

No.1 Praya Lane – A Place Called Home



It's close to 7.00 pm on a warm, breezy evening in Praya Lane, Melaka. The stringed hammock that's been gently swaying and cradling me the past two hours is far from comfy but the exhaustion from a long school day which started at 6.30 am gives way to my sleepiness and plunges me into a deep evening slumber.

A photo of No.1 Praya Lane, taken in the early 1990s. Photo courtesy of Glynis De Costa.

The hammock, hanging from teak wood beams “under” the house has been my go-to place every evening to hang out with my pet dog and read a few chapters of my *Form 2 Sejarah* (history) textbook. But no matter how hard I try, the evening breeze beats the history lessons hands down and lulls me to sleep.

Such was the life I had back when I was a teen, staying at No.1 Praya Lane. As I get out of the hammock, I take great care not to stand up straight lest I hit my head on the beams “under” the house. The area below the house was referred to as “under” the house and is only about 4 feet high. On some evenings, we'd bring out our tea and cakes to have “under the house”. When I was a kid, I used to play hide and seek with my cousins because I was still short enough to stand upright and the wide stilts provided great hiding posts for my cousins and me.

The house of No.1 Praya Lane stands as the first numbered house on a historic lane in Melaka called Praya Lane. It is an old house and is one of the few houses elevated on stilts in the Praya Lane area. Nevertheless, I know that I am not the only one to have resided in it and made good use of this part of the house. Many have come before me, calling this house their home, since this is the house of my great, grandfather, Edward de Rozario and his 10 children.

Because of its age and location, a mini inquiry into its history was deemed appropriate to form a part of the ‘Stories from Praya Lane’ project. At a glance, it is noted that the house appears to be located further away from the rest of the houses in the Praya Lane area, as it is located closer to the main road, whilst the other houses were centred around the heart of the *kampong*, which can be said to be the Assumption Chapel and the sea that washed up at the back of the church once upon a fairer time.

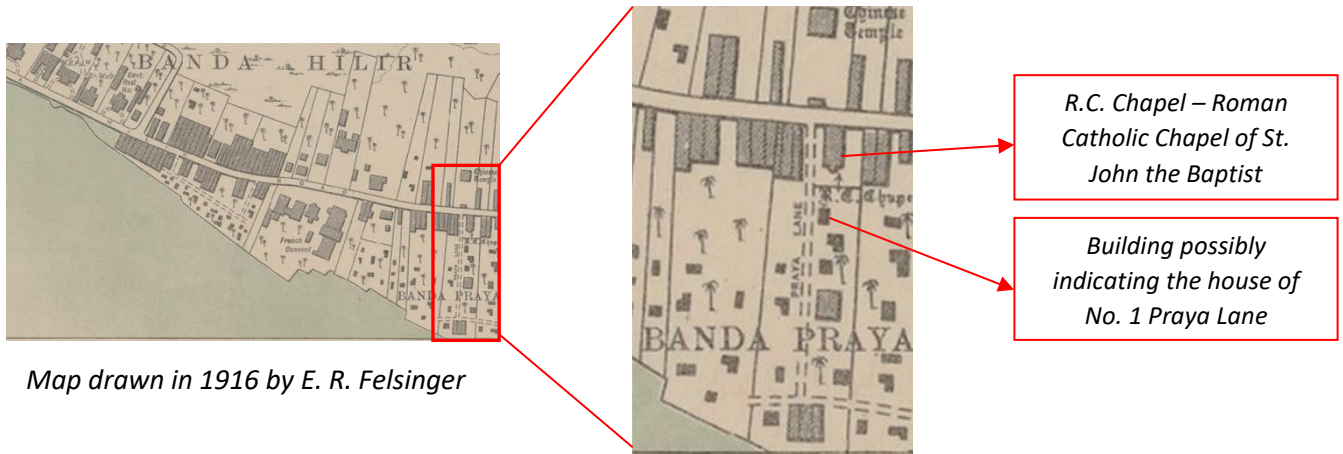
The first part of this essay attempts to uncover the history and origins of the house while the second part is a brief account of the earliest known owners and residents of the house, from before the 1930's, down the years, as well as some animated descriptions of their lives and occupations.

Part 1 – A brief history of the house

Those familiar to the area known as Bandar Hilir or Jalan Parameswara, downtown the older part of Melaka will undoubtedly have dined at or heard of the Saturday Ice Café, situated at the corner entering Praya Lane. However, outsiders who have not resided in Praya Lane might not be aware of the very first house located on stilts after the Saturday Ice Café building, i.e. No.1 Praya Lane.

