

» DISCOVER OUR SHARED HERITAGE

BEDOK HERITAGE TRAIL



BedokTRAIL

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INTRODUCTION



Present-day Bedok, 2016

From pirates to beach parties, fishing villages to coconut plantations, the story of the eastern coast of Singapore shares many common threads with coastal settlements across the world. At the same time, the intertwined histories of Bedok, Siglap, Tanah Merah and the East Coast are unique in many ways.

From the ancient days when Orang Laut fleets looked upon the red cliffs of Tanah Merah as a navigational guide, through the era of colonisation, all the way to Singapore's independence and present day, the area's transformative journey is told through the branching stories of Bedok and the East Coast in this Bedok Heritage Trail booklet.

Seeking to break Portuguese trade power in the 1600s, the Dutch directed their naval fleets to Southeast Asia. After the fall of Malacca in 1511, the Johor-Riau Sultanate's power centres were situated in towns along the Johor River. As Singapore's eastern shores overlooked the maritime approaches to the Johor River, the waters here became a battleground for the Dutch and Portuguese forces from the early 17th century.

That was the geopolitical situation when the *Santa Catarina*, an enormous 1,400-tonne Portuguese ship, was captured by the Dutch off Tanah Merah on 25 February 1603. The *Santa Catarina* had been sailing from Macau to Malacca, carrying some 700 soldados ("soldiers" in Portuguese), merchants and their families, as well as a cargo of immense wealth.

The amount of precious cargo obtained from the *Santa Catarina*, comprising porcelain, sugar, silk, *pao de aquila* ("eagle wood" in



A map detailing the naval battle of 1603 that led to the capture of the *Santa Catarina*, with one of the waterways on the main island likely to be the Sungei Bedok ("Bedok River" in Malay).



An illustration depicting the capture of the *Santa Catarina* found on a pamphlet printed in Middelburg, Netherlands, 1604

freedom of navigation and maritime trade as well as legal justifications for war. Thus, the waters off eastern Singapore can lay claim to a legacy that extends far beyond Singapore.

THE DRUM, THE RED CLIFFS AND THE DARKNESS

Though the name “Bedok” has been around for over 400 years, there continues to be some debate over its origins. One view is that it derives from the Malay word *bedoh*, a wooden drum used to issue the Islamic call to prayer, *adhan*, before loudspeakers became common or to sound a general alarm. Another account traces Bedok’s origins to the word *biduk*, which refers to a riverine fishing boat in Malay, and further links its origins to the presence of the Sungai Bedok (“Bedok River” in Malay).

“But beyond doubt the magical bedoh or tom-tom is in this class the most bewilderingly interesting. [...] I cannot describe the varying effects, only know I have never heard its like, and then pregnant of the unspeakable within, it refuses to give its music other than in the same order, whoever may handle the drum sticks.”

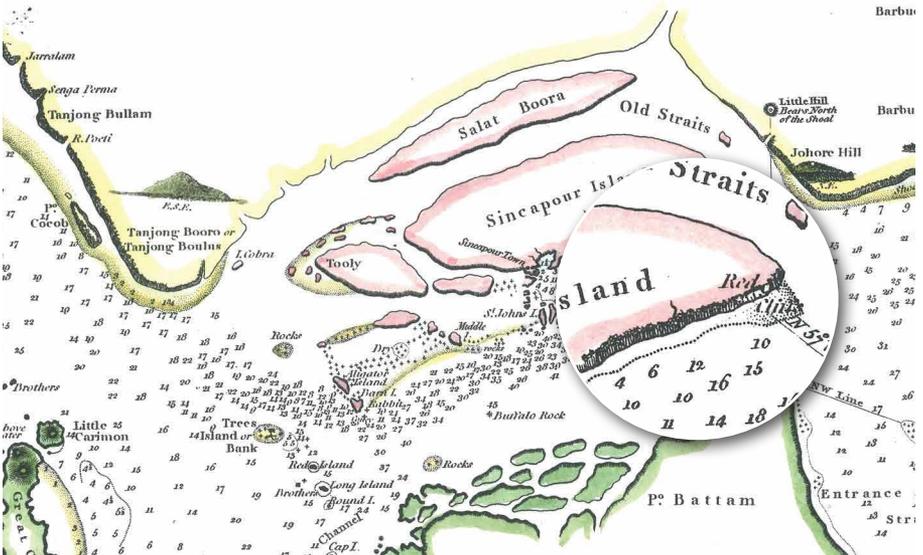


An example of a Malay bedoh

THE BEDOH

The *bedoh*, a drum made from a hollowed section of timber, is not just an instrument of volume, but one of complex and unexpected tones as well. An account in *The Singapore Free Press* newspaper in 1908 describes its mesmeric sounds as follows:

Tanah Merah’s name, on the other hand, has a more certain origin. It comes from the Malay term for the red cliffs once located along the coast before reclamation left the area landlocked. These cliffs used to function as a strategically located headland both to spot approaching enemies, and as a friendly lookout that sailors could use to navigate their course.



Horsburgh’s Chart of Singapore and Malacca showing Tanah Merah as “Red Cliff”, thus confirming its pre-colonial naming, 1806



A view of village life in Siglap, 1890s

Another area that may pre-date the founding of modern Singapore is Siglap. Malay tradition holds that the fishing village of Siglap was established by Tok Lasam, a royal from the Indonesian archipelago. Accounts differ about his place of origin and the manner of his arrival, probably in the early 19th century.

In one version, Tok Lasam was Raja Sufian, one of four Minangkabau princes who made their way across Sumatra and the Malacca Strait, visiting the Bugis settlements of Tanjong Rhu and Kampong Kallang in Singapore before founding Siglap in 1809. In another version, Tok Lasam's arrival in Singapore was the result of a Dutch invasion of his homeland of Gowa in the 1660s.

Siglap derives its name from the Malay term *si-gelap* meaning "dark one" or "the darkness that conceals." The name may originate in the pervasive shade from the thick canopy of coconut trees in the area, or alternately, a solar eclipse that greeted Tok Lasam upon his arrival here. The latter incident would date the founding of the village to the year 1821 when a rare total solar eclipse occurred.

Today, the grave of *Penghulu* ("chieftain" in Malay) Tok Lasam stands at the end of Jalan Sempadan together with the graves of his wife and *Panglima* ("commander-in-chief" in Malay). An 1860 land grant naming Pungooloo Abdul Assam as a property owner may corroborate Tok Lasam's existence, given the phonetic similarities in the names.



Double grave of Penghulu Tok Lasam and his wife, 2016

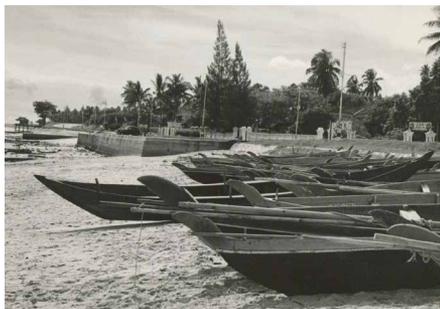


Grave of Penghulu Tok Lasam's Panglima, 2016

KAMPONG DAYS

EARLY SETTLERS AND THE COLONIAL ERA

In the 1800s, a number of *kampongs* (“villages” in Malay) lined the eastern coastline. These were mainly fishing settlements, and the nimble *kolek* (small wooden Malay boat) used both for fishing and for leisure sailing became an iconic symbol of the area. Villagers who did not take to the sea farmed vegetables and fruit or reared poultry.



Fishermen's boats drawn up on the beach at Bedok, 1953



A Malay fishing village in Bedok, 1963

Among the early inhabitants of Kampong Siglap, Kampong Bedok and other villages along the East Coast were the Orang Laut (literally “sea people” in Malay), a nomadic community most at home on the seas and rivers of Southeast Asia. As economic opportunities in Singapore grew after the arrival of the British in 1819, many other communities from across the Indonesian archipelago and Malaya made their way here. They included Sumatrans, Javanese, Baweanese, Bugis and groups from Borneo.

The fishing villages, however, had a disreputable side as reported by *The Singapore Free Press* in 1843:

“It is notorious that whatever the ostensible employment of these people may be, whether they enact the character of fisherman, woodcutters etc, their real and favourite occupation is piracy. Their villages along the shore from Tanjong Siglap to Sungei Changie are all so many nests of pirates from which at the fitting seasons issue numerous piratical boats who waylay the trading prows on their route to or from Singapore.”

It was not just the long-resident Malays, Bugis and Orang Laut who were accused of raiding boats from this part of Singapore. As late as 1869, a group of eight Chinese were convicted by the colonial authorities for piracy, with one repeat offender sentenced to 14 years in prison.



Orang Laut boys from a Malay village, 1890s

It should be noted that the charges of piracy came from a colonial European perspective. Some modern scholars have contended that what was often labelled piracy might have been attempts by traditional powers of the region to assert customs duties and taxation where zones of authority were blurred. However, the violence and bloodshed in some of these attempts were very real and newspapers of the time were often filled with gory tales of piracy incidents.

Oral history accounts passed down through generations of villagers mention that the British relied on the *Penghulu* ("chieftain" in Malay) of Siglap to suppress piracy and there are a number of stories where *Penghulu* Tok Lasam, often single-handedly, brings pirates to justice.

During the colonial era, many of the regional migrants worked as sailors, fishermen, drivers, port workers and tradesmen of various stripes. They were joined by other migrants from further afield - Hokkiens, Teochews, Cantonese and other dialect groups from China, as well as those from the Indian subcontinent. This resulted in a diverse, vibrant mix of communities in the east, with later arrivals including significant numbers of Peranakans and Eurasians.

From the mid-1800s, the British colonial authorities began to extend their control into the east of Singapore. Starting from 1830, land grants were issued to individuals for plantations in parcels of between 20 to 500 acres. Among the European property owners in the area were Dr Robert Little (Singapore's first coroner), Sir Jose D'Almeida (a Portuguese merchant), and John Armstrong (a trader). By 1855, there was a police station near the mouth of the Sungei Bedok, while a powder magazine (ammunition depot) and jetty were built in Tanah Merah.

Early Asian landowners in the area included Armogum Anamalai, a surveyor and architect, who bought part of Armstrong's plantation from its subsequent owner, Matthew Little, in 1885. Much of this 20-acre plot was then purchased in 1917 by Moona Kadir Sultan, a cattle merchant who later built the well-known Karikal Mahal mansion.



Bedok Police Station, c. 1930



The powder magazine used to be situated behind the fenced area in this image, Tanah Merah, 2016

FISHING IN THE EAST

As Singapore's small-scale fishing industry drifted into its sunset years, Kampong Siglap fisherman Ahmad Taib remarked to a newspaper reporter in 1970:

"How life has changed. Forty years ago, practically everyone here was a fisherman. But now, even the sea seems so far away, for the Government has reclaimed land from it. And none of my four sons wish to be fishermen."

A way of life on the east coast for centuries, fishing as a livelihood has endured from the pre-colonial days when political borders in Southeast Asia were virtually non-existent and, over time, evolved into the modern fish farms of today. Like the diversity of people in the area, the fishing styles practised in the east varied as well.



Fish drying in the breeze (East Coast), a print by Singaporean photographer Yip Cheong Fun, undated



A fisherman using a net to catch shellfish in the shallow waters along Bedok Beach, undated

Setting out before dawn, Malay fishermen would typically take soundings to locate *karang* ("coral" in Malay) areas, undersea rock formations or reefs where fish were abundant. Using small fish as bait to catch *ikan parang* ("wolf herring" in Malay) and *sotong* ("squid" in Malay) to catch *ikan tenggiri* ("mackerel" in Malay), they would drop both deep-sea and floating lines numbering up to twenty or more lines per boat.

Chinese fishermen would mainly utilise drift nets fixed on bamboo poles and pushed the nets through the sea from aboard sampans (small wooden Chinese boats) during low tide. They would make their way from Bedok or Siglap all the way to Katong, with the nets in front and baskets of fish trailing behind.



