

CHAPTER

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# Old Frees

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PROFILES

# Old Frees' Contribution To Singapore's Success Story

## The Judiciary

It is a well-known fact that Old Frees have dominated some of the top positions in Singapore's public service - a tribute indeed to the calibre of students who have gone through the portals of the venerable Penang Free School (PFS).

This is most apparent in the case of Singapore's Judiciary. This was acknowledged no less by the late Singapore's first prime minister Lee Kuan Yew himself in a speech given at a mass rally at the Penang Esplanade as far back as 24 March 1964 when he said "... (our) Chief Justice and three judges — all these people were Penang's contribution to the success story of Singapore."

What is astonishing too is that the three judges mentioned – Tan Ah Tah, AV Winslow and JWD Ambrose were all Queen's Scholars.

And it is not just the judiciary that Old Frees have dominated. They have also occupied some of the highest levels of other areas of Singapore's public service as well as in private enterprise.

Singapore's first Speaker of Parliament, Yeoh Ghim Seng, a prominent surgeon, was an Old Free. So was Lim Ho Hup, described by former PM Lee as the "lieutenant" of then chairman of the Economic Development Board, Hon Sui Sen (himself a Penangite, though not an Old Free) who was responsible for mapping out Singapore's industrial expansion. Then there was the chairman of the Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research (SISIR) Lee Kum Tatt.

Indeed, one of Penang's chief ministers once remarked that there were so many

Penangites in Singapore's administration and the professions that if all were to return home, Singapore would not be able to function!

Lawyer and Old Free Kok Weng On pointed out, "At one time in the history of Singapore, the judiciary was almost completely 'run' by Old Frees — from the Chief Justice and the judges, the Chief Registrar, the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General. The legal might of Penang Free School!"

### HOW IT CAME ABOUT

How, you might ask, did all this come about – that is, the prominence of Old Frees in Singapore?

The answer lies in the historical links which date back to 1826 when Singapore, Penang and Malacca were combined as the Straits Settlements and were an outlying residency of the British East India Company headquartered in Calcutta, (now Kolkatta) India. In 1867, the Straits Settlements were

made a Crown Colony and came under direct British control until 1946.

There was a gap during the Second World War years of 1942 to 1945 when the three territories were subjugated under the Japanese during the Japanese Occupation of then Malaya and Singapore. The British returned in 1945 but a year later, the Straits Settlements were dissolved and Singapore was made a British Crown Colony while Penang and Malacca became part of the Malayan Union.

In 1959, Singapore achieved self-governing status. In 1963, it became part of the newly independent Federation of Malaysia, together with Malaya, Sabah (the former British North Borneo) and Sarawak, both former British territories. In 1965, Singapore left the Federation to become an independent republic.

Under self-government in 1959, Singapore created a separate Legal Service Commission comprising the Chief Justice,

the Chairman of the Public Services Commission (PSC), a Judge of the Supreme Court appointed by the Chief Justice, the State Advocate-General and two other PSC members.

During the two years of merger from September 1963, there was a common Federal Judicial and Legal Service, with a separate branch in Singapore. The Legal Service Commission was superseded by the Singapore Branch Commission under the Federal Constitution. The High Court of Malaysia and the Federal Court of Malaysia replaced the Supreme Court of the Colony of Singapore and the Court of Appeal respectively.

After Singapore's separation from Malaysia, the Federal Judicial and Legal Service Commission was replaced by the Legal Service Commission.

### **FLUIDITY OF MOVEMENT**

With such a long intertwined history, and with Singapore and Penang belonging to the

same administrative entity for over 120 years, first as part of the Straits Settlements and later as part of Malaysia, it is little wonder that the movements of people in the two territories would be fluid especially that of public servants who would serve in wherever their posting would take them.

That is not the only reason. As former PM Lee put it so well, "It was not chance that brought so many able and outstanding persons to Singapore. For decades before the war, Singapore was the centre of education. Before and after the war, many able students came to Singapore for their education - to secondary schools, several of which had hostels run by missionaries to (the KE) Medical College (established 1905), to Raffles College (established 1928), and later, to the University of Malaya, sited in Singapore, when these two Colleges combined in 1950 (sic). It was only in 1962 that the University of Malaya moved to Kuala Lumpur."

## PREPONDERANCE OF OLD FREES IN LAW AND MEDICINE

This brings us to another point: Why the preponderance of Old Frees in law and especially now in medicine? As an Old Free put it, “The aspiration for top students in PFS was to become a lawyer or a doctor, as these were considered prestigious professions.”

Those awarded Queen’s Scholarships, which were discontinued in 1957, were invariably sent to the University of Cambridge to study law or medicine. Those who aspired to become doctors and were paying their own way came to Singapore because of the excellent reputation of the KE (King Edward VII) Medical College. That PFS had special classes to prepare these aspiring students for the medical entrance exams contributed to the pull factor.

## Justice Tan Ah Tah

Justice Tan Ah Tah was a Queen’s Scholar in 1924. Born in 1906, he was originally from Kuala Lumpur where he studied at Victoria Institution before enrolling in PFS in 1918. His scholarship took him to Cambridge University to read law. He was called to the Bar in 1930 before returning to Penang where he worked in a legal firm for a decade.

In 1941, he moved to Singapore when he joined the Straits Settlements Legal Service. In 1946, he was made Commissioner of Estate Duties and Stamps – the first Asian to be appointed.

He made news again a year later when he was the first of two locals to gain promotion to the Colonial Legal Service. The following year saw him being appointed as first magistrate, civil district judge and district judge in quick succession.

In July 1954, he was made acting puisne judge and confirmed as a judge in October 1955. In 1958, he rose to the position of acting Chief Justice of Singapore. In 1964, after Malaysia was formed, he was made a judge of the Federal Court, which saw him presiding over cases in Malaysia and Singapore.

Slated for retirement in November 1971, Justice Tan had his term of office extended after an amendment was made to the Singapore Constitution to allow judges to prolong their careers.

Alas, he was not able to enjoy his

retirement when he finally called it a day four years later in November 1975, as he died nine months after in August 1976.

During his entire career he was very active in the Old Frees’ Association of Singapore serving as its president for several terms.

## Justice James Walter Davy Ambrose

Born in Penang in 1909, JWD Ambrose was a star student at PFS where he topped the Senior Cambridge examinations of 1925. He was awarded the Queen’s Scholarship in 1928 to study law in Keble College at Oxford University. Apart from his scholastic abilities, Ambrose displayed prowess in sports, thanks, no doubt, to his PFS’ grounding. He was Oxford’s first foreign student to be awarded varsity colours for badminton and was made captain of the badminton team.

After graduating from Oxford, Ambrose enrolled in the Inner Temple and was called to the Bar in 1935.

Shortly after, he returned to Penang where he served an apprenticeship with the law firm, Wreford and Thornton. In 1936, he joined the courts of the Straits Settlements as an advocate and solicitor. He was made assistant official assignee, assistant registrar of companies and assistant official receiver. In 1939, he was posted to Malacca to serve as assistant public trustee of a newly formed



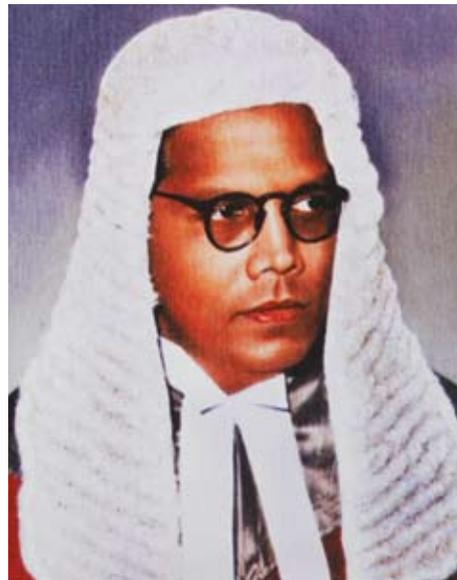
**Chief Justice Wee Chong Jin.**



**Justice Tan Ah Tah.**



**Justice Alfred Victor Winslow.**



**Justice James Walter Davy Ambrose.**

Public Trustee Office of Malacca.

In 1940, he joined the Straits Settlements Legal Service and in 1953 was promoted to the Colonial Legal Service. He served as the magistrate of Penang in 1954 before his transfer to Singapore as the new registrar in the Singapore High Court. He went on to become magistrate and district judge. In 1957, he was appointed official assignee and public trustee before being appointed high court judge a year later serving in the position for 10 years before his retirement in February 1968. He was the fourth Asian in Malaya to become a high court judge and the first judge of Indian ethnic origin to be made a puisne judge. He died on 28 October 1992 at the age of 82. He is remembered for his patience and composure as a judge and praised for his extensive knowledge of the law.

### **Justice Alfred Victor Winslow**

**B**orn in 1916 in Perak, AV Winslow was a brilliant student who passed his Senior Cambridge examinations at the tender age of 13. As he was too young to enter university and thus could not sit for the Queen's Scholarship examination, he spent his time doing other examinations including the London matriculation.

In 1934, he was finally considered old enough for university and sat for the Queen's Scholarship examinations. He aced it and was awarded a Queen's Scholarship to study

mathematics in Cambridge University. He was a gifted mathematician and indulged in his passion for Part 1 of his "Tripos" before switching to studying law as he wanted to join "a profession of high integrity" and which also served the common good.

He was called to the English Bar in 1940 after graduating and worked for a while in Britain before returning to Malaya. He joined the Straits Settlements Legal Service, serving as assistant official assignee, deputy registrar and sheriff, magistrate and district judge. In Chambers, he was known to be welcoming to newcomers and the inexperienced, often dishing out friendly advice.

In 1948, he was made crown counsel and deputy public prosecutor. In 1949, he was promoted to the Colonial Legal Service and was acting senior crown counsel until 1957 when he was appointed solicitor-general. In 1962, he was elevated to the Bench of the Supreme Court of Singapore where he remained before retiring in 1977 because of health reasons. He died in 1984 at the age of 68.

Winslow was active in OFAS serving as its president for several terms. At his passing, his colleagues lamented on "having lost a legal luminary and one of the most distinguished and learned judges."

### **Chief Justice Wee Chong Jin**

Similarly lauded was Justice Wee Chong Jin who served as the Chief Justice of

Singapore from 1963 till his retirement in 1990, a post he held for over 27 years. The first Asian to be appointed, he was also the longest-serving Chief Justice in the Commonwealth.

Known to be strict in court because of his desire to uphold the highest standards of the law, he has been praised by many lawyers - including those who had been ticked off by him - for his professional talents especially a photographic memory that allowed him to recall the facts of each case in precise detail.

Well-respected and admired, Justice Wee was also known to be fair and impartial.

Born in Penang in 1917, he attended PFS before leaving in 1935 to study law at Cambridge University where he was awarded the MacMahon Law Studentship, considered to be one of the most prestigious scholarships. He was also named the university's outstanding cricketer in 1937.

In an interview with *The Straits Times* in 1991 when he was guest-of-honour at a dinner organised by OFAS to celebrate the 175th anniversary of PFS' founding, he spoke fondly of his student days. He said, "School then was a whole-day thing, with the afternoons devoted to sports. For me, that was the best part of the day when I didn't have to go home and I could play cricket, basketball and football."

He recalled that many of the school's teachers were expatriates with many

coming from Oxford and Cambridge but his favourite was local geography teacher Zainal Abidin.

After he was called to the English Bar, Wee returned to Penang in 1940 where he was admitted as an advocate and solicitor of the Straits Settlements.

He then went into private practice in Singapore until 1957, working first with renowned criminal lawyer DK Walters and later with Wee Swee Teow and Co. which had offices in Singapore and Malaya.

In August 1957, he was appointed a judge at the Supreme Court of Singapore, the first Asian to achieve this honour. He went on to become the Chief Justice in 1963, breaking the century-old tradition of appointing British Chief Justices. Aged just 45 then, he was also the youngest to be appointed.

After his term of office as Chief Justice expired when he turned 65 in 1982, he had his term extended thrice, in 1982, 1985 and in 1988.

Justice Wee also served as first chairman of the Presidential Council of Minority Rights for 18 years from 1973.

He had also stood in as Singapore's head-of-state on several occasions, as acting Yang di-Pertuan Negara and as acting President.

Acknowledged for his love of sports especially cricket and badminton, thanks to his PFS days, the Chief Justice kept

up his interest throughout his career. He was captain of two cricket teams and was president of the Singapore Golf Association for 40 years from 1962 to 2002. He died in 2005.

## Tan Boon Teik



**A**part from sitting on the Bench, there were also other Old Frees serving in Singapore's judicial system.

One of them was Tan Boon Teik who was Singapore's longest-serving Attorney-General (A-G), a position he held from 1969 until his retirement in 1992.

Born in 1929, Tan left PFS to study law at University College London (UCL) where he graduated with an honours degree in law in 1951. He was called to the Bar the following year and in 1953, received his Master of Laws degree from UCL. On his return to Penang, he worked as an advocate and solicitor in Malaya and Singapore.

In 1955, he joined the Singapore Legal Service, serving first as magistrate and later deputy registrar of the High Court. He was appointed director of the Legal Aid Bureau in 1959 and senior crown counsel in 1963 before being appointed solicitor-general.

In February 1967, he was appointed acting A-G when the incumbent Ahmad

Mohamed Ibrahim was made ambassador to the United Arab Republic (now Egypt). He was confirmed in his post in January 1969.

As A-G, he was the government's chief legal adviser and public prosecutor and so played an important role in moulding Singapore's legal environment. Under his guidance, the Attorney-General's Chambers produced revised editions of Singapore's legislation in 1970 and 1985 and the first reprint of the Constitution in 1980.

One of his major contributions to Singapore's legal system was the establishment of the Singapore International Arbitration Centre of which he was the founding chairman. He realised the growing importance of arbitration as a means of dispute resolution and advocated Singapore's accession to the New York Convention and promoted arbitration extensively in Singapore and abroad.

Despite his heavy legal workload, the A-G, who was a skilled pianist, devoted much time to developing Singapore's arts scene. He was the founding chairman of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra and gave it direction for many years. He died in 2012. He is remembered for his exacting professional standards but would give due praise to good work done.

## Eu Cheow Chye



**Eu Cheow Chye as a member of the Penang Chinese Cricket XI in 1935.**

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**A**nother Old Free who served in Singapore's Legal System was Eu Cheow Chye who won a scholarship to study law in Raffles College after leaving PFS in 1936.

After graduating in 1939, he worked as a barrister and as a member of

the Colony Administrative Service attached to the Colonial Secretary's Office.

In 1952, he became the First District Judge and in 1963 was made the First Magistrate for three years before his appointment as Registrar in the High Court in 1966.

Apart from his legal work, Cheow Chye was also well known as a state cricketer. He played for Singapore in the early post-war years. In fact, before joining Raffles College, he was actively playing for Penang and was part of the Penang Chinese Cricket XI team.

He died prematurely in 1970.

# Medicine

## Lee Seng Teik

*Professor of Plastic Surgery*

*Year left school: 1959*



**D**ubbed the father of plastic surgery in Singapore, Lee Seng Teik is a doyen in the field of medicine.

He attributes his achievements to the solid foundations laid

down by PFS for which he is grateful.

"We were so very fortunate because PFS was at the pinnacle during the era of colonial English schools and English government schools. While Penang had Chinese, Malay and other vernacular schools and mission schools as well, in terms of public schools, the Free School was right on top.

"The school excelled in sports and other activities and out of this milieu you find the best people."

What impressed him was the range of activities and unusual societies the school

had, which helped to stimulate young minds. There was an Art Society which he could belong to as he was interested in art and painting. He was also a member of the Aristotelian Society, which was about maths and science while a Debating Society helped to sharpen one's oratorical skills.

He joined PFS from Bukit Mertajam High School where former Malaysian prime minister Abdullah Badawi was a classmate. Enrolling in Form 3, he remembers being interviewed by the outgoing headmaster JE Tod. He studied in PFS from 1954 to 1959 when the new headmaster JMB Hughes took over.

He said, "The spirit of the school was to go for excellence in study, sports and other activities which served to inculcate qualities of tolerance, leadership and sportsmanship for all irrespective of background.

"The pride for our school was something that grew in us and we just cannot help it."

On how he came to specialise in medicine, he said, "In school, there was a natural gravitation towards medicine as we excelled in the sciences especially in biology. Maybe I was also influenced by Albert Schweitzer's writings. The Colombo Plan Scholarships then (which replaced the Queen's Scholarships) given out to developing countries were awarded more for medicine and science than for law and other disciplines."

He and six of his cohort were selected for the scholarships for which three were for medicine and the rest for science and engineering.

He studied in the University of Adelaide and after obtaining his MBBS returned to Penang where he said he had a wonderful working experience at the Penang General Hospital.

"Then came Confrontation with Indonesia and doctors were needed to serve in the armed forces. We were asked to volunteer especially those who wished to go overseas for post-graduate training. I was one of them.

"We trained for three months as medical officers in the army and were then posted to various military units.

"I was with the Third Malay Regiment, an active fighting unit in Alor Star where I served 18 months. That was in 1966. Later, I was sent to Taiping to serve in the artillery unit for six months.

"In 1968, after finishing my scholarship bond, I went to the UK for post-graduate training, which was long and tedious, taking six and a half years. Training in the UK at that time was very tough and highly competitive. The country was flooded with doctors from the sub-continent – India and Pakistan – so qualifying for training positions in institutions was very tough.

"I enrolled in the Royal College of Surgeons to do the basic fellowship exam so

that I could compete for the better training posts. I was in rotational posts for two years after which I could choose any discipline. Before completing it I presented myself for the Edinburgh fellowship exams. I went to see my supervisor and said I wanted to learn something I had seen in the course of training – burns.

“There was a nasty accident when an oil truck had gone through a tunnel after someone threw a cigarette. It caught fire and I saw patients with burns but did not know how such patients could be treated. My supervisor Dick Heslop said he would put me in the burns unit in a hospital in Birmingham, which was a leading centre then, to learn. So I went there as a registrar and learned all about burns in a very research-oriented and academic unit. It was the best trauma unit at Birmingham Accident Hospital (BAH).

“I did six months’ training in burns and from there gravitated into plastic surgery because of reconstruction work and for the next four years I trained in plastic surgery in the UK. I was lucky to end up in various hospitals that were top plastic surgical centres. And this end part of training was very gratifying because I worked with the best people.

“Returning to Malaysia in 1975, I went directly to Kuala Lumpur to look for a job but they could not offer a suitable position for what I was trained for. So I decided to

come to Singapore where I had a meeting with the then permanent secretary of health, Andrew Chew, a trained doctor himself, who offered me a job on the spot. I have been here since.”

Professor Lee has held various posts in SGH such as Head of Plastic Surgery and Burns. He is the founding director of the SGH-Postgraduate Medical Institute and the founder director and advisor of the SGH Museum. He also founded the skin culture lab in the National Burns Centre in SGH in 1990.

Today, he is an emeritus consultant at the Department of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery in SGH and holds a faculty position in Duke-NUS graduate medical school.

In 2015, he and a close family friend, Lee Hoo Leng, contributed \$2.5 million to set up a new Professorship in Plastic Surgery and Regenerative Medicine to encourage research into the regeneration of body parts.

He said that while laboratories in the Burns Unit have been growing skin for transplant onto patients for several years now, it is hoped that the same thing could be done for other damaged or ageing organs and tissues.

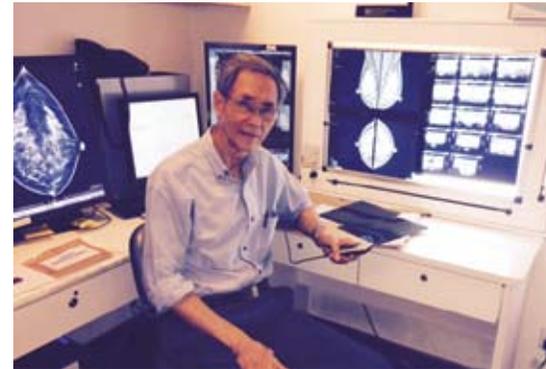
He said, “In an ageing population, regeneration of body parts is crucial. Tissue and organ regeneration is possible but we have a long way to go before we can achieve it. I believe that if researchers are given the

time and resources for further study, such regeneration is possible.”

