

*Chinese Market Gardeners  
in Camden*

*From 1899 to 1993*

**By Julie Wrigley  
Camden Historical Society**

At Camden Museum there is a bay remembering the Chinese market gardeners who lived and worked in Camden in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Chinese were nearly all men with their families still in China, engaged in vegetable market gardening along the banks of the Nepean River, for the Sydney market.

Usually they were earning money to send home to their wives and children. About every 4 or 5 years they made trips home to China.





## **Guangdong**

Almost all of the Chinese market gardeners who came to Camden in the very early 20<sup>th</sup> century were born in the Guangdong provinces, near Guangzhou (formerly Canton).

*Yiu Ming Temple,  
Retreat Street,  
Alexandria, Sydney.*

The Yiu Ming Society is one of the oldest and largest Chinese societies. Construction of the Temple started in 1908.

The Society provided assistance for newly arrived members seeking to establish themselves in Australia.



## Camden News Thursday 1 December 1910

It is interesting to watch those enterprising and skilful agriculturalists who are working the vegetable gardens near the Camden Bridge. They seem to be thoroughly conversant with the composition of the soil, and spare no expense in making any deficiency good.



*South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus*, Friday 8 December **1911**

## *Successful Chinese Gardeners (PART 1)*

The Chinese gardens on the river flat at Camden are worthy of notice and a strong evidence of what intense cultivation will do. One of the gardens, 22 acres in extent, is run by a syndicate of eight Chinese. . . . At the present time the whole of their leased land – for which they pay an annual rent of £132 (or £6 per acre rental)- is practically covered with vegetables of every description. . . . With water and plenty of manure, the **industrious Celestials** are able to raise truckloads of vegetables for the metropolitan market.

*South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus, Friday 8 December 1911*

## *Successful Chinese Gardeners (PART 2)*

The Chinese are born gardeners and irrigationalists. . . .  
Notwithstanding the big outlay in manure and wages, in addition to the rent of £132 per annum, the syndicate net a handsome sum for division among themselves.

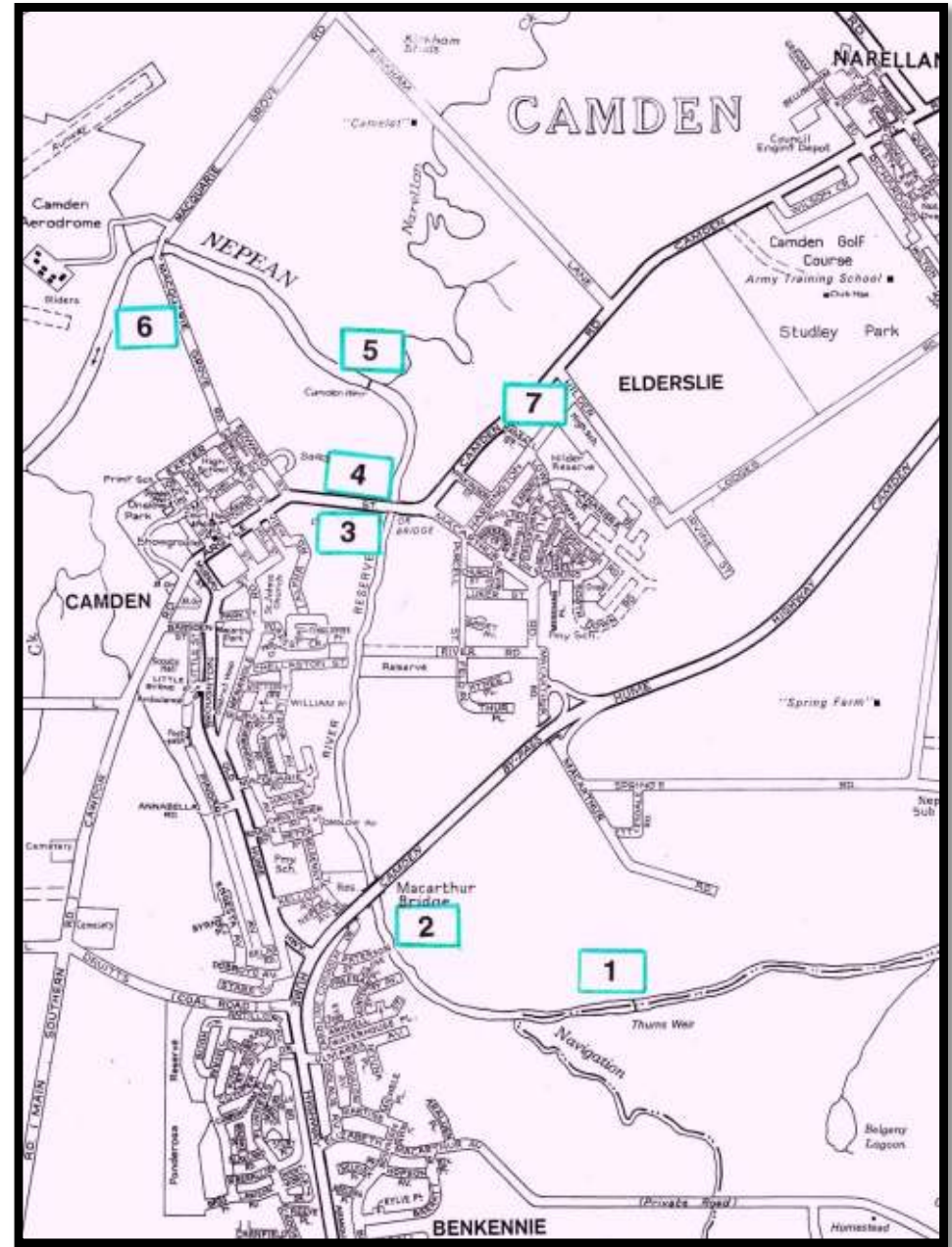
Providing they have no drawbacks in the shape of floods or hailstorms, it is safe to assume that **these men from the Flowery Land** will amass sufficient money within ten years to keep them in affluence in China for the rest of their lives.

