

- 5 Handy, 2012, pp. 10–11.
- 6 Lee, G. B. [2000, December 11]. I wanna cook like grandma. *The Straits Times*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 7 Handy, E. [1974]. *My favourite recipes* [p. ii]. Singapore: MPH Publications. Call no.: RSING 641.595 HAN
- 8 Lee, G. B. [1992, May 17]. Still handy after 40 years. *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 9 Handy, 1974, p. ii.
- 10 Handy, E. [1960]. *My favourite recipes* [p. vii]. Singapore: Malaya Publishing House. Call no.: RSING 641.595 HAN
- 11 Khor, C. [1989, November 22]. A literary stroll down memory lane. *The Straits Times*, p. 3. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 12 Khng, E. M. [1989, June 10]. Endearing book and great kitchen aid. *The Straits Times*, p. 19; Alman, J. [1983, August 9]. Have spice, will travel. *The Straits Times*, p. 24; *Where would we be... without Ellice Handy*. [2011, August 9]. Retrieved from Gastronomer blogspot; *Ellice Handy's light chicken stew*. [2008, October 23]. Retrieved from Cherry on a Cake blogspot.
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Despite 11 new editions over five decades, Handy's book has remained largely the same, with the exception of 30 new recipes that were included in the second reprint onwards. Pictured here is the cover of the 1952 first edition. *Image source: National Library Board, Singapore.*

Despite 11 new editions over five decades – in 1954, 1960, 1971, 1972 and 1974, and twice in 1975, 1976, 1980, 1990 and 2012 – Handy's book has remained largely the same, with the exception of 30 new recipes that were included from the second reprint onwards. The presentation has improved over the years; the first edition contained only text, but photos were added in the fourth and subsequent reprints. The most recent version by Landmark Books in 2014 is an elaborate glossy volume, with the recipes packaged to suit the modern consumer. The National Library has the 1960, 1972, 1974, 1990 and 2012 reprints.

The Malayan Publishing House also produced several Chinese editions of *My Favourite Recipes* titled *Shi shi cai pu* (适时菜谱) in 1978 and *Hua yuan jin zu shi pu* (华园锦族食谱) in 1980.

In the 1970s, Handy contributed to the *Female Cookbook* for eight years and

said she considers those to be her better recipes.<sup>13</sup> She also wrote another cookbook titled *Eastern Exotica* (1978), which is a selection of recipes taken from *My Favourite Recipes*. ♦ Irene Lim

#### Notes

- 1 Handy, E. [2012]. *My favourite recipes* [p. 9]. Singapore: Landmark Books. Call no.: RSING 641.595 HAN; The school that Sophia built. [1987, July 15]. *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 2 Welfare women get awards for service. [1957, July 21]. *The Straits Times*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 3 Singapore cookery. [1952, March 31]. *The Straits Times*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 4 Methodist Girls' School Alumni Association. [1987]. *Our favourite recipes: Meals from the Asian kitchen* [p. 113]. Singapore: Landmark Books. Call no.: RSING 641.595 OUR; Handy, E. [2013]. *Our favourite recipes* [p. 8]. Singapore: Landmark Books. Call no.: RSING 641.595 OUR

# A GLIMPSE OF 1930s SINGAPORE

**Title:** *The Lights of Singapore*  
**Author:** Roland St. John Braddell (1880–1966)  
**Year published:** 1934  
**Publisher:** Methuen & Co. (London)  
**Language:** English  
**Type:** Book; 205 pages  
**Call no.:** RRARE 959.57 BRA  
**Accession nos.:** B01428221C; B20048238E  
**Copies donated by:** R. Ramachandra and Lee Kip Lin

Imagine reading this about Singapore in a travel guide: “one of the cesspools of the world”, a place with “no ancient history, no romantic background”, “a paradise for second-class people”, a city with “wild night-life and opium dens”, and having a “terrible climate” that causes “bad health”.<sup>1</sup>