A kelong (wooden offshore structure for trap fishing) along the coastline, 1915

There were also *kelongs*, wooden structures extending into the sea on stilts made from the nipah palm, where people used nets to trap schools of fish. A few of the fishing practices were objectionable, with some fishermen causing alarm in the 1940s by using dynamite to blast fish out of the water. Japanese anglers in this area were also said to have been engaged in espionage around Singapore's coasts in the pre-World War II period.

Most traditional methods of fishing landed limited hauls and the fishing industry increasingly became economically unviable. Even as fishermen formed cooperative societies to better market their catch, their prospects were on a decline from the 1950s. According to the Singapore National Academy of Science, effective large-scale net fishing methods employed along the coast of Malaya greatly reduced the amount of fish in Singapore's waters.

Up to the 1960s, fishing remained one of the most dominant occupations for the people of the east coast. While fishermen hauled in a variety of catch from the sea, their family members scoured the beaches for shellfish including

cockles and mussels. The shoreline also held a host of mangrove swamps, from which villagers obtained *bakau* ("mangrove" in Malay) wood for their boats and fronds from the nipah palm to make attap roofs for their houses.

The land reclamation scheme that started in 1962 eventually transformed the face of the east coast and marked the end of traditional fishing in Singapore. By the late 1970s, there were fewer than a hundred fishermen left in the four fishing villages of Siglap.

KAMPONG BEDOK

While pre-modern villages have existed for centuries around the Sungei Bedok and the coast, the first appearance of Kampong Bedok in official records dates back to the 1850s in the form of land grants. On the eastern side of Bedok Road was Kampong Bedok Laut ("Bedok sea village" in Malay). By the 1950s, this *kampung* stretched from the coast and mouth of the Sungei Bedok to Jalan Greja. On the other side of the road was Kampong Bedok Darat ("Bedok shore village" in Malay), which included Jalan Haji Salam, Jalan Kathi and a rubber plantation.



Malay attap houses in a mangrove swamp, c. 1950s



A kampong at Bedok Corner, near today's Bedok Food Centre, early-mid 20th century

Former resident Marhaini Omar recalls:

"I lived in Jalan Kathi, one of the neighbourhoods of Kampong Bedok, from 1969 to 1970. Other neighbourhoods included Jalan Haji Salam, Jalan Greja, Jalan Langgar Bedok, Jalan Bilal and Taman Bedok. Kampong Bedok was a big area, and villagers classified their neighbourhoods according to the roads they lived on. Almost the entire kampong was related to one another and my family was the only 'outsider.'

I used to go to the seaside in front of Bedok Corner (the junction where East Coast Road met Bedok Road) to help another neighbour, who later became my father-in-law, find fishing bait. Just squeeze some lime on the shore during low tide and the worms would come out!"

Author and heritage blogger, Yeo Hong Eng, who used to live at the nearby Tanah Merah area, recounts his childhood experiences:

"Once every month, my grandma would take my siblings and I to Kampong Bedok for haircuts. Sometimes, we took the red Katong-Bedok Bus, but often we walked. From Bedok Boys' and Girls' Schools to Kampong Bedok was only about a mile. Sometimes, my grandma would stop by a long

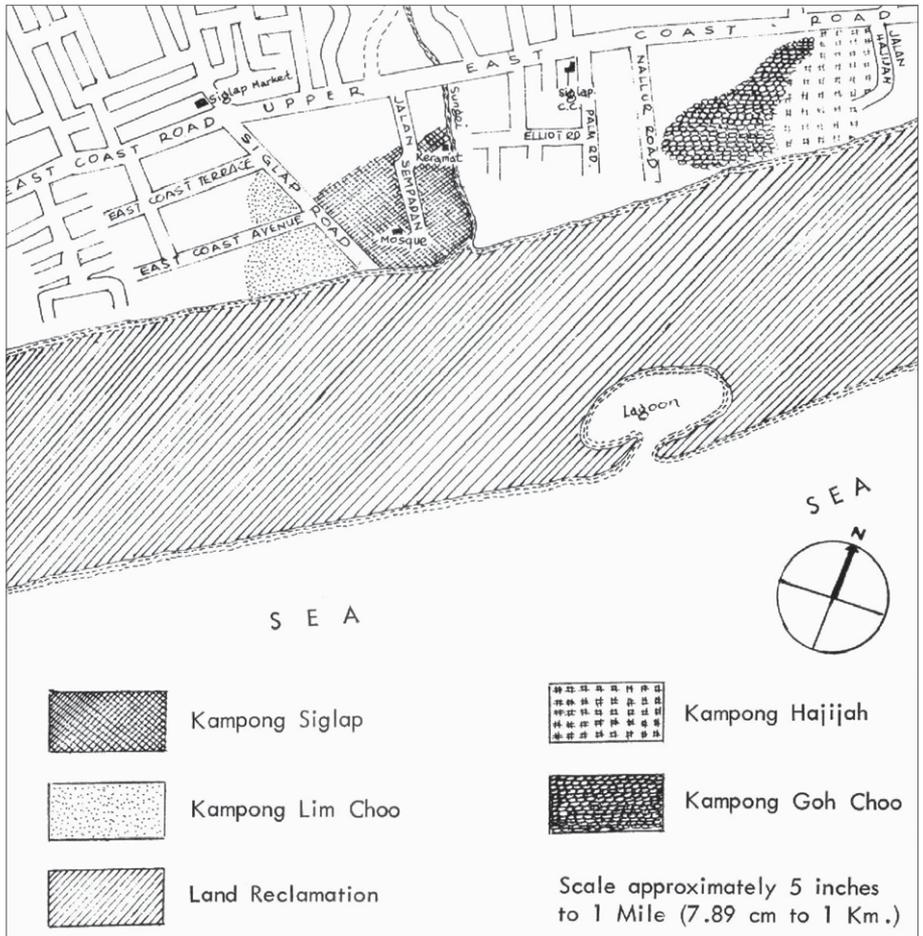
attap house. There were people busy pounding and packing belachan ("fermented shrimp paste" in Malay) in little baskets weaved out of coconut leaves."



The Katong-Bedok bus service which would have been the main mode of transport for residents to travel out of Bedok during that time, 1952



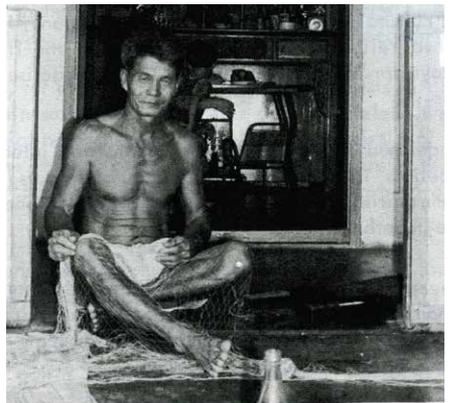
Salted fish and belachan drying in the sun in Siglap, c. 1970s



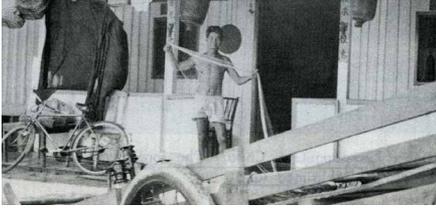
Map showing locations of the four major kampongs of Siglap, c.1970s

THE KAMPONGS OF SIGLAP AND FRANKEL ESTATE

Siglap as an area contained four main kampongs between the early 19th century and the 1980s. Coming from the direction of town along East Coast Road, the first fishing village in Siglap one encountered would have been Kampong Lim Choo. Like others established by Chinese migrants, this kampong was organised along clan and surname lines. The founders of this village were of the surname Lim and hailed from Chao'An in Guangdong, China. While the exact date of the kampong's establishment is unknown, it was in existence by 1937.



A fisherman mending his nets, c. 1970s



A fisherman's house in Kampong Lim Choo, c. 1970s

Apart from the founding Lims, the village also had Hainanese residents in the 1930s as well as a community of over a hundred Japanese fishermen during the pre-war years. After the Japanese Occupation, a number of oral history accounts expressed suspicion that they were spies sent to scope out Singapore's eastern coast.

After massive reclamation works starting from the 1960s transformed the coastline, the number of fishermen here and in neighbouring kampongs dwindled. By 1977, there were under 60 fishermen left in Kampong Lim Choo. Part of the village was converted to public housing flats in 1962 while the rest was redeveloped in the 1980s.

Further down East Coast Road was Kampong Siglap, the largest and most established of the fishing villages in this area. Extending from just after East Coast Terrace to Jalan Sempadan, this predominantly Malay kampong was dotted with coconut palms.

Rita Fernando remembers life in Kampong Siglap in the 1940s and 1950s:

"For us I would say really there was no difference in race, whether you were Malay or Chinese or Indian or Eurasian or whatever. We lived as one kampong, we did not even think of ourselves as Singaporeans then because we were just emerging from colonial rule. We just lived as kampong people and neighbours and we shared whatever we had. If somebody plucked coconuts from their tree and there were 100 coconuts, each house would probably get five or six."

Kampong Siglap was the oldest of the fishing villages in this area but the coastal changes wrought by land reclamation in the 1960s as well as the declining viability of Singapore's

small-scale fishing industry, resulted in just nine fishermen left living in the kampong by 1977. When redevelopment began in 1985, there were some 346 families of various other occupations in the kampong.

Former resident Chua Ei King's family was one of the last to move out of Kampong Siglap and he recounts his memories of the family business during the mid-1960s:

"My father sold pork from a makeshift stall before renting a stall at Siglap Market (where Siglap Centre stands today). I was told that the land which Siglap Market stood on belonged to the 'Serani Association' (Serani is a Malay term for Eurasians). A Lim Boo Seng rented the place to start the market and, in turn, sub-leased to stall holders. Due to the curfew at the time of the racial riots, food was sold very fast at the market as people rushed through purchases in order to make it home in time for the curfew. Some did not even wait for the meat to be chopped up into smaller pieces."



Malay houses in Kampong Siglap, c. 1970s



Kampong Goh Choo, c. 1970s



A typical house from Kampong Hajjah, c. 1970s

To the east of Kampong Siglap were Kampong Goh Choo and Kampong Hajjiah. Peopled mainly by Hokkiens and Hainanese from Cheow Huan province in China, Kampong Goh Choo was the smallest of the villages.

Kampong Hajjiah, on the other hand, had a mixed population of Malays and Chinese. It acquired its name from the generous actions of Madam Hajjiah binte Jumat, a wealthy woman who owned much of the land in the village and funded the construction of a mosque in the nearby Kampong Siglap. This village was previously known as Kampong Bahru, with its name meaning “new village” in Malay suggesting that it had been established as an offshoot of an older *kampung* in the area, possibly Kampong Siglap.

A teacher and author of the memoir *Kampungku Siglap*, Anis Tairan explains:

“Madam Hajjiah was a prominent landowner who bought a plot of land to build the original Kampong Siglap Mosque and contributed much to the welfare of the Siglap community. She lived in Kampong Bahru and was buried at the Lucky Heights area, also known as the Batu Lapan (“8th Milestone” in Malay) cemetery. Her grave was later moved to Pusara Aman in the Lim Chu Kang Muslim Cemetery.”

In the 1930s, the *kampung’s* *Penghulu* (“chieftain” in Malay) was Daud Bin Mohamed Shah, Madam Hajjiah’s nephew. A prominent community leader and Justice of the Peace, Daud was also a key figure in the 1938 founding of *Utusan Melayu*, the first newspaper



Madam Hajjiah’s grave at the Lucky Heights area, c. 1970s

in Singapore to be majority owned, financed and staffed by Malays. By 1977, there were only 14 fishermen left in Kampong Hajjiah, and the village was eventually redeveloped into a new residential estate by 1982.

Further inland from the fishing villages, there were vegetable farms as well as numerous coconut and rubber plantations. One of the largest of these plantations was owned by the Frankel family, after whom the housing estate in this area is named today.

The Frankels were Jews who migrated from Lithuania to Borneo, then to the tin mines of Kuala Lumpur before reaching Singapore in 1878. Speaking only Yiddish, the family matriarch Rosa Frankel would bring an eggshell and a feather to the market to signal her purchases of eggs and chickens. The Frankels opened a bakery that proved to be successful after which Rosa’s husband, Abraham, established the Frankel Brothers Furniture Store on Victoria Street.



