469

BUKIT TIMAH ROAD

Graduating to a Brighter Future



2012 AWARD

CATEGORY A

Owner:

National University of Singapore Bukit Timah Campus

Architect:

Forum Architects Pte Ltd

Engineer:

T.Y.Lin International Pte. Ltd.

Contractor:

Guan Ho Construction Co Pte Ltd

The revival of the historic NUS Bukit Timah campus showcases the restoration, recovery and upgrading of the 1928 Raffles College facility gazetted as national monuments - the Oei Tiong Ham, Manasseh Meyer, Federal and Eu Tong Sen Blocks - and Block A and the Library Block added in the 1940s and 1950s respectively. Today, the beautifully restored buildings continue to uphold



Oei Tiong Ham Block beautifully restored

their legacy as the cradle of Singapore's tertiary education. Sensitively adapted for reuse as modern classrooms and lecture theatres equipped with air-conditioning and the latest technology, the campus continues to inspire its present-day students, and enhance the memories of many generations who have walked its grounds and graduated from it.

A Studied Revival

The project team's meticulous research, investigation and documentation uncovered several architectural modifications and add-on design elements on the buildings. All the doors on most of the blocks that had been replaced over the years, as well as those on the Eu Tong Sen Block which had been removed, were painstakingly reinstated to their design detailing and rightful locations. The original coffered ceiling of Oei Tiong Ham Block was also sensitively restored after its surprise discovery, as was the severely altered connector between the building and Block A. As a result, much of the original soul, details and aesthetics were successfully preserved.

Awakening the Quads

Traditionally the open space where students congregated, the development's upper and lower quadrangles had insensitive alterations and additions like the covered structures along walkways which were discordant with the original design intent of the colonial-style architecture. A minimalist design approach was taken to bring them back into focus with the matured trees kept and the sprawling lawns landscaped to give greater prominence to the

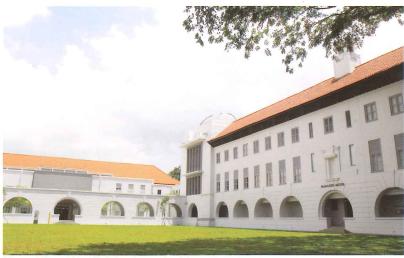
surrounding buildings. The new 'tiered landscape' decks along the Block B corridor add a nice touch as they open up more convivial spaces for students to mingle and relax. The original link connecting Oei Tiong Ham and Manasseh Meyer Blocks was also reinstated.

New Use for Familiar Spaces

Originally designed to be naturally ventilated, the buildings were upgraded and air-conditioned. This was done with expert subtlety. Louvred windows were reinstalled and fitted with glass to keep cool air in and ductwork and diffusers were masterfully hidden from view. The project team is also commended for employing new technology and creative thinking to achieve a sense of larger, column-free spaces within the Oei Tiong Ham graduation hall.

All in all, this project is carried out with disciplined and exemplary effort that culminated in the immaculate revival of a venerated national institution.





Library and Manasseh Meyer Blocks frame lower quadrangle lawn



Dome of Manasseh Meyer Block



Decorative turret



Cauldron-shaped sculpture on column



Eu Tong Sen Block



Cloistered passageway with rhythmic semi-circular openings



Timber lattice fanlight and louvered door



Oei Tiong Ham Block



Coffered ceiling at lobby of Oei Tiong Ham Block

BUILDING HISTORY

A Pioneering Educational Institution



Introduction

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 Dalvery 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 angsana 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)





Inception of the Campus

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,"

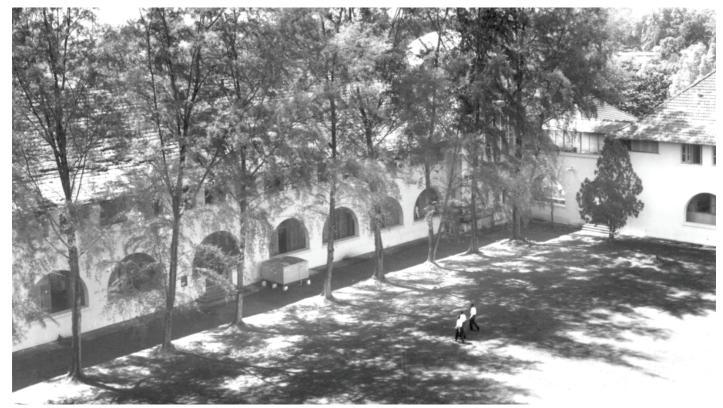
Edwin Lee and Tan Tai YongTaken from **Beyond Degrees** (1996)

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.

BUILDING HISTORY

A Pioneering Educational Institution







Opening Ceremony

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)



"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)

Historical Significance

Many memorable events were held in on campus, one of which is the speech address by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. In 1969, the student union invited PM Lee for 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 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*

BUILDING HISTORY

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Architecture of the Historic Campus

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)









Student Life in the Campus

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.

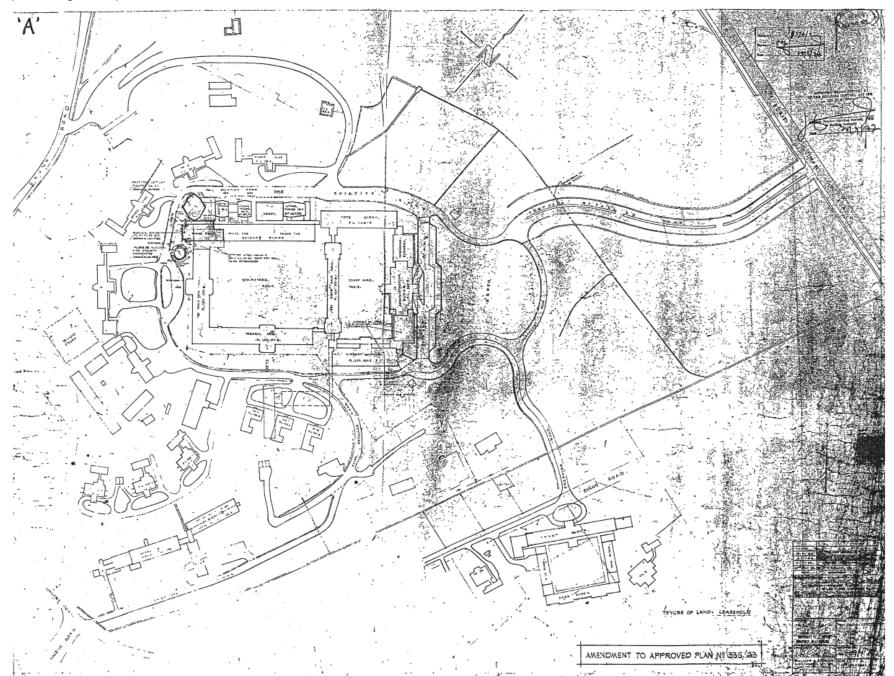
Some squares within institutions spur civic activities, the lower and upper quads of the Bukit Timah Campus. The square is a focal point and an identity marker, and bring back many memories of friends and activities which the quad witnessed.