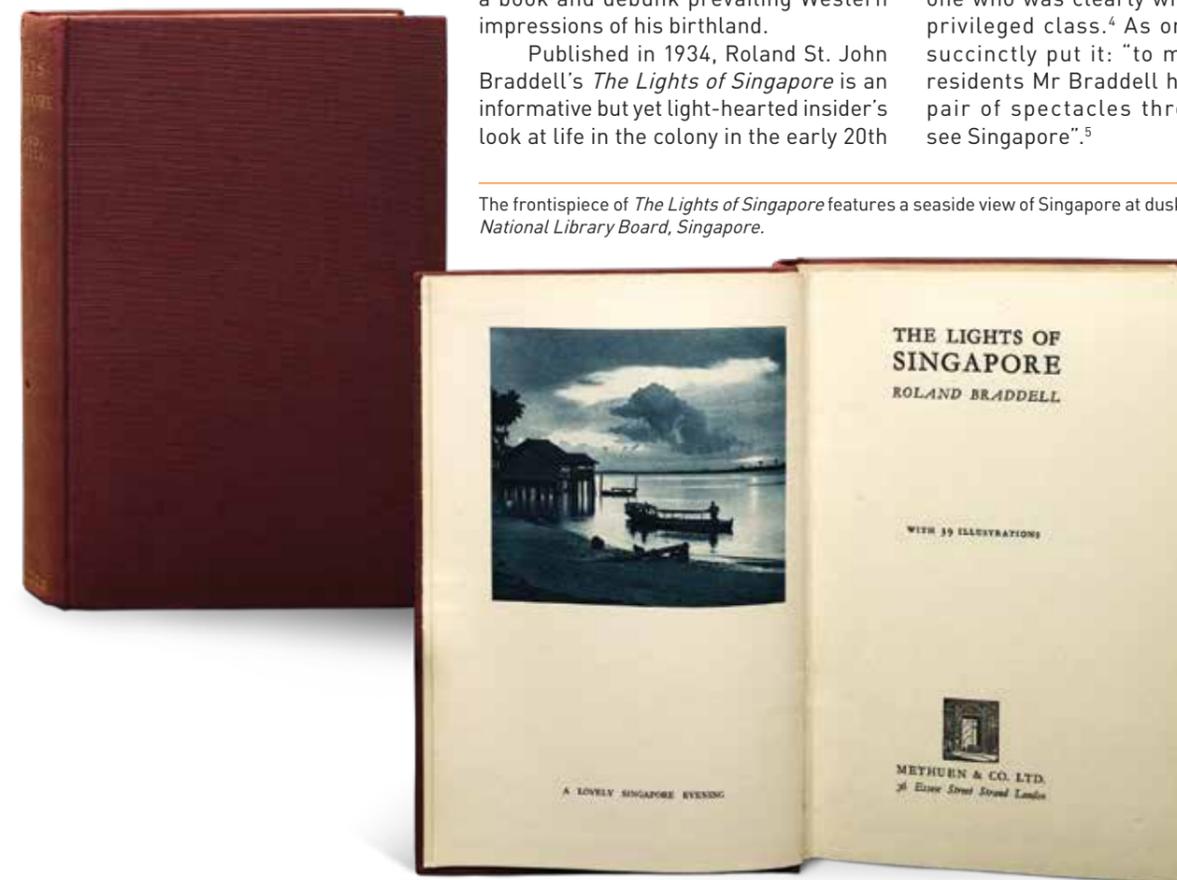
An erudite Singapore-born Englishman who disagreed with these swipes about the island felt compelled to write a book and debunk prevailing Western impressions of his birthland.

