

101 JALAN SULTAN

Regal Revival



Owner:

O&Y Builders Pte Ltd

Architect:

Kay Ngee Tan Architects

Engineer:

Ronnie & Koh Consultants Pte Ltd

Contractor:

Towner Construction Pte Ltd

The owner's and architects' deep appreciation and respect for the inherent qualities of this development have made this collaboration a winner from the start. Ten outstanding specimens of ornate Late to Art Deco shophouse-style buildings, circa 1900 to 1940s, have been imaginatively transformed into a regal boutique hotel where vintage charm has checked in for a long-term stay.



Late to Art Deco shophouse buildings transformed into regal boutique hotel

Salute To The Past

The architects' dedication to detailed research at the initial stage of the project paid off well. Both the interior and exterior of the conserved buildings have been beautifully restored. Taking the "Top-Down" approach, the team adhered to the 3R principles in restoring and reinstating the buildings' roof and façades. Great care was also evident in the reinstatement of the wide variety of doors and windows of the individual buildings. Those that were badly dilapidated were skilfully replicated; these include the many unique decorative fanlights. Existing pillars, columns, arches and intricate mouldings in the interior spaces were also faithfully restored.

The project team is commended for unearthing and showcasing an old metal sign plate bearing the emblem of a Malay printing press company, Harmy, that used to occupy the building. This reminder of the past has been given a new shine as it hangs in the lobby of the hotel for modern day visitors to appreciate the former life of Unit 101.

Creating New and Familiar Spaces

With good insights into the original spatial intent and configuration, the

architects impressively amalgamated this collection of buildings into a singular hotel development. Gaps between the buildings were sensitively covered with a see-through glass roof and a bridge at the rear over the existing backlane. A lushly planted timber deck rooftop now creates new green spaces as it effectively links the individual buildings together. As a whole, the unified development contains the back-of-house amenities, F&B establishments as well as new spaces that respect the inherent qualities of the originals.

The owner's sensitive foresight in accepting only 64 guest rooms instead of a hundred in favour of keeping the original spatial character of the buildings is lauded. Although the first storeys of nine of the buildings could have shopfronts, their residential fronts were voluntarily retained. M&E and air-conditioning system equipment were also thoughtfully and cleverly located and tastefully concealed from view.

Contributing To The Environment

More than enlivening the original buildings, this project has successfully enhanced the environment in more ways than one. Corridors and access passages to guest rooms are naturally ventilated and both environmentally and handicapped-friendly. The project has also resuscitated the back alleys of the development. Nice landscape design and atmospheric lighting enhance the friendly and interactive spaces for the hotel and neighbourhood.

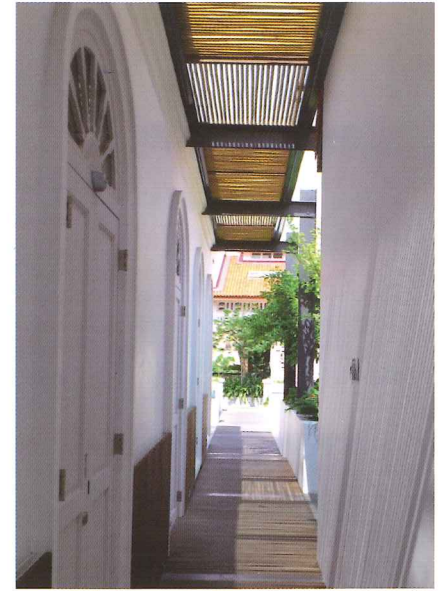
More than breathing life back into the heritage buildings, The Sultan hotel project has revived an interesting corner within the unique Kampong Glam Historic District for the entire neighbourhood to enjoy.



Aerial view of amalgamated hotel development



Water feature at second storey



Gap between buildings sensitively covered with a glass roof



Old printing press company sign plate



Decorative moulding



Capital with pineapple motif at five-footway



Suite with daylight from original French windows



Open verandah at second storey



Hotel lobby at first storey



Traditional patterned floor tiles

1 History of building from 'archaeological excavation'

As there were no early records of the owners of 101 Jalan Sultan, efforts were put into looking at details of the old building covered under grime & dilapidation to find clues of its past. Discovery of an old metal signplate bearing the emblem of the Harmacy Press led us into believing that the building was once part of a group of flourishing publishing firms established in Kampong Glam during the 20th century, thus explaining its distinct spatial differences from all other shophouses in the vicinity.