This house was given the address of Number 1, Praya Lane – an address that dates back possibly more than a hundred years old, when it was built. At various points the lane was renamed *Lorong Pantai* or *Lorong Praya*, but the residents still call it this lane, Praya Lane.

Very little information was found with regards to the origins of the house prior to the 1930's. No records exist of the year it was built or who built it. Hence, the exact age of the original structure remains unknown. Handed down accounts claim that the area around the house was used as a site for growing bean sprouts before it entered into the possession of my great, grandfather.



A map drawn in 1916, when Malaya or Tanah Melayu was still under British rule gives rise to the possibility of the house being already in existence at the time. This map, drawn by one E.R. Felsing¹ shows a section of Melaka, called Banda Hilir, south of the Melaka River, the main road being labelled as Hilir Road (now Jalan Parameswara) which connects the old town area to the areas further south such as Ujong Pasir and the Portuguese Settlement.

A section of the map is enlarged (as shown above) and Praya Lane is indicated as an offshoot of Hilir Road, marked with dotted lines, which is an apt description of the usage and size of Praya Lane compared to the main Hilir Road at the time, and even today. At the intersection of Hilir Road and Praya Lane, a chapel is drawn and labelled as “R.C. Chapel”. According to records, the current 3-storey shophouse building stands on an old chapel known as the Chapel of St. John the Baptist, i.e. a Roman Catholic Chapel. Behind the chapel, rectangular shapes are drawn along Praya Lane. Despite the absence of a key or legend, it is safe to assume that these rectangular shapes refer to houses along

¹ Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) Digital Library Gallica, Map (inset) of the Malacca territory / compiled and drawn at the Malacca Survey Office by E. R. Felsing, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530646195/f1.item.r=malaisie.zoom>

Praya Lane, and that the first house after the chapel would have been No.1, Praya Lane. If so, this would be the earliest record of the existence of the structure.

At the same time, the existence of the house is corroborated by oral accounts from the daughters of the late Gertrude de Rozario, born in 1919 and eldest child to Edward de Rozario and Beatrice Maude Berry. Gertrude is said to have resided at No. 1 Praya Lane from a very young age until leaving Melaka to follow her husband to Port Swettenham (now Port Klang) where he worked. This indicates that the house existed in the 1920s.

In addition, available documents show that the house was owned by Gertrude's father, Edward de Rozario who purchased it from his mother, Belbina Wilhemina Lazaroo who died in 1927, passing on the house to Edward. Taking all these into consideration it is very likely that the house was already in existence in the 1920s or even earlier in 1916 when Felsing's map was drawn.



However, in the absence of further information, the exact date the house was erected is still unknown. In any case, based on the information gathered, it is clear that the house is now more than a hundred years old.

The late Gertrude De Rozario, fondly known as Aunty Gertie by friends and family. The eldest of ten children of Edward de Rozario, Gertrude was born in 1919 and lived at No. 1 Praya Lane from her earliest years. She is seen in the photo standing at the side of the house. Photo taken around the 1930s. Photo courtesy of Joan De Costa.

Part 2 – Owners and Residents

First (Known) Generation

Pre-1930s



Edmundo
Hermenegildo
Lazaroo²
Born: 10 March
1845
Died: 22 July 1926



Belbina Wilhemina
Lazaroo
Born: 13 May 1868
Died: 26 March 1927

The first recorded owners of No. 1 Praya Lane is found in an official document issued on 12 April 1930. This document being the “*Letters of Administration De Bonis Non With Will Annexed*” released by the Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements, Settlement of Malacca records the granting of the estate Edward (De) Rozario, the step-son of Edmundo Lazaroo, following the death of Belbina Lazaroo, who is also the wife and mother of Edward.

This document indicates that the house was owned by a Melaka Portuguese named Edmundo Lazaroo. However as to how or when he acquired the house, this information sadly, has been lost through time. Similarly, aside from his name, little else is known about Edmundo Lazaroo.

Similarly, very little information was found on it’s second owner, i.e. the wife of Edmundo, i.e. Belbina Wilhemina Lazaroo who inherited the house from her husband Edmundo for a brief period of one year, since Belbina in 1927, a year after Edmundo. Unfortunately, no photograph of Belbina was found, although her tombstone was located at the Bukit Serindit Cemetery in Melaka. Belbina is said to have married twice, first to John Augustine de Rozario and later to Edmundo Lazaroo. Following her death in 1927, the house of No.1 Praya Lane was passed down to her eldest son from her first marriage, Edward de Rozario. Oral accounts indicate that Edward purchased the house from his mother.

