



A Media Release by My Community

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EXPLORE THE LEGEND OF BUKIT MERAH AND STORIES FROM THE REMAINING SINGAPORE IMPROVEMENT TRUST FLATS AT REDHILL CLOSE

Singapore, 23 May 2019 – Bukit Merah or “Red Hill” in Malay, reflects the neighbourhood’s red clay soil, which was used for pot making in the early 19th century. A folklore in the Sejarah Melayu, a compilation of Malay traditions and stories, traces the origins of the red-coloured hill to a village in Telok Bangah, where farmers and fishermen were persistently wounded and killed by swordfishes but the king and its advisors were powerless to avert the damages or appease the villagers. One day, an intelligent boy advised the villagers to ward off the swordfishes by building a barricade of tree trunks around their houses. The brilliant strategy forestalled the swordfishes from disturbing the villagers and the boy became an instant hero. The king became jealous of the boy and sent his troops to kill the village hero. The soldiers followed the boy to the top of a hill, where he resided, and spilled his blood which dyed the hill red.

2 My Redhill Heritage Tour follows the legend of Bukit Merah and uncovers the interesting people, stories and anecdotes in the neighbourhood. The tour is one of the nine guided tours developed and organised by non-profit organisation My Community and is supported by the Ministry of Community, Culture and Youth. The tour takes place on every 4th weekend (both Saturdays and Sundays) and participants can register for the tour at www.mycommunity.eventbrite.sg.

3 Mr Kwek Li Yong, Founder and President of My Community, said, “Every community has a story to tell. Through this heritage walk, we wish to narrate the endearing story of the common man and reconnect Singaporeans to the rich and diverse history and heritage of Redhill Close. The guided tour is heavily curated with

sensory cues that evoke the past, layered with personal accounts and experiences which took place on site. My Redhill Heritage Tour forms a convergence between collective memories and individual biographies and is essential to how we interpret and negotiate our colonial past through familiarity, sensory recollection and community ownership.”

4 For more information, please refer to:

- Annex A: Five things you probably don't know about Redhill
- Annex B: List of heritage sites on My Redhill Heritage Tour
- Annex C: List of free guided tours developed and organised by My Community

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About My Community

My Community is a non-profit organisation which researches about community heritage and documents social memories, celebrates community arts and heritage, and advocates for greater community involvement in cultural management and urban governance. We aim to shape and transform community spaces through arts, culture and heritage.

Before My Community was established as a society on 26 August 2010, the community group began organising tours in 2008 and blogging in 2009. My Community was registered as a charity under the Charities Act on 12 December 2015 and conferred with the status of an Institution of Public Character on 13 December 2016.

Today, My Community organises guided tours, exhibitions, festivals and other art, heritage and place-making programmes in Queenstown, Bukit Merah and Tiong Bahru. We have opened Singapore's first independent community museum in December 2018.

Annex A: Five things you probably didn't know about Redhill Estate

1. **Redhill is home to one of Singapore's oldest public housing flats.** Built in 1955, the cluster of 21 housing blocks comprising 878 flats were constructed by the Singapore Improvement Trust and were nicknamed "Chik Lau Chu" or seven-storey houses in Hokkien. Monthly rental for these flats was around \$52 then. On 3 December 2011, HDB announced that the cluster was earmarked for Selective Enbloc Redevelopment Scheme and residents from the cluster had since shifted to a nearby precinct at Henderson Road.
2. Although the place, "Bukit Merah" can be translated to Redhill in English, Redhill is in fact planned as a neighbourhood within Bukit Merah New Town.
3. **The town centre at Bukit Merah Central** was built on a hill known as Henderson Hill, and the location of the former HDB Centre was once designated as a site for an MRT Station. Constructed in the late 1970s and expanded in the late 1980s, the town centre is home to a hawker centre, office cluster, theatre, library, bus interchange, swimming complex and shops and flats.
4. A popular confectionary and biscuit factory, **Thye Hong Biscuit Factory**, was once situated near Redhill estate. The factory churned out a wide variety of biscuits ranging from Marie Cream Crackers, Horlicks biscuits to Jam De Luxe cookies, a popular shortcake with pineapple jam sandwiched in between. The factory also produced the famous Torch brand sweets which were served to air travellers aboard Malaysian Airways flights. The factory exported biscuits and confectioneries to Hong Kong, Fiji, Thailand, Saudi Arabia and even Mauritius.
5. Besides the biscuit factory, the neighbourhood was also home to the **Enabling Village**, an initiative by the Ministry of Social and Family Development and SG Enable Ltd to empower individuals with different abilities so that they can move independently and be accepted and valued for their contributions. There are many instagram-worthy art murals by students from Pathlight School.

