

The Bastin Collection on Raffles

The National Library recently acquired a treasured collection of letters and books of Sir Stamford Raffles. **J. B. Stanley** describes some of the highlights.



The National Library of Singapore recently acquired a highly prized collection of materials relating to Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of Singapore. The collection was assembled over many years by Dr John Bastin, a noted authority on Raffles and author of numerous books and articles on the history of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. This important acquisition, comprising more than 5,000 books, embraces a number of areas, including Java, Sumatra, Malaya, Singapore, Borneo and China, but the core of the collection, including both books and manuscripts, relate to Raffles.

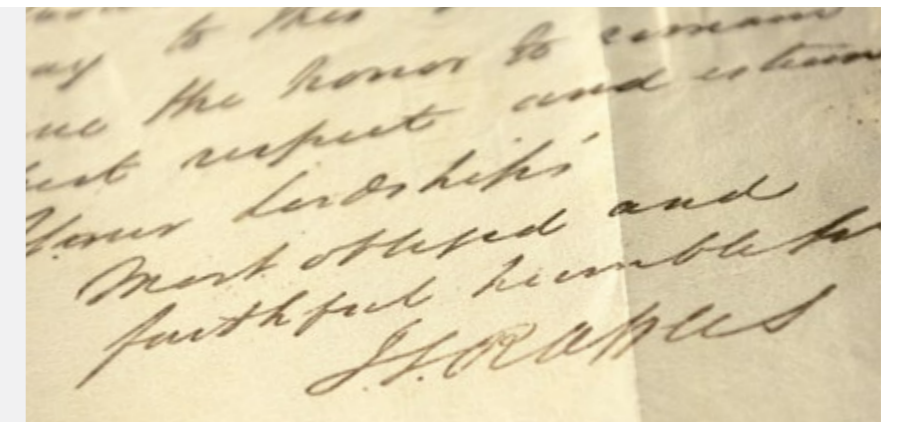
Letters by Stamford Raffles

Of the Raffles manuscripts, the most important is his so-called “autobiographical” letter which he wrote on board the brig *Favourite* during a voyage from Bengkulu to Calcutta on 14 October 1819.¹ The letter, which runs into 14 quarto leaves and written on both sides, is the longest of his private letters and was written in response to reading *A Biographical Dictionary of Living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1816). In this book, Raffles’ name appears together with the assertion that he owed his appointment as Assistant-Secretary to the Prince of Wales Island government (Penang) to his marriage to a woman connected with William Ramsay, the Secretary of the East India Company.

There was no truth in the statement, but as the matter concerned Raffles’ deceased first wife, Olivia Mariamne Devenish, it caused him great distress. Raffles took the opportunity to write this long letter to his cousin, the Reverend Dr Thomas Raffles, outlining the course of his life, and attributing his successful career entirely to his own efforts and to his good fortune. “Successful as my career may be considered to have been”, he wrote, “my advancement has been entirely owing to my own personal exertions and to what I have always called my good fortune – family, friends, and connections have done nothing for me –”.

Another letter of Raffles’, dated 10 November 1819, calls for his cousin’s missionary support for “an Institution I am about to form for generally educating the higher Class of Natives” – a prelude to the establishment of the Singapore Institution (today better known as Raffles Institution). “You take all Asia within your grasp –”, he wrote, “I only claim indulgence for one half – the portion which is least known but not the least populous – I advocate the cause of 30 millions immediately – and of 300 millions eventually – and think this is sufficient”.²

A third letter written by Raffles, “At Sea off the Coast of Borneo” on 14 June 1823, five days after his final departure from Singapore, refers to his difficulties with the Resident, Colonel William



Farquhar: “I have had a great deal of trouble & annoyance in the details [of the administration] owing to the imbecility and obstinacy of the local Resident Col. Farquhar but as [John] Crawford has relieved him & all my measures & plans are approved of & supported by the higher authorities, I have had a great reason to be satisfied with the result upon the whole –”.³

Raffles wrote numerous political and self-promotional pieces for publication in various newspapers in Calcutta and London, but no direct evidence of the fact has survived. It is therefore interesting that the collection includes a letter written by Raffles in Calcutta in 1818 to an unknown newspaper editor alluding to the brutal transactions of the Dutch in the Malay Archipelago in suppressing unrest at Palembang and Saparua, where a number of Indonesians were put to death by the Netherlands colonial authorities.⁴

Rare Book Titles

There are a number of books in the collection that belonged to Raffles, including a volume of the Bible in Jawi, printed in Batavia (Jakarta) in 1758,⁵ and a delightful children’s book, *Conversations on Botany* (London, 1823) that contains an account of the discovery by Dr Joseph Arnold of the giant flower, *Rafflesia arnoldi*, made when he was travelling with Raffles in southern Sumatra in 1818.