## Chin Wah Seng

*Radiologist*

*Year left school: 1961*



For Chin Wah Seng, PFS was a school like no other. He counts his fondness for his alma mater in many ways.

He said, “It starts with the physical surroundings. It has fantastic grounds. There is this huge field surrounded by architecturally beautiful old-style buildings. Then there is the culture of closeness that binds the students. I can’t quite pin it down but I think it stems from the leadership shown by our headmasters and senior teachers. It also stems from our curriculum and the wide range of activities that catered for the sporty boys and the less sporty types.

“I was taken by the number of societies we had, including even an Aristotelian Society.

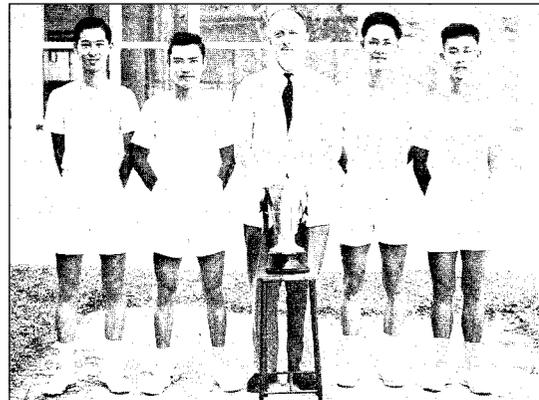
"In my mind, we clicked not because we were looking for something like in some schools where students are there because they want to build up a network for the future. We were more altruistic and valued more the spirit of comradeship.

"Another binding thread was the school magazine given free (until 1962) to each student at the end of the year. It was a kind of year book encapsulating what had gone on in the school for the whole year. It made for good reading and helped to strengthen the sense of belonging."

One of his favourite recollections was the school assembly on Monday morning when every student would gather in the school hall to listen to the headmaster's speech and teachers' announcements of activities for the week. The occasion was a poignant one for him when he was elected head prefect (school captain) and it became his duty to call the school to attention to await the arrival of the headmaster.

"The prefect system was well organised. Prefects had their own room and well-defined roles of helping to keep discipline in the school. As part of the system, senior prefects had to mentor junior prefects so that they could step up, thus adding to the grooming of leadership."

The way Wah Seng sees it, PFS did not do things by half. He talked about how he was inspired by his physical education teacher Teh Kheng Chooi to take up



**Winners of the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong's Cup 1961; from left, Khor Cheng Chye, Lee Chong Hoe (Captain), JMB Hughes (Headmaster), Chin Wah Seng and Phoon Chek Hoong.**

badminton and went on to win the inaugural Agong's Cup for the school in 1960. Thanks to him, other boys represented the school at the state level in rugby and other sports.

"All this has contributed to the feeling of pride among Old Frees that holds them together," he said.

The school was tops not only in sports but also on the scholastic side, sweeping many Queen's Scholarships in the past and in later years the Colombo Plan Scholarships. He himself was a beneficiary having clinched a Colombo Plan Scholarship to study medicine in Canada where he graduated with a MD degree in 1967.

On his return to Malaysia, he served two years as a medical officer in the General Hospital in Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru, district hospital in Batu Pahat and Kota

Tinggi and also two years of compulsory National Service as a doctor (Captain) in the Malaysian Armed Forces. This was during the communist insurgency period when there was combative activity in North Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah.

He subsequently joined Singapore's Ministry of Health where he specialised in diagnostic radiology in the Singapore General Hospital. He obtained a second Colombo Plan Scholarship to do postgraduate studies in London and subsequently sub-specialised in Interventional Radiology where radiological techniques are used in treating diseases in the internal organs.

In 1979 he was head-hunted to join the newly formed private Mount Elizabeth Hospital as consultant radiologist.

His greatest pride, he says, was in setting up the first diagnostic interventional radiology and cardiovascular laboratory, the first of its kind in a private hospital in Southeast Asia. This was with the help of a specialised supporting team consisting of an angiographic radiographer, nursing sister, cardiac cath technician and dark room technician.

After five years with Mount Elizabeth Hospital, he decided to open his own practice in the then Promenade. He ran it for 17 years before The Promenade was re-developed in 2000. When the hospital made an offer then to buy over his practice, he

accepted and he has been with the renamed practice, Parkway Health Services, Singapore ever since.

## Tan Yew Oo

Oncologist

Year left school: 1964



A chat with Yew Oo reveals his passion for his work - oncology or the treatment of cancers.

Yet if he were to pursue his original dream to become

an agronomist, he would not have been an oncologist and Singapore would have lost an important mentor and trainer in medical oncology.

He said, "Forty years ago, there were hardly any drugs for cancer treatment, perhaps just four or five drugs. No one had heard of oncologists until 1978 and the rate of cure for patients then was very low.

"Today over 100 drugs can be used for treating cancer. So there has been an explosion in the knowledge of cancer biology and cancer treatment. Now people can be cured and the rate of survival has gone up by about 20 per cent.

"Before, in the 1990s, drugs were available mainly for treating leukemia and

lymphoma. Since 2000, more new drugs are available for treating other cancers."

Fascinated by the changes in the world of oncology, he says, "Now you can offer patients hope that they can be cured. For those who cannot be cured, they can live longer. The pace of change has been tremendous and I am very excited by how the changes can give hope to people and how these have changed people's perceptions that cancer is not all doom and gloom.

"What I find satisfying too is in how these changes have inspired bright young doctors to go into medical oncology."

Yew Oo's journey in medicine had its beginnings in PFS.

"I was in a cluster of students for whom floating into medicine seemed to be a natural thing to do. But it was very competitive trying to get into medicine."

Then again, the school prepared its students well because of its "culture of diligence in which you are ingrained to work hard but also play hard. So while we were expected to do well academically we were also expected to enjoy sports and other activities.

"Our school system may not have been like a pressure cooker but it was still competitive because of the practice of streaming.

"Before we could get into secondary four, we had to pass our streaming exams in

secondary three and if we wanted to get into the science stream which took the *crème de la crème* of students, we had to do well. There was more streaming to get into Lower Sixth Form.

"All this helped to keep you focused, competitive and achievement-oriented."

All of which came in useful when it came to deciding on a medical career. Opting for the more established medical school in Singapore over Kuala Lumpur's newly opened medical school of two years, Yew Oo graduated with a MBBS degree then went to Canada, the US, Scotland and Australia for specialist training in internal medicine, haematology and oncology.

His plans to return to Penang to practise were scuttled when he was offered a position that did not allow him to make use of what he had been trained for so he decided to join the University of Singapore's Faculty of Medicine where he was a tenured faculty staff for 20 years from 1973 to 1993. During this period, he helped to establish the Department of Medical Oncology in the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) and later in the National University Hospital (NUH). He became a mentor and teacher to doctors among whom are several well-known medical oncologists today.

Despite being in private practice, Yew Oo is still active in teaching and postgraduate medical training. He continues to be involved in clinical cancer research and

clinical trials on novel anti-cancer agents.

"Singapore is an active centre for trials. For new drugs to be licensed, they have to go through trials and if data can be shown that the drugs are good, safe and useful for patient use, drug companies are allowed to sell them. We get experts to evaluate the drugs and submit their reports.

"The government here approves new drugs quite quickly so in neighbouring countries, if doctors cannot get access to these drugs, they can at least send their patients here.

"This helps make Singapore an attractive place to come to for treatment.

"After all, the government wants to promote Singapore as a medical hub and centre for this part of the world."

To this end, doctors in oncology are given training here and elsewhere to equip them with special skills, thus "adding to the talent pool", he says. "It also helps to publicise Singapore's expertise in the treatment of certain cancers and enhances its reputation as a medical hub."

Today, Singapore has 96 oncologists, the highest number in this part of the world.

Yew Oo does his bit to contribute by providing training and mentoring, something he has been doing for the past 15 years.

As he was head of department in the Faculty of Medicine, he was able to institute changes. Thanks to his American

training where hospitals and developments in oncology treatment are considered more modern and structured, he was able to gear teaching methods towards those practised in the US, a turn-around of 180 degrees from the former British-based system.

The change was justified as major discoveries in medicine have recently been done more in the US, he said.

## Lee Eng Hin

*Pediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon*

*Year left school: 1966*



For Lee Eng Hin, life in school was not all work and no play, thanks to The Fenders, a band that he formed "modelled after the Shadows."

He said, "The lead guitarist was Khoo Soo Teik, (he's teaching in Kuala Lumpur) while Yong Leong Chong, who trains pilots in Singapore Airlines was our rhythm guitarist. Lawyer Chan Ban Eng was our drummer while I played the bass guitar and accordion.

"We also had two buddies, Koh Kim Eow and Fong Chek Hong who sang with us, singing hits from the Everly Brothers and The Blue Diamonds.

"We played at school concerts,



**Examining a disabled child.**



**Eng Hin (second from left) with fellow residents during orthopaedic training in Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.**

appeared at talentime shows and played state-wide in Penang as guest artistes and even did two recordings.

"I come from a musical family. My father played the violin, my mother the piano while I played the guitar and ukulele. We started the band when we were 14 years old and

stopped playing to study when we were 17.

“Our school mates enjoyed our music and found us entertaining.”

Despite a musical background, when it came to a career, he decided to follow a different path. With a Colombo Plan Scholarship, he left to study medicine at the University of Western Ontario in Canada where he graduated with a MD in 1973.

“I had to decide on whether to be a general practitioner or a specialist, and I chose orthopaedics as it was a happy specialty where most of the conditions were not life-threatening and patients would usually get better,” he explained.

He trained in Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of Toronto Residency Training Program, obtaining his FRCS(C) in Orthopaedic Surgery in 1982. He continued, “When I did residency training I enjoyed my stint in paediatric orthopaedics and decided to do a fellowship at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. I was attracted to paediatrics because it is very challenging to treat children as the treatment has to take into account that they are still growing.

“In 1983, the head of orthopaedics in Singapore heard of me and went to Toronto to recruit me while I turned down a job offer at the same time at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.”

He was appointed as a senior lecturer at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and National University

Hospital (NUH). In 1997, he was made a full professor of orthopaedic surgery. He then went on to head the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at NUS and NUH and eventually became the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at NUS. As Director of the Division of Graduate Medical Studies at NUS he was responsible for ensuring that all postgraduate trainees were properly trained and rigorously assessed for competence before becoming specialists in their respective fields.

He recalled, “Nobody had been formally trained in paediatric orthopaedics here and as one of the first to have special training, I was asked to start and develop it as a sub-speciality in NUH. When KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital (KKH) was established in 1997, I was asked to start the Orthopaedic department.

“As part of my university work, I teach undergraduates and train post-graduate students to become orthopaedic surgeons. I have been doing this for over 30 years since 1983. I am glad to have played a part in nurturing our young doctors and increasing the pool of paediatric and general orthopaedic surgeons; I find it very satisfying and fulfilling.”

He also started Multidisciplinary Clinics for disabled children in both NUH and KKH, including a Seating Clinic which builds special seats to help severely disabled cerebral palsied children to sit up so that

they can see their environment instead of just looking at the ceiling, and to learn to use their hands. He was inspired to do this because of his training in Toronto.

One of his other contributions is the setting up of two special schools under the Rainbow Centre to provide early intervention, as well as programmes for autistic children and physically disabled children. One of the aims, he said, was to help integrate these children into normal schools.

For his efforts, he has won the President’s Social Service Award, Public Administration (Silver) Medal, Public Service Medal and the Clinician Mentor Award for mentoring students and trainees.

His contributions go beyond medical education, specialist training and social service. He has also contributed in research by setting up the NUS Tissue Engineering Programme, in which he and his team are working on stem cells to regenerate cartilage. “Instead of replacing worn out joints with metal and plastic prostheses, we try to heal them with the patient’s own cells.”

In addition, he was involved with Singapore’s biomedical initiative from the start in 2000 and he was the Executive Director of the Biomedical Research Council of the Agency for Science, Research and Technology (A\*STAR) between 2008 and 2012.

Eng Hin reflects, “From a lowly background in Penang, I have helped

Singapore in medicine, education, social service and research. I probably would not be able to do all this if I had remained in Penang." He attributes much of his success to the early formative years in the PFS.

He is currently still actively practising as a paediatric orthopaedic surgeon at both NUH and KKH. He is a Senior Consultant to the Ministry of Health, Senior Advisor to the Division of Graduate Medical Studies at NUS and is also helping Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Imperial College London with the development of the new Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine as member of their Governing Board and Chairman of the Academic Affairs Committee.

## Soo Khee Chee

*Head of National Cancer Centre*

*Year left school: 1969*



**Khee Chee examining a patient.**

For Soo Khee Chee, what stood out for him in PFS was the "intense sense of belonging that comes from a total immersion in an old school culture that emphasised not just achievements in academic studies but also in extra-curricular activities, especially sports."

He credits the school's British headmasters for having set the traditions and tone, running it like an English public school. But the teachers were "rather stern" and he remembers being punched by one of them in the face when he was in Form 2 as a means of instilling discipline – "all part of the growing up experience," he said.

What he treasures most are the friendships forged among students of diverse races and the "intense loyalty all of us have to our friends and school." As proof, he has kept in touch with his classmates over the years, especially those who had enrolled in the University of Singapore's Medical School.

"There were six of us and we are all still here," he said. "I think the school provided us with a vision of a broader world. It taught us good written and spoken English. It provided us with friends for networking and gave us a sense of belonging and pride in the achievements of our old boys."

After graduating in 1975, Khee Chee went to New South Wales, Australia where he worked as a Resident and Registrar at the Prince of Wales-Prince Henry Hospitals. In 1982, he obtained his Fellowship of the

Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

After deciding to specialise in head and neck surgery and surgical oncology, he moved to London to work in the Royal Marsden Hospital and later in the US at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre's Department of Surgery in New York.

In 1988, he returned to Singapore to work at the Department of Surgery at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH). In 1993, he was appointed head of the department and also senior consultant surgeon until 2004. In 1995, he obtained his Doctor of Medicine from the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Today, Khee Chee is the director of the National Cancer Centre, providing strategic leadership to more than 500 staff engaged in clinical care and research. He is also Vice-Dean of Clinical and Faculty Affairs at the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School. He is also Professor of Surgery at NUS.

He has helped to introduce a speciality of head and neck surgery and surgical oncology in Singapore. He is also involved in mentoring and nurturing a group of clinical scientists. "These are positions actively involved in medical science and serve as a bridge between basic scientists and clinicians," he said. "It is about bringing discoveries from the bench to the bedside and from the bedside to the bench."

He has wide-ranging research interests in conducting clinical trials for new

cancer treatments as well as in the field of biophotonics and its role as a new imaging modality for the early detection of cancer.

He has also trained international surgeons and has been Visiting Professor in the University of Toronto, Canada, the Jaslok Hospital and Research Centre in Mumbai, India, as well as Stanford University Medical Center (USA).

For his work, he was recognised with the Outstanding Teacher's Award in 1995 and Best Teacher (Undergraduate) Award in 2001. In 2003, he was awarded the National Day Award, Public Administration Medal (Gold) for all his contributions.

In 2008, he was given the National Outstanding Clinician Mentor Award from the Ministry of Health. In 2011, he was awarded the President's Science and Technology Medal in recognition for his contributions to Singapore's clinical service and healthcare landscape. He is currently the Benjamin Sheares Professor of Academic Medicine in Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School.

He is now involved in establishing collaborations between Singapore and Malaysia to bring the latest in cancer treatment to those who need it.

"This is a cancer centre that we are helping to set up in Penang. It started five years ago and we are partnering with the Adventist hospital to set up the Adventist Oncology Centre. It is a not-for-profit venture – the hospital provides the land to

build the cancer centre while we provide the expertise. We also host training sessions for their doctors and nurses here."

It is a project that resonates with him for as he says, "Penang is close to my heart".

## Peter Lim Ai Chi

*Senior Consultant*

*Singapore General Hospital*

*Year left school: 1972*



**Peter teaching in Qingdao, China.**

Peter Lim was in PFS for three years from 1970 to 1972 studying from Form 1 to Form 3 before moving with his family to Kuala Lumpur, where he completed his secondary education.

Yet, despite the short stint in PFS, his time there made the greatest impressions on him.

He explained, "The school instilled in us loyalty, camaraderie, an ethos of working

hard and striving for your goals. These qualities are what older schools effectively put in you as they have been developed over the years.

"These traditions are very important as you know you are part of a distinguished school where very notable people came from – high court judges, kings and our first prime minister. The implication was that you should similarly distinguish yourself because this is your bloodline and roots. It gave us a sense of belonging and continuity that goes back two hundred years and a sense of fellowship with people who are highly accomplished in other fields.

"Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard are successful and create successful graduates in part because belonging to such august institutions imbues in the students a sense that they are in a special place. They tend to be self-motivated and self-confident.

"So too in PFS where we were expected to do well in education while also focusing on outdoor activities and developing other qualities. Being in the Boy Scouts, for instance, taught us character, resilience, and cheerfulness. We went on tough hiking trips, camped in the pouring rain, but also had fun campfire sessions where girls from St George's and from the Convent Green Lane also took part. I used to be sickly as a kid but when I joined the Boy Scouts, I rarely got sick again."

He was referring to a time when as

a young boy he was often in and out of hospitals and clinics. He found hospitals and their smell of antiseptic fascinating. "I saw things such as needles and syringes being boiled for reuse, as well as sick people getting well. That was the start of my interest in medicine," he said. It was also the school spirit and ethos of serving which explains why "there are so many doctors among Old Frees."

He took a less well travelled path when he went to medical school in India after completing his A-levels. He went on to do postgraduate medical training in the US where he specialised in rehabilitation medicine. Peter's interest in this field stemmed from his orthopaedic surgery postings in India which included rehabilitation, and when he received an offer from the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago (RIC) at Northwestern University Medical School to further this interest, he took it up immediately.

After the residency programme, he stayed at the RIC as an attending fellow to do a subspecialty in arthritis-orthopaedic rehabilitation, working with patients with arthritis, fractures and joint replacements.

When he arrived in Singapore in 1992, he joined the only other rehabilitation physician in the public sector then and together they went on to train new specialists in rehabilitation in Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

Speaking of his work, he said, "We take care of people with disabilities – patients with strokes, spinal injuries, multiple fractures, joint replacements or cancer.

"We are doctors that can cross boundaries as our training is medical; we understand surgery, know what therapists do, and know what support systems exist in the hospitals and community. In other words, it is holistic medicine.

"Immediately after an accident or stroke, after the neurologist or surgeon finishes his job we take over. We have three main jobs. We take care of medical issues such as high blood pressure, blood sugar or electrolyte control, manage infections, and help to set medical parameters for therapists to work with. We also deal with complications resulting from these types of illnesses such as neurogenic bowel and bladder, autonomic dysfunction, neuropathic or musculoskeletal pain. And we lead the rehabilitation team which includes therapists, prosthetists and social workers.

"Our job is to help people get back on their feet or regain mobility and function so that they can return home and into society."

He returned to the US in 1993, where he established a fellowship programme for Singapore rehabilitation doctors to train at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas. He was persuaded to come back to Singapore in 2000 by Professor N Balachandran, the doyen

of orthopaedic surgeons to lead the development of Rehabilitation Medicine as a medical specialty in the Singapore General Hospital (SGH). Today, there are 10 consultant physicians and three senior resident specialists in training with the SGH Department of Rehabilitation Medicine.

Setting up the programme was in a sense fulfilling his duty. He continues to be actively involved in the teaching and development of medical rehabilitation not only in Singapore but also in Malaysia and around the region.

He is President of the Rehabilitation Medicine Society in Singapore, Chair of the Rehabilitation Physicians Chapter, College of Physicians Singapore, and was President of the ASEAN Rehabilitation Medicine Association. He is an associate editor of the American Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and is peer reviewer for various journals.

