

Singapore Pages: National Library Board's Online Heritage Collection

By Nor-Afidah A. Rahman, Senior Reference Librarian, Lee Kong Chian Reference Library

Background

When NLB planned to showcase its heritage collection online in 2003, they thought of an appropriate name to give to the portal - a name that would instantly invite people to thumb through Singapore's history and culture. A myriad of interesting names were thrown up, but one stuck as it was at once a simple yet consummate description of how the Singapore experience gets documented - through our pages. *Singapore Pages*, NLB's gateway to online and print resources on Singapore was thus born and officially launched on 31 October 2003.



To bridge the gap between these rare gems and their potential users, NLB started an initiative to identify and digitise them, a task that would take the Library through several phases. The initial phase involved a collaboration with the British Library that led to a trial digitisation of 38 of their rare items. From the NLB's heritage collection residing at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, another 38 rare items were identified and digitised. Needing a platform to showcase these 76 items, NLB created *Singapore Pages*. Thus began NLB's journey to bring to Singaporeans and to the world written words and images that tell the Singapore story.

Prelude to Singapore Pages

Among the treasures at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library are our rare books and manuscripts. The need to preserve these older and valuable items for future generations meant that they have to be kept under restricted access. At the same time, there are other older and valuable collections on Singapore that reside in overseas institutions. By virtue of distance and restricted access policy, these collections are out of reach for most Singaporeans. One such collection resides at the world-renowned British Library - the Oriental & India Office Collection. From this collection, of most significance to Singapore are the early printed books and periodicals from Malaysia and Singapore that include works from mission presses, lithographed works from early Muslim presses, Peranakan books in Malay, and a wide range of government and official records.

Highlights of Singapore Pages

Digitised Collection and The Singapore Story

Arising from NLB's digitisation of the rare imprints, more than 13,000 digital images documenting Singapore's history and culture are now available in *Singapore Pages' Digitised Collection*. These include early Singapore imprints and primary sources such as government records and manuscripts that are commonly referred to by researchers. They have significantly augmented the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library's Singapore and Southeast Asian Collections, for many a story can be told when the age-old printed books are supplemented by the new-age online materials. Whether they tell of the challenges and triumphs that shaped the remarkable lives of our forefathers or of the milestones that punctuated Singapore's growing up years, these stories are weaved from the lines of the printed as well as the online pages. *Singapore Pages* have captured and displayed these stories under its researched articles section called *The Singapore Story*.



One such story is *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, Singapore's founder. The writing of this article made use of old imprints that form part of *Singapore Pages' Digitised Collection*, specifically on Raffles. They are:

1. Boulger, Demetrius C. (1897). *The life of Sir Stamford Raffles*. London: H. Marshall.
2. Raffles, S. (1830). *Memoir of the life and public services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, particularly in the government of Java, 1811-1816, and of Bencoolen and its dependencies, 1817-1824: with details of the commerce and resources of the Eastern Archipelago and selections from his correspondence*. London: J. Murray.
3. Raffles, T. S. (1824). *Statement of the services [to the court of Directors of the East-India Company]*. London: Cox and Baylis.
4. *Singapore local laws and institutions, 1823*. (1824). London: Printed by Cox and Baylis.



The Singapore Story

Features researched packages on people, events and places that have made their mark on Singapore. Each package provides a narrative on a particular theme and is enhanced with images from the virtual shelf collection.

 **The Early Years**

 **Landmarks**

 **Literary Heritage**

 **Life & Times**


 **LifeLine**

The Singapore Story is an attempt at sifting out interesting details about Singapore's history from the digitised pages. Our Singapore and Southeast Asian librarians then re-enact the past by combining these details and other nuggets that they have unearthed from the Singapore and Southeast Asian Collections. Applying the adage, "a picture is worth a thousand words", *The Singapore Story* write-ups are peppered with images taken from the digitised pages.



SingaporeStory

The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles



Contents:
[Private Life](#)
[Career](#)
[The Founding of Singapore](#)
[Legacy](#)
[References](#)
[Web Resources](#)

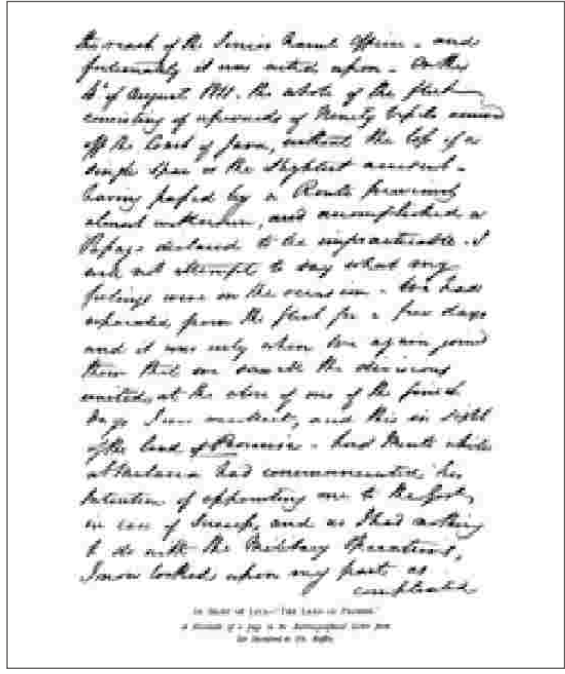
Feature Articles
[Sir Stamford Raffles' Family](#)
[Raffles' Landing in Singapore](#)
[Raffles Town Plan](#)
[Raffles' Bust](#)

Sir Stamford Raffles, founder of Singapore. Makepeace, W., Brooke, G. E., & Braddell, R. St. J. (Eds.). (1921). *One hundred years of Singapore, being some account of the capital of the Straits Settlements from its foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles on the 6th February 1819 to the 6th February 1919* (p. 8). London: J. Murray.

Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (b. 6 July 1781, off Port Morant, Jamaica – d. 5 July 1826, Middlesex, England) is famously known as the founder of modern Singapore. Besides being an outstanding colonial administrator with great vision, Raffles was also an accomplished scholar on the history and natural science of Southeast Asia. This biographical trail of Raffles provides an account of his life and times, including his private life, the main events and activities in his career as well as his achievements.

Private Life

This section highlights some of the key events that took place in the personal arena of a man largely known for his diplomatic achievements. Included are accounts of his birth at sea, details of his family life, and his early death at the age of 45.



Sample of Raffles' Handwriting

Another story that tapped on the wealth of *Singapore Pages' Digitised Collection* is *First Impressions Matter...*, an article that visits some of the popular notions about early Singapore. Using classic texts like the works of Munshi Abdullah and Makepeace, the article has several imagery of landscape in colonial Singapore. Altogether, the article made references to 15 digitised titles, including:

1. Abdullah Abdul Kadir, Munshi. (1918). *The autobiography of Munshi Abdullah*. (Shellabear, W. G, Trans.). Singapore: Methodist Publishing House.
2. Abdullah Abdul Kadir, Munshi. (1874). *[Hakayit Abdulla]: Translations from the Hakayit Abdulla (bin Abdulkadar), Munshi*. London: H.S. King.
3. Bennett, George (1834). *Wanderings in New South Wales, Batavia, Pedir Coast, Singapore, and China*. London: R. Bentley.
4. Cameron, J. (1865). *Our tropical possessions in Malayan India: Being a descriptive account of Singapore, Penang, Province Wellesley, and Malacca; Their peoples, products, commerce, and government*. London: Smith, Elder.
5. Makepeace, W., Brooke, G. E., & Braddell, R. St. J. (Eds.). (1921). *One hundred years of Singapore, being some account of the capital of the Straits Settlements from its foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles on the 6th February 1819 to the 6th February 1919*. London: J. Murray.



First Impressions Matter...: Old Transport in Carts and Wheels

NORA (NLB Online Repository of Artistic Works)

More recently, to the delight of creative writing enthusiasts, NLB launched *NORA* on 27 January 2005. *NORA* is a compendium of works by renowned and aspiring writers who contribute to a repository of drama, fiction, poetry and other writings. Comprising mostly unpublished as well as out-of-print works, the who's who of *NORA* include Madeline Lee, Eleanor Wong, Alvin Pang (these three are the pioneers of *NORA*), Edwin Thumboo, Ovidia Yu, Haresh Sharma, Goh Poh Seng and the late Kuo Pao Kun.



In the Works

Come November, or when the new National Library officially opens, *Singapore Pages* will be bringing out more of the old stuff and the not so old ones. Look out for another exciting list of digitised titles and more stories about Singapore. The new addition to the digitised rare works include:

1. *Travels in South-Eastern Asia*. (1831). London: C.J.G. & F. Rivington.
2. Thomson, J. T. (1865). *Sequel to some glimpses into life in the Far East*. London: Richardson.
3. Florence, C. (1889). *To Siam and Malaya in the Duke of Sutherland's yacht 'Sans peur'*. London: Hurst and Blackett.
4. *Photographic views of Singapore*. (1930). Singapore: H.P. Cork.
5. Nakhodá Múda. (1830). *Memoirs of a Malayan family*. London: Oriental Translation Fund.
6. *Malaya in monochrome: [a souvenir of the British Empire Exhibition]*. (1924). Singapore: Published for the Malayan Govt. by Houghton-Butcher (Eastern).

These will definitely provide the fodder necessary for churning out more interesting stories about old Singapore. *NORA* will also grow and will include contemporary non-English works. Visit us at www.nlb.gov.sg.

SingaporeStory

First Impressions Matter...

A glimpse of early colonial Singapore through written and visual impressions.

I remained lost in the thoughts aroused in me by the unexpected sight of the commercial achievement of the English. On this shore where not twenty years ago were grouped a few wretched Malay villages, half fishermen, half pirates, where virgin forest extended to the seashore, where the tiger hidden in the jungle awaited his prey, where a pirate canoe scarcely disturbed an empty sea, has risen today to a huge town, bustling with an industrious population. Here the gardens of sumptuous palaces are spread along the water's edge; here the stranger may take a breath of air at dusk, alone and unarmed, as safe from the tigers which have fled into the depths of the jungle as from the bandits who are kept in check by the vigilant eyes of a tireless police; and this hospitable shore has become the centre for ships of all nations. (Jules Rier, Head of French commercial mission to China and the Indies, 1843-46).

Falconer, J. (c. 1917). A vision of the past: A history of early photography in Singapore and Malaya. The photographs of G.R. Lambert & Co., 1880-1910 (p. 10). Singapore: Times Editions.

A fishing village in Tanjong Katong.

Wright, A., & Cartwright, H. A. (Eds.). (1908). *Twentieth century impressions of British Malaya: its history, people, commerce industries and resources* (p.238). London: Lloyd's Greater Britain Pub.

Contents

- [Why Impressions?](#)
- [Romantic or Realistic? Not All Impressions Flatter](#)
- [The Emportment of the East](#)
- [An Equatorial Metropolis: A Kaleidoscope of Colours and Sounds](#)
- [The Sons of the Celestial Empire: Ubiquitous and Industrious](#)
- [The Endlessly Entertaining Europeans](#)
- [Truly Tropical](#)
- [References](#)



Pictures from *First Impressions Matter...*: Ladies' Lawn Tennis Club (top) and the Esplanade