A farmer watering his vegetables in Bedok, 1954



Frankel Avenue today, 2016

The bakery and the furniture store were the foundations of the Frankels' fortune. Arriving in Malaya with little to his name, Abraham Frankel had previously toiled in the mines of Kuala Lumpur for 12 cents a day. In Singapore however, he became wealthy enough to buy more than 400 acres of land in Siglap, profiting greatly from the rubber boom in the early 20th century. The Frankels also became known for their philanthropy.

Lisa Ginsburg, Rosa Frankel's granddaughter, recounts the colonial lifestyle at Siglap before World War II:

"Every Sunday we would go to Siglap for tiffin (a British colonial term for lunch or a light meal). There was a grand dining room with a long table that seated twenty people. Servants would wait on us, bringing us the curries and (Malayan) delicacies we loved so well. One servant had to stand there endlessly, poor fellow, tugging on a rope which pulled the punkah ("fan" in Hindi) across the ceiling to keep a breeze going for us in the hot humid air."

In 1923, Frankel Estate was visited by Albert Einstein who was in Singapore briefly after returning from delivering lectures in Tokyo. In his journal, the eminent scientist praised the beauty of the coconut palms in the Frankel plantation. The Frankels also developed nearby Opera Estate, which bears road names inspired by European operas including *Aida*, *Carmen* and *Fidelio*. It was also home to Singapore's first President Yusof bin Ishak.



Yusof bin Ishak with his family at their Opera Estate home, 1955

Most of the members of Frankel family left Singapore in 1920s and 1930s to settle in the United States, although Rosa refused to leave until just before the island fell to the Japanese in 1942. Part of Frankel Estate was purchased by the Loke family of Cathay Organisation and Cathay-Keris Studio was established at 532D East Coast Road in 1953. The studio became one of two main local producers in Singapore's once-thriving filmmaking industry, and produced Singapore's first Chinese-language film, *The Lion City*.



Guests at Cathay-Keris Studio watching scenes from the film *Badang* being shot, 1962



The Frankel family with Albert Einstein and other members of the Jewish community, 1923

COCONUT COAST

In the 1800s, gambier dominated most of the plantation areas of Singapore, particularly in the north and the west. In the east, however, it was coconut that held sway. There were also attempts to cultivate cotton, coffee, betel nut and nutmeg here but these attempts proved largely to be failures.

When the first coconut plantations were established along the eastern coast in the 1830s, the cash crop thrived because of sandy soils and consistent demand for the crop both



Coconut plantation on the east coast, 1890s

in Singapore and from abroad. From 1881 however, infestations of the red beetle and rhinoceros beetle caused great damage to the coconut plantations.

Many plantation owners switched to rubber from 1911, encouraged by the boom in rubber prices and demand, although coconut eventually made a comeback in the 1930s with expanded markets for coconut oil and fresh coconuts. The plantations made way for residential developments in the 1960s although the coconut palm remains one of the enduring images associated with the East Coast.

The *kampung* residents of Bedok, Siglap and Tanah Merah made full use of the versatile offerings of the coconut palm. It was used in food and in making oils, while the dried leaves were mounted on wooden stakes and used by farmers to shade their vegetables from the sun. *Kampung* residents also used the ribs of the coconut leaves as *sapu lidi* ("broom" in Malay). On the beaches of Bedok, the ribbed coconut leaves and stems were made into fasteners for packets of *mee siam*, a popular dish of thin noodles in a tangy gravy, as well as utensils to eat the noodles.



Palm trees along Upper East Coast Road, which used to be at the seaside, 2016

KUBUR KASSIM AND OTHER CEMETERIES

Kubur Kassim, a Muslim burial ground at 426 Siglap Road, is the most prominent cemetery in this area. The date of its first burial is not definitively known but the cemetery was in use by 1925. The land here is part of the Wakaff Kassim, an endowment made by cargo boat and steam launch owner, Ahna Mohamed Kassim bin Ally Mohamed, in the 1920s. The endowment also includes Masjid Kassim, a mosque along Changi Road, and adjoining houses.



Entrance gate of Kubur Kassim cemetery, 2016

Kubur Kassim's distinctive bright yellow gates draw the eye as does its Indo-Saracenic architecture. This style, which combines elements of Mughal and classical European architecture, was popular in early 20th century Malaya. The land that Kubur Kassim occupies is believed to have served as a burial ground for Muslims in Siglap even before Kassim's endowment. Today, the cemetery also houses Khanqah Khairiyyah, a *sura* ("prayer house" in Malay) where religious classes are conducted, and a meeting place for a *tariqa* (an Arabic term for a Sufi Muslim order).

A number of graves here have been venerated as the final resting place of Muslim holy men. These *keramats* ("grave shrines" in Malay) continue to be visited by people of various faiths who pray or meditate there. One

prominent burial is that of Dr Hafeezduin Sirajuddin Moonshi bin Hakeem Abdul Hamid. Dr Moonshi's clinic, opened in 1916 on North Bridge Road, was the first clinic established by a Muslim in Singapore. A leader in the Indian Muslim community, Dr Moonshi was also a Municipal Commissioner and a member of the colonial-era Mohammedan Advisory Board.

A number of plots at Kubur Kassim are dedicated to Orang Bunian, supernatural human-like beings from Malay folklore. Urban legends of these "hidden people" being spotted here have made this cemetery a popular gathering place for those with an interest in the supernatural.

Another burial site that still stands in Siglap today is Tok Lasam's grave along Jalan Sempadan. The graves of Tok Lasam, the founder of Siglap village in the early 1800s, and those of his wife and *Panglima* ("commander-in-chief" in Malay) are the only ones left of a former cemetery. When redevelopment of this area occurred in the 1990s, community leaders petitioned successfully to retain this significant grave while others were exhumed and reinterred in the Muslim cemetery in Lim Chu Kang.

Hidden away nearby is a small Bawean cemetery that is located amongst the houses at Lucky Heights. The Baweanese are of Javanese origin and a significant number migrated to Singapore with many working as gardeners and drivers for wealthy families.

Due to residential redevelopment from the 1960s, larger Chinese burial sites formerly situated at Kew estate, Upper Changi Road and Tanah Merah Kechil were exhumed so that their sites could be reused for public housing.



The Bawean cemetery, 2011

KAMPONG CHAI CHEE

Kampong Chai Chee was defined by and named after its main trade – a vegetable market where farmers from Bedok, Tanah Merah, Kembangan and other surrounding areas brought and peddled their produce.



A road leading to Chai Chee, c. 1930

The exact date when the first vegetable seller set up his or her stall along the junction of the Peng Ann Road and Peng Ghee Road is unknown, but the market grew organically and gradually attracted a variety of roadside hawkers. With the bustle of trade and a growth in population, a predominantly Chinese *kampong* was established here in the 1920s. The name Peng Ghee is today reflected in the name of Ping Yi Secondary School, originally established

as Pin Ghee Public School in 1930 through the donations of prominent residents such as Chen Weiming (a Chinese physician), Koh Teck Loon (a businessman) and Poh Soon (a trader).

Even after the appearance of hawkers peddling biscuits, cakes, traditional snacks, meat and fish, Chai Chee's market remained known for its farm produce. Past resident Yeo Hong Eng remembers the farming and market activities here in the 1950s and 1960s:

"My mother told me the market had more vegetable sellers than those of other produce, hence the name Chai Chee which translates to 'vegetable market' in Hokkien. On sale were leafy vegetable types: lettuce, kailan (Chinese kale), choy sum (small Chinese cabbage), pak choy (Chinese white cabbage), and also beans and pulses. My family's farm planted and harvested bitter gourds, brinjals, ladies' fingers, long beans, sweet potato leaves, bayam (Chinese spinach), kang kong (water convulvus) and bitter leaves.

Harvesting began before dawn, with the aid of torchlights. It was about the same time that the mosque call to prayers would sound in neighbouring kampongs. Our farmland was not fertile enough and subject to flooding, so my mother would buy more vegetables from Geylang Serai and sell them at Chai Chee. Market activity began about 5am, ending about 11am; mostly unlicensed produce sellers, butchers and fishmongers. The earlier sellers had better spots for hawking their wares."



Vegetable Farm in Ulu Bedoh (now Chai Chee Estate), undated

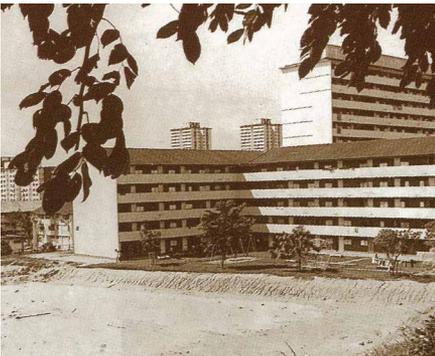
Civic organisations like the Yew Ghee Sia and Youths Improvement Association emerged in Chai Chee in the 1940s. The former was founded in an attap hut on Peng Ann Road in 1940 and started as an addiction centre for opium addicts. After World War II, the Yew Ghee Sia set up a mutual aid fund. The Youths Improvement Association, on the other hand, was established mainly to organise sports activities for the young villagers. Both these organisations continue to operate in the estate today.



Yew Ghee Sia, undated



Youths Improvement Association, undated



By the early 1970s, flats like these were built in Chai Chee

Redevelopment began in Chai Chee in the early 1970s, with the area experiencing both industrialisation and construction of public housing. High-rise Housing & Development Board (HDB) flats replaced *kampong* houses, and manufacturers including German camera maker Rollei set up factories here. The area's Member of Parliament, Sha'ari Tadin, captured the spirit of those days when he said in 1971: "Soon we will lay down our *changkol* ("hoes" in Malay) for *calipers* (measuring devices), and this calls for new thinking."



Rollei International press conference at the Rollei factory in Kampong Chai Chee, 1973

The Chai Chee Consumers' Club, a mini-supermarket run on a cooperative basis, was started in 1973 to help residents fight rising inflation by providing items like rice and sugar at affordable prices.

One landmark that remains from the *kampong* days is the Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association (SATA) Uttamram Clinic, established in 1962. The land was donated

by businessman and philanthropist G. Uttamram in the early 1950s, and today it contains a medical centre as well as the SATA headquarters.



Residents queuing to enter the Chai Chee Consumer's Club, 1974



The Uttamram Chest Clinic on the year of its opening (now SATA CommHealth Uttamram, Bedok), 1962



Mr and Mrs G. Uttamram, undated

TANAH MERAH

There were formerly two Tanah Merahs, delineated in colonial-era maps as Large Red Cliff and Small Red Cliff. They later became better known by their equivalent names in Malay, Tanah Merah Besar and Tanah Merah Kecil respectively. Tanah Merah Besar, sitting on higher ground and with a bigger area of red cliffs exposed, was located at Kampong Ayer Gemuroh (roughly where Terminal 3 of Changi Airport is today). Its smaller counterpart sat between Siglap and Kampong Bedok.

One of the early landmarks in Tanah Merah Kecil was a powder magazine and its jetty built in 1869. This was an ammunition depot used to store gunpowder and was opened as a commercial enterprise by businessmen Tan Seng Poh and Cheng Tee. Gunpowder had previously been stored on the ship *Princess Royal* and later on *tongkangs* (small Malay boats used for ferrying cargo), a practice that was both risky and expensive. The opening of the Tanah Merah magazine in August 1869 was described by *The Straits Times* newspaper as attracting "the largest gathering we ever remember to have seen in Singapore," with some two hundred luminaries of colonial society ferried there by steamer.

From the 1920s, the British military installed a number of pillboxes around Bedok, including atop a hill where Kew Drive is today and at beach areas such as in front of Bedok Rest House, opposite the present Bedok South Road and Kee Sun Avenue. Further east, pillboxes also dotted Ayer Mata Ikan and Kampong Terbakar.



The remains of a pillbox in Kampong Hajjiah in Siglap, c. 1970s



Remnants of the red cliffs of Tanah Merah Kechil, 2016

Mainly positioned to repel attacks from the sea, the profusion of pillboxes underscored the strategic defensive value of Singapore's eastern coast. However, these firing structures were hardly used during World War II as the main thrust of the Japanese invasion was land-borne via the north and west of the island. After the war, the pillboxes were no longer in operation and were used by residents as local landmarks and by children as makeshift play areas.



