

## FREEMASONRY IN SINGAPORE, MALAYSIA AND THAILAND

### Introduction

The Thais historically held Singapore and Malaysia as vassal states so this paper deals with these three neighbour nations together.

### Singapore

#### History of Singapore



The history of Singapore dates to the 11th century. The island rose in importance during the 14th century under the rule of Srivijayan prince Parameswara and became an important port until it was destroyed by Acehnese raiders in 1613. The modern history of Singapore began in 1819 when Englishman **Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles** established a British port on the island. Under British colonial rule, it grew in importance as a centre for both the India-China trade and trade in Southeast Asia, rapidly becoming a major port city.

In the early 15th century, Singapore was a Thai vassal state<sup>1</sup>, but the Malacca Sultanate quickly extended its authority over the island. The Portuguese seized Malacca in 1511 and between the 16th and 19th centuries, the Malay archipelago was gradually taken over by the European colonial powers, beginning with the arrival of the Portuguese at Malacca in 1509. The early dominance of the Portuguese was challenged during the 17th century by the Dutch, who came to control most of the ports in the region.

In 1818, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was appointed as the Lieutenant Governor of the British colony at Bencoolen. He was determined that Great Britain should replace the Netherlands as the dominant power in the archipelago, since the trade route between China and British India, which had become vitally important with the institution of the opium trade with China, passed through the archipelago. Raffles hoped to challenge the Dutch by establishing a new port along the Straits of Malacca. Raffles arrived in Singapore on 29 January 1819 and soon recognized the island as a natural choice for the new port. The island was ruled by the Sultan of Johor, who was controlled by the Dutch. A formal treaty was signed on 6 February 1819 and modern Singapore was born and in 1824, Singapore was ceded in perpetuity to the East India Company by the Sultan. As Singapore rapidly emerged as an important trading post, Britain consolidated its claim on the island and, in 1826 Singapore was grouped together with Penang and Malacca to form the Straits Settlements, administered by the British East India Company.

During the subsequent decades, Singapore grew to become an important port in the region. Its success was due to several reasons including the opening of market in China, the advent of ocean-going steamships, and the production of rubber and tin in Malaya. Its status as a free port provided crucial advantage over other colonial port cities in Batavia (Jakarta) and Manila where tariffs were levied, and it drew many Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Arab traders operating in South-East Asia to Singapore. The later opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 would further boost trade in Singapore. The British government agreed to establish the Straits Settlements as a separate Crown Colony on 1 April 1867 rather than administer the Island from India. This new colony was ruled by a governor under the supervision of the Colonial Office in London.

Singapore was not much affected by World War I (1914–18), as the conflict did not spread to Southeast Asia. After the war, the British government devoted significant resources into building a naval base in Singapore, as a deterrent to the increasingly ambitious Japanese Empire.

<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia

On 7 December 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbour and the Pacific War began in earnest. One of Japan's objectives was to capture Southeast Asia and secure the rich supply of natural resources to feed its military and industry needs. Singapore, the main Allied base in the region, was an obvious military target. By 31 January 1942 the Japanese had conquered the entire Malay Peninsula and were poised to attack Singapore. The fall of Singapore was the largest surrender of British-led forces in history. Singapore was occupied by the Japanese from 1942 to 1945. The Japanese army imposed harsh measures against the local population particularly the Chinese population. The most notable atrocity was the Sook Ching Massacre of Chinese civilians, undertaken in retaliation against support of the war effort in China. The mass executions claimed between 25,000 and 50,000 lives in Malaya and Singapore.

After the Japanese surrender to the Allies on 15 August 1945 British troops led by Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander for Southeast Asia Command, returned to Singapore. Much of the infrastructure had been destroyed during the war, including electricity and water supply systems, telephone services, as well as the harbor facilities at the Port of Singapore. By late 1947, the economy began to recover, facilitated by a growing demand for tin and rubber around the world.

The failure of Britain to defend Singapore had destroyed its credibility as infallible ruler in the eyes of Singaporeans. The decades after the war saw a political awakening amongst the local populace and the rise of anti-colonial and nationalist sentiments. The British were prepared to gradually increase self-governance for Singapore and Malaya. On 1 April 1946, the Straits Settlements was dissolved and Singapore became a separate Crown Colony. In August 1958, the State of Singapore Act was passed in the United Kingdom Parliament providing for the establishment of the State of Singapore. But, despite its economic success, Chief Minister Lee and others felt that their future lay in union with Malaya, despite the difference in racial balance, Singapore having a large Chinese majority.

On 16 September 1963, Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak were formally merged and Malaysia was formed. However, by late 1963 racial tensions were increasing as the Chinese in Singapore disdained being discriminated against by the federal policies of affirmative action, which granted special privileges to the Malays.

The external political situation was also tense as Indonesian President Sukarno declared a state of *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) against Malaysia and initiated military and other actions against the new nation. Indonesia also conducted sedition activities to provoke the Malays against the Chinese. Numerous racial riots resulted and curfews were frequently imposed to restore order.

