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**SINGAPORE CUSTOMS AND NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD**

**CUSTOMS HERITAGE PRESERVED IN HISTORIC BUILDING**  
**Historic site marker for former Custom House**

Singapore Customs' former headquarters at Custom House has been marked as a historic site by the National Heritage Board (NHB). The 57-year-old building along Maxwell Road is the 88<sup>th</sup> historic site in Singapore marked by NHB.

**Historic Site Marker for Custom House**

2 To launch the historic site marker for Custom House, Singapore Customs has organised an internal event for officers who have been in service when Custom House served as the headquarters then. The event was also attended by invited guests, including former Director-Generals who were once part of the heritage, retirees, and public officers from the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA), NHB and the Ministry of Finance.

3 Said Customs' Director General Mr Fong Yong Kian (方永健), "Custom House is an important part of our shared heritage and history. We are proud that the building which has served Customs for almost 60 years has been conferred a historic site marker. The building will continue to be a visible symbol of the department's history. With this marker, more Singaporeans will be able to learn about the exciting transformations of Customs from the '30s to the '80s and help bring Customs' history alive."

4 Said NHB's Deputy CEO Mrs Elaine Ng, "Historic sites are places that play an important part in Singapore's social, political and economic history including security and defence. They therefore serve as constant reminders of our shared heritage. We are pleased to include the Custom House building to our list of marked historic sites and hope that the public will be reminded of the important role Customs has played in shaping the history of Singapore."

## Tracing History and Milestones

5 The Custom House building was the Customs headquarters for almost 60 years. More than half of the department's developmental history from 1932 to 1989 was charted through the building. This was the period when the department underwent two name changes from *Government Monopolies Department* to *Excise Department* in 1935 and then five years later, to *Department of Customs and Excise (CED)*. In the 1940s, Customs contributed to the funding of World War II through the collection of war duties on fireworks, entertainment, playing cards and rubber, among others.

6 Customs played a critical role in establishing the first Free Trade Zones in 1966 to boost entrepot trade which was part of Singapore's export-oriented strategies. In the 1970s, Customs established its international presence by becoming a member of the *Customs Co-operation Council* which is now *World Customs Organization*. The department, together with Police and Central Narcotics Bureau, formed the Narcotics Detector Dog Unit in 1977. *TradeNet*<sup>®</sup> was implemented in 1989 – the world's first nationwide single-window trade documentation system.

7 Today, Singapore Customs is located at Revenue House, and is charged with the mission of assuring the integrity of the trading system to make trade easy, fair and secure. From administering preferential tariffs in free trade agreements, strengthening supply chain security, controlling strategic goods exports, to upholding our laws to ensure a level playing field for trade, Customs has progressively taken on an important and active role to establish Singapore as a secure and trusted global trading hub.

8 The full historical information on the historic site marker for Custom House and photographs of the building, then and now, are attached at [Appendix 1](#).

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**Historical Information on the National Heritage Marker for Custom House**

Built between 1930 and 1933 by the Public Works Department (PWD), Custom House is representative of the style and architecture of buildings designed by the PWD under the leadership of Frank Dorrington Ward, the Chief Architect. The original design of the building was centred on a courtyard partially surrounded by rooms with ample windows to allow for light and air. This concept worked well in Singapore's climate before the days of air conditioning. The design of its curved main entrance facade is a good example of how a building can 'turn a corner' and contribute to the visual identity of the street. Dorrington also designed the old Supreme Court, old Hill Street Police Station (today's Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts Building) and old Traffic Police Headquarters Building (Red Dot Museum today).



*Custom House, 1970s*

Like many other buildings commissioned by the PWD, Custom House was built to house administrative offices. The building was most notably known as Customs headquarters from June 1932 to August 1989. Other offices which had occupied parts of the building included the Film Censor's Office at the rear and the Maxwell Road Post Office on the ground level.

During the Second World War in 1941, Custom House provided shelter to expatriate customs officers fleeing Malaya. They and their families sought refuge on the ground floor of Custom House. Shelter was also provided to a number of Australian soldiers who were rescued from the sea after being attacked by Japanese troops.

Between 1959 and 1973, the Custom House underwent several rounds of renovation. In 1959, the entrance hall was renovated and a new lift was installed. The hall provided a fitting entrance to the building and accommodated the reception area and officers from the then Entertainments Duty Department. Due to the growing numbers of customs staff, the building was again renovated in 1967 to increase its floor area by 1,060 sq meters. Finally, in 1973, the building was fully air-conditioned to provide a more conducive working environment.



*Custom House, 1980s*

In 1989, the Customs headquarters was moved to the then World Trade Centre at Maritime Square and the 57-year-old Custom House was re-designated for commercial use and renamed as the White House. The Custom House was gazetted by the URA as a conservation building on 2nd April 2007, in recognition of its architectural and historical contribution to the area. It was renamed another time as Maxwell Chambers in 2010 and houses the world's first integrated dispute resolution centre for international arbitration cases. Singapore Customs is now located at Revenue House and has the vision of assuring the integrity of the trading system to make trade easy, fair and secure.



*The building is now occupied by Maxwell Chambers,  
a centre for international dispute resolution.*