Annex B: List of heritage sites on My Redhill Heritage Tour

No.	Site	Brief History and Description
1	Ling Shan Temple	<p>The Taoist temple was first constructed on a cemetery hill known as Leng Kee Hill in 1879. The land tenure was formalised in 1884 when Gan Eng Leng, cousin of businessman Gan Eng Seng, purchased a land parcel at Leng Kee Hill through his company Chop Leng Kee. The hill was designated as a burial hill and a section of the hill was reserved for the burial of Gan clan members. The remaining plot was transferred to Hokkien Huay Kuan's directors. The hill and road were subsequently named after the company whereas another nearby road Jalan Tiong or Cemetery Road in Hokkien.</p> <p>The temple was later rebuilt in 1915 with support from philanthropists Tan Boo Liat, Si Tiong Wah, Teo Soon Sian, Tan Kah Kee and Low Kim Pong.</p> <p>Leng Kee hill was closed for burial in 1923 and exhumation took place in 1963 for the development of the burial hill into a housing estate.</p>
2	Former Thye Hong Biscuit Factory	<p>The former Thye Hong Biscuit and Confectionery Factory at the junction of Alexandra Road and Tiong Bahru Road was one of the oldest biscuit manufacturers in Singapore. Built at a cost of \$250,000, the 40,000 square feet factory was opened in March 1935 to modernise biscuit manufacturing and expand production through automation.</p> <p>The factory comprised of two fully automated plants which weighed 65 tonnes each and measured 300 feet long. In this stretch, conveyor belts would pass the carpets of dough from which the biscuits were stamped, baked, cooled and packed in tins. In the 1960s, the factory employed more than 200 workers and produced 1,500 tonnes of biscuits every month.</p> <p>Turned out from the factory each day was a wide variety of biscuits ranging from Marie Cream Crackers, Horlicks biscuits to Jam De Luxe cookies, a popular shortcake with pineapple jam sandwiched in between. The factory also produced the famous Torch brand sweets which were served to air travellers aboard Malaysian Airways flights. The factory exported biscuits and confectioneries to Hong Kong, Fiji, Thailand, Saudi Arabia and even Mauritius.</p> <p>Tay Cheng Tar, 97, had worked as an accountant at Thye Hong from 1947 to 1981. He recalled, " There</p>

		<p>were many departments within the factory - production, packaging, marketing and so on. The machines would operate through the night so as to meet the massive demand from overseas markets."</p>
3	Enabling Village	<p>The Enabling Village is an initiative by the Ministry of Social and Family Development and SG Enable Ltd to empower individuals with different abilities so that they can move independently and be accepted and valued for their contributions.</p> <p>The cluster was launched by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in 2015 as an inclusive space. He proclaimed, "As SG50 draws to a close, it is timely to reflect on the kind of society we want to build in the future... We must continue to build a more inclusive society, valuing everyone and promoting active citizenship." It is also meaningful to have this space sited here because the buildings have a long history in education and training, having formerly been the Bukit Merah Vocational Institute and the Employment and Employability Institute."</p> <p>The village houses the Arts Faculty, where individuals can purchase artworks and merchandise designed by autistic youths studying at Pathlight School. The Fairprice outlet within the cluster was designed to support seniors and people with disabilities with features including call buttons at the entrance and store aisles where customers can seek help, magnifying glasses at every aisle for customers to read the product labels, and wheelchair friendly trolleys.</p>
4	Redhill Close SIT Flats	<p>Redhill Close estate is a cluster of 21 housing blocks comprising 878 flats constructed by the Singapore Improvement Trust in 1955. Nicknamed "Chik Lau Chu" or seven-storey houses in Hokkien, monthly rental for these flats was around \$52.</p> <p>In 1982, these rental apartments were sold to the occupants at a subsidised rate of \$19,000 for a unit along the corridor and \$20,000 for a corner unit. Residents who were unable to afford these flats had to relocate to other towns including Jurong.</p> <p>In the early 1990s, the slab blocks were extensively refurbished which gave its trapezoid roods and curvy façade.</p> <p>On 3 December 2011, HDB announced that the cluster was earmarked for Selective Enbloc Redevelopment</p>

