



Stories from the

INNER RING

Charms Along the City Fringe



Identity Corridor Guide

Stories from the Inner Ring: Charms Along the City Fringe

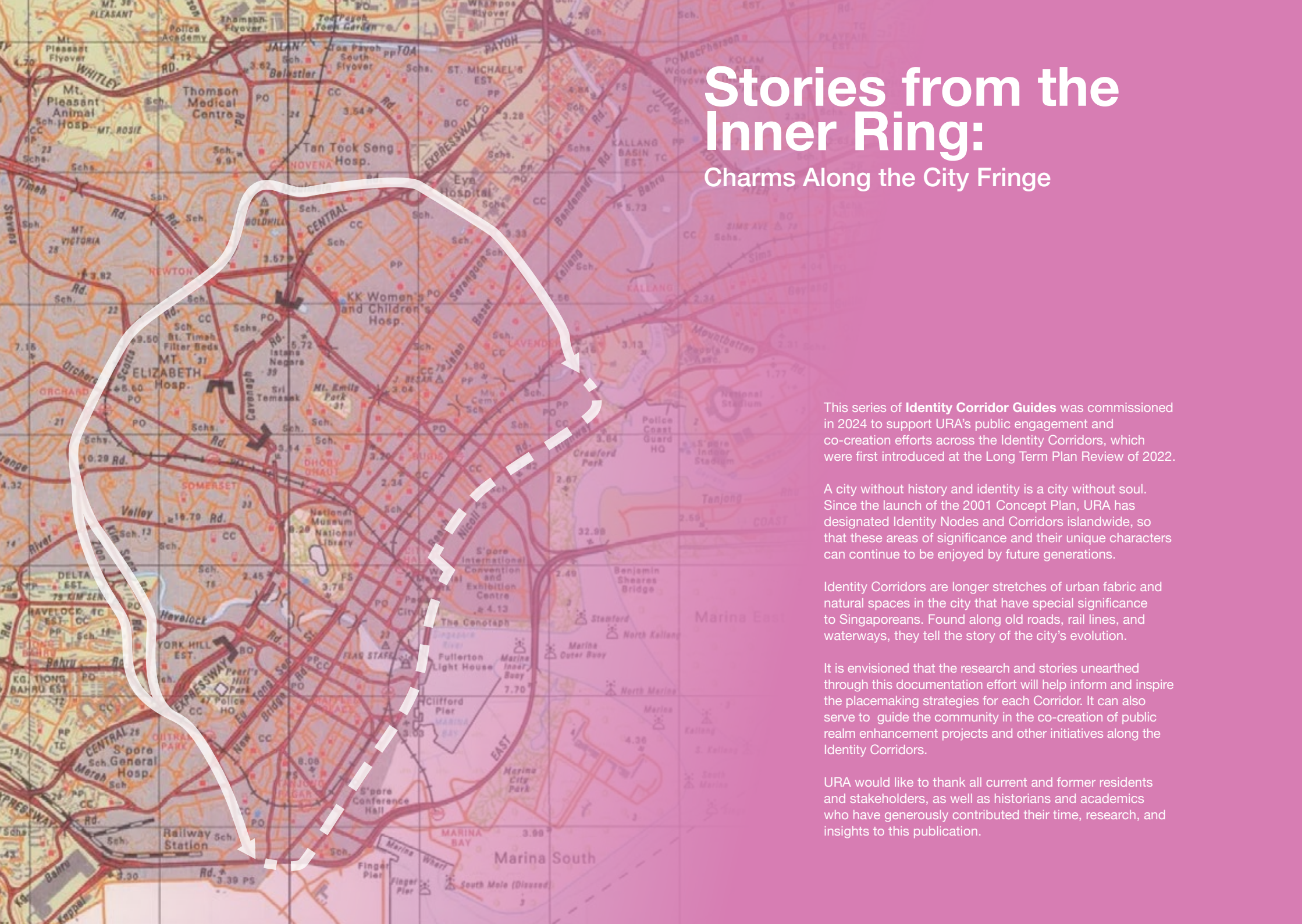
This series of **Identity Corridor Guides** was commissioned in 2024 to support URA's public engagement and co-creation efforts across the Identity Corridors, which were first introduced at the Long Term Plan Review of 2022.

A city without history and identity is a city without soul. Since the launch of the 2001 Concept Plan, URA has designated Identity Nodes and Corridors islandwide, so that these areas of significance and their unique characters can continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

Identity Corridors are longer stretches of urban fabric and natural spaces in the city that have special significance to Singaporeans. Found along old roads, rail lines, and waterways, they tell the story of the city's evolution.

It is envisioned that the research and stories unearthed through this documentation effort will help inform and inspire the placemaking strategies for each Corridor. It can also serve to guide the community in the co-creation of public realm enhancement projects and other initiatives along the Identity Corridors.

URA would like to thank all current and former residents and stakeholders, as well as historians and academics who have generously contributed their time, research, and insights to this publication.





Chinatown



Orchard Road



Tanjong Pagar



Jalan Besar



Kallang Industrial Estate



Outram



Moulmein



Balestier

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ISBN 978-981-94-1669-1 (Print)
ISBN 978-981-94-1670-7 (Digital)

Research and Design
HOL Content Curators LLP

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Printed in Singapore

INTRODUCTION

From Trunk Roads to Charming Neighbourhoods



The 1882 Raffles Town Plan outlines the historic colonial city centre from which subsequent urban development radiated outwards – roads, housing, and amenities were eventually established along the city's fringe to serve the growing communities living outside the town.

Evolution of the Inner Ring

In 1822, Sir Stamford Raffles introduced the Raffles Town Plan to organise development in the downtown area around the Singapore River, from Telok Ayer to the Kallang River. The plan featured a grid layout, ethnic zoning, and designated areas for commercial and government activities, with lasting influence on the city's fringe even today.

While the town's core was designated for commercial and administrative functions, the city's fringe saw the development of ethnic enclaves and residential areas, sparking early suburban growth. Additionally, trunk roads connecting the city's fringe to the town eventually became key transport routes.

By the early 1900s, several trunk roads had been established to serve areas beyond Raffles' planned town. These roads have become a familiar part of how we move around the city, including Outram Road, Balestier Road, Stevens Road, Paterson Road, and Kim Seng Road.

In 1929, the addition of Whitley Road by the colonial government connected these trunk roads into a concentric circle, forming the Inner Ring Road. The colonial authorities hoped that the 12-kilometre Inner Ring Road would relieve growing congestion in the city centre and encourage people to relocate to less developed areas on the city's fringe.

The development of the trunk roads opened accessibility beyond the city centre, allowing neighbourhoods to emerge along the Inner Ring. As the population grew, issues such as overcrowding and pollution worsened in and around the city centre.

The colonial government tasked the Singapore Improvement Trust with surveying the island, resulting in the 1958 Master Plan, which regulated land use and density while designating areas for infrastructure, community facilities, and open spaces.



The Inner Ring Road, conceptualised by the British government, was intended to reduce traffic congestion in the city centre.

The 1958 Master Plan did not eventually resolve inner-city traffic congestion, so the Singapore government carried out more comprehensive planning with the 1971 Concept Plan, a long-term strategy of encouraging the construction of satellite towns beyond the central area. The 1971 Concept Plan further modernised the Inner Ring by enhancing transportation infrastructure, including the development of the rail network, and integrating public housing, essential amenities, and green spaces to create a more balanced, well-connected city.



The 1971 Concept Plan set out broad principles to develop new housing towns, industrial estates, transport infrastructure, and recreational spaces across the island via a ring structure of satellite towns around the central water catchment.

The Inner Ring Today

Across the years, these city fringe neighbourhoods have evolved into unique places, each with their own rich heritage.

As an Identity Corridor, the Inner Ring Corridor strings together the charmingly eclectic and varied evolution of the city centre's fringe, driven by both grassroots efforts and government initiatives:

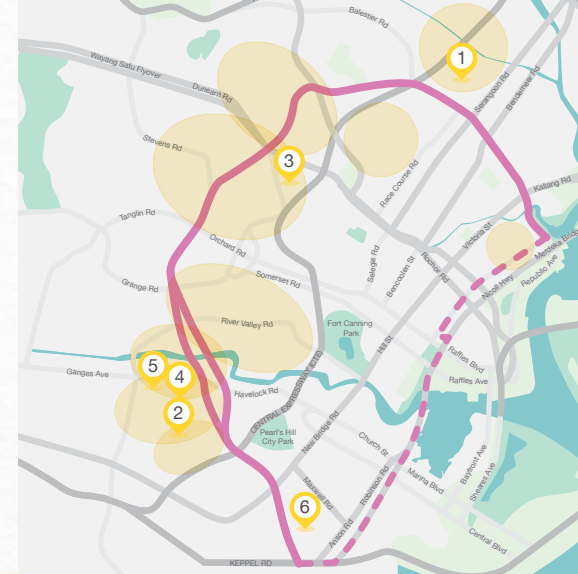
large-scale projects to inject housing and employment opportunities emerged alongside the organic rise of entrepreneurs, recreational spaces, and institutions such as hospitals, places of worship, and schools.

These developments have been essential in meeting the needs of the growing communities on the city's outskirts.

HOUSING THE COMMUNITY

The Inner Ring is home to some of Singapore's earliest government-built housing, beginning with the Singapore Improvement Trust's (SIT) nascent building efforts in 1927 to address overcrowding in the city centre. By 1959, the housing crisis had led to more squatter settlements, prompting the establishment of the Housing and Development Board (HDB) to prioritise mass housing construction.

Early HDB flats featured functional designs paired with modern innovations that set the stage for today's public housing estates. These innovations, such as neighbourhood centres, playgrounds, and fitness corners, are now common features. In the 1970s and 1980s, to ease street overcrowding in the city centre, many shops and street hawkers relocated to mixed-use high-rise HDB developments that combined residential and commercial spaces.



- Residential Areas
- 1 Townerville Estate
- 2 Tiong Bahru Flats
- 3 Monk's Hill Estate
- 4 Bukit Ho Swee Estate
- 5 Havelock Road HDB
- 6 Tanjong Pagar Plaza



Former SIT houses along Towner Road and McNair Road.

1 Townerville Estate

Townerville, an estate with six blocks of terrace houses, is a prominent landmark along McNair Road and Towner Road. The houses were built in the early 1920s by the SIT and were once used as government quarters.



HDB flats at Jalan Bukit Ho Swee.



Original site of NTUC Welcome Supermarket.



Pre-war flats at Tiong Bahru Estate.



Black-and-white apartments used to house junior municipal officers.

4 Bukit Ho Swee Estate

The Bukit Ho Swee fire of 1961 displaced many families and prompted HDB to accelerate flat construction. Jalan Bukit Ho Swee became HDB's first large-scale project after the fire, completed in the early 1960s.

5 Havelock Road HDB

The original hawker centre made way for NTUC Welcome Supermarket (now known as FairPrice Supermarket), which was the first supermarket to be located in a HDB housing block.

2 Tiong Bahru Flats

These low-rise pre-war flats, built in the 1930s by the SIT, featured amenities at specific ground-floor corner units and showcased innovative urban design using the then-modern material of reinforced concrete.

3 Monk's Hill Estate

The striking black-and-white apartments at Monk's Hill, featuring wide staggered balconies and tall rectangular windows, were built in 1947 by the Singapore Municipal Commission as accommodation for junior municipal officers.



Tanjong Pagar Plaza Market and Food Centre, and surrounding residential flats.

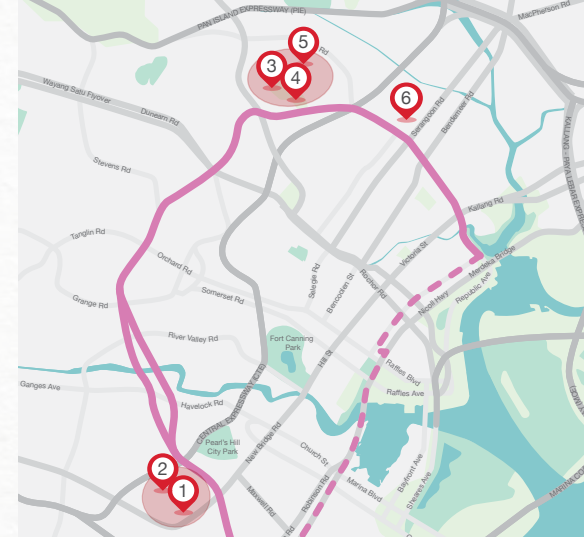
6 Tanjong Pagar Plaza

Completed in 1976, this high-rise HDB development comprises seven residential blocks as well as a two-storey podium block that houses a market and hawker centre. It was part of an urban renewal project to revitalise the city after working hours through introducing residences. Today, this mixed-use typology is seen throughout HDB estates.

HEALTHCARE FOR THE COMMUNITY

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Singapore's growing population led to more settlements on the city fringe. As a result, demand for essential services along the Inner Ring increased, leading to the establishment of medical institutions along trunk roads such as Balestier, Novena, and Outram. These areas typically offered clear, elevated land, away from the congestion of the city centre, yet were still within easy reach.