With regards to Belbina’s first husband, John Augustine de Rozario, oral accounts also indicate that John died at sea, thus no grave was ever erected for him.

² Photo taken from Geni.com, <https://www.geni.com/people/Edmundo-Lazaroo/600000038560303873>

Second Generation

1920s – 1960s



Edward Michael
de Rozario
Born: 2 May 1897
Died: 29 May
1966



*(Edward with wife,
Beatrice, photos courtesy
of Clement de Rozario)*

Beatrice Maude Berry
Born: 20 November 1898
Died: 18 June 1969

Edward de Rozario took official ownership of No.1 Praya Lane as well as No.3 Praya Lane in the late 1920s, following the death of his mother, Belbina in 1927. He married Beatrice Maude Berry and together they raised ten children, five sons and five daughters at No.1. Seven married and had families of their own, one joined the La Salle Brothers and two daughters, Elinor and May remained single and later went on to inherit both houses i.e. No.1 and No.3.

In the years between the 1920s and 1960s, No.1 Praya Lane was home to these ten children. Edward appears to have been an educated Malacca Portuguese descendant, because he worked for the British government of the Straits Settlements in the Customs Office. Records indicate that Edward later became a pensioner of the state government.

Edward's granddaughter, Clementine de Rozario recalls how her grandfather would sit down with her every day after school to attend to her homework and would teach her algebra. Clementine recalls that because of his adept tutelage, her homework was sought after by her classmates who needed help with solving the math questions. It can be said, therefore that Edward was indeed an educated man, who was able to gain access to education and a job within the ruling British government.

Given his socio-economic status, it is not surprising that all of Edward's children attended school, including his daughters. Four of his sons later went on to hold middle to high-ranking jobs in Kuala Lumpur. His third son, Roland (known as Brother Augustus of Mary) who joined the La Salle Brothers went on to make significant contributions and advancements to the educational opportunities of the nation's visually impaired, achieving numerous successes including being granted a Fulbright Scholarship by the Malaysian Association of the Blind to study at Boston College Massachusetts in 1967³. His fourth son, Benjamin worked with Malaysian government for 25 years and was awarded Anugerah Pekerti for best employee in 1980.

³ Brother Augustus D'Rozario fsc, 1929-2000, A Closer Walk: The story of childhood and youth in his beloved Malacca as dictated by Brother Augustus to Ms Jacqueline Tan from late 1999 to 24 July 2000 (Part I) and Brother Augustus D'Rozario fsc, La Salle Brother by Brother Vincent Corkery, https://fliphtml5.com/wnbdx/bfqv/Br_Augustus_D%E2%80%99Rosario/



Of the ten of Edward's children born in Melaka and raised at No.1 Praya Lane, seven moved away to Kuala Lumpur, Kelang, Penang and Singapore following their marriages.

De Rozario children in the 1940s taken in the house compound of No.1 Praya Lane.

*Left to right: Windsor, Benjamin and Elinor;
Front: May Mary Maude.*

*Photo courtesy of
Clementine de Rozario.*



Brother Augustus of Mary (Roland de Rozario also known as Simon de Rozario).

Photo courtesy of Clementine de Rozario.

The ten children of Edward de Rozario who were raised at No.1. Praya Lane:

1.	Gertrude Elizabeth Born: 14 September 1919 Died: 26 January 2011	6.	Roland Simon (Bro Augustus) Born: 24 March 1929 Died: 24 July 2000
2.	John Herbert Anthony Born: 13 June 1921 Died: 1 June 1989	7.	Magdalene Elinor Born: 12 August 1931 Died: 25 October 2003
3.	George Ogle Born: 2 April 1923 Died: 7 February 1984	8.	Benjamin Gerard Born: 5 February 1934 Died: 3 August 1984
4.	Olga Theresa Born: 18 February 1925 Died: 27 May 2005	9.	Windsor @ Yahaya Abdullah Born: 14 October 1936 Died: 4 May 2012
5.	Lindsay Joan Born: 12 February 1927 Died: 29 April 2002	10.	May Mary Maude Born: 8 May 1938 Died: 30 October 1984

Unfortunately, none of these ten siblings are alive today to share their own personal accounts of their lives spent at No. 1, although Brother Augustus managed to record his biography⁴ of his early years, thus giving a tiny insight into the lives and times of this generation through his eyes. No recorded accounts by the rest of the siblings pertaining to their father, Edward and mother, Beatrice were found either.

