

# MALAYSIA HALL A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

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**M**ALAYAN and subsequently Malaysian students who studied in the United Kingdom in the 1950s until 2004 will remember the 44/46 Bryanston Square, fondly known as Malaya or Malaysia Hall, as a home away from home.

On June 2, 2004, Malaysia Hall became part of Malaysian history in the UK when the keys of the hall were handed back to the landlord, Portman Estate.

At the handing over of the keys ceremony, the then Malaysian commissioner to the UK, Datuk Abdul Aziz Mohamed, paid tribute to Bryanston Square that had served princes, prime ministers and ordinary people so well in its life of service.

He signed the first page of the farewell book and said it was time to turn over a new page in history.

He then removed the plaque from the door and handed it to the last director of the Malaysian Student Department, Datuk Dr. M. Yusoff bin Mohd Nor.

As a student in the UK in the late 1960s, Malaysia Hall was a place to read Malaysian newspapers and catch up on our studies.

The lounge was where music students played the grand piano. The hall was a student-centred place which saw the setting up and establishment of diverse student-led organisations.

These included the nationalist Kesatuan Melayu United Kingdom, the socialist Malaysia Singapore Student Forum, the Malaysian Student Islamic group and Umno.

The hall was also where the country's independence movement architects used to meet and discuss political events, which led to the country obtaining its freedom.

One of the most distinguished names to have walked through the doors of Bryanston Square was Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj.

It was reported that when he returned here fresh from negotiations with the British to break the news of Malaysia's indepen-



One of the most distinguished names to have walked through the doors of Malaysia Hall was Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj (front row, fourth from right). FILE PIC

dence, the residents carried him around the building, once home to him when he was a student.

Others that frequented the hall included Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, Tun Dr Ismail Rahman and Lee Kuan Yew.

Another aspect of Malaysia Hall that was very dear to students was the canteen at the basement of the building. The food served there was perhaps the cheapest

Malay food in the UK.

It was also where most of the students and Malaysians gathered to catch up on the goings-on in the UK and back home.

I remember there were times when some students had to help out in the kitchen, especially when the then cook Encik Hashim was absent.

There were no complaints throughout, perhaps as the food

served was subsidised by the Malaysian Student Department.

Lest we forget, the memories of having lived and frequented Malaysia Hall during our student days, walking to the Marble Arch tube station, Oxford Street and Hyde Park will be cherished for as long as we live.

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