

STUDY ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF SINGAPORE'S BUILT HERITAGE AND LANDMARKS

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS REPORT

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STUDY ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF SINGAPORE'S BUILT HERITAGE AND LANDMARKS PERSONNEL

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INTERIM REPORT

1. In land-scarce Singapore, the topic of built heritage has always attracted attention. Land scarcity, population growth and increasing activities in urban areas have implications on urban planning. At the same time, there is a need to balance demolition and new construction with heritage conservation and adaptive re-use of heritage sites; given the increasing recognition that heritage is key to cultivating a sense of identity, belongingness, and well-being.

2. How do we know what is important to conserve and why? We first turn to the concept of built heritage. Built heritage can be defined as aspects of the physical environment that have been designed and constructed by people. Moreover, built heritage is deemed as heritage assets when they acquire social meanings that extend beyond their original purposes. In this regard, built heritage can be meaningful and important to individuals and communities, and its meaning and importance vary from person to person.

3. While experts and policymakers weigh in on their social, economic and cultural value, less is known about how public opinions of built heritage are formed. The Study on the Perceptions of Singapore's Built Heritage and Landmarks seeks to establish a framework to understand public opinion towards built heritage in Singapore. Specifically, the study presents data on how the general populace evaluates various sites and the reasons behind the evaluations.

4. The study is organised into two phases. Phase 1 consists of a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) held with segments of society by age, socioeconomic status and gender, to understand their evaluation processes of heritage sites. Phase 2 involves a large-scale survey, constructed based on findings from the focus group discussions in Phase 1. This report presents our key findings and analyses of the Phase 1 focus group discussions.

5. Phase 1 is guided by three research questions:

- a) Which heritage sites are Singaporeans aware of?
- b) Which heritage sites do Singaporeans perceive to be important?
- c) What is the appraisal criteria that Singaporeans use to evaluate the importance of heritage sites?

6. Data was collected from 26 September 2017 to 10 October 2017. Fifty-one (51) Singapore citizens participated in seven focus group discussions sessions. Participants were categorised into four age groups: 21 to 35 years old; 36 to 51 years old; 52 to 64 years old; and 65 years old and above—representing the Millennial, Generation X, Baby Boomer, and Silver generations, respectively.

7. To develop the focus group discussions' instrument, we first identified the list of public buildings and spaces to be assessed in our discussions. These include national monuments, conserved districts and structures in Singapore, which are open and accessible to the public. Given the extensive list of monuments and conserved buildings, we applied a set of criteria to streamline the list of heritage sites. The criteria include the following:

- a) Age (at least 30 years old)
- b) Architectural merit and rarity
- c) Historical significance
- d) Religious significance
- e) Economic contributions at present
- f) National importance at present

- g) Social significance at present
- h) Cultural significance at present
- i) Contestation

8. Subsequently, 90 public buildings and spaces were shortlisted for the focus group discussions. These sites are not only a physical representation of a notable period in architectural history, but also familiar places brimming with memories. They represent a wide range of places such as government buildings, transport infrastructure, recreational amenities, housing estates and green spaces. Several places that have been demolished were also included in the list, such as the old National Library at Stamford Road.

9. The final list of 90 sites was incorporated into a Self-Completion Questionnaire, which was presented to participants, at the start of each focus group discussion. To boost participants' visual recognition of the sites, a Photo Booklet was developed. It contains photographs and basic facts about each building and landmark.

10. Each focus group discussion started by asking participants for their awareness of the sites, using response categories of "Aware" and "Not Aware". For instance, as participants worked through the "Social Institutions" section, they could browse through the Photo Booklet (Appendix 1) and mark their awareness of the sites on the Self-Completion Questionnaire (Appendix 2).

11. The extent of awareness (i.e., total number of "Aware" responses) for each site was tallied and ranked. The top 10 sites that participants were most aware of comprise iconic buildings and landmarks located in the Civic District such as the Raffles Hotel, Fullerton Hotel (previously Fullerton Building) and Saint Andrew's Cathedral (Table 1).

