Between the Lines: Early Print Advertising in Singapore, 1830s–1960s not only gives us a vivid overview of advertising copy and artwork spanning 130 years, but also provides fascinating insights into the shifting social and economic dynamics of Singapore and their impact on the advertising industry.

This pictorial collection presents nearly 400 advertisements from print materials such as newspapers, books, periodicals and ephemera held in the collection of the National Library, Singapore. The advertisements are complemented by insightful commentaries – on subjects ranging from hospitality and household goods to food and fashion – that provide valuable context to the ad campaigns and help us understand the minds of both advertiser and consumer in Singapore, and, by extension, the socioeconomic conditions of the time.

Readers can see how icons like Raffles Hotel and the erstwhile Adelphi Hotel were promoted to discerning travellers of the 1930s, or how postwar homemakers were first targeted by advertisements for newfangled household appliances like refrigerators and vacuum cleaners.

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BETWEEN THE LINES
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BETWEEN THE LINES

Early Print Advertising in Singapore 1830s–1960s

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Advertisement by local company F&N marketing its aerated waters with an exoticised image of Malaya, brought to life by dramatic copywriting.
Source: *The Straits Times Annual*, 1952, p. 112. Retrieved from PublicationSG.

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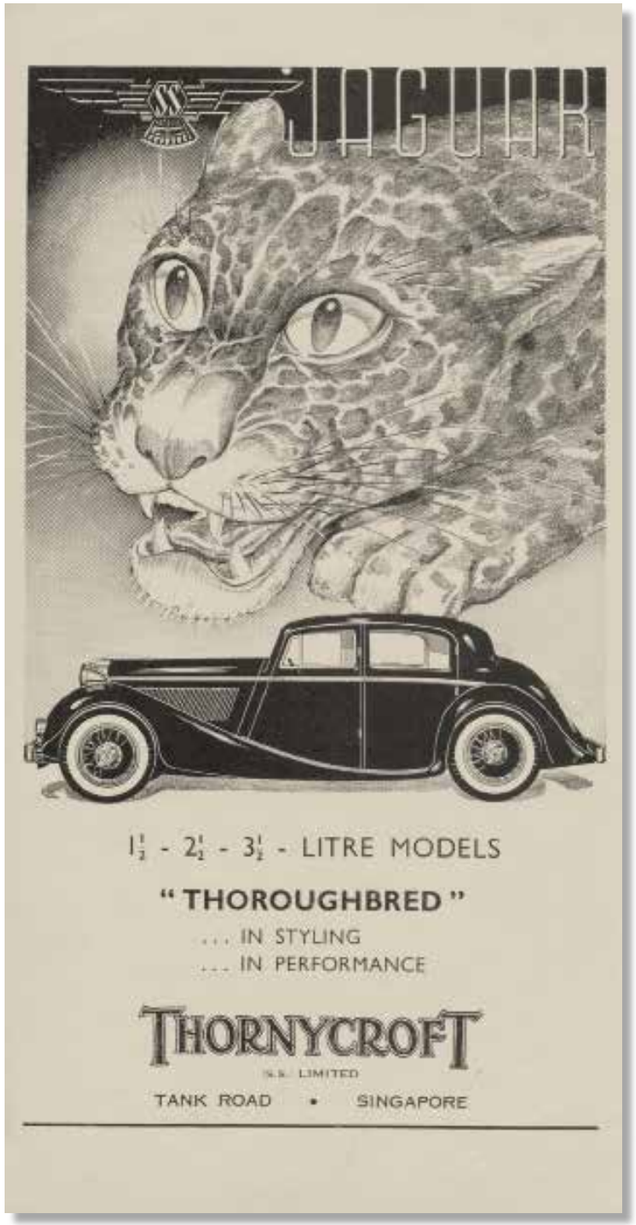
Advertisement for Daks flannels sold at Whiteaway's. (1940)

INTRODUCTION

How many advertisements have you seen today? Probably more than you realise. Our world is saturated with them, from print ads in magazines and newspapers, to commercials on radio and television, to pop-up ads on websites, and all manner of posters, banners and billboards dotting the urban landscape. We are surrounded by more advertisements than we can make sense of, selling us things we might need, things we never knew we needed, and things we clearly will never need – and yet we sometimes fall prey to them anyway.

Cast your mind back to 55 years ago, to a time before the introduction of television broadcasting in Singapore. Advertisements then played a rather different role within the information ecosystem. Newspapers and magazines were the cheapest, most accessible way of finding out what was going on, and advertisements were an essential component of these publications. How else would you know when the latest fashion, music or movies had arrived in town, or which department store was having a sale that weekend?

Cast your mind back another half a century earlier: Print advertisements were then strikingly simpler in design and predominantly text-based, without the large illustrations or photographs that we have become accustomed to. Despite being less arresting visually, they were packed with information and persuasive claims – the best accommodation to be had in town, the advantages of buying a gas stove for the home, the need for insect repellents to prevent "tropical diseases", the latest and most fashionable brands of perfumes and soaps from Europe. These advertisements paint a captivating picture of everyday life at the time, the things people needed, and the comforts and pleasures they desired.



A 1939 advertisement for Jaguar sports cars. Car ads appeared regularly in magazines published by the Automobile Association of Malaya.