As such, all the information presented in this essay are accounts gathered from interviews with five granddaughters of Edward and Beatrice. Of these five, three were raised at No.1 and had spent their early years with Edward and Beatrice. They are - Philomena Nonis, daughter of Olga de Rozario; Clementine de Rozario, daughter of George Ogle de Rozario and Dorothy Jannet De Costa, daughter of Gertrude de Rozario. Another granddaughter, Joan De Costa spent a full year during her teenage years at No.1. Another, Glynis De Costa frequently visited and later, in the 1980s, went on to reside permanently at No.1 until the early 2000s.

A fond and loving memory shared by Clementine about her grandfather Edward - her grandfather would walk her to school and back every morning and after school at the nearby Infant Jesus Convent when she was in primary school, looking out for her safety.

These five granddaughters and many other grandchildren of Edward and Beatrice spent their school holidays as children visiting their grandparents at No.1. Most of them still recollect precious happy memories from their bygone days, getting up to mischief all the time, as children at the behest of their elders. In total, there were more than 30 de Rozario grandchildren.



Some of the de Rozario grandchildren in the 1950s taken at the front door staircase of the house of No.1 Praya Lane. This staircase was removed when the house was removed in 1986. For most of them, this was "Grandpa's house", a holiday destination. Photo courtesy of Clementine de Rozario.

⁴ Brother Augustus D'Rozario fsc, 1929-2000, A Closer Walk: The story of childhood and youth in his beloved Malacca as dictated by Brother Augustus to Ms Jacqueline Tan from late 1999 to 24 July 2000 (Part I) and Brother Augustus D'Rozario fsc, La Salle Brother by Brother Vincent Corkery, https://fliphtml5.com/wnbdx/bfqv/Br_Augustus_D%E2%80%99Rosario/



De Rozarios on a trishaw ride in the early 1950s. Background is the zinc enclosure of No.1 Praya Lane, extending in front of No.3 Praya Lane. Seated below: Dorothy Jannet De Costa Seated above, left to right: Michael Banerji, May de Rozario and Philomena Nonis. Photo courtesy of Dorothy De Costa.

*De Rozario granddaughters on a wooden rocking boat in the house veranda of No.1 Praya Lane in the early 1950s:
Left : Philomena Nonis.
Right: Dorothy De Costa
Photo courtesy of Dorothy De Costa.*

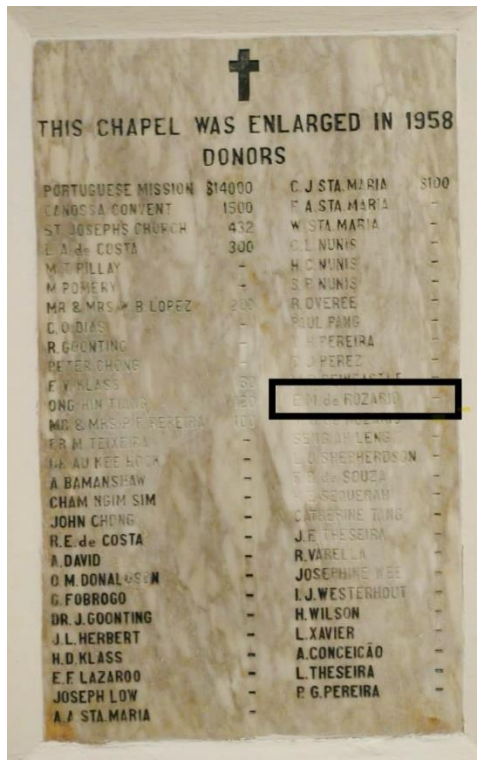


*Elinor de Rozario buying ice cream outside No. 1 Praya Lane, in the early 1950s:
Standing around the cart: Babara De Mello (grandniece of Edward) and two other children.
Standing in front of cart: Dorothy De Costa
Photo courtesy of Dorothy De Costa.*

Edward Michael de Rozario (1897 – 1966)

Edward worked in the Customs Office, which at the time was under British colonial rule and later became a pensioner. Little is known about how he was able to obtain his education or the gain access to a government job. It is also known that he owned plantations in Jasin, an area outside of Melaka. These plantations were said to have been fruit orchards, including nutmeg and rubber estates. This fact as well as his occupation in the Customs Office is confirmed by one of his sons, Roland de Rozario, @Brother Augustus of Mary) who touched on this in his autobiography⁵.