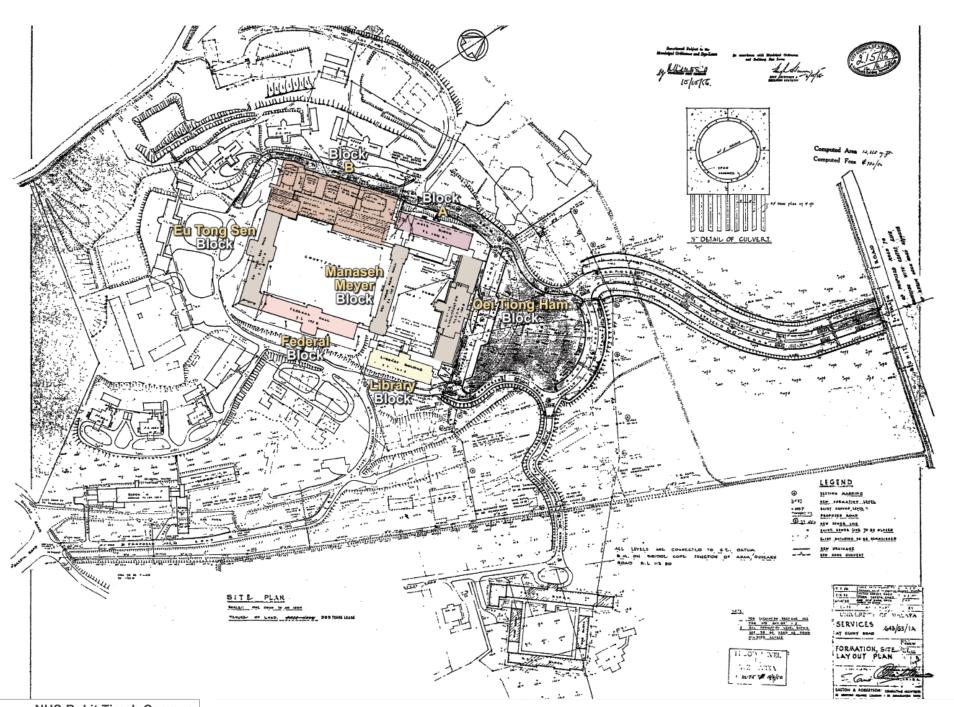
The 1950s and 1960s were a period of political awakening. Students actively took part in politics and demonstrated. There were protests on campus as students stood up for social and political causes. The University Specialist Club and Democratic Club was formed. One result was the detaining of some students 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.

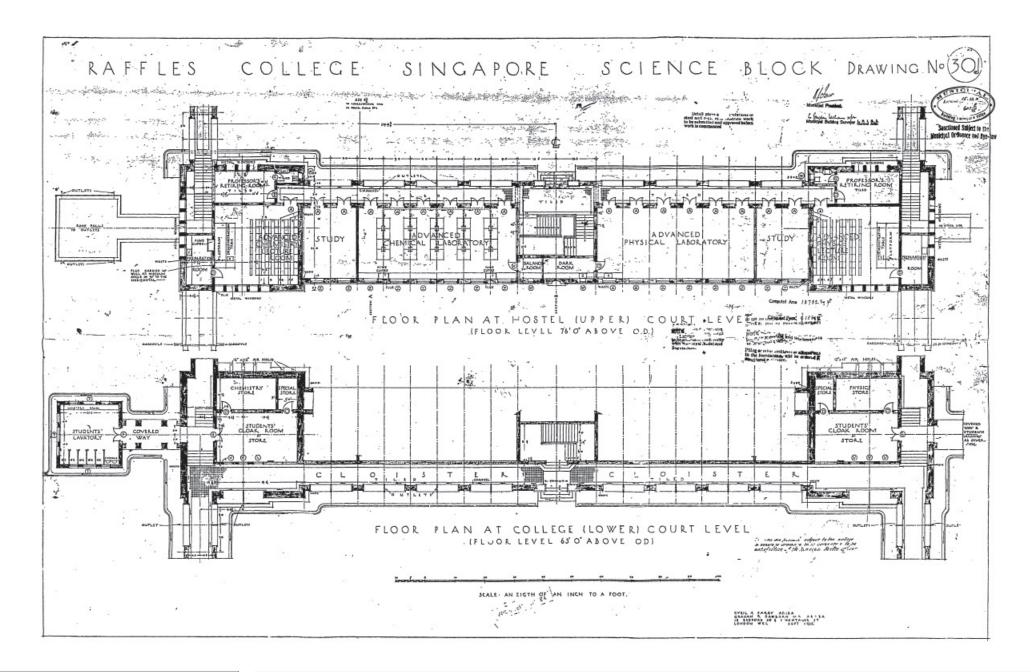
"It is out task to see that a University without a soul will not be allowed to exist in our country. Any institution producing technical robots, inarticulate scientists, dumb doctors, bigoted pedagogues and bureaucratic civil servants is not to be tolerated."