Table 1. Ranked frequency of "awareness"

Sites	n	%	Rank
Raffles Hotel	51	100.0%	1
Saint Andrew's Cathedral	50	98.0%	2
Rochor Centre	50	98.0%	3
The State Courts (previously Subordinate Courts)	50	98.0%	4
Fullerton Hotel (previously Fullerton Building)	50	98.0%	5
Changi Airport Control Tower	50	98.0%	6
Clifford Pier	50	98.0%	7
Singapore Science Centre	50	98.0%	8
The Cathay (previously Cathay Building)	50	98.0%	9
Sri Mariamman Temple	49	96.1%	10
Old Hill Street Police Station	49	96.1%	11
Former Supreme Court Building	49	96.1%	12
Benjamin Sheares Bridge	49	96.1%	13
Former Tanjong Pagar Railway Station	49	96.1%	14
Telok Ayer Market (a.k.a. Lau Pa Sat)	49	96.1%	15
Boat Quay warehouses and shophouses	49	96.1%	16
CHIJMES	48	94.1%	17
People's Park Complex	48	94.1%	18
Singapore Botanic Gardens	48	94.1%	19
The Padang	48	94.1%	20
Haw Par Villa (previously Tiger Balm Gardens)	48	94.1%	21

St James Power Station	47	92.2%	22
Alexandra Hospital (previously British Military Hospital)	47	92.2%	23
Goodwood Park Hotel	47	92.2%	24
Golden Mile Complex (previously Woh Hup Complex)	47	92.2%	25
MacRitchie Reservoir Park	47	92.2%	26
Fort Canning	47	92.2%	27
Jurong Town Hall	46	90.2%	28
Bukit Timah Railway Station	46	90.2%	29
Former Kallang Airport	46	90.2%	30
Singapore Art Museum (previously St Joseph's Institution)	46	90.2%	31
Old National Library	46	90.2%	32
The Changi Prison	46	90.2%	33
Pearl Bank Apartments	45	88.2%	34
Tiong Bahru pre-war flats	45	88.2%	35
Ministry of National Development Complex	45	88.2%	36
Railway Bridge at Upper Bukit Timah Road	45	88.2%	37
Kallang National Stadium	45	88.2%	38
Capitol Building (previously Capitol Theatre)	45	88.2%	39
Original Merlion statue (height 8.6m)	45	88.2%	40
Dakota Crescent SIT flats	44	86.3%	41
OCBC Centre	44	86.3%	42
Fort Siloso	44	86.3%	43
Old Police Academy	43	84.3%	44
Kallang Theatre	43	84.3%	45
Civilian War Memorial	43	84.3%	46
Former Singapore Conference Hall and Trade Union House	42	82.4%	47
Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall	41	80.4%	48
Gillman Barracks	41	80.4%	49
The Cenotaph	41	80.4%	50
Emerald Hill terrace houses	40	78.4%	51
Triple One Somerset (previously Singapore Power Building)	40	78.4%	52
Thian Hock Keng Temple	39	76.5%	53
Chinese temple on Kusu Island	39	76.5%	54
Cathedral of the Good Shepherd	38	74.5%	55
Masjid Sultan	38	74.5%	56
Bukit Brown Cemetery	38	74.5%	57
Change Alley Aerial Plaza	38	74.5%	58
The Majestic (previously Majestic Theatre)	38	74.5%	59
Toa Payoh Lorong 6 Dragon Playground	38	74.5%	60
Armenian Church of Saint Gregory	37	72.5%	61
Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital	36	70.6%	62
Chung Cheng High School (Main)	36	70.6%	63
Queenstown Library	36	70.6%	64
Malabar Mosque	35	68.6%	65
NUS Bukit Timah Campus (previously Raffles College)	34	66.7%	66
Van Kleef Aquarium	34	66.7%	67