A senior consultant of SGH and Group Chief Risk Officer, SingHealth, he holds four faculty positions: Clinical Professor, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston; Adjunct Professor, Medical Faculty, University of Malaya; Clinical Senior Lecturer, NUS (National University of Singapore) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and Adjunct Associate Professor, Duke-NUS Medical School.

## Lim Beng Hai

Hand surgeon

Year left school: 1976



For Lim Beng Hai, PSF provided the platform for what he is doing now – microsurgery.

He explained, “Our teachers encouraged us to be

creative and to think out of the box. Because of the many experiments we were tasked to do, I realised I was good at tinkering with many hands and that is how I ended up in microsurgery as it is the only thing in medicine that allows me to do that.

“What’s good about it too is that I can recreate nice things so it is very satisfying.”

Microsurgery is surgery that requires a microscope as the structures being operated on are very small such as blood vessels, nerves and capillaries, so it is “very challenging,” he said.

Beng Hai is also involved in research. He was part of the team that developed the six-strand loop suture tendon repair technique used for flexor tendon repair known as the Lim-Tsai technique. He had developed it with his boss Dr Tsu-Min Tsai when he was studying in the US where he was doing his fellowship in Hand and Reconstructive Microsurgery at the Christine Kleinert Institute

for Hand and Microsurgery in 1994.

He now wants to improve on it. He said, “I am developing a tendon development device, provisionally called a teno button. I have been working on this since 1997/98. It is a long road and we are now almost in the first stage.

“I want to do a stronger technique after tendon repair. This is a paradigm shift since the patient does not have to wear a splint, usually for six weeks, for the hand to heal. He can go back to work much earlier. In other words, I am aiming to go towards a splint-free repair which will be pioneering in the world.”

Of his time in PFS, he said, “I have very good memories. They were very stimulating times.”

Yet for him, life was about meeting targets rather than studying hard. He said, “I was in Wellesley School and knew that if I did well enough I would end up in Free School. Every year, the quota was the first best performing 50 students. But in one year, it took only 45 and since I was 46th on the list, I did not get in. I finally entered the school only in the Lower Sixth Form.”

Despite spending two years there, he said he benefitted from the school. He also has a strong attachment to it as evidenced by his donation to build a new basketball court to replace the old court and his efforts to host students from PFS coming to Singapore to play games with Singapore

schools such as a recent team which had arrived to play in a rugby tournament with Raffles Institution.

Of his donation, he said it was prompted by a suggestion of his former classmate, Jalil, the school’s past principal who said that help was needed to replace some ageing equipment, among them the basketball court, to maintain the school’s standards.

“Since I benefitted from the school, I thought I should give back and so made the donation,” he said.

“Some Old Frees among us went back to PFS last year to visit the place and some old boys relived their experience there by sitting in the chairs in the classrooms!”

Beng Hai’s journey as a hand surgeon began after he graduated from the National University of Singapore (NUS) with a medical degree in 1985, following which he obtained his Master of Medicine and joined the Fellow Royal College of Surgeons (Edinburgh) in 1990. In the same year, he did an Advanced Hand Surgery Traineeship.

After completing his training in the Christine Kleinert Institute, he was awarded the Senior Fellowship in Hand Surgery by the University of Louisville Hospitals in 1995 to 1996. He was later appointed Adjunct Assistant Professor to the Department of Surgery, University of Louisville.

He returned to Singapore and in 1998, was accredited as a Specialist in Hand Surgery.

He was appointed consultant Hand Surgeon at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) and in 2000 became Chief of the Department of Hand and Reconstructive Microsurgery at the National University Hospital (NUH).

He revels in teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students. Among his accomplishments as chief of the Department of Hand and Reconstructive Surgery was setting up the Department's annual cadaveric symposium and workshop for General Practitioners in 2000 and in 2001, the Foundations in Musculoskeletal Surgery for advanced trainees in Hand, Plastics and Orthopaedic surgery.

He also established the Microsurgical Training Laboratory in NUH in 2001. As its Programme Director, he set up a joint training programme in microsurgery with Germany's Aesculap Academy in 2003. The success of the training laboratory prompted him to set up the STAR (Skills, Training And Research) Laboratory two years later, in NUH. This has since expanded to include the Digital Medicine Laboratory.

Today, Beng Hai is the director and senior consultant hand surgeon at the Centre for Hand And Reconstructive MicroSurgery (CHARMS) located at Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre. He is also a visiting senior consultant hand surgeon at the Department of Hand and Reconstructive Microsurgery, NUH.

## Wong Peng Cheang

Obstetrician and gynaecologist  
Year left school: 1970



“I studied four years in PFS before leaving after Upper Six in 1970 for the University of Malaya to study medicine. I had been in the Science stream all along.

“For me, the school was probably the best school in Penang and perhaps in all of Malaysia. It was very old with a long history with many illustrious alumni. Looking at the long list of successful alumni and what they achieved only motivated us to excel.

“A few things stood out during my time there.

“One was the ‘click-clock’ sound of my Headmaster’s (Tan Boon Lin) shoes as he walked around along the corridors inspecting the school, staff and students. Another was a rather painful witnessing of a boy receiving public caning during school assembly in front of all the teachers and students.

“Lower Six was a year of reckoning because my class became co-ed and we had five girls joining us. They were very popular among the boys. We welcomed them.

“After graduation, I came to Singapore in 1977 because I wanted to be trained to be an obstetrician and gynaecologist. I heard



Wong Peng Cheang (standing, extreme left, in the group photo on the front page of *The Straits Times*, 21 May 1983) was a member of the original team which pioneered IVF (in-vitro fertilisation) in Singapore.

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of the famous Kandang Kerbau Hospital and of its doctors like Dr Lean Tye Hin and Professor SS Ratnam.

“After obtaining my MRCOG, I became interested in the study and treatment of fertility problems and was a member of the

original team which pioneered IVF (in-vitro fertilisation) in Singapore.

“Next I went to the US on a fellowship and on my return to Singapore started to get even more involved. By then the thought of returning to Malaysia did not arise because at that time IVF treatment was not carried out in Malaysia. It was obvious that if I wanted to progress in this field, I should remain in Singapore and pursue my career further here.

“The school’s motto ‘Strong and faithful’ struck a chord with me. The school helped us to learn how to be independent. In extracurricular activities or in the various societies that we joined, the teacher-in-charge was more of a guide and we were largely left to pursue our projects. So we developed a lot of leadership, drive and team building. We grew into the role.

“I think one of the school’s special traits is well reflected in our school song which we sang at assembly. One of its lines was ‘Free School for the brave and for the true’ - it was a constant reminder that we should pursue our goals with heart and soul.”

## Chan Kong Thoe

*Retired surgeon*

*Year left school: 1948*



As a star surgeon he made headlines in May 1970 when he performed Singapore’s first kidney transplant. Yet, that was only one of a long list of milestones Chan Kong Thoe had been chalking up, right from the time when he enrolled in Penang Free School in December 1941 to begin Standard VI.

Alas, his education was interrupted when Penang fell to the Japanese soon after and it was not until September 1945 when World War II ended that he was able to resume schooling.

Recalling the times then, he said, “I was in PFS in December 1941 for only about a week. I was so impressed by it. The school looked immense with its long corridors. The school field was endless in my mind with a shooting range at an inner end which made the school look ‘very advanced’. But I never saw it used though.

“After the war was over when Penang was liberated in August, PFS reopened in September. Things happened pretty quickly. A brigadier in the British Army was appointed our headmaster but was soon assigned to Kuala Lumpur to be the Director of Education, Malaya. Some teachers were also from the British Army. I remember a Major Miller who taught Geography; he always wore shorts and had a very strong Midlands accent and it was difficult sometimes to make out what he was saying.

“Our Maths teacher and Form Master, Mr Ong Teong Guan was outstanding; he was patient and made maths easy. Later, it was Ooi Khay Bian, who had a BA. He was also very good but had favourites, which was quite a common weakness in those days. Targar Singh was a great Geography teacher, making the subject lively and interesting. He was a very friendly man who used to cycle to school. I had known him since my elementary school days at Westlands School. Later, he went to PFS and was an excellent Scoutmaster and became the Rover Master when I started the first Rover Crew in PFS for

Senior Scouts. I was the Senior Rover Mate, which was the equivalent to Troop Leader in Scouting. A Rover crew traditionally cannot be headed by a minor (below age 21) and we were all schoolboys. It was the first Rover Crew in a school in this part of the world so we made history.

“Competition in PFS was very keen as it had high academic and leadership standards and we were studying among the very best. The kind of environment it provided helped to shape and mature my character.”

It also propelled him to maintain high standards for himself throughout his life - winning awards in school, getting appointed as School Captain, winning the coveted Queen’s Scholarship in his final year at PFS and topping his medical school examinations for all his six years of study. In his graduation year in 1954 when he was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, he scooped up all seven awards that were up for grabs by medical students.

Ironically, medicine was not his first choice. He said, “It was engineering all my life till then. I had scholarships for both the King Edward VII Medical College and Raffles College in Singapore, but my preference was Science and to obtain a BSc at Raffles which baffled all the teachers and my fellow students as medicine was the prime choice then. I changed to medicine at the last minute as I knew my parents would like it

although they never persuaded me.”

He was thrilled to be awarded the Queen’s Scholarship although by his own admission, he was “not too surprised”. He explained, “I had a very good academic record and could speak well and with confidence in interviews. By special dispensation from the Malayan Government, I was allowed to keep the title of Queen’s Scholar as I had won a better scholarship from the Singapore Government. I kept the title of Queen’s Scholar but had no emoluments. The rule then was that a person could hold only one scholarship or prize at any time. It also meant that I had to give up a Hutchings Scholarship that I had also won.”

He began his medical career in 1955 as a trainee under Benjamin Sheares (who later became Singapore’s second president) in the Obstetrics & Gynaecology department of Kandang Kerbau Hospital (KKH). Part of his two-year training had to include six months of full-time surgical training. He was attached to the “A” unit at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH). The unit was headed by Yeoh Ghim Seng who was later appointed as Singapore’s Speaker of Parliament. It was Professor Yeoh who steered him into a surgical career by declining to let him return to KKH.

In 1959, after passing the difficult FRCS (Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons) England examination after only

three months of preparation instead of a projected 33 months, Kong Thoe worked in two of England’s most famous hospitals – St Thomas and St James University Hospital – with top British surgeons.

After two years, he returned to work in the University of Singapore’s department of surgery as a lecturer and also as a surgeon back in the “A” unit at SGH where he did all the liver surgeries using techniques he had learnt from England.

In 1965, he took a sabbatical leave of six months after he had won a Hunterian Professorship from the Royal College of Surgeons, England to do research on liver cancer. He later went on to study kidney and liver transplantation in the United States where he performed experimental kidney transplants on dogs. In 1967, he was appointed head of the “A” unit as well as head of the university department of surgery where he introduced new and up-to-date surgical procedures. He was the first to do gastroscopy, laparoscopy (keyhole surgery) and other surgical procedures.

His preoccupation then as he puts it, “was to do liver transplants as liver cancer was one of the commonest cancers here. I was learning about liver transplants at Harvard Medical School and was on its Liver Transplant Team but no liver transplant was done during my time there. Finally, in Singapore, we did kidney transplants instead as all artificial kidneys for dialysis then at the

National Kidney Foundation were fully used.”

His historic kidney transplant in 1970 was so successful that the recipient of the transplanted kidney, who had been very ill prior to the surgery, went on to live for another 22 years.

Although Kong Thoe retired from the department of surgery before it carried out Singapore’s first liver transplant in 1990, it was his work and teaching that had set the stage for the transplant.

He observed, “There has been immense progress since I started doing surgery with many new surgical procedures and research being done now.”

# Architecture

## Lim Chong Keat

Year left school: 1948



**D**ato’ Seri Lim Chong Keat is a significant figure in Singapore’s post-independent architectural scene, having been the man behind some of

the Republic’s most noteworthy buildings built in the 1960s and 1970s. They include Singapore Conference Hall and Trade Union House (completed in 1965 under Malayan Architects Co-partnership with partners Chen Voon Fee and William Lim), Malaysia-Singapore Airlines Building (completed in 1969 under Architects Team 3) and Jurong Town Hall (completed in 1974 also with Architects Team 3).

With two of these buildings - Singapore Conference Hall and Trade Union House and Jurong Town Hall - declared national

monuments, Chong Keat has put an indelible mark on Singapore’s architectural scene.

The former, which has been recognised as a first-rate example of international style architecture in Singapore, emphasises the universality of his work even though it has also been noted for the *mengkuang* mat-inspired mosaic pattern on one of its exterior walls, a nod to the architect’s penchant for including local elements in his designs.

And thanks to his background in acoustics, Chong Keat went on to design other concert halls such as DBS Auditorium in Singapore, the Geodesic Dome (Dewan Tunku) and Shah Alam Town Council Auditorium in Kuala Lumpur and Penang’s 65-storey Komtar Tower in George Town, Malaysia’s tallest building until 1988.

Outstanding practitioner apart, Chong Keat has also been influential in moulding the earliest batches of architectural graduates when he was a lecturer at the Singapore Polytechnic where architecture was first established as a course in 1958 before it became a degree course at the University of Singapore in 1965.

Chong Keat has also played an important role on the architectural world stage in organisations such as the Commonwealth Association Architects (CAA), as the co-founding chairman of Architects Regional Council Asia (ARCASIA) and as chairman of the Commonwealth



**Singapore Conference Hall and Trade Union House.**

Board of Architectural Education (CBAE).

Chong Keat belongs to one of Penang's most prominent families. His brother, Lim Chong Eu, served as the state's second Chief Minister from 1969 to 1990.

Chong Keat studied architecture in the University of Manchester where he graduated with a BA Hons in architecture and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) where he obtained his master's degree in architecture with special interest in acoustics.

Although he was born in Penang, his links with Singapore go deep as it was the birthplace of his father, Lim Chwee Leong who was sent to Penang to serve as a doctor by his father while his brother, also a doctor, remained to serve in Singapore.

Chong Keat was invited back to Singapore in April 2015 to share his memories by giving a public talk as part of the Singapore Institute of Architects'

initiative to develop a database on pioneer architects and to record the republic's architectural history as part of its SG50 efforts to celebrate Singapore's Jubilee year of its modern founding. He has served as president of the Singapore Institute of Architects and on several public boards including the Singapore Housing and Development Board.

Today, the retired architect spends his time researching on botanical species and conservation in Penang and publishes the journal *Folia malaysiana*. As an avid botanist for the past 30 years, Chong Keat is passionate about documenting the island's rich flora, particularly palms and gingers of which he has discovered some 30 new species that are endemic to Penang.

Apart from pursuing his botanical passion, Chong Keat continues to cultivate his long-standing interest in the artworks of regional artists of which he has a very large private collection. A man of eclectic tastes, Chong Keat's interests extend to design, anthropology, music and art.

He is the founder chairman of the Penang Heritage Trust and has served on the board of the Penang State Museum.

## Tay Lee Soon

Year left school: 1949



“The ‘accidental architect’ label given to me may appear to be so when one looks in retrospect to the years spent in schools in Penang and in the University in

Melbourne.

“Listening to stories from family members of the greatest school in Malaya and to enrol in it in January 1950, from Francis Light School was a dream. I could not forget the concern of the class masters, the winning spirit of the sports masters and the camaraderie of the fellow students in the classes.

“I played cricket and hockey for Wu Lien-Teh's House and was swimming captain for the school. We all wanted to do well and give our best. Like when I hit the winning run in the inter-college cricket match against Malay College Kuala Kangsar or when the School beat Chung Ling High School in water polo. Announcements were made in the school assembly recognising the feats of the sportsmen of the school.

“In the early days at school, I dreamt of joining ‘General Templars 1000’ or the police force or the teaching profession since both my parents were school teachers, as some of

my buddies in the cricket, hockey and swimming teams did. However, after much thought and advice, and the family realising that I had the ability, talent and tenacity to achieve something, I decided to study

architecture. This decision did not arrive easily as I was made to sketch most of the iconic buildings in Penang such as the Municipality Buildings at the Esplanade, Buddhist Association Building at Anson Road and, of course, the Penang Free School. Finally I secured a job as an apprentice draughtsman in an architectural office in Singapore.

"I made an application to the Royal Melbourne Technical College and joined the college in January 1956. I later joined the University of Melbourne and graduated in 1961. That was how I became an architect. 'Accidental'? No, and it did not turn out too badly.

"In keeping with and true to the PFS spirit, I managed to balance studies and sports, excelling in hockey. I played premier grade hockey for the school, the Crusaders and the University of Melbourne. The work/sport spirit held on even when I was



**Lee Soon on his design for the Tan Chong Motors showroom on Bukit Timah Road: "I deliberately made it slightly slanted so that the cars in the showroom did not reflect off the cars passing by thus blinding motorists."**

practising as an architect. I was a member of the very successful Singapore Water Polo team at the SEAP (Southeast Asia Peninsular Games) and SEA (Southeast Asia) Games from 1965 to 1969.

"On graduating in 1961, I joined Booty Edwards Sdn Bhd and later was transferred to its Singapore office. I started Architects 61 Pte Ltd in 1974 and retired from practice in 2008. Architects 61 Pte Ltd developed into one of the major architectural firms with offices and projects completed in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Jakarta, Manila, India, Cambodia and Vietnam. I completed many major works and won awards including the Presidential Award for Design of the Conservation of Fullerton Hotel in Singapore. The firm has also associated and collaborated with many renowned architects such as Paul Rudolph, I M Pei, Kenzo Tange and Helmut Jahn.

"On reflection of the many types of

projects I have done, I find that I enjoy the challenges imposed on the conservation of old buildings and houses, where I have to balance and appreciate the philosophy and structure of the original architect and also enhancing the buildings to meet the requirements and aspirations of the Clients. Architecture to me is to not only to conceive beautiful building structures but it has to meet the owner's functional requirements and complete it within the budget and time. Within these confines and if we can produce a masterpiece, then it is a bonus.

"The grounding of honesty, integrity instructed and learned early from family and school has been my guiding principle through the years. An 'accidental' architect? ... I don't think so. FORTIS ADQUE FIDELIS."

## Heah Hock Heng

*Year left school: 1953*



Another architect who has put his mark on Singapore's architectural landscape is Heah Hock Heng.

He is best known for having designed the tower wing of

the Shangri-La Singapore, which opened in April 1971 as one of Singapore's first five-star

luxury hotels. Its owner, Robert Kuok, also tasked him to build the Rasa Sayang Resort in Penang, which opened in November 1973. Located at Batu Ferringhi, it earned a name as the largest beach resort in the region and till today is known for its distinctive Minangkabau roofs.

Working on hotels was a delight for Hock Heng as he had written on hospitality architecture for his thesis at Cambridge University. His first project though was not a hotel building but Singapore's Ngee Ann College (now Polytechnic) on Clementi Road.

From hotels, his architectural firm, Seah, Lee & Heah went on to design several other buildings in Singapore – many of them luxury condominiums such as Futura, Draycott Towers and Westwood that were classified as iconic then because of their unusual look.

He said, "We were experimenting with new forms then. Having studied classical architecture we did not do irregular shapes that computers can now give you. We had to draw then and that was the most satisfying part of our work."

However, he laments that after 30 years many of his projects have been torn down during the enbloc sales fever a decade ago which saw owners selling their properties to developers to re-build anew.

Today, Hock Heng works as consultant to firms such as New Space Architecture. "I bring in projects and do the initial

concept," he says.

Hailing from a prominent family in Penang, Hock Heng was the youngest of several brothers who all studied at PFS. "I thought it strange at first as our father was himself educated at St Xavier's. He was a rubber magnet and had dealings with many British brokers and I guess he could see the difference between PFS which had the cream of the crop among its teachers, many of whom, like our headmaster then (JE Tod) came from Cambridge and Oxford University while St Xavier's was run by missionaries.