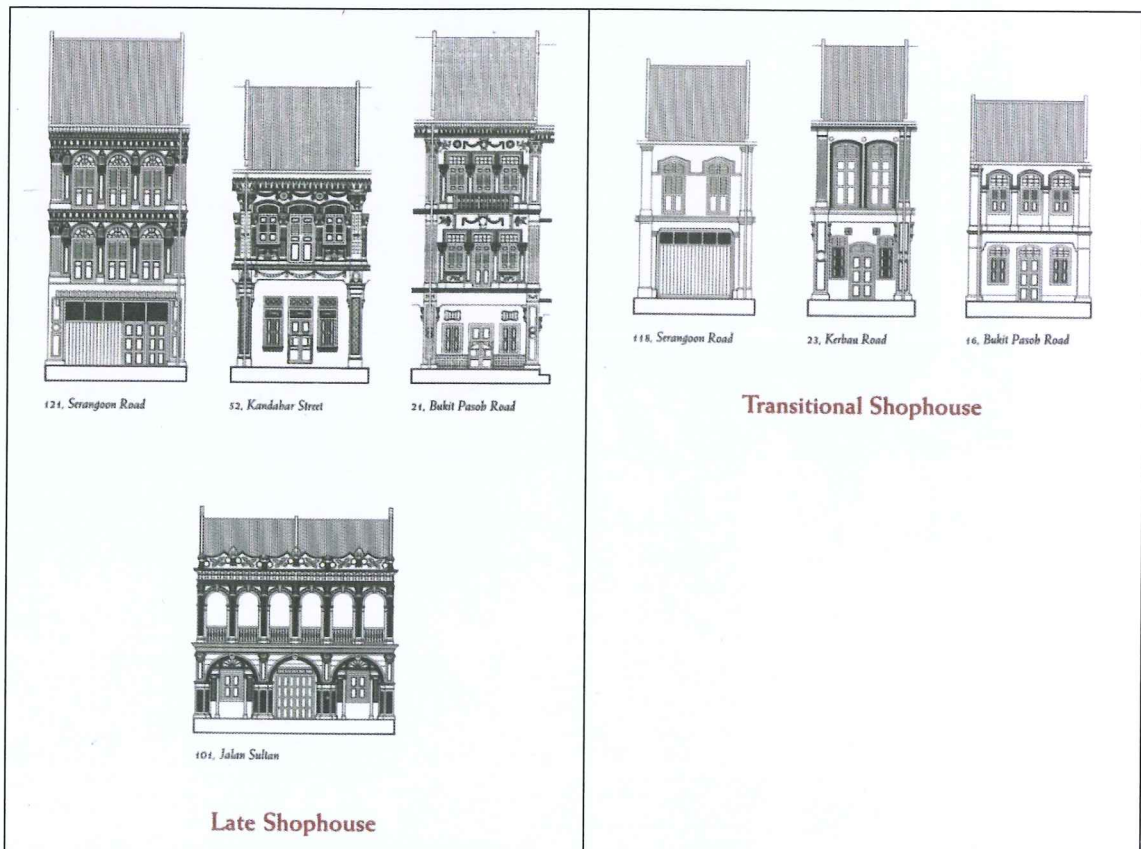


- 1 Column pilaster next to Main Entrance at 5-footway where metal signplate was discovered
- 2 Some preliminary scratching off of age-old grime revealed some engravings
- 3 Close-up photograph of the 330W x 230H metal signplate with the Harmacy Press emblem, and listing of their main publications

From the classification of Shophouse Facades by the Urban & Redevelopment Authority, units 101, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62 & 64 have been classified as 'Late Shophouse', with unit 101 Jalan Sultan being represented as one of the distinguished example of its category.

It is written in the Technical Leaflet for *Understanding the Shophouse More than a Façade* that **The Late Shophouse Style**, built between 1900 and 1940, is the most spectacular, particularly in the use of ornamentation.

In contrast, units 105, 107 & 109, which is adjacent to the richly ornamented unit 101, belongs to the 'Second Transitional Shophouse', where **The Second Transitional Shophouse Style** has simpler ornamentation. Designs were simplified and streamlined as they began to be constructed with a combination of the ornate Late and succeeding Art Deco style.¹



¹ Extract from *Understanding the Shophouse More than a Façade* Conservation Technical Leaflet from the URA

2 History of place & people through research articles & archives

When the project first commenced in year 2008, much time was spent at the archival sections of the National Library to understand the history of the place & the people who lived in Kampong Glam in the 20th century. While a separate essay was written based on these materials, an official press article¹ by the Malay Heritage Foundation was later released in year 2010, summing up the key points succinctly. The Annex C, which talks about the key characteristics & history of Kampong Glam, confirms the existence of The Harmy Press, as seen in the extract below:

A Publishing Centre

From the late 19th to early 20th century, Kampung Glam rose in significance where the constant flow of people in and around resulted in the exchange of ideas. These exchanges, and other factors, accelerated the development of a print industry which positioned Kampung Glam (and Singapore) as a publishing centre for the Malay region.