On the morning of 9 August 1965, the Parliament of Malaysia voted 126-0 in favor of a constitutional amendment expelling Singapore from the federation; hours later, the Parliament of Singapore passed the Republic of Singapore Independence Act, establishing the island as an independent and sovereign republic. The Konfrontasi was on-going and the conservative UMNO faction strongly opposed the separation. Singapore faced the dangers of attack by the Indonesian military and forcibly re-integration into the Malaysia Federation on unfavorable terms. Singapore immediately sought international recognition of its sovereignty.

The new state joined the United Nations on 21 September 1965 and joined the Commonwealth in October that year. Singapore later co-founded the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on 8 August 1967 and was admitted into the Non-Aligned Movement in 1970.<sup>1</sup>

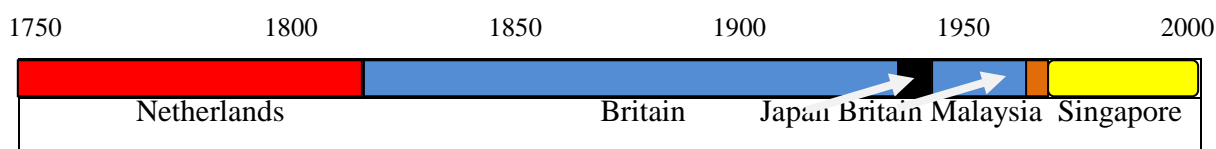
The government invested heavily in an education system that adopted English as the language of instruction and emphasized practical training to develop a competent workforce well suited for the industry.

British troops had remained in Singapore following its independence, but in 1968, London announced its decision to withdraw the forces by 1971 and Singapore rapidly established its own Defense Force, with the help of a national service program introduced in 1967.

Further economic success continued through the 1980s, with the unemployment rate falling to 3% and real GDP growth averaging at about 8% up until 1999.

The Port of Singapore became one of the world's busiest ports and the service and tourism industries also grew immensely during this period. Singapore emerged as an important transportation hub and a major tourist destination.

### Timeline of Singapore Territorial Occupation



### Freemasonry in Singapore

It is believed that the Dutch Masons were the first to set up an organized lodge in the Far East but the beginnings of Singapore's Lodge is traced to the founding of Freemasonry in the Eastern Archipelago.<sup>2</sup> This began with the establishment of the Lodge at Bencoolen in 1765. **Stamford Raffles** himself was instrumental in establishing Lodges in the region - namely Lodge Virtutis et Artis Amici in Java, Lodge de Vriendschap in Surabaya and Chapter La Vertueuse in Batavia.

Activities in Singapore began with the first 'mother' lodge, "Lodge Zetland in the East" No. 748 E.C established in 1845. At that first lodge meeting, twelve leading members of the small European community in Singapore - among them senior lawyer, **William Napier**, deputy superintendent of police, **Thomas Dunman** and Straits Times editor, **Robert Carr Woods** - were proposed for initiation.

On 15 December 1845, **William Napier** became the first initiated Brother, next was prominent citizen **Mr. William H. Read** followed by soldier, **Lieutenant Benjamin Bloomfield Keane**. Other notable Freemasons in Singapore's early history included the country's founder, **Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles**; first attorney-general, **Thomas Braddell**, **Rajah of Sarawak James Brooke**, **Admiral Henry Keppel**, **John Coulson Smith**, former headmaster of Raffles Institution, and **Thomas Owen Crane**, JP.

In Singapore, there are about 400 registered masons from all walks of life, who are members of 11 different Lodges in Singapore. They erected the Horsburgh Lighthouse (1850) and Raffles Lighthouse (1854), raised funds for the Tan Tock Seng Hospital and founded Singapore's first library.

Historically, they have always been charitable and supported non-Mason charities. During World War II, the Japanese Occupation troops imprisoned 250 Freemasons in Changi Prison<sup>3</sup>.

No	Name	Jurisdiction
1172	Ailsa	Grand Lodge of Scotland
1437	St Andrew	
765	St Patrick's Lodge	Grand Lodge of Ireland
508	Zetland in the East	United Grand Lodge of England
1152	St George	
2933	St Michael (Research)	
2970	Eastern Gate	
7178	Singapore	
7444	Stamford Raffles	
7533	Hordsburgh	
7629	Centenary	

<sup>2</sup> "Singapore Freemasonry" By Cornelius-Takahama, Vernon

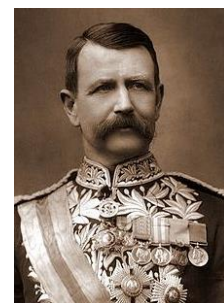
<sup>3</sup> Grand Lodge of the middle East website

## Famous Singaporean Freemasons



**Sir Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles**, FRS (1781–1826) was a British statesman, best known for his founding of Singapore. He is often described as the "Father of Singapore". He was also heavily involved in the conquest of the Indonesian island of Java from Dutch and French military forces during the Napoleonic Wars and contributed to the expansion of the British Empire. He was also an amateur writer and wrote a book entitled *History of Java* (1817).

**General Sir Charles Warren, GCMG, KCB,FRS** (1840–1927) was an officer in the British Royal Engineers. He was one of the earliest European archaeologists of Biblical Holy Land, and particularly of Temple Mount. Much of his military service was spent in the British South Africa, but in earlier life he was Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, the head of the London Metropolitan Police, from 1886 to 1888, during the period of the Jack the Ripper murders. His command in combat during the Second Boer War was criticised, but he achieved considerable success during his long life in his military and civil posts.