These institutions played a crucial role in managing epidemics like cholera and tuberculosis while also providing aid to the poor. They were built by local philanthropists and various ethnic groups, which highlights the importance of community involvement in creating a flourishing city.



- Healthcare Areas
- ① Singapore General Hospital (SGH)
- ② College of Medicine Building
- ③ Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH)
- ④ National Tuberculosis Care Centre
- ⑤ Former Middleton Hospital
- ⑥ Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital



Singapore General Hospital at its current location at Outram Road.



Singapore's first medical college.



Conserved building that was originally the home of Lim Soo Ban.

④ National Tuberculosis Care Centre

This conserved house at 144 Moulmein Road, which houses TTSH's National Tuberculosis Care Centre, used to be the home of Hakka businessman Lim Soo Ban. Nearby, 142 Moulmein Road was the convent of Franciscan nuns, who, drawing on their nursing experience, helped manage Singapore's tuberculosis crisis after World War II.

① Singapore General Hospital (SGH)

Established in 1821, this is Singapore's first general hospital and oldest medical institution. It was once located on Pearl's Hill, a strategic location near the port, where it was easily accessible by sick crew members. In the 19th century, prevalent diseases treated at SGH were often related to the respiratory, gastrointestinal, rheumatic, and reproductive systems.

② College of Medicine Building

Completed in 1926, the College of Medicine Building, with Neoclassical architectural influences, stands at the back of SGH's compound. As Singapore's first purpose-built medical college, it reflects the evolution of local medical services and advancements in the nation's tertiary education. Today, it houses the Ministry of Health, the Singapore Medical Council, and the College of Family Physicians.

③ Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH)

Established in 1844, TTSH is one of Singapore's oldest hospitals. It was originally named the Chinese Pauper Hospital and was founded with a donation of \$5,000 from Tan Tock Seng, a wealthy merchant of Fujian descent from Malacca. Initially built on Pearl's Hill, the hospital later moved to Balestier Plain, Moulmein Road, and finally to its current location on Jalan Tan Tock Seng. These former pavilion wards were the main buildings of TTSH when it moved to its present location in 1909.



Pavilion wards of TTSH at Moulmein Road.



The former Middleton Hospital was known as "Or Sai" by many.

⑤ Former Middleton Hospital

This quarantine camp, set up at Moulmein Road in 1907, evolved into the Government Infectious Diseases Hospital in 1913 and renamed Middleton Hospital by 1920. It was known as Or Sai ('black lion' in Hokkien) due to the black lion emblem at its entrance.



Kwong Wai Shiu was established to serve poor Chinese patients.

⑥ Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital

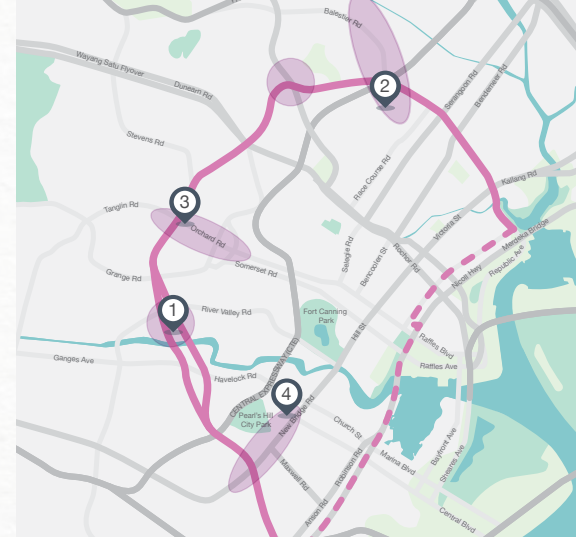
When TTSH relocated to Moulmein Road in 1909, the site along Serangoon Road was taken over by Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital. Established by Cantonese merchants, it served poor patients from the Guangdong prefectures of Guangzhou, Huizhou, and Zhaoqing, from which the hospital derived its name.

RECREATION FOR THE COMMUNITY

The Inner Ring bears witness to Singapore's evolving recreational scene. Many of these recreational opportunities naturally emerged along the city fringe, or routes that led into the heart of town.

In the early 20th century, amusement parks offering cinemas and performances became popular. Migrant communities

also introduced their favourite sports to Singapore, while post-war recreation expanded with more cinemas, nightclubs, and sports facilities. The late 20th and 21st centuries saw malls evolve into modern shopping belts that reshaped Singapore's recreational landscape, inviting visitors from near and far.



- Recreation Areas
- ① Great World Amusement Park
- ② Balestier Plain
- ③ Orchard Road
- ④ Eu Tong Sen Street



Great World Amusement Park offered a wide-range of entertainment for patrons.

① Great World Amusement Park

Built in the 1930s at Kim Seng Road, this was a popular destination for low-income families, as it offered free films and performances. After World War II, the park thrived with Shaw Organisation opening cinemas and the Flamingo nightclub. Today, it has been transformed into a popular mall, Great World.



Top and bottom photos (left): depict the past and present surroundings of C. K. Tang department store in Orchard Road.



Top and bottom photos (right): depict the past and present surroundings of Majestic Theatre at Eu Tong Sen Street.

② Balestier Plain

Initially meant as a runway for aircraft, Balestier Plain proved too short and became underutilised. The government then allowed clubs to use it as a sports field. The Ceylonese community, numbering 1,350 in the 1930s, had its Ceylon Sports Club here, which was bombed during World War II but later rebuilt. Other past and present clubs include the Ceylon Tamils' Association, Singapore Indian Association, YMCA, Singapore Chinese Recreation Club, Singapore Khalsa Association, and the Singapore Malay Football Club.



Large field at Balestier Plain.

③ Orchard Road

From the 1950s, Orchard Road grew into a major shopping belt with the opening of C. K. Tang, the first department store in the area. In the 21st century, Orchard Road underwent significant rejuvenation and is now a globally renowned lifestyle destination, welcoming visitors to the city centre.

④ Eu Tong Sen Street

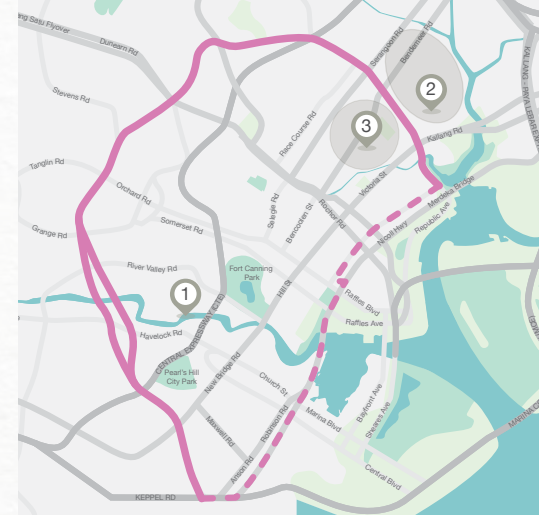
Eu Tong Sen Street in Chinatown, named after a rubber merchant, was formerly called Wayang Street, likely due to its Chinese opera theatres. Over time, it became a vibrant commercial and cultural hub with landmarks such as the Majestic Theatre, built in 1927 by Eu Tong Sen for Cantonese operas. Another notable site is People's Park Complex, a mixed-use development completed in phases during the 1970s. Its innovative design features offices and residences built above a large shopping complex.

INDUSTRY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Industry was once located right in the city centre, lining the banks of the Singapore River where bustling wharves and warehouses (also known as godowns) played a vital role in the nation's early economy.

As the rise of automobiles and the expansion of road networks transformed the landscape, industrial activities began to shift to the city

fringe. This movement accommodated the needs of a growing economy while also reducing congestion in the city centre. As a result, city fringe areas such as Kallang and Jalan Besar emerged as key industrial zones, reflecting Singapore's evolution from a port-based economy to a modern, diversified industrial landscape.



- Industrial Areas
- ① Singapore River
- ② Kallang Industrial Estate
- ③ Jalan Besar

① Singapore River

Due to the rapid growth of trade in 19th-century Singapore, development spread upstream along the Singapore River. Swamps were reclaimed to accommodate godowns that met the demand for goods storage. By the early 1930s, areas like Havelock Road, Robertson Quay, and Jiak Kim Street were lined with godowns.

These industrial buildings served as a transit zone for goods being redistributed to and from peninsular Malaya. They were gradually phased out in the late 1970s as the river could no longer cater to modern shipping activities and urban renewal efforts cleaned up the Singapore River. Some of these godowns have been repurposed as hotels and lifestyle destinations.



The Warehouse Hotel in Robertson Quay was built in 1895 and served as a godown.



Godowns at Jiak Kim Street.



Bumboats along Singapore River.

② Kallang Industrial Estate

The Economic Development Board was formed in 1961 to spearhead Singapore's industrialisation programme. As the programme expanded, the government set up the Jurong Town Corporation in 1968 to take over the responsibility of industrial estate development, including that of Kallang Industrial Estate.

Established in the 1960s on newly reclaimed land, Kallang Industrial Estate attracted businesses that changed the landscape of Kallang, and together with the adjacent public housing estates, transformed the area into a live-work town.



The Texas Instruments plant at Kallang Basin Industrial Estate opened in 1969.



Restaurants and cafés along Tyrwhitt Road.

③ Jalan Besar

Originally a track through a betel nut and fruit orchard in the 1830s, Jalan Besar ("big road" in Malay) was widened by the municipality in the 1880s and 1890s, earning its fitting name.

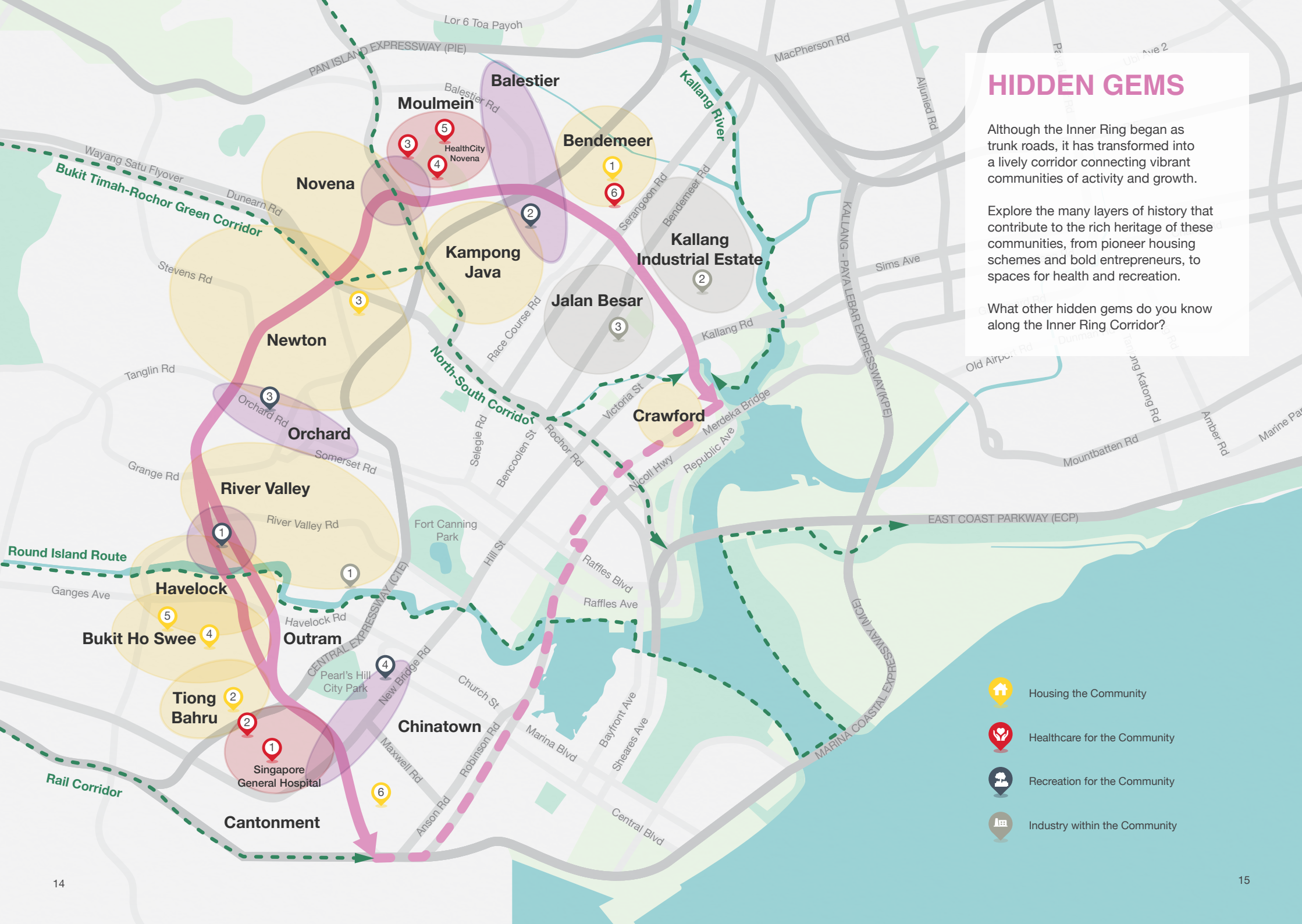
Today, streets such as Cavan Road, Tyrwhitt Road, King George's Avenue, and Lavender Street continue to house a legacy of light industries. The area blends old-world charm with a fresh wave of entrepreneurship emerging in the form of new cafés, restaurants, and design practices.