WHEELS OF CHANGE

The word "automobilism", meaning the use of automobiles,[1] entered the English lexicon in the late 19th century with the emergence of motor vehicles as a viable mode of private transportation. Karl Benz's "Patent-Motorwagen", first built in 1885, sparked a vehicular revolution that saw animal power replaced by the internal combustion engine. Thus was born the automobile – literally "self-moving" car. Since then, although the term "automobilism" has fallen into disuse, the world's love affair with automobiles has never waned, with succeeding generations embracing it with as much enthusiasm as did the early adopters.

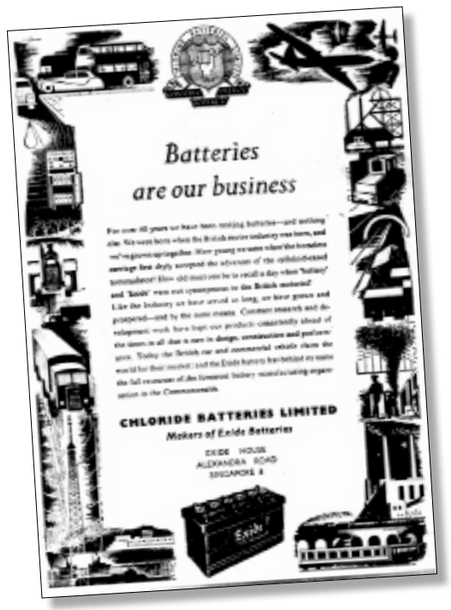
HORSELESS CARRIAGE

The Katz Brothers ushered in the age of automobilism in Singapore when they imported the first automobiles in August 1896. Before this, the horse and carriage, imported from Britain since the 1820s, was a popular means of passenger transport. Another common mode of transportation in the late 19th century was the *jinrickshaw* (man-drawn rickshaw), originally from Japan and introduced in Singapore in 1880 via Shanghai.[2]

The Katz Brothers were the sole agents for Benz and Co.'s "Motor-Velociped", which was advertised as a "horseless carriage". A favourable review in *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* newspaper described it as a "neat-looking four-wheeled carriage" that did not require an "expert driver", but commented that its $1,600 price was "somewhat high".[3]

Automobile ads continued to make reference to "horseless carriages" through the years, even into the mid-1950s. This was

(1923)



(1956)

(1951)

Many advertisers referenced the "horseless carriage" to imply their involvement in the automobile industry since the beginning.

usually to draw attention to the fact that the product or company had existed since the dawn of the automobile industry and grown along with it. Examples of such advertisements included those for Dunlop Tyres, Shell (formerly the Asiatic Petroleum Company) and Chloride Batteries Limited (see facing page).

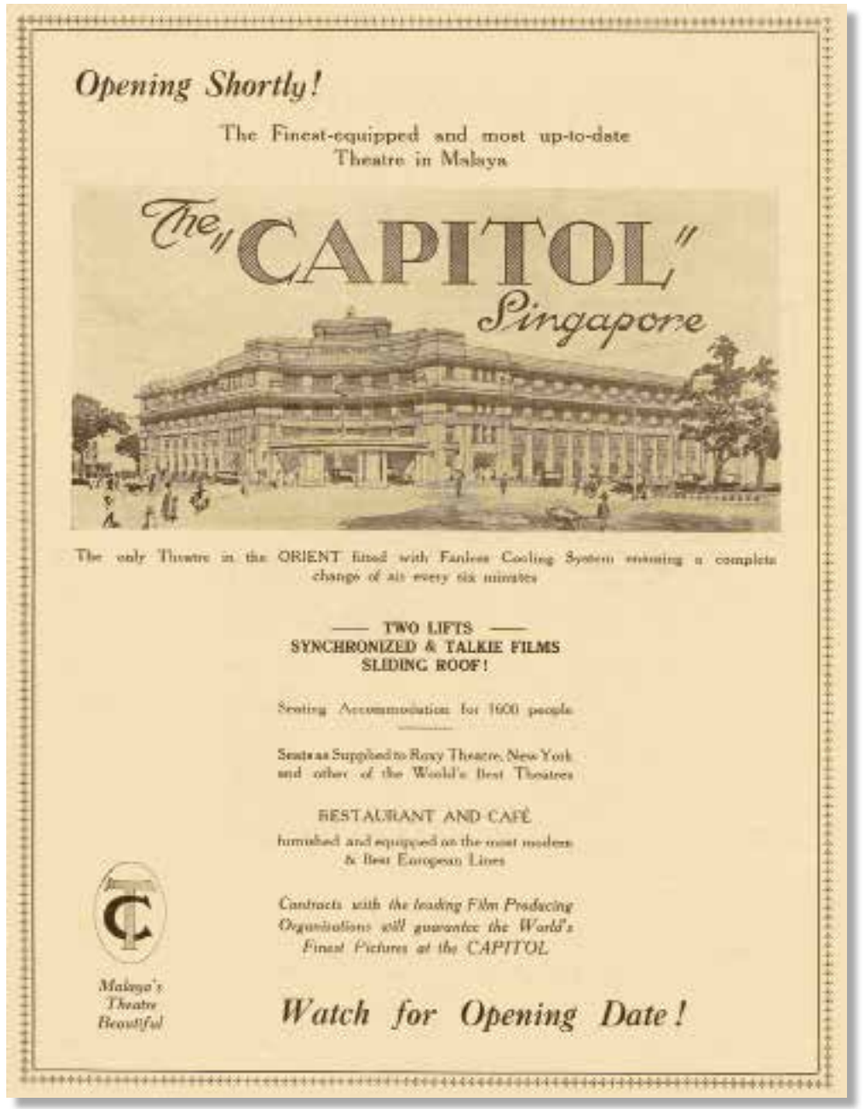
The introduction of automobiles was enthusiastically embraced by the who's-who of Singapore and Malaya. B. Frost of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company and subsequently Charles B. Buckley, publisher and famed author of *An Anecdotal History of Singapore*, were the first to own and drive the Benz in Singapore.[4] Soon, more automobiles were brought into Singapore. The Benz was followed by a De Dion Bouton and then an Albion.[5] All three models shared a reputation for being very noisy and hence did not require any horns to make themselves heard. Buckley dubbed his car "The Coffee Machine" because of the grinding noises it made.[6]

