



CHANGI CHAPEL AND MUSEUM

Understanding the Lives of Internees



Welcome to the Changi Chapel and Museum. This museum presents the stories of the prisoners of war (POWs) and civilian internees, who were imprisoned in the Changi area during the Japanese Occupation (1942–1945).

Let's go on a journey with four characters below, who will tell you more about their experiences and guide you through the museum.

Use this booklet to note down what you have learnt through their perspectives.

Character Profiles



Name: **Dave**
Age: **34 years old**
Nationality: **British**
Status: **Soldier**



Name: **Cecilia**
Age: **17 years old**
Nationality: **Australian**
Status: **Civilian**



Name: **Helga**
Age: **10 years old**
Nationality: **British**
Status: **Civilian**

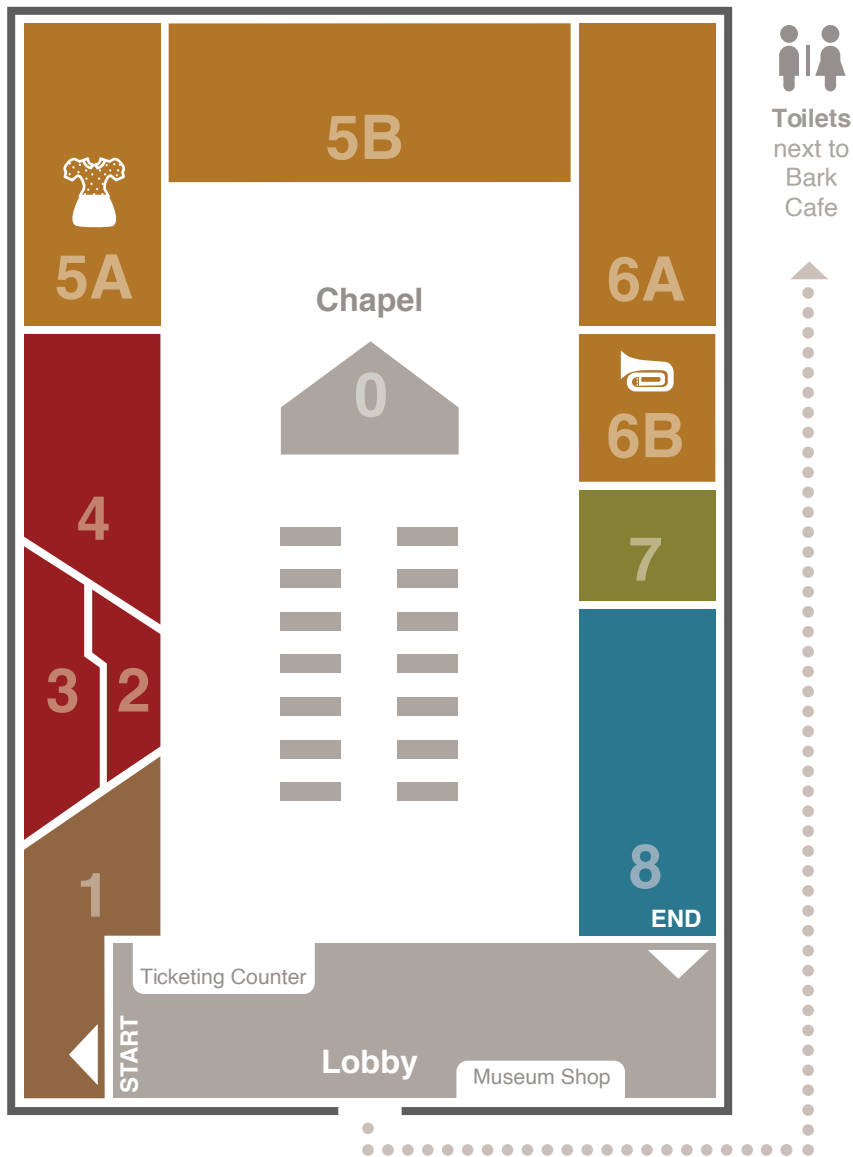


Name: **Stan**
Age: **25 years old**
Nationality: **British**
Status: **Soldier**

Did You Know?

People who were captured and locked up by the Japanese soldiers were all known as internees. Turn to page 8 to learn about the different groups of internees.

Getting Around



Tips for an Enjoyable Museum Visit

When you visit the museum, please remember:



Pay close attention to what you see and hear around you. Some of the answers you're looking for may just be near you!



