pests and harvesting.”

Bong’s family also grew French beans, which had to be harvested early in the morning as the buyer would arrive at about seven: “We had to pick the beans at 4-5am using candlelight. Due to the movement of the candles, people passing by thought that there were ghosts or spirits in our area.”

Bong’s family left the village in the early 1980s when the land was redeveloped. Hock Choon Community Centre closed in 1981. Later, a new Fuchun Community Centre was established at Woodlands Street 11 in 1988. The centre was subsequently replaced by the present Fuchun Community Club at Woodlands Street 31, which opened in 2003. Another legacy of the village is Hong Tho Bilw Temple, a temple located at Marsiling Industrial Estate (see page 57).

Kampong Kranji

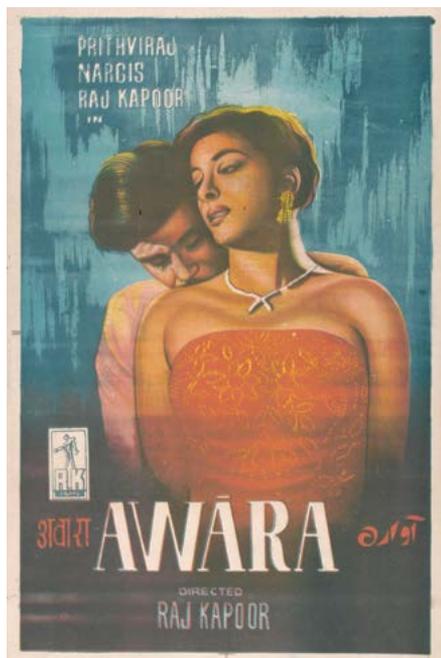
Kampong Kranji (also spelt as Kampong Keranji) was a coastal village located off Kranji Road. This village was probably established in the early 20th century and was marked in a 1924 map. It was later known as Kampong Wak Selat, after Jalan Wak Selat, a side-road that led to the village. Wak Selat (*Wak* is a Malay honorific for an elderly man) was believed to have been the village’s founder and oldest resident.

Kampong Kranji had a *surau* (Muslim prayer hall) as well as a cemetery where residents as well as Muslims from other villages in

Woodlands were buried. Another public facility was Kranji Community Centre, which opened near the junction of Woodlands and Kranji Roads in 1963 and closed in 1988.

According to former villager Ali bin Salim (b. 1948), the community centre stood on a site that was earlier an open-air cinema. In his memoir *Kampong Keranji 1948-1973*, Ali wrote: "This was where I used to watch various Hollywood, Malay, Indonesian, Tamil and Hindi films. I still remember the Hindi film with its song *Awāra hoon*, which was fantastic and everybody in the village sang it."

The area was also a location for two notable films: P Ramlee's *Pendekar Bujang Lapok* (1959) and Jamil Sulong's *Si Tanggang* (1961). Ali wrote: "The filming of *Pendekar Bujang Lapok* took place in 1959 at the Kranji coast, next to an old jetty called Hujung Batu. I was then in Standard 5. The filming required many extras, so it was a chance for the villagers to earn extra income."



Poster for the Hindi film *Awāra*, 1951
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

The village's eastern end faced Sungei Mandai Besar, where there was a railway bridge. Ali recalled: "This railway bridge was where I swam. I used the bridge as a platform to dive into the water like Tarzan. The base of the bridge had a large steel platform, where I used to sit to watch the trains passing by overhead."

Ali's parents had moved to Kampong Kranji in the 1930s. He recalled that there were many Chinese houses and shops along nearby roads such as Jalan Chuang Seng and Jalan Nam Seng and wrote: "During the Hungry Ghost month, a stage was erected on an open area. Every night, crowds would gather, including myself and other Malay residents, to see the wayang performances. I watched it so often that I became familiar with the stories."

In the early 1970s, Ali's house and a few others at Jalan Surau in Kampong Kranji were demolished and he moved to a flat in Marsiling. The houses at Jalan Wak Selat survived until 1993, when the village was demolished.



Kampong Wak Selat, 1993
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



House at Kampong Wak Selat, 1993
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Kampong Sungei Cina

Another coastal village was Kampong Sungei Cina, which was located near the former Shell lubricants plant.

Former resident Koraisha binte Abdul Kadir (b. 1955) moved to Kampong Sungei Cina from Toa Payoh after her marriage.

"I married my husband in 1973 and followed him to Sungei Cina. My husband's house was on the land side, but when you went further in, you could see the sea and Sungei Cina. Our kampong's location is now Block 217 or 218. My house was just facing the Shell factory gate, where they placed all the drums."

"My husband had his own boat. I used to follow him in the boat with my second daughter. We went fishing in the sea and he would throw the net and get ikan duri [a spiny catfish]. Sometimes, we caught crabs, ikan belanak [mullet] and ikan tamban [sardines]. We brought the fish home to cook."

Kampong Sungei Cina survived until the mid-1970s, when the residents were resettled in Woodlands. The village was then redeveloped into the Marsiling Crescent area. Koraisha shared: "Around 1975, everyone had to move out. We moved to Block 4 in Marsiling, which is still there. When I was at Block 4, Marsiling Market wasn't open yet, so people would sell fish and vegetables under the void deck. It was actually illegal – government inspectors would come, people would start shouting "Teh-Gu!" and everybody would run away. The area that is now Causeway Point was then all jungle, where we could find *kedodong* [a local fruit] and *pucuk ubi* [tapioca leaves]."

Kampong Lorong Fatimah

Kampong Lorong Fatimah was located west of the Causeway. Established around 1930, the village had a narrow lane that ran between the KTM railway line and the Woodlands coast, which was named Lorong Fatimah by the Rural Board in 1957.

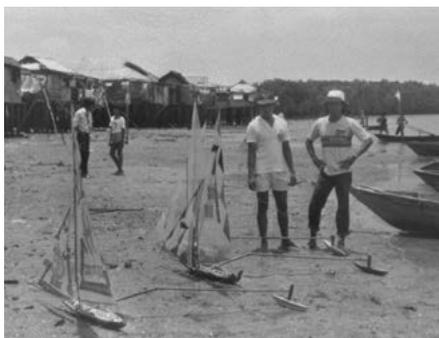
Both the lane and village were named after Hajjah Fatimah binte Haji Haroon (1893-1953), a community leader who owned a house in the village and helped to build a *surau* there.