WHO DARES WINS

Singapore's first lady motorist was Mrs G.M. Dare, who drove a Star motor car before switching to a two-seater Adams-Hewitt in 1906.[7] That year, car registration came into force and Mrs Dare enjoyed the distinction of driving Singapore's first registered car, which bore the licence plate number S-1.[8] She nicknamed it "Ichiban" (Japanese for "Number One"), but the locals,

An advertisement put up by either Mrs G.M. Dare or her husband to sell her first car. (1906)

Mrs G.M. Dare and her husband on their Adams-Hewitt bearing the licence plate S-1. (1930/31)



The Capitol promoting its up-to-date facilities in this pre-opening advertisement. (1929)

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

On 19 May 1842, a notice was published in *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*:

> **Prospectus for a Theatre**
>
> The Dearth of all amusement in Singapore induced several Gentlemen to suggest the establishment of Theatrical Performances by subscription; it has therefore been deemed advisable to circulate this paper, with the view of ascertaining the sentiments of the Gentry and Community in general, as to the desirableness of a scheme of this description.[1]

This view of Singapore's dismal options for "amusement" in the middle of the 19th century is well corroborated by the entertainment-related advertisements in the local English newspapers of the day – or rather, by their conspicuous paucity. However, as the settlement grew and prospered, the situation improved quickly. Observers of the entertainment scene in the late 19th and early 20th centuries described a variety of means for entertaining oneself: flying kites, listening to a storyteller, going to the theatre, dancing, listening to music, riding a bicycle, watching performances in open spaces and on the streets, among other amusements.[2]

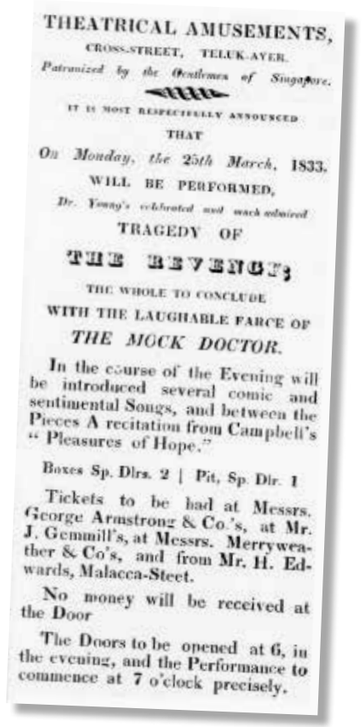
In tandem with these developments, advertisements for paid entertainment proliferated, appearing in various publications and printed materials. Public entertainment could be found in venues such as theatres, and later cinemas, as well as amusement parks and travelling circuses.

THEATRE: MULTIPURPOSE ENTERTAINMENT SPACE

The first record of an English-language amateur theatrical performance in Singapore is believed to be an advertisement published on 21 March 1833 in the *Singapore Chronicle*.[3] The show was staged on 25 March at Cross Street, and featured several types of performances, including a tragedy, *The Revenge*; a comedy, *The Mock Doctor*; and songs with music played by a military band.[4] In 1844, a new theatre, Theatre Royal, staged its first performance, *Charles the Second, or the Merry Monarch*, put up by a group of amateur players. This theatre was housed in London Hotel, located on Coleman Street then.[5]

When London Hotel moved in 1845, the theatre ceased to operate. The amateur group that used to stage performances there then refurbished the old Assembly Rooms at the foot of Fort Canning Hill into a theatre, and named it Theatre Royal.[6] Apart from plays, musical concerts were also held there, featuring "vocal and instrumental" performances by European opera singers, pianists, violinists and other musicians, as well as "dancing entertainment" in the form of ballet.[7]

After the old Assembly Rooms were demolished, the newly built Town Hall (1862) served as Singapore's main venue for theatrical performances. In 1909, it was converted into a full-fledged performing house and renamed Victoria Theatre, adjoining Victoria Memorial Hall (1905).[8] Throughout the years, Victoria Theatre hosted a variety of public shows and entertainment, including comedies, concerts, plays, operas, and film screenings,[9] put up by both local and overseas groups. While a sizeable number of the staged performances and films originated from the West, there were also shows from Asia, such as Chinese movies and Indian classical dance performances. Perhaps due to the flexibility of the venue in catering to different forms of entertainment, in 1927 a screening of the Chinese film *Dianying Nümingxing* (《电影女明星》; *Movie Actress*) was followed by a traditional Chinese opera performance by Wang Hanlun (王汉伦), a celebrated actress of the day.



THEATRICAL AMUSEMENTS,

CROSS-STREET, TELUK-AYER.

Patronized by the Gentlemen of Singapore.

IT IS MOST RESPECTFULLY ANNOUNCED THAT

On Monday, the 25th March, 1833.

