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Benjamin Keasberry

~ Recommendations ~

- [London Missionary Society in Singapore](#)
The London Missionary Society (LMS) set up a mission in Singapore in 1819. Besides preaching and running schools, the ...
- [Samuel Dyer](#)
Samuel Dyer (b. 20 February, 1804, Greenwich, England – d. 24 October, 1843, Macau) was a missionary to the Chinese ...
- [Sophia Cooke](#)
Sophia Cooke (b. 27 February 1814, Hilsborough, Norfolk, England–d. 14 September 1895, Singapore) was an Anglican missionary ...
- [Abraham Logan](#)
Abraham Logan (b. 31 August 1816, Hattan Hall, Berwickshire, Scotland d. 20 December 1873, Penang, Straits Settlements) ...
- [Singapore Institution Library \(1837–1844\)](#)
The Singapore Institution Library grew from a vision, by Sir Stamford Raffles, for an educated Singapore. Upon the founding ...
- [Richard James Wilkinson](#)
Richard James Wilkinson (b. 29 May 1867, Salonika, Greece–d. 5 December 1941, Izmir, Turkey) was a colonial administrator ...
- [Tan Che Sang](#)
Tan Che Sang (b.1763, Fujian, China–d. 2 April 1836, Singapore) was one of the earliest merchants from Malacca to come ...
- [Singapore Library \(1845–1874\)](#)
The Singapore Library, which grew out of the Singapore Institution Library, was established on 22 January 1845 as a ...
- [William G. Shellabear](#)
William Girdlestone Shellabear (b. 27 August 1862, England–d. 16 January 1947, Hartford, Connecticut, United States) ...
- [James Richardson Logan](#)
James Richardson Logan (b. 10 April 1819, Berwickshire, Scotland–d. 20 October 1869, Penang, Malaya) was the founder ...
- [Tan See Boo](#)
Tan See Boo, alias Tan Si-bo (b. 18 June 1833, Amoy, China–d. 25 November

1884, Singapore), was a Chinese missionary ...

- [The Singapore Free Press](#)

Published for the first time on 8 October 1835, The Singapore Free Press was Singapore's second English-language newspaper, ...

- [Jonas Daniel Vaughan](#)

Jonas Daniel Vaughan (b. 27 June 1825–d. 17 October 1891, at sea) was a sailor, public official and prominent lawyer ...

- [Thomas Braddell](#)

Thomas Braddell, C. M. G. (b. 30 January 1823, Rahingrany, Ireland–d. 19 September 1891, London, England) was Crown ...

- [Thomas Shelford](#)

Thomas Shelford (b. 23 November 1839, Cosford, Suffolk, England–d. 12 January 1900, Guildford, Surrey, England), CMG, ...

- [John Crawford](#)

John Crawford (b. 1783, Scotland–d. 1868, England) was the second British Resident of Singapore, holding office from ...

- [Chinese Christian Association](#)

The Chinese Christian Association (CCA) was established in October 1889 and lasted for more than half a century. The ...

- [Maria Dyer](#)

Maria Dyer (b. 1803, ? – d. 21 October, 1846, Penang, Malaysia) established girls' schools and inculcated Christian ...

- [Diana \(ship\)](#)

Launched on 12 July 1823, the first Diana was constructed at Messrs Kyds & Co. Dockyard in Kidderpore, near Calcutta, ...

- [Charles Burton Buckley](#)

Charles Burton Buckley (b. 30 January 1844, London, England–d. 22 May 1912, London, England) was a prominent resident ...

- [John Fraser](#)

A co-founder of Fraser & Neave (F&N), the world-famous bottler of fizzy drinks, John Fraser (b. 1843, Wigtown, Scotland–d. ...

- [Raffles Lighthouse](#)

Raffles Lighthouse is located on Pulau Satumu, 23 km southwest of Singapore, at the western entrance of Singapore Straits. ...

- [Stamford Raffles's career and contributions to Singapore](#)

Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (b. 6 July 1781, off Port Morant, Jamaica–d. 5 July 1826, Middlesex, England) is famously ...