Edward’s occupation and means of living set this family apart from the lives and times of a majority of the families living in the Praya Lane area. While most families were financially struggling with the lack of educational and work opportunities, Edward owned plantations and was able to educate all his children, aside from provide a comfortable life for them, which included enlisting domestic help from a few ladies i.e. distant relatives who also resided at No. 1 and did much of the housework. Edward’s grandchildren recall how he also gave his wife “an easy life” doing little more than embroidery work at home.



Yet, although being a person of means, Edward was known to be generous to the church and the poorer folk of Praya Lane. Accounts from his granddaughters provide further insight into his generosity, for example, he donated \$100 towards when the chapel was enlarged in 1958. As a result of his donation, Edward and his family were allocated pews at the Assumption church where they attended regularly.

Jannet De Costa also recalls that every year, on Christmas Day, Edward would give out money 40 cents to each child from the *kampung* who came to wish him and his wife on that merry day. She added that his own grandchildren did not receive any money from him but the kids from the *kampung* did.

Edward (E.M. de Rozario) is listed with other donors to the 1958 enlargement effort of the Assumption Church, on a marble plaque located on the wall behind the church organ. Photo courtesy of Simon Theseira.

Clementine recalls that Edward would also instructed that access Christmas food from his kitchen were saved and shared with some poor families in the *kampung*. Even his wife, Beatrice did her part to support such families by buying the breakfast meals sold by children from the *kampung*.

⁵ Brother Augustus D’Rozario fsc, 1929-2000, A Closer Walk: The story of childhood and youth in his beloved Malacca as dictated by Brother Augustus to Ms Jacqueline Tan from late 1999 to 24 July 2000 (Part I) and Brother Augustus D’Rozario fsc, La Salle Brother by Brother Vincent Corkery, https://fliphtml5.com/wnbdx/bfqv/Br_Augustus_D%E2%80%99Rosario/

Edward was also known to be a hands-on man in the house, particularly after his retirement. He made his own furniture, including wardrobes, tables, beds, living room chairs and mattresses as well as toys like kites. He also reared his own poultry, providing meat and fresh eggs for the household.

On festive occasions such as Christmas, it was the men of the house who would do the bulk, festive cooking. Edward was the main chef while his sons, Benjamin and Ogle assisted and went on to take after his love for cooking.



Edward, in the 1950s sewing a mattress in the back area of the house, next to the back staircase, an area that was later used as the second living room. Photo courtesy of Clement de Rozario.



Edward standing in front of his chicken coup, with his woodwork in the porch area of the house, in the 1950s. Photo courtesy of Clement de Rozario.

According to Edward's son, Roland (Brother Augustus), his father considered himself a "Britisher" because he associated himself with the British occupiers of the time. His occupation in the Straits Settlements Customs Office must have contributed to the affiliations. But Edward did not just mingle with his British coworkers or superiors, he and his family adopted their culture and lifestyle as well. For example, the Christmas table at No.1 featured many British-inspired dishes such as macaroni and cheese, pies and ham which he salted and made himself. On British commemorative days such as birthdays of the Royals, Coronation Day, he would put up the Union Jack flags outside his house. His daughters even dressed in gowns and hats according to the fashion of the time. These practices were passed down the generations.

Beatrice Maude Berry (1898 – 1969)

Beatrice is remembered as kind to some of her grandchildren and strict with the others. Nevertheless, she was described to have been given a good life akin to that of a Lady of the House provided by her husband, Edward. She was relieved from the heavy chores of the household, including cooking for the whole family. Instead, cousins or distant relatives of the de Rozarios would be taken in by the family and given these tasks. Beatrice is said to have spent her days embroidering, cutting veggies and stirring a large mug of milk for their nightly consumption.

Third Generation

1960s – 1980s



*(Elinor and May de Rozario,
photo courtesy of Clement de
Rozario)*

Left:

Magdalene Elinor de Rozario

Born: 12 August 1931

Died: 25 October 2003

Right:

May Mary Maude de Rozario

Born: 8 May 1938

Died: 30 October 1984

Following the death of their mother, Beatrice in 1969, May and her elder sister Elinor retained ownership of both houses, No.1 and No.3. However, they resided in No.1 while renting out No.3. The sisters lived quiet lives, engaged in numerous hobbies at home such as playing the guitar, singing, planting and fish rearing. Both were musically talented, May played the guitar while Elinor loved to sing.