WILL BE PERFORMED,

Dr. Young's celebrated and much admired

TRAGEDY OF

THE REVENGE;

THE WHOLE TO CONCLUDE WITH THE LAUGHABLE FARCE OF

THE MOCK DOCTOR.

In the course of the Evening will be introduced several comic and sentimental Songs, and between the Pieces A recitation from Campbell's "Pleasures of Hope."

Boxes Sp. Dlrs. 2 | Pit, Sp. Dlr. 1

Tickets to be had at Messrs. George Armstrong & Co.'s, at Mr. J. Gemmill's, at Messrs. Merryweather & Co's, and from Mr. H. Edwards, Malacca-Steet.

No money will be received at the Door

The Doors to be opened at 6, in the evening, and the Performance to commence at 7 o'clock precisely.

Advertisement for the first known amateur theatrical performance in Singapore. (1833)

The Town Hall in the 1880s, on the site of present-day Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall.

Victoria Theatre and Victoria Memorial Hall in the 1920s.

●昨晚南洋劉貝錦自製影片公司之新客試映記

南洋劉貝錦自製影片公司第一次出品新客一片：訂期昨晚假座大華樓試映一節：曾誌前報：茲悉昨晚各界前往參觀者：極爲擁擠：時屆八時許：新客即開映銀幕之上：計是片共九大本：惟因地致府：祇准其每至第六盤而止：故影是片：無取外景：則光線塲稍明晦：惟字幕則顯然模糊：主演員之動術：以初次被身銀幕之人：而能演此：亦算難得：倘能從此精益求精：則進步誠未可量：不僅到國內諸明星表現已也：殷予望之：

Newspaper report on the preview of the earliest known Malaya-made film, *Xin Ke* (《新客》; *New Immigrant*), which was screened at Victoria Theatre. (1927)

"A drink of distinction" – luxury alcohol brands appealing to their consumers' desire for status. (1953)

CHANGING TASTES

Food is a key aspect of Singapore's cosmopolitan identity today, with a variety of cuisines and food establishments from all over the world available in the city-state.[1] Global forces have shaped local food culture since colonial times: In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Singapore's position as a thriving port facilitated an inflow of technologies and a multitude of global consumer goods that became embedded in people's lifestyles and identities.[2] Food-related advertisements of the time sought to influence consumers' food preferences and choices. Today, they shed light on the changing practices in food importation, preparation and consumption over the years.

MODERNISING FOOD CONSUMPTION

Trade and technological innovations were two major drivers of change in Singapore's food landscape, bringing global food products to local consumers and spurring the manufacture of new industrial foodstuff.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 resulted in a dramatic increase in international trade. Singapore's position as a major entrepot on the East-West trade route enabled it to receive an extensive range of imported consumer goods, including factory-produced and manufactured foods.[3] These imported foods were products of advances in food technology brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

Indeed, during the late 19th century, food production in the West became increasingly mechanised and scientific, employing new technologies such as canning and continuous process machinery. Mass production and packaging, long-term storage, and long-distance distribution were thus made possible, leading to the production and export of foods such as breakfast cereal and canned fruit.[4]

The arrival of these goods in Singapore was reflected in the increasing number of advertisements. By 1897, Katz Brothers were listing all sorts of manufactured and preserved European foodstuffs for sale, from American canned pears to Cadbury chocolate creams in air-tight tins. Well into the 20th century, advertisements continued to make reference to "scientific methods" and "hygienic conditions" to assure consumers that they were buying the most modern and up-to-date products.

While it imported a significant quantity of foreign food products, Singapore also witnessed a growth in the local production of food and beverages as it steadily developed as an industrial city. Several local industries adapted modern scientific knowledge and technology in their ventures.

One example would be the locally produced aerated waters that were advertised in many publications. Aerated water was a product of 19th-century technological advances. Marketed as a boon in the hot tropics, aerated waters grew from being a scarce commodity to becoming a widely sought-after thirst-quencher.[5]

The local aerated water industry was kick-started in 1883 when Scotsmen John Fraser and David Chalmers Neave established the Singapore and Straits Aerated Water Company – the first facility in Southeast Asia to manufacture carbonated drinks. Later renamed Fraser & Neave Limited (F&N), the company introduced an array of brands, styles and flavours of soft drinks, which it promoted through eye-catching advertisements.[6]

The main office building of Lee Pineapple Co. Ltd. on Chulia Street. The company was set up in 1931 by businessman and philanthropist Lee Kong Chian. (1935–50)

Pineapple canning was a labour-intensive process. Pineapple cutters removed the eyes and stem of the fruit by hand before cutting them up, while supervisors ensured that the resulting cubes were of the correct size. (1952)

From its early days, Fraser & Neave touted the exceptional quality of its aerated waters, priding itself on its up-to-date production methods. (1907)

Aerated drinks being bottled at the Framroz plant on Allenby Road. (1965)

Other aerated drinks brands included Framroz & Co., founded by Parsi businessman P.M. Framroz in 1904.[7] The brand touted itself as "pioneers of fruit juice beverages", offering consumers "cooling" and "refreshing" drinks made from carefully selected Californian fruits.[8] Phoenix Aerated Water Works, established in 1925 by Navroji R. Mistri,[9] introduced drinks like "grapefruit pop" and "orangepop", and similarly promoted their products as the ideal antidotes to the hot Malayan weather.