*The early efforts in printing were initially of a religious nature before developing to encompass other genres seen as more effective channels to communicate the circulation of ideas. In the 20th century, publishing houses such as Royal Press, Al-Ahmadiyah Press and **Harmy** became household names in publishing and distributing works of local authors as well as magazines and other publications.*

Although the exact year in which 101 Jalan Sultan was built could not be determined based on evidential documentation, speculations were made based on its other prominent neighbour building, the Alsagoff Al-Arabiah *Madrasah*.



The Alsagoff Al-Arabiah Islamic School bears a clear engraving of the year 1912 on its front façade, and from the same article of MHF, there were relationships between the publishing houses and the *Madrasah* from the extract below:

¹ Malay Heritage Foundation Press Conference Article 'Malay Heritage Foundation appoints new Chairperson' dated 27th July 2010.

Haj and the pilgrimage brokers

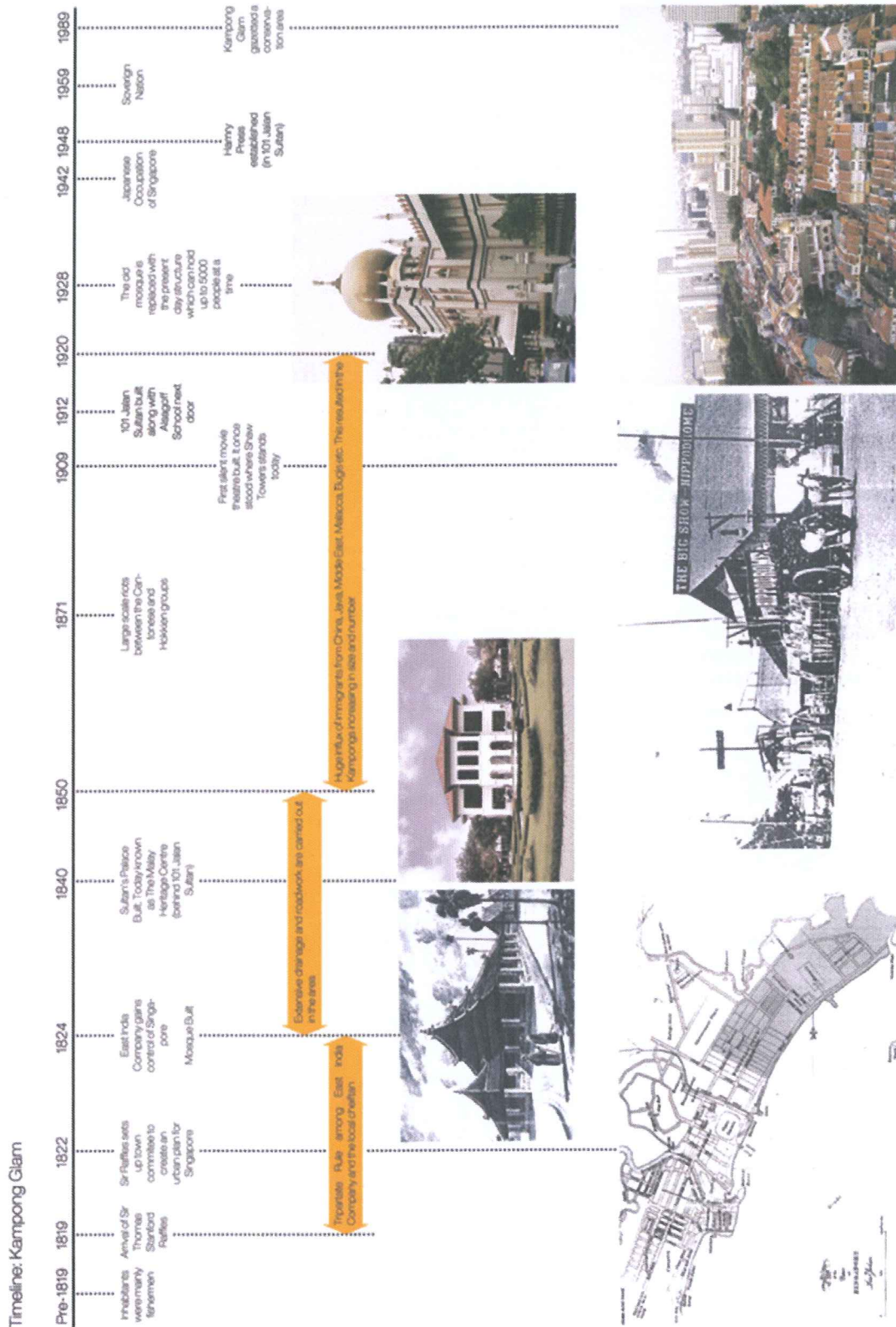
Kampung Glam became known as a hub for the Malay and Muslim communities. Kampung Kaji (approximately where Bussorah Street is) was a religious quarter, attracting many traders of religious artefacts as well as religious scholars.