Published in 1934, Roland St. John Braddell's *The Lights of Singapore* is an informative but yet light-hearted insider's look at life in the colony in the early 20th

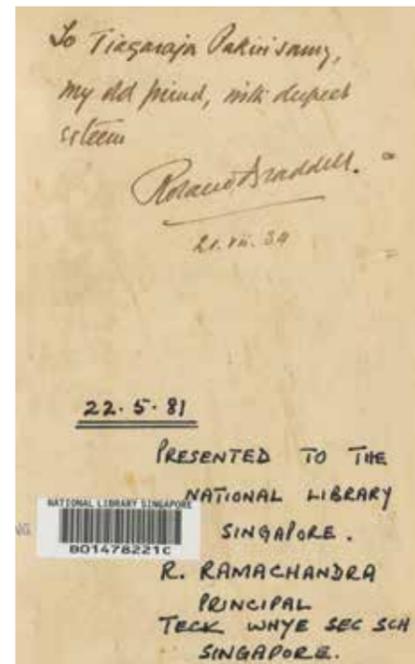
century. Written between April and November 1933,<sup>2</sup> the book was mainly targeted at Westerners but its engaging tongue-in-cheek style won many more readers over, its first print run of 500 copies selling out in only four days.<sup>3</sup>

The book distinguished itself from other expatriate traveller accounts of the day because it was written entirely from the point of view of a local – albeit one who was clearly white and from a privileged class.<sup>4</sup> As one reviewer so succinctly put it: “to many European residents Mr Braddell has given a new pair of spectacles through which to see Singapore”.<sup>5</sup>

The frontispiece of *The Lights of Singapore* features a seaside view of Singapore at dusk. *Image source: National Library Board, Singapore.*



(Right) A street scene of Singapore's Chinatown. All rights reserved, Braddell, R. St. J. (1934). *The Lights of Singapore*. London: Methuen & Co. (Far right) The National Library has four copies of the first edition of *The Lights of Singapore* published in 1934. The first, donated by R. Ramachandra, the then principal of Teck Whye Secondary School, on 22 May 1981, carries a handwritten dedication from the author Roland St. John Braddell to a friend. Image source: National Library Board, Singapore. (Below right) A *Straits Times* advertisement of the book on 22 July 1934. *The Lights of Singapore* is so popular that it has been republished several times since it was first printed © *The Straits Times*.



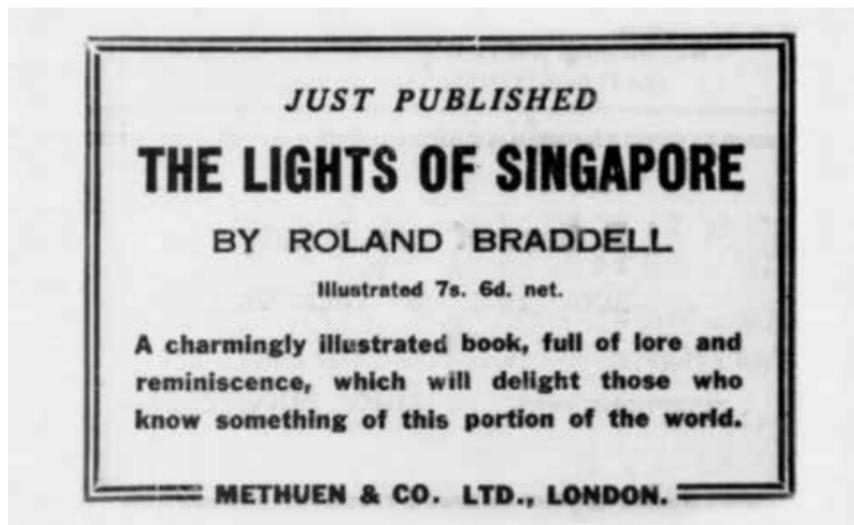
The book does not lend itself to easy categorisation into a single genre. It reads as a fact book on Singapore, a travel guide to places of interest, a history book on its pre-colonial past, and a collection of anecdotal stories and observations on the quirks and foibles of life in 1930s Singapore.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the fact that the book was written during the years of the Great Depression (1929–39), it adopted an exuberant tone in painting Singapore as a picture of progress and modernity, with its new railway station, motor cars, large buildings, massive land reclamations, and a new airport under construction in Kallang.