"My brothers and I, however, were grateful for being in PFS as we were able to benefit from its traditions, its emphasis on good ethics and the teaching of English."

His school years were compressed as he did not start education until the age of 11. Recalling the circumstances, he said, "I was in Westlands Primary School for just three days when the Japanese bombed Penang and our family was whisked to Penang Hill for our safety. We stayed there for four years."

After the end of the war, he returned to Westlands to study for four years before he moved on to PFS in 1950. "I left in 1953 at age 17 without finishing school. My father Heah Joo Seang was heavily involved in politics as president of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and Penang had a lot of thugs then. I remember having bodyguards when I was in my teens.

"Deciding that I would be safer out of Penang, he packed me off to England to do my 'A' levels. I suspect he also did not approve of my being smitten with a fellow student in PFS!"

He went on to study architecture in Cambridge.

Despite being in PFS for only three years, Hock Heng says he has fond memories of his school days.

"We had a maths teacher, Khoo Kay Beng, who gave us a good grounding in the subject. Our headmaster JE Tod who came across as very strict was actually very kind. He helped me when I was in England and got me to understand what studying in Cambridge was all about.

"We also had a voluptuous biology teacher and her classes were always well-attended and we all passed with flying colours.

"I was involved in sports - badminton, volleyball and football - which led to a lot of camaraderie among players. Through badminton, I got to know Eddy Choong, who later became a four-time champion of the All-England Open.

"There were less glorious moments though like when I was made to stand on the chair at the back of the classroom for being naughty and a girl that I liked came by and saw me – it was most embarrassing."

These days, it looks as if Hock Heng's life has come full circle. He is about to embark on another hotel project, back in Penang.

“This is to restore the former Crag Hotel on Penang Hill to AmanCrag and make it a luxury resort. It will have 20 rooms and the plan is to offer guests who stay there the same unique Aman experience of resort living,” he said.

## Ken Yeang

*Year left school: 1962*



Recognised globally as an eco-architect, Dato' Dr. Ken Yeang's design for Singapore's National Library Board headquarters on Victoria Street

received Singapore's Building and Construction Authority (BCA) Green Mark Platinum Award when it opened in 2005. This is the highest level of rating for environment-friendly buildings.

The building, besides consuming 70 per cent less energy than the industry average, also scored in its deployment of other 'green' features such as the ecological use of vegetation and landscaping that contributed to improving the indoor thermal environment and enhancing the biodiversity of its urban locality, its multi-storey sky-courts, large light-shelves to the Reading Rooms, solar sun-shading to the facades, a

naturally-ventilated central atrium and other innovations.

Another building that Ken completed in Singapore is the Solaris at the one-north business park which has received numerous awards. The building uses a 'tree' as a metaphor for its design, with a spiralling vegetated ramp in an ecological nexus from the basement to its top-most level, which Ken calls a 'vertical linear park'. Solaris was also given a BCA Green Mark Platinum Award and was shortlisted for the Royal Institute of British Architects' Lubetkin Prize in 2012.

Eco-architecture, also known as green architecture, gained prominence in 1990 when the United Nations met to discuss the impact of climate change and what could be done to deal with it. For Ken, however, his interest in eco-architecture started long before it became an industry buzzword in 1971 when he did his PhD at Cambridge University on the topic. He started as a researcher at the university working on the "autonomous" house project as a building that operated without relying on the city's utilities of electricity, water and sewerage. His doctoral dissertation on ecological design and planning gained him a PhD in 1974, and became his life's agenda. He was made an Honorary Fellow of Wolfson College in Cambridge University in 2015.

For Ken, buildings should respect

and biointegrate with nature instead of the other way around, as has been the standard practice. To do this, his design approach is to mimic the attributes of ecosystems in nature. Besides his work on eco-architecture, he is also a pioneer in the bioclimatic design of tall buildings.

His bioclimatic designs can be seen in Malaysia and elsewhere in the world. The high-tech Menara Mesiniaga in Subang Jaya, Selangor is a 15-storey tower capped by a sun-roof over a pool. Built over a raised green mound, it has terraced gardens gracing the balconies and external louvres as sun-shades while the tower uses natural ventilation in its elevator lobbies to reduce energy consumption. It received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1995 and several other industry awards.

Even Ken's residence, the Roof-Roof House completed in 1985, reflects his novel ideas on bioclimatic passive-mode low-energy architecture, having a double roof that lets in light and shades out the sun depending on the time of the day and the sun's path. His recently completed Extension to the Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital in London received the UK's BREEAM 'excellent' rating.

Ken interned for a year in Singapore from 1969-1970, working on the Mandarin Hotel extension before returning to the UK to complete his studies. He is a corporate member of Singapore's Board of Architects

and a Fellow of the Singapore Institute of Architects.

Singapore's BCA awarded him its lifetime achievement award in green architecture in 2015. He received Malaysia Government's Merdeka Award, being its equivalent of the Nobel Prize. The UK newspaper, *Guardian* named him as 'one of the fifty people who could save the planet.'

He lives between Kuala Lumpur and London.

## Chan Soo Khian

*Year left school: 1980*



Chan Soo Khian, also known as Soo K Chan, is known for clean modern lines yet with a touch of the classical when it comes to designing buildings.

However, while aesthetics are important in architecture, he firmly believes that buildings must also be functional and serve the client's needs.

He describes his style as "neo-tropical architecture", a term that has since become part of the architectural lexicon.

Indeed, his characteristic tropical yet contemporary buildings earned him the President's Designer of the Year Award in

2006 and he is credited with pushing Asian architecture into new directions.

He has a slew of other awards to his name including the Miami Biennale 2005 International Competition for The Ladyhill and The Royal Institute of British Architects Worldwide Award 2005 for the Lincoln Modern - both condominium projects in Singapore.

Founder and principal design director of SCDA Architects, his company is engaged not only in architecture but also in interiors, landscaping and product design.

Its multi-faceted approach has led it to work in areas such as master planning, resorts and hotels, commercial buildings, high-rise luxury apartments and houses all over the world. This includes the Lonudhuhuttaa in the Maldives, the OneKL condominium in Kuala Lumpur and the Singapore High Commission in New Delhi.

Currently, he is involved in four projects in New York City, three of which are luxury condominiums while the fourth is a hotel in Lower Manhattan.

His first development, the 31-unit Soori High Line project made headlines with its "resort living in the city" theme when it was launched in 2014. Half of its units will feature a private pool while all of the interiors and furniture in every one of its units are personally designed by Soo Khian.

Soo Khian's interest in New York stems from the time he had spent there as a doctorate candidate for a master's

degree in architecture in Yale University. He moved there after completing a degree in architecture from Washington University. He then worked for two years in the well-known architectural firm of Kohn Pederson Fox. A company project in Singapore led him here in 1990.

He later joined Architects 61 before striking out on his own with SCDA (Soo Chan Design Associates) in 1995.

Soo Khian has expanded the scope of his company's work to include other aspects of lifestyle such as the design and furnishing of Alila Villas Soori, Bali, a luxury resort that he owns and Comptoir Soori, a wine bar and epicerie located in the same row of shophouses as SCDA in Singapore's Chinatown.

Apart from being a practitioner, he imparts his knowledge through teaching architectural courses in various universities such as the University of Paris and Notre Dame University, Syracuse University and the National University of Singapore, which recently conferred him as Professor in NUS (Architecture).

He has fond memories of his time in Penang Free School where he enjoyed drawing caricatures of his teachers and passing them around. This penchant for drawing and his interest in building toys such as Lego stimulated his desire to become an architect – a good choice indeed.

# The Arts

## Dennis Lee

Pianist

Year left school: 1962



Living the life of a nomad is par for the course for Dennis Lee, a world renowned concert pianist. His performance schedule is booked two years ahead but he can sometimes receive a call to replace someone who has fallen ill and he has to take the first flight out as a replacement with just a few hours' notice.

It may be a bit of a bohemian lifestyle, he says, but he enjoys it despite the uncertainty about where he might be going. With his regular concert schedule, however, he knows well in advance where he is heading to. The 40 concerts he does each year take him around the world but he says he tries to make sure he returns to Singapore and Penang at every available opportunity.

Both places hold a soft spot for him – Penang as it was his hometown and Singapore as it is where he has held many a concert over the past four decades.

His interest in music began when he started piano lessons in the 1950s. He remembers how he used to practise on the piano and the violin instead of joining his classmates in playing football in PFS. Although it might have created a bit of a barrier then, he managed to forge some long-lasting friendships with other Old Frees. One of them is Tan Yew Oo who always looks forward to welcoming Dennis to his home whenever he is in Singapore to perform.

Dennis says, "I left PFS after Form 5 in 1962 to take my A-levels, two diplomas and two degrees in the UK. I also hold Singapore Permanent Residence. Already when I was still studying in the UK, I came back to the East periodically and gave recitals in Singapore - usually at the Victoria Concert Hall, Conference Centre and the DBS Auditorium.

"These were presented by various organisers including Donald Moore, the then Ministry of Culture and the Singapore Music Teachers' Association.

"It was a helpful experience for a young aspiring pianist like me. I also played a concerto with the Goh Soon Tioe Orchestra, as well as charity recitals for churches and orphanages.

"Later on, there was a 'mixed' programme presented by the Economic Development Board at Suntec, and more recently, two recitals of French piano music at the National Museum when the Musée d'Orsay of Paris loaned Singapore more than 100 Impressionist paintings.

"There have also been numerous masterclasses at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, and various talks about the importance of careful reading of piano repertoire and how to prepare for music exams for private music schools.

"I treasure the many occasions when I have played with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, at the Victoria Concert Hall as well as the Esplanade Cultural Centre. Most recently, my wife (Toh Chee Hung) and I performed a recital at the newly refurbished Victoria Concert Hall for SG50.

"We continue to hold dear our links with the cultural life of Singapore, while fulfilling our commitments in Europe, the USA and Canada, and other parts of Asia."

"I was also an examiner for the (UK

Royal Schools of Music for over 30 years, and this work took me to many countries including Australia, New Zealand, Turkey, USA, Canada, Hong Kong, Switzerland and Scandinavia. Now and then I am still invited to judge festivals and competitions all over the world, as well as give masterclasses. I find this variety stimulating, and hearing how other people approach music in different countries has helped me widen my horizons."

## CM Wong

*Chinese Antiques Collector and Historian*  
Year left school: 1921

A noted antiques collector and acknowledged as an authority on Chinese arts and culture, Wong Chong Min, better known as CM Wong, received his early education in English at PFS after his family had moved to Penang from Hong Kong where he was born.

The year was 1910 and the family was to move again in 1921, this time to China. It was during his two-year stay there that he developed an interest in the Chinese language and culture.

In 1923, the family moved to Singapore where the young CM Wong's proficiency in English and Chinese landed him a job as a court interpreter, a position he held for well over 35 years.

While carrying out his duties as an interpreter, CM Wong found time to deepen his interest in Chinese arts and to share his knowledge with others.

To this end, he co-founded the China Society of Singapore with Lee Siow Mong, another renowned Chinese culture expert, in January 1949. The idea behind the society was to spread the word on the finer aspects of Chinese culture to locals and expatriates alike. He reached out to them with talks and courses in Chinese arts and literature conducted in English.

He even put together a book on the subject in a 25th anniversary journal of the China Society of Singapore 1949-1974 as part of the organisation's commemorative celebrations. The China Society with its office at the Singapore Chamber of Commerce on Hill Street still thrives today.

For years, CM Wong and Lee Siow Mong were much sought after to give talks on "all things Chinese" at luncheons organised by associations such as the Rotary Club. He was often quoted for his views on Chinese culture and had been referred to on many an occasion as a "Chinese almanac expert".

To further promote Chinese antiques and paintings, he formed the Eastern Antique and Appreciation Society in 1980 with fellow antiques collector Lieu Tien Chung.

An affable man, CM Wong was also noted as an authority on Chinese jade. He was well-respected by his peers and

appreciated for his willingness to help.

His home in Tiong Bahru was described by a journalist Hoo Yew Gee during a visit as being akin to a Chinese museum. He wrote, "The furniture in his home and the paintings on the walls were all antiques."

Despite his large collection of priceless treasures, he was quoted by his daughter Rollyne, at his passing at the age of 88 in 1991, "All of man's material possessions are transient. Only experience and knowledge in our minds can be permanent and no one can take them away from us."

## P Ramlee

*Actor/director*

Year left school: 1947



The name P Ramlee is synonymous with the Malay film industry.

He was a man of many talents – actor, film director, singer, songwriter, music composer

and comedian. On top of this, he was an accomplished musician who played the ukulele, guitar, piano and violin. No other artiste in the Malay entertainment industry could hold a candle to him – even today, 40 years after his passing.

Born in Penang in 1929 of an Achehnese

father and Malayan mother, P Ramlee studied in PFS until the outbreak of World War II. During the Japanese Occupation that followed, he attended the Japanese Navy Academy but after the war ended, he was able to resume his studies at PFS where he was very active in sports, particularly badminton, football and sepak takraw.

In 1947, P Ramlee made a name for himself when he came in first in a song competition organised by Penang Radio. A year later, he was spotted by film director B S Rajhans when he sang in a music festival in Bukit Mertajam, Province Wellesley. Rajhans offered P Ramlee a role in Singapore as a playback singer for the lead actor in a movie titled *Cinta* (Love). It was to be produced by Malay Film Productions (MFP) which had been set up by the famed Shaw Brothers in 1947.

It was another film director, L Krishnan who gave P Ramlee his big break when he cast him in the lead role in *Bakti* (Faithfulness) in which he was required to sing five songs. It would be the first time that an actor would sing in his own voice. It was L Krishnan's first film after joining MFP in 1949. The movie was to launch both Krishnan's and P Ramlee's careers.

The movie premiered at Shaw's Rex Cinema in April 1950. It was a box office success and the film was shown in cinemas throughout Malaya as well.

Acknowledged as the pioneers of Malay



**The memory of P Ramlee lives on in his old family home, which has been preserved in Penang.**

cinema, the Shaw Brothers' studio located at 8 Jalan Ampas was prolific, churning out 150 Malay-language films in 20 years. P Ramlee was involved in one third of them. The 1950s and 1960s were truly the Golden Age of Malay cinema.

Hardworking and talented, P Ramlee went on to not only act but also direct movies. He acted in 65 movies, directed 34 films and sang 390 songs. He had a close relationship with Run Run Shaw, who was running the family business in Singapore. He brought Ramlee to film festivals around the globe. It was said that Run Run Shaw had such faith in P Ramlee that he would easily approve the projects that the latter wanted to work on.

Ramlee directed his first movie *Penarik Beca* in 1955. Some of his best known films were *Hang Tuah* (1956), *Musang Berjanggut* (The Bearded Fox, 1959) and *Madu Tiga* (The Three Wives, 1964). Ramlee became a

legendary figure and an icon of Malay arts and entertainment.

In 1967, MFP shut down when Kuala Lumpur became the new hub for Malay films after Shaw Organisation set up the Merdeka Film Productions studio there.

Ramlee relocated there and made several more films before it closed down in 1977. But alas, he was unable to retain the fame that he enjoyed while he was in Singapore. Still, no one has come close to matching him in his acting talents.

He died of a heart attack in May 1973, aged only 44. In 1990, he was posthumously awarded the Panglima Setia Mahkota (PSM), with the title Tan Sri. In the same year, he was accorded the title of Seniman Agong (Great Artiste).

Although MFP in Singapore was shut down after Ramlee had left, its premises at Jalan Ampas remain and there has been talk about preserving it as a film museum.

Today, Ramlee is remembered in Penang by a road named after him in 1983 – Jalan P Ramlee, formerly known as Caunter Hall Road where he was born. His family's wooden house, built by his father and uncle, has been restored and is open for visits. Next door is the Pustaka Warisan Seni Complex which houses the P Ramlee Gallery displaying various aspects of the artiste's illustrious career.

# Business

## Chan U Seek

*Businessman*

*Year left school: 1946*

He was one of the earliest high-flyers, holding a trusted position as director in various companies and as a government advisor.

Born in 1925 in Ipoh, Chan U Seek spent his early childhood in Medan, Sumatra, where his family had settled when he was just six months old.

In 1938, he was sent to Penang to be educated in a secondary school. He secured a place in PFS but the Japanese invasion of 1942 and subsequent occupation of Penang cut short his schooling. He returned to Medan where he worked as a clerk for Mitsubishi Shoji Kaisha. When the war ended in 1945, he went back to Penang to resume his studies but a lack of tables and chairs in PFS saw him spending the first several weeks in Chung Ling High School.

Alas, U Seek found it difficult to re-

adjust to school so he quit in 1946 to work in a trading company Chee Seng & Co that had been set up by his father and some partners. The company was an importer and exporter of goods and produce to and from Indonesia. Trade had to be conducted by barter as Indonesia, which was fighting the Dutch for independence then, did not have a lawful currency of its own.

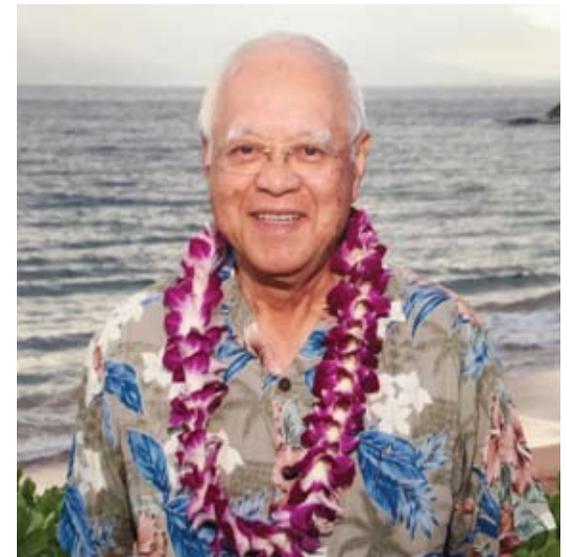
The company had to obtain permits from both Dutch and Indonesian officials to conduct its business. What's more, all cargo had to be inspected by the Dutch navy to ensure that restricted items were not entering Indonesia. Despite the trying times, the work that U Seek did provided him with valuable experience in dealing with the Indonesian business community and Indonesian officials – know-how that would come in useful later in his career.

In 1955, the Hong Kong-based Jardine Matheson Group (Jardine Group) was keen to expand their business in Southeast Asia due to trade restrictions in China. The Jardine Group conducted this expansion through an investment in Henry Waugh and Co. In the same year, U Seek was offered employment by Henry Waugh and Co (later renamed Jardine Waugh Limited) as an executive director based in Singapore.

The Jardine Group did not have business in Indonesia at the time, and U Seek was responsible for expanding its business interests there in various sectors



**Chan U Seek was a well-respected figure in Singapore's business community and beyond.**



**U Seek at the Airbus Golf Invitational in Maui, Hawaii in June 2008.**



**In the early days of the Jardine Group in Singapore.**

such as consumer goods, aviation and newsprint. In September 1963, U Seek and a colleague from the Jardine Group were appointed by the Deputy Colonial Secretary of Hong Kong to negotiate the terms of agreements between Hong Kong and Indonesia for the processing of raw cotton supplied to Indonesia. Hong Kong was involved as Indonesia did not have sufficient spinning capacity to turn the raw cotton into yarn. U Seek negotiated the allocation of raw cotton and yarn prices with the Indonesian government.

U Seek rose through the ranks steadily and was appointed by the Jardine Group to act as its Director of Aviation and Armaments in 1963. This was a position he

held until his resignation from the Jardine Group in 1970.

Building on the foundation laid by his exposure to businesses and government in Indonesia early on in his career, U Seek became an advisor to the Singapore government on the development of trading relations with Indonesia on numerous occasions.

The earliest known record of U Seek's public service was his participation as a member of Singapore's trade and economic mission to Indonesia on 12 February 1967 in response to an invitation from the Indonesian government. This mission was led by then permanent secretary (Economic Development) at the Ministry of Finance



**U Seek was intimately involved in the aviation industry.**

Sim Kee Boon. In the same year, U Seek accepted an appointment as a member of the Economic Development Board (EDB), a government agency in charge of creating business and job opportunities for Singaporeans.