A painting featuring a pillbox entitled "Fort", by Chen Chong Swee, 1946

By the 1940s, a *kampong* stood near the midpoint of the old Tanah Merah Kechil Road, which connected the parallel Upper Changi Road and Upper East Coast Road. Today, this area is known as the Limau housing estate,

a stone's throw from the Tanah Merah MRT station. Author of the book *The Little Red Cliff: 1946-1963*, Yeo Hong Eng, was born in Kampong Tanah Merah Kechil in 1946. He remembers the *kampong* being divided into two sections, one mainly populated by Chinese and the other by Malay residents, with a stream acting as the unofficial boundary.

The Chinese section, closer to Upper Changi Road, housed some 50 families during the post-World War II period, while the Malay section was situated towards Upper East Coast Road and the sea. Most of the Chinese were farmers while many of the Malays kept up their longstanding tradition of fishing. Yeo recalls a spirit of cooperation between the two races in his *kampong*, with most residents having bonded during the hardships of the Japanese Occupation. During periods of drought, Yeo's father would obtain water from valley wells in Malay areas, and families exchanged food, fruit and vegetables.

The Tanah Merah Besar area, meanwhile, was known for its seaside bungalows, some of which were owned by the government during the colonial era and used for holidays by civil servants. One well-known resident here was David Marshall, the lawyer who became Singapore's first Chief Minister in 1955.



Tanah Merah Kechil, 1930s



Automatic conveyer belt and earth spreader at the Bedok coastal reclamation, 1966

Like Bedok and Siglap, the face of Tanah Merah was transformed by land reclamation during the 1960s. As a result, the area lost its defining feature, the red cliffs, and their consignment to history is lamented by Yeo:

"If they were around now, the cliffs would be around the Housing and Development Board (HDB) Block 156, behind Temasek Primary School. In the 1960s, I saw the first load of earth being removed from the cliffs and dumped into the sea, levelling the famous landmark of ancient sailors and cartographers. I felt saddened by the loss [...] Future Singaporeans will know this place as Tanah Merah, but may not realise its significance and origin."

Today, beaches, mudflats, rock seawalls, breakwaters, a golf course and a ferry terminal make up the new coastal stretch created by land reclamation. While this area may be man-made, a diversity of marine and bird life still thrives here. Species that have been noted here include the dubious nerite snail, sand stars, various corals, anemones, crustaceans and fishes.

SIMPANG BEDOK AND KOH SEK LIM



A view of Jalan Simpang Bedok, 1986

In the 1960s, Simpang Bedok ("Bedok Junction" in Malay) Village stood at the northern end of the old Bedok Road that led to the coast. The area also included rambutan plantations, a Chinese cemetery and a post office established in the 1960s.

Simpang Bedok was also a recreational area for British soldiers based in Changi and other nearby camps, where food stalls selling fish and chips, ice cream and other Western fare flourished. Today, Simpang Bedok continues to be known as a popular late-night food haunt.

HERITAGE TREE

Sea Fig (*Ficus superba*)



Trunk girth: 7.9m
Height: 20m

This deciduous strangling fig grows mostly in coastal areas and develops a vast crown formed by many large spreading branches. A distinctive feature of the tree is its aerial roots which grow from its branches, trunk and base of its lower limbs.

This tree is located near Simpang Bedok, at the junction of Bedok Road and Upper Changi Road.



Simpong Bedok street view, 2016

On the eastern side of the Sungei Bedok was a plantation and farming area owned before World War II by the Chinese *towkay* (a title given to Chinese of good standing, especially businessmen) Koh Sek Lim. In the 1950s, there were some 70 families living in Kampong Sek Lim, which stood where the junction of Upper Changi Road East, Xilin Avenue and Simei Avenue is today.

In 1951, the government bought a 350-acre site from Koh Sek Lim's estate to resettle over 500 families who were displaced by the building of Paya Lebar Airport. With the new settlers establishing vegetable farms, the Koh Sek Lim area stretched to Sungei Ketapang near the coast and became a significant centre of food production.

Other parts of the Koh Sek Lim area were leased for sand mining in the early 1950s and, within a decade, sand extraction had created one of the largest lakes in Singapore. With some 300,000 cubic metres of sand extracted from an eight-acre site, the lake in 1961 was about nine metres deep. This has now become the Bedok Reservoir.

Today, the NEWater Visitor Centre, which is also a member of the Museum Roundtable group, is located here at 20 Koh Sek Lim Road. In November 2000, NEWater was first successfully produced in a demonstration plant here. This high-grade reclaimed water technology

developed by the Public Utilities Board brought together the water treatment processes of microfiltration, reverse osmosis and ultraviolet radiation. Achieved almost three decades after the idea of NEWater was first conceived, this great achievement, together with key milestones of Singapore's water journey and sustainability, are showcased at the NEWater Visitor Centre.



Bedok resettlement area in Koh Sek Lim Road, off Upper Changi Road, 1952



Bedok resettlement area in Koh Sek Lim Road, 1952



NEWater Visitor Centre, 2016

THE STORIES BEHIND STREET NAMES

JALAN HAJI SALAM

Haji Abdul Salam (1805-1923) was an enterprising fisherman who built and operated eight *kelongs* (wooden offshore structures for trap fishing) in Bedok. The daily catch would be hauled to Pasar Besi, otherwise known as the Beach Road Market, on sampans (small wooden Chinese boats).

Haji Salam's profits from the bounty of the sea enabled him to purchase about 100 acres of land in the area, stretching from Bedok Road and East Coast Road to Tanah Merah Kechil. He was also a major presence in the *kolek* (small wooden Malay boat) racing scene, with his 12-member team, Kilat Senja, winning a number of regattas.

KEE SUN AVENUE

Ching Kee Sun was a comprador with the Asiatic Petroleum Company, a regional predecessor of Royal Dutch Shell. He lived at No. 155 on the road that would come to bear his name, and was a leader in the Cantonese community as well as a Justice of the Peace. Kee Sun Avenue is also where the St Andrew's Community Hospital is located today.

KOH SEK LIM ROAD

A Hokkien from Malacca, Koh Sek Lim arrived in Singapore in the 19th century and worked as a bicycle repairman. Through a series of shrewd property purchases, he ended up a landlord and owner of rubber and coconut plantations in the east.

Koh Sek Lim's land holdings included plots around Bedok Road and stretched to the current location of the Singapore Expo, including a Kampong Sek Lim to the south of Upper Changi Road, which existed until the 1970s.

PARBURY AVENUE

Englishman George Parbury arrived in Malaya in 1911 to work for Cumberbatch & Co. in Kuala Lumpur. After moving to Singapore, he was managing director in rubber company Bruce Petrie Ltd and president of the Singapore Chess Club. Parbury also held public positions as a Legislative Councillor and Municipal Commissioner.

SENNETT ROAD

C. W. A. Sennett was a collector with the Inland Revenue and later Commissioner of Lands and chairman of the Rural Board. As Commissioner, he authored the Sennett Report in 1948 which underscored the urgent need for redevelopment of overcrowded slums in Singapore's city centre and the provision of housing for a growing population.

Through the Rural Board, Sennett worked with village committees to oversee development in outlying areas of Singapore. News of his impending retirement in 1948 moved seven village committees to request that the government retain his services, citing his "sympathy and assistance" to *kampong* residents. After retiring, Sennett founded a real estate company and developed Sennett Estate in Potong Pasir.



Alkaff Gardens, which were bought by H. Sennett Realty Company in 1949 and developed into Sennett Estate, c. 1930

WOO MON CHEW ROAD

A wealthy property developer and contractor, Woo Mon Chew's firm had a hand in the construction of a number of noteworthy buildings including Kallang Airport and the Old Hill Street Police Station. He was also a founding director of Overseas Union Bank. Woo built a seafront bungalow in this area for his second wife in the 1920s and laid the gravel road that would later be paved and named after him. He is remembered for supporting educational causes through donations before and after World War II.

JALAN BILAL, JALAN KATHI, JALAN GREJA

These roads, enduring from the Kampong Bedok days, are named after religious themes. Jalan Bilal and Jalan Kathi refer to a Muslim issuer of the call to prayer and a solemniser of marriages respectively, while Jalan Greja takes its name from the Malay term for a church.

SEASIDE PARK

After establishing the Cathay-Keris Studio at East Coast Road with Ho Ah Loke in 1953, film tycoon and property magnate Loke Wan Tho developed the Seaside Park housing estate in the 1960s. A prominent resident here was Lee Kong Chian, the plantation magnate who became one of Singapore's foremost philanthropists.

The roads in Seaside Park are named after Cathay-Keris films or facets of Malay culture. *Buloh Perindu*, released in 1953, was the first film produced by Cathay-Keris as well as the first Malay film in colour. Other roads here taking their names from 1950s films include Jalan Saudara Ku, Jalan Selandang Delima, Jalan Puteri Jula Juli and Jalan Dondang Sayang. The sprawling, hangar-like Cathay-Keris Studio has since been replaced by houses on Jalan Keris and Keris Drive.



The area around the former Cathay-Keris Studio today, 2016

TUMULTUOUS TIMES: WORLD WAR II



A group of gravediggers at the location of the mass graves in Siglap, 1962

Though it was spared the worst of the fighting, the eastern side of Singapore was not left untouched by World War II. The Japanese Occupation of 1942 to 1945 and its aftermath were periods of despair for many families whose loved ones had vanished at the start of the occupation, and failed to resurface even after the return of the British.

The accounts of the abovementioned families made it clear that a large number of Chinese males had been taken away by the Japanese in 1942. Some speculated grimly about their fates and whispered of atrocities. The first news from an official source, however, emerged only in 1948, when Japanese military officers were charged with war crimes and tried in court.

During the trials, details of the *Dai Kensho* ("great inspection" in Japanese) operation, later known as the *Sook Ching* ("purge" in Mandarin) operation, emerged. As part of the *Sook Ching* operation, the Japanese forced the majority of Chinese men in Singapore through a screening dragnet before systematically executing tens of thousands of them.



A 1941 Remembrance Day badge belonging to a victim of the Japanese Occupation in Singapore



A belt buckle belonging to a victim of the Japanese Occupation in Singapore, undated

After the occupation, a school principal and survivor, Lai Hsin Jen recalled his escape after he was taken with lorry-loads of others to a quarry at the old 7 ½ milestone Siglap:

"I am still marvelling at how I could have escaped. My batch consisted mainly of Chinese teachers. The other batches were of soldiers, volunteers and more than 1,000 civilians.

We were securely bound with ropes. A succession of rifle shots told us of our impending fate. I was determined to make a break for freedom. On reaching the top of the hill, I burst the ropes loose and immediately jumped down a steep slope just as the Japanese troops were starting the massacre. It was only 300 yards and a few shots wounded my left leg, but this did not stop me.

I was not chased, so I hid behind the trees until the morning when I made my way back to the city."

The Japanese screened the Chinese men at centres such as the former Pin Ghee School in Chai Chee and used local informants although the screening process appeared to be arbitrary. The entire *Sook Ching* operation, as it came to be known by the Chinese community, was aimed at punishing resistance and forestalling further efforts at opposing Japanese rule.

The revelations at the war crimes trials left many in shock and Taoist religious leaders declared that thousands of discontented spirits, killed during the *Sook Ching*, were roaming the land. To appease these spirits and ease their path to the afterlife, the Hoon Sian Keng Temple held a religious ceremony on a hill at Siglap as it was believed to be the site where the largest number of people had been killed. Masses of food, representative paper clothing and paper money were burnt as sacrifices for the wandering spirits. There was also an element of retribution present with some bringing paper models of Japanese soldiers being disembowelled by devils in the court of Hell.

In September 1951, several mass graves containing the remains of around 1,300 victims were found in Siglap, with principal Lai, former volunteer soldier Chang Cheng Yean and resident Low Ah Hong leading authorities to the valley site. They also testified that while many of the dead had been shot, some were killed after the Japanese poured kerosene on them and set them alight.