HIDDEN GEMS

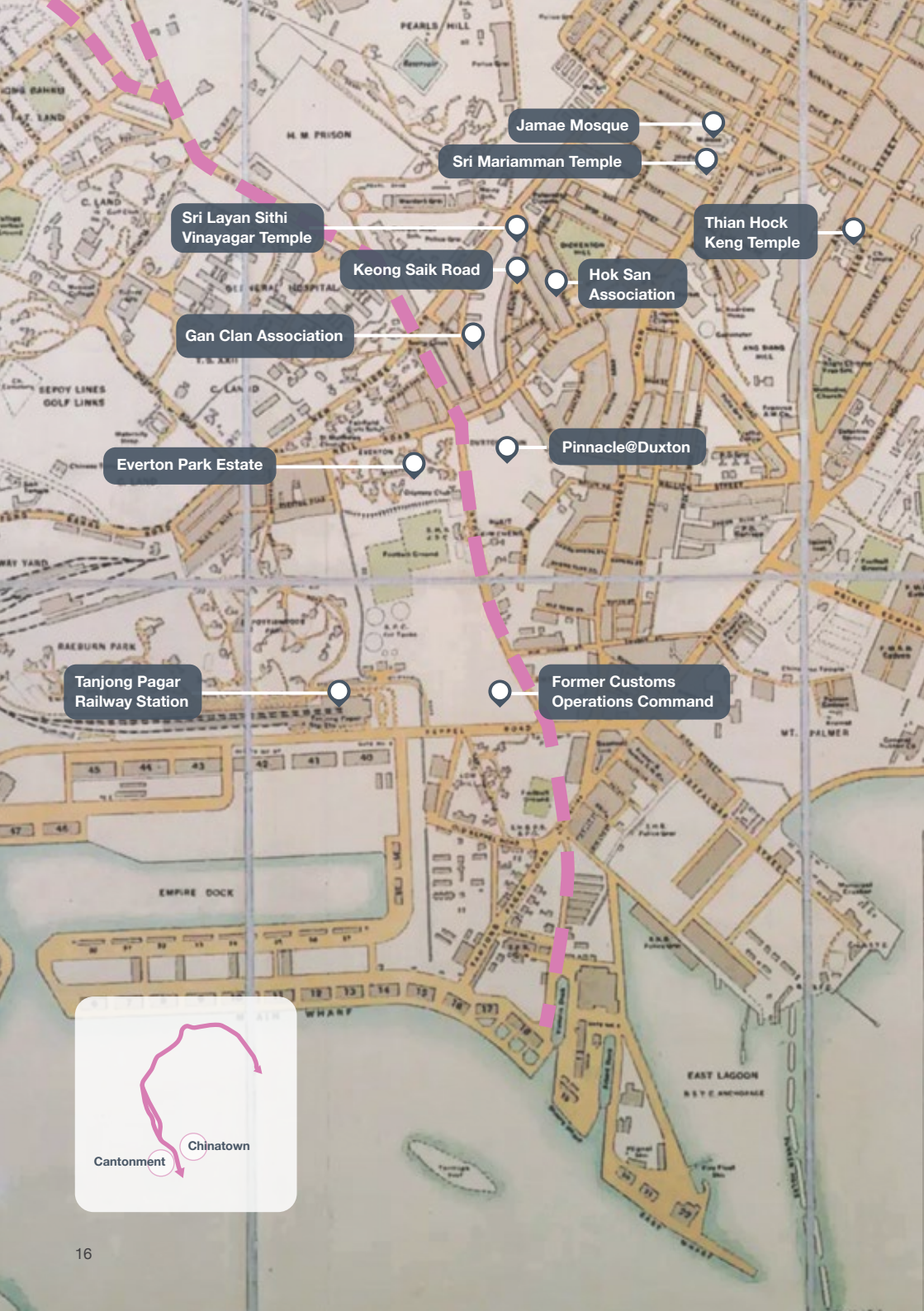
Although the Inner Ring began as trunk roads, it has transformed into a lively corridor connecting vibrant communities of activity and growth.

Explore the many layers of history that contribute to the rich heritage of these communities, from pioneer housing schemes and bold entrepreneurs, to spaces for health and recreation.

What other hidden gems do you know along the Inner Ring Corridor?



-  Housing the Community
-  Healthcare for the Community
-  Recreation for the Community
-  Industry within the Community



CHINATOWN

When Singapore became a free port, a surge of migrants from various ethnicities arrived, prompting Sir Stamford Raffles to organise them through his 1822 Town Plan, which designated the southwest bank of the Singapore River as a Chinese kampong. As Chinatown's population grew in the 20th century, it developed diverse trades, food offerings, clan associations, and places of worship, contributing to its status as Singapore's largest historic district today.

Trades, Streets, and Secrets

Before Raffles implemented his plan, a small Chinese community was already present in the area, cultivating crops such as gambier and pepper. By 1824, the area had grown to 3,317 Chinese settlers, forming the basis of what is now known as Chinatown, which today includes four conserved sub-areas: Telok Ayer, Kreta Ayer, Tanjong Pagar, and Bukit Pasoh.

Immigrants from China, belonging to different dialect groups, settled in distinct areas of Chinatown: the Cantonese in Kreta Ayer, the Hokkiens in Telok Ayer, the Teochews around Boat Quay, and the Hakkas on Upper Cross Street. Each group specialised in specific trades, with Hokkiens prominent in commerce as shopkeepers and porters, Hakkas known as medicine men and blacksmiths, and the Hainanese

finding success in the food industry. By the early 20th century, Chinatown was bustling with street vendors and businesses, with notable ones like *bak kwa* ("dried meat" in Hokkien) store Lim Chee Guan and goldsmiths Tin Sing still in operation today.

Initially, rather than joining clan associations, newcomers favoured religious associations and secret societies, the latter which became powerful and territorial by the early 19th century. Street clashes prompted colonial crackdowns starting in 1869. Gradually, the appeal of secret societies waned.

During this time, entertainment options were also limited, resulting in opium shops, gambling dens, and brothels becoming popular, particularly along Smith Street, Temple Street, and Keong Saik Road.



A street scene of Chinatown, 1946.

Clan Associations

Clan associations emerged in Chinatown during the 1820s to support Chinese immigrants adjusting to life in Singapore. These associations played a crucial role, especially for those who arrived alone, as they provided assistance, shelter, job opportunities, and a sense of community.

Over time, these groups evolved into influential institutions within the Chinese community. Today, many historic clan associations remain active, particularly in areas such as Telok Ayer and Bukit Pasoh, preserving their heritage while adapting to modern needs.

Points of Interest



Gan Clan Association at Bukit Pasoh.

Established in 1966, the **Gan Clan Association** is one of the many associations that have called Bukit Pasoh home since the 19th century. Today, the heritage centre within the association building celebrates the history of the Gan ancestry.



View of Keong Saik Road at dusk.

Along **Keong Saik Road**, a cluster of associations sprung up, leading to an accumulation of “entertainment options” for businessmen who wanted to unwind after meetings. Now, it is a street occupied by trendy restaurants and boutiques whilst still maintaining its unique heritage.



Hok San Association at Kreta Ayer Road.

The **Hok San Association** holds the title of being Singapore’s oldest lion dance troupe, set up to share its distinct Heshan-styled lion dance. The association is still active in its location along Kreta Ayer Road.

Multicultural Chinatown

In the 1822 Town Plan, the south of the Singapore River was designated for both Chinese and Indians. The small communities of Indian traders settled around the junction of South Bridge Road and Cross Street, where they sold goat milk, earning Cross Street the nickname Kampong Susu (“milk village” in Malay).

Due to its rich multicultural history, Chinatown became home to diverse religious sites, including Chinese and Hindu temples and mosques. For example, the Town Plan’s designation of the Chulias from Tamil Nadu’s coastal regions within Chinatown led to Jamae Mosque being built in this area instead of in the Muslim quarter of Kampong Glam.

Points of Interest



Jamae Mosque at North Bridge Road was built in 1835.

One of Singapore’s oldest mosques, **Jamae Mosque** was built in 1835 by Chulias from southern India’s Coromandel Coast. It showcases a unique blend of Chinese, Anglo-Indian, and Malay architecture, with its standout feature being the South Indian-style entrance flanked by two minarets and a miniature palace façade.



Founded in 1827, Sri Mariamman Temple is the oldest Hindu temple in Singapore.

Sri Mariamman Temple is the oldest Hindu temple in Singapore. Founded in 1827, it was built by Narayana Pillai, a Hindu trader from Penang, who contributed significantly to the Tamil community in Singapore. He chose the location for its nearby fresh water well. The temple inspired the naming of Temple Street and Pagoda Street.



Thian Hock Keng Temple is one of the oldest Chinese temples in Singapore.

When resources were available, clan associations would build temples dedicated to their patron deity. **Thian Hock Keng Temple**, built in 1895, is one of Singapore’s oldest and most significant for immigrants from Fujian province. It is dedicated to *Ma Zu Po*, a sea goddess in Chinese folk mythology.

CANTONMENT

Cantonment reflects Singapore's colonial past and strategic position as a port city. Named after the military cantonment established here during British rule, it initially housed troops and related facilities before transitioning into a maritime estate for the staff who worked at New Harbour, later renamed Keppel Harbour.

Military Quarters

In 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles instructed Major William Farquhar to establish barracks on Cantonment Road for the East India Company's sepoy troops, who were stationed there from 1824 to 1858. Sepoys, Indian soldiers employed by European military garrisons, were crucial for defending colonies in Asia and were among the first Indians in Singapore, helping to maintain order, clear land, and build defence structures.

The term "cantonment" refers to military lodgings, which is how Cantonment Road received its name. Locally, the Cantonese referred to it as *Ba Suo Wei* or *Pa So Bue*, meaning "end of Bukit Pasoh". The area later became known as Sepoy Lines.



A map, dated 1879, which includes Sepoy Lines.

View of New Bridge Road looking towards Sepoy Lines, 1906.



Maritime Heritage

In the mid-19th century, the arrival of steamships and growth of shipping activities following the opening of the Suez Canal prompted the need for a bigger port. The natural deep harbour at Tanjong Pagar was surveyed, and shipping firms built wharves in the area, leading to the birth of New Harbour during this time.

In 1864, the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company was formed to construct a dry dock at New Harbour, and it eventually controlled almost the entire shipping business in Singapore. It was renamed Singapore Harbour Board in 1913 and Port of Singapore Authority in 1964.

In 1900, New Harbour was renamed Keppel Harbour. To service it, a railway

line was built between Tanjong Pagar and the northern side of the island, allowing further trade with Peninsular Malaya. As Singapore's maritime industry grew in the 20th century, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) built Everton Park Estate, a public housing development initially meant for the staff of the Singapore Harbour Board, near the junction of Cantonment Road and Neil Road.

In addition, Maritime House, completed in 1984, functioned as a hotel for seafarers and is home to the Singapore Mariners' Club. It had also previously housed the office of the National Maritime Board and the Maritime Port Authority of Singapore.



Residents arrive for the opening of Everton Park Estate, the first phase of a housing programme for Singapore port workers, 1965.

Points of Interest

Opened in 1932, the former **Tanjong Pagar Railway Station** along Keppel Road was the southernmost terminus station along the Malay Peninsula's West Coast Rail Line, which stretched from Singapore to Penang. After railway services ceased in 2011, there are now plans to re-purpose the station to serve as a gateway to the Rail Corridor.



Former Tanjong Pagar Railway Station at Keppel Road.



Customs Operation Command building.

Built in 1940s, the former **Customs Operation Command** building served as the headquarters of several enforcement branches of the Singapore Customs from the 1960s to 2019. Located near the Tanjong Pagar and Pasir Panjang terminals, it enabled customs officers to efficiently monitor the flow of goods entering and leaving Singapore by sea.

Sri Layan Sithi Vinayagar Temple had its early beginnings at the "Sepoy Line" near Singapore General Hospital, serving nearby staff of the hospital and prison at Outram Road. In 1925, the Nagarthars – a community from southern Tamil Nadu, India built a bigger temple at Keong Saik Road and Kreta Ayer Road. It is administered by the Chettiar's Temple Society and attracts devotees of different races and faiths.



Sri Layan Sithi Vinayagar Temple at 78 Keong Saik Road.



A 12-storey HDB flat at Everton Park Estate.

One of the oldest residential estates in Singapore, **Everton Park Estate** is located near the junction of Cantonment Road and Neil Road. Built by the Housing and Development Board (HDB), the 12-storey flats were meant for staff of the Singapore Harbour Board. After undergoing renovation, the flats were re-allocated to residents in 1980.