At the backbone of this, and one of the most important trades in Kampung Glam, is the pilgrimage brokerage industry. Singapore was the pre-eminent node on the longer journey to Mecca for Muslims from this region who wanted to perform the haj. This role and position of Kampung Glam (and Singapore) continued until the late 1960s.

*The prospering of this industry was the impetus for growth of related activities such as the publishing industry and institutions such as madrasahs offering an Islamic education. Madrasahs established in Kampung Glam such as **Alsagoff Al-Arabiah** and **Aljunied Al-Islamiah** still stand today.*

APPENDIX: RESEARCH ARTICLE BY KAY NGEE TAN ARCHITECTS

1 Timeline diagram showing chronological occurrence of historical events & speculated year of erection of 101 Jalan Sultan



2 Essay article on the cultural history of Kampong Glam

Kampong Glam: A Lesson to the World

"Kampong" means "village" in Malay and "Glam" comes from the Glam tree (Figure 1) which was abundant in the area in the 18th and 19th century. The glam tree proved practical in many ways for the locals. Firstly, the hard timber could replace rotted hull planks and also be used for slow burning. Secondly, its papery bark was ideal for weaving and also caulking the seams of boats. Thirdly, the fruit, once dried, could be grounded to make a type of black pepper. Lastly, the leaves could be boiled and distilled to obtain 'Cajeput Oil' which helped in healing rheumatism and cramps.

Kampong Glam, as it is seen today gives only a pinhole sized view into its eventful history. It is an area that has brewed slowly and patiently and has stood the test of time to evolve to its present state. Today the streets are filled with shops of different trade's e.g. Persian carpets, Turkish handicraft, cane baskets and restaurants of different cuisines. Yet the area is seemingly quiet. The air that lingers over it reminds one of the seas after a heavy swell. The busy life of the early 20th century is nowhere to be found, but its remnants lurk in the shadows. They lurk in the shadows of the five foot ways, the doors and windows, all trying to tell a story of the past, to create a sense of nostalgia if you will. A nostalgia that wants us to close our eyes and imagine what lay here before the time of this calm and somnolent breeze?

Before the sails of the British fleet were seen in the Singapore Strait, the area was inhabited by fisherman and the island was mostly a large jungle. The boat was an extremely vital asset, since the fisherman had to use the land and the sea to survive. They used the beach at Kampong Glam to bring their goods ashore and also to repair damages caused at sea. This lifestyle however, was destined to change with the coming of the British. They arrived in 1819 with Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles

leading the way. He set up a factory on behalf of the East India Company and also established a port which would play a vital role in Singapore's and moreover Kampong Glam's future. With the creation of a port, trade grew at a brisk pace and with it came different cultures.

Bugis, Arab, Boyanese, Malay and the Chinese were some of the different races that settled in Singapore at the time. The Chinese already had a presence in the islands around Singapore, once word spread of a new port; they were one of the first to take advantage of it. In Manila, locals accused foreigners of poisoning wells and causing an epidemic and as a result killed 80 Europeans and Chinese. This was another reason for the inflow of Chinese into Singapore. Traders from Penang and