Jalan Puay Poon, 2016

More than 10 years later, more mass graves were found near a former school at Jalan Puay Poon and off Evergreen Avenue after sand-washing operations uncovered human remains. The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce began investigations and eventually found more than 50 mass grave sites, including a group of graves discovered in 1966 containing the remains of over 2,000 victims.

Across Singapore, tens of thousands of people were killed in the *Sook Ching*, with academics estimating between 25,000 and 50,000 victims. After lobbying by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the remains of the victims were reinterred under the Civilian War Memorial, which was completed in 1967 and dedicated to victims of the Japanese Occupation.

The *Sook Ching* killings were not the only massacres carried out in the Bedok area. In February 1942, about 100 Malay, Eurasian and Chinese soldiers captured by the Japanese were taken to Bedok Hill, executed and buried. These soldiers were from the 1st Battalion Malay Regiment, the 4th Battalion Straits Settlements Volunteer Force from Malacca and the Negri Sembilan F.M.S. Volunteer Force.



Members of the public attending the unveiling ceremony of the Civilian War Memorial, 1967

(RE)BUILDING: PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE EAST



An image capturing the reclamation work at Bedok, 1963

Post-war Singapore faced the predicament of a housing system plagued by overcrowding and unhygienic conditions. To compound matters, the population had grown from some 220,000 at the turn of the 20th century to over 900,000 by 1947. Shophouses in urban areas were overcrowded and the island's traditional housing infrastructure proved to be inadequate.

Hence, one of the most urgent tasks for the government in the 1960s was to solve the housing crisis. The result was a large-scale public housing programme by the Housing and Development Board (HDB) that would create new towns across the island, and transform the way most Singaporeans lived by rehousing them in flats. In tandem, land reclamation would add room for residential and industrial uses.



An aerial view showing Bedok New Town, Neighbourhood 1 with 4,000 housing units, and Chai Chee Estate in the background, 1974



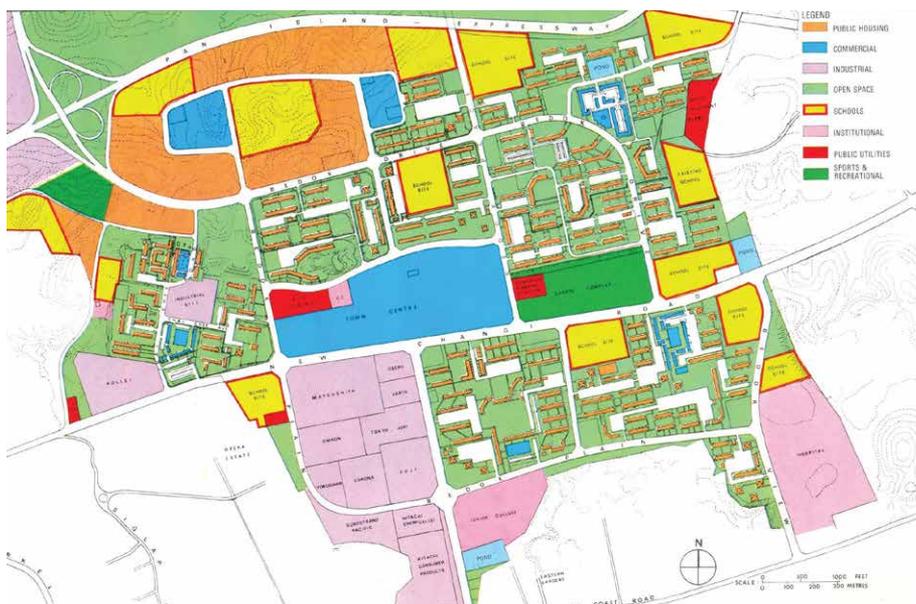
An aerial view of Bedok New Town, c.1980s

The first phase of the East Coast Reclamation Scheme began in 1965 and displaced around 1,000 families living on the high ground of Bedok. To resettle these families, HDB built a new S\$3 million housing estate at the 7th milestone of the old Upper Changi Road, roughly where Chai Chee Street meets Chai Chee Road today. The farmers who preferred to continue their agrarian lifestyles were resettled in Chua Chu Kang. By 1967, the Chai Chee flats housed resettled families from *kampongs* ("villages" in Malay) in Bedok, Eunos and Changi.

Further east, the hills of Bedok had tens of millions of cubic metres of earth removed for the reclamation scheme. In this area, HDB envisioned another New Town with a population of over 200,000, like Queenstown and Toa Payoh before it. Following HDB's New Town model of the 1960s and 1970s, Bedok would integrate housing, amenities and services with areas for light industry and serve as an early example of the live-work-play concept.



A newly-completed block of three-room flats at Chai Chee Estate, 1973



Plan of Bedok New Town, 1975





An aerial view of the coastline along Telok Kurau, Siglap and Upper East Coast areas, 1958

TURNING SEA INTO LAND: THE EAST COAST RECLAMATION SCHEME

Ever since Singapore's first land reclamation project created part of Boat Quay in 1822, reclaiming land from the sea has been a major strategy for the island's development. The nation's independence in 1965 came at a time when two major programmes ensured demand for land was high: a nationwide public housing agenda and a drive towards industrialisation.

It was within this context that a pilot reclamation project was initiated at Bedok Point in 1962. Government planners had initially been looking at methods to reduce traffic congestion along the old East Coast Road and Mountbatten Road, and arrived at the conclusion that it would be cheaper to reclaim land than to widen the existing roads. Greater land area for residential and industrial uses was also a draw and the pilot project became a success with 48 acres of land reclaimed the following year.

This paved the way for the East Coast Reclamation Scheme, the largest undertaking of its kind that Singapore had seen at the time. The rolling hills of Bedok were earmarked to provide the earth for the reclamation, and *kampongs* and farms were cleared ahead of the scheme's commencement in 1965 with a new housing estate at Upper Changi Road built to resettle 1,000 families.



A view of the land reclaimed through the pilot project in Bedok, 1964



Earth excavated from the hills at Changi and Bedok being used for the East Coast reclamation, 1965



Old Bedok Camp, 2016

Heritage blogger Peter Chan, who used to visit his grandmother at her home on Upper East Coast Road, and also completed his National Service at Bedok Camp, recalls:

"In 1963, my cousin, who was seven years older than I, led me to scale the Bailey bridge (a temporary bridge used in construction and by the military). We were scolded by the contractors for this dangerous adventure.

The Bailey bridge built across Upper East Coast Road to support the Phase 1 land reclamation (from 1965) in the Bedok area was a temporary steel framed bridge. It supported the conveyor belt system which transferred fill material from the hills to the sea off Upper East Coast Road. This project was undertaken by the Japanese contractor Ishikawa Jima Harima in 1966, as part of the S\$50 million Japanese War Reparation to Singapore.

In the 1970s, the bridge was my 'alarm clock' when I served my National Service at Bedok Camp. As the bus drove under the bridge, it created a low droning sound which was of the right decibel to wake me up for the next bus stop outside Jalan Haji Salam."

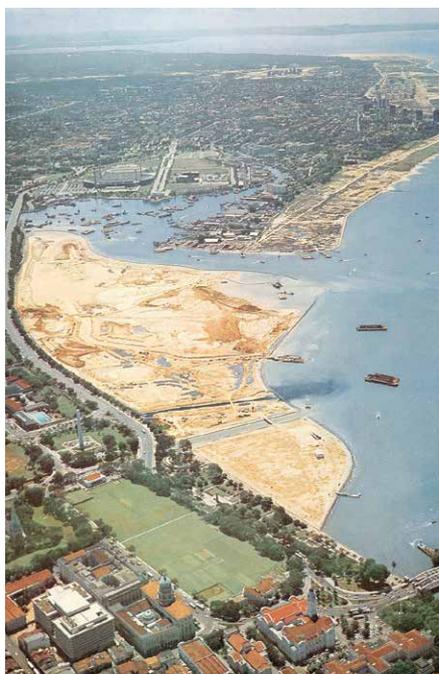


The Bailey bridge at Bedok settlement, 1955

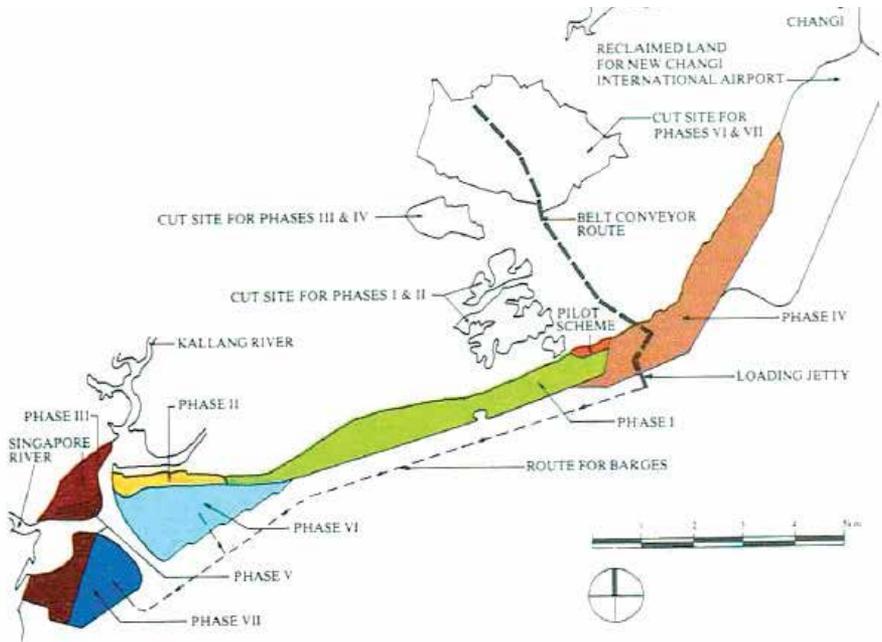
The multi-phased reclamation operation, stretching into the 1980s, demonstrated a new level of mechanisation. Bucket wheel excavators steadily flattened the hills of Bedok while a 16 kilometre-long conveyor belt transported that earth to the coast. Bridges and tunnels were built to minimise air pollution while mechanisation meant that noise pollution was kept to a minimum. This allowed the reclamation work to proceed 24 hours a day, speeding up the completion of this large-scale project.

By 1985, when the project was completed, more than 3,600 acres of land had been reclaimed and the shoreline was extended outwards by about a kilometre from Bedok to Tanjong Rhu. The final cost of the project was about \$613 million and included the creation of areas such as East Coast Park and the Marine Parade housing estate.

The shift from farming, fishing and *kampong* cottage industries became evident with the establishment of industrial estates within



Phase III of the East Coast Reclamation Scheme, with Bedok in the background, 1973



An illustration showing the phases and extent of the East Coast Reclamation, 1978-80



A bucket wheel excavator cutting earth for land reclamation at Bedok, 1966



A view of Marine Parade Estate built on reclaimed land along East Coast, 1973

the redeveloping Bedok. From the late 1960s, transnational companies including Matsushita, Oberg, Hitachi, Corona, Fuji and Rollei set up factories here that provided employment for the new town's residents. Many of these factories had a technological focus and manufactured electronics such as cameras, typewriters and other products that characterised post-independence Singapore's drive towards industrialisation.

With *kampongs*, farms and wooded areas cleared, the former hills presented a blank slate for HDB's town planning. Neighbourhoods within the town were differentiated with distinct colours for their blocks while clustered amenities offered shared social spaces and facilitated communal interaction.

Keith Tan, a resident who moved to a HDB flat in Bedok in 1980, recalls:

"It was here where I experienced my kindergarten, primary and secondary school life. When we first moved, I was excited - you get to see such a nice view over the East Coast."



Interior view of a Corona typewriter manufacturing factory at Bedok Plain (now Bedok South Road), 1974

When the Pan Island Expressway was extended to link the airport to the city centre in the 1980s, the knowledge that there would be more traffic passing by Bedok led to its unique angled block layout, designed to give visitors travelling from the airport an unobstructed view of modern public housing.