Speak softly while discussing with your friends and do not run. This will ensure a good experience for everyone!



Turn off the flash on your camera or phone when taking photographs. No video recording is allowed.



Food and drinks should be consumed outside the museum.

Look out for these icons for the different activities in this booklet!



Fill in the blanks/boxes



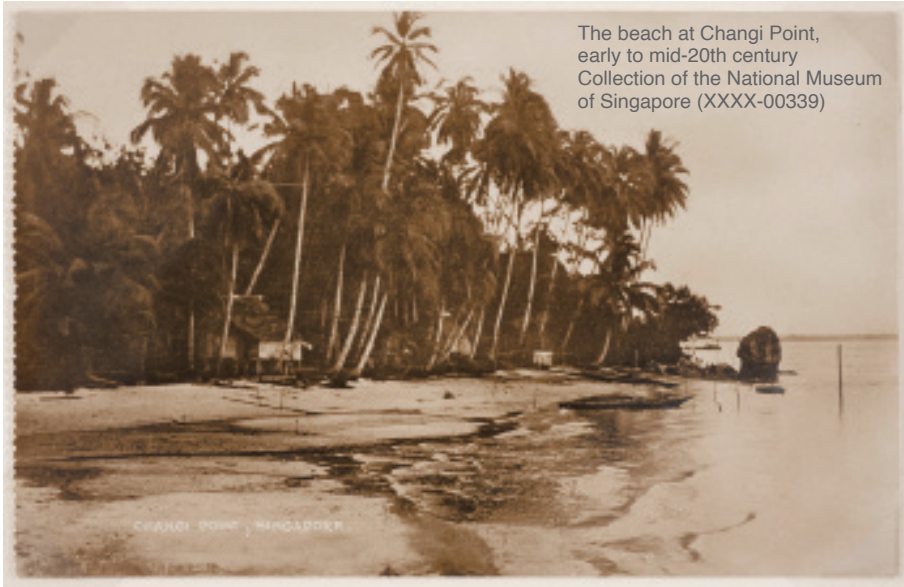
Reflection



Discussion

Changi Before the Japanese Occupation

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Changi was fairly isolated, with only a few houses, a small village, and a few public facilities. Residents remembered it as a quiet, idyllic place.



The beach at Changi Point, early to mid-20th century
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore (XXXX-00339)

Changi Before the Japanese Occupation

After World War One (1914–1918), Japan's growing power and influence led Britain to see Japan as a threat to their colonies in Asia. In Singapore, the colonial government built up coastal defences in the 1920s to repel any attacks from the sea. An example of these are the coastal guns known as the Johor Battery.



The Fall of Singapore

Despite the military defences built by the colonial government, the Imperial Japanese Army successfully invaded Singapore in 1942.

This is a Japanese map of Singapore published by the Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shimbunsha (Tokyo Daily News Agency) during World War Two:



World War Two Japanese Map of Singapore, c1942
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore (2016-00297)

Notice that the map is extremely detailed, even marking out the forests and the railway that connected Malaya and Singapore.

Based on this map, how important do you think Singapore was to Japan and why?



What could this map also tell you about the strategies used by the Imperial Japanese Army in the invasion of Singapore? Think about the details on the map and discuss with your friends.



John Ritchie Johnston was a POW in Changi from 1942 to 1945. His notebook, which can be found in the gallery, records his thoughts about the Fall of Singapore. This is how he remembered the last days before Singapore fell:

“ Those seven memorable days, during which the [Japanese] stormed the fortress, were a veritable nightmare for the inhabitants, both the civilians and military.

The defending troops were none too hopeful, though consciously waiting for those promised reinforcements which never came... The morale of the civilian population rapidly [began] to deteriorate, as their white employers one by one began to mysteriously disappear.