		<p>Scheme (SERS) and residents from the cluster had since shifted to a nearby precinct at Henderson Road.</p>
5	Bukit Merah Town Centre	<p>The development of Bukit Merah Town Centre began in the late 1960s when a two-storey hawkker centre, 968 flats and shops were completed in the centre.</p> <p>In the late 1970s, the development of Telok Blangah estate prompted the expansion of the town centre and a temple was acrimoniously demolished to make way for the construction of a swimming complex and bus interchange. The swimming complex and library was opened in 1982.</p>
6	Former HDB Centre	<p>The Housing and Development Board (HDB) is a statutory agency originally conceived under the purview of the Ministry of Law and National Development in 1960. Since 1975, the Board falls within the ambit of the Ministry of National Development. The evolving functions and objectives of HDB can be categorised into two broad areas. First, the board intends to provide basic shelter for both the lower-income and middle-income groups as well as home ownership for Singaporeans who cannot afford private housing. Second, the board also provides housing and estate management services.</p> <p>Singapore's population ballooned after World War II, From a mere 52,900 in 1850, the population quadrupled to 229,900 in 1901 and then mushroomed to 940,700 in 1947. Compounding the housing problem were unauthorised kampongs constructed by private contractors in the eastern and western section of the city to meet the growing demand for affordable rental housing among lower-income immigrants. These settlements, known as squatters, were constructed using salvage material including old wooden planks and boxes, rusty corrugated iron sheets and scrap metal with attap (thatched) roofs. Elsewhere in the city centre, people crammed into heavily modified shop houses which were originally constructed to accommodate a shop on the ground floor and house the people who worked there on the second level. The shop houses and their rooms were partitioned into dark, airless warrens of miniscule cubicles devoid of sanitation and privacy and large enough for a mattress. Developed in a "girdle of squalor and misery," the squatter settlements and their associated quagmire – unemployment, crime, infectious diseases, racial tensions and fires – flourished in the underbelly of the port city. (Figure 1.2) In 1947, an estimated 680,000</p>

	<p>out of a population of 947,000 in Singapore were residing in squatters and overcrowded conditions.</p> <p>While the Singapore Improvement Trust is a recognised institution within the colonial authority for the construction of public housing in Singapore, it neither possessed the statutory powers nor was given the duties similar to a Housing Authority. Under Section 44 (3) of the Singapore Improvement Ordinance, the Board "may with the approval of the Minister erect such buildings as the Board may think fit."</p> <p>In 1959, Singapore's population was 1.6 million and an estimated 500,000 people were living in slums and squatter settlements.</p> <p>During the election hustings for the 1959 Legislative Assembly, the People's Action Party (PAP) campaigned for an extensive public housing programme to resolve Singapore's longstanding shortages - a clear and decisive message which struck a chord with the voters.</p> <p>Following a landslide victory, where the PAP won 43 out of 51 seats in the Legislative Assembly, the political party swiftly enacted the Housing and Development Ordinance and the Planning Ordinance. By the end of the year, the Singapore Improvement Trust was dissolved, and replaced with a Housing and Development Board to concentrate on the provision of public housing, as well as a Planning Authority to provide for the planning and improvement of the city-state.</p> <p>After taking stock of the housing situation, the Housing and Development Board conceived an ambitious 5-year housing programme which provided for the construction of 51,031 flats at a cost of \$194.1 million between 1960 and 1964.</p> <p>In 1987, a \$69 million complex of shops and offices was constructed in Bukit Merah Town Centre to house the headquarters of the Housing and Development Board (HDB).</p>
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Annex C: List of Community Guided Tours Developed and Organised by My Community