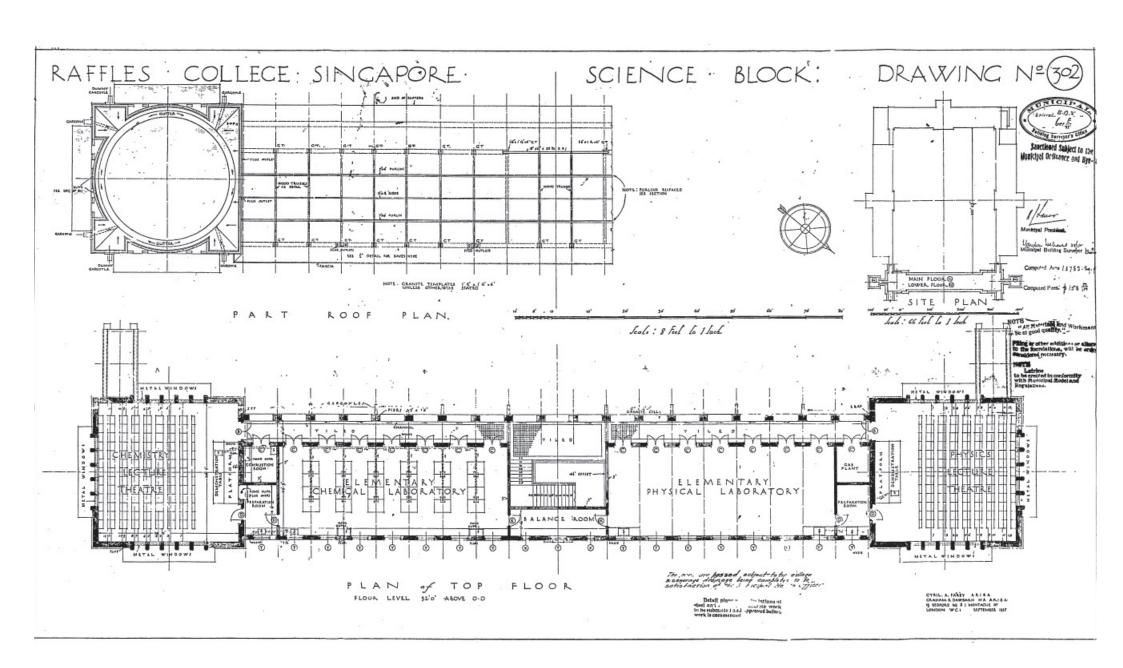
Editorial
Taken from *The Grad*

Architectural floor plans of original campus

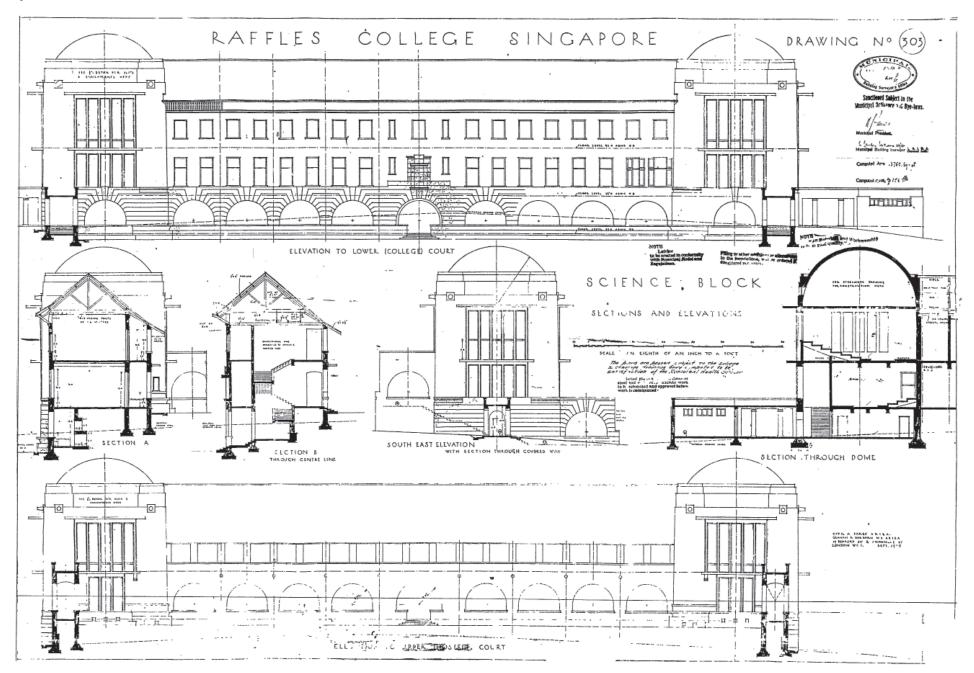


