

# An Uncle replies to Pheng Soon



I was delighted that you mentioned me in your reminiscences as a "Caveman" in the July 2005 issue of the *SMA News*.

Since you are the only one interested in the medical aspects of our family history, I have decided to appoint you (without your permission which I am sure you would not object) the repository of what little I have gathered from my researches into the medical history of early Singapore.

Your grandfather graduated in 1918, at the same time as his younger brother Ee Liat. They joined the Government Service and were posted to the Outpatient Department.

During colonial times, locals known as "natives" to the Government seldom had their names mentioned in the official records, although they did most of the work for which their British superiors got all the credit. Their names only happened to be mentioned because they wrote the annual reports of the Outpatient Clinics they were in charge of. I have perpetuated their names

in my article "Early Years of the Outpatient Services, Singapore". (*Singapore Med J* 1994; 34:82-93.)

Your grandfather was later posted to the Mental Hospital and served there for years. In fact, he was a "Psychiatrist" but was not recognised as a specialist by the Colonial Government. He knew more psychiatry (especially in the Singapore context) than the young British doctors who were his superiors.

The records showed that Uncle Ee Liat was bright (like all the Lees!). He was sent to London to sit for the Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (D.T.M. & H.) and he passed the examinations with Distinction.

I summarise here the official despatches from the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London to the Governor of the Straits Settlements, and from the Governor to the Secretary of State:

1) From the Secretary of State - Despatch 364 of 25.6.1921.

Because of increase of fees at the London School of Tropical Medicine, 5 "free" (scholarship) places allotted to the Straits Settlements instead of 6.

2) From the Secretary of State - Despatch 371 of 29.6.1921.

Re: Course of instruction at the London School of Tropical Medicine for Mr Lee Ee Liat, Assistant Surgeon. Awarded one of the Government's "free" places. (Locally qualified doctors in the Government Service were known as Assistant Surgeons in those days.)

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3) From the Secretary of State –  
Despatch 434 of 6.8.1921.

Lee Ee Liat passed the examination at the London School of Tropical Medicine with Distinction. 76% of the marks.

4) From the Secretary of State –  
Despatch 495 of 8.9.1921.

Have not received leave certificate or report on Dr Lee Ee Liat regarding his attendance at the London School of Tropical Medicine.

5) From the Governor – Despatch 536  
of 28.10.1921.

Reply to the Secretary of State's despatch 495 of 8.9.1921.  
Re: Dr Lee Ee Liat and the London School of Tropical Medicine.  
He received a Travelling Scholarship of \$750 from the Medical School.

A number of his British colleagues who later held top jobs, for example, as Head of the Social Hygiene Department, didn't do as well:

1) From the Secretary of State –  
Despatch 172 of 14.4.1923.

Dr H P Hodge – DTM & H Certificate. 52% of the marks.

2) From the Secretary of State –  
Despatch 173 of 14.4.1923.

Dr E D Lindow – DTM & H Certificate.  
52% of the marks.

3) From the Secretary of State –  
Despatch 174 of 14.4.1923.

Dr R W C Kelly – DTM & H Certificate.  
66% of the marks.

4) From the Secretary of State –  
Despatch 175 of 14.4.1923.

Dr E V Lapprian – DTM&H Certificate.  
57% of the marks.

Uncle Ee Liat left the Government Service to be a General Practitioner because he could not tolerate the racial discrimination. His clinic was at New Bridge Road, very close to the College of Medicine.

I went to see him there many times when I was "broke" as a medical student and he was very generous. Each time he gave me \$100. It was a princely sum in those days. My salary as a House Officer in 1954 was \$400 p.m. A newly-appointed (first year) Medical Officer received \$820 p.m.

This letter to you has started me thinking about an article for the *Singapore Medical Journal* on the life of a HO in the early 1950s. ■

## WHAT IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN

In the announcement for the 9<sup>th</sup> SMA Ethics Convention in the August 2005 issue of the SMA News, Dr Teo Eng Swee's designation was "Consultant Forensic Pathologist, Health Sciences Authority".

We wish to clarify that Dr Teo is giving the presentation in his personal capacity, and he is not representing the Health Sciences Authority.

We apologise for the error.