Hajjah Fatimah was Singapore's first Malay woman to become a Justice of the Peace in 1948. She was also President of the Women's Section of the Singapore Malay Union and sought to improve the educational and social status of Malay women.

The villagers made a living from the sea or worked in nearby industries. They also had a strong tradition of crafting and racing wooden *jong* (small sailing boats) and organised regular races until the 1980s. During such races, contestants would launch their *jong* from the Johor Strait, where the wind would propel the boats towards a finish line.

Rudy Zahiruddin bin Mohamed Omar (b. 1978), a long-time resident of Woodlands, was a frequent visitor to the village. He recalled:

"To enter Kampong Lorong Fatimah, drivers had to go past the old Woodlands Checkpoint and show their passports or ICs. No need to chop for residents. They just needed to show their ICs. Then you pass the checkpoint and there's a small lorong before the Causeway starts. There is another guardpost there and a Cisco officer will check your IC or passport again before you enter the village."



Jong such as these were frequently raced by the residents of Lorong Fatimah, 1989
Harun Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Kampong Lorong Fatimah in the foreground with Woodlands' flats in the background, 1989
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Kampong Lorong Fatimah, 1980s
Courtesy of Sofea @ Noraini Abdul Rahman

"I once attended a wedding there, which was held right beside the railway track. The wedding tent blocked the whole lane, but everyone understood that there was a wedding. You could see the trains zooming past while you were eating."

"Kampong Lorong Fatimah was to me the most beautiful kampong in Singapore. There were two types of houses: one was on the land, the other was on the water. My mom's cousin's house was on top of the water. I had to walk on the planks to reach the house. They looked flimsy but were quite strong actually."

One former resident whose home straddled both land and sea is Nurul Munirah Abdul Samad (b. 1984). Part of her house stood on dry ground, but the kitchen area was raised on stilts above the tide. She explained: "Most of our house was on land, but there was a connecting bridge to a small hut over the water. During high tides, you could jump out of the window into the sea."

Munirah's grandfather Haji Jaafar Sarpan had bought the house in the 1960s and extended it to provide more room to receive guests. Munirah recalled her father Abdul Samad Haji Jaafar telling her: "At times, your grandfather and I had to swim below our kitchen to check whether the stilts were still strong."

Jamilah Binte Abdul Hamid, Munirah's mother, recalled: "Our house was very near the customs. We liked it because we could go to JB every day - we just walked across anytime we liked."

Munirah has fond memories of playing by the sea with her neighbours: "We would always meet up and have all sorts of games. Right after school we would go fishing and barbeque the fish in front of the house. We had games like marbles and catching spiders, or we would climb up rambutan trees - my brother also borrowed somebody's boat to go into the mangroves."

The fun and games ended at sundown. Munirah explained: "In the kampong, we wouldn't be playing after dark. We would make sure that all windows were shut. There was a strong belief, because we were surrounded by forests, that

a lot of spirits were roaming around, so people would close their windows and doors."

The residents of Kampong Lorong Fatimah had to relocate in 1990 as the land was needed for a new Woodlands Checkpoint. Before they left, the villagers organised a final *Pesta Laut* (Sea Carnival) with *jong* races and sampan tugs-of-war, which drew more than a thousand people. Rudy recalled attending this final hurrah: "It was a *pesta* to commemorate and mark the end of the kampong. It had events such as boat and *jong* races, and a competition where you had to climb up a pole lubricated with oil to get a prize."



Munirah's elder sister Alizah bte Abdul Samad, her mother Jamaliah binte Abdul Hamid and her elder brother Sanusi bin Abdul Samad at Kampong Lorong Fatimah, 1980s
Courtesy of Nurul Munirah Abdul Samad



Munirah (centre) with her elder brother Sanusi (left) and friend Cheli at Kampong Lorong Fatimah, 1980s
Courtesy of Nurul Munirah Abdul Samad

RELIGIOUS LANDMARKS OF WOODLANDS

Woodlands' former villages made way for new housing and checkpoint developments by the 1990s. However, the religious institutions that once served these rural settlements have survived and continue to cater to the spiritual and social needs of the community. Today, these houses of worship have become prominent and important landmarks of Woodlands that also help to foster a sense of community and kampong spirit within a modern housing estate.

Masjid An-Nur

6 Admiralty Road

With its 55-metre-high minaret and striking blue tiles, Masjid An-Nur is one of Woodlands' most prominent landmarks. It was inaugurated on 20 April 1980 by then Senior Minister of State (Foreign Affairs) Rahim Ishak. "An-Nur" means "The Light" in Arabic and refers to Allah who illuminates.

The mosque's origin dates back to the 1960s, when the residents of Kampong Lorong Fatimah, Kampong Mandai Kechil, Kampong Kranji and Kampong Sungei Cina formed a committee to build a mosque and began to raise funds. By 1978, the community had raised nearly \$36,000, and with the aid of MUIS' Mosque Building Fund, construction began in November 1978.

Designed by Tony Tan Keng Joo, a HDB architect, the mosque features a 14-storey high minaret. The prayer hall has a *mimbar* (pulpit) made from *chengal* (a hardwood) with batik-like patterns and a golden dome crafted in Kelantan. The dome has small windows that catch and reflect light, alluding to the name of the mosque. The mosque can accommodate

up to 6,000 worshippers and has ramps, toilets and lifts for the handicapped and elderly. It also runs a community programme called *Qaryah* ("neighbourhood" in Arabic), which organises activities such as *kenduri* (communal meals), Tarawih prayers and Islamic singing in different parts of Woodlands.