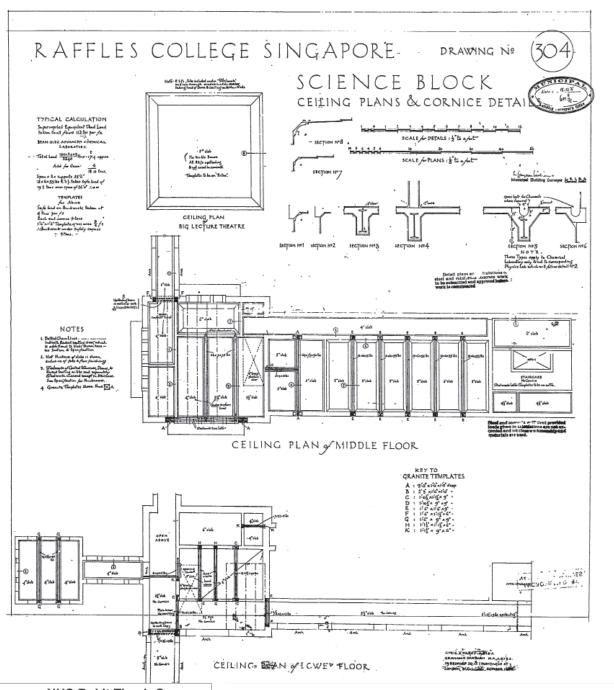


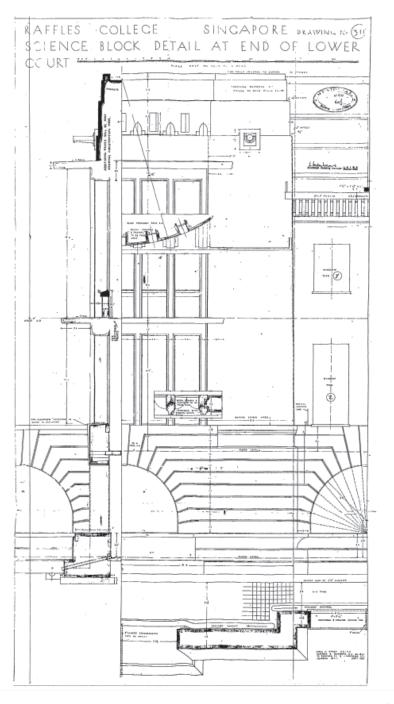




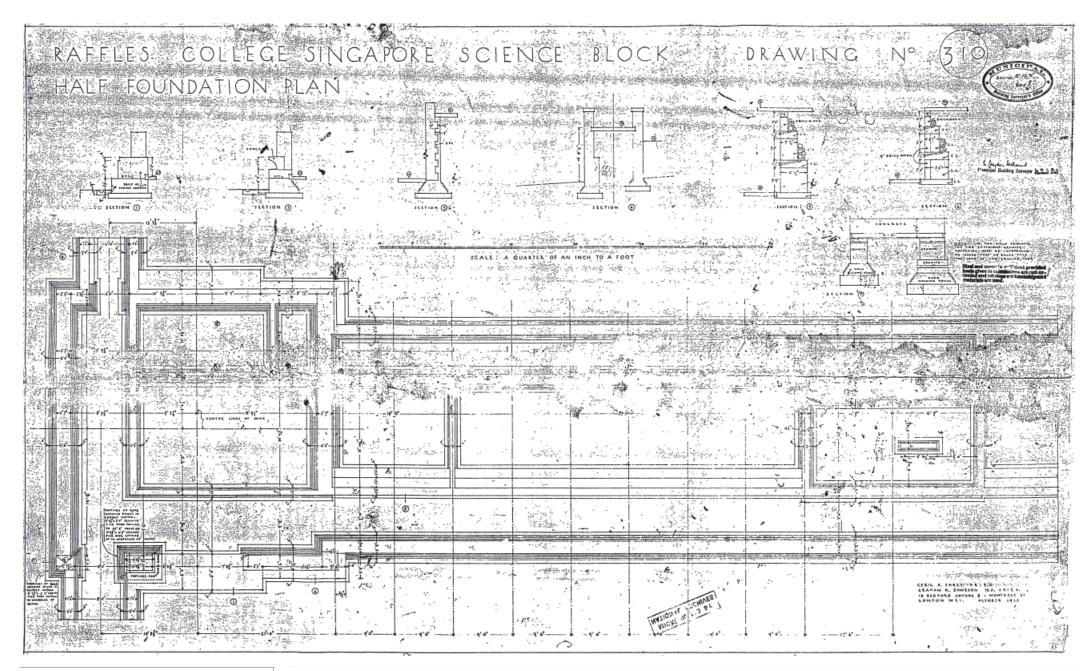
Manaseh Meyer Block

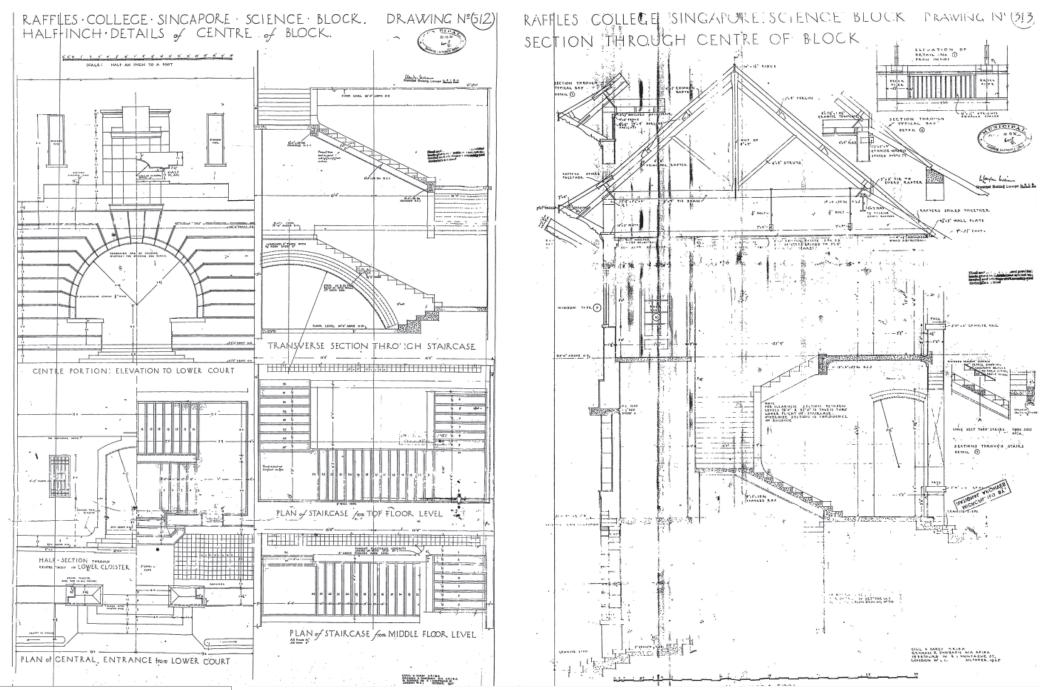