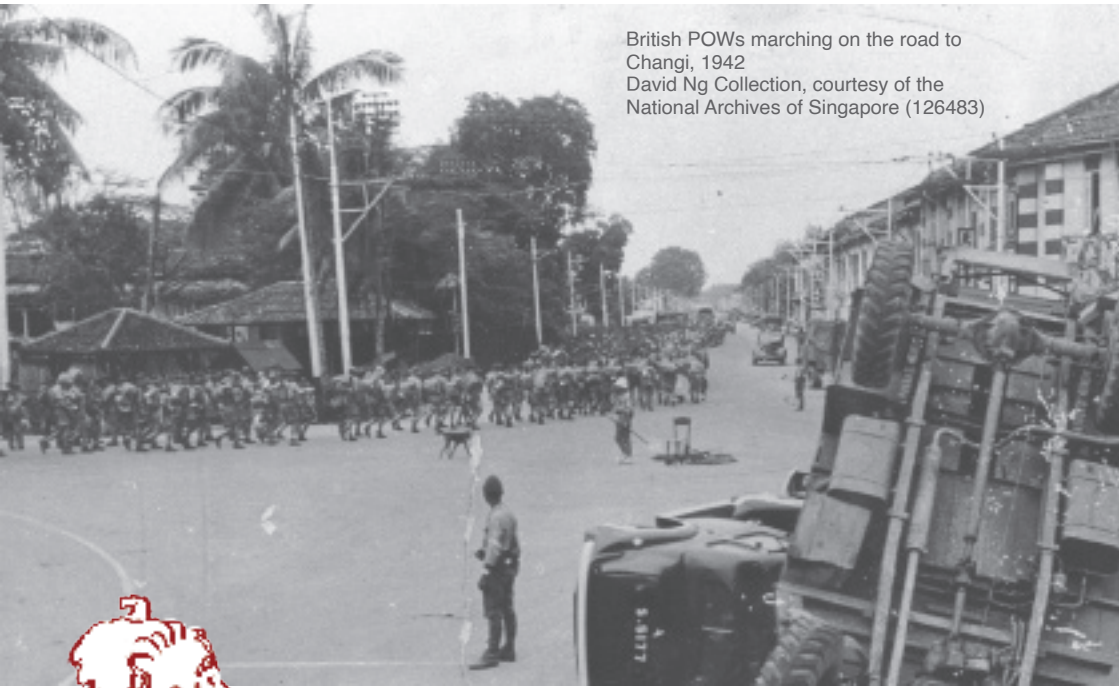
The wharves were besieged by frantic men, women and children, and ship after ship left the quayside steadily at night. ”

From this excerpt, what can you infer about the few days leading up to the Fall of Singapore? What was the situation like for those in Singapore at the time?



The March to Changi

After Singapore fell, many soldiers and civilians were rounded up, and made to march to Changi. Most of the POWs were the tens of thousands of Australian and British troops involved in the Battle of Singapore. Many were interned in Changi, together with the civilians. The civilians comprised men, women and children, including individuals of Asian descent related to British citizens by marriage or birth, as well as Eurasians.



British POWs marching on the road to Changi, 1942
David Ng Collection, courtesy of the
National Archives of Singapore (126483)



There were **two** main groups of internees: the POWs and civilian internees. POWs were soldiers like Stan and I, who fought against the Japanese army. Civilian internees, like Cecilia and Helga, were **NOT** soldiers. Some of them were family members of the soldiers.

Profiles of the Internees

Let's take a closer look at our four characters.

Return to page 1 and read the profiles of each character carefully. Based on their background, think of possible reasons why they were imprisoned in Changi and note them down in the boxes below.



Name: **Dave**

Reasons for being interned:

Name: **Cecilia**

Reasons for being interned:

Name: **Helga**

Reasons for being interned:

Name: **Stan**

Reasons for being interned:

Why do you think civilians were also imprisoned? Discuss with your friends.



I am only
ten years old and
they are locking
me up...



What the Internees Brought With Them

The internees could only bring with them items they could carry. However, there were also many restrictions. Look around the gallery to see some of the items that were brought along.

Do you see any similarities between these items? If you were in a similar situation, what would you bring with you?

John Ritchie Johnston's watch, c1940s
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore (2018-00754)



◀ Drawing commemorating the 122 Field Regiment's involvement in the Malayan Campaign, c1941–1945
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore (2017-00299)



Let's take a closer look at the following artefact, which belonged to POW Anthony Newsom:

Anthony Newsom's POW tag, c1942–1945
Collection of the National Museum of
Singapore (2014-01484)



Tags like these were issued by the Japanese army to the POWs as a form of identification. What information can be found on this tag? Can you tell who this belonged to just by looking at it?



What information about the POW is missing from the tag? What can you infer about how the Japanese army viewed the POWs through this?



