

Biographical Notes

K G Tregonning (13 June 1923 – 20 July 2015) – Historian

Kennedy Gordon Phillip Tregonning was an Australian academic who taught at the University of Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s.

Tregonning was born in Australia to a medical doctor, Donald Rupert Charles, and his wife. He was one of three sons, and all three boys attended the Christ Church Grammar School and Hale School in Western Australia.¹ Tregonning left school in 1941 and joined the army, and later, the Royal Australian Air Force.²

After World War II, Tregonning resumed his education, enrolling in Adelaide University. He graduated with honours in Political Science and History in 1949,³ and went on to become a history lecturer at the University.⁴ In 1950, Tregonning went to New College, Oxford on a Gowrie Scholarship to pursue a Bachelor of Letters, and completed his third year research on a Nuffield Scholarship.⁵

After completing his postgraduate studies, Tregonning joined the University of Malaya in Singapore as a lecturer in the History department.⁶ He lectured on modern Southeast Asia.⁷ In 1959, he succeeded Cyril Northcote Parkinson as the Raffles Professor of History.⁸ Tregonning's students included Chiang Hai Ding (historian, Singapore Member of Parliament), Wong Lin Ken (historian, Singapore Member of Parliament), Lau Teik Soon (Singapore Member of Parliament) and Joseph Conceicao (Singapore Member of Parliament).⁹

In 1959, while he was head of the History department, Tregonning became the first person to be awarded a PhD by the University of Malaya under its new constitution.¹⁰ In 1960, he founded the *Journal of Southeast Asian History* (renamed the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* ten years later).¹¹

Besides teaching, Tregonning researched and wrote major publications concerning the history of Southeast Asia and Singapore. They included *North Borneo under Chartered Company Rule: North Borneo, 1881-1946*,¹² *Straits Tin: A Brief Account of the First Seventy-five Years of the Straits Trading*

¹ The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, *The Medical Practice at 328 Stirling Highway, Claremont, from 1896 -2011*, pp. 2-3, retrieved from <https://www.racgp.org.au/FSDEDEV/media/documents/RACGP/History/Practice%20histories/Claremont-Medical-Practice.pdf>

² "In Memoriam. Dr KG Tregonning MBE (1923-2015)", *MBRAS Facebook* (28 September 2015), retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/mbras.asiatic/posts/in-memoriamdr-kg-tregonning-mbe-1923-2015-dr-kennedy-gordon-phillip-tregonning-m/724584024341631/>

³ "In Memoriam: Dr K. G. Tregonning 1923–2015", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (December 2015), p. 157; "Principal and scholar", *The West Australian*, 27 August 2015.

⁴ "Principal and scholar", *The West Australian*, 27 August 2015

⁵ "Principal and scholar", *The West Australian*, 27 August 2015; "In Memoriam: Dr K. G. Tregonning", p. 157.

⁶ "To get first PhD. degree under new constitution", *The Straits Times*, 12 March 1959; "In Memoriam: Dr K. G. Tregonning", p. 157.

⁷ Tregonning, K. G., *Merdeka and much more: the reminiscences of a Raffles Professor 1953-1967*, Singapore: NUS Press (2010), p. 13.

⁸ "In Memoriam: Dr K. G. Tregonning", p. 157; "The Raffles Chair of History", *The Straits Times*, 25 May 1950.

⁹ "Historian to write book on S'pore in the 1980s", *The Straits Times*, 25 December 1979; Tregonning, *Merdeka and much more*, p. 29.

¹⁰ "To get first PhD. degree under new constitution", *The Straits Times*, 12 March 1959

¹¹ "In Memoriam: Dr K. G. Tregonning", p. 157.

¹² This was first published in 1958 by the University of Malaya Press. In 1965, it was reissued as *A History of Modern Sabah (North Borneo, 1881-1963)*.

Company Limited, 1887-1962,¹³ *The British in Malaya: The First Forty Years 1786-1826*,¹⁴ *Home Port Singapore: A History of Straits Steamship Company Limited 1890-1965*,¹⁵ *The Singapore Cold Storage, 1903-1966*,¹⁶ and *A History of Modern Malaysia and Singapore*.¹⁷ He also compiled a bibliography of sources on Southeast Asia, entitled, *Southeast Asia: A Critical Bibliography*.¹⁸

In 1967, Tregonning returned to Australia, where he served as Headmaster of Hale School, his alma mater. He retired in 1988 after heading the school for 22 years.¹⁹ When he retired, one of the houses at the school was renamed Tregonning House.²⁰

In 1980, Tregonning was awarded an MBE for his contributions to education.²¹ He died at his home in Western Australia on 20 July 2015.²²

Link to [K G Tregonning Private Papers Index List](#)

¹³ Tregonning, K. G., *Straits Tin: A Brief Account of the First Seventy-five Years of the Straits Trading Company Limited, 1887-1962*, Singapore: Straits Times Press (1962).

¹⁴ Tregonning, K. G., *The British in Malaya: The First Forty Years 1786-1826*, Tucson: Association for Asian Studies, (1965).

¹⁵ Tregonning, K. G., *Home Port Singapore: A History of Straits Steamship Company Limited 1890-1965*, Singapore: Straits Steamship Co. Ltd, (1967).

¹⁶ Tregonning, K. G., *The Singapore Cold Storage, 1903-1966*, Singapore: Cold Storage Holdings Ltd. (1967).

¹⁷ Tregonning, K. G., *A History of Modern Malaysia and Singapore*, Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, (1972).

¹⁸ Tregonning, K. G., *Southeast Asia: A Critical Bibliography*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press (1969).

¹⁹ "In Memoriam: Dr K. G. Tregonning", p. 157; Tregonning, *Merdeka and much more*, p. 99; MBRAS, In Memoriam.

²⁰ "House System", Old Haleians' Association website, retrieved from <https://www.oldhale.com/History/House-System>

²¹ "Principal and scholar", *The West Australian*, 27 August 2015.

²² "Principal and scholar", *The West Australian*, 27 August 2015.