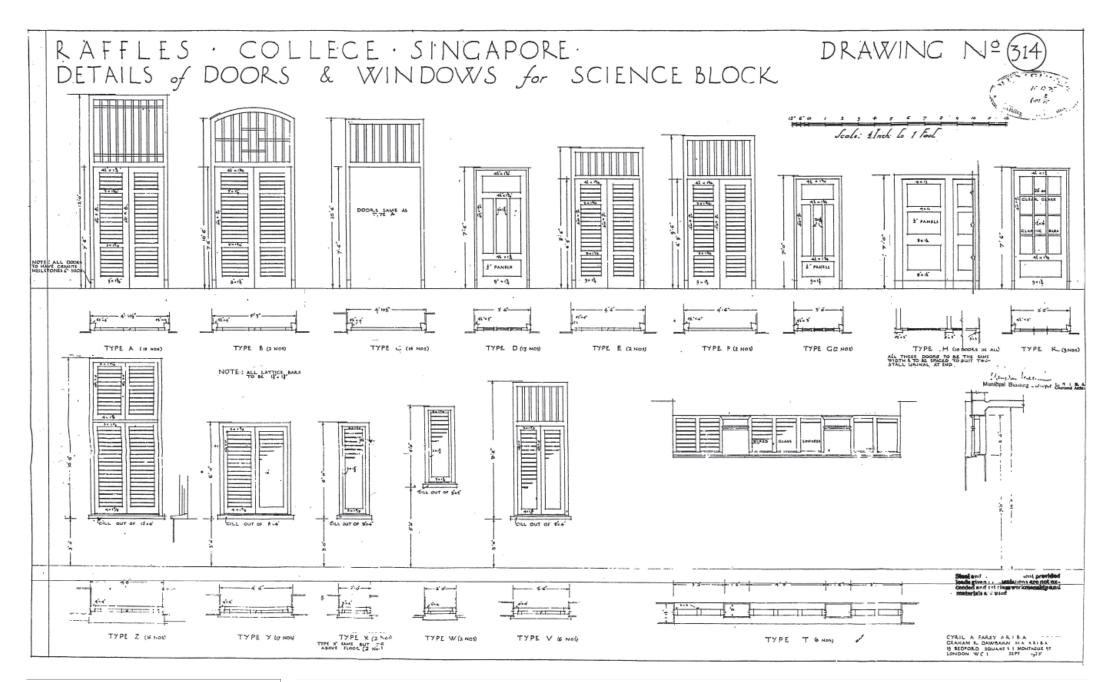


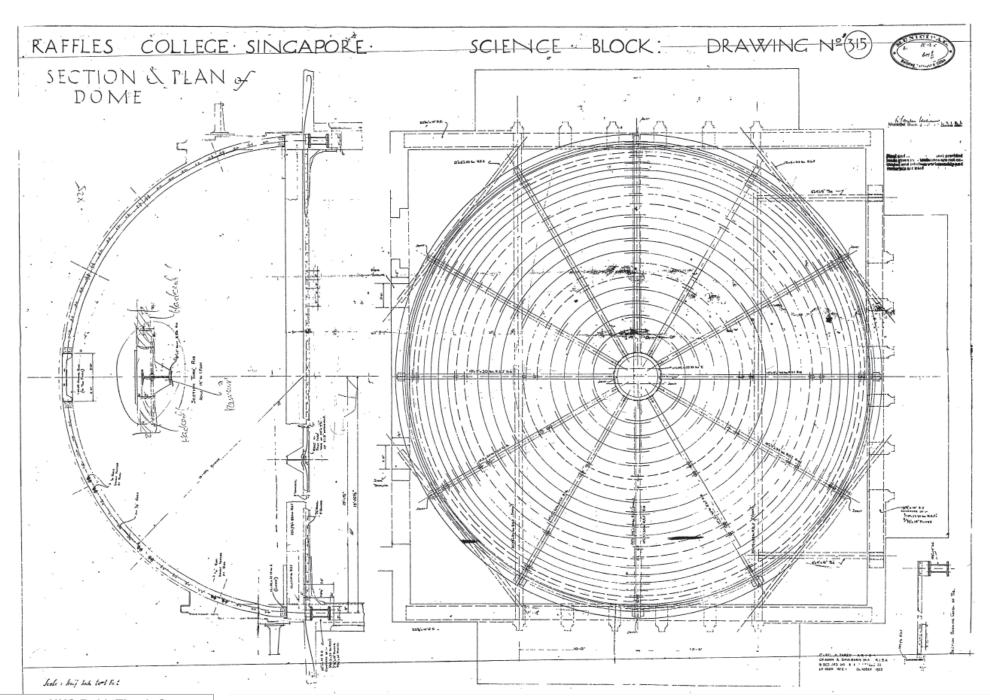


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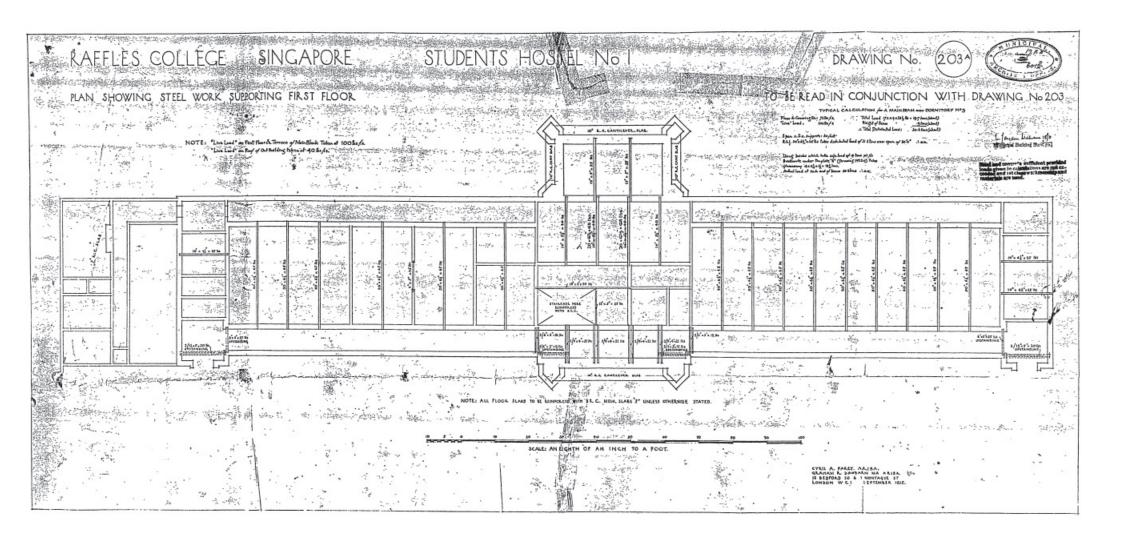