*The Japanese character 豪 refers to Australia, while 下 is short for 下士官 which means non-commissioned officer (a member of the armed forces who has achieved their rank by rising from the lower ranks rather than by receiving a commission).

Living Conditions in Changi

To house the large number of prisoners, there were various prison camps scattered across Changi. Civilians were held in Changi Gaol* (known as Changi Prison today), where women and children were separated from the men. The military men were divided across different camps such as Selarang Barracks and Roberts Barracks. Look out for the map in this zone.

Changi Prison was built to house 600 inmates, each in a cell. By 1944, it was 16 times over its capacity. Each cell often had at least four people in it.

What was it like within the prison cell? Let's have a closer look on the next page.

Did You Know?

Gaol is an old English spelling of the word "jail", and it is also pronounced the same way.

“ ... but when you're really ravenously hungry, you'll eat anything, even bits of army blanket, because the very fact of swallowing something was relieving. ”

—Sergeant C. David Griffin, Australian Imperial Force



Painting of prisoners of war in Changi, c1945
Gift of Wang Weiming,
Collection of the National
Museum of Singapore



Explore this replica cell and have a look at the artefacts and quotes on display in this gallery. What do you think the living conditions in Changi Prison were like?



The Internees and Work Parties

Almost immediately after the POWs were imprisoned in Changi, the Japanese army began using them as forced labour in Singapore, and later, overseas.



Underground tunnels constructed by interned civilians to be used as fortifications by the Japanese in Singapore, c1945
Collection of the Australian War Memorial (2006-003041-AWM)

What kind of work were the POWs in Singapore forced to do? Look for your answers on the wall that says “**Work Parties in Singapore**”.



- 1 Excavating and constructing
- 2 Unloading at Keppel Harbour
- 3 Building a at Bukit Batok

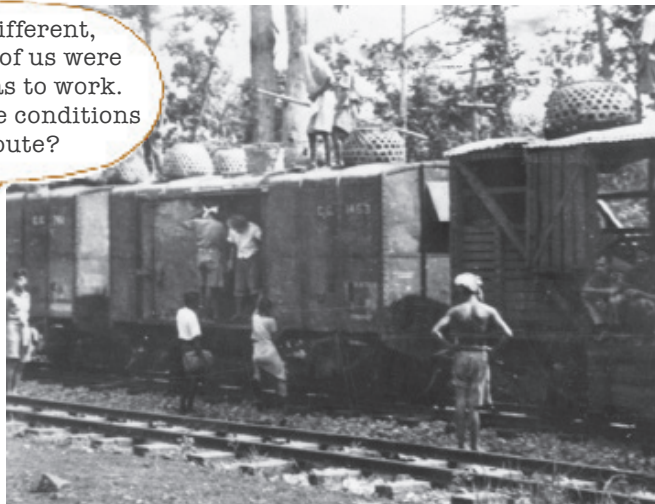
Thai-Burma Railway

Most of the POWs who went overseas were sent to the infamous Thai-Burma “Death Railway”. Have a look at the gallery text titled **“Work Parties Beyond Singapore”**.

Think about the different, possible ways some of us were transported overseas to work. What do you think the conditions were like, en route?



Burma-Thailand
Railway, c1945
Collection of
the Australian
War Memorial



Why was the Thai-Burma Railway known as the “Death Railway”?
Describe the working conditions based on what you see in the gallery.



The Selarang Barracks Incident

In September 1942, the Japanese army demanded that all POWs sign a “non-escape declaration” form. Upon their refusal, more than 15,000 prisoners were imprisoned at Selarang Barracks, where they were crammed in a small space without proper sanitation. This caused diseases to spread quickly.



2nd Australian Imperial Force and British POWs in Selarang Barracks Square, 1942
Collection of the Australian War Memorial

In your opinion, what was the purpose of getting the POWs to sign that form? Discuss with your friends.



Double Tenth Incident

On September 1943, an Allied taskforce blew up six Japanese ships in a raid code-named Operation Jaywick. Convinced that some of the internees supplied information to the Allied forces, the Japanese army assembled the civilian internees in the courtyard and ransacked their rooms on 10 October. In the subsequent months, some internees were imprisoned and tortured for information.

Find out more about this incident by watching the video clip in this gallery.

Religion and the Changi Murals

With no idea when they would be released, some of the internees sought comfort in religion. An example of that would be the set of five murals painted by Stanley Warren, an internee, in a room in Roberts Barracks that served as a chapel. A replica of these murals is in this gallery.