Masjid An-Nur, 1980
Courtesy of Housing & Development Board



Worshippers during prayers at Masjid An-Nur's worship hall, with its elaborate mimbar, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Haji Taib bin Kasmani (b. 1934), a longtime Woodlands resident, has been volunteering with the mosque since its opening. He shared: “The mosque was newly completed in 1980. Back then, during Ramadan and Hari Raya Puasa, the entire community would gather here and *gotong-royong* [work together] to cook meals for everyone. Even today, people still do this.”

“Many Malaysians also came here while they were working here. They would stop by on their way to work, and before they returned to Johor Bahru after work. Before Masjid An- Nur was built, there was no mosque in Woodlands, only small surau. Before the mosque was ready, we celebrated Hari Raya under the blocks or in an open area. I used to come to the mosque almost every day, as the mosque is like a second home to me.”

Masjid Yusof Ishak

10 Woodlands Drive 17

Opened in 2017, Masjid Yusof Ishak serves the Woodlands South area. It was named after Singapore’s first president to honour his contributions to nation-building and promoting a harmonious multicultural society. The mosque contains a heritage wall featuring Yusof Ishak’s life and legacy.

Masjid Yusof Ishak can accommodate about 4,500 worshippers. Its architecture blends traditional Islamic motifs with Nusantara (Southeast Asian) elements such as verandas and eaves. The entrance has benches to facilitate informal gatherings and discussions, similar to the *anjung* (porch) of a traditional Malay house. It was designed by Lee Kut Cheng of RSP Architects.



Masjid Yusof Ishak, 2022

Courtesy of National Heritage Board

The Church of St Anthony of Padua

25 Woodlands Avenue 1



Church of St Anthony of Padua, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

The Church of St Anthony of Padua traces its history to the former Mandai Catholic Village and first Church of St Anthony at Stephen Lee Road, which closed in 1993. The congregation then moved to Woodlands Avenue 1, where the present church was officially opened by Archbishop Gregory Yong on 23 April 1994.

Designed by architect Clement G Hendricks, the church features a non-traditional fan-shaped worship hall which has no pillars so that worshippers have a clear view of the altar no matter where they stand. The exterior walls have 12 lance-shaped arches, which were added during renovations in 2019. Symbolising the Gospels' 12 apostles, each arch has an oculus (eye-like feature) inspired by the rose windows of the Cathedral of Lisbon (the birthplace of St Anthony).

The church entrance has a bronze statue of St Anthony cradling the infant Jesus, which is an exact replica of the original statue in Padua, Italy. Inside are two pillars with statues of Mary and Joseph, which came from the old church in Mandai. The church's Altar Table was the one used by Pope John Paul II to celebrate Mass at the National Stadium during his visit to Singapore in 1986. The table was then donated by the Redemptorists (a Catholic order) to the Church of St Anthony of Padua.

Sri Arasakesari Sivan Temple

25 Sungei Kadut Avenue

Sri Arasakesari Sivan Temple was officially opened in 2005 by then Education Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam. It has a history that dates back to 1924, when a shrine to Lord Siva and other deities was established at Woodlands Road by Ceylonese Tamils. The land on which the shrine stood was then donated by V Kathiraso, a Johor Bahru resident, in 1966, and a brick temple was built in 1968.

The original temple was the only Hindu temple in Singapore to have a Lord Siva shrine under



Original temple and pond at Woodlands Road, 1980s
Courtesy of Sri Arasakesari Sivan Temple



Bo tree at the original temple, 1980s-1990s
Courtesy of Sri Arasakesari Sivan Temple

a Bo tree as well as a ceremonial pond. During festivals, devotees would immerse themselves in this pond to receive blessings.

Navaratnam Karunakaran (b. 1947), the temple's chairman, recalled: "The temple was originally located just two bus-stops from the Checkpoint. It was formed about a century ago, when a devotee made a shrine under a Bo tree. The pond was originally a small stream. There was a hill behind the temple and water would run down, so they made a small pond to divert the water."

In 1997, the temple had to relocate to Sungei Kadut to make way for a semiconductor park. The new location was next to a canal, which was then fully covered up to provide more space. "We had to cover the drain in front, like how the big drain at Orchard Road outside Mandarin Hotel was covered", explained Karunakaran, who added that the grounds were made to resemble a woodland with many trees surrounding the temple. "I wanted the temple to be filled with greenery. Not a single cent was spent. It was all done by volunteers who brought in saplings from Mandai and Lim Chu Kang."

Besides well-known festivals such as Deepavali and the Tamil New Year, this temple is known for Aadi Amavasai or the No-Moon festival. Held on the night before the new moon appears in the month of Aadi, this festival involves special prayers and offerings of sesame seeds and dried grass to one's ancestors. Another important festival is Maha Sivarathiri, when thousands of devotees offer prayers to Lord Siva during his dance of creation and destruction, and enjoy a variety of food served through the night.



Devotees at the temple during the No-Moon festival, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board



Sri Arasakesari Sivan Temple, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Sri Siva-Krishna Temple

31 Marsiling Rise

Sri Siva-Krishna Temple was founded in 1962 at 832 Sembawang (now Canberra Residences) by P Kunjukrishnan, who erected an unauthorised shed in which he placed several shrines and deities. Taxi drivers then began to gather at the area and it became a popular site of devotion for Hindus in Sembawang. After the founder died, K Velautham brought in more deities and expanded the shrine, which was eventually named Sri Siva-Krishna Temple.

In 1982, when its original site was redeveloped, the temple relocated to a Marsiling Rise with the help of then Sembawang Member of Parliament Dr Tony Tan. The building was originally a makeshift structure, but in 1986, a new management committee, led by the temple's then president Arumugam Sivalingam, was formed and raised funds to build a proper temple, which was completed and consecrated on 1 September 1996.

This is the only Hindu temple in Singapore dedicated to Lord Siva-Krishna, a deity with the attributes of both Lord Siva and Lord Krishna. This deity is housed in the temple's main sanctum, before which are small statues of the deity's two mounts: Sri Nandi (the bull) of Lord Siva and Sri Garuda (a bird-like being) of Lord Krishna.