Through to around 1969, U Seek continued to promote trade between Singapore and Indonesia through various official dialogues of a similar nature held in each of the two countries. One of these was a Tourism Technical Fact Finding Mission on 28 April 1968 to discuss with the Indonesian government certain proposals to develop the island of Bali for tourism.

Led by then deputy secretary of the Ministry of Finance and deputy chairman

of the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board Ngiam Tong Dow, the mission comprising 10 delegates spent 12 days in Jakarta and Bali.

With great foresight, the Singapore government believed that tourists flying to Bali would pass through Singapore if Bali were to become a tourist destination. U Seek was appointed advisor to the mission.

As a result of his business and personal reputation in Singapore, U Seek was also invited to chair the Singapore Ex-Political Detainees Aftercare Society from March 1970 to 2000 (following his role as committee member since April 1968). This was an organisation formed to reintegrate former political detainees into mainstream society and to help them live stable and productive lives in Singapore. Having served its purpose, the Society was dissolved in 2000. In recognition of his contributions, U Seek was honoured with a National Day Award in 1984.

In 1970, U Seek resigned from Jardine Waugh Limited to set up his own business, conducted through Associated Equipment Pte Ltd. Over the years, he acquired a reputation as a leader in the business community by embarking on a myriad of commercial ventures in diverse sectors ranging from aviation to retail by forming lasting partnerships with local business magnates.

He served as a director in Metro Holdings Limited for more than three decades, since its listing in 1973. As a

skilled negotiator, he was involved in Metro Holdings' acquisition of the Orchard Square Project (today's Ngee Ann City) from the British Crown Agents for Overseas Governments and Administrations in 1975. In 1973, U Seek was a founding director of Avimo Singapore Ltd, a joint venture between Sheng-Li Holdings Co Pte Ltd (predecessor of Singapore Technologies Engineering) USH International and himself. Avimo was engaged in the making of defence-related electro-optical equipment, and held a successful public offer in 1987.

A regular fixture at the Paris and Farnborough air shows for decades, U Seek had a keen interest in aviation and was the Chairman of Aerostar Leasing Ltd, a company formed in the 1990s which helped to modernise the fleet of Vietnam Airlines through the leasing of Airbus aircraft to the airline.

Despite a very successful career that saw him moving around in the highest levels of the business world and in top government circles, those who knew U Seek recall him as an amiable, warm, down-to-earth person with no airs.

Outside the corporate boardroom, he always found time for friends and treasured particularly his involvement with The Old Frees Association, Singapore (OFAS). He was proud to be an Old Free.

"He was, in fact, one of the prime movers of having a coffee-table book published to document PFS, the Old Frees

in Singapore and the activities of OFAS. He would attend meetings regularly to give his input," recollected OFAS' honorary secretary Gabriel Teh.

Sadly, he passed on in 2009 without seeing the book to fruition. He was aged 84.

*With contribution from Nicholas Thio, a grandson of Chan U Seek.*

## **John Lim Kok Min**

*Company Director*

*Year left school:1958*



While many Old Frees have been known to have made an indelible mark in the fields of law and medicine in Singapore, others have made their own contributions in a totally different field – the corporate world.

John Lim Kok Min probably would not have imagined the significant inroads he would be making when he first joined Singapore's Fraser & Neave (F&N) as a trainee executive in 1962 after completing his BA Honours degree at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur.

He climbed up the corporate ladder very quickly and eventually became F&N's Group Deputy Marketing Manager. He later

joined Pepsico International, an American multi-national company as its Regional Marketing Director in 1978, based first in Bangkok and then in Singapore.

He was head-hunted four years later to join Cold Storage Holdings as its Distribution Director and rose to become its first local Group CEO (Chief Executive Officer), a significant milestone as this position had until then always been held by expatriates.

He has also been Group Managing Director of JC-MPH Ltd, Pan-United Corporation and finally as President and Executive Deputy Chairman of LMA International NV, from which position he stepped down at the end of 2010.

Today, more than five decades since he started his career, and at 75, an age when many others would have long retired, John remains active in the corporate world. He continues to serve on the boards of various public listed and private companies. He is currently the Independent Chairman of Boustead Projects Ltd and of IREIT Global among other directorships.

John is also active in the public sector and GLCs (government-linked companies) as well as the non-profit sector, devoting much time and energy to serve on several statutory boards, GLCs, trade associations and professional bodies over the years. His many appointments have included being chairman of the Building & Construction

Authority, Senoko Power Ltd, Gas Supply Pte Ltd, Singapore Institute of Directors as well as deputy chairman of four institutions: Agri-Foods & Veterinary Authority, Temasek Polytechnic, NTUC Fairprice Co-operative and Singapore Institute of Management. He is also a past president of Sentosa Golf Club.

Another area of his expertise is corporate governance and he is recognised as a leading figure in this field in both Singapore and the region. Since the beginning of 2000 he has been a core member of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) - Asian Roundtable on Corporate Governance and is a Resource Person for Asian Development Bank and International Finance Corporation, which is part of the World Bank. He also served as Chairman of the OECD Asian Corporate Governance Network for State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) from 2006 to 2012.

For his outstanding contributions to the corporate community, John was awarded the Public Service Medal (PBM) by the President of Singapore in 2006.

John credits Penang Free School for having shaped his life and career. He says, "My alma mater prepared me well for my many leadership roles in life. It gave me self-confidence and resourcefulness to adapt to all kinds of environment and equipped me with the ability to adjust where necessary and to strive to succeed.

"In addition, the school taught me the values of honesty, integrity and humility, especially in victory, and the importance of teamwork."

He looks back with fondness on his days at PFS where he studied from 1953 to 1958. He excelled in football and hockey, representing the school in many competitions and was a school prefect as well as House Football Captain.

He said, "I have wonderful memories of PFS – my time there were some of the best years of my life. The friends I made and the camaraderie forged, especially on 'outstation' trips for inter-school football and hockey matches are memories that I always treasure. I also have fond recollections of my many expat teachers who took a genuine interest in our welfare and treated us, in many respects, as equals."

Of his past headmasters and teachers, both local and expatriate, he remembers best JE Tod, JMB Hughes, Brian Smith, G Bainbridge, WE Howe, W Williams, De Turville, Ong Poh Kee, Rajendra Nath, Lim Boon Hor, Teoh Cheng Hai, Tan Boon Soon, Tan Ah Fee, MSR Ambrose and Tan Boon Lin.

For John, one of the school's special traits was that every boy studying there - irrespective of race, language, religion, social status or wealth - was treated equally.

He said, "It was all about integrity, fairness and treating others as you would

want others to treat you. This was what the school imparted to me - the virtue of humility and the importance of racial harmony in a multi-racial society.”

## Ng Kong Yeam

*Retired. Formerly Group Chairman,  
Sino-America Tours.*

*Year left school: 1961*



**D**ato' Ng Kong Yeam demonstrated the staunch spirit of an Old Free by adopting a 'never say die' attitude in the face of adversity. And like a

true alumnus, he believes in 'giving back to society' and so had been quietly donating to his former schools to assist needy students.

Born into a wealthy family, the young Kong Yeam lived a life of luxury including even wearing a Rolex watch when he was just in Primary 1. However, when his father, who owned a chain of goldsmith shops and several properties in Penang, was cheated and saw his business collapse, Kong Yeam was steeled to rebuild his family's fortunes.

He was 15 then and to make matters worse, the young boy who had been studying in Chung Ling High School was expelled for writing about a students' demonstration in the school magazine even

though he and his fellow editors did not take part.

Luckily, upon appeal to the state authorities, he was allowed to enrol in PFS where he sat for his 'O' levels.

He started working life as a chief clerk in a village council in Perak and later became a court interpreter.

Determined to get into university, he sat for his 'A' level examinations after just six months of self-study. His results enabled him to clinch a place in the law department at the then University of Singapore.

However, he was no ordinary student, skipping classes while working as a full-time court interpreter in Johor Bahru and attending only evening tutorials.

He was 25 and had a wife and young daughter to support.

Graduating with honours after four years, Kong Yeam landed a job in a law firm. The income then was so good and costs of living so cheap that he was able to save money to invest in property.

In an interview with *The Straits Times* in 2006, Kong Yeam said that back in the 1970s, he was able to earn more than enough to buy a car (it cost just \$8,000 then) and a house in two months.

He and a few friends pooled their savings to invest in a piece of land and some shophouses on Cecil Street.

It proved to be a fortuitous move. After receiving approval from the authorities to

redevelop the land by building office blocks, he and his buddies were able to sell the plot to Far East Organisation for more than 20 times their purchase price after a short period of time.

Much of Kong Yeam's life after that would bear proof of the entrepreneur that he is.

After the windfall, he quit his career as a lawyer to become a property developer. He was only 40 then. Although most of his developments were in Singapore, Johor, Kuala Lumpur and Penang, he ventured as far afield as the United States. In the 1990s, he developed a 394-unit condominium named Opulence in Las Vegas and it quickly sold out.

He is noted for giving unusual touches to his properties such as the Tudor-styled Greenridge housing project in Singapore.

From developing properties, Kong Yeam moved into the travel business. He bought over Sino-America (SA) Tours with a partner UIC. In 2003, he decided to buy over UIC's share and became the sole owner of the agency.

He admits that it is difficult to make profits in the travel agency business but he says he is in it not for the money but for the pleasure it gives.

Not surprisingly, he has travelled extensively for business and leisure. Old Frees remember the golfing trips he often organised including one to the UK, which

included visiting JMB Hughes, the popular headmaster. He was also a prime mover in inviting Hughes to visit Old Frees in Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, contributing generously to host him.

In fact, Kong Yeap revealed that he has been contributing to his two alma maters – Chung Ling and PFS - regularly.

"I support education. It enhances the human race," he has been quoted as saying, and this is reflected in his children's education and careers. His eldest daughter Irene is a Professor at Warwick University and a senior member of Wolfson College, Cambridge University. His second daughter Iris graduated from Pepperdine University in California and is in the Film/TV production business in New York, while his son Gabriel completed his undergraduate and Master's degrees from the London School of Economics and Political Science, and has now taken over the family businesses.

Today, at 76, Dato' Ng is retired to Johor Bahru and lives with his wife Datin Ling Chooi Sieng, who was also a lawyer and his partner in his legal firm. He leaves the overseeing of his travel agency and other businesses to his son.

## Education

### Catherine Lim

*Educator/Author*

*Year left school: 1958*



As an author, Catherine Lim needs no introduction having published, to date, nine collections of short stories, five novels, two collections of poetry and several political commentaries.

Although she traces her love for literature back to her childhood days in Kulim, Kedah where she was born and in Province Wellesley where she first studied, devouring books by Enid Blyton and Richmal Crompton, she acknowledges that her time in PFS helped to deepen her interest in the written word.

She said, "We had good English teachers, one of whom was Mrs Hughes, the wife of the headmaster JMB Hughes. She was not a regular teacher but she

was excellent and I enjoyed her classes tremendously.

"Mrs Hughes was approachable and had a talent for story-telling. She and the other English teachers would begin each lesson by getting the students to laugh to make them at ease and win them over. That must have rubbed off on me as I tend to do that with my audiences whenever I give a talk. But as our teachers used to say, being sincere was important as well.

"Mr Hughes himself was extremely popular. He was very fair, kind and honest and was greatly missed when he retired. Over the years, ex-students invited him back to Penang – that was a measure of his popularity.

"I was very diffident and shy as a student but I spent many happy moments there. I played netball and enjoyed the school's scout outings. When I was in the Bukit Mertajam Convent prior to PFS, I related only to the nuns. But in PFS, suddenly we had to learn to relate to boys and to teachers from overseas. We also had to do projects that I never did before in the convent such as giving speeches. I wouldn't be surprised that my confidence to speak in front of others today stemmed from there.

"We also had social gatherings which was nice as I had never been to dances or parties before."

Catherine credits the exposure to a new environment and a different culture in PFS for instilling in her certain skills that have

since stood her in good stead such as social skills and public speaking.

"Our literature texts were more demanding than what I had been exposed to before and this pushed us up to a higher level of thinking," she explained.

Catherine began her teaching career at St Andrew's School soon after graduating from the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur and moving to Singapore in 1967. Determined to make sure her own students would enjoy literature as much as she did, she found ways and means to inject interest and inspire creativity.

"I made sure my students would not be bored. I would encourage them to write of local superstitions for instance. Sometimes I got them to prepare three stories beforehand - one happy, one sad and one of a personal experience. I taught them how to fit their story to a title thus preparing them for composition.

"I wanted to make a good job of my work and help the students to build up on their vocabulary.

"I was excellent in preparing them for exams, I think. I would scour exam papers for the past ten years, observe trends and advised the students to go for topics that were easy to write.

"I taught them to use dialogue and write local stories as examiners tended to be taken by these. I loved interacting with young people so it was a gorgeous job."

In 1980, she went into administrative work as a project director with the Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore.

In 1988, after completing her PhD in applied linguistics from the National University of Singapore, Catherine was appointed a specialist lecturer with the Regional English Language Centre teaching sociolinguistics and literature. In 1992, she left her educational career to become a full-time writer.

It was not a difficult decision as Catherine had been published much earlier, starting with her first short story collection called *Little Ironies: Stories of Singapore* in 1978.

"I was lucky as I was publishing at a time when it was a novelty. I also used names like Ah Bah, which resonated with the local environment. I had these 18 stories and I showed them to Heinemann and they decided to publish them. I think there is an element of luck when it comes to publishing."

Catherine has not looked back since. She continues to write focusing on Singapore society and themes of traditional Chinese culture.

"My stories always have an underlay of humanity, courage, compassion and trust, which are the most important human attributes that I got from my parents," she concludes.

## Betty Ooi Poh Gek

Teacher/Principal/Deputy Director Schools (West)  
Year left school: 1964



An alumna of St George's Girls' School, Poh Gek recalls having to sit for an entrance examination to get into the Sixth Form of PFS.

"St George's had no sixth form classes then," she said, "and we all aspired to get into PFS because of its reputation as a premier school.

"When I first entered, I was in awe because of my impression of it producing top scholars. The school took in top students of diverse backgrounds. We mixed well together but there was always the pressure to do well and to excel.

"The culture of diligence in school was strong, the teachers were caring and we were all motivated to do well.

"Girls were in a minority and thank goodness, the boys treated us sensitively. They were quite mischievous though. I was in the science class and often when we did dissection classes, I remember a few of the boys were fond of putting in things like rats' tails in the pockets of our skirts!

"But there was a lot of collaboration among us even if we were in competition.

We helped each other with schoolwork and shared notes.

"In PFS, we were also encouraged to be well-rounded, so I took up badminton. The annual sports day was a big affair and the House fever was very great as those belonging to the various Houses would cheer vociferously for their team-mates to win the championship shield.

"Apart from sports day, the other memorable occasion for me was the weekly school assembly. It was a formal and dignified affair. The school captain would go on stage to announce the arrival of the headmaster. He was Tan Boon Lin then and he would stride into the hall amid a hushed silence. Only his shoes could be heard – clip clop, clip clop..."

After PFS, Poh Gek studied science at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. She taught for one and a half years in Penang and Kuala Lumpur before moving to Singapore in 1970.

She began her teaching career as a biology teacher in Beatty Secondary School before moving on to Anderson Junior College and Cedar Girls' Secondary School. She was later appointed principal of Yuan Ching Secondary School and of Temasek Junior College. She also took up a series of appointments at the Ministry of Education as senior inspector of schools, assistant director of schools, deputy director of school placement and scholarships and finally,

deputy director schools (west). In all, she spent 34 years in the education service.

Her time in PFS helped her to deal with her 'difficult' task of disciplining the students of Yuan Ching Secondary School. She said, "Most of them were latch key children who did not know how to spend their time after school; they were not very disciplined. I tried to inculcate a sense of discipline among them and raise their self-esteem and to get them to take pride in their work, just like the students in PFS.

"I focused on pastoral care programmes and after three years could derive satisfaction from the programmes as they had a positive effect on the students. The students were involved in community projects including dancing and singing. They learnt to gel together and were extremely proud that they could even beat some of the better schools in a whole-school effort national community singing/dancing competition.

"I guess it all stemmed from my PFS experience where our teachers were caring and so I tried to do the same to the students at Yuan Ching.

"At Temasek Junior College which is one of the top five junior colleges, the students there were already very motivated, so my role was different. My mission was to build a caring and achievement-oriented college. My focus was to stretch the potential of the students further, to learn not

by rote but to explore and go beyond their textbooks and to have a joy and passion for learning and – like in PFS - help develop the students' leadership potential.

"It worked well with the students taking part in project work, leadership programmes, a diverse range of co-curricular activities and community service."

In her last posting from 2002 to 2003, Poh Gek was still involved in developing leadership, this time among principals and vice-principals.

"As deputy director of schools, I led a group of cluster superintendents in the west zone with over 90 primary and secondary schools and junior colleges," she explained. "Our main role was to supervise the principals and vice-principals in these schools and evaluate and develop them to make sure there was quality leadership in schools. We worked closely with them to ensure that schools were effectively managed and quality staff and quality programmes were in place with students the ultimate beneficiary."

## Chong Tian Hoo

Teacher/Educator

Year left school: 1961



“I was born in Perak in a small rubber estate known as Banir Estate, 12 days after Japanese troops landed in Kota Baru, Kelantan. I don’t think the estate exists

anymore.

“I came to Singapore in 1947 and enrolled in the Chinese Commercial and Industrial School (renamed Gong Shan Primary School now located in Tampines) in Tiong Bahru. After my primary education in the Chinese stream, I went to St Patrick’s School for Standard III and IV from 1953 to 1954.

“I moved to Penang and continued Elementary 6 in Westland School. I was selected for Form 1 in PFS in 1955, sat for the Lower Certificate of Education at Form 3, completed Form 5 and obtained the School Certificate. I continued with Lower and Upper Form Six classes in PFS after which I sat for the Higher School Certificate examinations in 1961.

“My results got me admitted into the 2nd year of a science course in the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. I graduated with a BSc in 1963 and Diploma in Education in 1964.

“In 1965, I was recruited as a mathematics and physics teacher in PFS by the then headmaster Tan Boon Lin.

“In 1970, I left for the United States to do a master’s degree in education at Eastern Illinois University. After graduating in 1971, I taught in the university for a year before coming to Singapore in 1973 as I had been offered a teaching job by the Ministry of Education. I was posted to the Teachers’ Training College (TTC) as lecturer. I was offered sabbatical leave to do a masters’ degree in Computer Science in Western Michigan University in 1980 and later in 1984 was awarded study leave to do my PhD at the University of Pittsburgh.

“I went on to become senior lecturer and principal lecturer in TTC and at the Institute of Education (IE). Later, when IE became part of the Nanyang Technological University and was renamed National Institute of Education (NIE) I was elevated to associate professor and made an associate dean in 2000. As a maths specialist, I headed a project to train selected groups of experienced maths teachers so that they could go back to their respective schools to conduct refresher courses for their teachers – it was a kind of train-the-trainers programme.

### Fond Memories of PFS

“I have fond memories of my time in PFS. I can even remember to this day, our

headmasters’ and teachers’ names, events such as Additional Sports in which everyone had to take part and School Sports, and the school’s special milestones.

“Mr Tod (when I was admitted into PFS in 1955) and the ever popular JMB Hughes were our headmasters when I was a student. After Malayanisation, Tan Boon Lin was the headmaster, the first Asian to be appointed after colonial rule. Poon Poh Kong was headmaster just before I left for my further studies in USA.

“I also remember my teachers very well. Among those who taught me were Ong Teong Guan and Lye Tong Weng (Maths), Tan Ah Fee (Chemistry), Lim Boon Hock and Lim Boon Hor (Geography), Teh Kheng Chooi (History), Tan Boon Soon (PE), JMB Hughes (English Literature), Mrs Hughes (General Paper), Eddy Chung (Applied Maths), Lee Eng Leong and Khoo Tiang Lim (Biology), Beh Teik Chooi and Lim San Hoe (English Language), Capt Mohd Noor and Iskandar (Bahasa Kebangsaan), Teoh Cheng Hai and GS Reutens (Art) and C Ganasalingam (Physics).

