News from the Singapore Archive Project

By Jo Halford

Project recap

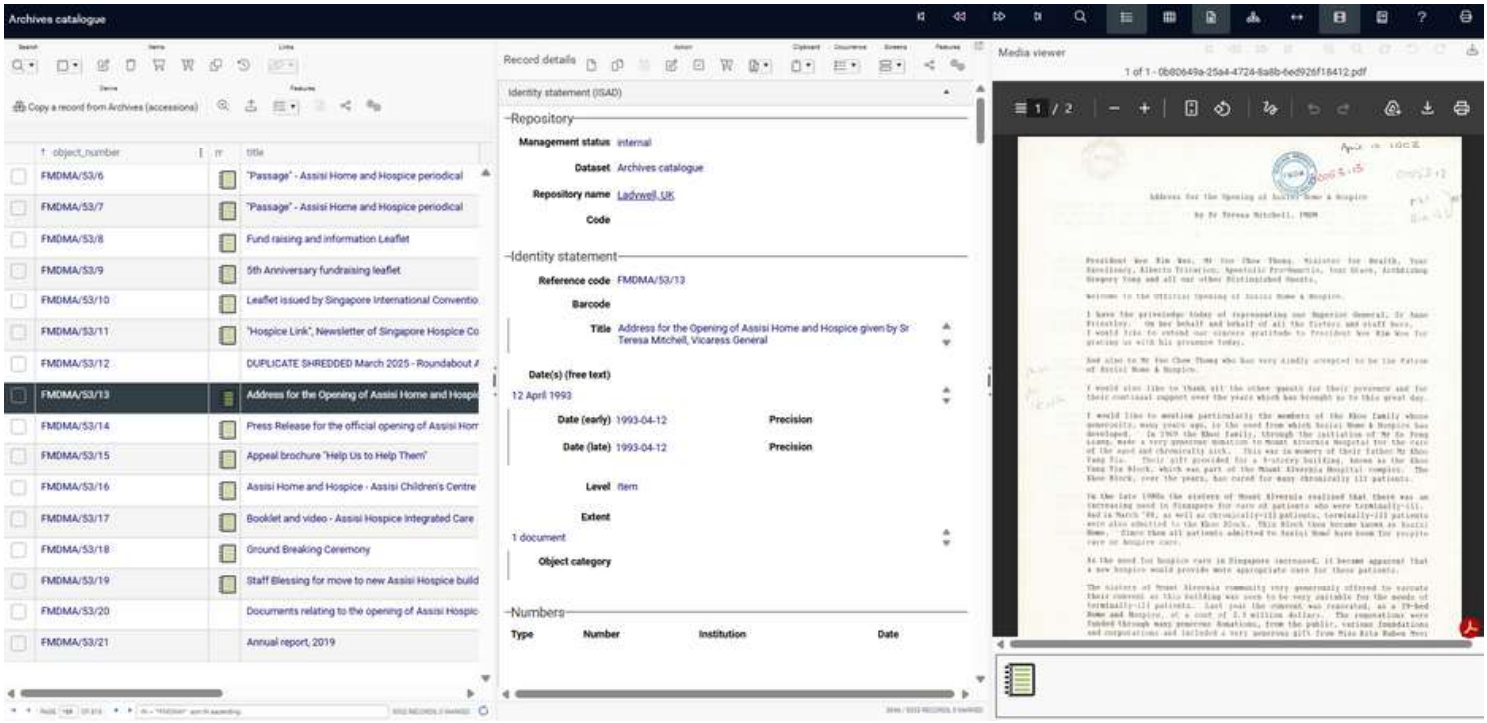
In October 2024, we began exploring how best to ensure the long-term preservation of the archives at St Francis Convent, Singapore. Following my visit to Singapore and Malaysia to assess the collection and meet the sisters and mission partners, CLT confirmed that the archive would be transferred to Ladywell to be cared for alongside the rest of the congregation's records.
In February 2025, Srs Teresa Mitchell and Claudia Lee spent four weeks in Singapore preparing the material for shipment, supported by mission partner Carolyn Ng.

Arrival at Ladywell

On 17 April 2025, after a nervous wait while the shipment was in transit, two pallets containing 22 large boxes of documents, carefully prepared by Srs Teresa and Claudia, arrived safely at Ladywell. Srs Jane Bertelsen and Helena McEvilly had already brought back several additional boxes with their luggage, including valuable photograph albums from Mount Miriam, Penang.

Jo Halford receives the archive in Ladywell

The boxes were immediately placed in the climate-controlled strongroom, and I spent the following months recataloguing and repackaging the collection. More than 5,000 records relating to FMDM activities in Singapore and Malaysia are now listed on our cloud-based archive database, with many digitised for easier access across the congregation.



Archives database showing part of the catalogue for Singapore

All non-archival packaging and fastenings have been removed and replaced with acid-free folders and boxes.

Some of the reboxed Singapore archive collection in the Ladywell strongroom

Photographs and preservation

Alongside the paper documents, Sr Teresa and I have listed, repackaged and scanned hundreds of photographs from both Singapore and Mount Miriam. These newly digitised images have already supported mission partners in Penang as they prepare for Mount Miriam Cancer Hospital's Golden Jubilee later this year.

Repackaged photos from Singapore

To improve long-term care of the photo collections, I successfully applied for the Catholic Archives Society's Small Project Award, receiving £250 towards archival-quality storage for the 23 large-format photo albums.

Large format photo album, safely stored in a new archival box

Reflections

Working on this collection has been a fascinating journey. The records vividly capture the lives, ministries, challenges and achievements of the sisters in Singapore and Malaysia, revealing their relationships with local communities, the wider Church, and the congregation as a whole. Their stories continue to inspire.

A particular highlight is the Postulants' Inventory Book, which lists the young women from Singapore and Malaysia who entered the congregation between January 1951 and July 1976 and the items they brought with them. Sharing Sr Marina Chai's page with her prompted wonderful memories—an example of how archives can spark meaningful conversations.

Please get in touch if you have any questions about anything in this part of the archive. If you would like to consult any documents or photos, we will be pleased to help.

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Sr Marina was interested to look at her page in the book