

Singapore HeritageFest 2009
“Arte (factually) Speaking” Story-Writing Competition
Shortlisted Entry (Lower Secondary Category)



Contest ID: 120
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Artefact: Colonial Posting Box. Red Colonial Posting Box
Museum: Singapore Philatelic Museum

Red Nostalgia

The post box stands outside the museum. The colour of brilliant scarlet, its hulking frame stands guard outside the portal to a world of stamps. It is the only survivor of its kind. The rest have faded away into oblivion or have been smelted down to make other things. There it remains; the last vestiges of the colonial post service now nothing more than a relic to be gawked at. It is rich with heritage and memories; now it begins to recollect. The box begins to think long and hard, comparing the Singapore of then and now.

Even as the crowds mill around it, speaking in tongues it has vaguely heard before (is that Cantonese?), the post box drifts into its past, trying to grasp something of its former glory. It tries to piece back its fading memories, and it digs hard and deep, eventually managing to conjure up some idea of its past glory.

It occupied a spot on Edinburgh Road. Well-dressed gentlemen would ride up to it and slot letters back home into its mouth. The hustle and bustle of Europeans surrounded it. The royal cipher adorned its door, reminding all who passed that this was the property of the mighty British Empire. Now all that remains is this post box, sadly standing outside the museum. The gentlemen are gone, faded into ashes and dust by the ravages of time. Edinburgh Road now lies between the presidential residence and a big shopping mall. Instead of smartly dressed Europeans, teenagers in t-shirts and skinny jeans now roam the place where the post box once stood.

The cipher on its belly is gone, filed away by the patriotic Singaporeans in 1965. There is no need to look hard for this memory. It remembers it well. The agony; the disgrace of having the symbol of one's monarch forcibly removed from one's body. It remembers its silent screams, imploring the newly-sinister postal staff to stop, its voice strangely stifled and unheard. Of course, they couldn't hear it, and the symbol of British imperialism was gone from this post box. Newly independent, Singapore wanted to distance itself from its former colonial masters. It was used for a while, as the young nation struggled with its newfound freedom. The box resumed its tasks, storing letters in the depths of its cast iron belly.

The nation prospered and the post box was retired from service. Where it took a few horses to draw it, the post box was placed on a lorry and driven off to a place unknown to it. There, it was left in a large room, along with its brethren. It brooded over its fate in silence, the dark

room helping it in its wordless musings. It watched in pain as its brethren disappeared, to be smelted down or to be thrown into a junkyard, perhaps? Very soon, the posting box was left alone in the large, dark room. One day, the men came for it. It waited in odd anticipation for its own ignominious fate. The driver and the men placing it onto a lorry exchanged a few words, and the box overheard something like "philatelic" and "museum". At once, its spirits soared; the post box would shout for joy, if it could. It would be something to remind the post box of its glorious past, at least. Brought to the museum, the men placed it outside the entrance of the museum, where it languishes to this day.

(575 words)