Read more about the murals in the interactive panels!

Did You Know?

The original murals still survive today in the Changi Air Base, a restricted-access area.



Let's take a closer look at this mural. Other than its religious symbolism, what else do you think was the artist trying to say through the mural?



Making Everything You Need

The internees struggled to survive in captivity due to the lack of food and resources.

Toothbrush made from bamboo and coconut fibre, c1942–1945
Gift of the family of Forbes Wallace
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore (2019-00638)



Trying their best to improve their lives, they thought of different ways to get some of the necessities they needed. The POWs set up workshops around Changi, and through ingenious methods, made a variety of products. Some examples include soaps, toothbrushes, and even medical supplies. Have a look at the interactive display to find out more!

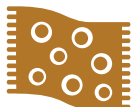


Create Your Own Tools

Using the following materials, which were commonly found in the POW camps, try sketching your own invented items or tools that you might use every day:



Bamboo



Scraps of Cloth



Food Tins



Rice Sacks

Coconut
HusksPieces of
WoodArmy
BootsRubber
SapBicycle
Spokes

Women Prisoners and Their Crafts

Although the women prisoners in Changi were not put through hard labour like the POWs, their living conditions were not much better.

Mary Angela Bateman, an art teacher, created a set of watercolour drawings while interned in the prison. Here are some of her works:



Changi Prison a.k.a. Child at Play, c1942–1945
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore
(2014-01498)



Dungeon Mates, c1942–1945
Collection of the National Museum
of Singapore (2014-01489)

Find the rest of Mary Angela Bateman's paintings on the interactive panel in this zone.

What do you observe in these paintings? What can you tell about the lives of women and children based on them?



The Changi Quilts

Many of the women turned to embroidery to pass the time and find comfort in a craft they knew well. Shortly after they were imprisoned in Changi Prison, they started sewing quilts to be sent to military hospitals.

The women were asked to put “something of themselves” in the quilts they sewed. It also became a way for the women to tell their husbands or fathers that they were still alive.

Let’s take a closer look at some of the squares that were part of the quilts:

Did You Know?

There were a few quilts sewn and the one on display is a replica of a British quilt. The squares below are from an Australian quilt.



This square has a small figure curled up in a dark Changi cell. The phrase “How long O Lord how long!” conveys the uncertainty the prisoners faced while in captivity.

Embroidered ‘Australian Changi quilt’, 1942
Collection of the Australian War Memorial
(REL/14235)



This square depicts a scene of Penang in green, beige, cream, and blue; showing a beach with a palm tree, hills and clouds in the distance, and a native boat on the water.

What do you think the women who embroidered the quilts wanted to convey? Do you see anything in common between the two squares?



I helped to sew
the Girl Guides'
quilt as well!



Going to School in Changi Prison

There were also children among the internees at Changi Prison, and they lived with the women in areas separate from the men. The poor living conditions meant that the children were often ill and starving. However, the adults did their best to keep the children occupied and distracted. One of the ways was to have them attend classes.

Try to imagine what the classes in Changi Prison would look like. Discuss with your friends, then draw or write your interpretation of a Changi classroom in the box below:



Think about the subjects taught or the stationery we used. How many hours a day do you think we spent at school?

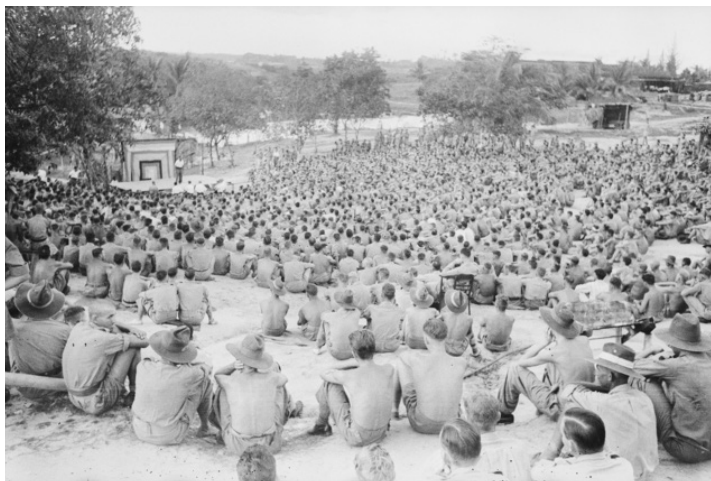


Creative Pursuits

To lift their spirits, the prisoners organised all kinds of activities for everyone to participate in. Performances such as musical recitals, comedic skits and even circus acts were very popular, occasionally hosting up to 1,000 audience members. The prisoners came up with creative ways to make intricate sets with whatever they had.

