

Check out pre-1900 maps of S'pore for free on website

Developed by Yale-NUS team, platform has 1,500 digitised maps of Republic and S-E Asia

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Balestier Road is today lined with colourful shophouses and apartment blocks, but a much different housing type dotted the road in the late 19th century.

In an 1892 map of Singapore showing principal residences and places of interest, more than 10

country bungalows line the road. The houses were owned by residents who worked or had businesses in the town area near the mouth of the Singapore River, which by then had become crowded and expensive to live in.

The map, from the collection of the University of Oxford's Bodleian Libraries, is one of 1,500 pre-1900 maps of Singapore and South-east Asia that have been digi-

tised and are free to access from a new website.

Compiled by a research team from Yale-NUS College, the online platform has maps from three other libraries besides the Bodleian Libraries – Singapore's National Library Board, Leiden University Libraries and Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

The research team was headed by Yale-NUS urban studies professor Jane Jacobs, who said at the platform's launch event held virtually on Aug 30 that one of the project's goals is to leverage digitisation to

make the libraries' collections available to a range of users, such as geography and history teachers, students, scholars and amateur history enthusiasts.

Yale-NUS curator Robin Blackburn said that while some of the maps on the platform were previously available only for physical viewing at the libraries, others could be accessed from each library's online catalogue, but would have been difficult to find.

The research team has made the maps easier to access on its new platform by adding metadata to each map beyond what was pro-

vided by the source libraries.

For instance, besides date and location searches, users can search for maps with features such as bus stations or post offices, as well as based on where they were published, and by whom.

The historical maps have also been overlaid on a present-day map so users can get a sense of how places have changed over time.

Aside from map searches, users can learn about map production through a curated set of maps and text in a page called Imagined Geographies on the platform's "MapJourneys" section. Another page, called "Where is Southeast Asia?", explores the historical portrayal of South-east Asia in maps.

The project was funded over two years by a Ministry of Education Social Science Research Thematic Grant, which – among other things – helped to build an in-house team within Yale-NUS that developed the platform. It can be accessed at historicalmaps.yale-nus.edu.sg

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