FIRE AND REDEVELOPMENT: KAMPONG SIGLAP

While *kampung* living offered advantages such as close-knit communities and a rustic environment, the fires that easily devoured the mainly attap and wood *kampung* houses were a frequent hazard. One such fire engulfed Kampong Siglap on 5 February 1962 as villagers celebrated the Lunar New Year.

Former bank officer Aloysius Leo De Conceicao recalled how the neighbouring *kampungs* worked together to put out the fire:

“It was during the Chinese New Year. I remember everybody from the neighbourhood came out to help the fire brigade and firemen. Because I think they had a bit of difficulty getting the water. I remember my cousins who were staying just opposite the kampong also went to help the fire-fighters quell the fire. It was sad because it was during the festive season.”

The fire had started after a bundle of firecrackers was thrown onto the roof of a Chinese medicine shop opposite the Siglap market. Blazing out of control, the fire soon spread to other shophouses and the rest of the *kampung* in minutes. When it was finally subdued by fire-fighters including those from the Army Fire Service and the Royal Air Force (RAF) Changi, a total of 81 shops and houses had been destroyed and nearly 500 people were rendered homeless.

While the blaze revealed the vulnerabilities of *kampung* living, it also brought forth the resilience of the community. A fire relief committee set up by the villagers and headed by Legislative Assembly member Sahorah binte Ahmad organised fundraising efforts including a concert featuring popular actresses Maria Menado and Marsita (a resident of Kampong Siglap) to solicit donations. By the end of 1963, the government completed four blocks of five-storey flats on the fire site and those who had lost their homes during the fire were given priority for the new flats.



Firemen battling the fire at Kampong Siglap, 1962

SIGLAP FIVE BAND

The Siglap Five band was formed in 1963 by a group of boys from Siglap Secondary School. The initial line-up consisted of Hamid (vocals), Karim (guitar), Nick (bass), Hamidon (bass) and Ariff (drums). At the end of 1963, the music label Philips offered them a recording contract. Although they recorded in Malay for Phillips, they performed more English songs at their gigs. Influenced by the British rhythm and blues sound made famous by the Rolling Stones, The Who and The Kinks, Siglap Five also took their cue from local bands such as The Antartics.

After recording a first EP (extended play) album with Jeffrey Din, the band toured Malaysia and Singapore, and also appeared at the Malam Vespa concerts organised on Orchard Road by the Italian motorcycle company. In 1968, the band split up as its members were called up for National Service. Part of their legacy lies in being arguably the first popular local band to use the organ and the first band to record British R&B standards in Malay.



The Siglap Five band performing, 1968

FENGSHAN: A MOVABLE HERITAGE

The roots of Fengshan Estate lie not in Bedok or the East Coast, but to the north in the Paya Lebar district. Many of the early residents in this estate were resettled from the farming village of Chang Mao Hng in Tai Seng, Paya Lebar.

Chang Mao Hng once stood at the junction of Paya Lebar Road and Airport Road. In 1902, three immigrants from Swatow, China, founded

a village temple dedicated to the Nine Emperor Gods with joss stick ash taken from the Nan Tian Temple in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur.

The temple underwent expansion in 1927 and was named Hong San Temple (or “temple on phoenix hill” in Hokkien) after a geomancer shared that there was “phoenix’s home” at the back of the temple. The temple thrived and soon became a hub for the villagers of Chang Mao Hng and it subsequently established Hong San Public School and a village cooperative society.

The temple was so closely identified with the village that when its residents were resettled to the new HDB estate here in the early 1980s, the estate, previously Bedok North, was renamed Fengshan – the hanyu pinyin version of its Hong San name. While the temple remains at its original site in Paya Lebar today, the village school relocated from Tai Seng to Bedok and evolved into today’s Fengshan Primary School.



A dragon dance performance at Fengshan, 1987



Playground at Bedok North (now Fengshan), 1978



Fengshan Estate, 2016

BUILDING BLOCKS: HISTORY THROUGH ARCHITECTURE



Aerial view of the seafront bungalows along Upper East Coast area in Siglap, 1958

A walk through the streets of the east, taking in houses that stood before Singapore became independent in 1965, retells the story of how the privileged lived in Singapore during the colonial era.

While neighbouring Katong and Joo Chiat are known for their Peranakan architecture, the rest of the estates along the eastern coast harbour a myriad of styles. Between Siglap Hill and Simpang Bedok, there is a predominance of the German-born Bauhaus aesthetic (a design philosophy that united art, crafts and technology). Many of the homes here were built in the 1960s and showcase Bauhaus features that emphasise modernity,

including the use of pre-fabricated concrete, an asymmetrical house plan and rectilinear openings.

During the 1960s, architects also took inspiration from the Art Deco movement, a movement which was decades old at that time and already well-established in Singapore. Art Deco houses in the east flaunted their curves and stylised patterns, and embraced ornamentation, symmetrical geometric designs and striking colours.

The architecture of the area also comprises cooling features to stave off the tropical heat. Examples of such features include rectilinear

“fins” framing windows that provided shade against the sun and ventilation grills at the top of walls which allowed sea breezes to enter and cool the home.

These architectural elements enhanced the pleasures of seaside living and reflected the tastes of the *towkays* (Chinese of good position, especially businessmen) who financed holiday houses or bought second homes for their mistresses in this area. This was the cream of society who sought coastal refuges from the bustling city. Other house-owners here included the local *kelong* (wooden offshore structures for trap fishing) owners and cattle dealers.

The way that houses were laid out also provides tell-tale signs of their occupants’ lifestyles and motivations for living in the east. The attraction of the sea is clear in the orientation of the post-war Magness House on Nallur Road, with the house positioned to command a prized coastal view at the time.



Magness House, 2016

Another house along the same road, built during the 1920s, reflects the lifestyles of the privileged during the colonial era. Built in the classical Palladian style that drew inspiration from ancient Greek and Roman architecture, this house was constructed with lower-floor service rooms and outhouses for cooking and washing. In later years, the service rooms were repurposed as reception rooms.

Service staff who were not housed in the same building often lived in narrow and compact barrack-style houses designed in a pared-down classical style that was favoured during the 1940s. An example of such barrack-style houses can still be seen near Magness House.

Chua Ei King, a pork seller at Siglap Market, shares:

“I never really met the rich and famous of Siglap because they usually sent their amahs (a “hanny or domestic servant” in Chinese dialects) on shopping errands.”



1920s detached house also along Nallur Road, 2016



Barrack-style houses that still retain their past external appearance, 2016

FORMER COASTLINE: SEA PAVILION AND OLD SEAWALLS



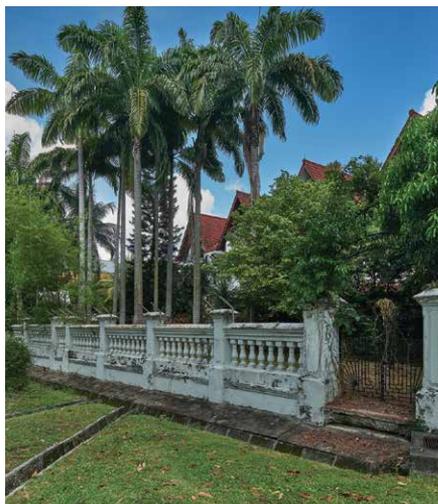
Sea pavilion at 494 Upper East Coast Road

Prior to land reclamation, there were a variety of seaside structures built along the former coastline for residents' enjoyment. These ranged from simple open pavilions to fully-furnished chalets used for picnics and parties. Many such pavilions were demolished during World War II to prevent Japanese landings from the sea.

Today there is only one sea pavilion remaining at the East Coast area. It is a single-storey concrete structure built in the 1950s for the owners of Jurong Brickworks, Koh Eng Poh and Chan Wah Chip. Built in the Modern architectural style, the sea pavilion cantilevered over the sea before land reclamation took place. Such a cantilevered structure is unique to Singapore's coastal architecture as sea pavilions in other countries were typically built on stilts in the water.

Another seaside structure that remains from before the reclamation is a seawall by Marine Parade Road, which stretches across several properties and outlines the original coastal embankment. Its stylised gate details, posts and balustrades hark back to the European influences of colonial architecture, with seaside-themed ornamentation in the form of Art Deco grill gates featuring sun rays, scrolls and the ubiquitous coconut palms.

Another nearby seawall dates to the 1910s and features intricate rosettes and interlinked



A now-landlocked seawall near Marine Parade Road, 2016

coins carved into its face. Possessing a style that may be described as Straits Baroque, the artistry reflects an attention to detail that characterises much of the architecture in the east. Similarly graceful and expressive detailing can be found in Art Deco-inspired gates of residences, unfurling driveways and classical-style lampposts.



Art Deco-style metal grill gates along the old seawall show coastal motifs, 2016



Seawall featuring carved rosettes and interlinked coins, 2016

LOCAL MEETS GLOBAL: HOMES AND SHOPHOUSES

With Malay communities and those from across the Indonesian archipelago well-established in the east, no survey of the architecture of the area would be complete without acknowledging traditional Southeast Asian styles. A number of homes here, mirroring the diversity of cultures that met and melded in Singapore, feature *kampung* (“village” in Malay) style elements while others combine these elements with European influences.

A 1960s house on Wiltshire Rise, just behind Lucky Heights, bears the character of a traditional Malay home. Constructed in brick, wood and zinc, its layout includes the *rumah ibu* (“main living space” in Malay) partitioned into sleeping areas, a prominent *serambi* (“veranda” in Malay), an overhanging roof and a *rumah dapur* (“kitchen” in Malay). Within the compound, courtyard intervals mark extensions made to the residence.

Villa Kahar, along Bedok Avenue, is a fine example of a synthesis between traditional and imported styles. Standing on stilts that recall the *kampung* house, this 1920s residence also possesses a symmetric outlook, pale colours and a balcony that show its Neo-Rococo influences. Outhouses at the back functioned as bathrooms, kitchens and servants’ quarters, and an adjacent house likely has its origins as an outgrowth of living quarters from the original Villa Kahar structure.

Shophouses, one of the iconic architectural forms of Singapore and the region, can be found in the east as well. Along Upper East Coast Road is a row of 1920s shophouses featuring the Neo-Georgian style that was experiencing a revival in the United Kingdom during that period.



A house at Wiltshire Rise based on the layout of a traditional Malay home, 2016



Villa Kahar along Bedok Avenue, 2016



A row of Neo-Georgian style shophouses along Upper East Coast Road, 2016

COMMUNITY LIFE

In Bedok and the East Coast, schools, mosques, temples and churches speak eloquently of the diversity of the many communities that made their home here.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

One of their shared aspirations was for a better life through education, and many fishermen and farmers who had little or no formal education of their own were determined to secure their children's futures. Pooling their precious resources to hire teachers, they established village schools. Other families went without the helping hands of their children, choosing instead to send them to government or community schools that were usually much further away.

SEKOLAH MELAYU PADANG TERBAKAR

The Government Annual Education Report of 1883 noted that two schools had been established at Siglap and at Kampong Padang Terbakar that year. The latter village, with a name that refers to "burnt fields" in Malay, was located to the east of Bedok Corner, close to where Xilin Avenue is today. Sekolah Melayu Padang Terbakar provided essential primary education for children in the area, including those from *kampongs* ("villages" in Malay) in Bedok who sometimes had to walk for up to an hour to get to school.

FISHERIES DEPARTMENT SCHOOL

With the sea at its doorstep and a centuries-rich fishing culture, it was little surprise that the Fisheries Department established a school here during the colonial era. This school was located at the eighth milestone of the old Upper East Coast Road, known colloquially as Batu Lapan ("eighth milestone" in Malay).

In a high-raftered boathouse, youths were taught how to handle fishing vessels before being brought out to sea for practical exercises. A variety of fishing methods, the manufacture

and mending of nets as well as modern fisheries science, including the preservation of seafood through canning, curing and bottling were taught. Educators at this school included Ishak bin Ahmad, father of Singapore's first president Yusof bin Ishak, and Justice of the Peace A. Karim bin Embi Abdullah.

CHAI CHEE SECONDARY SCHOOL

From the 1960s, *kampong* residents were well aware of shifting tides in education. For example, the English language was increasingly regarded as an important asset in the national drive towards industrialisation. As a result of the heightened awareness of the importance of education, particularly English-based education, villagers pressed politicians for secondary schools to be built in their districts.