**William Napier** (1804–1879) was a lawyer and newspaper editor in Singapore, also Lieutenant-Governor of Labuan. In 1833 he was appointed as Singapore's first law agent in 1833. He was also one of the two founders of the Singapore Free Press, and edited that weekly newspaper until 1846, when he returned to the UK for health reasons.

**Thomas Dunman** (1814-1887) was the first Commissioner of Police in Singapore from 1856 to 1871. During his time heading the police force, **Dunman** was known for being on good terms with the people of various classes and communities within Singapore, and thus able to gain assistance and first-hand information regarding what was happening in the city. He was respected by leaders of the European community, and supported by influential Malays and Indians. Morale in the force improved and the crime rate in Singapore decreased under his leadership.



**Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry Keppel, GCB, OM** (1809–1904) was a British admiral, son of the 4th Earl of Albemarle and of his wife Elizabeth, daughter of Lord de Clifford. His first command was largely passed on the coast of Spain, which was then in the midst of the convulsions of the Carlist War. Captain **Keppel** had already made himself known as a good seaman. He was engaged with the squadron stationed on the west coast of Africa to suppress the slave trade. In 1837 he was promoted post captain, and appointed in 1841 to the service in China and against the Malay pirates, a service which he repeated in 1847, when in command of HMS *Maeander*.

He served in the Crimean War and again sent out to China, this time in command of the *Raleigh*, as commodore, and later commanded HMS *Alligator* until his promotion to rear-admiral. For his share in the action at the Battle of Fatshan Creek he was

made KCB. **Sir Henry Keppel** served as Commander-in-Chief, Cape of Good Hope and West Coast of Africa Station in 1860, Commander-in-Chief, China Station in 1867 and Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth in 1872, before retiring from the active list in 1879 as Admiral of the fleet.<sup>1</sup>

**James Brooke, Rajah of Sarawak, KCB** (1803–1868) was the first White Rajah of Sarawak. His father, Thomas Brooke, was an English Judge Court of Appeal at Bareilly, British India; his mother, Anna Maria, born in Hertfordshire, was the illegitimate daughter of Scottish peer Colonel William Stuart, 9th Lord Blantyre, and his mistress Harriott Teasdale. James Brooke was born in Secrore, a suburb of Benares, India.



**Sir Thomas Braddell** (1823–1891) was an Irish lawyer, the first Attorney-General of Singapore. He was Attorney-General from 1867 to 1883, when, with his brother Robert Wallace Lee Braddell, he founded the Singapore legal firm of Braddell Brothers. In the 1850s, he published historical works on the early settlement of Singapore in the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago*.

**William Henry Macleod Read** (1819–1907) was an active participant in the commercial, political and social life of Singapore and the Malay states between 1841 and 1887.

**John Coulson Smith**, a former headmaster of Raffles Institution and **Thomas Owen Crane** a Justice of Peace and trustee of Raffles Institution were also prominent Freemasons in Singapore.

**Robert Carr Woods**<sup>4</sup> (1816-1875) was the first editor of The Straits Times and guided it through its difficult early years. He also laid out Bukit Timah cemetery, co-founded Singapore's first law firm, served briefly as a judge and drove the campaign for transferring control of the Straits Settlements from India to London. **Woods** was a Mason, a trustee of Raffles Institution and secretary of the Sailors' Home, which he helped establish and secretary of Tan Tock Seng Hospital's management committee. **Woods** became deputy sheriff in 1850 and was a municipal commissioner from 1860 to 1861 and from 1864 to 1873.

**T. S. Zain** was the first Malay to be installed in the symbolic "Chair of King Solomon".

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<sup>4</sup> "Robert Carr Woods Sr" Article by Duncan Sutherrland – National Library Board Singapore

## Malaysia

### History of Malaysia



Malaysia is a country in South East Asia whose strategic sea-lane position brought trade and foreign influences that greatly influenced its history. Hindu and Buddhist cultures imported from India dominated early Malaysian history. In the first millennium CE Malay's became the dominant race on the peninsula. The small early states that were established were greatly influenced by Indian culture. Indian influence in the region dates back to at least the 3rd century BCE. The Hindu and Buddhist cultures reached their peak in the Sumatran-based Srivijaya civilization, whose influence extended through Sumatra, Java, the Malay Peninsula and much of Borneo from the 7th to the 14th centuries.

Although Muslims had passed through Malaysia as early as the 10th century, it was not until the 14th and 15th centuries that Islam first established itself on the Malay Peninsula. At times, the Khmer kingdom, the Siamese kingdom, and even Cholas kingdom tried to exert control over the smaller Malay states. The power of the Buddhist Maharajas was further undermined by the spread of Islam. By the late 13th century, the Siamese kings of Sukhothai had brought most of Malaya under their rule. In the 14th century, the Hindu Java-based Majapahit Empire captured the peninsula. Islam came to the Malay Archipelago via Arab and Indian traders in the 13th century, ending the age of Hinduism and Buddhism.

The adoption of Islam by the 15th century saw the rise of number sultanates, the most prominent of which was the Melaka (Malacca). The Malacca Sultanate is commonly considered the first independent state in the peninsula. In exchange for regular tribute, the Chinese emperor offered Melaka protection from the constant threat of a Siamese attack. Islamic culture has had a profound influence on the Malay people, but has also been influenced by them.