*Trove, National Library of Australia.*

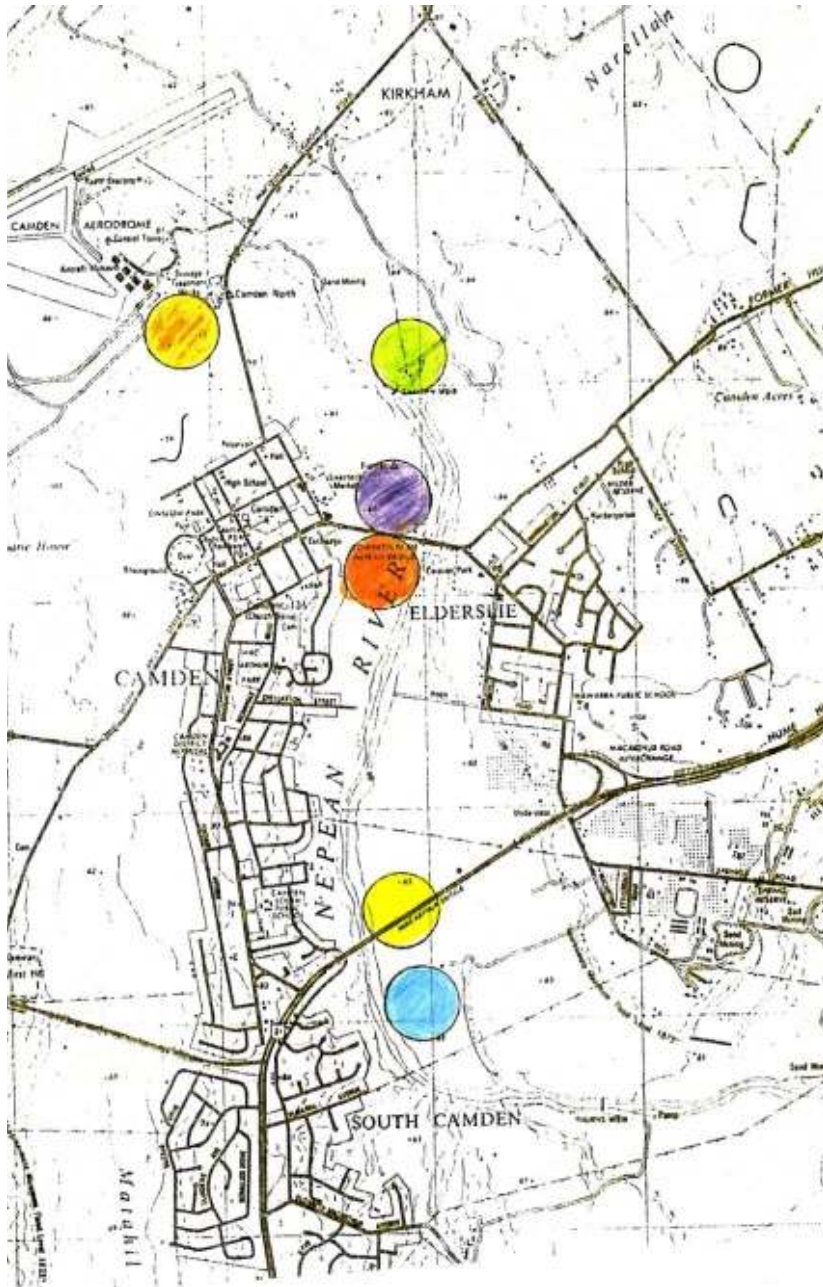
# Camden, 1920s

Where were the gardens?

- 1. Nesbitt's
- 2. Thurn's
- 3. Town
- 4. Whiteman's
- 5. Sheil's
- 6. Davies'
- 7. Elderslie



# Camden Chinese Gardens 1920s



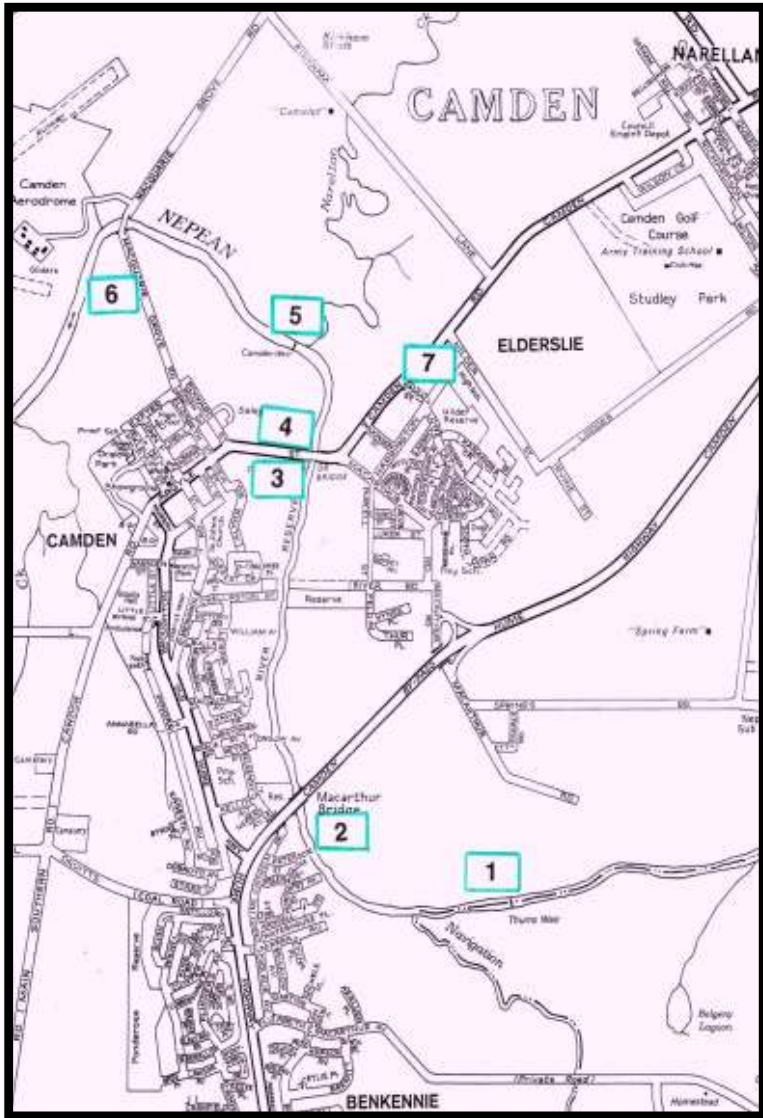
- Blue - Nesbitt's
- Lemon - Thurn's
- Red - Town
- Purple - Whiteman's
- Green - Sheil's
- Orange - Davies

# Chinese market gardens in Camden

The Chinese gardens were conducted by groups of about 12 to 14 men in six main locations. The gardens were usually between 10 and 20 acres. The groups were known locally by the name of the owner of the land on which they farmed.