Singapore benefited from advances in technologies related to food preservation, storage and distribution. With the discovery of plating in the 1850s and 1860s, canning became possible and revolutionised the food industry.[10] In Singapore, and Malaya generally, pineapple plantation owners made use of the new technology to give their perishable product a longer shelf-life and wider reach. Singapore subsequently emerged as a key centre of the global pineapple canning industry.[11] Among the best-known names was Lee Pineapple Co. Ltd. – founded by businessman Lee Kong Chian in 1931 – whose canned pineapple products were popular locally and overseas.

Bata, hailing from the Czech Republic, was one of the earliest modern shoe sellers in Singapore, opening its first store in 1931 at Capitol Building. It advertised extensively in English, Malay, Tamil and Chinese newspapers. (1958)

A MATTER OF STYLE

Singapore in the 19th century was a thriving cosmopolitan free port that attracted people of diverse ethnicities from all over the world.[1] Travellers such as Isabella Bird, who visited Singapore in 1879, saw a "city ablaze with colour and motley with costume",[2] with Europeans, Malays, Chinese, Indians and other residents and visitors decked out in their own fashion. Initially, the advertisements for apparel in the newspapers did not reflect this rich sartorial mix, being predominantly targeted at the Europeans and affluent Asians, and featuring mostly Western fashion trends and products.

From the 20th century onwards, however, more print advertisements for local and regional traditional wear started to appear. At the same time, Western brands of beauty products increasingly localised their ads – such as by using Asian models – to reach out to the growing local market.

19TH-CENTURY COLONIAL FASHION

Beginning in the 1830s and '40s, popular merchant houses like Little, Cursetjee and Co. and Whampoa and Co. frequently advertised[3] lists of their merchandise such as English and French boots; Parisian bonnets; various types of chemisettes; corsets; gloves; horse-hair petticoats; dresses made of muslin, silk and satin; cashmere shawls; and stockings. These advertisements reflected the Western fashion trends of the period.

The reduction in travel time between Europe and Singapore due to the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 enabled the demand for European fashion goods to be met more promptly.[4] By the end of the 19th century, advertisements had become more pictorial, with illustrations of Victorian fashion trends, from the popular makes of corsets to the various types of crinolines, gloves, hats, belts and neckties.

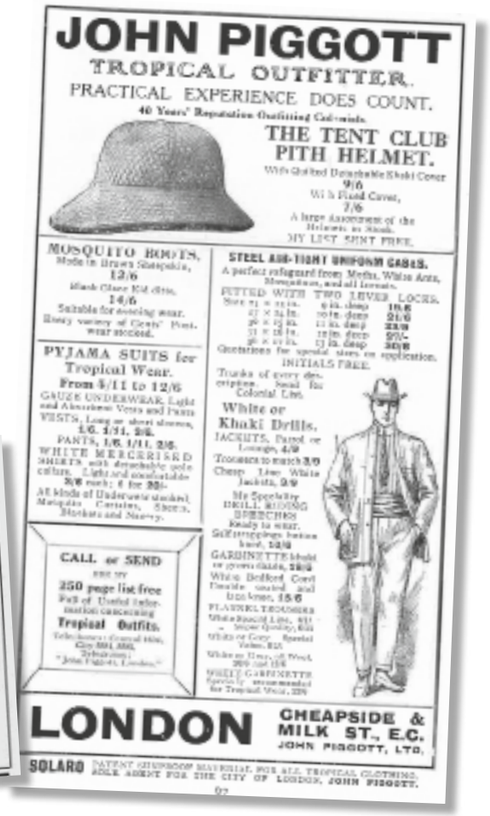
These early fashion advertisements reveal that, for the most part, the British continued to dress as they would have done in chilly England. Bird described the European woman in the tropics as an "ungraceful heap of poufs and frills, tottering painfully on high heels, in tight boots, her figure distorted into the shape of a Japanese sake bottle, every movement a struggle or a jerk, the clothing utterly unsuited to this or any climate, impeding motion, and affecting health, comfort, and beauty alike".[7] Horace Bleackley, a British author, during his visit to Singapore in 1925, recalled seeing well-dressed European women in frocks that followed closely the latest fashions of London and Paris. The men wore European evening dress as their ballroom attire, which in the days before air-conditioning was "the most unsuitable attire for dancing in the tropics that could be imagined".[8]

However, there were also examples of Western fashion adapted to the tropical climate. The European men incorporated the topee, a lightweight helmet made of pith, into their attire. This they wore at all times – even when they went swimming – to prevent sunstroke.[9] From the 1910s to '30s, advertisements show that clothes merchants like John Piggott and Meakers in England were catering to the Europeans living or travelling to tropical climates. Pith helmets, mosquito boots, vests made of absorbent materials, and white and khaki drill suits became popular. Department stores in Singapore such as Robinson & Co. also advertised fabrics such as cotton and linen that gave wearers greater comfort in the local heat and humidity.

In the 19th century, the "hourglass" figure became the new ideal of feminine beauty as well as an indicator of social status. Constricting undergarments such as the corset were used to achieve this.[5] (1898)

The wearing of hats – a marker of social class – reached its zenith at the turn of the 20th century, when no Western gentleman would think of stepping out of his house bare-headed.[6] This 1902 John Little & Co. Ltd. advertisement depicts the various styles of hats available in Singapore: Monte Carlo hats, Singapore sun helmets, single Terai hats, silk hats, Ellwoods helmets and white straw boaters.