Fig 1: Glam Tree

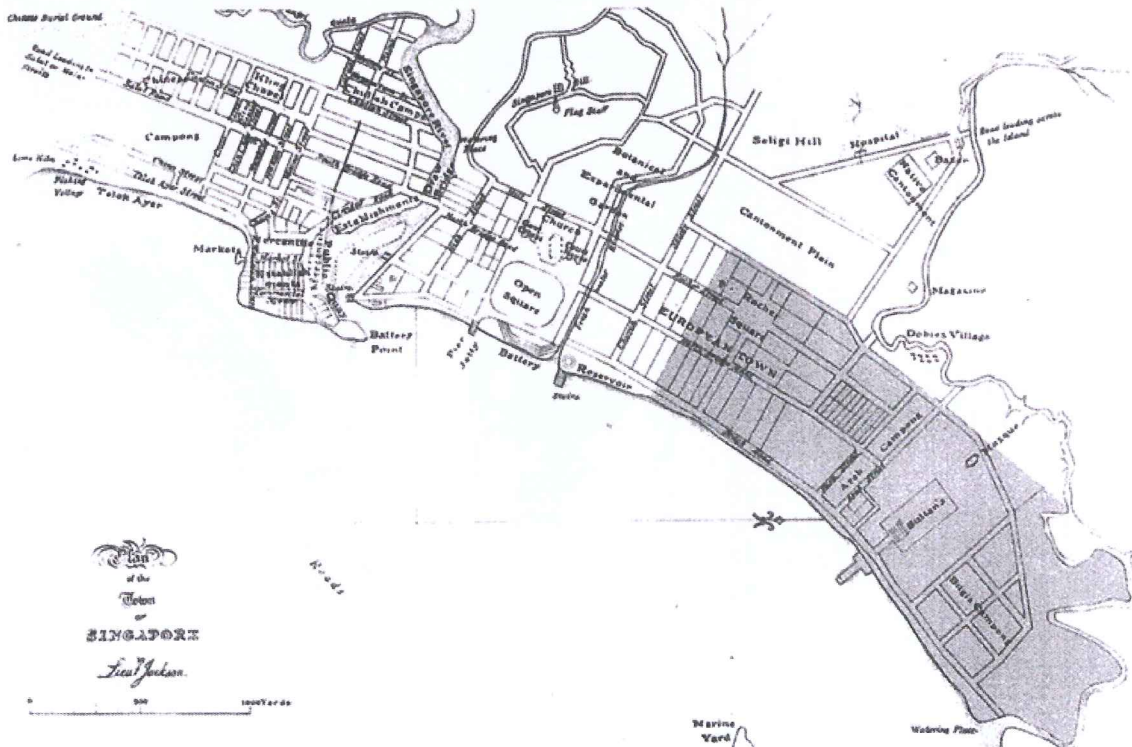


Fig 2: Jackson Plan 1828

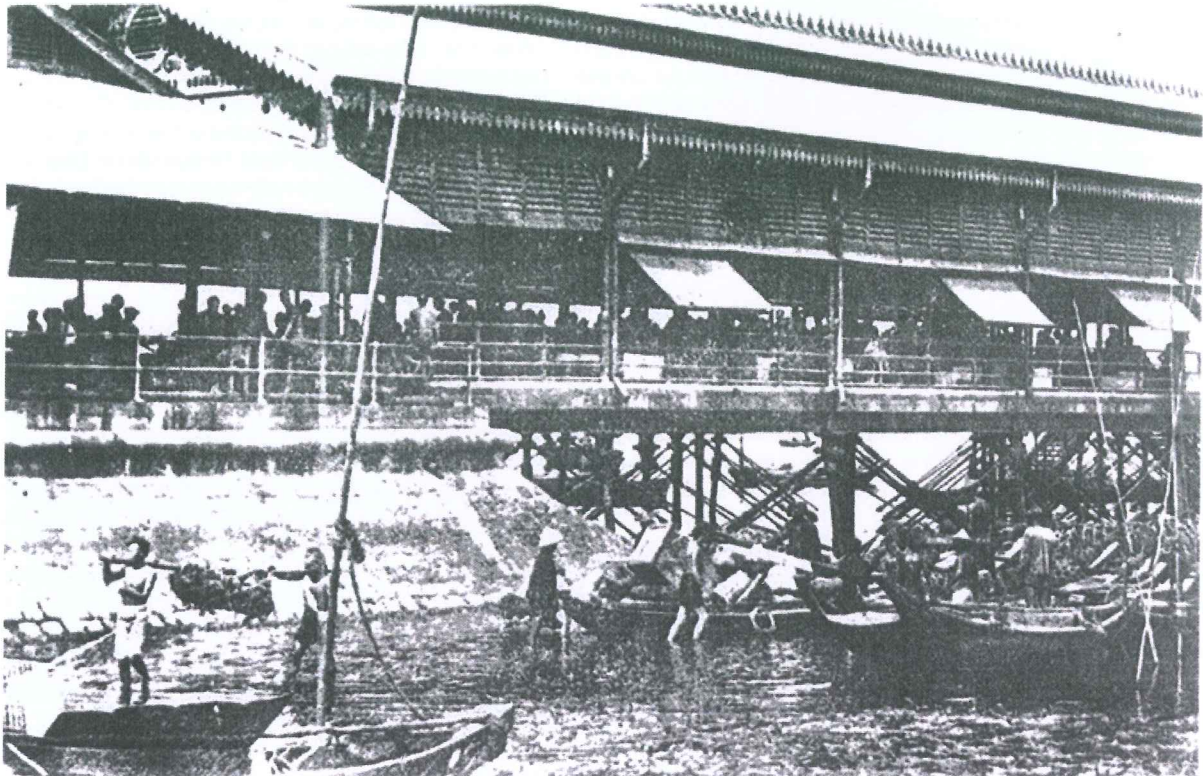


Fig 4: Clyde Terrace Market

Malay were also attracted to the profits free trade promised. The other major settlers were Javanese and the Boyanese, who were mostly brought onto the island by the Bugis as slaves. Among the other settlers, Arab merchants were the ones that had the deepest influence on Kampong Glam, an influence which is reflected in the street names of Arab Street, Bussorah streets, Baghdad street etc. One of the first Arab settlers was Syed Mohammed bin Harun Al-Junied, a prominent leader of Arabs in the East. His arrival prompted other Arab merchants to take residence in Singapore. This influx of different cultures took place in a span of 3-4 years and caused the city to grow chaotically and at an unprecedented rate.