- **NESBITT'S CHINAMEN** were located about 500 metres south of the present Macarthur Bridge across the Nepean.
- **THURN'S CHINAMEN** were located on the river flats under Macarthur Bridge.
- **CHURCH or TOWN CHINAMEN** were where the present softball courts are. This group had no connection with any Church, but their garden was close by St John's, hence the name. 'Town' referred to their closeness to Camden.
- **WHITEMAN'S (later WATSON'S) CHINAMEN** were located at what was later called Hop Chong's, or the present *Trattoria La Vigna*.
- **SHEIL'S CHINAMEN** were located on the eastern bank of the river, adjacent to Camden Weir, and bounded by Narellan Creek on the eastern side.
- **DAVIES' CHINAMEN** were located on the western side of Macquarie Grove Road, south of Macquarie Grove Bridge.
- **ELDERSLIE** A small family unit was located on the eastern side of the old Highway, at Elderslie, about mid way between Hilder Street and Wilkinson Street, in the late 1920s

# Camden Market Gardens – Chinese Leaders



- 1. SING MO [Nesbitt's]
- 2. HOP CHONG [Thurn's]
- 3. YEE LEE [Town]
- 4. YONG LEE [Whiteman's]
- 5. SUN CHONG KEY [Sheil's]
- 6. TONG HING [Davies]
- 7. Georgie the Chinaman [family unit at Elderslie]

# LEASES

*The leader, or 'Boss', had the greatest financial share in the cooperative. Each member contributed a share of the capital required and took a share of the profit or loss. The arrangement lasted from one Chinese New Year to the next.*

*The members of the group could change from year to year but the leader remained in charge.*

- The Boss and the Cook were known in the town and interacted with residents. They were given credit at the shops because as the baker, Frank Stuckey, stated, they were 'good people to deal with' and always settled their accounts at Chinese New Year.*

# Roles in the Garden Cooperative

Notes from historian Dick Nixon, written 1976

- 1. **The Boss** who arranged the lease with the owners.
- 2. **The Market Man** who went to Sydney with the vegetables.
- 3. **The Engine Man** who looked after the irrigation pumping plant on the river bank.
- 4. **The Cook** who became known to the local shopkeepers.
- 5. Other workers . . .



Photo of Dick Nixon, 1990s

# Working Methods

The market gardeners worked long hours from dawn to dusk, most days of the year, using hand-made tools such as the harrow, and heavy watering cans carried on a pole slung across the shoulders.



# Georgie Lee – Generous Chinese Market Gardener

One of the early Chinese gardeners in Camden,  
before WW1:

- \* Probably came to the colony before Federation in 1901 and the immigration restriction laws of 1902.
- \* Leased land in Elderslie in 1899. The first Chinese market gardener in Camden mentioned in *Trove*.
- \* Listed from 1901 to 1904 in the Camden Electoral Roll as a lessee in Elderslie of house and land.
- \* Sold land in Elderslie in 1905.

# Georgie Lee

BOOK No. 11.  
Form No. 21. COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA. No. 10  
DUPLICATE. Immigration Restriction Acts 1901-1903 and Regulations.

**CERTIFICATE EXEMPTING FROM DICTATION TEST.**


I, William Lawson <sup>1909</sup> the Collector of Customs  
for the State of New South Wales in the said Commonwealth,  
hereby certify that George Lee  
hereinafter described, who is leaving the Commonwealth temporarily, will be excepted  
from the provisions of paragraph (a) of Section 3 of the Act if he returns to the Com-  
monwealth within a period of three years from this date.

Date 25 April 10 W Lawson  
1909 Collector of Customs.