- [Alexander Laurie Johnston](#)

Alexander Laurie Johnston (b. Dumfriesshire, South Scotland–d. 19 February 1850, Bluehill, Kircudbright, Scotland), ...

- [William H. Read](#)

William Henry Macleod Read, K.C.N.L., C.M.G., affectionately known as WH, (b. 7 February 1819, Scotland–d. 10 May 1909, ...

- [Gaston Dutronquoy](#)

Gaston Dutronquoy was a prominent hotelier and entrepreneur in

Singapore during the 1840s and early 1850s. He was also ...

- [Song Hoot Kiam](#)

Song Hoot Kiam (b. 1830, Malacca–d. 7 October 1900, Singapore), after whom Hoot Kiam Road is named, is reputedly the ...

- [Philip Jackson](#)

Lieutenant Philip Jackson (b. 24 September 1802, Durham, England–d. 1879) was an officer in the Bengal Regiment Artillery, ...

- [Paterson, Simons & Co.](#)

Paterson, Simons & Co. was an early trading company in Singapore whose origin can be traced back to 1821. Although no ...

- [Joseph Balestier](#)

Joseph Balestier (b. circa 1788, France?–d. 1858, York, Pennsylvania, United States) was the first consul to Singapore ...

- [Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society](#)

The Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society was founded in November 1877 to research and document information relating ...

- [Robert Fullerton](#)

Robert Fullerton (Sir) (b. 1773–d. 6 June 1831), a Scotsman, was governor of Penang. In 1826, he was appointed first ...

- [Japanese Cemetery Park](#)

The Japanese Cemetery Park at 22 Chuan Hoe Avenue was established in 1891 to serve the burial needs of Japanese residents ...

- [Sophia Blackmore](#)

Sophia Blackmore (b. 18 October 1857, Goulburn, New South Wales, Australia–d. 3 July 1945, Australia) was the first ...

- [Raffles Town Plan \(Jackson Plan\)](#)

The Raffles Town Plan, also known as the Jackson Plan, refers to Stamford Raffles's plan for the town of Singapore formulated ...

- [Jose d'Almeida](#)

Jose d'Almeida Carvalho E. Silva (Dr) (b. 27 November 1784, St Pedro Do Sul, Portugal–d. 17 October 1850, Singapore), ...

- [Roland St John Braddell](#)

Dato Sir Roland St John Braddell (b. 20 December 1880, Singapore–d. 15 November 1966, London, United Kingdom), a prominent ...

- [Guthrie & Co.](#)

Guthrie & Co.'s history began in 1823 when a partnership was established between Alexander Guthrie and Thomas Talbot ...

- [Tigers in Singapore](#)

Tigers in Singapore were sighted mostly in the forested areas of Bukit Timah, Choa Chu Kang and Pulau Ubin during the ...

- [Lady Mary Wood](#)

Lady Mary Wood was a 49-metre long paddle wheel steamer launched in 1841 and registered in 1842. It is said to be named ...

- [Flint Street](#)

Flint Street stretches from Battery Road to Boat Quay and is flanked on each

side by the Bank of China building and ...

- [Thomas de Multon Lee Braddell](#)

Sir Thomas de Multon Lee Braddell (b. 25 November 1856, Province Wellesley, Penang–d. 31 January 1927) was Attorney-General ...

- [G. D. Coleman](#)

G. D. (George Dromgold) Coleman (b. 1795, Drogheda, County Louth, Ireland–d. 27 March 1844, Singapore) was Singapore's ...

- [Walter Makepeace](#)

Walter Makepeace (b. 22 December 1859, Coventry, England–d. 1941) was a journalist and editor of The Singapore Free ...

- [Bendemeer House](#)

Located off Serangoon Road, Bendemeer House was formerly called the House of Whampoa or Whampoa House. It was a mansion ...

- [Thio Chan Bee](#)

Thio Chan Bee (b. 5 April 1904, Medan, Sumatra, Indonesia–d. 13 December 1978, location unknown) was an educationist ...