In March 2022, the temple opened a four-storey annex building with a multi-purpose hall, dance studios and classrooms. Temple president T Suresh Kumar shared that all members of the community, irrespective of religion, are welcome to organise activities and classes at the annex building. He added: "The notion that most people carry is that this is a Hindu temple and is only for Indians and Hindus. Being a multiracial society, we don't want to be so restricted. We would like to work with the community centres, various self-help groups and the grassroots to see how we can help the community as a whole."

The temple also organises a chariot procession that has become an annual spectacle in Woodlands. Held every April, the main deity is placed in a chariot that is driven around the estate. Devotees gather at various parts of Marsiling, Woodgrove, Admiralty and Woodlands to welcome the chariot and receive the deity's blessings.



Original makeshift temple after it shifted to Marsiling from Sembawang, 1980s
Courtesy of Sri Siva-Krishna Temple



Statue of the presiding deity of the temple, Lord Siva-Krishna, 1996
Courtesy of Sri Siva-Krishna Temple



Sri Siva-Krishna Temple, with the new annex on the right, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Hong Tho Bilw Temple (凤图庙)

31 Marsiling industrial Estate Road 3

Hong Tho Bilw Temple (also known as Feng Tu Miao) was originally located in Kampong Hock Choon by a lane called Lorong Chikar (now Woodlands Town Park East). The main deity is Xie Tian Da Di (also known as Guan Di Gong), a famous general known for his righteousness and loyalty who was deified as a god of war and wealth. Other deities in the temple include Wu Ying Shen Jiang (the Five Battalion Commanders), Guanyin the Goddess of Mercy and Tua Pek Kong.

The temple was founded by Yang Lin, a man from Anxi in China's Fujian province. In the 1920s, when China suffered from civil strife, Yang dreamt that Guan Di Gong ordered him to leave for Nanyang (the South Seas). He then left for Singapore with his family and a statue of Guan Di Gong just before soldiers reached his village. The Yangs settled in Yishun initially but later moved to Kampong Hock Choon.

During World War II, many villagers were imprisoned by the Japanese in a rubber factory. Fortunately, a female villager managed to explain that they were simple farmers and persuaded the soldiers to let them go. The villagers regarded this as a blessing from Guan Di Gong. Later, five other villagers were captured and tortured by the Japanese. They prayed to Guan Di Gong and they were

eventually released. After the war, the grateful villagers built a temple to Guan Di Gong at Lorong Chikar, which was completed in the late 1940s.

Former Hock Choon resident Jessica Bong has vivid memories of this temple: "The villagers would all go to Feng Tu Miao for festivals and whenever there were Hokkien opera performances. The operas would start in the late afternoon, and we children would be in no mood to study. People from other villages as far as Ulu Sembawang would come in lorries to watch these performances."

One of these visitors was Anthony Tan (b. 1943) of Mandai Tekong Village, who recalled: "In Woodlands, there was an important temple called Feng Tu Miao, where they worshipped Guan Di Gong. Every year, they had an important ritual and the villagers would walk there to watch the wayang performance. It took about an hour because of all the hills



Hong Tho Bilw Temple at its original site in Kampong Hock Choon, 1980s
Courtesy of Hong Tho Bilw Temple



Main shrine at Hong Tho Bilw Temple, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

and streams. We were Catholics but we still watched as we had no other source of entertainment.”

After Kampong Hock Choon was redeveloped in the 1980s, the temple relocated to Marsiling Industrial Estate, where the present building was completed in 1996. The original statue of Guan Di Gong is enshrined in the main hall, while the compound outside has a rock (next to the shrine of the Tiger Lord) that formerly served as a cornerstone of the original temple.

Shang Di Miao Chai Kong Temple

(上帝廟濟公瓊)

10 Marsiling Industrial Estate Road 3

Shang Di Miao Chai Kong Temple was founded in 1935 by the residents of Lorong Woodlands Kechil, who raised funds to build a small hillside temple. The main deity is Xuan Tian Shang Di, a Taoist god who controls the elements. Other deities include Tian Hou Niang Niang (also known as Mazu) and Hua Guang Da Di (the Heavenly Marshal).

Lorong Woodlands Kechil was a rural lane which cut through a village of residents from different dialects. The area had rubber estates and a few hundred houses whose inhabitants grew vegetables and raised pigs and poultry.

During the Japanese Occupation, the area around the temple, where villagers sought

shelter, was left untouched by the Japanese. Hence, the villagers believed that the temple's deities helped to protect them from harm. In 1946, the villagers also erected a wayang stage at the foot of the hill below the temple, which was also used as a classroom for Yi Ming School.

In the past, the temple regularly organised a grand procession, which featured lion dances and acrobats who accompanied the deities as they were carried through the Woodlands area to bless the residents. This tradition continued until the late 1980s, when the Lorong Woodlands Kechil area was redeveloped. In 1990, Shang Di Miao merged with Ji Gong Temple from Yio Chu Kang to become the present Shang Di Miao Chai Kong Temple, which was completed in 1994. The temple underwent renovation in 2021 and installed ramps to improve access to the temple.



Festival at the original Shang Di Miao in Lorong Woodlands Kechil, 1980s

Courtesy of Shang Di Miao Chai Kong Temple



Main shrine at Shang Di Miao Chai Kong Temple, 2022

Courtesy of National Heritage Board

WOODLANDS TODAY AND TOMORROW



The first HDB flats (Blocks 1-5) in Marsiling during construction, at the bottom left are flats built for KD Malaya staff, 1972
 Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

The transformation of Woodlands into a modern estate began in the 1970s and continues today. At the same time, Woodlands' role as Singapore's gateway to Johor has expanded with the building of new checkpoint facilities and rail connections. Despite these developments, this northern corner of Singapore still stays true to its "woodlands" character with ample parks and coastal greenery.

New town in Woodlands

The idea of developing a modern housing estate in Woodlands dates back to 1956, when the government announced that Woodlands would be the "first of the three new towns to be developed under the Singapore Master Plan", which aimed at tackling overcrowding

and poor housing by creating satellite towns outside the city. After Singapore gained internal self-rule in 1959, these plans were put on hold as the government focused on areas such as Queenstown and Toa Payoh.