There are also Raffles’ own copies of the *Code of Provisional Regulations, for the Judicial and Police Departments* (Batavia, 1812) and *Proclamations, Regulations, Advertisements, and Orders*, issued by him as Lieutenant-Governor of Java between 1811 and 1815,⁶ as well as his own copy of his refutation⁷ of the charges of corruption levelled against his administration by Major-General Robert Rollo Gillespie, the commander of the military forces in Java. The work was printed in Batavia in 1814 in what Raffles describes as “a few private copies”. Raffles’ copy is bound up with his printed *Memorial* addressed to the directors of the East India Company in 1816, together with a printed *Extract* from a public letter addressed by the directors to the Supreme Government in Bengal exonerating him of all the major charges made against him by Gillespie.

(Facing page) A portrait of Sir Stamford Raffles presented by his nephew, W. C. Raffles Flint, to London’s National Portrait Gallery in 1859. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

(Above) Sir Stamford Raffles’ signature on one of the many letters he wrote.

Another extremely rare item in the collection is a copy of the *Addresses, &c. Presented to Mr. Raffles, on the occasion of His Departure from Java*, which was printed by Cox and Baylis of Great Queen Street, Lincoln's-Inn Fields, London, in 1817.⁸ This copy is in its original wrapper and preserved in mint condition as is the copy of his *Statement of the Services of Sir Stamford Raffles*, which was printed privately in London in 1824.⁹ This particular copy belonged to Lady Sophia Raffles, who had inscribed the title of the work in ink on the upper wrapper.

A particularly interesting item is a limited-edition large-paper copy of Raffles' two-volume *The History of Java* (London, 1817),¹⁰ which he presented to his friend Lord Mountmorris and one of the founding members of the Zoological Society of London, with an accompanying letter in which he states that the book "was put together & written in the confusion of a London life" and that he intended to issue an additional volume of plates. This is the only evidence of Raffles' intention to issue a third volume of the book at the time and it is interesting that the collection includes a copy of the rare second edition of *The History of Java*, written by Raffles and published by John Murray in 1830¹¹ with a volume of uncoloured plates, including two hitherto unrecorded plates of Borobudur.

All of Raffles' printed works are included in the collection, including a copy of his paper "On the Maláyu Nation, with a translation of its Maritime Institutions",¹² printed at the Hindostanee Press in Calcutta and published in volume XII

of the *Asiatick Researches* in 1816¹³ and also the Signet Library copy of George Finlayson's *Mission to Siam* (London, 1826)¹⁴ with Raffles' memoir of the author. The latter's two "Discourses" to the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences, printed by the Government Press in Batavia in 1814 and 1815, are also part of the collection,¹⁵ as is Raffles' "Descriptive Catalogue of a Zoological Collection, made ... in the Island of Sumatra and its Vicinity"¹⁶ printed in volume XIII of the *Transactions of the Linnean Society of London* in 1822.

Of particular interest and rarity is an original copy of Raffles' *Substance of a Memoir on the Administration of the Eastern Islands*, which he had printed privately in London in 1824 and is represented here by a copy in its original wrapper, sewn as issued.¹⁷

Raffles' "Address on the Institution of the Agricultural Society of Sumatra," and other papers printed in *Malayan Miscellanies*,¹⁸ are contained in the short-lived publication, *The Investigator, or Quarterly Magazine*, published in London between 1820 and 1824, and edited by the Rev Dr Thomas Raffles. This periodical has never been directly used by Raffles' biographers, and it is interesting that it contains one of the first biographical accounts of Raffles, "Memoir of Sir Stamford Raffles, Knt., F.R. and A.S.", written by his cousin.