The Portuguese were the first European colonial powers to establish themselves in Malaysia, capturing Malacca in 1511, followed by the Dutch. Portuguese influence was strong, as they aggressively tried to convert the population of Malacca to Catholicism. In the early 17th century the Dutch were at war with Spain, who obtained the Portuguese Empire due to the Iberian Union. The Dutch pushed the Portuguese out of Malacca in 1641. The Dutch diverted most trade to its colonies on Java. In 1795, during the Napoleonic Wars, the British with the consent of the Netherlands occupied Dutch Melaka to forestall possible French interest in the area.

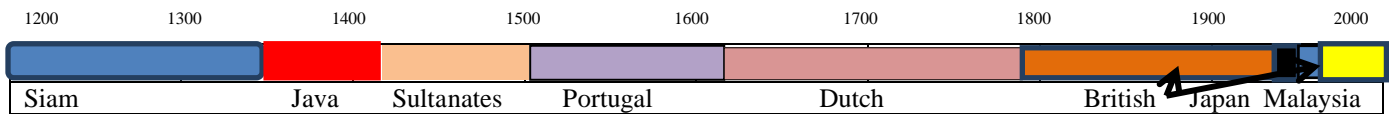
The British, who after initially establishing bases at Jesselton, Kuching, Penang and Singapore, ultimately secured their hegemony across the territory that is now Malaysia. The Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 defined the boundaries between British Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies (which became Indonesia). A fourth phase of foreign influence was immigration of Chinese and Indian workers to meet the needs of the colonial economy created by the British in the Malay Peninsula and Borneo.

In 1909 the Siamese kingdom was compelled to cede Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu, which already had British advisors, over to the British. During the late 19th century the British also gained control of the north coast of Borneo. In 1841, a British adventurer, **James Brooke**, helped the Sultan of Brunei suppress a revolt, and in return received the title of Raja and the right to govern the Sarawak River District. In 1846 his title was recognized as hereditary, and the "White Rajahs" began ruling Sarawak as a recognized independent state. The Brookes expanded Sarawak at the expense of Brunei.

Japanese invasion during World War II ended British domination in Malaysia. The subsequent occupation from 1942 to 1945 unleashed nationalism in Malaya and Borneo. In the Peninsula, the Malayan Communist Party took up arms against the British. A tough military response was needed to end the insurgency and bring about the establishment of an independent, multi-racial Federation of Malaya in 1957. The Malayan Emergency as it was known, lasted from 1948 to 1960, and involved a long anti-insurgency campaign by Commonwealth troops in Malaya against the Malayan Communist Party in the North. In 1963, the British territories in North Borneo and Singapore were granted independence and formed Malaysia. Approximately two years later, Singapore was expelled from the Federation.

A confrontation with Indonesia occurred in the early-1960s. Race riots in 1969 led to the imposition of emergency rule, and a curtailment of political life and civil liberties which has never been fully reversed. Since 1970 the "National Front coalition" headed by United Malays National Organization (UMNO) has governed Malaysia. Economic growth dramatically increased living standards by the 1990s. This growing prosperity helped minimize political discontent.

**Timeline of Malaysia Territorial Occupation**



**Freemasonry in Malaysia**

Freemasonry in Malaysia had an intermittent beginning. The first Lodge formed in Malaysia was Lodge Neptune in Penang<sup>5</sup> in 1809 but it closed in 1811 and revived in 1825. In 1822 Lodge Humanity with Courage was warranted in Penang but it merged with Lodge Neptune in 1826 and was dormant by 1846 but it began again in 1850 only to be erased in 1862. However by the turn of the century Lodges had been established in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Perak and in Sabah and Sarawak. In 1906 Lodge Scotia No. 1003 under the Grand Lodge of Scotland was founded and, by the outbreak of World War II, UGLE consecrated more Lodges in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Klang, Seraman, Sungai Petani (in Kedah) and Johore Bahru.

The District Grand Lodge of the Middle East under the Grand Lodge of Scotland was consecrated in Kuala Lumpur on October 20, 1916 to bring under a local banner, the then 3 operative Scottish Lodges in British Malaya, namely Lodge Scotia No. 1003 (Penang), Lodge Tullibardine in the East No. 1118 (Kuala Lumpur), and Lodge Malaya No. 1146 (Klang).

Henderson<sup>6</sup> reports that, although the Craft has been discussed in Parliament and is required to make reports on its membership, “good relation between Craft authorities and the Government have been maintained, and there appears to be no reason to suspect that this relationship will not be continued in the future.”