When Sir Raffles returned to Singapore in 1822, he realized that his original plan was not heeded and now the city was bedlam. He formed a Town Committee and spent a year creating an urban

plan for the city according to ethnic groupings. In the Jackson plan of 1828 (Figure 2), the layout of the city is divided into different Kampongs like Chinatown, European Town, and Bugis Kampong etc. In the same plan Sir Raffles allocated space for Sultan Hussain to build his palace and mosque and placed the Arab Kampong right next to it. Sir Raffles believed that all migrants of the Islamic faith will be better suited if placed together and next to the Sultan's residence. The mosque, built in 1824, served the island's Muslim population for over 100 years. In 1928 it was replaced with the present day Mosque which holds the largest muslim prayer gathering in Singapore. Many Chinese, Javanese, Boyanese, Malay, Arab and Indian families resided in Kampong Glam since the early 19th century. For example, the Javanese settlements were found mainly on Arab Street and Haji Lane which were colloquially called Java Street and Bali Lane respectively.

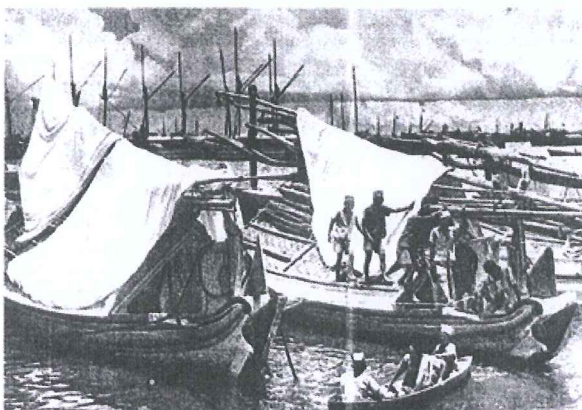


Fig 3: 'Prahus'

In those days, the trade winds are what decided buying and selling of goods. The Bugis would come with the North-West monsoon in the months of September and October. They anchored their boats in the waters off Kampong Glam and their 'prahus' turned into floating shops (Figure 3). Chinese middlemen were rowed on to the boats to do business. The Chinese on the other hand used the north eastern monsoon winds that brought them in the months of December and onwards. During this time the docks grew intense with activity. Shopkeepers spreading their wares to be sold; employers running around to find strong bodied immigrants were a common sight in those days. The Chinese 'junks' left the shores of Singapore with the south-west monsoon between April and June. By 1822, 3000 vessels brought a total of \$8 million in import-export trade. However, this free trade came at a cost.

The census conducted in 1824 shows that of the total population of Singapore, about 60% was Malay, 31% Chinese, 7% Indians and the rest comprise about 2%. Over the next 12 years the Chinese replace the Malay in being the largest ethnic group and by 1849 comprised of half the population. The confluence of largely uneducated cultures caused unwanted rifts and lawlessness in the community. When the first Chinese ships arrived in 1821, the sultan's servants demanded presents be given to Sultan Hussain. The Chinese captain of one ship refused and as a result was imprisoned. This caused uproar among the Chinese community who then petitioned for the captain's release. The hot tempered Bugis were in constant quarrel with the Chinese middlemen with whom they did most of their business. Murders, robberies and street brawls were routine in Kampong Glam. Munshi Abdullah, a famous historian, writes "Everyday without ceasing, murders took place along the road to Kampong Glam. There were policemen on duty here and there but they themselves were often murdered." Along with racial tensions, fires and epidemic also caused problems for the communities. In 1847, fire consumed 273 homes in Kampong Glam. In 1838, an outbreak of smallpox claimed 300 lives. In 1851, due to polluted water and bad drainage, cholera claimed another 300 or so lives. People were packed into slums which were rife with malnutrition, sickness and chronic opium smoking. In 1848, Dr. Robert Little estimated that 20% of the population was addicted to opium, of which 50% were Chinese males.