Among other periodicals in the collection are the five volumes of *The Java Government Gazette*, which is a key printed source of information on Raffles' administration in Java. It began as a weekly publication on 29 February 1812

under the editorship of a young American printer named A. H. Hubbard and continued until 17 August 1816.¹⁹ This particular copy of the *Gazette* is the most complete of three extant copies of the newspaper, and contains all the supplements, additional supplements and extraordinary issues published by the Government Press in Batavia during the British occupation of the island. The issues of the *Gazette* printed in 1816–17, after the restitution of the Dutch colonial rule in the island, are also in the collection.

Raffles' role in establishing (with Sir Humphry Davy) the Zoological Society of London, which was set up in 1826, is represented in a number of publications and documents, including a copy of the rare original *Prospectus of the Society* with the names of its members added in Raffles' handwriting.²⁰

Lady Sophia Raffles makes her appearance in several works, including a copy of the *Memoir* of her husband which she presented to the Rev Dr Thomas Raffles in 1830. The copy is inscribed "with the Editor's affectionate regards", and contains a letter in which she states that although the book was "too large", her object had been to produce a "record more than a popular reading volume". In this respect, the book proved highly successful because it not only established Raffles' historical reputation but also provided important materials for his subsequent biographers.²¹ In another moving letter to the Reverend Dr Thomas Raffles dated 8 April 1820, Lady Raffles explains that her decision to accompany Raffles on the arduous journey to the central highlands

of Sumatra in 1818 was influenced "only by one motive – affection for my Husband – to be parted from him is the only misery my Soul shrinks from – to be united to him in life & death the bright hope of my existence –".²²

Other books in the collection associated with Lady Raffles include a privately printed copy of the *Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late William Marsden* (London, 1838) inscribed by his widow Elizabeth Wilkins thus: "Lady Raffles with the Editor's best regards".²³ Most of Marsden's publications, including a presentation copy of the third edition of *The History of Sumatra* (London, 1811), with the large folio of plates,²⁴ and a copy of the unrecorded fourth edition with the plates reduced to quarto format, are in the collection, together with copies of his *Grammar of the Malayan Language*²⁵ and *Dictionary of the Malayan Language*,²⁶ both published in London in 1812.

An item of significant interest relating to William Marsden is a large printed folding map of Sumatra that Raffles constructed from surveys of the island (and printed privately in London in 1829 with a dedication to Marsden).²⁷ It includes an inset map of Singapore that Lady Raffles included in a few special copies of her *Memoir* when it was published the following year.

The collection is particularly strong in books relating to Raffles' other friends and associates, including all the major printed works by the Scottish orientalist, John Leyden, including his translation of the *Malay Annals* (London, 1821), with an introduction by Raffles;²⁸ the publications of his physician and private secretary, Dr William Jack, including the latter's famous and notoriously rare essay titled "Third Paper on Malayan Plants" printed by the Sumatra Mission Press in Bengkulu in 1820; and virtually all the publications by the American naturalist, Dr Thomas Horsfield, who enjoyed Raffles' official patronage in Java during 1811–16. These publications include Horsfield's doctoral thesis on plant poisons, which was printed in Philadelphia in 1798; his papers on the upas tree and medicinal plants of Java; his works on the insects of Java, including the rare *Annulosa Javanica* (London, 1825); and an account of his botanical discoveries as described by Robert Brown and John Bennett in *Plantæ Javanicæ Rariores* (London, 1838–52). Horsfield's contributions to Indonesian zoology are described in his own copy of *Zoological Researches in Java and the Neighbouring Islands* (London, 1821–4),²⁹ which contains a unique proof lithograph plate of the Malayan tapir – the first printed lithograph of any Indonesian subject.

To these and other important works must be added one of the first books printed in Singapore and Malaysia respectively – James Low's *Dissertation on the Soil & Agriculture of the British Settlement of Penang* (Singapore, 1836);³⁰ and William Milne's *Retrospect of the First Ten Years of the Protestant Mission to China* (Malacca,

The Rare Materials Collection

One of the main functions of the National Library is the collection and preservation of rare materials on Singapore's history. As a result of a concerted process that began in the mid-19th century, the library's Rare Materials Collection today numbers over 11,000 items. Preserved in a climate controlled room on level 13 of the National Library Building, the collection comprises mostly books and periodicals, but also materials such as manuscripts, maps, photographs, art prints and illustrations, as well as handwritten letters and documents. The collection covers mainly geography, history, languages and literature, religion and the social sciences, with a special focus on Singapore and Southeast Asia from the 15th to early 20th centuries.