Lodges operating in the Grand Lodge Middle East under the Grand Lodge of Scotland are as follows:-

No	Name of Lodge	Location	No	Name of Lodge	Location
934	Kuala Lumpur	Kuala Lumpur	1529	Angus	Ipoh
1118	Kilwinning in the East		1452	Sarawak	Kuching
1545	Sri Aman		1821	Mulu	Kuching
938	Penang	Penang	1826	Api-Api	Kota Kinabalu
1003	Scotia		1823	Si-Rusa	Port Dickson
1589	Royal Pahang	Kuantan	1836	Darul Takzim	Johor

<sup>5</sup> W.Bro. E. F. Mullan on Lodge St George website

<sup>6</sup>“Masonic World Guide” Kent Henderson ISBN 0 85318 1 39 X

The District Grand Lodge of the Eastern Archipelago, which was formed in 1858, operates under the United Grand Lodge of England and has Lodges as follows:-

No	Name of Lodge	Location	No	Name of Lodge	Location
3830	Kedah	Sungai Petani	2555	Perak Jubilee	Taiping
1555	Royal Prince of Wales	Penang	3212	Kinta	Ipoh
9849	Neptune Lodge.		3418	Napier	
2337	Read	Kuala Lumpur	3552	Negeri Sembilan	Seramban
3369	Klang		3557	Elliot	Malacca
3674	Makepeace		5324	Johor Utara	Muar
7004	Baldwyn		3946	Johore Royal	Johore Bahru
7661	Sentosa		9652	Labuan	Labuan
7997	Edward Holiday		7047	Kinabalu	Kota Kinabalu
8469	Fidelity		7989	Beaufort	
9572	Joseph Eu		9717	Table	Tawau
9768	Sri Damai		7545	Elopura	Sandakan

The District Grand Lodge has published its proceedings since 1909 under Lodge St Michaels Research Lodge in Singapore called “The Pentagram” and this is available up to 1984 on the Lodge website. It contains notes on the Grand Lodge as well as articles to promote advancement in Masonic knowledge.

### Some famous Malaysian Freemasons



**H.R.H. The Sultan of Johor, Colonel Sir Ibrahim** was the first member of the Malaysian royalty to become a Freemason. His Royal Highness was initiated into Freemasonry on 11th April 1906 in Empire Lodge No. 2108 in London and on a subsequent visit was passed to the second degree in the same Lodge. After his passing he succeeded to the throne of Johore which prevented him from returning to England as he took his new duties and responsibilities very seriously and played a very active role in the administration and development of the state. So he remained a Fellow Craft for fourteen years. Fortunately for Freemasonry, a new Lodge was formed in Johore Bahru and when His Royal Highness came to know about it he immediately supported it enthusiastically. On 5th June 1920 the ceremony of his raising was conducted by the acting Deputy District Grand Master W.Bro. W **Makepeace**. In July 1920 he accepted the office of Senior Warden and became WM in 1921. His Royal Highness believed that the teaching of Freemasonry are compatible and in conformity with those of the Koran.

**The Honourable Dato Abdul Rahman** C.M.G. was installed as W. Master of Empire Lodge No. 2108, London on 23rd May 1922. He was the first and possibly the only Malay to be WM of a London Lodge.

**H.H. Tunku Abdul Malik Ibni Sultan Badlishah** was the second member of the Malay Royal Family to become a Freemason. He is the younger brother of the present Sultan of Kedah. He was initiated into Lodge Kedah No. 3830 E.C. Sungei Petani on 9th January 1959 and raised on 10th July 1959. He was 29 years old and was an Assistant Land Officer in the Kedah Civil Service. He was WM of this Lodge. **Tunku Malik** became Regent of Kedah from 1970 to 1975 when his elder brother, HRH The Sultan of Kedah, became the King of Malaysia.

**HRH Sultan Idris Ibni Sultan Iskandar Shah** was initiated into Freemasonry in Lodge Napier No. 3418 EC in Ipoh on 9th July 1960. He succeeded to the throne and became HRH The Sultan of Perak and did not hold any office in his Lodge for the next 13 years but was WM in 1976.



## Thailand

### History of Thailand



Tai peoples, who originally lived in southwestern China, migrated into mainland Southeast Asia over a period of many centuries. The oldest known mention of their existence in the region is in a 12th century A.D. The country's designation as Siam by Westerners likely came from Portuguese, the first Europeans to give a coherent account of the country. Portuguese chronicles noted that the king of Sukhothai had sent an expedition to Malacca at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula in 1455. Following their conquest of Malacca in 1511, the Portuguese sent a diplomatic mission to Ayutthaya. A century later, on August 15, 1612, *The Globe*, an East India Company merchantman bearing a letter from King James I, arrived in "the Road of Syam". The European colonial powers threatened occupation in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but Thailand survived as the only Southeast Asian state to avoid European colonial rule. After the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, Thailand endured sixty years of almost permanent military rule before the establishment of a democratic elected-government system.

The most recent and accurate theory about the origin of the Tai people stipulates that Guangxi province in China is really the Tai motherland instead of Yunnan province. A large number of Tai people, known as the Zhuang, still live in Guangxi today.

A Tai chief drove out the native Wa people and founded the city of Chiang Saen around 800 AD. For the first time, the Tai people made contact with the Indianized civilizations of Southeast Asia and began to adopt Buddhism and Sanskrit royal names. Around 900 AD, major wars were fought and the Mon forces captured Chiang Saen. In 937, Prince Prom the Great took Chiang Saen back from the Mon.

Overpopulation might have encouraged the Tais to seek their fortune further southwards. By 1100 AD, the Tai had established themselves as rulers at Nan, Phrae, Songkwae, Sawankhalok, Chakangrao, etc. on the upper Chao Phraya valley. These southern Tai princes faced Khmer influence from Lavo.