- [Constance Mary Turnbull](#)

Constance Mary Turnbull (Professor) (b. 9 February 1927, Northumberland, England–d. 5 September 2008, Oxford, England), ...

- [Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church](#)

The Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church at 77 Prinsep Street was built in 1843 by Reverend Benjamin Peach Keasberry, ...

- [Munshi Abdullah](#)

Munshi Abdullah (b. 1797, Kampong Pali, Malacca–d. October 1854, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia) was also known as Abdullah bin ...

- [Mission Press](#)

Established by Christian missionaries in 1823, the Mission Press was the first printing press in Singapore. It published ...

~ Related Pictures ~

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Benjamin Peach Keasberry, Reverend (*b. 1811, Hyderabad, India–d. 6 September 1875, Singapore*), was an early Protestant missionary to Singapore known for his pioneering work in the Malay mission here. He arrived in Singapore in 1839 and went on to establish the Malay Mission Chapel (today's [Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church](#)), spearhead Malay education, and advance printing and publishing in Singapore. He ran a successful mission press that printed many of Singapore's early religious and commercial literature. The press was known for its innovative use of lithography that produced beautiful decorative Malay works resembling handwritten calligraphy. Keasberry was also a prolific translator and publisher, and contributed many works in Malay, notably a revised translation of the New Testament Bible, an enlarged and improved English-Malay dictionary and several school text books.¹

Early life

Born in India to British parents, Keasberry was raised in Surabaya during the British occupation of Java. He completed his education in Mauritius and Madras. After a failed business venture in Singapore, he returned to Java to work as a clerk in a mercantile firm in Batavia. After the death of a close friend, he felt the call to missions and applied to be an assistant missionary with the Batavia station of the [London Missionary Society](#) (LMS).²

Keasberry apprenticed under W. H. Medhurst of the LMS from 1830 to 1834. During this time, he learnt Bible translation, village preaching, hospital chaplaincy and teaching in mission schools. He also acquired the skills of printing, book binding, lithography and literature distribution. The knowledge gained proved invaluable to his later ministry in Singapore. In 1835, Keasberry went to New Jersey where he furthered his studies at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church. There, he met and married his wife, Charlotte Parker.³

In 1839, the couple set sail for China as independent missionaries, hoping that financial support would come from the American Board of Commission for Foreign Mission (ABCFM). However, upon arrival in Macau, they were denied entry into China. With the intent of returning to Java, they boarded a ship that was bound for Singapore. When they disembarked in Singapore, Keasberry noticed the potential of the Malay work here and decided to plant his roots on the island. He initially supported himself by giving drawing lessons while interacting with the Malays and distributing tracts in his free time. He became acquainted with the work of the Malay mission of the LMS chapel. Owing to his fluency in Malay, he was invited to join the LMS in September 1839. He remained an agent of the LMS until 1847 when it closed its Singapore station to focus on its work in China. Having already established a ministry here, Keasberry chose to stay on as an independent missionary and resigned from the society.⁴

Malay Mission Chapel

Keasberry began his ministry with the Malay mission of the LMS chapel at [Bras Basah Road](#). The ministry grew and a larger meeting place was soon needed. To this end, he acquired a piece of land in [Kampong Bencoolen](#) for the construction of a new chapel. The Malay Mission Chapel (also called the Prinsep Street Chapel) was completed in August 1843, supported by public donations. At its inaugural service, more than 60 Malays and Straits-born Chinese attended. Due to his close association with the chapel, the church was popularly called the “Tuan Keasberry puna Graja” (meaning Keasberry’s Church in Malay). The chapel held regular services in Malay and English, and its members included early [Straits Chinese](#) such as [Song Hoot Kiam](#). After Keasberry’s death, the chapel came under the auspices of the English Presbyterian Mission and is known today as the Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church.⁵

Although Keasberry’s life work was focused on the Malays, his ministry extended to the Chinese as well. In 1861, he partnered catechist Ching Kwang and preacher [Tan See Boo](#) of the Presbyterian Church to establish a preaching point in [Bukit Timah](#). In 1862, a chapel for the Chinese community in Bukit Timah was built with funds raised from the congregation at the Malay Chapel. The Chinese church is known today as Glory Presbyterian Church.⁶