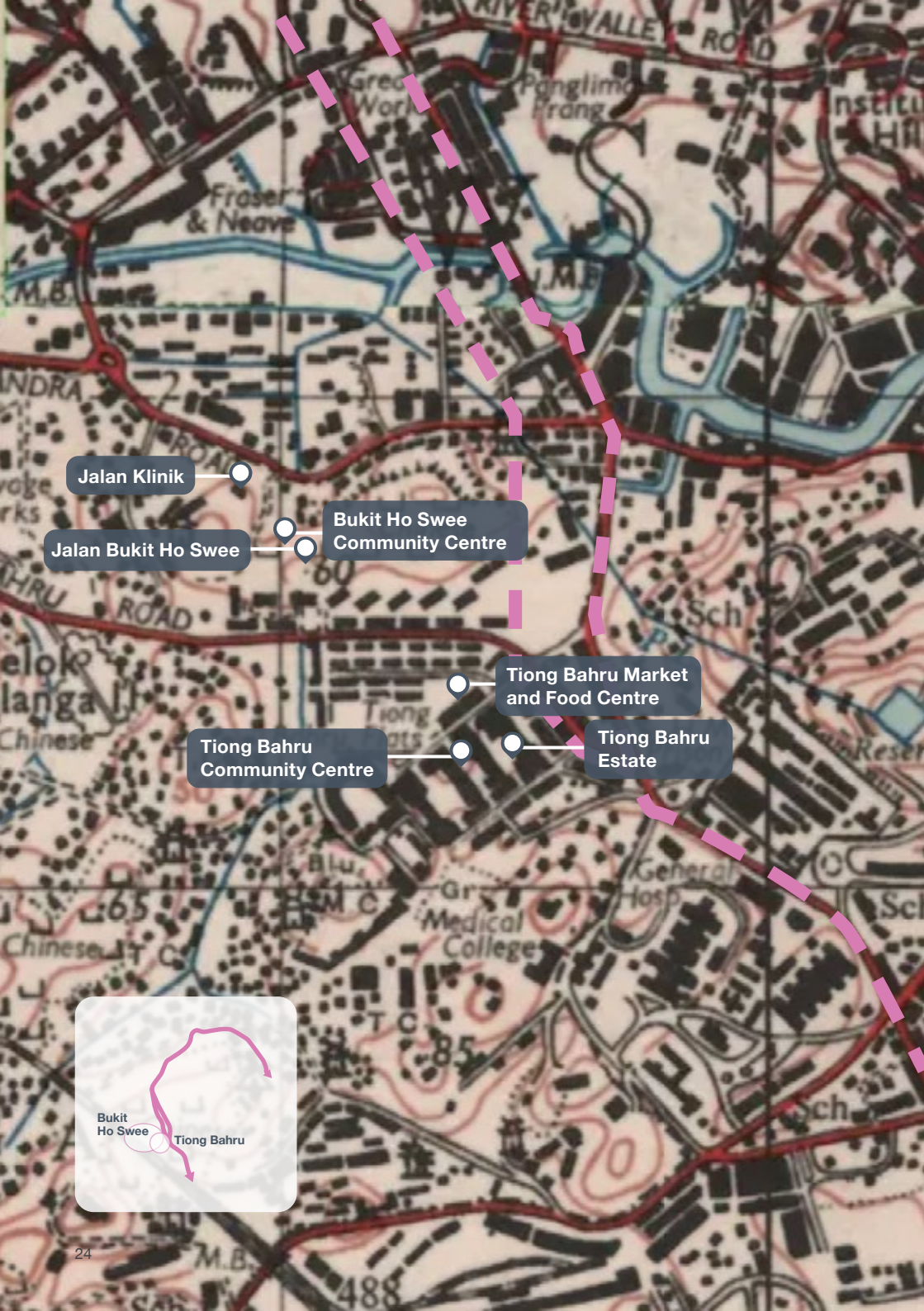
Cantonment Road HDB flats, built in 1964, were the first ten-storey blocks in this area and among the first to be built by HDB. Today, **Pinnacle@Duxton** stands in its place.



Former HDB flats at Cantonment Road.



Pinnacle@Duxton.



TIONG BAHRU

Tiong Bahru is one of Singapore’s most recognisable residential neighbourhoods, where rich history meets modern charm. A leisurely walk through the area introduces visitors to the iconic Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) flats, which feature unique designs intended to house the overcrowded population from the city centre in an orderly and liveable environment.

First Public Housing in Singapore

Originally a vast Chinese cemetery, Tiong Bahru evolved into a dense informal settlement, following the relocation of Singapore General Hospital to Outram Road in 1882. The hospital’s presence encouraged an influx of settlers, and over the next 40 years, a village known as Kampong Tiong Bahru (*Si Kah Teng* – Hokkien for “Four-Pillar Pavilion”) emerged, primarily consisting of wooden and attap huts.

As the population grew, especially with spillover from overcrowded Chinatown, the area faced deteriorating living conditions marked by frequent fires

and congestion. In response to these challenges, the SIT initiated a housing development project between the 1930s and 1950s. Observing the poor living conditions in Chinatown further spurred the need for a systematic, top-down approach to housing development.

Thus, the SIT aimed to transform Tiong Bahru into a well-organised estate with modern infrastructure. Tiong Bahru’s location on the city fringe also facilitated the SIT’s efforts to clear the marshland and easily relocate large numbers of people away from the growing city centre.

SIT flats under construction, 1940.



Types of SIT Flats in Tiong Bahru



Conserved pre-war "aeroplane" flats at Tiong Bahru.

"Aeroplane" Flats

Blocks 81 and 82 on Tiong Poh Road are known as "aeroplane" flats by residents due to their resemblance to airplane wings from afar. Designed by architect Alfred G. Church between 1936 and 1941, these pre-war flats showcase the Streamline Moderne style, a late form of Art Deco inspired by the sleek shapes of automobiles and ocean liners. This style features clean curves, long horizontal lines, rounded corners, flat roofs, and nautical elements like porthole windows. In 2003, 20 blocks were designated for conservation to preserve this architectural heritage.

Horse-shoe Flats

The curved horse-shoe flats at Moh Guan Terrace and Guan Chuan Street, constructed between 1939 and 1940, include Block 78, the largest in Tiong Bahru. This block uniquely straddles both streets and features Singapore's first purpose-built air-raid shelter in public housing, designed to serve as a play area that could be converted during emergencies. The ground floor houses shops, including the iconic Hua Bee coffee shop, established in the 1940s and known for its coffee with butter. These five-storey flats, called Tiong Bahru *Gor Lau* in Hokkien, were the tallest in Singapore at the time of their construction and are now conserved.



Five-storey flats at Moh Guan Terrace.

Post-war Flats

After World War II, the SIT constructed several four-storey flats between 1948 and 1954 around Lim Liak Road and Seng Poh Road. Designed by architects Lincoln Page and Robert FN Kan, these flats embraced the International Style, focusing on clean, boxy forms, simplicity, and functionality, in contrast to the decorative Art Deco style. To soften the boxy appearance, Page and Kan incorporated curved staircases and porthole windows. The flats were designed for tropical conditions, featuring large windows and overhangs inspired by traditional shophouses.



Four-storey, post-war flats at Tiong Bahru.

Points of Interest



Tiong Bahru Community Centre at Eu Chin Street.

Shortly after the war, Tiong Bahru residents recognised the need for an organisation to coordinate community activities. In 1951, the **Tiong Bahru Community Centre** building was established at Eu Chin Street at the cost of \$20,000 and was officially opened in front of some 500 guests and residents. It was in fact a converted standalone air-raid shelter and is still there today.



Tiong Bahru Market is popular with residents and visitors to the estate.

Opened in 1951, **Tiong Bahru Market and Food Centre** is a gathering place for residents, neighbours, and visitors to shop, dine, and socialise. The market was designed to accommodate a significant number of street hawkers catering to the rapidly expanding Tiong Bahru community, many of whom moved from nearby Chinatown. In the early 2000s, the building was redeveloped into the well-known community landmark it is today.

A UNIQUE SENSE OF PLACE

“The estate is inspiring because it keeps offering perspectives. It has such a rich history and layers.”

As a former resident who lived in Tiong Bahru estate for a decade, Dr Marc Nair says there is nowhere else like it. The educator, poet, and multi-disciplinary artist created a podcast “Estate Frequencies” to share unique stories from the neighbourhood.

It is a place that has always inspired him. He says, “The estate is inspiring because it keeps offering perspectives. It has such a rich history and layers – from the street names to the names of the buildings, to the architecture, to the individuals who come here.”

He adds, “Working on the podcast made me think about how the estate can be experienced. You can start by asking ‘What is a place?’ or ‘What is a space?’. And you find that the answers may or may not be what you think it is. Everybody experiences



Dr Marc Nair, Educator, poet, multi-disciplinary artist, and former resident of Tiong Bahru

the estate differently and Tiong Bahru estate offers a lot of raw material to shape.”

He says, “Visitors entering the estate may get the sense that they are in their own little space or in their own little pocket of history.”

Dr Nair’s personal favourite spot in the estate is Tiong Bahru Market.

“In the evenings, residents have dinner there or relax with a beer in the terrace. It is my favourite place to sit and watch the world go by,” he says.

When he has visitors, he usually brings them to see the pre-war and post-war buildings. The taller buildings in the vicinity can provide a stunning aerial view of the estate. Another special landmark is the Monkey God Temple because it has its own community – devotees come from other estates to celebrate major events such as the Monkey God’s birthday.

Dr Nair says, “It is nice to see more diversity around the neighbourhood. For example, there is a record shop in the market that has become a little community space where people hang around listening to music. Things like that create points where people can gather.”

MY CHILDHOOD IN TIONG BAHRU

“It is hard to describe the unique character of the place but it evokes a strong sense of nostalgia for me.”

Mdm Mandy Lee, 80, was born in Tiong Bahru during the Japanese Occupation in 1945. Back then, she lived in a pre-war SIT flat in Seok Poh Road with her parents, grandmother, and six other siblings.

She says, “My father owned a successful business selling radios and Vespa scooters and my mother was a homemaker.”

Her father’s shop was called Lee Radio, and it was located next to the coffee shop famous for the popular bird singing corner. One of her childhood memories of her father’s shop was sneaking petty cash from his shop to buy herself sweet tea next door.

“It was fun growing up in Tiong Bahru. I was quite independent and my mother would make me run errands such as placing bets for *Chap Ji Kee* – a Chinese card gambling game.”

One of her favourite memories was watching movies with the other neighbourhood kids near the Tiong Bahru Community Centre. A huge white cloth would be draped over a wall outside the



Mdm Mandy Lee, Retiree, former resident of Tiong Bahru

Centre and movies would be projected on the makeshift screen. She would occasionally get *kacang putih* (“white nuts” in Malay – a popular street snack) before the movie and looked forward to the *tikam tikam* (“random pick” in Malay – refers to a game) for a chance to get a free snack from the vendor.

As children, they would also get up to all kinds of mischief around the estate. One of the things she remembers doing was to run up to the second storey of the SIT flats and then execute a daredevil jump onto the grass patch below.

She says, “It is hard to describe the unique character of the place but it evokes a strong sense of nostalgia for me. I live in Kim Tian Road now but my brother still lives in the area and we like taking walks in the estate after dinner.”

Scan to listen to stories about Tiong Bahru.



Estate Frequencies is a creative podcast that explores city neighbourhoods. It is created by poet and multidisciplinary artist Marc Nair. Sound and music by Saturn Sound Studios. Visuals by Nicole Soh. Produced by Carolyn Oei.

BUKIT HO SWEE

Bukit Ho Swee, once a kampong located near Kampong Tiong Bahru, is named after Tay Ho Swee, a prominent merchant in the Chinese community. Similar to the origins of Kampong Tiong Bahru, the population of Bukit Ho Swee surged from the spillover of overcrowding in Chinatown in the post-war years. A great fire in the kampong spurred the government to speed up the construction of high-rise public housing in the area.

Squatter Settlement to Public Housing

On 25 May 1961, a devastating fire broke out in Kampong Bukit Ho Swee. Strong winds, combined with oil and petrol from nearby godowns, exacerbated the blaze. The fire left 16,000 people homeless.

Following the disaster, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) launched a massive rebuilding effort to rehouse the displaced residents. Five blocks of

one-room emergency flats were quickly built to rehouse displaced residents. This initiative marked the beginning of Singapore's first large-scale public housing project, transforming the kampong into modern high-rise flats. These emergency flats were later demolished in 1988, and the site was redeveloped into the HDB estate now known as Boon Tiong Arcadia.



Construction of the first phase of the Bukit Ho Swee housing estate, 1961. This phase comprised five blocks of emergency flats for the fire victims.

Early HDB Innovations

Before the fire, HDB had in fact already started constructing flats in Bukit Ho Swee. Blocks 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 at Jalan Bukit Ho Swee were partially completed when the fire occurred. Finished in 1962, just a year after the disaster, these blocks still stand today.