Thai city-states gradually became independent from the weakened Khmer Empire and Lanna's independent history ended in 1558, when it finally fell to the Burmese; thereafter it was dominated by Burma until the late 18th century. Local leaders then rose up against the Burmese with the help of the rising Thai kingdom. The 'Northern City-States' then became vassals of the lower Thai kingdoms of Thonburi and Bangkok. In the early 20th century they were annexed and became part of modern Siam, the country now called Thailand.

The first ruler of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya, King Ramathibodi I (ruled 1351 to 1369), made two important contributions to Thai history: the establishment and promotion of Theravada Buddhism as the official religion – to differentiate his kingdom from the neighboring Hindu kingdom of Angkor – and the compilation of a legal code based on Hindu sources and traditional Thai custom, which remained a tool of Thai law until late in the 19th century.

Beginning with arrival of Portuguese ambassador Duarte Fernandes in 1511, Ayutthaya, known to the Europeans as 'Kingdom of Siam', came into contact with the West during the 16th century. It became one of the most prosperous cities in East Asia. Trade flourished with the Dutch and French among the most active foreigners in the kingdom together with the Chinese and Japanese. The Ayutthaya period is known as "Golden age of medicine in Thailand" due to progress in the field of medicine at that time.

The heirs of Rama I became increasingly concerned with the threat of European colonialism after British victories in neighboring Burma in 1826. The first Thai recognition of Western power in the region was the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the United Kingdom in 1826.

In 1833, the United States began diplomatic exchanges with Siam, as Thailand was called until 1939, and again between 1945 and 1949. However, it was during the later reigns of King Mongkut (1804–1868), and his son King Chulalongkorn (1853–1910), that Thailand established firm rapprochement with Western powers. The Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 defined the modern border between Siam and British Malaya by securing Thai authority over the provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun, which were previously part of the semi-independent Malay sultanates of Pattani and Kedah. A series of treaties with France fixed the country's current eastern border with Laos and Cambodia.

The Siamese revolution of 1932 was led by a group of young military officers and civil servants. The group held key figures, ministers who were of the royal blood as hostages while the king, Rama VII, was at the summer palace in Hua Hin. The coup, usually called 'The Revolution of 1932', transformed the Government of Thailand from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy.

Within a decade Thai politics ran into turmoil as the revolutionary government plunged into factions; military and civilian figures. Fear of communism, extreme revolutionary ideas and ultra-nationalism caused the sharp fighting among the new ruling elites. Eventually the military faction emerged.

In 1941, Thailand invaded French Indochina, beginning the French-Thai War. The Thais, well equipped and slightly outnumbering the French forces, easily reclaimed Laos. The French, outnumbering the Thai navy force, decisively won the naval Battle of Koh Chang. The Japanese mediated the conflict, and a general armistice was declared on January 28. On May 9 a peace treaty was signed in Tokyo, with the French being coerced by the Japanese into relinquishing their hold on the disputed territories.

On December 8, 1941, a few hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan demanded the right to move troops across Thailand to the Malayan frontier. Japan invaded Thailand and engaged the Thai army for six to eight hours before Phibun Songkhram ordered an armistice. Shortly thereafter Japan was granted free passage, and on December 21, 1941, Thailand and Japan signed a military alliance with a secret protocol wherein Tokyo agreed to help Thailand regain territories lost to the British and French (i.e. the Shan States of Burma, Malaya, Singapore, & part of Yunnan, plus Laos & Cambodia)

The Free Thai Movement was an underground resistance movement against Japan founded with the assistance of the United States Office of Strategic Services (OSS.) Led from within Thailand from the office of the regent, Pridi, it operated freely, often with support from members of the Royal family such as Prince Chula Chakrabongse, and members of the government.

After Japan's defeat in 1945, due to the help of this movement, American support mitigated Allied terms, although the British demanded repatriations in the form of rice sent to Malaya, and the French, return of territories lost in the Franco-Thai War. In exchange for supporting Thailand's admission to the United Nations, the Soviet Union demanded repeal of anti-communist legislation. In the postwar period, Thailand had close relations with the United States, which it saw as a protector from communist revolutions in neighbouring countries. Communist guerrillas existed in the country from early '60s up to 1987, counting almost 12,000 full-time fighters at the peak of movement, but never posed a serious threat to the state.

Recently, Thailand also has been an active member in the regional Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), especially after democratic rule was restored in 1992. The post-1973 years have seen a difficult and sometimes bloody transition from military to civilian rule, with several reversals along the way. Thereafter the country remained a democracy apart from a brief period of military rule from 1991 to 1992. The populist Thai Rak Thai party, led by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, came to power in 2001.

On September 19, 2006, after the dissolution of the parliament, Thaksin then became the provisional government. While he was in New York for a meeting of the UN, Army Commander-in-Chief Lieutenant General Sonthi Boonyaratglin launched the bloodless September 2006 Thailand military coup d'état supported by anti-Thaksin elements in civil society and among the Democrat Party. A general election on 23 December 2007 restored a civilian government, led by Samak Sundaravej of the People's Power Party, as a successor to Thai Rak Thai.

## Freemasonry in Thailand

Westerners began to arrive in the kingdom as part of diplomatic and commercial missions in the late 19th century. History has shown that these are the necessary seeds for the growth of Freemasonry<sup>7</sup>. Thailand was an absolute monarchy that had never been colonized. It has distinct and rigid classes of society. The central Masonic concepts of democracy, treating men of all social class on the level, and the Judeo-Christian basis for the Craft's legends must have seemed unnatural and strange to the devoutly Buddhist local population.