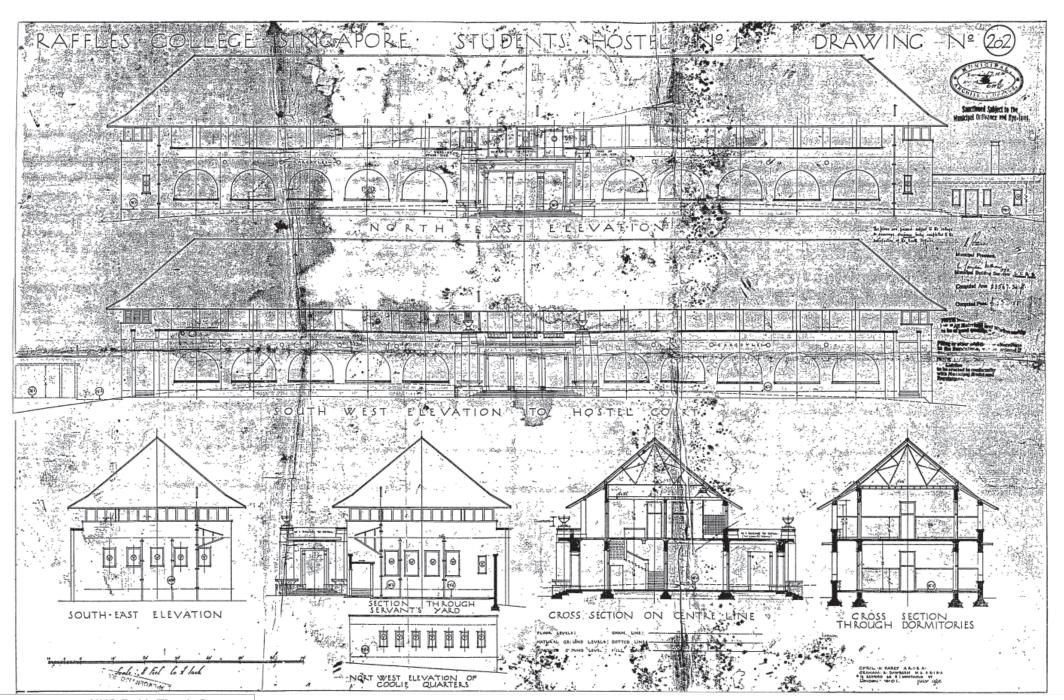


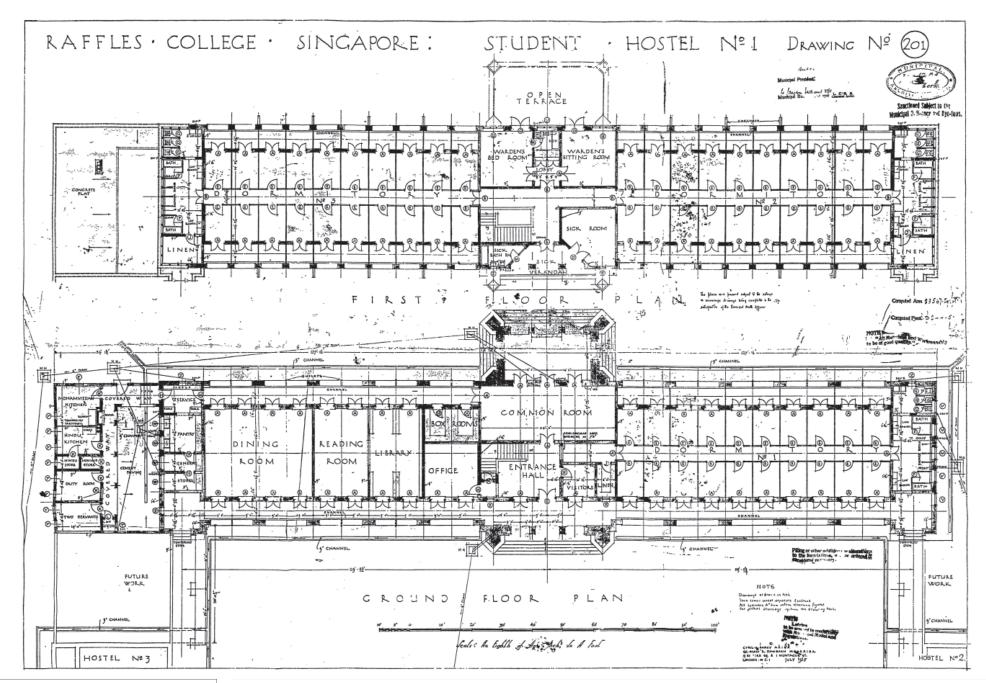


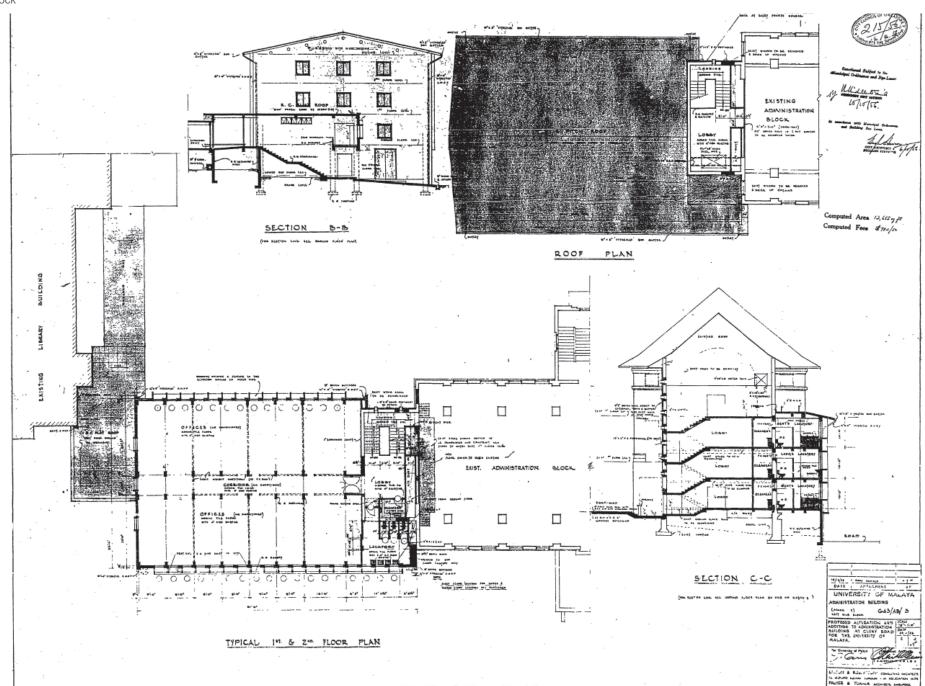


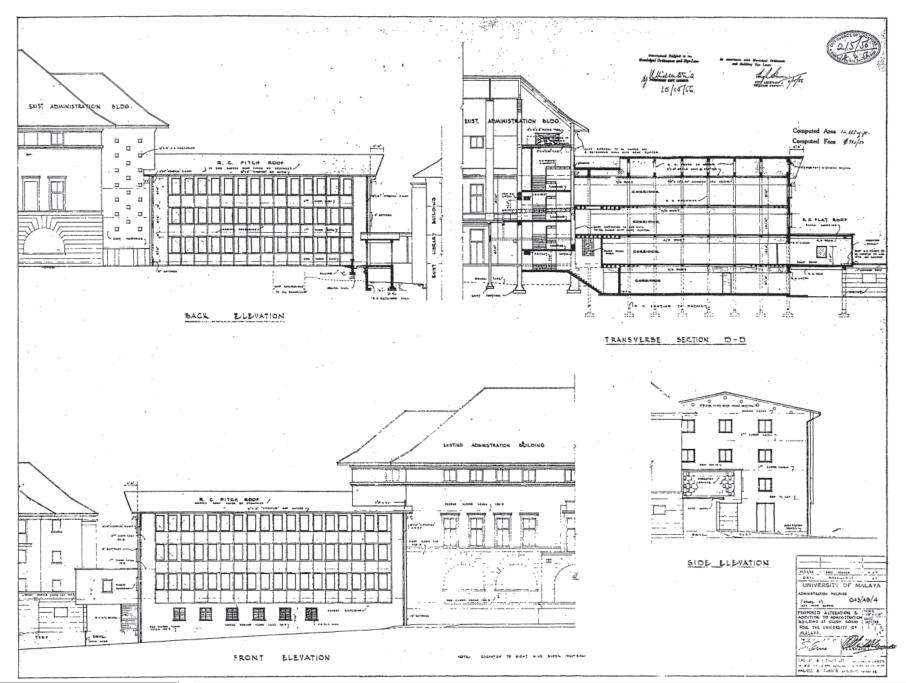