C1: Heritage Tours

No.	Guided Tours	Communities	Frequency	Duration	Description
1	My Dawson Heritage Tour	My Queenstown	Every first weekend (Both Saturdays and Sundays)	0830 to 1230	My Dawson heritage tour recounts the history of Singapore's first satellite town from a modern residential town in 1959 to the founding of the port city in 1819. The guided tour weaves in interesting stories from the nutmegs and rubber plantations, botanic garden and military encampments. Participants can get to meet long-time residents in Forfar Heights, Strathmore Avenue and Dempsey.
2	My Alexandra Heritage Tour		Every second weekend (Both Saturdays and Sundays)	0830 to 1230	My Alexandra heritage tour visits the military installations constructed by the British troops to defend the naval outpost at Keppel Harbour and follows the chronology of World War II from Fort Pasir Panjang to the massacre at Alexandra Hospital and its neighbouring Boh Beh Kang village. Participants also get to enter the black and white bungalows at Alexandra Park and hear first-hand accounts of the war from former Boh Beh Kang villagers.
3	My Holland Village Heritage Tour		Every third weekend (Both Saturdays and Sundays)	0830 to 1230	My Holland Village heritage tour traces the transformation of Queenstown from a rustic Hakka Village and rubber plantation in the 1870s to a bustling military village in the 1930s and a renowned expatriate centre and tourist attraction known as Holland Village in the 2000s. Participants also get to meet and hear anecdotes from long-time residents and shop keepers at Thambi Magazine, Commonwealth Crescent Market and the VIP block
4	My Tanglin Halt Heritage Tour		Every fourth weekend (Both Saturdays and Sundays)	0830 to 1230	My Tanglin Halt heritage tour traces the evolution of Queenstown as Singapore's first satellite town. The tour visits iconic landmarks including Singapore's first HDB flats along Stirling Road, the first polyclinic, neighbourhood

					sports complex and branch library. Participants also get to meet librarians, long-time residents and shop keepers along the tour.
5	My Tiong Bahru Heritage Tour	My Bukit Merah	Every 1 st weekend (Both Saturdays and Sundays)	Various times	My Tiong Bahru heritage tour features Singapore's only conservation estate where participants explore the pre-war and post-war architecture and learn about the culture and arts, food and romance, as well as intriguing people and stories associated with the charming and picturesque neighbourhood. The tour includes an exclusive visit to Singapore's first communal civilian air raid shelter in a residential estate which saved and gave lives during world war II.
6	My Mount Faber/Sentosa Heritage Tour		Every 2 nd weekend (Both Saturdays and Sundays)	0830 to 1230	My Mount Faber/Sentosa Heritage Tour recounts the stories of World War II through the underground tunnels, military encampments and secret reservoirs in Mount Faber and Sentosa. The tour also features anecdotes and stories from ex-villagers and military personnel stationed at Mt Faber and Sentosa.
7	My Telok Blangah Heritage Tour		Every 3 rd weekend (Both Saturdays and Sundays)	0830 to 1130	My Telok Blangah heritage tour traces the 700-year history of Singapore as a prosperous port city at the southern tip of Peninsula Malaysia, from a trading emporium founded by the legendary Sang Nila Utama in 1299, to a pirate-infested free port established by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819 and a modern metropolis in the 21st century. The tour features an array of national monuments and historical sites including Masjid Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim, Radin Mas Ayu, Bukit Kasita and Church of St Teresa.
8	My Redhill Heritage Tour		Every 4 th weekend (Both Saturdays and Sundays)	1000 to 1200	My Redhill heritage tour recounts the legend of Bukit Merah and the interesting tales from one of Singapore's oldest neighbourhoods. Participants can visit the soon-to-be-demolished Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) flats at

					Redhill Close and get up close with the fascinating residents and shop keepers at Redhill Market.
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C2: Museum Tours

No.	Tour	Frequency	Duration	Registration	Description
1	A Tour Around Museum @ My Queenstown	Every Saturday and Sunday	1230 to 1330	www.mycommunity.eventbrite.sg	An immersive walk around Museum @ My Queenstown where participants would hear interesting stories and anecdotes of Singapore's first satellite town through artefacts, objects and old photographs.