In 1966, the Housing & Development Board (HDB) announced plans to develop Woodlands into a new town with 50,000 flats. The name "Woodlands" was chosen due to the area's wooded appearance and undulating terrain, as seen from the Johor Strait. Construction of Woodlands New Town began in 1971 and the first flats in Marsiling (Blocks 1-5) were completed in 1973. To provide public amenities, Marsiling Market was completed in 1975, along with nearby shops, a post office, a community centre and a bus terminal.



Flats at Marsiling Drive, 1974

Courtesy of Housing & Development Board



Marsiling Post Office, 1976

Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Rudy Zahiruddin bin Mohamed Omar (b. 1978) grew up watching Woodlands' development. He shared:

"I was born in Block 17 Marsiling Road, near the market. It was a rental flat. Blocks 1-5 and the blocks surrounding Marsiling Market were the first flats to be built. Blocks 3 and 4 are rental flats today. The next batch of flats, Blocks 22-37, were built opposite Masjid An-Nur."

Rudy later moved to a flat between Admiralty Road and Marsiling Lane: "In Marsiling, after building Blocks 201-206, they started building Blocks 210-218. I witnessed the construction of these blocks as a boy. From my window I could see all the bulldozers. Earlier, it was a forest and Kampong Sungei Cina."

In the mid-1970s, HDB also began work on a new "frontier town centre" for Woodlands. Located just before Woodlands Checkpoint, this town centre was planned as a commercial and recreational hub with government offices, banks, shops, eateries, supermarkets, a hawkers centre, a bus terminal and cinemas. Completed in 1979-1980, Woodlands Town Centre also had flats above the shops.



Aerial view of Woodlands undergoing redevelopment, the low flats in the foreground are quarters for KD Malaya, 1976

Courtesy of Housing & Development Board

One former resident was Koraisha binte Abdul Kadir, who shared:

"I moved to Block 1A Woodlands Town Centre, which has been demolished, in the 1980s. Downstairs, there were shops that sold cakes and clothes. There was also an Oriental Emporium, a hawker centre and a temporary bus interchange with services such as 167 and 180. It was a super busy place with many fruit stalls and shops selling garments. There was also Woodlands Cinema and a bowling alley."



Woodlands Town Centre with the bus terminal in the background, 1986
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Former Woodlands Cinema, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

From "ghost town" to regional centre

In the early 1980s, Woodlands had a reputation of being a "ghost town", as it was far from the city and hence, had relatively few residents compared to other housing

estates. Chandran Kandiah, who bought a flat at Marsiling Drive as it was close to his workplace in the 1970s, recalled:

"Nobody liked to go to Marsiling at that time, as it was an outlying area. So I had a choice of which unit I wanted, and the balcony overlooked the Causeway. I spent 10 years there on the 24th floor. It was wonderful because you got the morning sun. It was a five-room flat and I bought it for \$30,000."

This situation changed in the 1980s and 1990s as new transport links and facilities emerged. In 1986, the Bukit Timah Expressway (BKE) was completed, which connected Woodlands to the city via a non-stop highway. The next milestone was the extension of the MRT line to Woodlands, which was announced in 1990. This helped to boost demand for flats there.

In the early 1990s, the government also announced that Woodlands would become a regional centre for northern Singapore as part of its strategy to alleviate congestion in the city by creating commercial hubs in outlying areas of the island. As the old Woodlands Town Centre had become too congested, a new town centre was planned around the upcoming Woodlands MRT, which opened in 1996. This was also the first MRT station to have an underground bus interchange which replaced the older terminals at Woodlands Town Centre and Marsiling Lane.

The vibrancy of the surrounding area was further enhanced by Causeway Point, which opened in 1998, and Woodlands Civic Centre, which opened in 2001. The latter was the first regional services centre where different government services and amenities (such as a post office and library) were housed under one roof.

Meanwhile, Singapore shifted its railway checkpoint from Tanjong Pagar to Woodlands in 1998, and a new Woodlands Checkpoint complex was completed in 1999. This move marked the beginning of the end for railway operations in Singapore, and the last KTM

train from Tanjong Pagar to Johor Bahru ran on 30 June 2011, operated by the Sultan of Johor. The former KTM line was later converted into the Rail Corridor, a 24-kilometre-long passage for recreation and nature.

Parks in Woodlands

Woodlands has retained its “wooded” character thanks to its many parks that provide natural and recreational areas for residents. The first park there was



Woodlands Town Garden, 1980s
National Museum of Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board

Woodlands Town Garden, which opened in 1983. Located around Sungei Mandai Kechil near the former Marsiling Village, this park has a scenic lake, a viewing tower and sheltered pavilions. In the 1980s, the lake became a popular angling spot. Woodlands Town Garden was renovated in the 2010s and reopened as Marsiling Park in 2018.

Another scenic park is Woodlands Town Park East. This area was formerly part of Kampong Hock Choon and was known as Hill 180 by National Servicemen who trained there. In the 1990s, this 30-metre-high hill was converted into a neighbourhood park with views of Woodlands’ skyline, hiking trails and a community garden.

Woodlands also has the largest park in the north, Admiralty Park, which opened in 2007. The name of this park is a reminder that the nearby area was once a naval base operated by the British Admiralty. This park consists of a nature area with mangroves around Sungei Cina and an urban zone with a playground for children of different ages and abilities.



Viewing tower at Woodlands Town Garden, which was a popular feature of the park, 1982
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Just north of Admiralty Park is Woodlands Waterfront Park. Opened in 2011, this park features a 1.5-kilometre waterfront promenade and a 400-metre jetty that was formerly used by the Royal Malaysian Navy. This jetty has seats that were formerly mooring anchors used to secure ships. It also has an old shed, which is now a restaurant. Inside the restaurant, visitors can find a preserved hoist system which was used to lift heavy loads.



Mooring anchors which can still be found at the former jetty today, 2022

Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Another coastal park, Mandai Mangrove and Mudflat, was announced in 2018. This upcoming nature park is located around Sungei Mandai Besar and Sungei Mandai Kechil, which were formerly the sites of villages such as Kampong Mandai Kechil and Kampong Lorong Fatimah. Mandai Mangrove and Mudflat will include trails and bird hides where visitors can view migratory birds from a safe distance.



