

No. 469 BUKIT TIMAH ROAD

Study of Form and Function



Owner:
National University of Singapore

Architect:
Forum Architects

Engineer:
T.Y. Lin International Pte Ltd

Contractor:
Guan Ho Construction Co Pte Ltd

From its early days as Raffles College, to its current occupants, National University of Singapore Faculty of Law, the Bukit Timah Campus has been home to generations of students for more than 80 years. Conservation work sought to keep this rich history alive and yet provide modern amenities befitting a world-class educational institution.

Challenging Course

The campus is an eclectic mix of different styled buildings constructed at different times. Central to this conservation were three modern buildings constructed as part of the national programme to develop a skilled workforce. Block B, a low 4-storey building built in 1956, and Lecture Theatre 1 (LT 1), a functional single-storey pitched roof structure built in 1962, were designed by Palmer and Turner as part of the expansion of the campus. Science Tower, a 10-storey block, designed by Ho Kwong Yew and Sons after an extensive fact-finding mission to the United Kingdom and said to be the best of new campus designs after World War II, was built in 1964 and opened by then-Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, in 1966.

While the architects were mindful to retain many of the original structures, they also had the challenging task of adapting them to meet the functional needs of the faculty. These included facilities like a larger lecture theatre, a multi-purpose auditorium and a moot court. The architects also faced a tight deadline of less than 10 months to complete restoration before the school reopened.



Science Tower refitted with trademark adjustable vertical sun-shading fins

Laws of Attraction

Special attention was given to restore Block B's façade. A blue canopy that had obscured part of the front of the building was replaced with a thin slab that was parallel to the existing window line. Windows that had been boarded up over time were also restored. Now, Block B's entire original façade can be viewed as a seamless whole once again.

The hexagonal-shaped LT 1 was converted into a moot court for students to conduct debates. While internally, its original tiered flooring was removed to create a flat floor, the new court's external shading fins were retained. The distinctive metal sun-shading fins on the front of Science Tower were also reinstated, with new fins of identical profile and colour but made of perforated aluminium.

While the two lecture theatres in front of Block B were redeveloped into a multi-purpose auditorium, the original forecourt between these two buildings was enhanced as an entrance courtyard. Such juxtaposition of the old and the new creates unusual spatial formations that inject life into this part of the campus.

Making The Grade

The restoration does justice to the campus' evolution without forfeit to its heritage. It deservingly scores well with its fine balance of utilitarian and aesthetic goals.



View of restored façade of Block B from quadrangle



Sensitively added glass linkway



Juxtaposition of old and new creates spatial formation



Entire original façade of Block B kept



Integration of old and new buildings



Distinctive sun-shading fins of Science Block



Deep concrete fins of Block B for effective sun-shading



New interior of moot court



External shading fins of LT 1 retained



1. site history

A historical heritage site, the Bukit Timah Campus is the cradle of Singapore's tertiary education. The first sight that greets the visitors and students, the campus green is an idyllic spot for campus concerts. Guitar performances under the shady trees and students lounging in the sun made this zone a meeting point. A popular photo-taking spot on high ground with gentle slopes, it was part of the Botanic Gardens.

"Those who studied at Raffles College between late-20s and the late 40s remember the Bukit Timah Campus as wonderfully wooded [and] bucolic. Down the slope from Dalvey estate, near steps that lead up to No.5, a tembusu tree stands tall with thick horizontal branches jutting out low down its trunk. Climb up the 48 steps to the house, you come across the angšana tree which also has fragrant yellow flowers. These carpet the ground after an overnight shedding. Also on the ground but mushy are the fallen fruit of oil-palms that are so old they reach higher than the sloping roof of the building. Half a dozen water fowls wander about the grounds; their resonant croaking makes their presence very much felt. The grass snakes that co-exist with them slither silently, occasionally making their way into the building to give humans a scare. Squirrels have their freedom of the compound among the rambutan and durian trees. The old building's cream coloured walls and rust coloured trim, its old-world wooden-slat windows steadily losing their khaki-green, the two non-matching glass and aluminum casements, the obtrusive aircon units, the unadorned flagpole atop the cone, the modern red-brick annex all make up a rather melancholic picture."