As the materials are in essence equivalent to precious museum artefacts, access to the secured collections room is limited to staff only. To facilitate easy access, the Rare Materials Collection is being digitised and gradually made available on the National Library's BookSG website at eresources.nlb.gov.sg/printheritage.

Microfilm copies are also available to library users at level 11 of the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library (Singapore & Southeast Asian Collection) at the National Library Building. If there is a need to view the originals, please email your request to ref@library.nlb.gov.sg



1820);³¹ and the first book on Sumatra – Adolph Eschelskroon's *Beschreibung der Insel Sumatra* (Hamburg, 1781),³² in both the German and Dutch editions.

This remarkable collection of books, which also includes most of the English books on Borneo

– including presentation copies by the first Rajah of Sarawak, Sir James Brooke – constitutes one of the finest private libraries on the Malay Archipelago ever assembled. All this today forms part of the Rare Materials Collection at the National Library. ♦

Notes

- 1 Raffles, T. S. (1819, October 14). *Autograph letter from Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles to his cousin, Reverend Dr. Thomas Raffles, with salutation "My dear cousin": Letter: 1819 October 14*. Call no.: RRARE 959.5703 RAF
- 2 Raffles, T. S. (1819, November 10). *Autograph letter from Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles to his cousin, Reverend Dr. Thomas Raffles, with salutation "My dear cousin": Letter, 1819 November 10*. Call no.: RRARE 372.9598 RAF
- 3 Raffles, T. S. (1823, June 14). *Autograph letter from Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles to his cousin, Reverend Dr. Thomas Raffles, with salutation "My dear cousin": Letter: 1823 June 14*. Call no.: RRARE 959.5703 RAF
- 4 Raffles, T. S. (1818). *Letter from Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles addressed to a newspaper editor, with salutation "My dear sir": Letter, 1818*. Call no.: RRARE 959.8022 RAF
- 5 *Al-Qawl al-'atiq iaitu segala surat Perjanjian Lama*. (1758). [Batavia: s.n.]. Call no.: RRARE 224.9 QAW
- 6 Raffles, T. S. (1812). *Code of provisional regulations for the judicial and police departments at Batavia, Samarang, and Sourabaya, containing rules for the practice, and mode of proceeding, in civil and criminal cases, in the several courts of justice... in the different districts throughout the Island of Java*. Batavia: A. H. Hubbard. Call no.: RRARE 345.598 RAF
- 7 Raffles, T. S. (1814). *The charges of Major General Gillespie against The Honourable T. S. Raffles, Lieutenant Governor of the Island of Java, with various papers and documents, in refutation of them relating to the administration of the British Government, in that Island its Dependencies*. Batavia: [n.p.]. Call no.: RRARE 353.46095982 CHA
- 8 *Addresses etc. presented to Mr. Raffles on the occasion of his departure from Java*. (1817). London: Printed by Cox and Baylis. Call no.: RRARE 959.570210924 RAF
- 9 Raffles, T. S. (1824). *Statement of the services of Sir Stamford Raffles*. London: [Printed privately by Raffles].
- 10 Raffles, T. S. (1817). *The history of Java*. London: Printed for Black, Parbury, and Allen, Booksellers to the Hon. East-India Company ... and John Murray ... Call no.: RRARE 959.82 RAF
- 11 Raffles, T. S. (1830). *The history of Java*. London: J. Murray, 1830. Call no.: RRARE 992.2 RAF
- 12 Raffles, T. S. (1816). *On the Maláyu nation: With a translation of its maritime institutions*. Calcutta: Asiatick Society. Call no.: RRARE 959.503 RAF
- 13 *Asiatick researches, or, Transactions of the society instituted in Bengal, for inquiring into the history and antiquities, the arts, sciences, and literature of Asia*. (1788–1839). Calcutta: Printed and sold by Manuel Cantopher. Call no.: RRARE 950.05 AR
- 14 Finlayson, G., & Thomas, T. S. (1826). *The mission to Siam, and Hue the capital of Cochin China in the years 1821–22: From the journal of the George Finlayson; with a memoir of the author by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*. London: Murray. Call no.: RRARE 959.3 FIN