Stamford Arts Centre (previously Stamford Girls' School)	33	64.7%	68
National Aerated Water Company	33	64.7%	69
Former Royal Air Force (RAF) Seletar	32	62.7%	70
Ascott Raffles Place (previously Asia Insurance Building)	32	62.7%	71
Memories at Old Ford Motor Factory	32	62.7%	72
NUS Baba House	31	60.8%	73
Church of the Blessed Sacrament	30	58.8%	74
Old bus stops at Old Choa Chu Kang Road.	30	58.8%	75
Upper Circular Road shophouses	28	54.9%	76
Thow Kwang Dragon Kiln	28	54.9%	77
David Elias Building	26	51.0%	78
Dakota Crescent Dove Playground	26	51.0%	79
Fort Tanjong Katong at Katong Park	25	49.0%	80
Former Victoria School	24	47.1%	81
Beaulieu House at Sembawang Park	23	45.1%	82
Palmer House (previously Chinese YMCA Building)	22	43.1%	83
Khong Guan Biscuit Factory	22	43.1%	84
Chesed-El Synagogue	20	39.2%	85
Kampong Silat Flats	20	39.2%	86
Keramat Radin Mas	18	35.3%	87
Former Government Housing at Haig Road	16	31.4%	88
Former Ramakrishna Mission Building	14	27.5%	89
Forfar House	13	25.5%	90

12. Subsequently, participants were asked to indicate their perceived importance of the 90 sites, using response categories of “Not important to me”, “Neutral”, and “Important to me”. For instance, as participants worked through the “Social Institutions” section, they could browse through the Photo Booklet (Appendix 1) and mark their perceived importance of the sites on the Self-Completion Questionnaire (Appendix 2).

13. In relation to the perceived importance of the sites, the three answer options were coded as follows: -1 for “Not important to me”, 0 for “Neutral” and 1 for “Important to me”. Consequently, the perceived importance of each site was scored and ranked. The top 10 important sites comprised infrastructure-related buildings such as Clifford Pier and Changi Airport Control Tower, as well as British colonial buildings such as the Fullerton Hotel (previously Fullerton Building), Raffles Hotel, and the former Supreme Court Building (Table 2).

Table 2. Ranked score of “importance to participant”¹

Sites	Score	Rank
Clifford Pier	37	1
Singapore Botanic Gardens	37	2
Changi Airport Control Tower	36	3
Fullerton Hotel (Previously Fullerton Building)	34	4
Raffles Hotel	31	5

¹ A higher positive score indicates greater perceived importance to participants, while a lower negative score indicates lower perceived importance to participants.

Old Hill Street Police Station	31	6
Former Supreme Court Building	31	7
People's Park Complex	31	8
The Cathay (Previously Cathay Building)	30	9
Telok Ayer Market (a.k.a. Lau Pa Sat)	29	10
Boat Quay warehouses and shophouses	29	11
MacRitchie Reservoir Park	29	12
Benjamin Sheares Bridge	28	13
The Padang	28	14
Civilian War Memorial	27	15
Singapore Art Museum (Previously St Joseph's Institution)	25	16
Saint Andrew's Cathedral	24	17
Former Tanjong Pagar Railway Station	24	18
CHIJMES	23	19
Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall	23	20
Original Merlion statue (height 8.6m)	23	21
Old National Library	22	22
Haw Par Villa (Previously Tiger Balm Gardens)	21	23
Tiong Bahru pre-war flats	20	24
Golden Mile Complex (previously Woh Hup Complex)	20	25
Kallang National Stadium	20	26
Fort Canning	20	27
NUS Baba House	18	28
Railway Bridge at Upper Bukit Timah Road	18	29
Former Kallang Airport	18	30
Sri Mariamman Temple	17	31
Thian Hock Keng Temple	17	32
Bukit Timah Railway Station	17	33
Singapore Science Centre	17	34
The State Courts (previously Subordinate Courts)	16	35
Capitol Building (previously Capitol Theatre)	16	36
Emerald Hill terrace houses	15	37
Alexandra Hospital (previously British Military Hospital)	15	38
Goodwood Park Hotel	15	39
The Changi Prison	15	40
Masjid Sultan	14	41
The Cenotaph	14	42
Cathedral of the Good Shepherd	13	43
Chinese temple on Kusu Island	13	44
Toa Payoh Lorong 6 Dragon Playground	13	45
Fort Siloso	12	46
Van Kleef Aquarium	11	47
Pearl Bank Apartments	10	48
Former Singapore Conference Hall and Trade Union House	10	49
NUS Bukit Timah Campus (previously Raffles College)	9	50
Rochor Centre	8	51