Braddell also described the different facets of cultural life in Singapore, from the religious rituals practised by locals to the entertainment found in the colony, including Hollywood movies and grand parties where multicultural cuisines were served. Colourful depictions of the people, from Hailam (Hainanese) servants to rickshaw pullers complete his portrait of a charming and complex city that was fast becoming a glittering emporium of the East.

Braddell also praised Singapore for being one of the few places that had “large surpluses, little public debt, [and] low taxation”. One of the astute observations he made in the book was that the island had an “outward modernity” that was underpinned by “age-old beliefs and ancient superstitions”.<sup>7</sup> He also wrote of the perennial complaint by locals on Singapore’s lack of culture, a not unfamiliar rhetoric that still exists in contemporary Singapore.

*The Lights of Singapore* was published in London in July 1934, and sold for \$3.50 a copy. The book includes 29 plates of photogravure<sup>8</sup> on places of interest in Singapore and Malaya, most of which were taken by Nakajima & Co., a popular photo studio located at the Raffles Hotel.



To boost publicity, the book was advertised as “a new book presenting the romance and history of Malaya”, “suitable for sending home”, “full of lore and reminiscence, which will delight those who know something of this portion of the world”, and one that creates “an intimate picture of Singapore” while bringing out “the romance and history of that city as well as Malaysia generally”.<sup>9</sup>

Those stirring descriptions worked. A second edition was released the same year in September, and a third edition, with revisions and corrections, was published the following year. The fourth and fifth editions were released in 1939 and 1941 respectively. In all, the book sold about 5,000 copies before World War II (1942–45), making Braddell one of Malaya’s most popular authors.<sup>10</sup> Subsequent editions

were published in 1947, 1966 and 1982, the latter two by Oxford University Press.

The National Library has four copies of the first edition of the book published in 1934. The first was donated by R. Ramachandra, then principal of Teck Whye Secondary School, on 22 May 1981. It carries a handwritten dedication from Braddell to a friend (whose name is not legible) with the message, “My old friend, with deepest esteem”.

The second and third copies were donated to the library by the late Mr Lee Kip Lin, an architect and author of several architectural books on Singapore and Mr Koh Seow Chuan, founder of DP Architects. The fourth copy comes from the John Bastin Collection. ♦ Gracie Lee

## Notes

- 1 Braddell, R. (1982). *The lights of Singapore* (pp. 3–4, 14, 17, 19, 22–23). Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press. Call no.: RSING 959.57 BRA-[HIS]
- 2 The Wanderer. (1934, July 29). Mainly about Malaysians. *The Straits Times*, p. 2. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 3 The lights of Singapore. (1934, September 2). *The Straits Times*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 4 Wicks, P. C. (1986, September). [Review of] *The lights of Singapore* by Roland Braddell; glimpses into life in Malayan lands by John Turnbull Thomson. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 17(2), 381–383. Retrieved

- from JSTOR; “The lights of Singapore”. (1934, July 30). *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 8; W. A. H. (1934, July 30). Today’s special article. *The Straits Times*, p. 12. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 5 Notes of the day. (1935, January 14). *The Straits Times*, p. 10. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 6 Intimate book on Malaya. (1934, July 22). *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 7 Braddell, 1982, pp. 39, 47–48.
- 8 Page 9 Advertisements Column 1. (1934, August 1). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 9 *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, 1 Aug 1934, p. 9; Page 16 Advertisements



Portrait of Roland St. John Braddell (1880–1966). All rights reserved, Makepeace, W., Brooke, G. E., & Braddell, R. St. J. (1921). *One Hundred Years of Singapore (Vol. II)*. London: John Murray.

