A touch of the past for new SMU campus

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THE new campus of the Singapore Management University (SMU) in Bras Basah is really not all new. Pieces of the past have been embedded in it. They provide a link to the rich past of the civic district, where some familiar features were removed to make way for SMU’s 4.5ha city campus. Most symbolic perhaps are the 1,000 red bricks from the old National Library building at a site now torn down despite public protest. Another: the old trees from the parks in the neighbourhood. The wrought-iron fence from Raffles Girls’ School can also be spotted in the campus, as SMU is determined to let the public be a part of its environment.

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AN SMU SPOKESMAN

KEEPING ALIVE THE MEMORY

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A PASSAGE IN TIME: For the SMU campus, which was opened to the public last Thursday, preserving pieces of the past is part of its move to let the public be a part of its environment.

A CHAPTER FROM THE PAST

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wall of the Li Ka Shing library cost a couple of thousand dollars, said an SMU spokesman. “We felt that since we are going to be just across the road from the old library site, we ought to preserve a piece of it,” she added. The library building was demolished for the construction of an underground road.

The wrought-iron fence from the RGS site in Queen Street dates back to 1928. It was moved a few metres from its original location opposite the old MPH Bookstore in Stamford Road. The fence now stands in front of SMU’s business school.

The most costly effort, however, was the preservation of the old rain trees and angsana trees from the Bras Basah parks. The university spent more than $1 million to store 16 trees which have been replanted on the campus green that faces the Singapore Art Museum.

Two are particularly significant. One is a bodhi tree, said to be planted in the 19th century, and the other a rain tree, believed to be about 70 years old. The bodhi tree once stood where a 19th century prison used to be.

These mementoes are a nice gesture by the SMU, said businessman Terence Tan, 48, who was among the many Singaporeans who had protested against the demolition of the National Library building.