“The school in my time had a spirit of excellence and focused on character development so that we might grow up to be well-behaved and refined “gentlemen”. Besides excellence in studies, good values, integrity, trustworthiness and kindness were some virtues constantly being emphasised, encouraged and inculcated. To achieve

these goals, all of us had to perform chores including the daily cleaning of our classrooms and painting of classroom walls once a year.

"As an elite school, it accepted some 200 students each year from various feeder schools (Westland School, Hutchings School and Francis Light School) who had to sit for an entrance exam.

"We had many school traditions. School assembly was held once a week in the school hall; male teachers had to wear a tie and coat (as the oldest school in Malaya, we were following the British grammar school model). The whole assembly was called to attention by the head prefect – in my Upper Sixth Form year it was Chin Wah Seng – after which the school bell would ring announcing the arrival of the headmaster who would walk from one end of the hall through the middle aisle to get to the stage at the other end.

During the assembly, teachers would make announcements and the headmaster would give his message touching on various topics such as academic excellence, values, integrity, good attitude and behaviour, and filial piety. We would finish by singing "God Save the Queen" before independence and "Negara Ku" after Merdeka; this would be followed by the School Song composed and written by GS Reutens.

"Then there were the Sports days. We had two kinds of sports, namely

additional sports & school sports, to be competed among the five Houses named after headmasters and a well-known Old Free: Cheeseman, Hamilton, Hargreaves, Pinhorn and Wu Lien-Teh. Tunku Putra House (named after the founding Prime Minister of Malaya who was also an Old Free) was later added. I was the Housemaster of the last two mentioned Houses for a number of years. We also had an annual cross country run (from school through Batu Lanchang cemetery), and an annual hike up Penang Hill from Moongate near the Waterfall Gardens.

"Another valuable feature of the school was the extra-curricular activities held every Monday and Thursday afternoons. I was in charge of the Sixth Form Recreational Activities (SFRA) and Alex Ooi Koon Hean was the inaugural chairman before he left for Singapore to do his medical course at the university. It was an enjoyable time for me as the student leaders were very enthusiastic and hard-working involved in not only planning physical activities but also writing and designing newsletters for distribution as well as organising other activities such as movie shows.

"Other cherished memories were our school hall which had a uniquely designed cement semi-dome above the stage at one end of the school hall. It was a bit echoey and was demolished and replaced with what it has today.

"There was also our school clock which

still graces the tower of our main building. It was our own 'Big Ben'. I remember on one occasion when the clock needed massive repairs, Old Frees in Singapore were asked to donate money. We all contributed willingly.

"Another tradition was that every 21st October, which was Founder's Day, the headmaster and prefects at PFS would go, in the early morning before school began, to the tomb of Reverend Hutchings, our founder, to attend a memorial service. I was a Hutchings scholar and was given the honour to lay a wreath. The tomb in the Christian cemetery in Farquhar Street is incidentally the resting place of Francis Light, Penang's founder."

## Lily Yeap Lay Leng

*Teacher/Educator*

*Year left school: 1962*



"I was in St George's Girls' School and sat for the entrance exams for PFS as I wanted to get into Form Six to learn among boys! Apart from the school's image of excellence I also liked the way in which Penang Frees carried themselves; they were gentlemanly and not stuck up.

"I remember JMB Hughes teaching me Geography, Mrs Hughes General Paper, and Mr Bennet and Mr Baird English Literature. What I recall vividly was our English Language teachers insisting that we should always speak properly.

"Tian Hoo and I met in PFS. Our 'love affair' only started when we were in the University of Malaya. My career more or less paralleled that of Tian Hoo's as I also became a teacher and served in the Penang Chinese Girls' School after graduation with a BA degree and Diploma in Education. I also studied in USA at Eastern Illinois University (MS in Ed), Western Michigan University (MS in Librarianship) and University of Pittsburgh (Doctor in Education), specialising in pedagogy. I also joined TTC and IE as Lecturer and Senior Lecturer and NIE as Associate Professor before retiring.

"What I found amazing about PFS was how great its reputation was when for its 150th anniversary or sesquicentenary a special postage stamp was issued by the Malaysian Government."

*Tian Hoo and Lay Leng are still contributing to society today. They helped train in-service teachers in Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates and are doing consultancy work in schools.*

## Public service

### Yeoh Ghim Seng

*Speaker of Parliament/Surgeon*

*Year left school: 1940*



He was Singapore's Speaker of Parliament for 19 years — from 1970 to 1989 — one of the longest-serving of any parliament in the world.

Born in Ipoh, Perak, in 1918, he studied in St Michael's Institution in his hometown before entering PFS.

He then went to Cambridge University to study medicine in the 1940s. After graduating, he worked on attachments with various hospitals before becoming a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England (FRCS) in 1950. A year later, he returned to Malaya and was appointed consultant surgeon to the Singapore General Hospital (SGH).

In 1956, he was made Professor of Surgery at the University of Malaya in Singapore, the first Asian to hold the chair. He left in 1962 to go into private practice although he continued to train medical graduates from the university. Six feet tall and lanky, he was dubbed "the biggest but fastest Asian surgeon".

The Old Frees' Association, Singapore President Alex Ooi, himself a doctor, said that he was reputed even among surgeons to have the "stadiest pair of hands".

Professor Low Cheng Hock, emeritus consultant at Tan Tock Seng Hospital and Past Associate Dean and Chairman, Medical Board said, "Professor Yeoh Ghim Seng symbolises the great Asian surgeon of the early days. I admired his confident hands

that moved with beautiful dexterity. I could never get more than being a third assistant or a note-writer.”

In 1962, Dr Yeoh entered politics after accepting an invitation to join the People’s Action Party. He stood in a by-election in the constituency of Joo Chiat, which he won by a walkover. He was to serve as its Member of Parliament for 22 years.

In 1968, he was made Deputy Speaker of Parliament and in 1970, he was elected Speaker of Parliament, which was a departure from the norm as those before him came from a legal background.

If not for his dedication to medicine, he would have become a minister – a fact alluded to by then Minister of Law, Environment, Science and Technology, E W Barker, who said if not for his commitment to surgery, Dr Yeoh “could with ease and distinction occupy one of the front benches on this side of the House.”

In 1977, Dr Yeoh was appointed the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organisation’s (AIPO) first president. A Public Service Star (B.B.M.) recipient, an active Rotarian and Justice of the Peace, Dr Yeoh sat on various boards as chairman including the Detainees’ Aftercare Association and the University of Singapore Council. In 2005, the National University of Singapore created the Yeoh Ghim Seng Professorship in Surgery in his honour.

He died in 1993 aged 74.

## **Ahmad Ibrahim**

*Minister for Health/Minister for Labour*  
*Year left school: 1947*

Ahmad Ibrahim was born in 1927. After completing his education in Penang Free School, he made his way to Singapore, where he already had an older brother working and where he believed he would secure a better job with his fluency in the English language.

He was able to clinch a job, soon after his arrival, as a telephone operator at the Singapore Naval Base in Sembawang. It proved to be the turning point in his life resulting in him eventually carving a name for himself as one of the early Malay pioneers of Singapore, including being an active unionist and a political leader.

Working at the Naval Base was an eye-opener for Ahmad as he learnt about the poor working conditions of his fellow workers such as the long hours they put in, the late payment of their wages and how badly treated they were. It was to provide the platform for his leap into the world of politics.

He quickly gained the respect of his colleagues who elected him as the Vice-President of the Naval Base Labour Union. He later also became the first branch secretary of the All-Singapore Fire Brigade Employees Union.

In 1955, he was persuaded by his trade union in the Naval Base to contest

in the Legislative Assembly elections as an independent candidate for Sembawang.

He won and later was co-opted into the People’s Action Party (PAP) central Executive Committee in 1956.

In 1959, contesting under the PAP banner, he again won the Sembawang seat as a member of the Legislative Assembly. In the same year, when the PAP government formed its first Cabinet, Ahmad was appointed the Minister for Health and was also made Assistant Secretary-General of the PAP’s central Executive Committee.

In September 1961, in a Cabinet reshuffle, he was appointed the Minister for Labour.

He died prematurely at the age of 35 in 1962 while still in office because of a liver ailment.

Despite his short stint in public office, he made an impression on those around him.

He was given a state funeral, which was attended by Singapore’s then Head-of-State Yusof Ishak, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, other Cabinet Ministers, and thousands of people from all walks of life.

Then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in a tribute said, “He made friends easily, and there are many in Singapore who cannot help liking him as a man, his modesty and straight-forwardness.”

Today, he is remembered in Singapore in many ways - by a road called Jalan Ahmad Ibrahim in Jurong, two schools (Ahmad Ibrahim Primary School and Ahmad Ibrahim

## The personal touch —by a Minister



THE Minister for Health, Inche Ahmad Ibrahim, personally attends to a patient in the children's ward of the General Hospital during his tour yesterday.—Straits Times picture.

## PREMIER ON FAMILIARISATION TOUR OF HEALTH MINISTRY



SINGAPORE, Wed. — The Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, today visited the Health Ministry to familiarise himself with its work.

Mr. Lee had a short discussion with the Health Minister, Inche Ahmad bin Ibrahim, before touring the Outpatients Department dispensary and the Blood Transfusion Centre at the General Hospital.

He showed particular interest in the Blood Transfu-

sion Centre where he inquired about various aspects of the service.

The Prime Minister will complete his tour of the Ministry on Friday.

Straits Times picture shows Mr. Lee at the Ministry with the Health Minister, Inche Ahmad bin Ibrahim (right) behind whom is Dr. Sheng Nam Chin, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry, and Dr. Ho Yuen (left), Deputy Permanent Secretary.

A Cardinal  
flies in  
today for  
one day

Secondary School) both in Yishun (a district next to Sembawang) and a mosque, Masjid Ahmad Ibrahim, also in Yishun, named after him.

## Wong Lin Ken

Historian/Minister of Home Affairs  
Year left school: 1951

Born in Penang in 1931, Wong Lin Ken, who was known to be a bookworm since his early days was a respected name in academia. He was a brilliant student in Penang Free School after which he entered the University of Malaya in Singapore where after graduating with an MA in 1955, he was awarded a Queen's Scholarship to do his PhD in Britain.

At the age of only 24, a thesis which he had submitted for his Master's degree was published in 1961 and was acknowledged as a work of classic. Entitled *Trade of Singapore 1819-1869*, it was praised for its meticulous research and has long been recognised as having made an invaluable contribution to the economic history of Southeast Asia.

After graduating, he went to the School of Oriental & African Studies of the University of London where he obtained his doctorate with his thesis, *The Malayan Tin Industry up to 1914*. Upon his return, he was appointed a lecturer to head a new course, *Economic History of Southeast and*

*East Asia*, in the Department of History in the newly formed University of Singapore in 1959, later renamed National University of Singapore (NUS) in 1980. He rose to eventually head the department. In 1966, he was made Raffles Professor of History (the first time a local had been appointed), a chair he held until his demise in 1983.

He left academia for about a decade to make forays into the world of diplomacy and politics. He was appointed as Singapore's first Ambassador to the United States, serving with distinction from May 1967 to December 1968. While serving as ambassador, he entered politics to contest the General Elections of April 1968 as a candidate for the People's Action Party. He was elected as Member of Parliament for the Alexandra constituency, a position he held from 1968-1976.

In September 1970, he was appointed Minister for Home Affairs but left two years later in September 1972 to return to the academic fold.

He was active in other realms - as a member of the Cinematograph Films Appeal Committee (1963); Chairman of the Singapore Adult Education Board (1964-1967); and Patron of the Junior Chamber of Singapore. He was conferred the Public Service Star in 1966.

He died in 1983 at the age of 51. In the same year, a Wong Lin Ken Memorial Medal and Book Prize was set up in his name by his

former colleagues, students and friends. To this day, the gold medal and book prize are awarded each year to the top student from the NUS' Department of History.

Professor Wong is also remembered through two books and several articles that he has authored. One of them is on Penang, entitled *The Revenue Farms of Prince of Wales Island 1805-1830* first published in 1964 in the *Journal of the South Seas Society* and reprinted by the National University of Singapore in 1985. Another article, first published in 1978, in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* was

### **The Straits Times** 5 July 1959

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## HE HEADS ECONOMIC HISTORY

**D**R. WONG LIN KEN, 27, who returned from Britain recently, will head a new course of study at the University of Malaya's Singapore Division.

The new subject is the Economic History of South-East and East Asia, including India.

It will form an optional part of the History Honours Degree course.

Dr. Wong, a former student of the Penang



Dr. Wong Lin Ken

Free School and the University of Malaya, graduated with an M.A. degree in 1955.

In that year he was awarded a Queen's Scholarship and proceeded to Britain where he studied for three and a half years at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London.

In London, he obtained his Ph.D. degree in History for his thesis on "The Malayan Tin Industry up to 1914."

Dr. Wong told the Sunday Times that he hoped the new course at the university would begin in the next academic year.



**The Straits Times 5 September 1970**

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*Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepot Port 1819-1941.*

So acclaimed are his scholarly contributions that a tribute was made to him at a meeting of historians of Southeast Asia in Singapore in October 2002. There

was a clamour among them to have his first work *Trade of Singapore 1819-1869*, which had been long out of print, republished.

In the reprint, eminent historian Professor Wang Gungwu wrote a special preface about Professor Wong whom he had known when they were both undergraduates and graduate students at the University of Malaya in Singapore in the 1950s.

According to another renowned historian Kwa Chong Guan who knew Professor Wong and worked with him in the University of Singapore and later in NUS, Professor Wang also noted in his obituary of

Professor Wong published in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* vol. 14, no. 2, Sept 1983, that "in the first half of his academic career, from his MA thesis to his PhD thesis, Prof Wong was working towards becoming the first economic historian in Southeast

Asia. But after he returned to academia from politics, he widened his scope of research to the recent political history of Singapore, and Singapore's place in the history of Southeast Asia."

Mr Kwa elaborated, "He started researching into Singapore's strategic and military history, on which topic he asked deep questions about Singapore's strategic location and was working towards an answer terminated by his premature death.

"His talk to the Singapore Command and Staff College on 'The Fall of Singapore [in 1941] A Wider Historical Perspective' provided an insight into the line of questioning he was developing on Singapore's military history.

"I republished the text of Professor Wong's talk in a small volume I edited on Singapore's military history, *Defending Singapore, 1819-1965* in the Singapore Armed Forces publication *Pointer* in 1996. His essay on 'The Strategic Significance of Singapore in Modern History' was one of his last articles published in 1981 and republished in *A History of Singapore*, edited by Ernest C T Chew and Edwin Lee, outlining the deep questions Professor Wong was asking about Singapore history."

As Professor Wang Gungwu observed, "Wong Lin Ken was intense in his enquiry, rigorous in his thinking and extremely demanding of himself as he was of his colleagues and students."

## Lee Kum Tatt

Chairman of SISIR

Year left school: 1947



Born in Penang in 1927, he had to disrupt his studies at Penang Free School to move to Medan, Sumatra with his family due to the impending war. He was only able

to return in 1947 to resume his studies.

In 1948, he won a scholarship to study science in Raffles College. After graduating in 1954, he joined the Government Department of Chemistry as a chemist, toxicologist and biochemist.

Two years later, he went to Canada and the United States on a United Nations (UN) fellowship to study the international opium trade and represented Canada in the UN Narcotic Commission.

Returning in 1958, he was appointed head of the forensic laboratory in the Department of Chemistry. A year later, he was appointed to the Board of Governors of the Singapore Polytechnic.

In 1960, Dr Lee was appointed biochemist in the Department of Pathology in the Ministry of Health. In 1965, he was made Chairman of the Science Council with the task of creating activities to promote science to the public. He also travelled



Lee Kum Tatt at Raffles College.



**Dr & Mrs Lee Kum Tatt: Courting days at the Botanic Gardens (1956).**

to London and California seeking expert advice on the notion of establishing a science centre. It took seven years before his efforts bore fruit with the opening of the \$14 million Singapore Science Centre in 1977.

In 1969, Dr Lee was also appointed chairman of the newly formed Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research (SISIR) which was responsible for the promotion of scientific research and development.

In the 1970s, he spearheaded efforts to develop a tourism souvenir that could be identified as unique to Singapore. The result was RISIS – SISIR spelt backwards - a gold-plated orchid that became a success,



**Dr & Mrs Lee Kum Tatt (1976).**

beyond even his expectations.

Describing how RISIS came about at its launch in 1976, Dr Lee said in an oral history interview:

“RISIS was a fluke. It was a fluke. It was never planned. Everyone comes and asks me: ‘Dr Lee, how did you think of the orchid?’ It was never planned. So we said, ‘Okay, we just try and do the orchids and preserve it.’ Can we do it? Well, we’ll try. We’ll get the technology. Orchid is something native to us. The technology is ours. How do we overcome time? So we put some gold on it because gold is time-honoured. After that, it caught.”

Looking back at his long civil service career, Dr Lee had this to say, “I always

seem to be on the fringe of grey areas that nobody wants to touch. And I enjoyed doing that. You see, you trace my life, it’s like that. Science, I never do Science. Bio-chemistry, I never do bio-chemistry. Quality control, I know nothing about quality control. Business, I never trained to do business. Standards Council, I never know anything about standards. There must be something basic that we can use in some of us...So creativity means you see things like other people are staring at you and other people cannot see or dare not see. And I seem to enjoy doing that kind of thing.”

When Dr Lee retired as Chairman of SISIR in 1985, it had a staff of 360. He died in 2008 at the age of 81.

# Recalling his spirit of adventure

I first came to know Dr. Lee Kum Tatt when he was in his Honours year (B.Sc) at the University of Malaya, now the National University of Singapore (NUS) in 1952. I was one of his lecturers.

I supervised his PhD in Chemistry which he was awarded with in 1955, becoming the first recipient of a Chemistry doctorate from the University. During the period he was preparing his thesis (1952-1954), he became very close to me and my family. He treated me as his "surrogate" family as he had no relatives in Singapore, being from Penang. These were important years that forged the bond between us which lasted a lifetime.

We chose different career paths – I continued in academia and he ventured into the "open" untested waters. He started off as a Forensic Chemist with the Government Chemistry Department but made the first side-step in 1960, when he assumed the post of Senior Biochemist in the Department of Pathology, Ministry of Health. He subsequently became Chief Biochemist serving for seven years before his second side-step, when he was seconded to lead the Industrial Research Unit. He transformed it into the well-respected Singapore Institute of Standards

and Industrial Research (SISIR). He was the Founder Chairman, a post he held until retirement in 1985. The "SISIR Mark" became a hallmark of quality and reliability and was much sought after by both local and foreign manufacturers.

Always passionate about Science, he founded the Singapore Science Council and was instrumental in initiating the Singapore Professional Centre and the Science Park. He also helped to initiate the Singapore Quality and Reliability Association (now the Singapore Quality Institute). To inculcate the love for science in the young, he created the Science Quiz, a popular TV programme where children from various schools competed to answer questions about science. This programme sparked interest not only in the school children, but also in their parents and grandparents, who, whilst supporting their children by watching the programme, were also learning science. Thereafter he initiated the Science Centre, today a well-visited attraction for school children, the public and tourists.

Another example of the innovative side of Kum Tatt is the creation of the RISIS orchid in 1976. This is probably an example

of "applied science" in the true sense. He was able to take an orchid, which is organic in nature, and find a way to gold-plate it, without contaminating and destroying the gold bath. It may seem simple, but it took a lot of research to perfect the technique, and he was awarded many patents for the technique. To this day, the RISIS orchid remains an iconic and unique gift from Singapore.

Kum Tatt received many awards for his achievements, but perhaps the award he treasured most was the Distinguished Alumni Award presented to him by the Faculty of Science of NUS in 2005. Kum Tatt always regarded himself as a Scientist, and Chemistry held a special place in his heart. He felt therefore, like the prodigal son, highly honoured that the Faculty of Science recognised him for his scientific achievements.