Bukit Brown Cemetery	8	52
OCBC Centre	8	53
The Majestic (previously Majestic Theatre)	8	54
Armenian Church of Saint Gregory	7	55
Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital	7	56
Chung Cheng High School (Main)	7	57
Upper Circular Road shophouses	7	58
Change Alley Aerial Plaza	7	59
Gillman Barracks	6	60
Ascott Raffles Place (previously Asia Insurance Building)	6	61
St James Power Station	5	62
Malabar Mosque	4	63
Dakota Crescent SIT flats	4	64
Jurong Town Hall	4	65
National Aerated Water Company	4	66
Thow Kwang Dragon Kiln	4	67
Kallang Theatre	4	68
Memories at Old Ford Motor Factory	4	69
Queenstown Library	3	70
David Elias Building	3	71
Stamford Arts Centre (previously Stamford Girls' School)	2	72
Chesed-El Synagogue	1	73
Old Police Academy	1	74
Former Victoria School	1	75
Church of the Blessed Sacrament	0	76
Former Royal Air Force (RAF) Seletar	0	77
Khong Guan Biscuit Factory	0	78
Triple One Somerset (previously Singapore Power Building)	-1	79
Keramat Radin Mas	-3	80
Former Government Housing at Haig Road	-4	81
Ministry of National Development Complex	-4	82
Beaulieu House at Sembawang Park	-4	83
Dakota Crescent Dove Playground	-4	84
Kampong Silat Flats	-6	85
Old bus stops at Old Choa Chu Kang Road.	-6	86
Former Ramakrishna Mission Building	-6	87
Fort Tanjong Katong at Katong Park	-8	88
Palmer House (previously Chinese YMCA Building)	-9	89
Forfar House	-13	90

14. Our thematic analyses of the focus group discussions' verbatim transcripts identified four key dimensions—knowledge, memories, physical attributes, and value congruence—as central in one's evaluation of a heritage site.

- a) Knowledge refers to one's explicit or tacit understanding of a site, including its historical and sociocultural significance. Having knowledge about the site's historical significance means knowing information about its age or the historical

events associated with it. Sites that possess historical significance could be classified into two broad categories—old in terms of chronological age and associations with historical events. Similarly, having knowledge about the site’s sociocultural significance means knowing information about its importance to the various religious, ethnic, community, and civic groups in Singapore. Sites that possess sociocultural significance could be classified into three broad categories—associations with religious groups, associations with ethnic groups, and “everyday” heritage.

- b) Memory refers to both collective memories (i.e., shared and passed down by a generation, cohort, or group) and personal memories attached to a site. It is noteworthy that the collective and personal memories of a site are not bound to its physical existence. For instance, sites that no longer exist such as the Kallang National Stadium and Old National Library still hold collective and personal memories for generations of Singaporeans. In addition, the personal memories of a site are not bound to one’s autobiographical memory; it could be transmitted across generations through family or clan.
- c) Physical attributes refer to the physical characteristics of a site, including one’s perceptions towards a site’s architectural appeal and functional utility. Architectural appeal refers to the perceived aesthetic appeal and perceived distinctiveness of a site. Sites that possess architectural appeal and/or distinctiveness could be classified into three broad categories—colonial buildings, iconic landmarks and post-independence landmarks. Sites that demonstrate functional utility could be classified into three broad categories—war memorials, niche sites and repurposed sites.
- d) Finally, value congruence refers to intangible considerations about a site, vis-a-vis one’s values, beliefs or ideology. These dimensions form the foundation of one’s evaluation of a site of which one possesses sufficient information to make an assessment. The issue of value congruence often emerges in the discussions about the repurposing of heritage buildings. For instance, while participants are knowledgeable about CHIJMES’s historical and religious roots, its transformation from a former Catholic girls’ school and chapel into an entertainment and lifestyle complex comes into conflict with the participants’ personal values and beliefs.