In 1968, the government set up Chai Chee Secondary School along Sennett Road, which offered lessons in both English and Chinese. Integrated schools such as Chai Chee, which offered instruction in multiple languages, became the norm in the decades ahead, with English later emerging as the main medium of instruction together with mother tongue languages such as Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. Later renamed Bedok Town Secondary School, this institution has since merged with Ping Yi Secondary School.

PING YI SECONDARY SCHOOL

61 Chai Chee Street



Ping Yi Secondary School, 2016

Established as Pin Ghee Public School in 1930, this institution took its name from the Peng Ghee neighbourhood in Kampong Chai Chee. This originally Chinese-medium school was founded through strong support and donations from villagers.

For the first seven years of its existence, Pin Ghee functioned as a village school and would have made use of communal village facilities such as the *wayang* (Malay for a theatrical or operatic show) stage. When the school acquired its own facilities in 1937, the seven classrooms in the new school quickly filled up due to the strong demand for education among the residents of Chai Chee.

Like a number of other Chinese schools, Pin Ghee found itself swept up in the turmoil of pro-communist and leftist movements in the 1960s. These movements drew much support from the young Chinese and many students asserted their political opposition with boycotts of examinations, demonstrations and so on. The Pin Ghee Old Boys' Association was also banned from publishing what the authorities deemed as politically subversive articles.

The political battles of Chinese-medium schools as well as the national shift towards English as the language of business and administration, meant that the appeal of Chinese schools such as Pin Ghee began to wane in the 1960s. With enrolment declining substantially and the government acquiring its land, the school closed down in 1976.

In 1983, the institution was revived as Ping Yi Secondary School, with English as its medium of instruction and a curriculum following the national education syllabus.

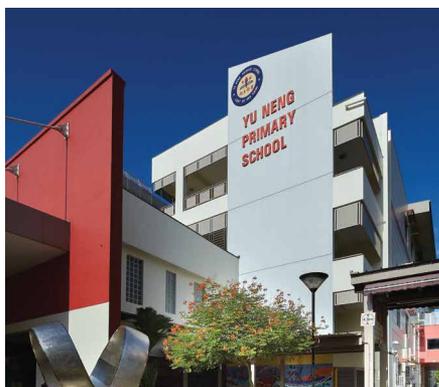
YU NENG PRIMARY SCHOOL

56 Bedok North Street 3

Another village school established and financed by the community was Yeu Neng School. Founded in 1935 by Huang Hua Long and other villagers, the school had Mandarin and other Chinese dialects as its medium of

instruction. Classes were held in a zinc and attap building, with an enrolment of about 20 students from *kampongs* around Simpang Bedok.

Rapid growth after the Japanese Occupation saw the school hitting an enrolment of nearly 700 students. In 1982, it moved to Bedok North Street 3 and changed from an aided school receiving partial funding to a fully-funded government school. In the process, the school was renamed Yu Neng Primary School.



Yu Neng Primary School, 2016

ST. STEPHEN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

20 Siglap View



St Stephen's School, 2016

Beyond the village and government schools, religious institutions also established schools in Bedok. One such example was St. Stephen's Primary School, founded in 1957 by Rev. Br. Stephen Barkley of the De La Salle Catholic order in Singapore. In its early years,

St. Stephen's attracted mainly Catholic students from the eastern coastal areas, but its student population has since grown to become multi-religious and multi-cultural.

ANGLICAN HIGH SCHOOL

600 Upper Changi Road



The opening ceremony of Anglican Chinese High School at Upper Changi Road, 25 January 1960



Anglican High School, 2016

Founded by the Chinese congregations of the Anglican community, this institution was the first Anglican school to use the Chinese language as its main medium of instruction.

Anglican High School started lessons in January 1956 with a principal, three Chinese teachers, three English teachers and 123 students. Classes were held at St Andrew's Secondary School in Potong Pasir, until the present-day school at Upper Changi Road was completed in 1960. That year also marked a special milestone as the school opened its doors to female students for the first time.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Reflecting the diverse communities that have sunk their roots in this area, the East Coast is dotted with religious institutions of various affiliations. Even as they maintain distinct religious identities, many of these places of

worship also helped forge bonds between different communities through inter-religious activities and day-to-day cooperation.

KAMPONG SIGLAP MOSQUE

451 Marine Parade Road

Masjid Kampong Siglap has served Muslims in the area for more than a century. The exact date of its establishment is unknown although it is believed to be around the late 19th century. A frame with Quranic inscriptions found in the old mosque mentions a rebuilding of the mosque in 1902, and oral history accounts of the villagers note that this was the second or third time the mosque was rebuilt.

Built on land owned by Madam Hajjah binte Jumat (of Kampong Hajjah), the construction of the mosque was a community effort. Fishermen donated funds from selling their daily catch while the women laboured to haul sand from the beaches to the building site.



The old Masjid Kampong Siglap building, now Darul Quran Singapura, 2016



Kampong Siglap Mosque, 2016

The *kampong* residents also hand-carved a variety of mosque drums, including the *kentung*, the *tabuh* and the *beduk* for issuing the *adhan*, or call to prayer, and for raising the alarm during emergencies. The well of the village was also used for the necessary ablutions before prayers or Quran readings. As a community resource, kitchenware such as pots, pans and cutlery at the mosque was made freely available for the villagers to use.

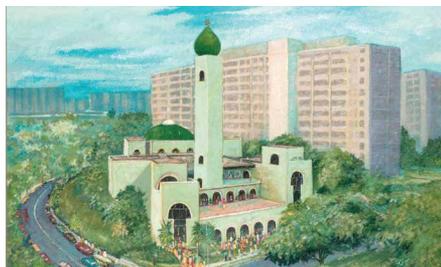
A new mosque was built next door and opened in 1992, and the original Kampong Siglap Mosque was converted and used for religious classes. The old mosque was considered ideal for these classes due to its serene environment and *kampong*-style architecture. The centre was renamed the Darul Quran Singapura in 2009.

The same year, a fire gutted the new mosque building. Fortunately, the community spirit and resilience of Siglap residents came to the fore once again and the rebuilding of the mosque was financed partly through community donations.

MASJID AL-ANSAR AND MASJID AL-TAQUA

161 A Bedok North Avenue 1 and
11A Jalan Bilal

Other mosques in the Bedok area include Masjid Al-Ansar, financed and constructed during the first phase of the national and community-supported Mosque Building Fund initiative in 1981, and the Masjid Al-Taqua, established in 1883. The latter greatly influenced the character and culture of Kampong Bedok, and may have inspired the cluster of Islamic-themed road names in the area such as Jalan Bilal and Jalan Kathi.



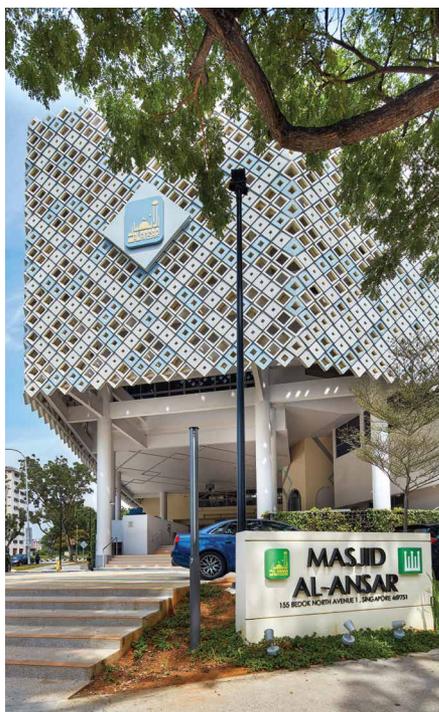
A painting of Masjid Al-Ansar by S. Mohdir, 1991



Masjid Al-Taqua, 2016



Muslims waiting to break fast together at the Masjid Al-Ansar, 1970



Masjid Al-Ansar, 2016

KIM SAN TEMPLE

25 Jalan Ulu Siglap



Kim San Temple, 2016

Established in 1948, the Kim San Temple at Jalan Ulu Siglap is dedicated to the Nine Emperor Gods. During the ninth month of the Lunar calendar each year, this Taoist temple celebrates the Nine Emperor Gods festival with a street procession of dragon or lion dance troupes, temple mediums and devotees carrying sacred urns.

Proceeding to a nearby river or sea, in this case at East Coast Park, the devotees invite the deities into the sacred urns, which are then brought back to the temple. The procession may also stop by other temples dedicated to the Nine Emperor Gods and even churches and mosques. After nine days during which worshippers ask blessings of the Emperor Gods at the temple, the sacred urns are brought out to sea on a boat to send the deities off.

YUAN MING SI TEMPLE AND MAN FATT LAM TEMPLE

631 Upper East Coast Road and
211 Bedok Road

The colourful fronts of Chinese temples are visible in this multicultural area. Yuan Ming Si Temple and Man Fatt Lam Buddhist Temple, built around 1971, both at Upper East Coast Road, have seen the area undergo its transformation from the pre-reclamation days to the residential enclaves of today.

In particular, Yuan Ming Si Temple records show that the construction of the temple was carried out from 1963 to 1964 on the empty garden grounds of a seafront-facing bungalow. It was founded by a local Buddhist monk, Sek Tat Ming, and is a temple dedicated to Sakyamuni (another name for Buddha)



The opening ceremony of the Yuan Ming Si Temple, 1965.



Yuan Ming Si Temple, 2016

and Guan Yin, a bodhisattva representing compassion and mercy. Today, the bungalow still stands but the coastline has been extended further out.

The Man Fatt Lam Temple is also dedicated to Buddha and contains a columbarium to store ancestral tablets. Nearby is the Man Fatt Lam Home for the Aged which was built through the donations of the life savings of one of the nuns from the temple.

BETHESDA FRANKEL ESTATE CHURCH

4 La Salle Street



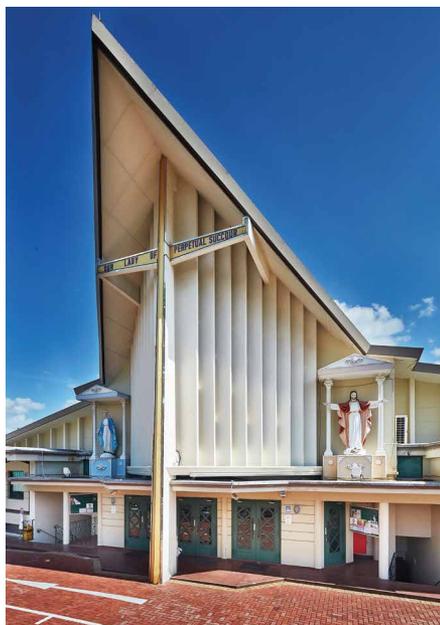
Bethesda Frankel Estate Church, 2016

The Bethesda Frankel Estate Church was established by members of the Christian Brethren movement in the 1950s. The movement was brought to Singapore during the mid-1800s by Englishman Philip Robinson, founder of the Robinsons departmental store.

The church evolved from outreach activities started by the Bethesda Church in neighbouring Katong, including a kindergarten at Jalan Pipit (now Roseburn Avenue) and a Sunday school. The Bethesda Frankel Estate Church started services in 1958 and a church building on La Salle Street was completed in 1964.

THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR

31 Siglap Hill



The Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, 2016

During the 1950s, the growth of the area's Catholic population resulted in a sharp increase in the congregation size of the Church of the Holy Family in nearby Katong, and its priest Fr. Rene Ashness started an appeal for donations to build a new church in Siglap.

Through collections and house-to-house fundraising, about \$280,000 was raised for the land and construction of the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, built in 1961. An annex building was completed in 1997 and houses a time capsule containing church memorabilia, which will be opened in its centenary year of 2061.