**Professor Rayson Huang** taught chemistry at the University of Malaya in Singapore and later the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. In 1969, he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of Nanyang University, Singapore and in 1972, he became the first Chinese Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong. The article is part of a foreword he wrote for Lee Kum Tatt's published blog, *A Fabulous Journey*.

## Lim Ho Hup

Director, Economic Development Board  
Year left school: 1949



Entering PFS for Lim Ho Hup was for one reason: Acquiring a qualification in English to enable him to get a 'proper' job.

He said, "I needed an English

education, otherwise I would starve. Coming from a poor family, I needed to ensure I could get a job. A Chinese education was not good enough; one needed grounding in English so I moved from Chung Ling High School to PFS in mid-1947. It would be a lifelong handicap if one were not able to speak English. I had actually spent two years in an English primary school before the war disrupted everything.

"Being in Free School helped because of its ambiance; everybody spoke English so I was forced to speak English too. It also had top English teachers; as a school that was free of religion, race and promoting free thinking, it attracted the top teachers.

"The Free School culture must have influenced me as I went from junior middle in Chung Ling to completing Standard Eight; before the war, I managed to only finish Standard One in English.

"After one and a half years, I sat for my

Higher School Certificate and got the credit in English language that I wanted. With this and some luck in getting a scholarship, I was able to get into the University of Malaya in Singapore, studying science."

Describing himself as a 'Johnny come lately' he said, "I was not a typical 'Old Free' who would have studied four to six years."

After graduating, he worked at the university as a graduate assistant, demonstrating laboratory sessions, which enabled him to study for his master's in Chemistry. "I then got a job in the Government Chemistry Department as a document examiner. My job was to identify handwriting in criminal cases and for the Special Branch, to identify people involved in communist activities."

In 1961, when the Economic Development Board (EDB) was formed, Ho Hup was made the first local director, taking over from an appointee of the United Nations. He was to occupy the post for nine years.

Citing it as his most important career move, he was the right-hand man of then chairman, Hon Sui Sen, a Penangite himself (alumnus of St Xavier's Institution).

"EDB in those days did nearly everything. Our role was to promote industrial development and provide facilities for industries. We had to create the right climate and overcome difficulties of land supply, water and infrastructure. So we developed Jurong Industrial Estate to house the industries.

"After seven years, Jurong Town Corporation (JTC) was set up as our task was to promote investment and create new industries and jobs and not be a real estate operator running the industrial estate, a role handed down to JTC. Later, we started the Industrial Research Unit (IRU) which morphed into the Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research (SISIR). I knew Lee Kum Tatt, another Old Free, who was a chemist in the General Hospital and asked him to look after the IRU as its first director. He made a good job of it."

In 1970, he was seconded to the Ministry of Education as director of technical education.

His role was to develop and promote technical education. "In those days, if a student's primary school results were not good enough for mainstream schools, he would be posted to a technical school, which was considered inferior.

"My task was to change this thinking. The first thing I did was to induce confidence in technical teachers by increasing their pay and to instil pride in them so that good students would not shy away from the technical stream.

"After all, a school is good only if it can attract good students and the quality of the school is determined by the student intake."

He must have done a sterling job as after his two-year secondment was over, the post of director of technical education was scrapped.

He then returned to EDB, leaving in the

early 1980s to start a plastics company.

Declaring that no other school came close to PFS, he said, "There has been no true competition, even from our rival, St Xavier's. We had illustrious Old Frees. When Yeoh Ghim Seng was appointed as the first Asian professor in the university, we were all very proud. Then there was Lim Chong Keat who designed some of Singapore's best known buildings. There was also Wong Lin Ken, a history professor and later Minister for Home Affairs. He was the patrol leader of boy scouts in PFS while Chong Keat was the tenderfoot.

"The school had a well-deserved reputation."

## Yeoh Keat Chuan

*Managing Director*

*Economic Development Board*

*Year left school: 1988*



He is the second Old Free to head the Economic Development Board (EDB) following in the footsteps of Lim Ho Hup, who was the first director.

For Yeoh Keat Chuan, it all began thanks to a solid foundation gained at PFS.

"It was the school's drive for excellence

that was instilled in us. It prepared us well when the time came for my classmates and me to think of how we could establish the best route to get into university. There were not many international schools in Malaysia then so we had to look outwards. We found out about the prestigious ASEAN scholarships that were being offered by Singapore to students wanting to pursue their 'A' levels so quite a few of the students in my batch applied for them.

"Eight of us from PFS were awarded the scholarships. I went to Temasek Junior College and stayed in Anglican High School Hostel. I learnt to be independent, living on my own for the first time. My time in PFS helped me adjust as we were taught to study on our own. Coming from a top school with an exceptional reputation, even in Singapore, we knew we had to represent it well and not let it down while studying for our 'A' levels."

Keat Chuan has other fond memories of his schooldays. "There was this tradition of throwing first-year newcomers into the school pond if they happened to be nearby. I enjoyed being part of the scouts movement. We had a wonderful scoutmaster, Mr Khoo Poh Kheng, who guided us well. We went camping, learnt to cut bamboo to build things and cook. We did other outdoor activities in the beach, park or botanic gardens which all helped to get the scouts to know each other.

"We bonded in other ways through sports and going on excursions. I was honorary secretary of a UNESCO club which organised trips to various places in Malaysia to visit historic institutions such as the Parliament in Kuala Lumpur. These were very popular."

After his 'A' Levels, Keat Chuan applied for, and was awarded, a Glaxo-EDB scholarship that enabled him to study chemical engineering at the Imperial College of Science, Technology & Medicine at the University of London

He was part of the first batch of scholarship holders of Glaxo, which had donated S\$60 m to the Singapore government to start a scholarship fund to help students kick off an EDB career.

"Three hundred people have benefitted from this programme to date," he said.

When he returned, he joined the EDB as senior officer in the Industry Development Division (Chemicals) in 1994.

In 1997, he was posted to Washington DC as EDB's centre director. Then he was based in New York in 2000 as regional director for Eastern Americas for the next three years.

His role was to travel around the US to meet with companies to persuade them to invest in Singapore.

He went on to enrol in Stanford University's Graduate School of Business Masters in Management Science

programme graduating in 2004.

He returned in 2005 to head the Biomedical Sciences Cluster in EDB. In 2008, he was posted to San Francisco as international director overseeing the Americas region, which included the EDB's seven offices. He returned to Singapore in 2010 as Assistant Managing Director overseeing the engineering industries. In July 2012 he was appointed Managing Director of EDB.

Conscious of how he has benefitted from scholarships, Keat Chuan says one of the reasons why his work is perfect for helping him "give back" is because of the EDB's role to create a better economic future for Singaporeans.

He said, "We are proud of our role to bring in and develop industries in Singapore.

"EDB is responsible for securing multi-million dollar investments leading to good jobs and exciting careers for Singaporeans. I am privileged to have had the opportunity to work with companies such as Shell, ExxonMobil, GlaxoSmithkline, Novartis, Rolls-Royce, and ST Engineering.

"Our role is to look at which industries are competitive and in which area and try to bring in the leading companies in these sectors.

"EDB's industry clusters contribute 35 to 40 per cent of Singapore's GDP."

## Sports

### Tan Poh Seng

*Tennis coach/teacher*

*Year left school: 1964*

Although Tan Poh Seng taught biology in New Town Secondary School, he was also well known outside the classroom for another activity — tennis.

Indeed, several old boys of New Town have fond memories of the man who taught them to wield a tennis racket, play the sport well and help pave their paths to a lucrative future career — as a tennis coach — when they found studies were not their forte. A few like Wong Chee Leong and Yang Siang played Davis Cup for Singapore.

When reminded of this, Poh Seng modestly brushes aside his role, remarking that he did not consciously get his students to choose coaching as a career, but it did dawn on him that for those not too academically inclined, tennis coaching could become an alternative career.

Apart from mentoring his young charges, Poh Seng also played a major



role in training and grooming promising Singapore tennis talents who went on to become national players when he served not only as the Republic's national coach, Davis Cup non-playing captain but also as the Head Coach of Singapore Sports Council Junior Scheme in the late 1980s and early '90s.

He also served as Vice-President of the Singapore Lawn Tennis Association in charge of technical development for several years. By wearing many tennis hats, he could set up a nation-wide scheme to groom young tennis talents as well as run age-group tournaments to give aspiring juniors exposure to competitive tennis. By being involved with the Singapore Lawn Tennis Association and the Singapore Sports Council, he could also coordinate coaching clinics and tennis courses run by noted foreign coaches to elevate the coaching standard of Singapore coaches.

He was also tasked by the International Tennis Federation to run tennis clinics in Guam and Mongolia. He holds a United States Professional Tennis Association Pro 1 certification and is an International Master Professional in the United States Professional Tennis Registry.

Contributing to the popularity of tennis in Singapore is nothing new to Poh Seng as he was instrumental in improving the sport of tennis in Penang in the 1970s before emigrating to Singapore in 1980.

While in Penang as a Biology teacher at Methodist Boys' School, a number of his tennis students like Kuldip Singh and Francis Su became national players and represented Malaysia in Davis Cup.

At the Chinese Recreation Club where he was the Captain and Head Coach of the Tennis Section, the club produced many national champions like Toh Seok Har and Albert Cheah. Poh Seng himself was the Malaysian National Champion in 1974-75. He represented Malaysia in the Davis Cup tournament in 1970, 1974 and 1975 and the SEAP (Southeast Asian Peninsular) Games in 1973 and 1975.

Like most Old Frees, Poh Seng is very passionate when it comes to sports. When he was in PFS, he represented the school in tennis, hockey, cricket, athletics (javelin) and the occasional rugby matches. He also played soccer and badminton. He represented Penang Combined Schools in tennis, hockey and cricket and University of Malaya and Penang in tennis and hockey. He was appointed Head Prefect in 1964.

He described his time at Penang Free School as one that was fun-filled as there were so many games that he could participate in. Although he admitted he did not study too much, he praised the school for instilling in its students a sense of responsibility.

He said, "We learned how to organise and lead. We had teachers who not only

taught in the classroom but were actively engaged after school activities. In games, the older students - many of them school team players - would teach the younger ones and pass on their skills. As such, every student had the opportunity to participate and appreciate the varied activities offered. Our headmaster whose house is situated within the school grounds would be around most afternoons at inter-school matches mingling with the students and lending his support."

He attributes his love of sports to his father who not only encouraged him to play different sports but also bought him all the equipment that he needed. As for tennis, his father brought him to Chinese Recreation Club to play the game.

Poh Seng now resides in San Diego, California. Retired, he is happily engaged not only in coaching his grandchildren and taking them to tennis tournaments but is also actively competing in tennis. He and his grandson won the USTA (United States Tennis Association) National Grandfather-Grandson doubles title in December 2014.

In 2016, he hopes to compete in the USTA National Super Senior Father-Daughter doubles event. This event is for fathers who must attain the age of 70. "My daughter and I are looking forward to compete in this event. What's so great about tennis is that it is a sport that one can play to a ripe old age."

## Selvadurai Sooceleraj

*Hockey coach/Teacher*

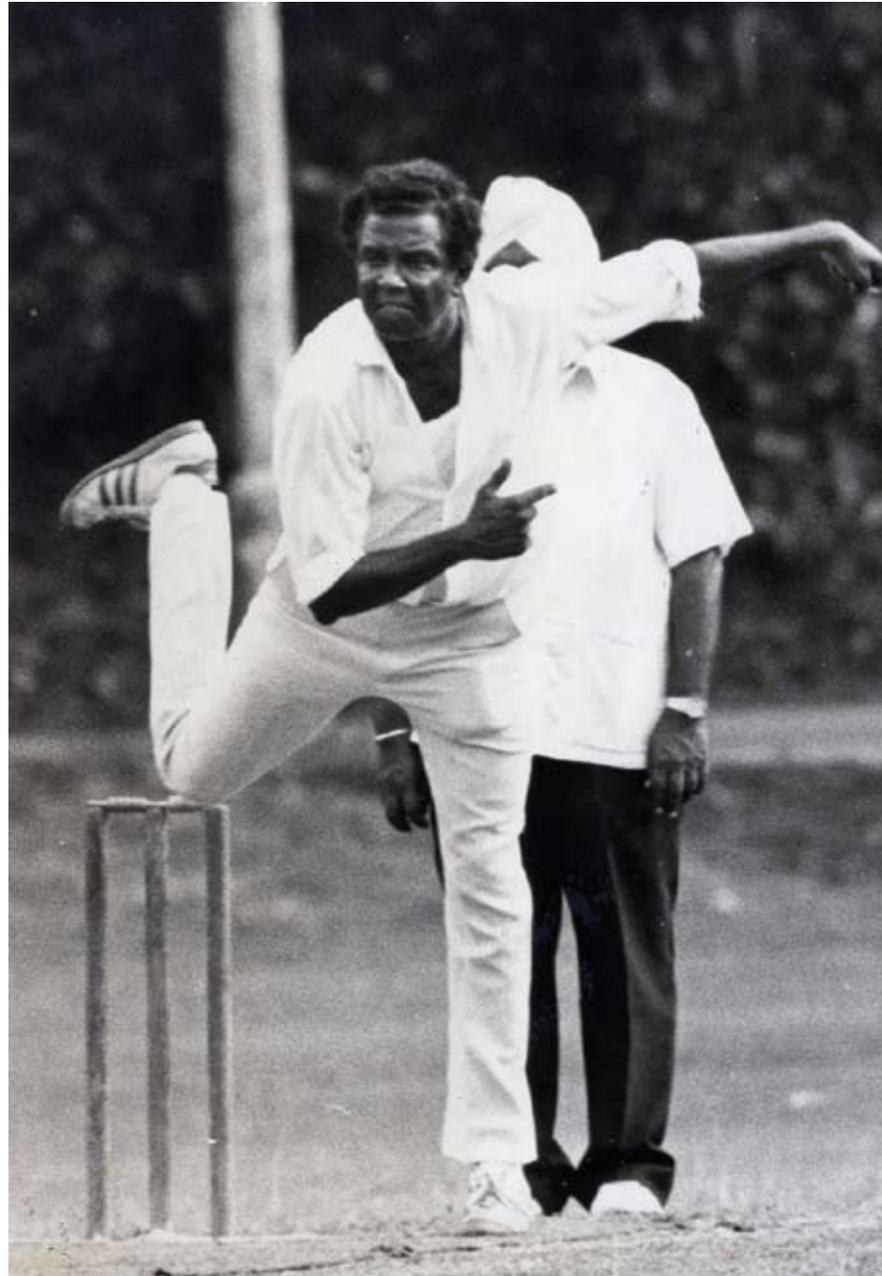
*Year left school: 1953*

Better known as Sooce (pronounced Soocy), Selvadurai Sooceleraj was a true-blue Old Free with his love for sports, thanks to PFS's policy of a well-rounded education system that included equal emphasis on sports development.

Sooce shone in hockey, cricket and rugby, representing not only the school and Penang nationally but also Malaya on the international stage.

He came to Singapore soon after leaving PFS and was recruited as a chemistry teacher at Victoria School (VS) where he was also a physical education teacher and hockey coach. He taught hockey not just to VS students but he also trained national hockey players. He was credited with producing some of Singapore's finest hockey players such as national hockey captains Lam Yin Koi and Kee Yaw Lin and well-known cricketers such as Hira Singh and M Neethianathan and Singapore's acknowledged best national cricketer Stacey Muruthi.

Indeed, cricket was especially dear to his heart and he himself indulged in the game till he was 60 years old. A feared leg-spinner for the Ceylon Sports Club, he was the oldest player in Division One cricket. There were memorable headlines to his winning exploits on the cricket field such as



**Sooce represented not only the school and Penang nationally but also Malaya on the international stage.**

Source: The Straits Times  
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“Sooceleraj hero in a 2-win run” in *The Straits Times* (20 May 1963) and “Sooce, 59, still has batsmen in a spin” in *The Straits Times* (27 July 1989).

He was well known for his booming voice, his love for sports and his fervent desire in instilling in his wards a similar passion. For him, training in sports was all about getting his students into the field to toughen up and develop the right frame of mind to compete in tournaments.

Sooce served as a sports teacher and hockey coach in VS for 30 years before retiring in 1990. In 2011, he died in his sleep at the age of 81, sorely missed by his students, colleagues and the hockey and cricket fraternity. But his name lives on in a special sports award announced a year later.

In 2012, when *The New Paper's* School Sports Stars were made public, a special teacher-coach award was also given out to recognise the people behind these stars. Named the S Sooceleraj Award and presented by Soilbuild Group, the award was to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of teacher-coaches. Such coaches have a heavy load — regular class teaching followed by sports coaching in the field and the marking of papers and preparation for the next day's lessons at night.

It was an award Sooce would have been proud of.

## Others

### Joshua Chiu Ban It

*Anglican Bishop*

*Year left school: 1938*

Joshua Chiu Ban It was a brilliant scholar at PFS. He was active in school representing the badminton team of the Wu Lien-Teh House of which he was a member and as editor of the school magazine. In 1937, he was elected Head Boy or School Captain and in 1938, he was awarded the Hutchings Scholarship. He went on to study at King's College, University of London, graduating with a Bachelor of Laws in 1941.

He was ordained at Westcott House, a Church of England theological college in Cambridge in 1943 after a period of study. His first posting was as curate of the St Francis of Assisi Church in Bournville, near Birmingham.

He returned to Penang to practise as acting vicar for a while before becoming a full minister with the Church of England in 1950. He was assistant priest at St Andrew's Cathedral before becoming parish priest

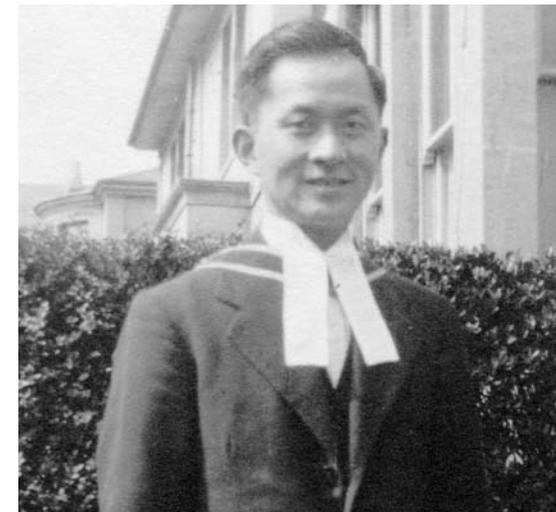
of St Hilda's Church, Singapore, from 1952 to 1955 and then served as the Vicar of Selangor (the first Asian to be appointed) and Canon of the Diocese of Singapore.

During his time in Selangor, he was elected the first vice-president of the Old Frees' Association in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, which was formed in 1959.

He was appointed home secretary of the Australian Board of Missions from 1959 to 1962 after which he served as Secretary for Laymen Abroad in the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

From 1964 to the beginning of 1966, he was a lecturer in Ecumenics at St Augustine's Theological College Canterbury in the UK until his elevation to the Episcopate.

Upon his return to Asia in 1966, he was consecrated as the first Malayan-born Bishop



**In Chambers, 1941.**



**Bishop Chiu and his wife Wendy after his consecration ceremony as bishop in 1966.**

of the Diocese of Singapore and Malaya, a post he held until he retired in 1982. He was the sixth bishop. He was also Dean of the Anglican Diocese of Singapore from 1970 to 1982. Between 1968 and 1973 he was Vice-Chairman of the Council of Churches in East Asia and acting Chairman from 1970.

On 20 February 1972, on the last day of her first state visit to Singapore, Queen Elizabeth II and the British Royal Family attended a service at St Andrew's Cathedral. It was presided over by Bishop Chiu.

In 1982, Bishop Chiu retired and is now residing in Britain.