Maurice Baker,

taken from *The Heart Where It Is* (1994)

1. site history



Eventful moments marked the illustrious history of the University. The most significant and memorable was Foundation Day on 8 October 1949 which officially installed the University of Malaya at Bukit Timah. Besides the Senate and the Council of the University, representatives from foreign universities in Britain and Asia, and the Sultans from Malaya came in their full regalia to participate in the pomp and ceremony of the event in typical British tradition. Foundation Day ceremony was held at Oei Tiong Ham Hall at Bukit Timah campus. The first Chancellor of the University, Malcolm Macdonald was also installed at the ceremony. A British empire-wide architectural competition was conducted and the winning design was by Cyril A Farey and Graham R Dawbarn. The architecture was simple and modern. The college was formed around two quads grassy courtyards with rows of buildings on the periphery.

"The first sight of Raffles College struck me with a feeling of reverent awe. Perched on top of a hill amidst sylvan surroundings, the stately group of buildings looked truly imposing. The somber grey of the camouflaged walls, and the cloistered tranquility which pervaded the place inspired me with an almost pious reverence. As I walked along the flagged corridors flanked on either side by circular arches, I was deeply affected by the quiet grandeur of the scene."

Chong Seck Chim,

Taken from Raffles College: 1928-1949



1. site history

With its open, green quads and beautiful, wide, arched corridors, the Bukit Timah campus resembles a traditional British college campus- stimulating environment for scholarly reflection and contemplation with Oxford styled arches and corridors, pylon-like tower projecting from the roof at midpoint along their length and flattened domes of cupolas on either side at the ends.

There was communal interaction and small spontaneous performances in the cosy lower quad. The verandahs and corridors were 'hot spots' for students to gather or to escape the sun or rain.

Ragging also took place between class change over periods.

"unlike 'ragging' as practiced in the British universities where students organized a parade through town to raise money for a charity, the activities in Raffles College and the medical college was more akin to 'fagging', a system of bullying whereby a British public school pupil acted as a servant to an older schoolmate."

Lee Kip Lee,

Taken from *Amber Sands: A Boyhood Memoir* (1995)

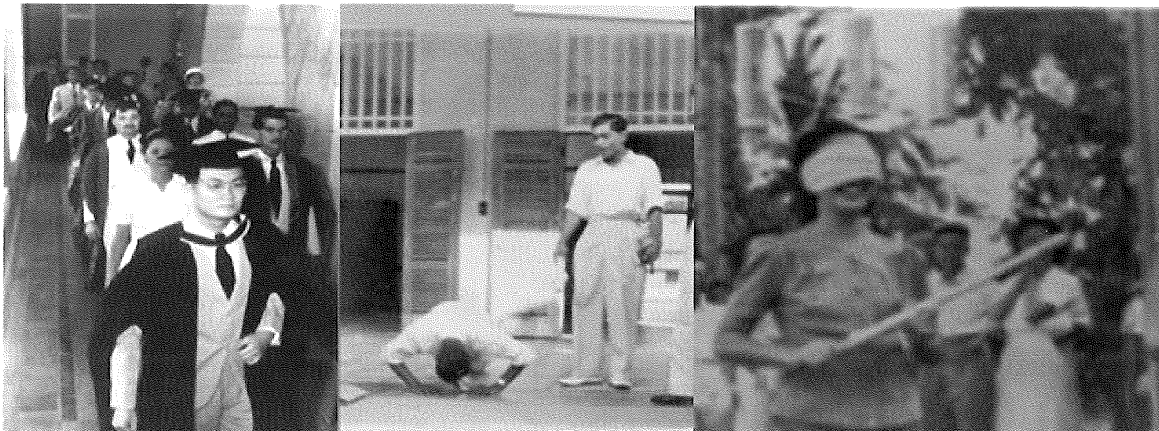
Tutorials were conducted in lecturers' offices, and at times in the residence of lecturers. This strengthened the teacher-student bonds that remained throughout life.