Other forms of expression, such as reading and writing, were also popular outlets for the internees.

A large crowd is entertained by an Australian Imperial Force concert party at Changi prisoner-of-war camp, c1942
Collection of the Australian War Memorial

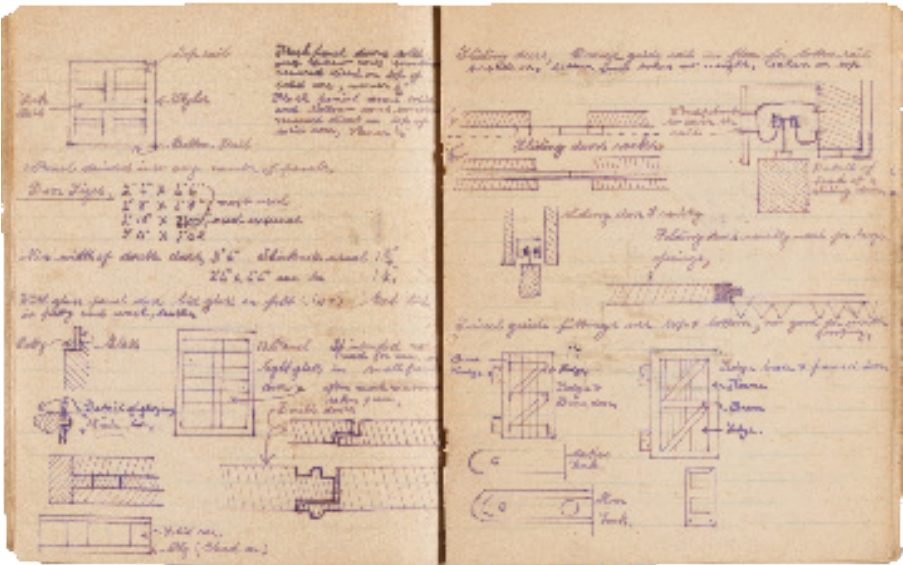


Why do you think it was important for the internees to engage in various forms of entertainment?



Changi University

There was also a series of educational classes and lectures for adults, known as “Changi University”. At one point, there were 9,000 POWs enrolled in the various classes.



Former POW Sergeant John Ritchie Johnston's exercise book, c1940s
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore (2018-00762-001)

Let's take a closer look at what they studied:
What are some of the subjects they learnt?
Unscramble the letters to find out more!



1 Y A A L M

2 E E E G G I I N N N R



Liberation

On 15 August 1945, after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese Emperor announced the unconditional surrender of all Japanese forces. This brought an end to World War Two. Following that, the Allied troops began landing in POW camps to free the prisoners and provide aid.

A surrender ceremony took place later, on 12 September 1945, at the Municipal Building (now part of the National Gallery Singapore).



The release of Allied prisoners of war from Changi Prison, 1945
Collection of Imperial War Museum (CF 725)

Imagine that you are one of the internees. What would you think and how would you feel upon hearing the news of the surrender?



Legacies

The internees at Changi displayed great courage. Although the experience was a traumatic one, many of them went on to lead full lives in Singapore or in their home countries.

All four characters in this booklet are loosely based on actual internees. Two of them have their names on the wall in this zone, and a third character is featured in one of the galleries.

Can you guess who they are?



Read or listen to the stories of the internees presented in this zone. Why do you think it is important for us to preserve and learn about their experiences? 

Changi Chapel

This chapel is a replica of one out of numerous churches built by POWs in Changi during their internment. The cross and the furnishings for the church were made by the POWs from materials they scavenged.

Let's take a closer look at the cross:



Did You Know?

There were multiple places of worship set up across the various prison camps in Changi.

What are the main materials used to make the cross?

1

2

Reflections

How did the Japanese Occupation affect these internees? Compare what life was like for them before the war, when they were imprisoned in Changi, and after they were freed.



How can you apply the values shown by the internees in your everyday life?

Presented by



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