**Bishop Chiu greeting Queen Elizabeth II at a church service in St Andrew's Cathedral during her state visit to Singapore in 1972.** Source: The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Permission required for reproduction

## EK Lim

Optometrist

Year left school: 1953



**B**etter known as EK, Lim Eam Khoon was hoping to be an architect but ended up in the eye-care industry instead and carving out a reputation as 'pioneer'

optometrist.

Recounting how this came about, he said, "After leaving PFS, Tay Lee Soon (my classmate) and I did sketches to be sent to Regent Polytechnic in London. He ended up studying architecture in Melbourne instead when he was there to watch the Malayan hockey team playing in the Olympics.

"I trooped off to London on my own but found out that my application did not reach Regent Polytechnic. As luck would have it, I met an Old Free, Khoo Boon Haw, who had been studying medicine in Singapore the year before but had to drop out of the course. He decided to go to London to study optometry and persuaded me to join him at the Northampton College of Advanced Technology (renamed City University).

"It seemed like an attractive alternative as it was only a three-year course versus six years for architecture.

"As it turned out, optometry was good for me as it was a course that enabled me to serve people.

"London was very advanced in the field of optometry. The course was quite exacting as apart from the course in college, I had to be attached to a spectacle-making company after which I could sit for the diploma for which I was made 'freeman of the city of London'. With this, I could practise optometry in London which I did for a year after I had qualified in 1959 before returning to Penang in 1960."

Recalling his schooldays, he said, "I was in PFS after Hutchings Primary School. I spent most of my time in sports playing football, rugby, hockey and badminton. I represented the school in football and rugby although I was better known for the latter. In fact, from 1956 to 1958 when I was in London, I was the only Asian representing my college in rugby.

"I remember some of our teachers rather well. One of the classic punishments in PFS was getting students to stand on a chair. For our history teacher, Lim Boon Hock, this would be for things like forgetting history dates. He would make you stand on a chair for the rest of the class. I did this three times.

"On one of these occasions, when our Sixth Form classes had turned co-educational and we had girls from St George's enrolled in our school, I remember standing on a chair in one part of the

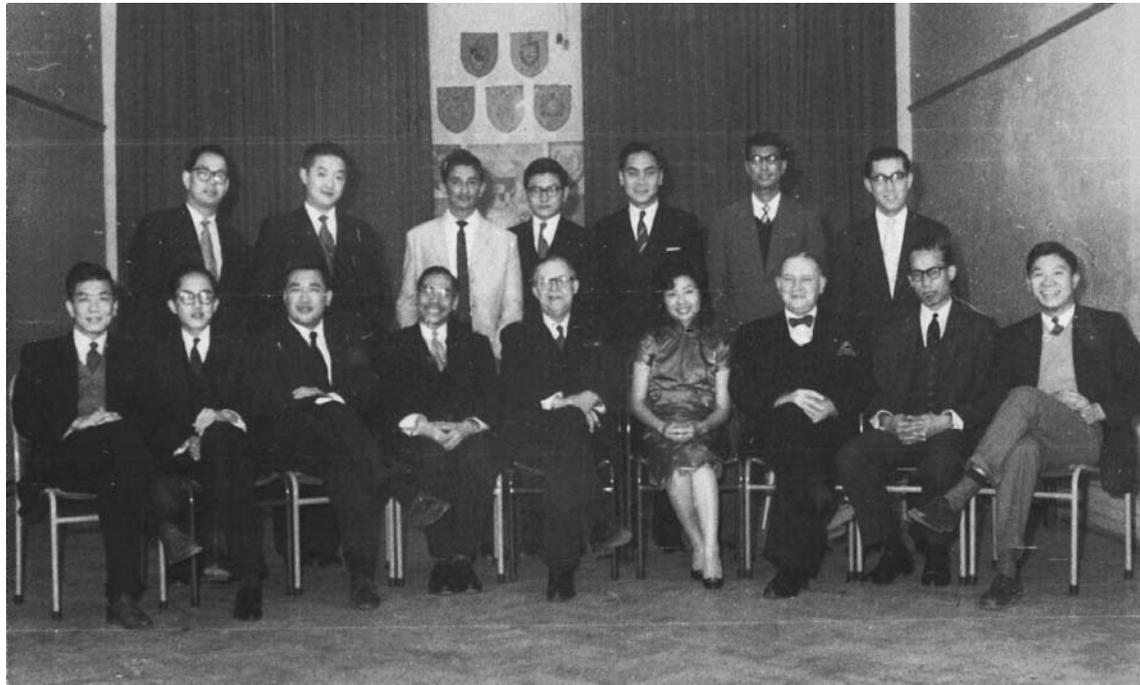
classroom with Khoo Teck Hock standing on another chair in the back while some girls were walking past. Someone told us to get down just as the girls were passing by but we could not as our history teacher was still there! No boy ever liked to have girls see him standing on chairs.

"There were also teachers with other peculiarities. We had Captain Mamat Nor, a very strict Malay teacher, who was always smartly dressed in a white suit and wore a songkok. Then there was Lee Eng Leong, who taught us biology, with his fondness for half-eye glasses, which he peered over to look at us. We also had an assistant teacher from Ireland, Penny Pettigrew, who always wore low cut tops, making her a favourite among the boys!

"Apart from these, there were other memorable occasions. In 1952, our class held a tea party to celebrate Queen Elizabeth's coronation, which was attended by headmaster Tod."

During his student days in London, EK was in touch with other Old Frees. He explained, "Penang was a British colony and for most of us, the UK was considered 'our motherland'. When it came to studying overseas, the UK and especially London would come to mind.

"I joined the Old Frees Association (OFA) there and our former headmaster Tod who was from Hove and had just retired was our patron. The association was active,



**1958 UKOFA Reunion at Malayan Hall, London.**

organising get-togethers from time to time. When Malaya became independent in 1957 for instance, we had a celebration in Malaya Hall.

"Among the members of OFA London were Lim Chor Pee, who was studying law and had his own private law practice in Singapore and Chandran Arul, who is still practising as a lawyer in Singapore. Chor Pee was the OFA secretary in 1955 and 1956. He handed it over to me so I became secretary in 1957. I asked Arul to take over when I had to leave London after finishing my course.

"Because of PFS and later OFA in

London, I like to organise functions. I was a prefect and that helped develop my organisational skills. Chor Pee and I enjoyed organising picnics and dance functions when we were in school. PFS encouraged us to be sociable.

"That came in useful whenever I attended functions in optometry and when people came from overseas to Singapore for optometric meetings, I would take them out. I liked doing that.

"The same applied to Old Frees. I was always encouraging Old Frees to get in touch with me whenever they visited

Singapore as I was constantly in touch with other Old Frees. We would always end up with a dinner; I would call Chor Pee and Lee Soon to join in. For me those links were, and still are, very important. I continue to keep in touch with Arul."

On his reputation as pioneer optometrist, EK said, "It all started when I had just arrived in Singapore in 1971 when soft contact lenses had just been introduced. Like everyone else, I had been working with hard contact lenses in Penang during the 10 years of my business there.

"When soft lenses were first approved for use here, nobody knew how to fit them. I decided to learn how to do it by going to London. I went to the manufacturer to see how the lenses were made. Convinced of their usefulness, I started ordering them to fit my customers. I had to do measurements for each patient's eyes and had to order the lenses specifically.

"It did not take long for the trend of wearing soft lenses to take off when people realised how comfortable they were compared to the hard lenses which were rigid and difficult to wear.

"Because I was the first to introduce the lens, I was called a pioneer in the field, making a name for my company which was EK Lim Pte Ltd. Other optometrists soon followed suit.

"Now of course, ready-made soft lenses are used in the market."

## Alex KH Ooi

Obstetrician and gynaecologist

Year left school: 1969



He wears many hats but unlike the proverbial 'Jack of all trades and master of none', Alex has been on top of all the roles he has taken on during his career and

accomplished them well.

When asked why he felt compelled to take on social responsibilities despite a busy medical practice to attend to, he says, "I have always had an inclination towards service to others or to causes where I am able to contribute. This trait, I feel, is a natural extension of the desire to be a doctor. It carries with it a sense of caring, professionalism and empathy."

It is, without doubt, the result of years of nurturing in PFS where students have always been encouraged to serve the community and think of others and its spirit of discipline.

Recalling his time there, Alex said, "In my time at the school, we were made to play as many games as possible and take on at least one extra-curricular activity and yet be focused on studies as required. This, coupled with encouragement (sometimes pure designation!) to lead, was to be the catalyst to the moulding of character and

responsibility to self and others.

"I was a Sea Scout and school prefect and played games, mainly rugby, volleyball and waterpolo. I remember the grueling and character building experience of canoeing round Penang Island in our self-made canoe, carrying our own supplies for sustenance!"

His sense of social responsibility began early, starting with his days as a medical student in the University of Singapore.

He said, "The university provided many extra-academic service avenues. I had the honour of being class representative for all five years of medical school. I was President of the Medical Students' Society and the first Asian President of the International Federation of International Student Associations. I was also Vice-President of the University of Singapore Students' Union and Chairman of the Asian Students' Association.

"I have also been involved in fund-raising and activities for charity, sometimes as Chairman. I have been President of The Old Frees' Association, Singapore for some years and was instrumental in bringing the Dr Wu Lien-Teh legacy to light and setting up the Wu Lien-Teh Society in Penang.

"Other organisations where I have served as president include the Rotary Club (and twice as district-secretary), Warren Golf Club (1984-87), The Tanglin Club (2000-2003) and, presently, Singapore Island Country Club from September 2015.

These roles are often categorised as

'thankless' but Alex sees it from a different perspective. He explains, "I find them challenging. It is difficult to change human nature but it is work that needs to be done and which I feel I have the disposition for. I just face the duties, taking obstacles in my stride. Keeping up with my own professional work, which I find gratifying, keeps me sane!"

"Many people may believe otherwise but, for me, it is often not difficult to handle people in committees as I believe the greater majority of volunteers serving in these committees are people with an innate nature for observing good governance, doing due diligence and expecting only self-satisfaction."

The motivation for serving stemmed from the desire to help resolve conflicts, which were a bane in some of these clubs and to help make progress on the clubs' original objectives.

He looks back with satisfaction that the club accounts at Warren, for instance, were nursed back to health while its golf course was re-configured and its social facilities enhanced. At The Tanglin Club, the ability to help resolve the conflicts then and developing and executing the Master Plan to enhance the clubhouse and building a sports complex gave him a sense of pride.

"They were challenging yet rewarding times especially as I could leave office on a happy note."

## Lim Chor Pee

Lawyer and playwright

Year left school: 1954



Although he carved out a name for himself as a successful litigator in several high-profile court cases, Lim Chor Pee was also well-known as a luminous playwright.

He was credited with sowing the seeds of local English-language theatre in Singapore and nurturing it to what it is today. When his highly acclaimed first play *Mimi Fan*, written in 1962, took to the stage, it was hailed as having set a milestone in home-grown drama production.

Yet when Chor Pee left Penang Free School in 1954 to go to Britain to read law in St John's College, Cambridge, becoming a playwright was probably not his first priority despite a widely recognised passion for the theatre during his school days.

He joined PFS in 1949 after Wellesley Primary School and Francis Light School. A member of Hargreaves House, he took part in many activities including joining the Scouts. In December 1952, he attended the Pan-Pacific Scouting Jamboree in Australia as one of the school's representatives.

In going to Cambridge, Chor Pee was following in the footsteps of his father, Lim

Kheng Kooi, an Old Free and a Queen's Scholar in 1927, who scored a double-first in law at the same college.

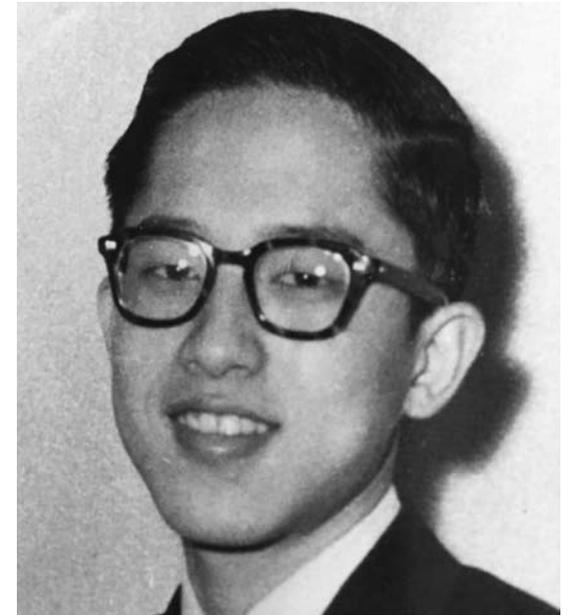
After graduating in 1958, Chor Pee was called to the English Bar in 1959 as a member of The Honourable Society of the Inner Temple.

He then joined the Singapore Legal Service serving as a Crown Counsel and Deputy Public Prosecutor in the Attorney-General's Chambers and District Judge as well as the first Legal Adviser to the Tax Department. In 1962, he was called to the Malayan Bar in Singapore.

It was while he was working in the Legal Service that he started to write *Mimi Fan* in his spare time in the evenings. It was the 1960s and Singapore was in the throes of early nationhood. It had just been granted self-governing status by the British in 1959 and in 1962 it was on its way to gaining independence by joining Malaya, Sarawak and Sabah to form the new Federation of Malaysia a year later.

All this gave rise to stirrings of a national identity and a clamour for a Singapore voice to be heard on stage amid what was then a Western-skewed presence mounted by expatriate theatre groups.

As Chor Pee put it in an article he wrote in the journal *Tumasek* in 1964, "The amateur theatre anywhere in the world is the place where the future professional theatre begins. And there can be no proper theatre unless there are playwrights."



And so with a group of like-minded individuals, he founded the Experimental Theatre Club (ETC) in 1961 to create 'Malayan theatre' and encourage local playwrights by staging their works. ETC staged *Mimi Fan* in 1962 to packed houses during its three-day run at the then Cultural Centre on Canning Rise. It was a story about an English-educated Singaporean returning home from Britain in the liberal swinging '60s and his encounter with a free-spirited good-time girl *Mimi Fan*. The core of the play centred on the theme of truth and identity.

Coincidentally, one of the actors in the critically acclaimed play was another Old Free, Lim Teong Quee, better known as

TQ Lim, retired judicial commissioner and father of Singapore actor Lim Yu-Beng.

Reflecting on its sensational success and on why he wrote the play for an English-speaking new generation, Chor Pee was quoted as saying: "It went down nicely because the audience could feel and see for themselves that is...you can identify yourself with one of them on stage because it's the way we normally would have spoken or would have reacted in a similar situation, rather than some foreign play which is of foreign values that is not totally known to us...."

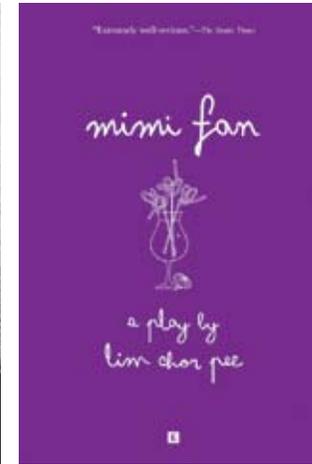
Chor Pee was the first to dream the Singapore play and give it its initial shape. But he was not just a playwright. He was also a theatre company director and a theatre theoretician. He is widely credited for having kick-started the local theatre scene in Singapore and galvanising locals to follow suit.

Chor Pee took on the role of ETC's artistic director from 1962 to 1967. He wanted to set ETC apart from other theatre companies especially expatriate-run ones such as The Stage Club. He was also against patronising colonial influence in local drama, which was prevalent in the days following Singapore's independence. In one instance when a theatre critic of *The Straits Times* M. E. Constant wrote condescendingly: "Let the local theatre clubs be not too proud to learn from the expat clubs," Chor Pee retorted: "This



**Lim Chor Pee's play, *Mimi Fan*, was first staged in 1962 featuring (from left) Annie Wee, Ronald Bloom and Lim Teong Quee better known as TQ Lim, an Old Free.**

**Right: Cover of *Mimi Fan*, recently re-published by Epigram Books.** Photo: Epigram Books



sort of attitude should have gone with the plumed hat."

It was his determination to distinguish local theatre and end the domination of expatriate-produced plays that moved him to write *Mimi Fan*. He wanted to produce a realistic play with characters making punch lines that a local English-speaking audience could appreciate rather than spouting 'Queen's English', which he felt was not a true representation of Singaporeans.

Chor Pee followed up on his success by writing another play *A White Rose at Midnight* in 1964 about a romance between an English-educated university graduate and a Chinese-educated former nightclub singer, which was also staged by ETC.

Despite skilfully juggling between being a practising lawyer and a stalwart

of Singapore's English-language theatre for years, Chor Pee gave up drama to concentrate on his legal career in 1964.

He had just started his own law practice then named Chor Pee & Hin Hiong, after leaving the Legal Service. After some years the firm dissolved and he founded Chor Pee & Company. This firm became the first of a handful of foreign law firms that were given licences to operate in Vietnam, at a time when few local firms had ventured out into the region. In the late 1990s he formed Chor Pee & Partners. Several notable Singapore lawyers and former lawyers either chambered or worked at these firms. In Malaysia, Chor Pee also practised under Albar Zulkifly & Yap and later Chor Pee Anwarul & Company with offices in Kuala Lumpur and Johor.

As a lawyer with a fine reputation, he had a flair for handling extremely difficult cases and was held in high regard by his clients. Chor Pee's endurance as a lawyer can be seen in four decades of cases reported in the law reports. His talent and skill as an advocate has been etched in the memories of many Singapore and Malaysian lawyers.

Remembered for his kind and likeable disposition, he was also known to be a hardworking member of the legal community. Throughout 2006, even while battling lung cancer very bravely, he continued with his legal practice with admirable dedication until his final days. He died in December 2006, aged 70.

## Alan Tan Khee Jin

Law professor

Year left school: 1986



“I was from the Class of 1986 (Form 5), and over half my class have ended up in Singapore. Says a lot, doesn't it? ... My fondest memories are of my teachers and classmates. Those were the formative years, and everything in my life I have learned from those years – leadership, hard work,

competition, politics, negotiation, nastiness, everything! I was a prefect and the Prefects' Board did crazy things like going out on motorcycles to bust smoking students – when I think back, we were downright crazy. But we were happy.

“Our form teacher, Ms Choong Lai Yong, remains in the school. She holds the distinction of being the last remaining teacher of that generation who's still teaching. We were fond of Molly Ooi (our first teacher in Form 1), Johnny Ooi (whose prime mission was to ensure the school's dominance in hockey), Lim Lay Eong (later Mrs Ooi!) and Low Boon Ewe (who drummed into us that we were the *crème de la crème*). What I remember was the entire class landing in detention (DC) one day and being lectured by the principal, GK Iyer. Someone had written something crass on the blackboard about a teacher and never owned up to it, so everyone was punished ... we still don't know who did it.

“We knew the school was special, with her incredible history, and she gave us the platform, the confidence, to excel in whatever we did. I'd like to think my friends and I live the school motto – *Fortis Atque Fidelis* – Strong and Faithful. I still wear the school tie when I do TV interviews. It gives us a kick to tell Singaporeans that we're older than their country!

“It would be too romantic to paint all Old Frees as gentlemen. There are thinkers,

doers, scientists, artists, money-spinners and yes, rogues among us, but there's one thing in common: We all love the school.

“I hated the idea of becoming a lawyer, so I do something even better: teaching and spawning them. So I'm incredibly fortunate to have a great job, mentoring young would-be lawyers and moulding them into responsible and ethical individuals. And it has to do with the Penang Free School, the institution whose teachers and environment gave me the very same drive and inspiration.

“As a Professor of Law at the National University of Singapore, I specialise in the law relating to aviation and airlines, advising airlines like AirAsia on the regulation of the airline industry. I also research into Indonesian environmental issues, particularly the haze problem that has afflicted us in recent years, as well as criminal law. I teach these areas of the law to my students at the National University of Singapore (NUS), where I've been teaching for 22 years now in what has been my first and only job.”