Each year the number of Chinese migrants settling in Singapore grew drastically. By the mid-1870's 30,000 Chinese males were arriving from China every year. This number reached its highest in 1927 when the all time record stood at 360,000. There were essentially two types of settlers who came from China - the hardworking, smart businessman and the triad gangster. Kampong Glam's brotherhood was the Tong Beng and Lu Thien, its leader, was banished for terrorizing the district and blackmailing shopkeepers. The massive migration waves of 1853/54 brought men like Lu to the shores of Singapore. In 1854, huge riots broke out between the Hokkien and the Cantonese allegedly over catties of

rice. There was fighting all over the city and the next day it got worse. Men were stabbed and chopped to pieces and women had their breasts cut off and then tortured to death. All in all 600 people were killed and about 500 arrested. In 1871/72 rioting broke out again and this time public flogging of the criminals had to be carried out. Built in 1872, the Clyde Terrace Market (Beach Road and Rochore Road- Figure 4) was known to be the gangsters den. It was constructed at the sea front where the boats would pull right up to during high tide and unload the fresh produce to hawkers. The mob leaders extorted money from hardworking hawkers under the excuse of protection. In 1956, 100 gang members marched through Bugis, Hylam and Malabar Streets to show their power. Witness accounts talk about regular fights breaking out on the streets between different gangs. This Mob violence only got worse with the realization of the PAP's urban redevelopment plan.

In the early 1960's the area today called Crawford estate was a slum development occupied by a number of different communities like the Malay, Boyanese, Javanese, Chinese and some Muslim Indians. The PAP planned the area to be redeveloped which involved the relocation of these residents. Indonesian broadcasts in 1964 accused the government of 'deliberately forcing Malays out of the city'. Racial tensions grew after the government rejected UMNO's (United Malays National Organization) demands for economic advantages for Malays. Fighting eventually broke out in various parts of city between the Malays and the Chinese & claimed the lives of many.

Ever since the creation of the free trade port at Kampong Glam, lawlessness, racial tensions and other social evils arose. The trade's star attraction was money and everybody gained from it. What the community lost was its conscience. Murders, rapes, robberies, child trade, slave trade, gambling, opium addiction all added up to make Kampong Glam a not so nice place to live in. Crime was eventually curbed after Singapore got going on its own two feet. However, the racial tensions took time to ease. With the setting up of Goodwill committees and an increase in educated