Eu Tong Sen Block

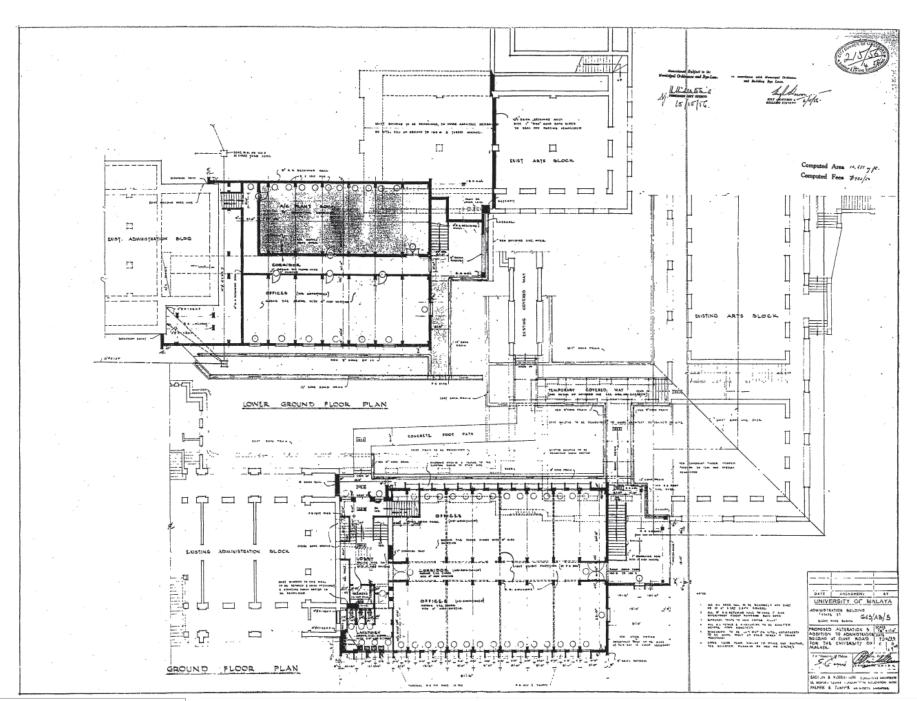


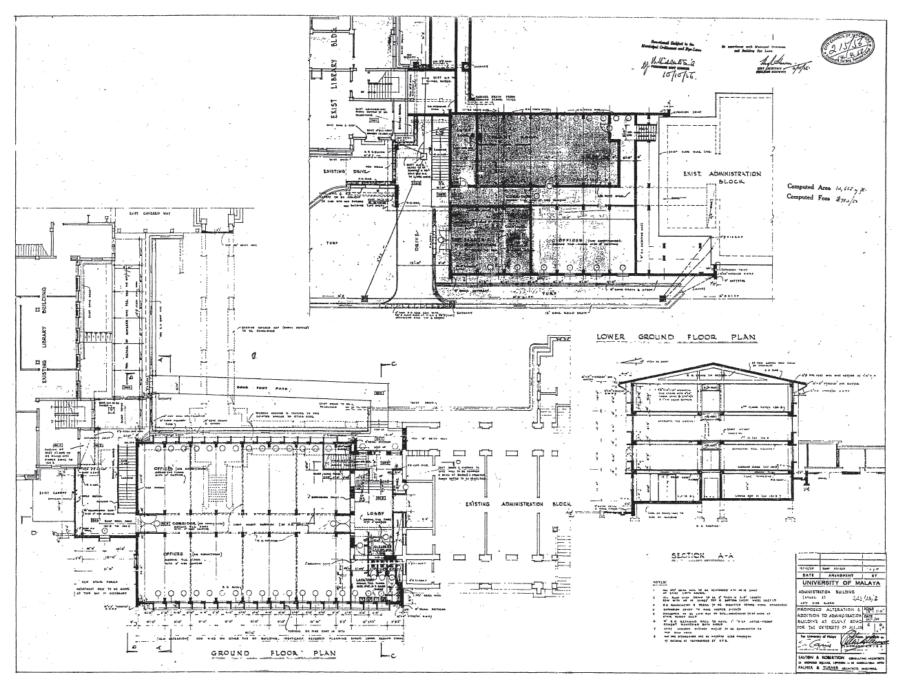


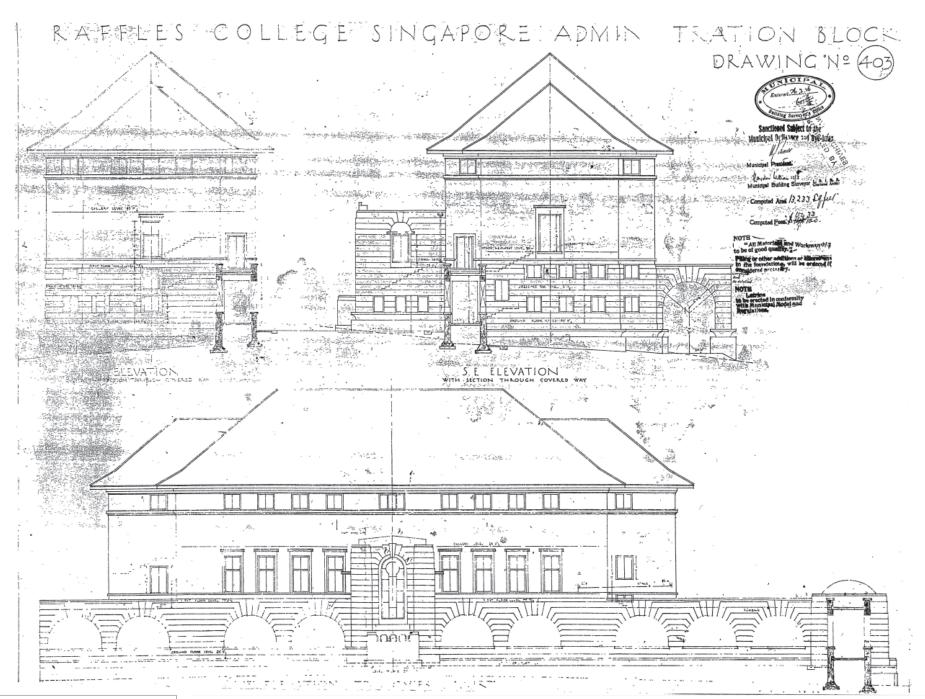


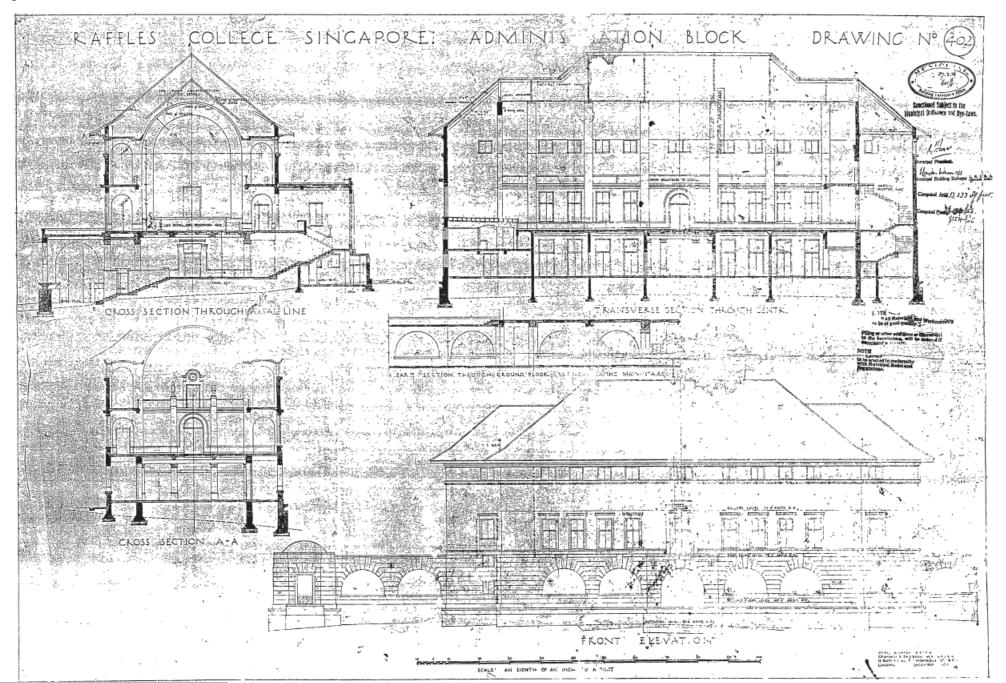