Sungei Mandai Kechil, the site of the future Mandai Mangrove and Mudflat Nature Park, 2010s

Courtesy of NParks



Preserved hoist system in the former shed, 2022

Courtesy of National Heritage Board

Woodlands also has a park connector network that links Admiralty Park and Woodlands Waterfront Park to Ulu Sembawang Park Connector, which begins near Woodlands South MRT. Part of the Northern Explorer Park Connector Network launched in 2010, Ulu Sembawang Park Connector is 1.3 kilometres long. Ending at Mandai Road near the zoo, the park connector runs through a wooded scenic area that was formerly farmland and rural settlements such as Mandai Tekong Village.



Ulu Sembawang Park Connector, 2022

Courtesy of National Heritage Board

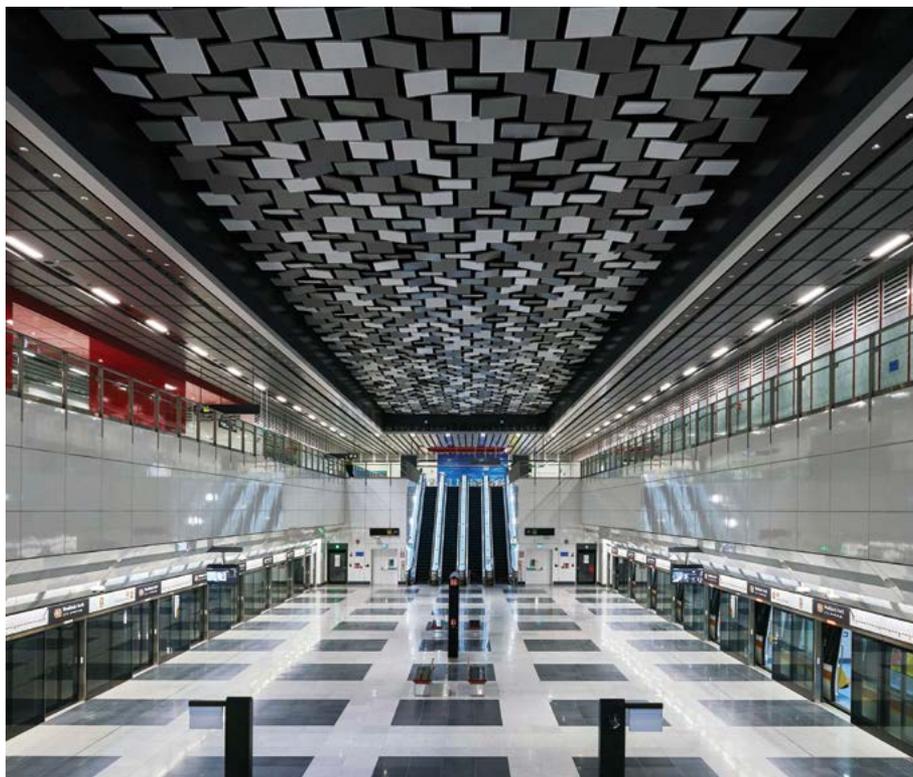
Woodlands in transition

Woodlands has continued to evolve as Singapore's northern gateway to Malaysia in recent years. In 2017, the former Woodlands Town Centre was vacated and its hawkers relocated to the new Marsiling Mall. The old town centre was then demolished to make way for an extension of Woodlands Checkpoint. This extension, which will also encompass Blocks 210-218 Marsiling Lane, is needed to reduce future congestion, as the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority expects traffic at Woodlands Checkpoint to rise by 40% by 2050.

Meanwhile, Woodlands North MRT Station opened in 2020. In the future, this station will be linked to a Rapid Transit System, a light railway that will allow travellers to reach Johor Bahru in just five minutes.

In 2015, HDB announced that Woodlands would be given a makeover under its Remaking Our Heartlands initiative. Envisioned as the Star Destination of the North, this makeover includes new homes in Woodlands North Coast, which will offer a "housing in the woods" experience, while Woodlands Central will have a Town Plaza that serves as a bigger community hub. There will also be new walking and cycling paths between the MRT stations and Woodlands' parks to provide seamless connections.

The abovementioned plans will reference Woodlands' rich history so that future developments will preserve its unique character as Singapore's gateway in the north and a green and wooded neighbourhood by the scenic Johor Strait.



Woodlands North MRT Station, 2022
Courtesy of National Heritage Board

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Abdul Raheem Moideen
 Ali bin Salim
 Athanasios Tsakonas
 Bal Singh s/o Chanan Singh
 Cheng Yam San
 Commonwealth War Graves Commission
 Cyprian Lim
 Henry Cordeiro
 Hong Tho Bilw Temple
 Housing and Development Board
 Karunakaran Navaratnam
 Mandai United Temple
 Masjid An-Nur
 National Archives of Singapore
 National Parks Board
 Oh Kian Tee
 P G Roy
 Shang Di Miao Chai Kong Temple
 Singapore Prison Service
 Sri Arasakesari Sivan Temple
 Sri Siva-Krishna Temple
 Swaminathan Vetharaniampillai
 T Suresh Kumar
 Urban Redevelopment Authority
 Woodlands United Temple
 Yeoh Hong Eng

>> PROJECT TEAM

Tan Jeng Woon
 Ian Lin

>> WRITER AND RESEARCHER

Marcus Ng
 Alicia Tan

>> WRITER

Marcus Ng

>> DESIGNER

2EZ Asia Pte Ltd

>> PHOTOGRAPHER

Alex Heng

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SUGGESTED SHORT TRAIL ROUTES

COMMUNITIES OF WOODLANDS

1.5 hours with public transport (4 km)

Despite its far-flung location in Singapore's northern corner, Woodlands has been home to many communities who also set up institutions to cater to their spiritual needs. This trail introduces you to different religious institutions and community landmarks that originated in Woodlands and continue to serve residents today.



