

MEDIA RELEASE

**DISCOVERY OF BOUNDARY MARKER REVEALS EXTENT OF SINGAPORE PIONEER
TAN KIM SENG'S ESTATE IN 19TH CENTURY SINGAPORE**



Tan Kim Seng's Hong Hin boundary marker being assessed and cared for at the Heritage Conservation Centre (Photos courtesy of the National Heritage Board (NHB)).

SINGAPORE, 19 November 2021 – Who would have thought that a stone marker found in a Singapore forest would lead to greater insights about Tan Kim Seng, a prominent Straits Chinese merchant and philanthropist, and one of the largest land owners in Malacca and Singapore during the 19th century?

2 The stone marker in question turned out to be a boundary marker. Boundary markers are typically used to identify and establish the location of land properties. During the colonial period, landowners were required to emplace boundary markers at critical points (usually corner or turning points) on their properties.

3 The boundary marker, discovered at Ulu Pandan Forest (more commonly known as Dover Forest), has been identified as one that delineated the boundary of Tan Kim Seng's former estate, which covered a substantial area in southwestern Singapore in the 19th century. The Chinese name of Tan Kim Seng's business “豐興” (Hong Hin) as well as his English initials 'T.K.S' are engraved on the marker.

[Please refer to the **Annex** for more information about the marker's specifications, Tan Kim Seng as a pioneer, and the extent of Tan Kim Seng's estate.]

4 Following consultation with the relevant agencies and with the support of Tan Kim Seng's descendants, the boundary marker was carefully extracted by the National Heritage Board (NHB) on 27 October 2021. The boundary marker is now at NHB's Heritage Conservation Centre where it has been cleaned, and is currently undergoing conservation treatment and further research.

5 Mr Alvin Tan, Deputy Chief Executive (Policy & Community) of NHB, said: "The boundary marker is of heritage significance because it is the only known boundary marker associated with Tan Kim Seng, and it reveals the extent of his former estate in Pasir Panjang. It is also unique because it is one of the few bilingual markers that are engraved with English and Chinese characters. As such, we will be accessioning it into the National Collection where it will receive the necessary care and be used as a resource to educate current and future generations of Singaporeans about the life and contributions of one of the early pioneers of Singapore."

6 Prof Walter Tan, the great-great-great grandson of Tan Kim Seng, and his wife Mrs Vivienne Tan said: "We are happy that the historical background relating to our ancestor, pioneer Tan Kim Seng has been further enriched by the discovery of this boundary marker, and that more would come to know about him via NHB's ongoing research efforts which would be made public in due course. We also hope that this can ultimately encourage public with related documents or research to come forward as well, as such resources can help us unearth more discoveries on Tan Kim Seng's life."

7 As part of the National Collection, Tan Kim Seng's Hong Hin boundary marker will join the other 107 objects associated with the notable Peranakan figure and his family, and may be displayed in The Peranakan Museum after it re-opens in 2023 following its current revamp.

8 In the meanwhile, the public can look forward to NHB's video featuring the behind-the-scenes extraction of the boundary marker which will be uploaded on Minister Desmond Lee's Facebook page and NHB's Roots SG YouTube channel after 12.00pm today, and a more in-depth video featuring NHB's research findings and interviews with an expert and Tan Kim Seng's descendants to be released on NHB's resource portal, *Roots.gov.sg* by the end of 2021.

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About the National Heritage Board

The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993. As the custodian of Singapore's heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit.

NHB's mission is to preserve and celebrate the shared heritage of our diverse communities, for the purpose of education, nation-building and cultural understanding. It manages the national museums and heritage institutions, and sets policies relating to heritage sites, monuments and the National Collection. Through the National Collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Please visit www.nhb.gov.sg for more information.

ANNEX

Specifications of Tan Kim Seng's Hong Hin boundary marker

- Dimensions – 90cm (length) x 26cm (width) x 11cm (depth)
- Weight – 62kg
- Material: Granite
- Inscription – “豐興山” (丰兴山) and “T.K.S”
 - Hokkien pronunciation: Hong Hin
 - Mandarin (Pin Yin) pronunciation: Feng Xin

About Tan Kim Seng

- Tan Kim Seng (1806-1864) was a prominent Peranakan businessman, philanthropist, and community leader in 19th century Singapore.
- Tan Kim Seng was appointed Justice of Peace in 1850. He helped to establish one of Singapore's first Chinese-language schools, the Chinese Free School, and was well known for his generous donation to improve the city's water supply.
- Tan Kim Seng continued the family business when he came to Singapore, which was also known as Kim Seng & Company to the British. However, the Chinese community recognised Tan Kim Seng's business name as “Hong Hin”, which is why Kim Seng Road is also colloquially known as “Hong Hin Lo” in Hokkien.

About Tan Kim Seng's Estate

- Based on ongoing research, Tan Kim Seng's estate would have encompassed today's Clementi Avenue 2 in the west to Dawson Road in the east, and School of Science and Technology in the north to Southern Kent Ridge Park in the south. The Hong Hin marker would have delineated the northernmost frontier of his estate. See map below for more details.



The map shows the (estimated) original land boundaries of Tan Kim Seng's estate based on ongoing research. (Image courtesy of NHB)