Malay boarding school

Keasberry was also a pioneer of vernacular education. He first taught Malay classes at the [Singapore](#)

[Institution Free School](#) with Alfred North, an ABCFM missionary, and [Munshi Abdullah](#). Although the classes later ceased due to low enrolment numbers, he continued to serve in the school as an examiner for writing and drawing.⁷

In 1840, Keasberry started his own free Malay boarding school with 12 [Orang Laut](#) boys. The boys were taught reading, writing, geography, arithmetic, music, and Bible scriptures in Malay. Natural sciences and English were later added to the curriculum. The students also received vocational training in printing, lithography, book binding and typesetting to provide them a means of living after graduation. Some of the older boys were hired as apprentices in Keasberry's mission press. As the school grew, Keasberry moved the school and his residence to larger premises at [River Valley Road](#) in 1848. The property, which he named Mount Zion, was bought with the inheritance he received after his father's death. Keasberry also hired Munshi Abdullah to assist with teaching. In 1857, a Malay girls' school was added. The Malay school was an institution of good standing at its time and counted among its students members of the Johore royal family. Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim had placed two of his sons, Abu Bakar (who later became the Sultan of Johore) and Abdul Rahman, in his care. Keasberry financed the running of the school with the earnings of the [Mission Press](#), private donations, as well as grants from the LMS, the Temenggong and the government.⁸

Mission Press and translation work

In his efforts to reach out to the Malays, Keasberry also published and translated many works in their language. In 1840, he began printing educational materials with a lithographic press that he had borrowed from ABCFM missionaries. Among the first publications he printed were a children's book of Bible stories that he had translated from T. H. Gallaudet's *The Picture Reading Defining Book*; a collection of hymns in Malay; and a book on Natural Philosophy titled *Kitab Darihal Tabiat Jenis-Jenis Kejadian Iaitu Guna Bagi Kanak-Kanak*. However, progress was slow as the lithographic stones were defective and supplies lacking. Keasberry appealed to the LMS for new printing equipment and supplies. Failing to hear from the LMS, he purchased two lithographic presses and stones from Germany at his own expense.⁹

In September 1842, the LMS finally responded to Keasberry's requests by transferring its English and Malay printing press in Malacca to Singapore. A book bindery was also added in 1843. With a functioning printing press and book bindery, Keasberry was able to introduce vocational training in book binding, lithography and typesetting to his students. The LMS also deployed [Samuel Dyer](#), who had been developing a fount of movable Chinese metallic types, to Singapore. From 1842 to 1846, the printing press turned in modest profits through the efforts of Keasberry, who dedicated himself to Malay printing, and Samuel Dyer, John Stronach and Alexander Stronach. The latter three were China LMS missionaries stationed in Singapore, who devoted themselves to Chinese printing.¹⁰

When the LMS left Singapore in 1846, the Malacca printing press was shipped to China. However, Keasberry was able to continue his printing operations in Singapore, having received a fount of types that was transferred from the LMS mission in Penang, a small lithographic press as well as printing materials from the LMS Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca. Keasberry also procured his own printing equipment and supplies for the printing of Malay materials, and converted the old chapel, which the LMS had deeded to him, into a printing and book binding establishment.¹¹

The printing press undertook commercial, educational and religious printing. These included commercial jobbing (letterheads, bills of lading, etc.), two of Singapore's early Chinese newspapers *Tifang Jih Pao* (Local News) and *Jit Sheng* (Rising Sun), and various publications including school books, biographies, journals, hymn books, prayer books, the Bible and religious tracts. Keasberry was known for advancing the use of lithography in Malay printing. He was able to tap on the decorative potential of the technique to reproduce the form of the Malay manuscript. Among his finest lithographic works is the Malay journal *Cermin Mata* (*The Eye-Glass*). With Keasberry's success, the technology gained wide acceptance with the local Malay commercial press, as it presented a gradual transition from manuscript copying to printing, and was less costly than typography. Keasberry's influence also extended to educational books. When government Malay schools expanded in the 1870s, the government issued many textbooks that were similar in form and content to the school books that Keasberry had developed for his Malay school.¹²