Between 1878 and 1905 there were four failed attempts to start an English lodge. The brethren in Bangkok faced the most amazing string of bad luck which is recorded in the history of Lodge St John as follows:-

*"The first known record of Freemasons in Thailand<sup>8</sup> dates from 1878, when there were seventeen "regularly constituted Freemasons in Bangkok", who proposed to start a Lodge. By June 1878, however, it was announced that "...the proposed Lodge could not be proceeded with". In early 1880 a second attempt was made, but also failed. It took a further eighteen years before there is any record of Brethren meeting to erect a Lodge. In 1898 the impetus came from Masons afloat on merchant vessels and keen Brethren in Singapore, who wished to support the opening of a Lodge in Bangkok. The obstacle this time was that there was a lack of potential Officers of sufficient rank and experience in the Craft. After correspondence backwards and forwards with Grand Secretary in England on the matter of whether or not the UGLE would issue a Charter, it had to be said that "there is not in Bangkok one Master Mason who has held the Office of Warden to put forward for the Master's Chair, but there are English, Scotch, Irish, Danish and German Constitution Brethren in Bangkok sufficient to form a Lodge". The Grand Secretary's reply was not surprising. He stated that "numbers did not count and since there was no-one qualified and experienced enough to be installed as Master, the Most Worshipful Grand Master could not be recommended to grant a Warrant".*

*In 1900 things Masonic started out much more promisingly. The Brethren in Bangkok applied for a Warrant to the Grand Lodge of Ireland. This was approved and the Warrant was issued to establish Lodge No. 300 on 4 October 1900. But ... the Master designate, Bro. George F. Travers Drape, a barrister working for the Siamese government, died suddenly. Informal Masonic meetings continued during the next five years, usually held in the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank compound, and in April 1905 a petition, signed by over 30 Masons, supported by the Freemasons of Singapore and by the English District, was sent to the UGLE for the erection of Lodge Menam .... However the Master designate fell ill of fever and subsequently died. So... the Petition had to be withdrawn.*

*After all these failed attempts to establish a Lodge under the Irish and, especially the English Constitutions, ... the Brethren in Bangkok, who hailed from nine different regular Constitutions, did not have the stomach to approach Dublin and London again. And so, early in 1907, they decided to approach Edinburgh. In doing so they received the wholehearted support of their Scottish Brethren in Lodge Scotia in Penang, whose Lodge had been Consecrated in 1906. ...and finally, the Charter of Lodge St. John No. 1072 SC was signed in Grand Lodge in 1910. But ... owing to departures from among the Brethren in Bangkok between 1907 and August 1910, this first Charter had to be returned and re-issued. But at last the Freemasons of Bangkok were to have their Lodge. In 1911 Lodge St. John was consecrated, although without several names on the re-issued Charter being in their designated Offices or even present. However Lodge St. John was Consecrated and a Master, Wardens and Office Bearers duly took their places.*

The lodge attracted a very international following including British, Thai, German, Swiss, American and other brethren but by 1938 25% of the Brethren were Thai, almost exclusively what were termed in later years "old school Thais", that is, those of good family who had been sent to Europe and North America for education following the encouragement of King Chulalongkorn and his successors.

<sup>7</sup> The Thai Freemason website History page

<sup>8</sup> "The History of Lodge St. John" W. Bro.: James Soutar

This diversity was shortly to become critical to the fate of the brethren in Bangkok. In World War II, Thailand remained neutral. Shortly after the Japanese entered Thailand at the start of World War II, the Japanese secret police raided the rented premises where the Lodge met. Records, regalia and other items were seized and brethren from Allied countries were interred. Thankfully the international flavour of the lodge enabled the neutral Thai and Axis German brethren to save some of the early records. They were also able to help the interred brethren to cope better with their incarceration.

A growth spurt hit Freemasonry in the kingdom between 1991 and 1997, when five lodges were formed. A second Scottish lodge, Lodge Pattaya West Winds was opened in Pattaya in 1991, more than 80 years after Lodge St. John. This was followed by the kingdom's first Irish lodge, Lodge Morakot. The National Grand Lodge of France (GLNF) founded Lodge 7 Niveaux de la Sagesse in Chiang Mai in 1994 and Lodge Tantawan Fleur du Soleil in Bangkok in 1996.

After the recovery from the 1997 financial crisis, a second growth spurt occurred and seems to still be in progress. Lodge Lane Xang was a Scottish lodge originally formed in Laos, but that went dark in 1976. The brethren of Bangkok reopened the lodge in Thailand in 2000. In 2001, the English finally succeeding in establishing a beach head with Chula Lodge in Bangkok a mere 123 years after their first attempt. This was followed by the opening of Light of Siam Lodge in Phuket in 2004.

In 2005, the GLNF formed a second Lodge Hoa Sen Lumière d'Asia in Bangkok while the Irish branched out to southern Thailand with a lodge in Songkla.