Start your journey at [Hong Tho Bilw Temple](#), which is a short walk from Woodlands MRT via Exit 1. Located at Marsiling Industrial Estate Road 3, this Taoist temple is dedicated to Guan Di Gong, a god of war and wealth. It was established in the late 1940s in Kampong Hock Choon, a farming village in Woodlands. Next to it is [Shang Di Miao Chai Kong Temple](#), which was founded in 1935 in a village at Lorong Woodlands Kechil (now Singapore Turf Club).

The two villages were resettled in the 1980s, and the two temples, which opened here in 1996 and 1994 respectively, are living legacies of Woodlands' pre-war rural communities.

Next, walk through the industrial estate and head towards Marsiling Rise to [Sri Siva-Krishna Temple](#), the only Hindu temple in Singapore devoted to Lord Siva-Krishna, a deity who is a combination of Lord Siva and Lord Krishna. Founded in 1962 in Sembawang, this temple moved to Marsiling in 1982 and the present building, with its beautiful entrance *gopuram* (gate-tower), was completed in 1996.



After viewing the temple, cross Marsiling Road and walk down Marsiling Lane to [Marsiling Lane Market & Food Centre](#). Opened in 1975, this was the first market to serve the Marsiling HDB estate. Today, it remains a popular destination for residents who enjoy its many old-school stalls and shops.



Then, take a bus to one of Woodlands' most iconic landmarks, [Masjid An-Nur](#), with its beautiful blue walls and towering minaret. Opened in 1980, this mosque was the result of fund-raising efforts by Woodlands' Muslim community who sought to build a mosque for their religious needs. The mosque also has a water cooler along the path outside to provide relief to thirsty passers-by.



Across the road from the mosque is [Marsiling Park](#). Opened in 1983 as Woodlands Town Garden, this was the first park to provide a recreational space for residents of the Woodlands HDB estate, and was subsequently renamed Marsiling Park in 2018.

Finally, take a bus from Woodlands Centre Road to [The Church of St Anthony of Padua](#). This Catholic church began in the 1920s when Catholic Teochews from China found refuge in Mandai. They established a wooden chapel, which was replaced in 1960 by the first Church of St Anthony. The church then relocated here in 1994. Its entrance has a bronze statue of St Anthony of Padua, while its fan-shaped worship hall has an altar table that was used by Pope John Paul II to celebrate Mass during his visit to Singapore in 1986.



WOODLANDS AT WAR

2 hours with public transport (9 km)

Why does Woodlands have places with names like Admiralty Road and Admiralty Park? This is because the British Admiralty, which ran Britain's Royal Navy, was once a prominent military force in Woodlands. This trail brings you to these and other former military sites and reveals their integral role in Woodlands' history.



Begin the trail at the South Entrance of [Admiralty Park](#), a short walk from Woodlands MRT, via Exit 3. The name of this park, the largest in the north, is a reminder that much of northern Woodlands used to be part of a British naval base that was active from 1938 to 1971.

Enjoy a scenic walk through Admiralty Park. Upon arrival at the park's North Entrance, turn right and walk along Admiralty Road West. At the first junction, you will see on your right the preserved Administration Block of [former KD Malaya](#), a Malaysian naval base that occupied this area from the 1950s to 1997. You will also see a small prison (presently closed) across the road, that was built in 1950 as quarters for naval policemen. The prison is known as Khalsa Crescent (as many residents were Sikhs) or Torpedo (as it stood next to the naval base's Torpedo Depot) and is no longer in use.

Next, cross the junction, turn left and walk back along Admiralty Road West to reach Woodlands Waterfront Park. Here, you will find the **former Malaysian Base Jetty** that was completed in 1966 as part of the KD *Malaya*. This 400-metre-long jetty now offers a spectacular view of the Johor Strait and has seats that were once mooring anchors for ships. It also has a restaurant, and is a popular fishing spot.



Continue westwards along the park's waterfront promenade, which provides a clear view of the **Causeway**. Opened in 1924, the Causeway was an important military site during World War II. After the last Allied defenders of Malaya crossed the Causeway on 31 January 1942, it was blown up to prevent the Japanese from crossing over into Singapore.



Finally, use the Marsiling Park Connector to reach Woodlands Centre Road, and take a bus to **Kranji War Cemetery**. This World War II commemorative site was formerly the burial ground of a prisoner-of-war camp. After the war, the site was expanded into a resting place for more than 4,400 Allied soldiers who died in Singapore and Malaya. At the heart of the cemetery is the hilltop Singapore

Memorial, which bears the names over 24,000 casualties of the Commonwealth land and air forces who have no known grave. The register of names, kept by the War Graves Commission, can be found at the entrance.



A JOURNEY THROUGH THE WOODS

1.5 hours on bike; 2.5 hours on foot with public transport (15 km)

True to its name, Woodlands continues to be a place filled with trees and woods. This trail allows you to explore the parks and other green spaces that make up Woodlands, as well as the rich history of these places. Due to the extended length of this route, cycling is suggested.



Start your journey at **Marsiling Park**, a short walk from Marsiling MRT. This park consists of a lake surrounded by landscaped pavilions and a landmark spiral viewing tower. In 2018, the park was renovated and renamed Marsiling Park. This name comes from Marsiling Estate, a former rubber plantation established in this area by Lim Nee Soon in the early 20th century. Lim had named the plantation after Ma Xi, his ancestral village in China.



Next, use the Marsiling Park Connector, which runs past the old Woodlands Checkpoint, to get to Woodlands Waterfront Park. Here, you will find a 1.5-kilometre-long waterfront promenade with excellent views of the Causeway and the Johor Strait. Continue along this promenade to reach the [former Malaysian Base Jetty](#) that was completed in 1966 as part of *KD Malaya*, a Malaysian naval base located here between the 1950s to 1997. Today, the jetty is a popular recreational spot that offers a splendid view of Singapore's wooded northern coast.