Meakers, a men's outfitter in London, advertising their "tropical and colonial outfits". They also had an assistant in attendance with "considerable experience in the Malay States". (1936)



John Piggott, a "tropical outfitter" based in London, advertised in the colony as having "40 years' reputation outfitting colonials". They sold pith helmets, mosquito boots, pyjama suits, white and khaki drill suits, and steel air-tight uniform cases. (1914)

A 1949 advertisement for the newly opened Majestic Hotel on Bukit Pasoh Road in Chinatown highlighting its grand furniture, elegant bar and comfortable rooms.

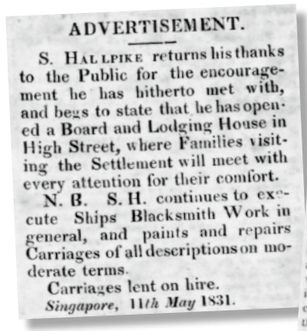
A WARM WELCOME

The mid-1840s saw the first steamships arriving in Singapore from Europe. These steam liners not only delivered mail and cargo, but also transported passengers. To cater to visitors and an expanding population, hotels and restaurants began sprouting up, first in the town centre and then radiating outwards as transport infrastructure developed. By the 1920s, Singapore's hospitality scene had blossomed and come into its own with a respectable selection of hotels and restaurants, which courted consumers with promises of luxury, comfort, modernity and gastronomical delights.

EARLY PLAYERS

One of the first establishments to offer commercial accommodation in Singapore was a "board and lodging house" by the Singapore River, on High Street,[1] set up in 1831 by boatyard owner Stephen Hallpike. It was a modest establishment "where Families visiting the Settlement will meet with every attention for their comfort" (p. 98).

Eight years later came the first major player in the nascent hotel scene: London Hotel, opened by the enterprising Gaston Dutronquoy, who was also a professional photographer.[2] Besides the requisite "palankeens" (palanquins) or horse carriages for hire, the hotel also provided tiffin (light lunch) on demand, cold and warm baths, billiard tables and grounds for skittles, a British bowling game (p. 98). Despite what its ads would have us believe, the hotel's reputation left much to be desired. Travellers complained about the facilities and the service, as well as the noise from the debauchery that went on till the wee hours in the alley and billiard room.[3]



ADVERTISEMENT.

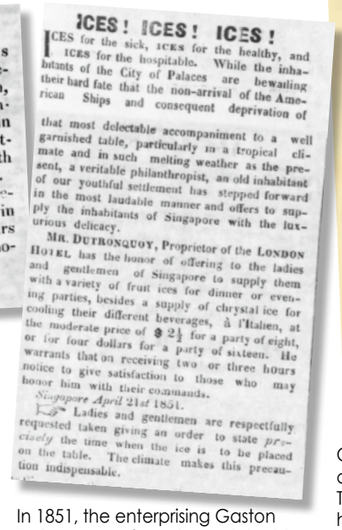
S. HALLPIKE returns his thanks to the Public for the encouragement he has hitherto met with, and begs to state that he has opened a Board and Lodging House in High Street, where Families visiting the Settlement will meet with every attention for their comfort.

N. B. S. H. continues to execute Ships' Blacksmith Work in general, and paints and repairs Carriages of all descriptions on moderate terms.

Carriages lent on hire.

Singapore, 11*th May* 1831.

Stephen Hallpike's "board and lodging house" was located on a now-expunged section (Hallpike Street) of High Street near the Singapore River. (1831)



ICES! ICES! ICES!

ICES for the sick, ICES for the healthy, and ICES for the hospitable. While the inhabitants of the City of Palaces are bewailing their hard fate that the non-arrival of the American Ships and consequent deprivation of that most delectable accompaniment to a well garnished table, particularly in a tropical climate and in such melting weather as the present, a veritable philanthropist, an old inhabitant of our youthful settlement has stepped forward in the most laudable manner and offers to supply the inhabitants of Singapore with the luxurious delicacy.

MR. DUTRONQUOY, Proprietor of the LONDON HOTEL has the honor of offering to the ladies and gentlemen of Singapore to supply them with a variety of fruit ices for dinner or evening parties, besides a supply of chrystal ice for cooling their different beverages, à l'Italien, at the moderate price of $ 2½ for a party of eight, or for four dollars for a party of sixteen. He warrants that on receiving two or three hours notice to give satisfaction to those who may honor him with their commands.

Singapore April 21*st* 1851.

☞ Ladies and gentlemen are respectfully requested taken giving an order to state *precisely* the time when the ice is to be placed on the table. The climate makes this precaution indispensable.

In 1851, the enterprising Gaston Dutronquoy of London Hotel sold ices for guests to enjoy in the "melting weather". Ice was then a novelty in Singapore, and gladly welcome in the tropical heat. (1851)

Advertising Sheet

OF THE

SINGAPORE DIRECTORY,

1855.

LONDON HOTEL.

The London Hotel, kept by G. Dutronquoy, is situated on the Esplanade, commanding a splendid view of the harbour of Singapore and under the immediate patronage of the Peninsular and Oriental Company. Passengers arriving at Singapore who may honor him with their presence will find every comfort and moderate charge, according to the time of their stay.

There is a Sporting a separate hotel for Families.

☞ Hot and cold Baths at all hours. Four excellent billiard tables, and a good skittle ground.

The London Hotel, tenu par G. Dutronquoy est situé sur l'Esplanade, commandant une superbe vue du port de Singapore, et se trouve sous le patronage immédiat de la Compagnie Peninsular et Orientale.