15. Our analyses revealed age differences in the appreciation and evaluation of heritage sites. Older participants focused on buildings and landmarks related to Singapore’s nation building and national development, while younger participants paid more attention to sites facing threats of demolition and redevelopment.

16. Based on the four key dimensions identified, we make three recommendations:

- a) Address the knowledge gap among Singaporeans, especially among heritage sites identified as important by experts and/or policymakers. Experiential learning activities such as heritage trails can be organised to engender knowledge and shape public perceptions towards built heritage.
- b) Ensure that heritage sites remain as accessible and inclusive public spaces, so that more Singaporeans can come forth to experience these sites. Events and activities can be organised to create positive memories of the heritage sites and thereby increase the appreciation of built heritage among Singaporeans.

- c) Ensure that heritage sites not only retain their façade, structure and heritage, but also meet our city's sociocultural and commercial needs. Private sector participation in the conversations about built heritage conservation can offer new insights into the adaptive re-use of old buildings for contemporary business needs and thereby increase the economic value of built heritage in Singapore.

17. Through the four key dimensions identified and recommendations offered, it is hoped that policymakers will be better equipped to prioritise and approach built heritage conservation, education, and engagement in Singapore.

18. Please direct comments and queries to Seah Chia Shih Paveena, Senior Research Analyst, Social Lab, Institute of Policy Studies, at paveena.seah@nus.edu.sg.

APPENDIX 1 – EXAMPLE OF THE SECTION ON “SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS” IN THE PHOTO BOOKLET

21/6/2018



Alexandra Hospital (Previously British Military Hospital) 亚历山大医院 (前英军医院)

Located in Queenstown. Built in 1938 as a hospital
Gazetted for Conservation in 2014

Photo Credit: TODAY



Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital 广惠肇留医院

At Serangoon Road. Built in 1960 as a hospital
Gazetted for Conservation in 2012

Photo Credit: The Lion Row



Telok Ayer Market (a.k.a. Lau Pa Sat) 老巴刹美食中心
At Raffles Quay near Telok Ayer MRT. Built in 1823 – 1824 as a market
Gazetted for preservation as a National Monument in 1973
Photo Credit: Wandering Dejavu



Singapore Art Museum (Previously St Joseph's Institution) 新加坡美术馆 (旧圣约瑟书院)
At Bras Basah Road. Built in 1855 – 1867 as an education institution
Gazetted for Preservation as a National Monument in 1992
Photo Credit: Wikipedia



NUS Bukit Timah Campus (Previously Raffles College) 国大武吉知马校园 (前莱佛士学院)
At Bukit Timah Road near Botanic Gardens. Built in 1926 – 1928 as an education institution
Gazetted for Preservation as a National Monument in 2009

Photo Credit: The Lion Row



Stamford Arts Centre (Previously Stamford Girls' School)
史丹福艺术中心 (前史丹福女校)
At Waterloo Street near Bugis MRT. Built in 1920s as an education institution
Gazetted for Conservation in 1994

Photo Credit: Isaac Tan



Former Victoria School 前维多利亚学校
Tyrwhitt Road in Jalan Besar. Built in 1933 as an education institution
Gazetted for Conservation in 2007
Photo Credit: Open Buildings



Chung Cheng High School (Main) 中正中学总校
Goodman Road near Dakota MRT. Built in 1968 as an education institution
Gazetted for Preservation as a National Monument in 2014
Photo Credit: The Straits Times