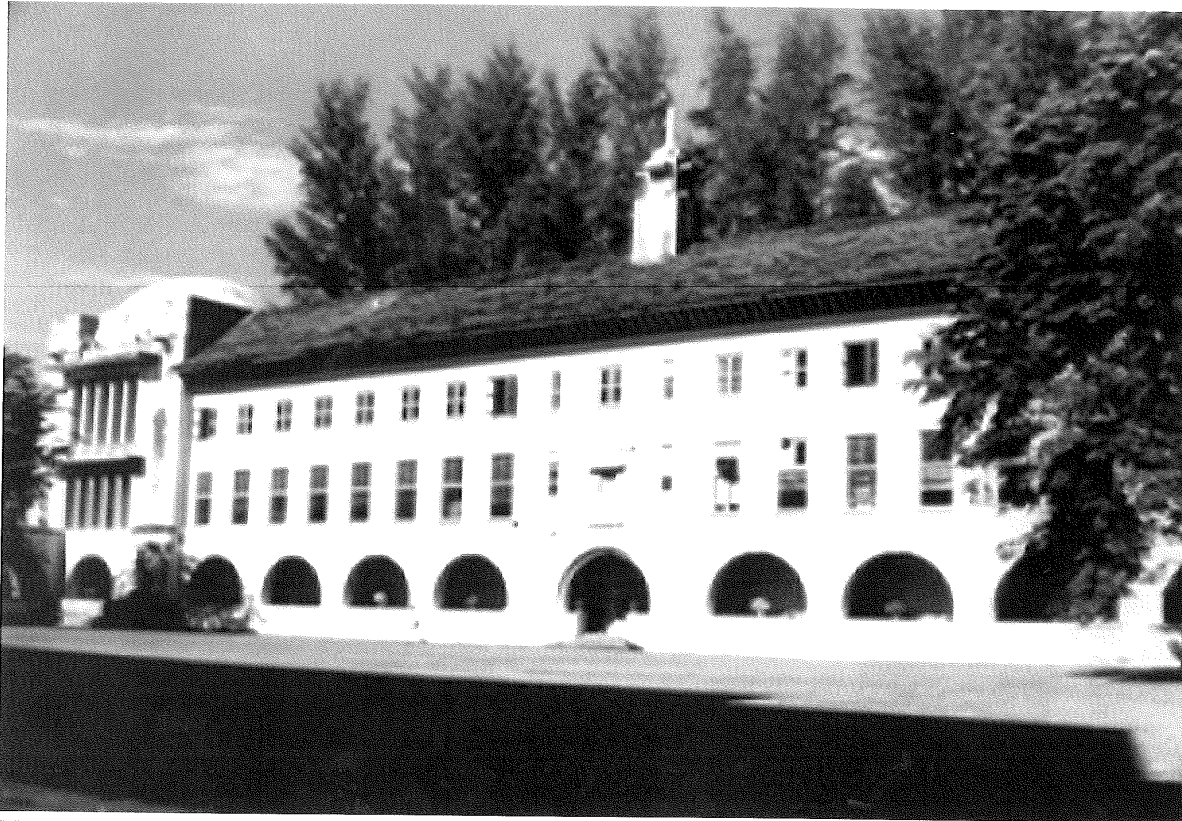
"Clothes were formal. Students had to wear a tie and appear in a full suit of white drill at every lecture... On one occasion at a History lecture by Professor Dyer, who always entered the class in full regalia in his gown and mortar board, he noticed that one of the students had taken off his jacket. I recall vividly Professor Dyer's order, 'You! Remove your naked presence from my immediate vicinity!'"

Maurice Baker,

Taken from *A Time of Fireflies and Wild Guavas* (1999)

By 1950s, class attire was less formal with boys in shirts and pants, and girls taking to frocks, cheongsams, and saris. Staff and student attire today is casual, with comfort a priority, given our humid tropical climate.