Les passagers arrivant à Singapore, qui veulent bien lui honorer de leur présence trouveront tout ce qui est confortable à des prix modérés selon la durée de leur séjour.

Il y a à côté un hotel séparé pour des familles.

☞ Des bains chauds et froids à toute heure. Quatre billards excellents, et un très bon jeu de quilles.

El abajo firmado encargado de la fonda titulada London Hotel, que esta situada en la Esplanada, dominando una perspectiva magnifica del puerto de Singapore, y bajo la inmediata proteccion de la Compañia Peninsular y Oriental ofrece su hermosa Posada a los Pasageros que llegan á Singapore y quieren honrar con su presencia; asegurando con los que hallaran una casarada asistencia, y ganos muy moderos, segun el tiempo de su detencion.

Contiguo á esta fonda hay otra separada para familias.

☞ Baños frios y calientes á todas horas. Cuatro excelentes mesas de billar.

G. Dutronquoy.

Contrary to the promises made in this London Hotel advertisement, American businessman George Francis Train definitely did not encounter "every comfort" during his stay there in 1855. As he passionately recounted: "[The hotel was] kept in a manner that would disgrace a landlord in the backwood of Kansas, where your food looks uninviting, and is brought to you by Asiatics and Islanders who always seem to me to have their hands upon their half-clad body, when you want a piece of bread, some Malay curry, or a pineapple."[4] (1854)

EASTERN PROMISES

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 gave Singapore's hotel sector a much-needed boost. With the duration of the sea passage from England halved to three weeks, more travellers started venturing eastwards. Accommodation options in Singapore saw a concomitant rise, with many more hotels dotting the town centre.

By the turn of the century, wealthy European and American travellers were most likely to call at either the Hotel de l'Europe or Raffles Hotel, both occupying palatial grounds near the Padang. Other principal hotels of the early 20th century included Adelphi Hotel (p. 108), Hotel van Wijk and Hotel de la Paix (p. 108). Serving Westerners almost exclusively, most of these colonial hotels came to be defined by the grandeur of their European architecture. Their advertisements reflected as much: Instead of images of the guestrooms, photographs of the hotels' facades frequently took centre stage, selling the image of colonial power, luxury and comfort.

More often than not, European visitors had a tough time adjusting to Singapore's climate and culture, and most harboured a condescending attitude towards the Asian populace, as was typical of race relations during the colonial era. Responding to the anxieties of the Western traveller in a foreign land, ads for European hotels often sought to reassure their potential clientele that they would find the familiarity of home at their establishments. Frequently touted selling points of the hotels were their European management, chefs, cuisine, language proficiencies, comforts and so on. The colonial hotel was thus presented as a safe space that protected the affluent European traveller from the idiosyncrasies of the local culture.

BEYOND THE GRAND HOTELS

While the grand hotels were the preserve of well-heeled Europeans, there were also options for visitors of humbler means. In 1917, the Young Women's Christian Association hostel on Fort Canning Road was opened, offering a place of respite for female travellers.[5] On Oxley Rise near River Valley Road was The Mansion, advertised as an upscale boarding house. Situated on elevated ground, The Mansion served food that was supposedly comparable to hotels' offerings.

HOTEL DE L' EUROPE

SINGAPORE

HOTEL DE L'EUROPE SYNDICATE PROPRIETORS

ESTABLISHED HALF A CENTURY.

SITUATION UNRIVALLED. THE OLDEST ESTABLISHMENT

The only Hotel facing the Esplanade.

NOW ENTIRELY UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT.

Foreign Languages spoken. Cuisine under European Supervision.

Branch Establishment: St. Valentine's Bath Hotel, 29 Bukit Timah Road.

HOTEL DE L'EUROPE.

1855-1906.

NEW BUILDING (in course of Construction).

C. CHAYTOR, Manager.

Established in the mid-1850s, the Hotel de l'Europe became the chief competitor to Raffles Hotel in the early 20th century. In this advertisement, readers are confronted with the hotel's gleaming future embodied in an illustrated panorama of the forthcoming building. (1906)

RAFFLES HOTEL

SINGAPORE

"THE DAWN OF SINGAPORE." The Sphere, London, March 24th, 1906.

Renowned for its All-round Modern Comforts.

FACING THE HARBOUR.

CUISINE

The Best.

TWO EUROPEAN CHEFS.

ACCOMMODATION UNLIMITED. Every Room has its Private Sitting, Dressing, and Bath Rooms.

GUEST RIGHTS

Band and Dancing.

Sarkies Brothers, PROPRIETORS.

A montage of images in this Raffles Hotel advertisement shows off the imposing building and the luxurious dining hall, together with a long list of aristocrats and high-ranking officials who were among the hotel's distinguished clientele. (1906)

A 1952 ad depicting the warm, cosy home atmosphere that Osram lamps promised to create.

THE MODERN MALAYAN HOME

Modern utilities and amenities revolutionised home life across the world in the early 20th century, and Singapore was no exception. What it really boiled down to was the introduction of gas, electricity and running water to households, but in its wake, a vast array of appliances that made use of these innovations soon appeared on the market, radically changing the way people cooked, cleaned and entertained themselves at home.

Singapore's march to modernity from the 19th century onwards was not without its complications. This was primarily due to the vastly differing living situations of the population. Most European expatriates lived in the city centre and its environs, in "modern" homes made of brick, and were generally the first to receive new amenities such as sanitation and electricity. The majority of the Asian population, on the other hand, were either living in the *kampong* (villages) on the outskirts of town and beyond, or else crammed into tenement shophouses, well into the 1960s; the physical construction of their houses did not facilitate the introduction of modern amenities.