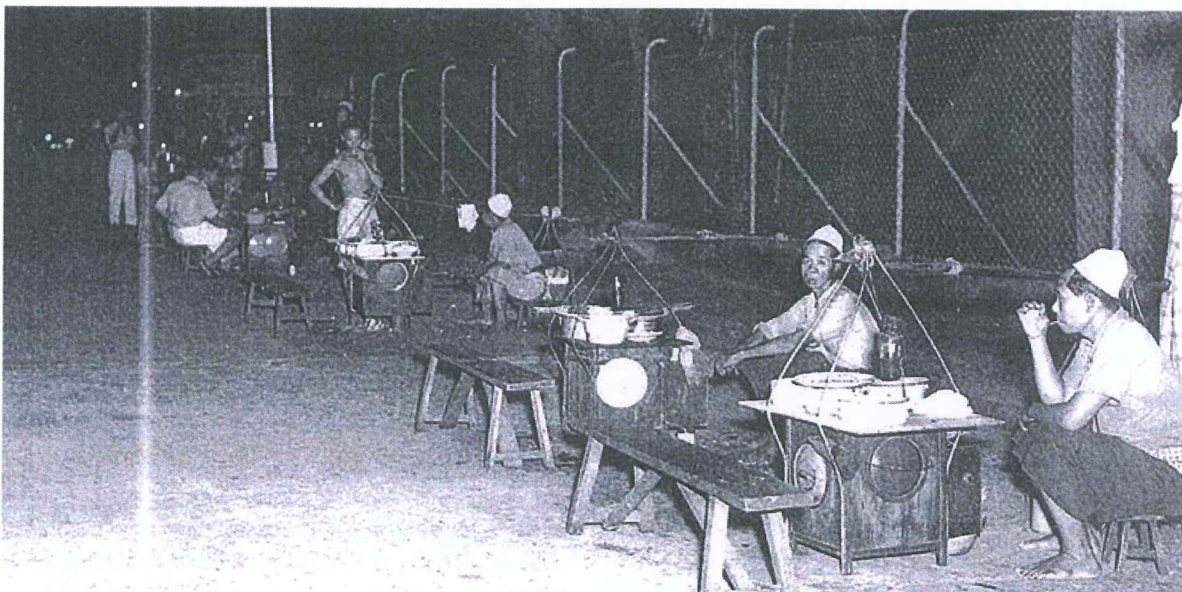


Fig 5: Javanese 'Satay' Men

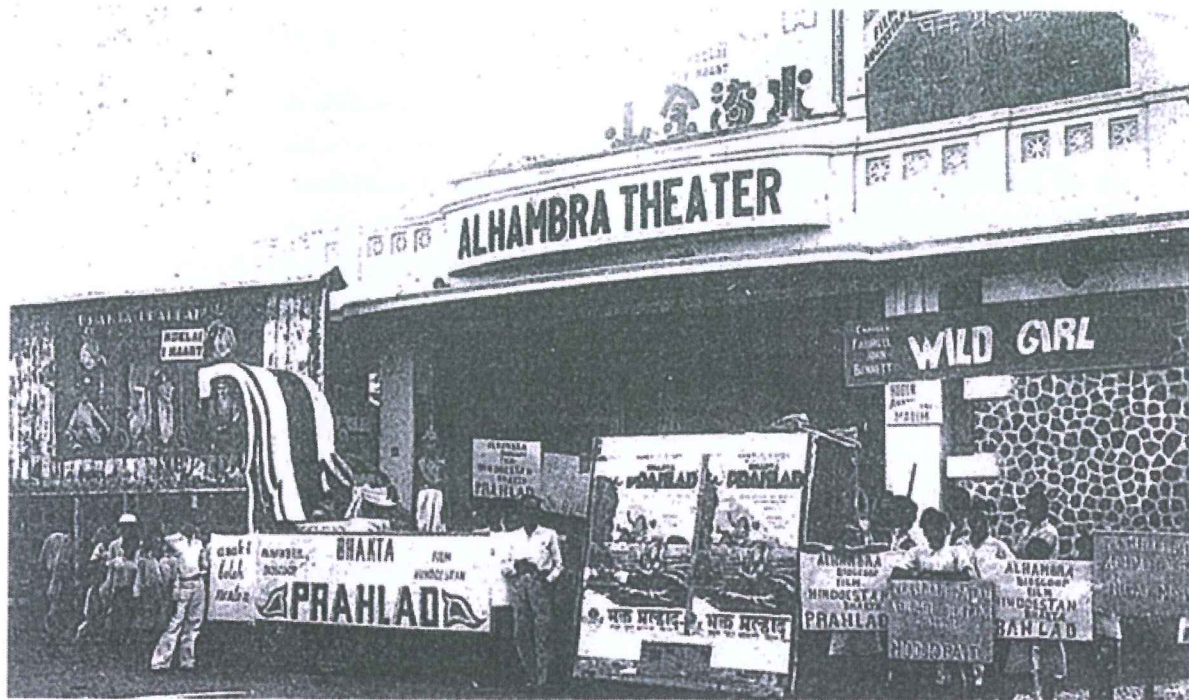


Fig 6: The Alhambra Theatre

individuals, issues of race started to dissolve. These harsh times were indeed a challenge for all. For the first time so many different cultures were forced to merge. It is said that when the Amazon River meets the dark waters of the Rio Negro they do not mix for 6km, but eventually merge. In the same way when these different cultures merged for the first time, due to ignorance, social problems arose. This forced merger also offered a chance to learn and understand the differences. The society, unknowingly, through each one's small contributions created a new culture, a new style of living, one that is seen everywhere in Singapore today.

The Arab community, though small in numbers, had a very large influence on the Kampong Glam. The wealthy Arab families contributed greatly to mosques and religious schools (Madrasah). The Alsagoff Arab School and the Madrasah Al-Junied Al-Islamiah School were built in 1912 and today are one of the few remaining Islamic religious centers of learning. The Javanese brought music and food with them. Javanese satay men provided a perfect end to an evening at the cinema (Figure 5). The Hippodrome, which ran silent movies, was situated on Beach Road (currently Shaw Towers stands in its place). It was replaced with the Alhambra theatre which showed English films (Figure 6).

The Marlborough, Alhambra's neighbor, showed Chinese films imported from Hong Kong. Between the two theatres was the Satay club, an open air food court. Before Nicoll Highway was built, for entertainment, people used to go to the seaside to listen to old Hakka ladies in small 'tongkangs' singing popular love songs. Indian Bengali men could be seen on the streets going door to door and milking their cows for their customers. Malay printing presses occupied many shop houses around the Sultan's palace

during the late 19th century. Printing of Muslim and Islamic books reached its highest in the 1890's. These were mostly printed in presses based in the Kampong Glam area. The Muslim books and magazines were a lot of the times read or sung out loud to the public as a style of theatre. The Mosque also played a big part in helping Kampong Glam evolve. It attracted various retailers to come and set up shop on the streets that led up to it, a lot of which are still active today. These activities and past times forged a culture that helped people get through the turbulent times of gang violence, the oppressive times of Japanese occupation and also the racially tense times of post independence.

It was their new way of life, thinking, food etc. that created a beautiful fusion of colors and painted an incredible mural. This mural, now a little faded, can still be seen in the daily activities of the area. One can find it in the Malay basket weaver's beautiful craft, in the Persian carpets' illusive patterns and in the colors of the cloth in the Indian merchant's shop. A bond was created in those tense times, one that could not be broken by the time that passed and will not be by the time to come. This bond of unity is what gives Kampong Glam and now Singapore a strong identity and also serves as an example to the world.

Research Article by Kay Ngee Tan Architects, 2008.