May was the youngest of her 10 siblings and worked as a Telephone Operator in the then Telecoms Malaya until cancer forced an early retirement. She is remembered as a kind and loving aunt and grandaunt.

Elinor, on the other hand, maintained the household. Elinor is also remembered as a generous and kind aunt to her nieces and nephews.

*(May de Rozario, seated in the front area of the house,
with window panes in the 1970s. This corner of the house
was renovated in 1986 by Bernard Sta Maria and was
walled up and converted to a small room to house the
bookshelves. Photo courtesy of Clement de Rozario)*





May de Rozario, standing in front of her row of fish tanks in the 1970s, in the back portion of the house, that was later used as a second living area. Photo courtesy of Clement de Rozario.

Elinor de Rozario and her cousin, Irene Nonis in the porch area of the house, in the early 1980s. Elinor loved planting and gardening. Photo courtesy of Clement de Rozario.



Shortly after May's life was taken by her illness in 1984, Elinor was approached by her own niece, Teresa Glynis De Costa and her husband, the late Bernard Sta Maria in 1985 with an offer to purchase the main house, No.1 Praya Lane. Elinor sold No.1 to Bernard and moved into No.3, having demolished the old wooden house and rebuilt a semi-brick house where she lived until her final days.

Fourth Generation

1980s - 2020s



Bernard Sta Maria
Born: 20 September
1944
Died: 30 July 1987

*(Bernard Sta Maria,
at his desk in
Taman Perkota
Melaka, prior to
moving to No.1
Praya Lane in 1985.
Photo from Bernard
Sta Maria's
collection.)*

In 1985, the ownership of No.1 Praya Lane was thus transferred to the late Bernard Sta Maria, who himself originated from another part of Praya Lane. The following year saw major renovations on the older sections of the house including modifications to the front section where a small office was made, equipped with bookshelves. As Bernard was a lover of history, particularly the history of the Malacca Portuguese, his book collection included many books on the history related to the Portuguese exploits in the region.

Tragically, Bernard did not survive long after renovating the house. He passed away on 29 July 1987, two years after buying the property from Elinor de Rozario.

Following his demise in 1987, ownership of the house was transferred to his wife, Glynis Teresa De Costa, the granddaughter of Edward de Rozario. Glynis herself was born in No. 1 Praya Lane in 1950, as it was the practice at the time to give birth at home as were many of her siblings and cousins, all grandchildren of Edward. Glynis however was raised with her parents in Port Klang but would visit her maternal grandparents at No.1 during school breaks. She recalls happy memories of times spent with cousins at her grandfather's house playing "under the house" but mostly getting into trouble with the elders for sneaking out to swim in the sea and other childhood antics.

Fifth Generation

2000s to date



(Don John Sta Maria, Glynis Teresa De Costa and Natassa Sta Maria, photo taken in 2024. Photo from Natassa Sta Maria's collection.)

After the demise of Bernard, Glynis continued to reside and raise her children in the house until they left home to pursue education and jobs in Kuala Lumpur in the early 2000s. Glynis herself moved away to Klang shortly after, to be closer to her children. Following her move, the house was tenanted to Joseph Sta Maria, the younger brother of Bernard Sta Maria for about 10 years and later on, the back area of the house was tenanted to a non-relative.

Currently, the house is owned by the author, Natassa Sta Maria and her brother, Don John Sta Maria.

Current issues with the house:

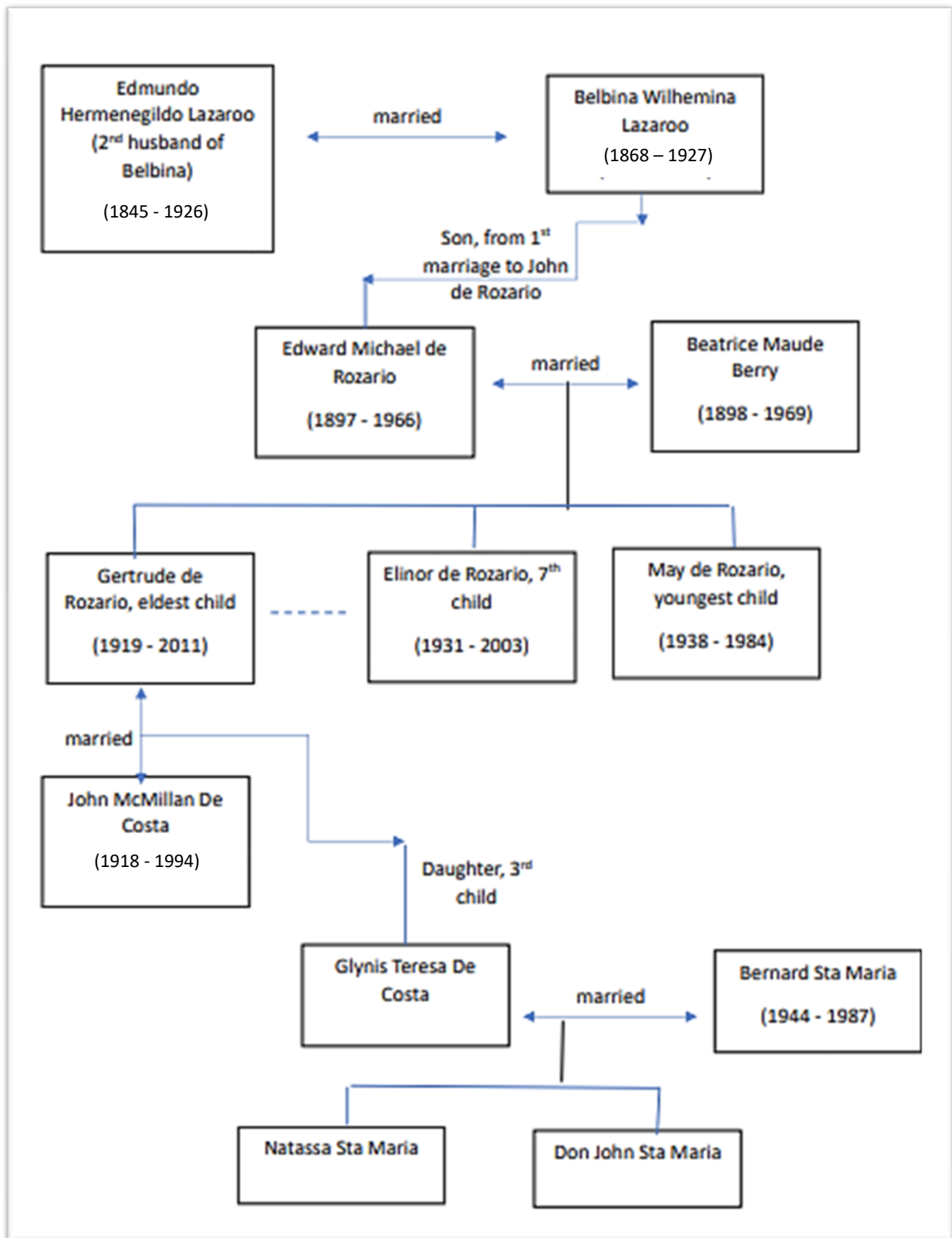
The age of the house, i.e. the upper part on stilts, being more than a century old has not been immune to termite attacks over the years. The last efforts to prevent termite infestation was made more than ten years ago. Recent discoveries have been made of termite infestation in the main beams on which the frame of the house rests. Despite the frame being made of solid teak wood, some parts have succumbed to termite attacks.

Another recent issue relates to the back wall of the house which was recently discovered to be sitting on land that is owned by Rosa Hotel. Talks have been underway to demolish the back wall and rebuild a substitute in order to return that section of the land to Rosa. However, no work has commenced at the time of writing.