DESCRIPTION	
Nationality <u>Chinese</u>	Birthplace <u>Canton</u>
Age <u>50 years</u>	Complexion <u>Dark</u>
Height <u>5 ft 5 in. Book</u>	Hair <u>Brown</u>
Build <u>Medium</u>	Eyes <u>Brown</u>

Particular marks —  
(For impression of hand see back of this document.)

PHOTOGRAPHER  
Full Face — Profile —



Date of departure April 10 Destination China  
Ship Changsha  
Date of return 28 April 1910 Ship Yawata Maru  
Port Sydney Shimonoseki  
St. Krugg 1910  
Customs Officer



# Camden Show 1903

In 1903 the *Camden News* stated:

**George Lee** won prizes for the best collection of vegetables, best collection of potatoes of 5 varieties, sweet potatoes, cabbages, onions, turnips, squashes, pumpkins, lettuce, celery, beetroot, radishes, and peas.

The variety shows how successful George Lee was as a market gardener. He also won prizes in the Camden Show in 1904 and 1905.

*Chinese market gardeners like George Lee played an important role in supplying the food needs of a growing town.*

## VEGETABLES.

Judge, Mr J Porter.

Stewards, Messrs. G Furner, J Dawson, A J Doust  
Best collection of vegetables, not less than 12 varieties, Carrington Hospital

Best collection of vegetables grown by exhibitor in the police district of Camden, G Lee 1 and special, Carrington Hospital 2

Best collection potatoes, not less than 5 varieties 5lbs of each sort, G Lee

1 cwt Early Rose potatoes, G Lee,

1 cwt Brownell's Beauty, George Lee

1 cwt potatoes, any other variety, G Lee

1 cwt sweet potatoes, W Anderson 1, G Lee 2

2 cabbages, George Lee.

Dozen onions, George Lee

6 white turnips, George Lee

6 parsnips, Carrington Hospital

6 carrots, Carrington hospital.

2 vegetable marrows, J Linton.

2 squashes, George Lee

2 crown pumpkins, W E Smart 1 and special, W Jenkins 2

2 ironbark pumpkins, F Dengate 1, G Lee 2

2 table pumpkins, of any other variety, John Small 1, W Jenkins 2

6 lettuces, George Lee

6 stalks of celery, George Lee,

1 dozen tomatoes, W Booth.

Best collection kitchen herbs, W H Dunk

3 cucumbers, John Small.

2 quarts French beans in pod, green, Carrington hospital.

2 quarts table peas, in pod, green, George Lee

3 red beetroots, George Lee.

6 bunches long radishes, George Lee.

6 bunches short or turnip radishes, George Lee,

2 citron melons, R Cross 1, A Thurn 2

2 ordinary preserving melons, R Todd 1, R Cross 2

2 English preserving melons, Jenkins 1, McLeod 2

2 Rio pumpkins, P Agnew 1, J Linton 2.

Two grammar pumpkins, W Jenkins 1, J Linton 2

The account of the Camden Show in 1903 gives a clear picture of **George Lee** and his personality.

*“An amusing incident occurred shortly after the Governor had declared the show open. George Lee, the popular Chinese gardener of the district, who, for the last two years had given the whole of his winning prizes at the Camden Show to the Camden Cottage Hospital, presented himself to the Governor with hat off and a polite bow, “Good day, Mr. Governor, gim’ me your hand.” His Excellency shook the extended hand with a smile, and thus won the heart of the people in one bound.”*

*Camden News, 26 March 1903.*

# First Camden Death recorded in 'Births, Deaths and Marriages'

The Chinese market gardeners in Camden worked hard and kept to themselves. They appeared in newspapers only when there was a flood or an accident.

- On 30 April 1921 **Chun Yuen** died in Camden Hospital after an accident when he encountered a mob of cattle being driven to market and was knocked down on the Menangle Road. Chun Yuen was taken to Camden Hospital and attended by **Dr West**, but he died two hours later.
- At the Inquest his brother stated that Chun Yuen *'had no money here, he sends it along to China to his wife and family.'*



*Dr Francis West*



### **Chun Yuen 1870-1921. Photos from his Certificate of Exemption**

National Archives show that on 16 March 1909 Chun Yuen, aged 54, had applied for a 'Certificate of Exemption from the Dictation Test' for up to three years. He travelled to China from Queensland in March 1909, and returned in July 1910. Travelling via Queensland was the cheapest way of going back to China but it would have been a journey involving considerable hardship.