1. site history

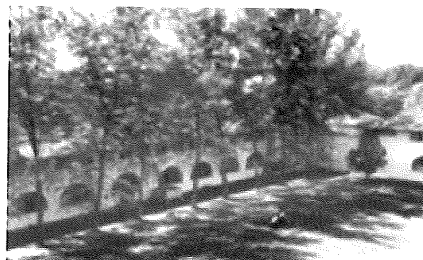
The upper quad was the central hub to student life. It was where the students walked across to get to their classes. The campus was small and students from different faculties would mingle. The campus holds fond memories as well as personal and sentimental value for those who studied there.

Some squares within institutions spur civic activities, the lower and upper quads of the Bukit Timah Campus. The square is a focal point and an identity marker, and bring back many memories of friends and activities which the quad witnessed.

The 1950s and 1960s were a period of political awakening. Students actively took part in politics and demonstrated. There were protests on campus as students stood up for social and political causes. The University Specialist Club and Democratic Club was formed. One result was the detaining of some students on St John's island. Like-minded students would go to the police station to obtain visit passes to visit the detainees to keep their morale up.

" It is our task to see that a University without a soul will not be allowed to exist in our country. Any institution producing technical robots, inarticulate scientists, dumb doctors, bigoted pedagogues and bureaucratic civil servants is not to be tolerated."

Editorial,
Taken from *The Grad*



1. site history

Many memorable events were held in on campus, one of which is the speech address by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in Lecture Theatre .



In 1969, the student union invited PM Lee for a special talk, a landmark speech, attended by thousands. Students filled the lecture theatre and spilled out to the corridors. It was a time of important political and historical events, when Singapore had gained independence and was still in transition. Students were active in politics. The government was concerned about the views of some of the expatriate academic staff. The PM urged them not to accept blindly what the expat staff in the social sciences taught, without questioning their citizenship. He also emphasised the University's role as integral to nation building.

" I wonder whether you understand, whether you have a grasp of the realities of the society in which you are living. I have the feeling very often that, because the administration is so effective, you are living, like fishes in aquariums, in different tanks. And in your tank, there are only angel fish, a few black mollies, some red carp. And in the other tank, are some tiger fish, piranhas, man-eating types of fish."

Lee Kuan Yew,

Prime Minister's address to students (1969)

"I was warned that my editorship of the Singapore Undergrad would get me into trouble. The most memorable article I wrote was called "A question of decorum". It was on an electrifying event that took place when the then PM addressed the University students. When the chairman of that forum was asked by the PM to restrain a questioner, he replied," I am the chairman, I decide."

Kishore Mahbubani, "Four of the best"

Taken from Memories Beyond Degrees

1. site history

In 1919, a working committee for education recommended a college for higher education to be known as Raffles College, also the Singapore centenary memorial of Sir Stamford Raffle's founding of Singapore and the nucleus of a future university. The Government's endowment fund started with \$2 million, with large donations received from Sir Manasseh Meyer, Oei Tiong Ham, Tan Soo Guan and Eu Tong Sen. The college opened to its first 43 students in June 1928.

"Raffles College students enrolled for either arts or science. The arts students worked in the library and the science students, in the laboratory. They pondered over their booked day and night, but at tea-time they were ready to take off for football, rugby, cricket, or hockey. There were other recreational activities; music practice with voice or violin, listening to the gramophone, or strolling and romancing in the Botanic Gardens."

Edwin Lee and Tan Tai Yong,
Taken from Beyond Degrees (1996)

During the war years there was a growing consensus in developing the British colonies especially in higher education. In 1949, a bill creating the new university, University of Malaya was passed. This was made more significant as it coincided with the beginnings of an independent Singapore.

The university opened a campus in Kuala Lumpur when Malaya gained independence setting in motion the separation of universities. In 1962, the university was renamed University of Singapore.