BEDOK LUTHERAN CHURCH

485 Bedok South Avenue 2



Bedok Lutheran Church, 2016

The plan to build a church here began alongside HDB's plans for setting up a satellite town in Bedok. The Lutheran Council planned to reach out to residents in this area and to Lutheran members who lived in other parts of Singapore. In 1977, Lutheran families in Bedok began to meet in different homes for Bible studies and prayer sessions. Regular services began to be held the following year at a rented terrace house at Jalan Tanjong, and the year 1979 saw the first baptisms performed by the church. The original building for the Bedok Lutheran Church was completed in 1981.

BEDOK METHODIST CHURCH

86 Bedok Road



Bedok Methodist Church, 1953

The Bedok Methodist Church started in 1946 and operated from an attap house chapel at Padang Terbakar, where the first gospel service was delivered by Rev. Chew Hock Hin. It was only six years later, in 1952, that the construction of a new church building began. The church then expanded to accommodate increased membership in 1973 and again in 1995, with its expansions funded mainly through donations from the Methodist community.

SUN, SAND AND SEA



Koleks during the New Year's Regatta, c. 1900

COASTAL PLEASURES

Until the 1960s, the beaches by East Coast Road and Upper East Coast Road were relatively untouched by development, except for the bungalows located by the sea. These beaches drew both residents of the area and people from other parts of Singapore, as they offered a range of popular pastimes including fishing, shellfish picking, sailing races and dance parties.

Heritage blogger Peter Chan recalls his childhood in Bedok:

"In those days, school holidays did not mean an overseas holiday trip to exotic Bali or to snowy Europe. We went to catch fish in the Sungei Bedok, now called Bedok Canal, and explored the old kampongs at Padang Terbakar (now a golf course) and Ayer Gemuruh."

In his book *That's How It Goes*, Eurasian dental surgeon Jock F. A. C. Oehlers recalled family holidays spent at the beach at Tanah Merah during the 1930s:



Bedok Canal (previously Sungei Bedok), 2016

"Tanah Merah was a long distance from the city centre and it took a good hour to reach by car along narrow, winding roads. But once there, it was heaven to be by the seaside. [...]"

My father would ask me to accompany him to the beach to collect remis ("clams" in Malay). With wooden spatulas, we would scrape the surface of the beach to uncover them. They were not always easy to find, but once an area of the beach was found where there were colonies of them, it was a delight to be able to fill our containers with remis.

(After washing the shells and boiling the clams) all we had was a tiny amount for each of us, just enough to place on a cut slice of cucumber. And with a little sprinkling of chilli sauce, the hard-sought-for remis was swallowed in one gulp!"



By the sea at Bedok, 1927



Bedok Beach (Changi Beach / East Coast Park today), 1940s

Near Kampong Bedok and at Siglap, the festival of Mandi Safar was a highlight for Muslims up to the 1950s. Safar is the second month of the Islamic calendar and refers to autumn time when the leaves turn yellow. It is also believed by some to be a month of misfortune. During

Mandi Safar, Malays would wear brightly-coloured clothes and visit the beach to cleanse their bodies and souls with seawater. Some believe that this practice also washes away bad luck, which has led to the festival being deemed by most Muslim authorities as *haram* or forbidden. For this reason, Malays in Singapore no longer celebrate Mandi Safar.

The post-war decades also saw the peak of the *kolek* (small wooden Malay boat) races, which were fiercely competitive affairs drawing participants from other coastal *kampongs* from as far as Jurong, the West Coast, the many small islands around Singapore and even from the east coast of Malaya and the Indonesian islands. Chinese sailors also raced in their *pukats*, which are canoe-like boats.

The *kolek* races were held during Hari Raya Haji and other festive periods, and had multiple categories based on the number of crew, from the single sailor to seven-man crews. The coveted prizes included trophies and cash.

On the beach, spectators watched the races keenly, or participated in other games such as climbing greased poles and catching ducks placed into the sea. The post-race dance parties were perhaps as eagerly anticipated as the races themselves, with hundreds of people participating in *ronggeng* (a dance from Java) and *joget* (a dance from Malacca).



A kolek race at Bedok, 1963



East Coast Park, 2016

Where many of the pioneer generation hold unforgettable memories of the beaches of Bedok and Tanah Merah, those of later generations are partial to a different nearby beach. This is East Coast Park, created during the land reclamation which took place from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Stretching from Tanjong Rhu in the south to Changi in the east, East Coast Park features seafood restaurant clusters, swimming lagoons and water-themed attractions. One of the main focal points of the park is the 250 metres-long Bedok Jetty.

The jetty was completed in 1970 to handle the unloading of vehicles and other military surplus from the United States during the Vietnam War, most of which were destined for the scrap yard and auctioned off from a nearby junkyard to companies from around the world. The construction cost of \$1 million was borne by the Singapore government-owned United Metal and Plant Corporation. The government then took over the jetty in 1975 and converted it for recreational uses.

Bedok Jetty offers a variety of sights, sounds and smells. Fishermen hanging kerosene lamps to attract *sotong* ("squid" in Malay), radios blaring out songs in many languages, families



Bedok Jetty, 1986



Fishing at Bedok Jetty, 2014

picnicking, teenagers strumming their guitars and itinerant peddlers offering anything from *nasi lemak* to imitation leather goods are all familiar scenes for Bedok Jetty regulars.

Over the years, Bedok Jetty has witnessed military exercises and naval displays, and ships full of Vietnamese refugees fleeing the Vietnam War anchored near its waters awaiting aid from various organisations in Singapore. Even

the first aerobridges imported into Singapore, bound for Changi Airport in 1980 to replace the old mobile steps used at Paya Lebar Airport, were unloaded at Bedok Jetty.

Some four decades on, Bedok Jetty continues to hold a special place in the hearts of Singaporeans. A poll by *The Straits Times* newspaper in 2014 saw Singaporeans nominating the jetty as one of 10 local landmarks they wanted to see conserved.

FOOD PARADISE

Before East Coast Park became famous as a food haven by the seaside, there was Bedok Corner. From at least the 1940s to the 1970s, this stretch of beach was popular with diners who made a beeline for the pushcart hawker stalls that appeared there in the late evening.

A 1950 article in *The Singapore Free Press* newspaper described how the area came to life after dusk:

“Bedok Beach looks like any other stretch of land during the day, relatively unoccupied except for a few fishermen and hawkers with a quiet sea beating up against the shore. After sunset, hawkers seem to spring from the very street, carrying cauldrons full of fresh fish and vegetables. In no time at all, a desert stretch of land becomes one of the liveliest spots of night life in Singapore.”

The various stalls sold hawker favourites, such as *satay* (barbecued meat skewers), seafood dishes and local desserts. For the beachgoers who arrived earlier in the day, there would be roaming hawkers carrying packets of *mee siam* (a noodle dish with gravy), *nasi lemak* (coconut milk rice with various accompaniments) and *otak* (grilled and spiced fish paste). Heritage blogger Joe Elliott recounts:

“At the side of Bedok Rest House were stalls on the pavement and behind them on the beach were tables and chairs. The stallholders were cooking various foods, which I had at one of tables in 1952. It was several pieces of meat on a thin wooden skewer and a small dish of sauce. The meat when dipped into the sauce was out of this world – it just melted in your mouth and I’ve never tasted anything like it since. The memory forgets what they were called but will never forget the taste.”

The hawker stretch of Bedok Corner lost its popular appeal in the early 1970s when the beach succumbed to land reclamation. One surviving stall from the Bedok Beach days is the Ye Lai Xiang stall that earned its reputation from its cuttlefish and *kangkong* (“water convulvus” in Malay) dishes and *cheng tng* (Chinese dessert consisting of a clear, brownish syrup sweetened with rock sugar with a variety of ingredients). Set up



The Bedok Rest House, a popular food spot, 1940s



Bedok Food Centre, 2016

in 1939 by Chinese immigrant Ye Gui Ying, the stall's *cheng tng* combines the Hokkien, Teochew and Peranakan versions of the dessert into a 12-ingredient dish.

Today, the Ye Lai Xiang stall operates from the Bedok Food Centre at the junction of the Bedok and Upper East Coast Roads. This food centre is the modern successor of the area's hawker culture and was first built in 1971. The centre was rebuilt in 2005 and now features architecture in the Minangkabau (a community from Sumatra, Indonesia) style. Its steeply pitched roofs are characteristic of

that style while the central courtyard recalls the communal spaces of the *kampong* and acknowledges the cultural heritage of Bedok's early settlers.



Ye Lai Xiang stall selling *cheng tng* at the Bedok Food Centre, 2016

HERITAGE TREE

Sea Fig (*Ficus superba*)



Trunk girth: 11.6m

Height: 16m

This Sea Fig Heritage Tree is located in the carpark area of Bedok Food Centre.

While hawkers dominated one side of Bedok Beach, the other side was dotted with seafood restaurants such as Palm Beach Seafood, Wyman's Haven, Red House, Spring Court, Sin Hua Hin, Kheng Luck Seafood, Long Beach Seafood and Bedok Sea View Seafood. Heritage blogger Peter Chan recalls:

"My maternal grandmother once operated a restaurant called Wyman's Haven in one of the seafront bungalow houses. Her signature dish was roasted pigeon. There was one other competitor to Wyman's Haven on the same road about four houses away at that time – it was Palm Beach Seafood."

Long Beach Seafood, which has since become a successful chain of restaurants, first started at the former Bedok Rest House, a coffee house that catered to military staff from camps in Changi and Bedok. One long-time employee of Long Beach Seafood, Wee Lok Li, shares his memories of Bedok Rest House from his childhood:

"The surroundings were really beautiful! The beach was right in front of Bedok Rest House, and tables and chairs were placed outside for customers. The beach was really beautiful during low tides, and we children and the people living in the area would go down to the beach to dig for cockles. We would just play at the beach... The environment was very good. There was also a hawker centre near the Rest House where they sold satay, chicken rice, chicken porridge and so on. There were about seven to eight stalls and it would be very crowded at night. In front of the hawker centre was the sea."



Long Beach Seafood's main branch at its East Coast Parkway site, 2016



Long Beach Seafood Restaurant during its humble beginnings at Bedok Rest House along Old Bedok Road, 1946

Along the coast (now Upper East Coast Road), was also the Hua Yu Wee restaurant, which continues to operate today from its original 1920s bungalow. The bungalow features detached double-storey wings, outhouses and steps to the former beachfront. It boasts a mainly classical design with a wing marked with Neo-Rococo friezes and archway ornaments. A relatively newer restaurant that has nevertheless made its mark is located in Fengshan Estate. Established in 1973 in the Frankel Estate area, Chin Lee Restaurant is a family business that serves Singaporean Teochew food. Owner Eric Chua Hwa Choon explains:

"We have been in Fengshan since 1980 and are quite well-known in this area. We are the first few who came into this heartland as a restaurant. Most of the heartland eating places were coffee shops... We were one of the pioneers because we have been in this trade and this area since the 1980s."



Old Chin Lee Restaurant at Frankel Estate area, 1970s



Hua Yu Wee restaurant, 2016



Chin Lee Restaurant in Fengshan Estate, 2016

REMAKING OUR HEARTLAND: BEDOK AND EAST COAST TODAY

Bedok and the East Coast are part of HDB's Remaking Our Heartland (ROH) initiative, which began in 2011. ROH aims to update a town's physical environment and improve accessibility, install new recreational areas as well as showcase the heritage and culture of the area.

Dedicated cycling and pedestrian paths that connect activity hubs such as East Coast Park, Bedok Reservoir Park and Bedok Town Centre, are designed to enhance the town's

accessibility and its overall liveability. Other features of the ROH initiative include an Integrated Transport Hub, a Bedok Integrated Complex that brings together community, eldercare, library, medical and sporting facilities, and a new Bedok Town Plaza and Heritage Corner. Heritage place markers along the Bedok Heritage Trail route also highlight various significant locations in Bedok and the East Coast, and commemorate the social and cultural memories associated with them.



Bedok Integrated Complex (this illustration is an artists' impression and actual development may differ), 2015

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The Bedok 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. Presented by the National Heritage Board in collaboration with the Housing & Development Board, we hope this trail will bring back fond memories for those who have lived, worked or played in the area, and serve as a useful source of information for new residents and visitors.

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Aerial view of the East Coast Reclamation Scheme in its final phases, extending from Bedok to Tanjong Rhu, 1972