The Dutch established their first lodge in South East Asia with the consecration of Loge Erasmus, No. 297 in Bangkok on January 7, 2006. The lodge works in English and includes brethren from The Netherlands, Thailand, and assorted other countries. It has become a focal point for Dutch masons from all over south-east Asia and even Australia<sup>9</sup>.

In February 2006, the Scottish founded the first Thai language lodge. Lodge Ratanakosin, No. 1833 SC refers to the name bestowed upon what is now Bangkok by the first king of the Chakri Dynasty in 1782. The name translates as "Bejeweled City of the God Indra." The Standard Scottish ritual is being translated by a team of very distinguished Thai brethren. The lodge works in Thai and English.

Now Thailand supports lodges from six Grand Lodges offering ritual in three languages. Freemasonry may have had a rocky start in Thailand, but we hope that the strong and very diverse system in place continues to grow and flourish for years to come. Freemasonry in Thailand is small, and, though mostly concentrated in Bangkok, lodges are expanding out to the rest of the country. A virtual Masonic explosion had been taking place in Thailand since 1993. From one Lodge for 82 years Thailand now has 15 regular Lodges under six different Constitutions.

Lodge Hoa Sen Lumière d'Asia, No. 1503 (French speaking) was founded in 2005 with the intention of working in Vietnam once conditions there improve to the point where Masonry is possible.

The Lodges currently working in Thailand are listed in the following table. While most have been founded in Thailand, two have expatriated from Shanghai and Vientiane, Laos.

No	Name of Lodge	Location	Jurisdiction
9791	Light of Siam	Pattaya	United grand Lodge of England
9745	Chula	Bangkok	
1803	Pattaya West Winds	Pattaya	Grand Lodge of Scotland
1072	St John (oldest 1911)	Bangkok	
1632	Lane Xang (ex-Laos)		
1833	Ratanakosin (Thai language)		
936	Lodge Songhla	Hat Yai	Grand Lodge of Ireland
945	Morakot	Bangkok	

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<sup>9</sup> See also "*Freemasonry In Thailand (A non-colonial masonic environment !!)*" Holden Research Circle

No	Name of Lodge	Location	Jurisdiction
7	Niveaux de la Sagesse	Chiang Mai	National Grand Lodge of France
1600	Star of the East	Bangkok	
1524	Foederis Arca in the Orient of Shanghai		
1503	Hoa Sen Luminere d'Asia		
1030	Tantawan		
30	Siam Military	Bangkok	Prince Hall GL of Delaware
297	Erasmus	Bangkok	Grand East of the Netherlands

A Mark Lodge and Two Royal Arch Chapters operate in Thailand and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of the Orient of Taiwan holds a conference each year in Thailand.

### Some famous Freemasons in Thailand



**Vuthi Boonnikornvoravith**, Treasurer of St John's Lodge succeeded in raising the funds and opening the Lodge St. John Masonic Hall and is a Past District Grand Master of the District Grand Lodge of the Middle East

He is currently Country Director and a Past International; Director of Lions Quest.

**James M. Baker** (1861-1940) was a US diplomat and government official. He was elected secretary of U.S. Senate in 1913 and became the deputy commissioner of the Internal Revenue Bureau. He entered a private law practice in 1921 and was appointed US minister to Siam by Franklin Roosevelt in 1933.

**Edward E. Brodie** (1876-1939) was a U S newspaper man. He began working with the Morning Enterprise, Oregon City in 1901 and later became its owner and publisher until 1935. He was appointed as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Siam in 1921 and later to Finland, serving until 1933. He was a 32° Mason AASR and a Shriner.

### Conclusions

Singapore is said to be the hub of Freemasonry in Southern Asia but its Lodges still operate under the auspices of the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland and Ireland, despite the number of indigenous Singaporean members.

Freemasonry in Malaysia is important because it flourishes in one of the few countries in the world where Islam is the dominant religion and it has Muslim members, some of them Sultans of the various States who are religious leaders and who have explicitly found Freemasonry to be fully compatible with the Koran.

With the number of operating Lodges operating in every corner of Malaysia it is surprising that no National Grand Lodge has yet been founded. Although United States influence has never been dominant in Singapore and Malaysia, if the Lodges had been founded under US Grand Lodges then a National Grand Lodge would have been established many years ago.

Malaysia has a dual legal system by which citizens can elect for certain social processes, such as marriage and divorce, to obey Sharia law instead of the common law. Its need to maintain adequate racial relationships, together with increasing prosperity, brings about this state of tolerance on which Freemasonry has built and to which it has contributed.

Freemasonry in Thailand is also of particular interest because it succeeds in a Buddhist country and also because it is the only one in South East Asia that had avoided European settlement.

The assistance given by the United States in the immediate post-war settlements and its temporary presence in Thailand during the Vietnam War helped Freemasonry grow but the “Thai Freemason” reports that there has yet to be the widespread, local support necessary to fuel growth sufficient enough to drive the formation of a Thai Grand Lodge.

Although the traditional Thai social stratification is being broken down by the growth of a successful “middle class” it, together with possible ambiguity about the Deity of Theravada Buddhism, may still create some hesitation with potential candidates. As such, Thailand is considered "open" territory. This is why there are six different Grand Lodges represented in the Kingdom.

The formation of a Grand Lodge of Thailand would prevent any new Lodges being formed by other Grand Lodges and would only sensibly be achieved by agreement between these Grand Lodges.