

Omar Kampong Melaka Mosque

By : A group of Madrasah Aljunied Students

On Tuesday, the 20th November 2018, we interviewed Mr. Yusoff Ali, to get to know more about Omar Kampong Melaka Mosque. Mr. Yusoff Ali, 63, has spent most of his life at the oldest mosque in Singapore. He started visiting the mosque at around 17, after he stopped studying. He was walking around Keng Cheow Street one day, when fate happened to bring him to Masjid Omar.

Interviewee's Background.

Mr. Yusoff has been actively volunteering at the mosque since the 1970s especially in the publicity aspect. It is no doubt that he has contributed a lot to the mosque and is respected for his honourable services. Mr. Yusoff stated that he would design and edit posters for the mosque's events. His career as a marketing coordinator in a publishing company has proven his ability to put to use the skills he established as a form of volunteer work. Now, Mr Yusoff Ali is currently the chairman of Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka.



Mosque's Background

The long-standing Omar Kampong Melaka Mosque was first built in 1820 and officiated by Dr. Yaacob Ibrahim on June 4th 2010. This mosque has been around for about two centuries, witnessing the progress in Singapore. People of different races, ethnicities and social classes have all set foot into the great Omar Kampong Melaka Mosque. Holding a special place in the Muslim community, Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka was declared a historic site by the National Heritage Board in 2001.

Masjid Kampong Omar Melaka was originally made out of wood, just like any other 'Kampong' house back in the 1800s. As the years past, Masjid Omar went through many renovations. The Muslim population was growing and Masjid Omar was

expanded. By 2010, the mosque had an annex building that resides an office, classrooms and a prayer hall just for the female Muslims.

The mosque was renovated, from time to time. From using cheap wood, Masjid Omar's doors are now made out of rosewood. Mr Yusoff emphasised that rosewood helps prevent damage caused by termites, thus it is able to last longer. He also shared with us how the mosque looked like back in the days. The mosque used to be surrounded by wooden kampong houses. Worshippers used to take their ablution from a large water tank unlike now where taps are installed for convenient use. Since then, Mr Yusoff has seen and met many different types of people visiting the mosque. From different cultures and races, many have ever stepped foot into Masjid Omar. There were also some programmes held until now, such as *Maulid Rasul* and breaking fast during *Ramadhan*.

Back in the day, Masjid Omar only accommodated for the Muslim men. Not only till the 2000s was a small air-conditioned annex building built beside the men's prayer room, solely for the Muslimahs (female muslims) who wished to perform their prayers there.

However, even through major renovations, the mosque's wooden ceiling and marble tiles remained, so as its divinity and holiness.



Mr. Yusoff Ali explaining about Masjid Omar's infrastructure.

The marble-tiled floor and stairs behind the male's prayer hall that has been used even before major renovations.



The black-painted wood that has been used since the early days of Masjid Omar.

His Contributions

Perhaps, what pushed Mr Yusoff further to lend a helping hand, was that his skills and experience were needed around the mosque. For example, Mr. Yusoff designed and printed posters to be pasted around the mosque. He also added that the key to volunteering is availability and passion. Passion is definitely the key to excel in what you do. Which was what he clearly had, as he frequently visited the mosque as it happened to be the nearest one to his workplace. He also saw great potential for the mosque to be a bonding centre as it attracted not only Muslims but non-Muslims too, who happened to be of different races. This way, he grabbed the golden opportunity to create strong ties amongst the people. Here, we are given one of the example which highlights the marking point of harmonious living in Singapore.

The stepping stone of his contributions was the fact that he visited the mosque often. Little by little, Mr. Yusoff grew from a boy who always visited the mosque, into the chairman of the mosque. Mr Yusoff expressed his sorrow when he was asked what he foreseed for the future of the mosque. He stated that not many youth are active in visiting the mosque, as they are caught up with everyday tasks, such as work. He is very dedicated to continue his legacy and help the mosque till his last burst of energy.

He hoped that the mosque would still be standing and filled with visitors as it holds very rich history. Sadly, many youth nowadays do not seem to venture and find out about our local mosques. They do not bother to join classes or activities held. Thus, Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka is unknown to most people in the later generations, due to its secluded location. Hence, this explains the lack of interest and support toward the mosque. We hope that one by one, we can help fulfill Mr. Yusoff's dream and continue his footsteps.