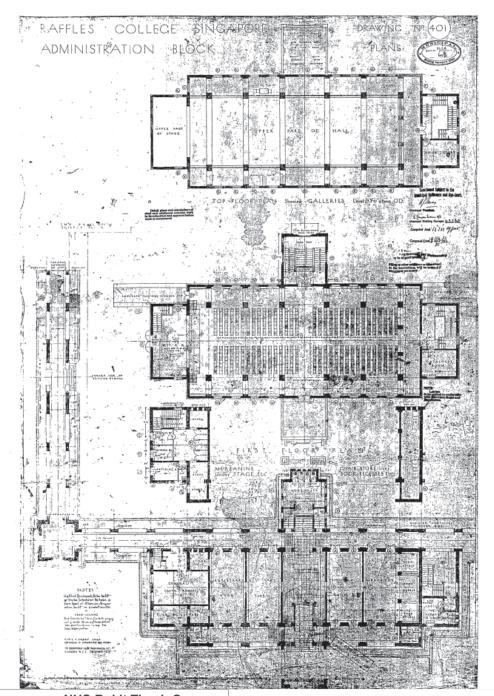


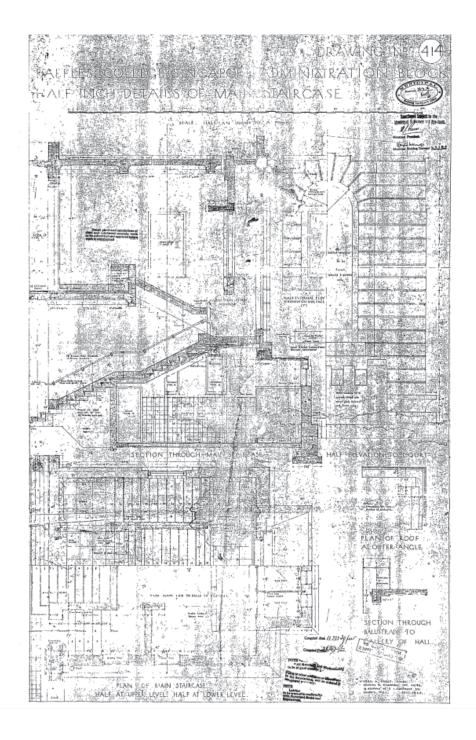












NUS Bukit Timah Campus URA Architectural Heritage Awards 2012