Singapore Science Centre 新加坡科学馆
Science Centre Road near Jurong East MRT. Built in 1977 as an education institution
Photo Credit: Wikipedia



Old National Library 前国家图书馆
Was at Stamford Road. Built in 1960, Demolished in 2004
Photo Credits: Ng Cheng Kiang



Queenstown Library 女皇镇图书馆
At Margaret Drive near Queenstown MRT. Built in 1970 as a library
Gazetted for Conservation in 2014
Photo Credit: Building and Construction Authority



Palmer House (Previously Chinese YMCA Building) 荣辉大厦
At Palmer Road near Shenton Way. Built in 1953 – 1956 as a socio-cultural institution
Photo Credit: The Straits Times



Former Ramakrishna Mission Building 前拉克里斯南传道会建筑
At Norris Road near Serangoon Road. Built in 1932 as a socio-cultural institution
Gazetted for Conservation in 1998
Photo Credit: The Straits Times



Bukit Brown Cemetery 武吉布朗坟场
Near Lornie Road. Built in 1922, Partially Demolished
Placed on World Monuments Fund's 2014 World Monuments Watch
Photo Credit: Jack Lee



Goodwood Park Hotel 良木园酒店
At Scotts Road in Orchard.

Originally built in 1900 as a club house for the German expatriate community in Singapore

APPENDIX 2 – EXAMPLE OF THE SECTION ON “SOCIAL INSTITUTION” IN THE SELF-COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE

E. Social institutions

1. These are some old buildings that used to house social institutions in Singapore. Are you aware of these places? Please circle Yes or No.

	Name of place	Aware of the place?
a)	Alexandra Hospital (Previously <i>British Military Hospital</i>)	Yes / No
b)	Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital	Yes / No
c)	Telok Ayer Market (a.k.a. Lau Pa Sat)	Yes / No
d)	Singapore Art Museum (Previously <i>St Joseph's Institution</i>)	Yes / No
e)	NUS Bukit Timah Campus (Previously <i>Raffles College</i>)	Yes / No
f)	Stamford Arts Centre (Previously <i>Stamford Girls' School</i>)	Yes / No
g)	Former Victoria School	Yes / No
h)	Chung Cheng High School (Main)	Yes / No
i)	Singapore Science Centre	Yes / No
j)	Old National Library	Yes / No
k)	Queenstown Library	Yes / No
l)	Palmer House (Previously <i>Chinese YMCA Building</i>)	Yes / No
m)	Former Ramakrishna Mission Building	Yes / No
n)	Bukit Brown Cemetery	Yes / No
o)	Goodwood Park Hotel	Yes / No

2. How important are these places to you? Please circle your answers.

	Name of place	Not important to me	Neutral	Important to me
a)	Alexandra Hospital (Previously <i>British Military Hospital</i>)	1	2	3
b)	Kwong Wai Shiu Hospital	1	2	3
c)	Telok Ayer Market (a.k.a. Lau Pa Sat)	1	2	3
d)	Singapore Art Museum (Previously <i>St Joseph's Institution</i>)	1	2	3
e)	NUS Bukit Timah Campus (Previously <i>Raffles College</i>)	1	2	3
f)	Stamford Arts Centre (Previously <i>Stamford Girls' School</i>)	1	2	3
g)	Former Victoria School	1	2	3
h)	Chung Cheng High School (Main)	1	2	3
i)	Singapore Science Centre	1	2	3
j)	Old National Library	1	2	3
k)	Queenstown Library	1	2	3
l)	Palmer House (Previously <i>Chinese YMCA Building</i>)	1	2	3
m)	Former Ramakrishna Mission Building	1	2	3
n)	Bukit Brown Cemetery	1	2	3

o)	Goodwood Park Hotel	1	2	3
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3. From this list, please choose two most important places and tell us why they are important.

	Most important	Reasons
a)		
b)		

4. From this list, please choose two least important places and tell us why they are not important.

	Least important	Reasons
a)		
b)		