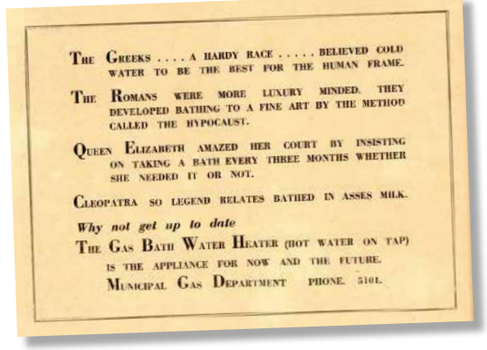
A major factor in the modernisation of the home was the introduction of sewerage and running water. Prior to 1910, Singapore's waste disposal system consisted of outhouses and night-soil collection, where residents would pay for collectors to carry off their human waste. Islandwide sanitation was a massive infrastructural project, and it was not until 1987 that the night-soil system was finally phased out.[1]

Running water was another issue that took many decades to resolve. While well-to-do

These two ads – for gas and electric cookers – appeared in *The Next Meal Cookery Book* by Mrs W.E. Kinsey, who was known for writing recipes for the colonial population in Malaya. The use of gas and electric cooking and heating in the home developed in parallel with each other, with advertisers competing (sometimes in the same publication) to sell their fuel over the other. (1927)

households in the town centre had access to piped water by the mid-1800s, some villages were still drawing water from communal pumps and wells as late as the 1950s.[2]

Thus home appliances like electric washing machines were targeted at those who had access to running water and electricity. Until the '50s and '60s, when more residents were relocated into public housing that could support a full host of utilities, only a small number of dealerships importing modern home appliances existed.

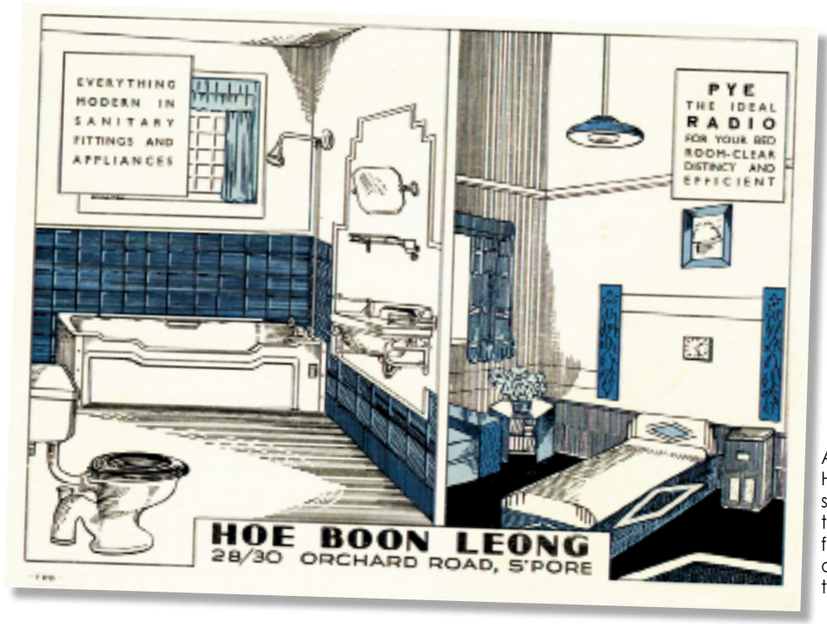


The Municipal Gas Department promoting gas-powered water heaters as the future of bathing. (1938)

GAS AND ELECTRICITY

Before the advent of gas and electricity in Singapore, municipal and household power – for uses such as street lighting and cooking – came from the burning of oil, coal and wood. In 1862, the Singapore Gas Company opened Kallang Gasworks, the first plant dedicated to manufacturing gas for street lighting.[3] In 1901, gas production was taken over by the Municipal Commissioners and expanded for home use.[4]

Electricity followed swiftly after: In 1906, Raffles Place, North Bridge Road and Boat Quay became the first streets to be lit by electric lighting.[5] Electrical supply was made



A 1940 ad by Hoe Boon Leong showcasing both their bathroom fittings and electrical appliances such as the PYE radio.

available for private use soon after, albeit only to households that could support and afford the installation of wiring systems.

As a result, home gas and electricity became commonly advertised in newspapers, books, and magazines, with the messaging revolving around their economic benefits, reliability, safety and convenience. Advertisers such as the municipal gas and electricity departments took pains to assure customers that the energy saved in the long run would be worth the relatively large start-up cost of installing gas pipes and electrical wiring in their homes.

MODERN CONVENIENCES: HOME GADGETRY AND APPLIANCES

The introduction of electricity in the home created a consumer market for household goods and entertainment, resulting in a flood of new inventions from the United States, Europe and, later, Japan. Besides home staples like electric lights, appliances such as refrigerators, blenders, electric irons, ceiling fans and vacuum cleaners also started to become heavily advertised in the early 20th century.

In general, advertising for household goods in Malaya was undertaken by the local dealerships and department stores that imported them. However, major brands such as the General Electric Company, Morphy-Richards and National also placed advertisements for their own products, as they had the capital to run extensive advertising campaigns to promote their goods in what had become a fairly competitive market for household products.

Initially, only the more affluent had the means to purchase modern household appliances. For example, an electric iron advertised in *The Straits*

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