In these early HDB flats, concrete blocks replaced timber kampong houses, while flush toilets, showers, and kitchens were integrated into sturdy networks of water plumbing and electricity. Units were linked by a common corridor, a feature that continues to be seen in HDB blocks today. Although these early flats were designed

to be functional – focused on optimising space, reducing costs, and facilitating easy construction – they still pioneered housing typologies that paved the way for the HDB flats we now live in.

The 1960s also saw the rapid establishment of community centres in Singapore, with over 100 of them sprouting across the island to foster kinship within new housing estates. Bukit Ho Swee Community Centre was one of them, opened in 1965. It provided a community space for residents to maintain the kampong spirit, with celebrations like National Day, children's camps, exhibitions for national campaigns, and sports competitions.

Points of Interest



Block 26 at Jalan Klinik used to house a clinic at the void deck.

Block 26 at Jalan Klinik was the first to feature a void deck instead of having ground floor residential units. Initially, a clinic was housed here, hence the name "Jalan Klinik".



Former Bukit Ho Swee Community Centre.

Bukit Ho Swee Community Centre opened in 1965 and served the community as they adjusted to their new homes.



View of Block 2 at Jalan Bukit Ho Swee.

Jalan Bukit Ho Swee

Blocks 2 to 10 were built in the 1960s and housed victims of the Bukit Ho Swee fire. The swift construction of the buildings was a major achievement for the Housing and Development Board.



OUTRAM

Outram Road, formerly known as Cantonment Road, was renamed in 1858 to honour James Outram and other heroes of the 1857 Indian Mutiny. Among the Chinese, Outram is still referred to as *Si Pai Po* (“sepoj plains” in Hokkien and Cantonese), a reference to the sepoj lines that once stood at one end of the road. The area is notable for Pearl’s Hill, where important institutions were strategically situated due to the area’s elevation that allowed close oversight of the city.

History of Pearl’s Hill

For many years, Pearl’s Hill was made up of gambier plantations cultivated by Chinese farmers. In 1822, Captain James Pearl, owner of the *Indiana* – the ship that brought Sir Stamford Raffles to Singapore in 1819 – purchased the hill and named it Mount Stamford in Raffles’ honour. He later renamed it Pearl’s Hill before selling it to the colonial government.

Pearl’s Hill used to be taller than Fort Canning. Due to security concerns, engineers were commissioned in 1859 to lower the height of Pearl’s Hill to prevent it from obstructing the guns installed at Fort Canning. Recognising its strategic elevation nonetheless, the British established a military fort on the hill in 1864. Urban development followed, particularly after Pearl’s Hill Reservoir was built in 1898 to supply fresh water to the growing population in the city centre.

From the top of Pearl’s Hill, a view of Chinatown, 1847.

Eyes on the City

Developments on Pearl’s Hill included institutions that facilitated close supervision of the city to uphold law and order. For example, Pearl’s Hill Prison operated from 1847 until the 1950s. It was demolished in the 1960s to make way for Outram Park Complex and later other newer developments.

The Upper and Lower Barracks, completed in 1934, housed the Sikh Contingent of the Straits Settlements Police. After World War II, these buildings served various government agencies, including the Singapore Police Force and the Criminal Investigation Department, until 2001. The Upper Barracks also marked the beginnings of the Ministry of Interior and Defence, which later split into the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Defence.

Today, though these institutions have left the foothills, the Upper and Lower Barracks still remain as conserved buildings, while Pearl’s Hill City Park affords visitors unique views of the city framed by lush greenery.



From Pasar Malam to Mixed-Use Complex

At the foot of Pearl's Hill, there was once a public park called People's Park. Due to its proximity to New Bridge Road, and the influx of street hawkers from bustling Chinatown, the site grew into a wet market known as People's Park Market, or Pearl's Market, in the 1930s. It featured many night stalls, including those famous for selling durians until late. Tragically, a fire on Christmas Eve in 1966 destroyed the timber-built market.

The following year, prompted by the fire, the government announced plans for urban renewal in the area. This included the construction of People's Park Complex and People's Park Food Centre. By mid-1969, the first phase of what would then

be Singapore's largest shopping and residential complex was completed, and stallholders began moving in. People's Park Food Centre still features food stalls on the first level and retail and textile shops on the second and third levels.

In 1973, the iconic high-rise residential block that makes up People's Park Complex was completed, making it the first mixed-use development in Singapore. Created through a collaboration among private developers, architects, and public agencies, People's Park Complex introduced a modern retail culture while honouring the site's historic marketplace, embodying Singapore's post-independence vision for urban renewal.



1962 Lorange Plan illustrating the division of the city centre precinct.



People's Park Market, or Pearl's Market, 1960.

Points of Interest



View of People's Park Complex and Majestic Theatre at Eu Tong Sen Street.

Eu Tong Sen Street

Named after a rubber merchant, this street was formerly called Wayang Street, likely due to its Chinese opera theatres. Over time, it became a vibrant commercial and cultural hub with landmarks such as the Majestic Theatre, built in 1927 by Eu Tong Sen for Cantonese operas. People's Park Complex is a mixed-use development completed in phases during the 1970s. Its innovative design features offices and residences built above a large shopping complex.



Singapore General Hospital at Outram Road.



Pearl Hill's Terrace is now home to diverse businesses.

Due to the area's proximity to the port, Seamen's Hospital was founded on Pearl's Hill in 1845 to provide vital medical care to seafarers. After more than a decade, Pearl's Hill had to be fortified and the hospital relocated. Today, it is known as **Singapore General Hospital**. Notably, writer Joseph Conrad spent six weeks in Seamen's Hospital recovering from a leg injury.

The Upper Barracks of **195 Pearl's Hill Terrace** once accommodated various units of the Singapore Police Force. It is now a creative hub, home to around 100 diverse businesses, ranging from ceramic workshops and thrift stores to cafés and independent jewellery brands.

HAVELOCK

Havelock Road, named in 1858 after General Sir Henry Havelock, who died during the 1857 Indian Mutiny, has evolved from a simple road into a significant thoroughfare due to its proximity to the Singapore River. A vast network of warehouses grew in the area, supporting Singapore's bustling trade era when the river served as a key artery for commerce.

A Bustling River of Trade

In the 1890s, the Havelock area, located upstream of the Singapore River, was still relatively undeveloped and consisted of swampy tidal land. Due to the rapid growth of trade and population in Singapore at the time, development spread upstream along the river. The tidal swamps were then reclaimed to meet the demand for warehousing goods that flowed down the river, from the port.

By the early 20th century, buildings catering to entrepôt trade emerged at Havelock

Road, Robertson Quay, and as far upstream as Jiak Kim Street. By the early 1930s, these areas were fully developed with warehouses, commonly known as godowns, while the river teemed with bumboats transporting goods to and from the harbour.

These early industrial buildings along the Singapore River played a crucial role in the nation's development. Shophouses and godowns were essential for storing goods unloaded from ships until favourable trade winds allowed for their onward journey.

Godowns at Jiak Kim Street, 1974. By this time, urban renewal phased out trade and warehousing in the area, and today, the godowns that remain are repurposed for other uses.



A Growing Community

The increasing migration and trade encouraged the growth of residential communities alongside the godowns.

In the 1930s, Great World Amusement Park opened on Kim Seng Road. It was the largest of three amusement parks that offered affordable entertainment from the 1920s to the 1960s. In addition to bandstands, food stalls, and popular theatres, cinemas were a unique and major attraction at the park. After the war, there was a revival of cultural shows at the park, including Chinese and Malay operas and theatre featuring popular songs, which attracted families.

By the 1950s, schools, religious institutions, and other entertainment venues were thriving in the area. Post-war rebuilding further transformed Havelock, with Housing and Development Board (HDB) flats rising alongside low-rise shophouses. Block 22 Havelock Road, completed in 1964, became the tallest HDB block in the area and was known as *Chap Lak Lau* ("16 storeys" in Hokkien).

Today, Great World (formerly known as Great World City) stands at the former site. The mixed-use development houses, offices, specialty shops, eateries, supermarkets, a cinema, and more.



Great World Amusement Park, 1930s.



Block 22 Havelock Road stands next to old shophouses.

Points of Interest

The Havelock area was historically swampy due to the Singapore River's multiple distributaries. This led to the construction of a pipeline arch in the late 1920s, which was part of the Central Pipeline bringing water from Johor to Singapore. Painted black, the arch became a landmark for locals and was used to cross a distributary of the river. Eventually, the area along Havelock Road, between Zion Road and Delta Road, became known as **Orh Kio Tau** (Hokkien and Teochew for "black bridge head", referring to the pipeline arch).



The iconic arch near Havelock Road used to be black in colour.



The Giak Hong Tian Temple is dedicated to the Jade Emperor.

The **Giak Hong Tian Temple** was established in 1887 by Cheang Hong Lim, a prominent Hokkien philanthropist, of which Hong Lim Park is also named after. It is dedicated to the Jade Emperor and the location was considered favourable because the Singapore River was in front and the hill at the back.



Former godowns at Havelock Road have been transformed into a boutique hotel.

The Warehouse Hotel, a boutique accommodation, was originally constructed in 1895 and functioned as a warehouse for easy transportation of goods along the Singapore River.



The Church of St Bernadette at Zion Road.

Church of St Bernadette, built in 1959, served the growing Catholic community in areas such as Tiong Bahru and Alexandra Road following the post-war population increase. The parish played a key role in assisting those affected by the Bukit Ho Swee fire.

ORCHARD

Orchard Road got its name from the orchards, pepper farms, and nutmeg plantations that lined it in the 1830s. After the failure of the plantations due to disease and deteriorating soil quality, the area transitioned into a residential suburb with both large bungalows and shophouses. Gradually, as more roads were built offering direct access into the city, the Orchard area made way for new businesses set up by entrepreneurs, who transformed it into a shopping belt.

Plantations, Cemeteries, and Bungalows

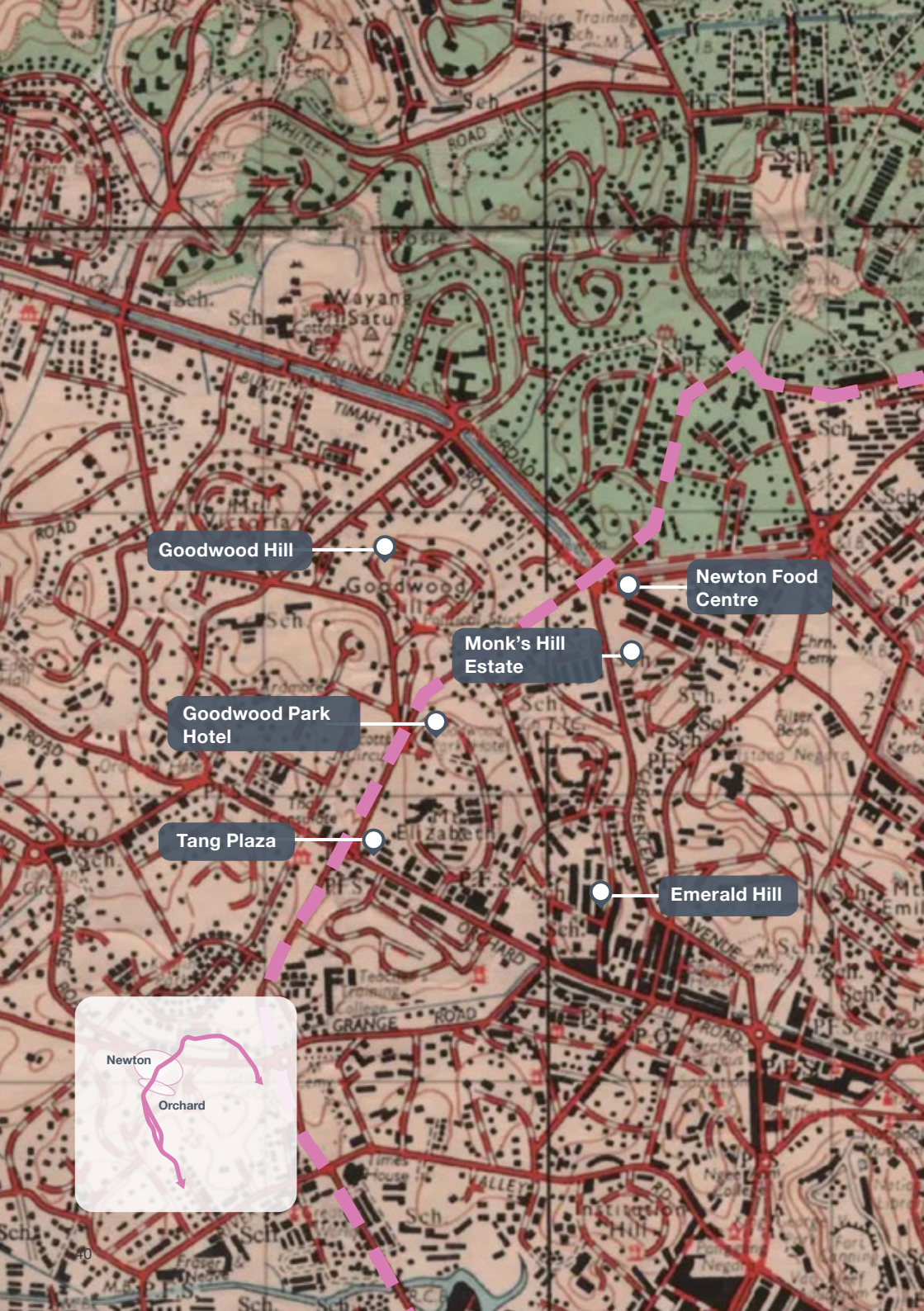


Early settlers, attracted by the hills and excellent soil, first set foot in the Orchard area in the 1830s and cultivated spices, especially nutmeg plantations. These plantations were primarily owned by European residents and partly supplied by the British East India Company, who hoped to turn a profit.