- 15 Raffles, T. S. (1814). *A discourse at a meeting of the Society of Arts and Sciences in Batavia, on the twenty-fourth day of April 1813, being the anniversary of the institution, delivered by Thomas Stamford Raffles*. Batavia: Government Press. Call no.: RRARE 959.80222 DIS
- 16 Raffles, T. S. (1822). *XVII. Descriptive catalogue of a zoological collection, made on account of the Honourable East India Company, in the island of Sumatra and its vicinity, under the direction of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, Lieutenant-Governor of Fort Marlborough; with additional notices illustrative of the natural history of those countries; XVIII. Second part of the descriptive catalogue of the zoological collection made in the island of Sumatra and its vicinity*. [S.l.: s.n.]. Call no.: RRARE 590.9598 RAF
- 17 Raffles, T. S. (1824). *Substance of a memoir on the administration of the Eastern Islands ... in 1819*. London: [Printed privately by Raffles].
- 18 *Malayan miscellanies*. (1822). Bencoolen: Sumatran Mission Press. Call no.: RRARE 991 MAL
- 19 *Java government gazette*. (1812–1816). Batavia: Printed by A. H. Hubbard at the Govt. Press. Call no.: R 959.82 JAV
- 20 Zoological Society of London. (1825). *[Short prospectus and original list of members of the Zoological Society of London, May 1825 with the names in manuscript in the hand of Sir Stamford Raffles, founder and first president of the society]*. [London: Author].
- 21 Raffles, S. (1830). *Memoir of the life and public services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, F.R.S. &c., particularly in the government of Java, 1811–1816, and of Bencoolen and its dependencies, 1817–1824: With details of the commerce and resources of the Eastern Archipelago and selections from his correspondence*. London: John Murray, Albemarle Street. Call no.: RRARE 959.570210924 RAF
- 22 Raffles, S. (1820, April 8). *Autograph letters from Lady Raffles to Raffles' cousin, Reverend Dr. Thomas Raffles*. Call no.: RRARE 959.5703092 RAF
- 23 Marsden, W. (1838). *A brief memoir of the life and writings of the late William Marsden written by himself: With notes from his correspondence*. London: Printed by J. L. Cox. Call no.: RRARE 941.0730924 MAR
- 24 Marsden, W. (1811). *The history of Sumatra: Containing an account of the government, laws, customs, and manners of the native inhabitants, with a description of the natural productions, and a relation of the ancient political state of the island*. London: Printed for the author by J. M'Creery. Call no.: RRARE 992.1 MAR
- 25 Marsden, W. (1812). *A grammar of the Malayan language with an introduction and praxis*. London: Cox and Baylis. Call no.: RRARE 499.15 MAR
- 26 Marsden, W. (1812). *A dictionary of the Malayan language, in two parts, Malayan and English and English and Malayan = Loghat Melayu ia-itu pada menyatakan Bahasa Melayu dan Bahasa Inggeris*. London: Cox and Baylis. Call no.: RRARE Malay 499.13 MAR
- 27 Raffles, T. S. (1829). *Map of the island of Sumatra constructed chiefly from surveys taken by order of the late Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*. London: Published for the proprietor, by J. Gardner. Call no.: RRARE 912.5981 MAR
- 28 Leyden, J. (1821). *Malay annals*. London: Longman. Call no.: RRARE 959.503 MAL
- 29 Horsfield, T. (1824). *Zoological researchers in Java, and the neighbouring islands*. London: Printed by Kingsbury, Parbury & Allen. Call no.: RRARE 591.9922 HOR
- 30 Low, J. (1836). *A dissertation on the soil & agriculture of the British settlement of Penang, or Prince of Wales Island, in the straits of Malacca; including Province Wellesley on the Malayan peninsula. With brief references to the settlements of Singapore & Malacca*. Singapore: Printed at the Singapore Free Press Office. Call no. RRARE 630.9595123 LOW
- 31 Milne, W. C. (1820). *Retrospect of the first ten years of the Protestant mission to China*. Malacca: Printed at the Anglo-Chinese Press. Call no.: RARARE 266.40951 MIL
- 32 Eschelskroon, S. (1781). *Beschreibung der Insel Sumatra: Besonders in Ansehung des Handels, und der dahin gehöorigen Merkwürdigkeiten*. Hamburg: Carl Ernst Bohn. Call no.: RRARE 915.9810421 ESC