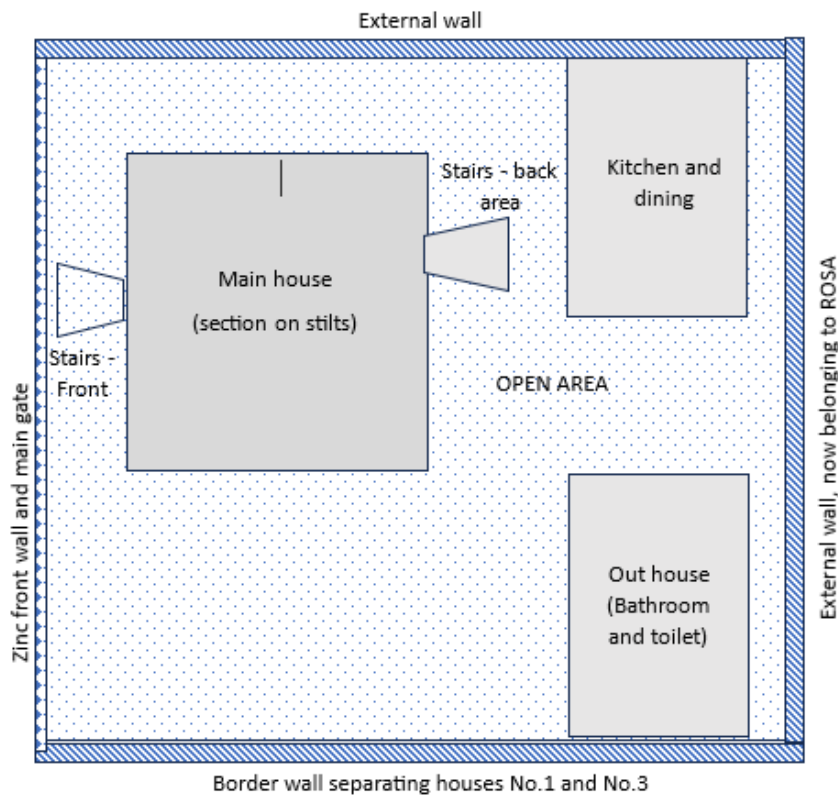
Timeline of ownership of No. 1 Praya Lane

pre-1930s	Edmundo Hermenegildo Lazaroo (1845 - 1926) and Belbina Wilhemina Lazaroo (1868 - 1927)
1920s – 1960s	Edward Michael de Rozario (1897 - 1966) and Beatrice Maude Berry (1898 - 1969)
1960s - 1980s	Elinor de Rozario (1931 - 2003) and May de Rozario (1938 - 1984)
1985 - 1987	Bernard Sta Maria (1944 - 1987)
1987 - 2000s	Glynis Teresa De Costa
2000s - date	Natassa Sta Maria and Don John Sta Maria

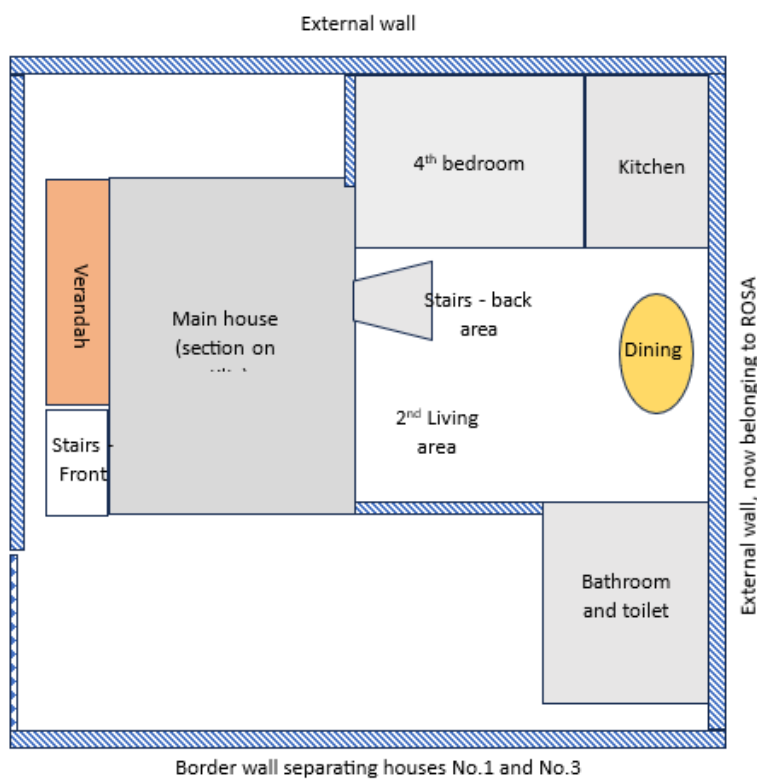
Family Tree



2D sketch of the original layout of No. 1 Praya Lane



2D Sketch of No. 1 Praya Lane up to the 1960s.



2D Sketch of No. 1 Praya Lane current layout.

Special thanks to the granddaughters of Edward de Rozario who generously shared their stories and memories as well as contributed the precious photos and documents used in this essay:

- Clementine de Rozario – Interview, documents and photos
- Joan De Costa – Photos and internet research
- Dorothy De Costa – Interview and photos
- Glynis Teresa De Costa - Interview
- Philomena Nonis - Interview

Essay prepared by

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<https://www.prayalane.com/>