As a Chinese-populated midpoint between the busy port and European plantations to the north, the Orchard area was prime real estate for development. By the late 1800s, country bungalows, shophouses, and cemeteries emerged.

Municipal commissioners lived along Orchard Road, while cemeteries for Chinese, Sumatran, and Jewish communities occupied land that is now part of Ngee Ann City, Hotel Grand Central, and the Dhoby Ghaut train station respectively.

View of Orchard Road, 1911.



From Market to Supermarket



Hawkers at Koek's Bazaar at Orchard Road and Cuppage Road, 1905. On the right stands Orchard Road Market.

As Orchard's affluent population grew, businesses were started in the area to meet their needs. Between Koek Road and Cuppage Road, a lawyer and municipal commissioner founded Orchard Road's first market. In 1890, the government acquired the market and rebuilt it as the Orchard Road Municipal Market, colloquially known as *Tang Leng Pa Sat* or *Tanglin Pa Sat*. Originally located where Orchard Point stands today, the market was renowned for its high-quality goods and catered to wealthier European clientele, offering fresh produce until the mid-1960s.

In 1905, Singapore's first Cold Storage opened nearby, marking the introduction of the modern supermarket concept to the island. It imported meats, poultry, and dairy products from Australia, combining refrigerated food technology with innovative retail strategies. Cold Storage also brought Singapore's first ice cream, called Paradise, which was later rebranded as Magnolia. The Cold Storage Milk Bar, located at the present-day site of The Centrepoin, became a popular destination in the 1960s for desserts.



Cold Storage on Orchard Road, 1950s.

Rise of a Shopping District

Orchard Road's transformation into a shopping belt began in the 1950s. In 1957, Ngee Ann Kongsi exhumed their Orchard Road cemetery, Tai Shan Ting, and constructed the Ngee Ann Building on part of the land. A year later, the C. K. Tang department store opened across the street, with Tang Choon Keng hoping that people who came from Johor would stop by on their way downtown. Parts of the former Tai Shan Ting cemetery were later leased out, spurring more commercial developments, such as Wisma Indonesia in 1961.

Meanwhile, as Orchard Road emerged as a social hotspot, entertainment options increased. Notable cinema theatres of the

era were the Pavilion, the original Lido Cinema, and Orchard Theatre, which had Jackie's Bowl on the ground floor.

Urban renewal initiatives in the 1970s further solidified Orchard Road as a premier shopping destination, with the rise of luxury malls, hotels, and more entertainment venues. To relieve traffic congestion in the city, the construction of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) infrastructure in the Orchard area began in 1982. By the 1980s, the Somerset, Orchard, and Dhoby Ghaut MRT stations were completed, positioning Orchard Road as a key hub within Singapore's transportation network.



View of Shaw House and Lido Cinema, 1960s, along Orchard Road and Scotts Road junction.



Points of Interest



Scotts Road was named after Captain William G. Scott, a harbour master and post master of Singapore, who owned plantations in the area during the 1840s. Scotts Road later became an upscale residential area for wealthy expatriates. **Goodwood Park Hotel**, built in 1900 on Scotts Road, began as the Teutonia Club, an elite enclave for the expatriate German community.

The **Goodwood Hill** estate is named after Goodwood Park, the Duke of Richmond and Gordon's Sussex estate. Built by the Public Works Department in 1910 for colonial officers, the estate's black-and-white bungalows were inspired by mid-19th-century plantation houses. From the 1960s to the early 2000s, part of the site was used for training Singapore's political and civil service leaders, with many early civil servants undergoing induction courses there.



Black-and-white houses at Goodwood Hill.



Conserved houses at Emerald Hill.

C. K. Tang became Orchard Road's first department store and a major shopping landmark. In 1982, the original building was replaced by **Tang Plaza**, which has retained its signature green-tiled roof and red colonnades till today.



Tang Plaza along Orchard Road.

NEWTON

In the late 19th century, Newton began its transformation from nutmeg plantation to verdant residential suburb, aided by the newfound accessibility provided by motor cars. The establishment of denser neighbourhoods in the area was jumpstarted by pre- and post-war housing efforts by the Singapore Municipal Commission (SMC) and later the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT), which reshaped the area through the building of key roads, schools, and the quaint estates that are still present.

Newton Circus' Railway Origins

In the early 1800s, Newton was primarily a nutmeg plantation. In 1903, the Singapore Government Railway opened a route that started at Tank Road, passed through Orchard and Newton, and ended at Kranji. Newton Circus served as a railway station. This initiative, meant to ease congestion in the urban centre, led to an influx of residents in areas like Orchard and Newton.



Newton Station, 1910.

Vibrant Community, Verdant Suburb

By the 1930s, the railway lines at Orchard and Newton were removed to make way for new roads that better connected the island. Car ownership had increased and roads were more practical for short-distance travel. The Newton Circus roundabout was constructed in 1933 to manage traffic from eight converging roads: Bukit Timah Road, Clemenceau Avenue, Dunearn Road, Scotts Road, Newton Road, Keng Lee Road, and Kampong Java Road.

During this time, the SIT completed levelling Monk's Hill and had built a canal through it. It constructed apartments here in the 1950s for civil servants, offering them convenient access to government offices without being based in the city centre itself. The origins of the name "Monk's Hill" have multiple stories.

One suggests it was named after a resident named Carnie, who lived there in the 1860s, while another claims a Chinese monastery once stood on the hill.

The government quarters built by the SIT and the numerous schools emerging in the area created a vibrant community in Newton, attracting street hawkers many were gathering at the Newton Circus crossroad by the 1950s to sell their goods. To accommodate them in an orderly manner, the government constructed a hawker centre, completed in 1971. With a unique horseshoe-shaped design set within lush greenery, Newton Food Centre complemented Singapore's garden city image while providing a home for hawkers resettled from Cuppage Road and Koek Road.

Points of Interest



Monk's Hill Estate, just a stone's throw from Newton Food Centre, features charming black-and-white apartments nestled in a tranquil setting with a strong sense of community spirit.

Black-and-white SIT houses at Monk's Hill Estate.



Newton Food Centre is a popular spot for local food.

Newton Food Centre has gone through several expansion and upgrading programmes. Today, it remains a beloved dining spot for both locals and tourists.

MEMORIES FROM A FORMER GIRL GUIDE

“In the aftermath of the fire, the Girl Guides went out in teams to distribute food and drinks... it is part of our guide laws to be good people, to be helpful.”



Dr Eileen Aw, Retiree and former Chief Commissioner of Singapore Girl Guides Association

Her affinity for the outdoors inspired Dr Eileen Aw to join the Girl Guides of Singapore (GGS) when she was 11 years old.

The former chief commissioner of GGS still remembers the wooden hut that served as the organisation's first headquarters at Buyong Road.

She says, “Our headquarters was near the circus at Newton and surrounded by beautiful greenery. After meetings, we would hurry around the corner of Koek Road to buy ice balls. The man would use his bare hands to shape the icy treats but it didn't bother us!”

Dr Aw recalls how the big field and a canal just behind the GGS building became a playground for the girl guides.

“We had a lot of fun in those days. There were many shophouses and a Marican stationery shop we frequented. Another one of our favourite haunts was the ice kacang stall at the former food centre at Koek Road. It was quite a bustling area! The area changed over time – besides the Orchard Road Post Office and Orchard Road Market, other landmarks were the

Boy Scouts headquarters, Monk's Hill School, and SIT flats.”

One of the most memorable community projects Dr Aw took part in was volunteering to help victims of the Bukit Ho Swee fire.

“I was about 15 years old at the time. In the aftermath of the fire, the girl guides went out in teams to distribute food and drinks. It was a meaningful experience because it is part of our guide laws to be good people, to be helpful.”

Dr Aw also remembers visiting St Andrew's Orthopaedic Hospital – the first hospital in Singapore to treat children with tuberculosis of the bones and joints – to bring cheer to the patients.

“I think in the past we mainly served children and youths through our guiding education. But these days, we are also taking care of the elderly in our community through volunteer work with organisations such as the Sree Narayana mission and St John's Home.”



BALESTIER

During Singapore's rapid urbanisation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, housing demand soared. Many wealthy businessmen built bungalows in Balestier, then a rural area away from the bustling city centre. Over time, shophouses emerged to provide various services and accommodate the growing local population. Alongside, grassroots efforts by the local community supported a plethora of amenities and turned Balestier into a flourishing hub of activity.

Emergence of Country Bungalows

Balestier Road was named after Joseph Balestier, a botanist and agriculturist who arrived on the island in 1834 and was appointed as the first U.S. Consul to Singapore in 1837. He owned a sugarcane plantation in the area that proved unprofitable, leading him to attempt to sell the estate. In the mid-1850s, the British government eventually acquired the land, which became known as Balestier Plain.

In the late 1800s, the town area in Singapore grew increasingly crowded and rents soared. Europeans and Eurasians with modest means were pushed to the suburbs – what was once a collection of attap huts along Balestier Road gradually gave way to country bungalows owned by wealthy families, including newly minted Chinese merchants who conducted business nearby in the city centre.

A Thriving Community

Alongside the wealthy, new settlements emerged along Balestier Road, ranging from Chinese farming villages to Malay communities. These communities left a legacy in the form of Malay road names in the area, such as Jalan Raja Undang, Jalan Dusun, and Jalan Rama Rama.

Additionally, a brick kiln operated in the vicinity, powered by the labour of Indian convicts, some of whom remained in Singapore as traders and craftsmen.

As the Balestier area grew more populated, the community initiated various grassroots efforts. Healthcare institutions, places of worship, recreational clubs, and food centres were established by workers, philanthropists, and merchants, transforming the area into a vibrant hub.



Pongal or Harvest Festival being celebrated at the Indian Association along Balestier Road, 1967.

Growing Community Spirit

The grassroots initiatives in Balestier, beginning in the late 19th century, highlight the collective spirit of the area's diverse ethnic and religious groups, with many efforts dedicated to supporting the poor.

For instance, Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital, funded by the Cantonese community, provided free treatments. Meanwhile, a unique phenomenon was the emergence of vegetarian halls, which reflected not just the growing Buddhist cultural presence there but also the migrant origins of Singapore. In their early years, these halls served as homes for migrants without support. Some, such as Chan Chor Min Tong, specifically provided shelter for single migrant women.

Recreational needs were met through the formation of clubs. From the 1930s, Balestier Plain was home to the Ceylon Sports Club, Ceylon Tamils Association, Singapore Indian Association, Young Men's Christian Association, Singapore Chinese Recreation Club, Singapore Khalsa Association, Singapore Malay Football Club, and Kamala Club.

Street hawkers became a common sight in Balestier, particularly near temples and wayang stages. In the 1900s, several public markets were established to accommodate them, while coffee shops, bakeries, and other eateries began to populate the shophouses lining Balestier Road.

Influence of Philanthropic Pioneers



Hoo Ah Kay, also known as Whampoa, 1850s.

Merchants also acquired large tracts of land in Balestier, subdividing them into residential lots and attracting new settlers. Among them was Hoo Ah Kay, known to the British as "Whampoa", after his birthplace, Huangpo in Canton, China. In the late 1840s, Whampoa owned a hilly area between Balestier Road and Moulmein Road, later named Whampoa's Hill. His prominence in the community contributed to the naming of both the area and a road after him. His private garden along Serangoon Road, known for its diverse flora, contributed to Singapore's horticulture history.

In the late 1800s, the Aljunied family, descendants of Syed Omar bin Ali Aljunied, an Arab merchant from Yemen, settled on Balestier Road. Syed Omar was a notable philanthropist, funding places of worship and Tan Tock Seng Hospital's original site.

STORIES FROM A VETERAN NURSE

"Nursing has changed a lot... with better training and career opportunities, today's nurses work alongside doctors to provide better patient care."



Ms Lim Siew Geok, Principal Nurse Educator, TTSH

Ms Lim Siew Geok has been a nurse at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) for more than 20 years. Looking back, the hospital has not only transformed the delivery of healthcare to the community over the years but changed the skyline of the Balestier area.

As a junior nurse, Ms Lim remembers walking through a remote and hilly terrain to get to work. Now, historical buildings such as the pavilion wards and modern buildings such as the TTSH Integrated Care Hub form part of the vibrant landscape.