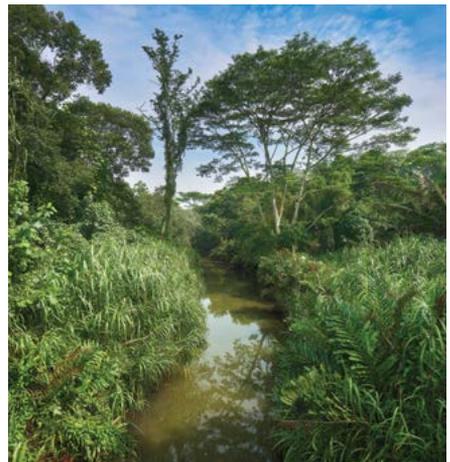
Go through the park's carpark and cross Admiralty Road to reach [Admiralty Park](#), the largest park in the north. Opened in 2007, this unique park features walking trails and a boardwalk that runs through a mangrove swamp, a remnant of the coastal woods that once guarded Woodlands' northern shoreline.

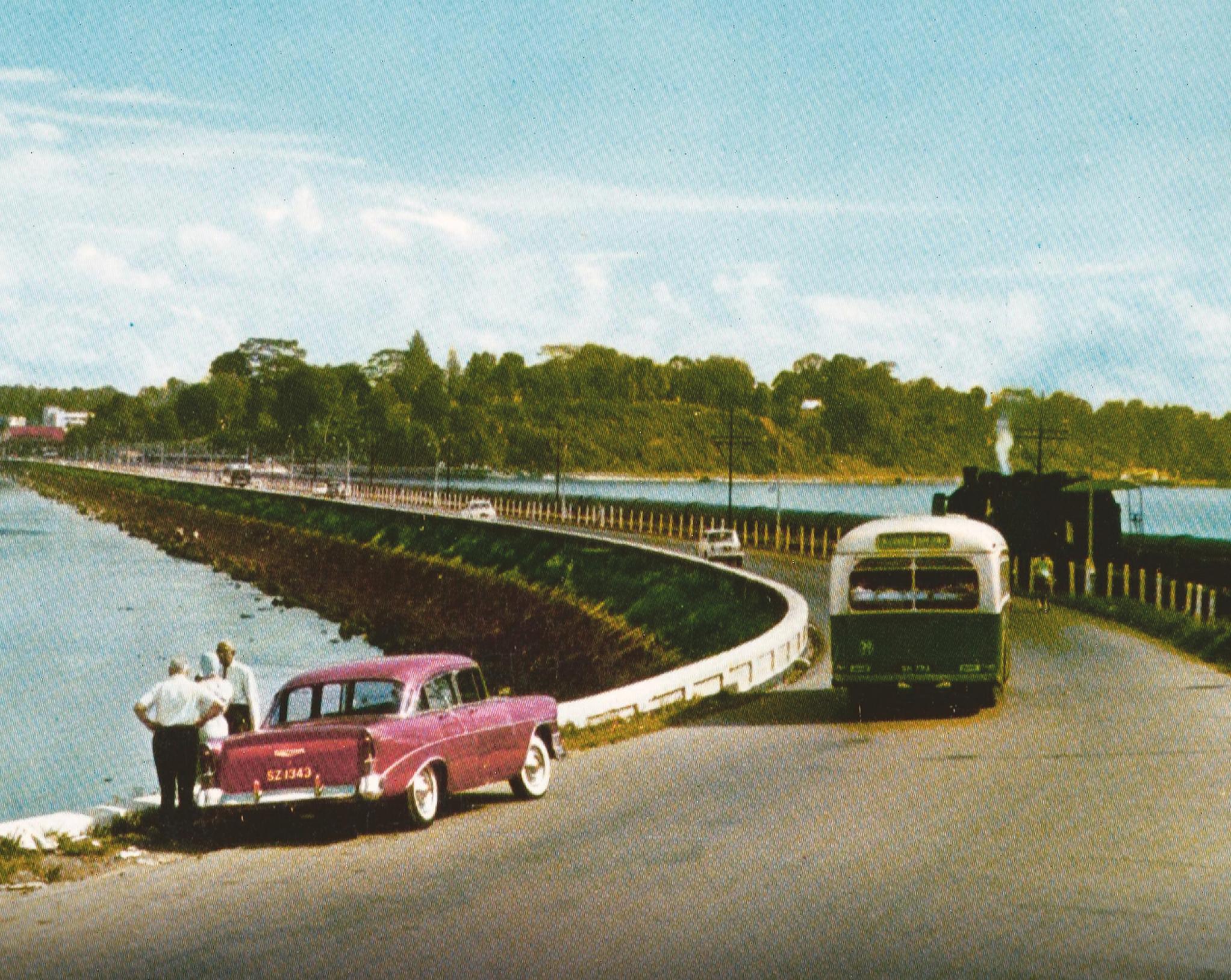
Cycle or walk through the park and upon arrival at its Southern Entrance, cyclists can use the Woodlands Avenue 2 Park Connector to reach the Woodlands (SLE) Park Connector, which will bring you to the [Ulu Sembawang Park Connector](#). If you are exploring the trail by foot, take the MRT (Thomson-East Coast Line) from Woodlands station to Woodlands

South station, and walk to Woodlands Avenue 12. Turn right into the Woodlands Avenue 12 Park Connector and you will arrive at the start of Ulu Sembawang Park Connector.

Now a popular jogging and cycling spot, Ulu Sembawang Park Connector was formerly part of Jalan Ulu Sembawang, a rural track that ran through Mandai Tekong Village and a Catholic Teochew Village. Today, it offers a scenic path through a hilly countryside that shows a glimpse of old Woodlands' landscape.

Ulu Sembawang Park Connector ends at Mandai Road. Here, continue to [Sri Arasakesari Sivan Temple](#) at Sungei Kadut Avenue by cycling or taking a bus along Mandai Road towards Woodlands Road. This Hindu temple was founded in Woodlands in 1924 and has a "woodland" design with many trees all around the shrine. It is also the only Hindu temple in Singapore to have a ceremonial pond.





*The Causeway prior to its expansions, 1950s
National Museum of Singapore collection, courtesy of National Heritage Board*

The Woodlands 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. 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 visitors and new residents.

Supported by



*The completed Causeway, c. 1924
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.*