Keasberry was also a prolific translator and editor. Among his notable achievements was the translation of the New Testament in Malay, which he printed in Roman characters in 1853 and in Jawi in 1856. The translation work was commissioned by the British and Foreign Bible Society and undertaken with the assistance of Munshi Abdullah. Titled *Kitab Alkudus, Iya Itu Injil Isa Almasih Tuhan Kami* (Malay for *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*), Keasberry's translation was a revision of Reverend R. Burn and Reverend C. H. Thomsen's translation of the New Testament that was printed in 1831. It included the later revisions made by various LMS missionaries such as Reverend J. Evans and Samuel Dyer.¹³

Select works translated and/or printed by Keasberry¹⁴

1843: *Syair Negeri Singapura Terbakar* (*Syair of the Burning of Singapore*) / *Bahwa Ini Hikayat Isa* (*Life of Jesus*)

1845: *Bahawa Ini Puji-Pujian Yang Dinyanyikan Dengan Berbagai-Bagai Lagunya Pada Tatkala Sembahyang Atau Pada Tatkala Berhimpun-Himpun Akan Meminta Doa* (*Hymns of Praise*)

1846: *Bahwa Ini Hikayat Binatang* (*Natural History in Malay*) / *A Vocabulary of the English and Malay Languages, Enlarged and Improved*

1847: *Zabur Iaitu Surat Segala Mazmur* (*The Book of All the Psalms*) / *Syair Kampung Gelam Terbakar* (*Syair of the Burning of Gelam Village*)

1848–51: *Taman Pungatauan Bagie Kanak Kanak* (*Garden of Knowledge*)

1849: *Hikayat Abdullah* (*Stories of Abdullah*)

1852: *Pengutib Segala Remah* (*Collector of Grains of Knowledge*) / *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah Ke Kelantan* (*Account of Abdullah's Voyage to Kelantan*) (2nd ed.)

1854: *Perjalanan Orang Menchari Slamet* (*Pilgrim's Progress*)

1855: *Ceretera Ilmu Kepandaian Orang Putih* (*Story of the White People's Knowledge Expertise*)

1856: *Hikayat Pada Menyatakan Darihal Benua Asia Dan Afrika Serta Dengan Tokong-Tokong Pulau Di Tanah Melayu* (*An Elementary Geography of Asia and Africa: With a Special Chapter on the Malay Peninsula*)

1857: *Kitab Sembahyang Yang Dipakai Dalam Majlis Orang Kristian Dan Adat Membahagi Sakramen-Sakramen Dan Lain-Lain Rukun Dan Adat-Adat Dalam Gereja Menurut Adat-Adat Gereja Negeri Inglan Dan Irian Dengan Cara Dan Adat-Adat Membuat Dan Mengaturkan Dan Mengkuduskan Bisap-Bisap Paderi-Paderi Dan Dikan-Dikan* (*Book of Common Prayer*)

1859: *Perumpamaan Nabi Allah Sulaiman (The Book of Proverbs)*

1862: *Kitab Taurat Musa Yang Bernama Kajadian (The Book of Genesis in Malay)*

1863: *Bubrapa Pungajaran Deripada Injil Isa Almasih: Yang Dikhotbatkan Dalam Greja, Dikampong Bungkulu (Sermons in Malay)*

1872: *Taurat Nabi Allah Musa Yang Bernama Keluaran (The Book of Exodus)*

Death

Keasberry died of heart disease on 6 September 1875 while preaching at the Malay Mission Chapel.¹⁵ He was buried at Bukit Timah Cemetery and his grave is marked by a tombstone installed by his former student Abu Bakar, the Maharaja of Johore.¹⁶

Family

First wife: Charlotte Parker (*–d. 21 April 1845, Surabaya*)

Second wife: Ellen Scott (*m. September 1846–d. 6 September 1899, Singapore*)¹⁷

Author

Gracie Lee

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