Patient profiles have also changed over the years. In the past, the hospital served mostly patients who lived in the vicinity. Ms Lim still has vivid memories of past medical cases.

"Back then, it was common to see patients with tapeworms or maggot-filled wounds. Most of them were from the lower-income bracket and were less-educated than patients today; they were not so conscientious about proper hygiene," she says.

The ailments were also quite different back then.

She recalls, "Tuberculosis and other lung and respiratory diseases were common. We also attended to many delirious patients when we were on night duty as many

people allowed their medical conditions to escalate before seeking treatment. When left untreated, diseases such as diabetes can make patients delirious."

Manpower was very lean back in the day, and Ms Lim remembers working in wards that were only staffed with two or three nurses.

"We focused on providing acute care as there weren't enough nurses to serve the community beyond the hospital walls. But we did have midwives going out of the hospital to deliver babies in the kampongs!"

Reflecting on the past, she says, "Nursing has changed a lot since the old days. It used to be perceived as a 'dirty job', but with better training and career opportunities, today's nurses work alongside doctors to provide better patient care. Over the years, TTSH has expanded from just a hospital building to include the National Centre for Infectious Diseases, the Integrated Care Hub, as part of the wider HealthCity Novena."

Ms Lim says, "Healthcare is more multidimensional now. We are also developing partnerships with different providers in the community, such as optometrists and general practitioners, to bring health services much closer to the community."

Points of Interest



Goh Chor Tua Pek Kong Temple was built by Chinese plantation workers.

The origins of **Masjid Hajjah Rahimabi Kebun Limau** date back to 1959, when Muslim residents sought land for a *surau* – a small place of worship, leading to a government allocation and the mosque's completion in 1964. A growing population led to renovations, and the mosque reopened in 1984. It is named in honour of its benefactor, philanthropist Hajjah Rahima Bee Ahmad Angullia, as well as after Kebun Limau, meaning “lime garden” in Malay.



Masjid Hajjah Rahimabi Kebun Limau near Balestier Road.



Balestier Plain is home to various sports clubs.

Balestier Plain was briefly converted into a landing field for aircraft by 1920, but the runway proved too short for practical use. As the area became underutilised, the government permitted various clubs to use Balestier Plain as a sports field, including the Singapore Indian Association and the Ceylon Sports Club, which helped strengthen the community spirit.

The **Goh Chor Tua Pek Kong Temple** is the oldest religious institution in the area, founded in 1847 by Hokkien workers from Balestier's sugarcane estate.



Balestier Market and Food Centre at 411 Balestier Road is more than 100 years old.

Built in 1922, **Balestier Market** is Singapore's only surviving rural market building. The municipality purchased the site in 1920 and constructed the market to provide fresh food vendors a space to sell their produce without obstructing traffic.



Kwong Wai Shiu hospital was established to serve the poor in the community.

During a severe malaria outbreak in early 20th-century Singapore, the colonial government turned to the Chinese community for help in building a facility to combat the disease. In response, a group of Chinese merchants raised funds to establish **Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital** in 1910, which remains one of Singapore's oldest charity hospitals today.

MOULMEIN

By the late 19th century, Singapore's rapidly growing population led to overcrowding and deteriorating living conditions, creating an ideal environment for the spread of infectious diseases. To manage these diseases, centres were established in Moulmein, chosen for its proximity to Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), which was already established by then. Moulmein thus became an important hub in Singapore for public health management.

Rich Medical History

Between 1892 and 1911, Singapore faced significant epidemics of smallpox and cholera. Infected individuals often died not only in hospitals but also in the streets or in their homes, frequently unnoticed.

The colonial government struggled to contain these outbreaks, leading to growing calls for a more effective infectious disease hospital.

Moulmein emerged as a potential site due to the proximity of TTSH. Eventually, several key centres were set up in Moulmein to address various public health crises.

One such facility was Middleton Hospital, founded along Moulmein Road in 1907. In the mid-1900s, Middleton Hospital played a vital role in treating and controlling typhoid, polio, diphtheria, and smallpox.

The establishment of Middleton Hospital marked a pivotal moment in colonial Singapore, as it led to significant legislative changes that expanded the municipal commission's responsibilities for public health and housing in the town.

Another important facility was Mandalay Road Hospital, which was originally set up to treat pauper women. It was subsequently used for other healthcare services up till 1994.

Established in 1948, the conserved European-style bungalow at 144 Moulmein Road still continues to operate as the National Tuberculosis Care Centre, adding to the rich history of healthcare in this cluster.



Children being cared for at Middleton Hospital, 1952.

Nursing Nuns in Singapore

After World War II, tuberculosis and malaria spiralled out of control in Singapore. The lack of a medically trained local workforce made these health crises more severe, forcing the government to seek external assistance.

The Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood (FMDM), an international religious congregation of Catholic women, were called upon to provide support due to their extensive nursing experience and training. The FMDM sisters worked as nurses at Mandalay Road Hospital, where they also trained local student nurses.

Their contributions were vital in managing the growing healthcare demands during this period.

By the late 1950s, tuberculosis had been brought under control, thanks to the introduction of improved treatment methods and the development of new vaccines.

With the public health crisis alleviated, the Franciscan nuns took a significant step forward by establishing Mount Alvernia Hospital at Thomson Road in 1961, which also became an important healthcare institution.



A Franciscan nun training a local student nurse at Mandalay Road Hospital, 1959.



Staff of the Mandalay Road Hospital, 1955.

Points of Interest



Former Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood convent.

The first FMDM convent was situated at **142 Moulmein Road** and named Mount Alvernia after Mount Alverno in Italy, where Saint Francis of Assisi received the stigmata.



Former house of Lim Soo Ban.

This house at **144 Moulmein Road** used to be the home of businessman Lim Soo Ban, who was a prominent member of the Hakka community. It is now the site of TTSH's National Tuberculosis Care Centre.



Pavilion wards at TTSH.

This cluster of old buildings, built in the 1920s along Martaban Road, was the **former Middleton Hospital**, which served women who were the poorest of the poor. After the war, it housed TTSH's tuberculosis treatment centre and a nursing school managed by the FMDM nuns, and eventually became a rehabilitation centre before being leased to private tenants.

St Michael's School (currently St Joseph's Institution Junior) was built on land previously owned by the Singapore Improvement Trust. It was named after the Saint and in honour of a former school director of St Joseph's Institution – Brother Asciscus Michael. When the school opened its doors in 1954, it had an enrolment of 590 pupils. The three-storey building comprised 17 classrooms, an office area, a staff room, a hall, as well as three large fields.



Students of St Michael's School.

MEMORIES OF MOULMEIN

“When my parents bought a television – the first in the kampong – everyone showed up uninvited that night to watch TV.”



Mr Jerome Lim, Heritage Consultant and former resident of Moulmein Road

Named after Mawlamyine, the first British Burmese capital from 1826 to 1852, Moulmein Road used to be a quiet multiethnic enclave. The area has special significance for Mr Jerome Lim because his memories of Moulmein Road are tied to the stories his late mother used to share with him. It is also where he went to school at the former St Michael's School, now St Joseph's Institution Junior.

He says, “My mother moved here with my grandmother in the post-war era. At the time, my grandmother was working for a group of English nuns from the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood. They were not ordinary nuns because they were medically trained. Besides running the tuberculosis wards at Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), they also trained TTSH's nursing staff.”

He remembers two prominent houses along Moulmein Road. The house at 144 Moulmein Road was owned by a Hakka businessman named Lim Soo Ban who died a bankrupt.

“My mother remembers his funeral procession started from his house was miles long. Because Lim Soo Ban's family contravened the directions of the official assignee of the insolvency office by organising a lavish funeral, the house was acquired by the State,” says Mr Lim.

The house is now the National Tuberculosis Care Centre for TTSH.

He adds, “The other house at 142 Moulmein Road was the residence of Professor Eric Mekie, head of surgery at TTSH before it became a convent for the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood nuns, who arrived in 1949. It had a small chapel on the second floor, and just behind the house was the servants' quarters where my mother and grandmother lived.”

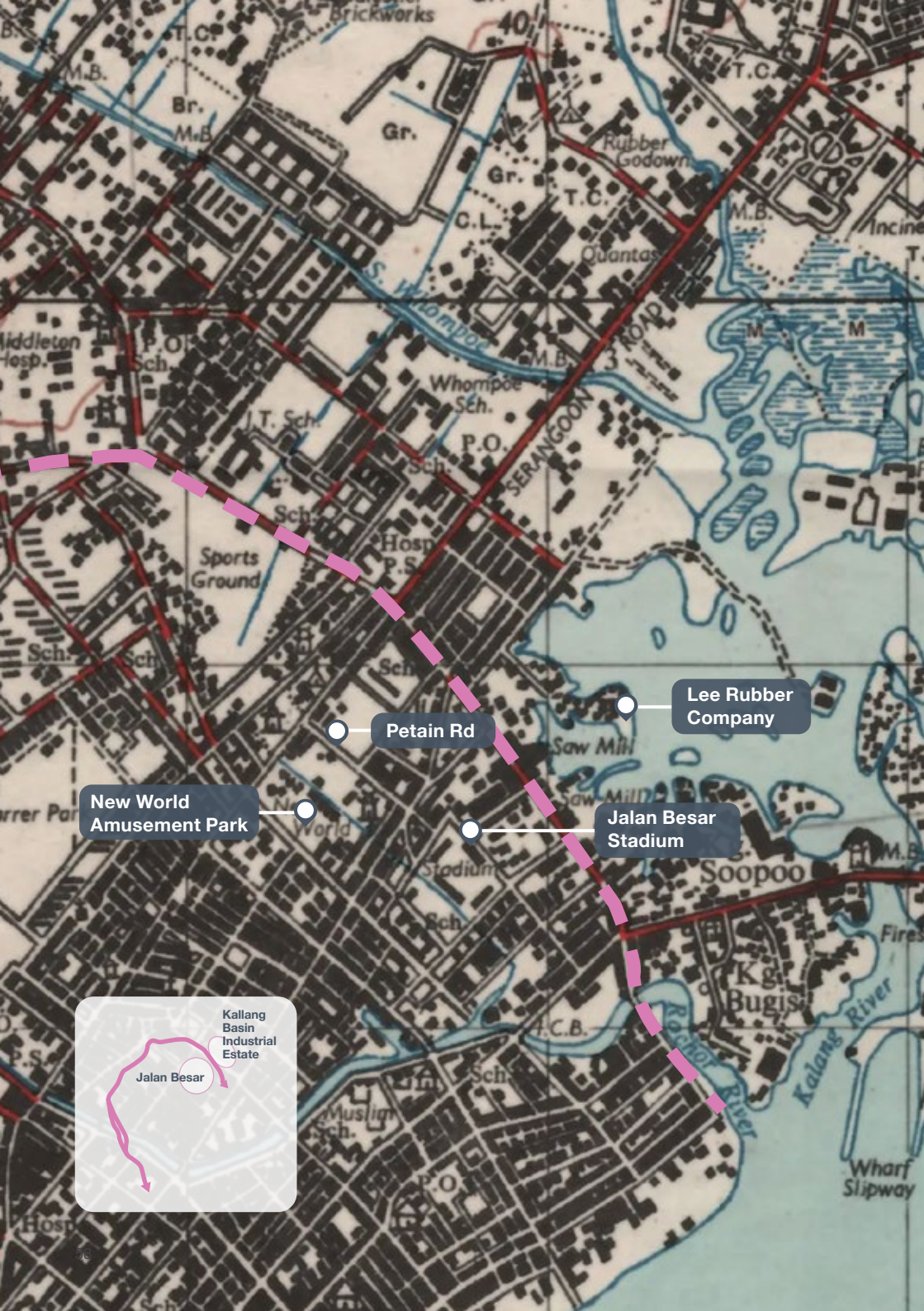
Mr Lim recalls an anecdote his parents shared about living in Moulmein Road:

“After they got married, my parents rented a house near Kampong Chia Heng, which overlooked a Jewish cemetery. When my parents bought a television – the first in the kampong – everyone showed up uninvited that night to watch TV. It was quite common in those days for people to do such things; no one would bat an eyelid.”

Before the Central Expressway was built, the neighbourhood was an expansive one with Buddhist temples, *zhai tangs*¹ and sports clubs occupying the landscape. Mr Lim remembers the melting pot of cultures in the estate.

He says, “Besides kampong residents, the area was home to a mix of communities, from Jewish and Eurasian families to Ceylonese, Burmese, and Indian communities.”

1. Zhai tangs refer to vegetarian halls providing shelter for single male or female migrants from China.



JALAN BESAR

Jalan Besar began as a simple track through a betel nut and fruit orchard established by the Norris Brothers in the 1830s. By the 1890s, it had expanded into a major road, providing access to the surrounding swampland. This land was later reclaimed and developed into shophouses and buildings, attracting industries and communities to the area.

From Roads to Mercantile Hub

Jalan Besar reflects how British-built trunk roads, designed to transport agricultural produce from interior settlements to the town as well as facilitate law and order, fuelled the growth of industry and community around them.