## WHO WAS ROLAND ST. JOHN BRADDELL?

Roland St. John Braddell (1880–1966) was a prominent lawyer who contributed much to the public life of Malaya. The third generation of Braddells to settle in the region, he was the eldest son of Thomas de Multon Lee Braddell, Chief Justice of the Federated Malay States (1913–17);<sup>1</sup> and grandson of Thomas Braddell, the first Attorney-General of the Straits Settlements (1867–82).<sup>2</sup>

Braddell was born in Singapore on 20 December 1880. He received his education at King’s School, Canterbury, and Worcester College, Oxford, where he obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1904. He was called to the Middle Temple Bar in 1905, and the Straits Bar the following year. Braddell then practised at Braddell

Brothers, the law firm established by his father and uncle, Robert Wallace Glen Lee Braddell.<sup>3</sup>

In April 1936, Braddell was appointed an unofficial member of the Johor Executive Council for a period of two years by the sultan of Johor. He served as legal advisor to the United Malays National Organisation, played an instrumental role in the negotiations that led to the establishment of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 and had a hand in drafting the federation agreement. Thereafter, he continued to serve as legal and constitutional advisor to the rulers of the Malay States.<sup>4</sup>

Legal achievements aside, Braddell was also known as a scholar of Malayan history. He was one of three editors – including Walter Makepeace and Gilbert Edward Brooke – of Singapore’s centenary celebration publication, *One Hundred Years of Singapore* (1921) (see page 26). He also wrote several legal and history books, including *Commentary on the Common Gaming Houses Ordinance of 1888* (1911), *The Law of the Straits Settlements: A Commentary* (1915) (see page 82) and *The Lights of Singapore* (1934) (see page 79). In addition, Braddell had many of his papers published in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*.<sup>5</sup>

Braddell made many contributions to other areas of public service as a municipal commissioner; member of the Singapore Housing Commission; president of Singapore Rotary Club; president of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, and president of the Singapore Art Society, among other appointments. Described as a “real Malayan par excellence”, Braddell was knighted in 1948 for his services to Malaya.<sup>6</sup>

In July 1951, Braddell left Singapore but returned to Kuala Lumpur two years later to start up his legal practice there. He played a part in the establishment

- Column 1. (1935, November 16). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 16; Page 7 Advertisements Column 1. (1934, July 22). *The Straits Times*, p. 7; Page 9 Advertisements Column 1. (1934, June 23). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 10 Colony Cavalcade: Malayan record. (1935, November 3). *The Straits Times*, p. 2; Black market in books. (1947, July 20). *The Straits Times*, p. 5. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

## Notes

- 1 Death of Lady Violet Braddell. (1948, October 28). *The Straits Times*, p. 7; New Braddell generation in Singapore. (1947, October 18). *The Straits Times*, p. 7. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 2 Attorneys-General of the Straits Settlements from 1867 to 1936. (1936, November 8). *The Straits Times*, p. 16; Sir Thomas Braddell (1927, February 4). *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 3 As I was saying. (1933, October 7). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG; Makepeace, W., Brooke, G. E., & Braddell, R. St. J. (Eds.). (1991). *One hundred years of Singapore* (Vol. 2, p. 430). Singapore: Oxford University Press. Call no.: RSING 959.57 ONE
- 4 Dato Roland Braddell appointed to Johore Executive Council. (1936, April 27). *The Straits Times*, p. 12; Braddell retires, cuts last link. (1960, November 26). *The Straits Times*, p. 9; Ramani, R. (1968, August 28). Roland Braddell. *The Straits Times*, p. 9. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 5 Centenary history of Singapore. (1920, November 15). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 6; Gaming and gambling. (1911, November 8). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 12; The making of a colony. (1916, February 19). *The Straits Times*, p. 6; Intimate book on Malaya. (1934, July 22). *The Straits Times*, p. 7; Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 6 *The Straits Times*, 26 Nov 1960, p. 9; Sir Roland Braddell. (1948, June 11). *The Straits Times*, p. 4; Singapore citizen. (1951, July 21). *The Straits Times*, p. 6; “The Lights of Singapore”. (1934, July 30). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884–1942)*, p. 8. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 7 Death in London of Sir Roland Braddell. (1966, November 17). *The Straits Times*, p. 1. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.
- 8 *The Straits Times*, 17 Nov 1966, p. 1.