The first major road, completed by the British administration in 1841, was Serangoon Road, which was linked to European Town (around Beach Road and Rochor Road) as part of the 1822 Raffles Town Plan. To alleviate congestion on Serangoon Road, the British later expanded a nearby dirt track, naming it Jalan Besar, meaning “big road” in Malay.

After World War I, urbanisation intensified around Jalan Besar. Situated near Singapore’s port, and with easy access to

the Rochor and Kallang rivers where traders unloaded cargoes, Jalan Besar was ripe for development. New roads, such as Kitchener Road, Jellicoe Road, and Flanders Square, were laid and named after World War I personalities and battle sites. The area’s swamps and tidal flats were reclaimed, making way for shophouses, places of worship, and schools.

By the mid-20th century, Jalan Besar had become a hub for industry and commerce. Rubber factories, food processing facilities, hardware stores, textile shops, and engineering workshops began to sprout. These local firms contributed significantly to Singapore’s economy and some of them remain today.

Jalan Besar was a hub for industry and commerce.



New World Amusement Park

Petai Rd

Lee Rubber Company

Jalan Besar Stadium



Entrepreneurial Spirit

Jalan Besar's expanding industrial sector in the 20th century included various light industries as well as engineering workshops. Many of these light industrial shophouses have remained today, with some still operated by their original businesses.

In the 1980s, urban renewal saw some of the industries, including those on Syed Alwi Road, Kitchener Road, French Road, and Kelantan Road, consolidated in Jalan Besar Plaza. Today, the area around Jalan Besar, such as Cavan Road, Tyrwhitt Road, King George's Avenue, and Lavender Street,

continue to house printing presses, motor workshops, and metal companies.

Meanwhile, a new generation of entrepreneurs has taken over the area, emerging in the form of cafés, restaurants, and design practices. Chye Seng Huat Hardware, once a hardware store on Tyrwhitt Road, is now a café and community space. Local bespoke furniture company Roger & Sons, having evolved from a provider of system office furniture, is intentionally located on King George's Avenue to pay homage to the area's industrious history.

New World Amusement Park

Once a prominent landmark to the north of Kitchener Road, New World Amusement Park offered an exciting array of entertainment options.

It opened in 1923 and was built by businessman Ong Sam Leong's two sons, Boon Tat and Peng Hock. New World featured performers who sang and dance for audiences during an era when live entertainment was the primary form of recreation in town.

During the peak popularity of New World Amusement Park in the 1930s, the neighbourhood grew rowdy and complicated. Rival secret societies, smuggling, and extortion became rampant around areas like Petain Road, and some of the shophouses were even turned into brothels.

Although the amusement park closed down in 1987, many still associate New World with the area. Today, the site has been redeveloped into a condominium, public park, and shopping mall. As a reminder of its vibrant past, the original gate of the former New World has been reconstructed at the entrance to the public park.



New World Amusement Park, 1949.

TALES FROM TYRWHITT ROAD

“Our world revolved around the large field outside our house ... I also remember that there was sometimes a sweet smell drifting from the Framroz factory nearby.”

Mdm Loke Loo Lin spent her childhood years in Tyrwhitt Road with her siblings, parents, and grandparents. She recalls that it was a predominantly Chinese neighbourhood surrounded by small industries and businesses.

“My grandfather came to Singapore when he was 19 and worked as a rent collector for Loke Yew – his son, Loke Wan Tho was the businessman who founded Cathay Organisation. And my father had a jewellery business with a few of his friends,” she says.

“My siblings and I had a lot of fun growing up there. We had a *ma jie*¹ who looked after us but she also rented a ‘black room’² in Chinatown where she stored her belongings.”

At the end of the row of houses at Tyrwhitt Road was a ‘void deck’ where a vendor sold snacks from a makeshift stall. And, around the corner was a small shop hawking sundries, dried goods, and toys.

“Our world revolved around the large field outside our house, mainly the playground with see-saw and slides, and a pavilion that had a ring of benches around it. I also remember that there was sometimes a sweet smell drifting from the Framroz factory nearby.”



Mdm Loke Loo Lin, Retiree and former resident of Tyrwhitt Road

One of her childhood memories was watching neighbourhood boys make kite strings using cow gum and glass.

“They would crush broken glass and stir it into the melted gum in an old cigarette tin. Then, they would coat ordinary sewing strings with it. When dry, the glass strings can cut your fingers if you brush against them!”

The children would have kite fights in the park where the objective was to cut your opponent's kite string and capture their kites when they tumbled from the sky.

“We also played in the back alley behind the house. We would always see a man kneading the dough for bao or meat buns at the back of the shop. He would have a ‘Good Morning’ towel over his shoulder which he used to wipe away copious sweat that probably dripped into the flour!”

She remembers the Chye Seng Huat Hardware Store and similar shops in the area but they never ventured too close as it was always dusty and cluttered with metal pipes.

“I like the new developments in the area now – the fancy cafés, restaurants, offices, and art gallery nearby make the place very lively and interesting.”

1. Cantonese term for female domestic servant who vowed to remain unmarried.

2. Rooms were partitioned into smaller spaces that were rented out. Most of these spaces did not have windows and were poorly ventilated.

Points of Interest



Shophouses at Jalan Besar.

The double-storey pre-war terrace houses on **Petain Road**, built in the late 1920s, were initially the homes of the nouveau riche, who had accumulated wealth from the rubber boom. These houses are in the Chinese Baroque style, featuring symmetrical lines, delicate ornaments, and ceramic tiles on both the floors and walls.



Pre-war terrace houses along Petain Road.



Jalan Besar Stadium was the birthplace of the "Kallang Roar".

After World War I, Singapore experienced a boom in the rubber trade, and Jalan Besar became a hub for rubber processing factories. Among the most notable were those owned by philanthropist Lee Kong Chian, known as the Rubber and Pineapple King. He founded **Lee Rubber Company**, located at 161 Lavender Street. Today, the Art Deco-style shophouse is a conserved building that has been repurposed for new businesses.

Another landmark in the area is **Jalan Besar Stadium**. Built in 1932, it is considered the birthplace of Singapore football. It was here that the Malaya Cup (1932–1966) and later the Malaysia Cup (1967–1973) were held for over four decades before moving to the National Stadium. Jalan Besar Stadium was later redeveloped and the new sports complex was launched in 2003.

KALLANG INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

Kallang Industrial Estate originated from Singapore's post-war economic development in the 1960s. Its location near the city centre as well as the Kallang Basin, a site of early trade activities, made it ideal for industrial development. Kallang Industrial Estate played a crucial role in Singapore's transition to an industrialised economy, and has permanently changed the landscape of the Kallang Basin.

From Fields to Factories

Kallang was originally an area characterised by a mix of residential and agricultural use, with paddy fields and small villages. By the late 19th century, sawmills, oil and rice mills, and abattoirs had established themselves in Kallang, followed by engineering workshops and factories lining the banks of the Kallang River.

In the 1960s, following the decline of traditional sectors such as agriculture, the Singapore government actively promoted industrialisation as part of its broader economic development strategy. The Kallang area was strategically selected for industrial development due to its proximity to the city centre and the Kallang Basin, which provided access to water transport.

In 1964, millions of tons of earth were transported from Toa Payoh to fill the Kallang Basin. The Kallang River was straightened, and roads were widened. By 1968, approximately 388 acres of new land had been made available, largely reserved for light and medium industries and low-cost flats.

Initially named Kallang Basin Industrial Estate, it was Singapore's second largest after Jurong Industrial Estate. Factories, warehouses, and industrial buildings were constructed to accommodate various businesses, including manufacturing, engineering, textiles, food processing, and logistics.



Texas Instruments at Kallang Basin Industrial Estate.

Over time, semiconductor and electronics companies also emerged in the area. Additionally, around 15,000 housing units were built by the Housing and Development Board to accommodate workers and those affected by the urban renewal projects.

In 1971, Kallang Industrial Estate was further expanded, leading to the demolition of Kampong Soopoo, a nearby squatter colony, to make way for new light industries. More than 100 families from Kampong Soopoo were compensated and resettled in Toa Payoh. The old shophouses along Kallang Road were also torn down and replaced with two seven-storey flatted factories for the manufacture of garments, electronics, and printing materials.



A Singapore-made tugboat, Bunga Chalong, at Kall Teck Shipyard in Kallang Industrial Estate, 1964.

Job Creation

Kallang Industrial Estate was pivotal in Singapore's transition to an industrialised economy, significantly contributing to job creation and economic growth.

The companies in the estate provided numerous low-skilled jobs for the increasing number of school leavers each year. Unlike casual workers in colonial times, industrial workers benefited from regular employment and fixed working hours.

The shift towards industrialisation also affected the traditional roles of women in society. With increased job opportunities, many women entered the workforce, enhancing their household incomes and helping to alleviate labour shortages. The estate's proximity to housing also allowed women to balance their domestic responsibilities while working.



Women workers in a factory, 1967.

Flatted Factories

Flatted factories were built in Kallang Industrial Estate, inspired by similar structures in Hong Kong.

Before these flatted factories were constructed, light industries such as metalworking, shoemaking, textiles, and paper manufacturing operated from low-rise units, often in pre-war shophouses or zinc factories, such as those seen in Jalan Besar.

The flatted factories proved popular and were quickly occupied. Renowned multinational companies such as the Blue Box Factory, Texas Instruments, and General

Electric established their presence in these factories within Kallang Industrial Estate.

This success spurred further private investment in flatted factories. Alongside those developed by the Jurong Town Corporation, numerous privately developed multi-storey factory blocks have sprung up across Singapore over the years.

Together with the Kolam Ayer Industrial Estate, Kallang Industrial Estate presents exciting future opportunities to envision a vibrant creative landscape for the next generation of entrepreneurs.



Flatted factory at Kallang Industrial Estate.

EYE ON THE FUTURE



Aerial view of central area in Singapore.

A Charming City Fringe Corridor

Through the years, the historic trunk roads that make up the Inner Ring Corridor have played a significant role in facilitating the dynamic movement of people and trades in and around the city centre. When viewed as part of the larger network of key city-bound roads, decommissioned rail lines, and maritime trade routes, these trunk roads have contributed significantly to the development of various districts along the Corridor.

Charming and diverse communities, attractions, and institutions blossomed along the city fringe over time. From the quaint neighbourhoods in Tiong Bahru, Jalan Besar, and Newton to bustling districts in Orchard Road, Eu Tong Sen Street, and Balestier Road – each is a well-loved place with a distinct charm.

The Inner Ring is the only Identity Corridor that encircles the city centre. Weaving through this rich and varied urban landscape, the Corridor's colourful tapestry of stories chart Singapore's growth from a colonial port to a vibrant metropolis.

Bringing Communities Closer

Past and present journeys to the city fringe have evolved over time. From trains that set off from Tanjong Pagar Railway Station to cars that navigate the Newton Circus roundabout to Singapore's modern rail networks – the city fringe has evolved in tandem with dominant modes of transportation.

In the future, the Inner Ring will be an active mobility corridor that focuses on the pedestrian-cyclist experience and transforms how people move in and around the city.

Stitching together existing and future city fringe neighbourhoods, key attractions, and other recreational routes such as the Round-Island Route, Rail Corridor and Thomson-Kallang Corridor, the Inner Ring will serve as a key conduit for the community.

Placemaking along the Identity Corridor

Earmarked as one of the Identity Corridors in Singapore, the Inner Ring and its recreational potential will continue to be enhanced by the Urban Redevelopment Authority to better serve the communities who live and work there.

With improved walk-cycle infrastructure along the Corridor, the paths will connect with other intra-neighbourhood routes to promote deeper exploration of city fringe neighbourhoods and their hidden gems.

Different areas of the Inner Ring will be able to evolve unique characters – strengthened through urban design, placemaking, and community involvement – and develop a special sense of place and familiarity to locals and visitors alike.

Enliven Public Places Together

The Lively Places Fund will continue to spark and support community projects such as the creation of public spaces, furniture, and artwork at appropriate areas within these neighbourhoods to create delightful community nodes.

It is hoped that this collection of stories and memories of life by the Inner Ring will inspire Singaporeans to discover and create their own stories and memories through a variety of community projects in the years to come.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following groups, organisations and individuals for sharing their stories and insights with us:

Interviewees:

Dr Eileen Aw, Dr Marc Nair, Mr Jerome Lim, Mdm Mandy Lee, Ms Lim Siew Geok, and Mdm Loke Loo Lin

Heritage guide:

Mr Koe Pak-Juan

Special Thanks to:

Creators of Estate Frequencies; Girl Guides Singapore; Mr Jerome Lim, The Long and Winding Road; National Archives of Singapore (NAS); National Heritage Board (NHB); National Library Board (NLB); Department of Geography, National University of Singapore (NUS); NUS Libraries; Singapore Armed Forces Mapping Unit, MINDEF; Singapore Land Authority (SLA); Tan Tock Seng Hospital

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ISBN 978-981-94-1669-1 (Print)
ISBN 978-981-94-1670-7 (Digital)