# Chun Yuen

- The **Death Certificate** stated that Chun Yuen was a Chinese market gardener. The Registrar was Mr Ben Hodge.
- Chun Yuen was 51 years old and had been in the colony for 30 years. In 1888 he had married Ung Lee in Canton, when he was 18. He had come to the colony about 1891 when he was 21.
- Chun Yuen is buried in the Chinese section of Rookwood Cemetery (Allotment 266). He was buried on 2 May 1921.
- It is sad that he came to Camden probably hoping to make his fortune and died far from home.

NEW SOUTH WALES  
BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES REGISTRATION ACT 1995

REGISTRATION NUMBER  
8821/1921

**DEATH CERTIFICATE**

Date and place of death	Name and occupation	Sex and age	Cause of Death Duration of last illness; medical attendant; when he last saw deceased	Name and occupation of father. Name and maiden surname of mother	Informant
1921. 30 <sup>th</sup> April Schneider Hospital Schneider Winnipeg W. B. W.	Chun Yuen Chinese Assistant Market Gardener	Male 51 Years	Major cerebral haemorrhage (1) cessation of the brain (2) accidentally killed (3) finding by (4) medical held 6 <sup>th</sup> May 1921 W. B. W. Ballwood B. W. W.	Ung (1) Yuen (2) Farmer (3) H. W. Lee	W. B. Ballwood B. W. W. B. W. W.

Particulars of Registration	When and where buried; name of undertaker	Name and religion of Minister and names of witnesses of burial	Where born and how long in the Australasian Colonies or States	Place of marriage, age, and to whom	Children of marriage
W. B. W. 9 <sup>th</sup> May 1921 CAMDEN	2 <sup>nd</sup> May 1921 (1) Chinese (2) Section (3) Rookwood Cemetery (4) Rookwood W. B. W. Peters	(1) W. Todd (2) Church (3) England (4) Peters H. B. B. W.	China (1) 18 (2) 30 Years	China (1) 18 (2) Ung Lee	years. Unknown



Before accepting copies, sight unaltered original. The original has a coloured background.

REGISTRY OF BIRTHS  
DEATHS AND MARRIAGES  
SYDNEY 29 February 1921

I hereby certify that this is a true copy of particulars recorded in a  
Register in the State of New South Wales, in the Commonwealth of Australia

*Ben Hodge*

Registrar

# Certificate of Exemption from the Dictation Test

The White Australia Policy enacted laws discriminating against the Chinese. They had to apply to travel, and gain the Certificate to be sure they could return. They were identified by a hand print or finger prints.

Book No. 17 *See Serials, Townsville, 10th 11th 102 July*  
Form No. 21. COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA. No. 30  
DUPLICATE. *375*  
*Immigration Restriction Act 1901-1905 and Regulations.*

### CERTIFICATE EXEMPTING FROM DICTATION TEST.

I, *William Howe Irving* the Collector of Customs for the State of *Queensland* in the said Commonwealth, hereby certify that *Chen Yuen (of Townsville)* hereinafter described, who is leaving the Commonwealth temporarily, will be excepted from the provisions of paragraph (a) of Section 3 of the Act if he returns to the Commonwealth within a period of *one (1) year* from this date.

Date *4/12/09* *W. H. Irving*  
Collector of Customs

DESCRIPTION.	
Nationality <i>Chinese</i>	Birthplace <i>Canton</i>
Age <i>54 years</i>	Complexion <i>Yellow</i>
Height <i>5 ft 8 in</i>	Hair <i>Black</i>
Build <i>Slight</i>	Eyes <i>Dark Brown</i>

Particular marks *Nil*  
(For impression of hand see back of this document.)

Full Face *Portrait* Profile *Portrait*

Date of departure *8. 11. 09* Ship *Kaiguan*  
Date of return *12/7/10* Ship *Eastern*  
Port *Townsville* *10/9067* *Balboa*  
Collector of Customs





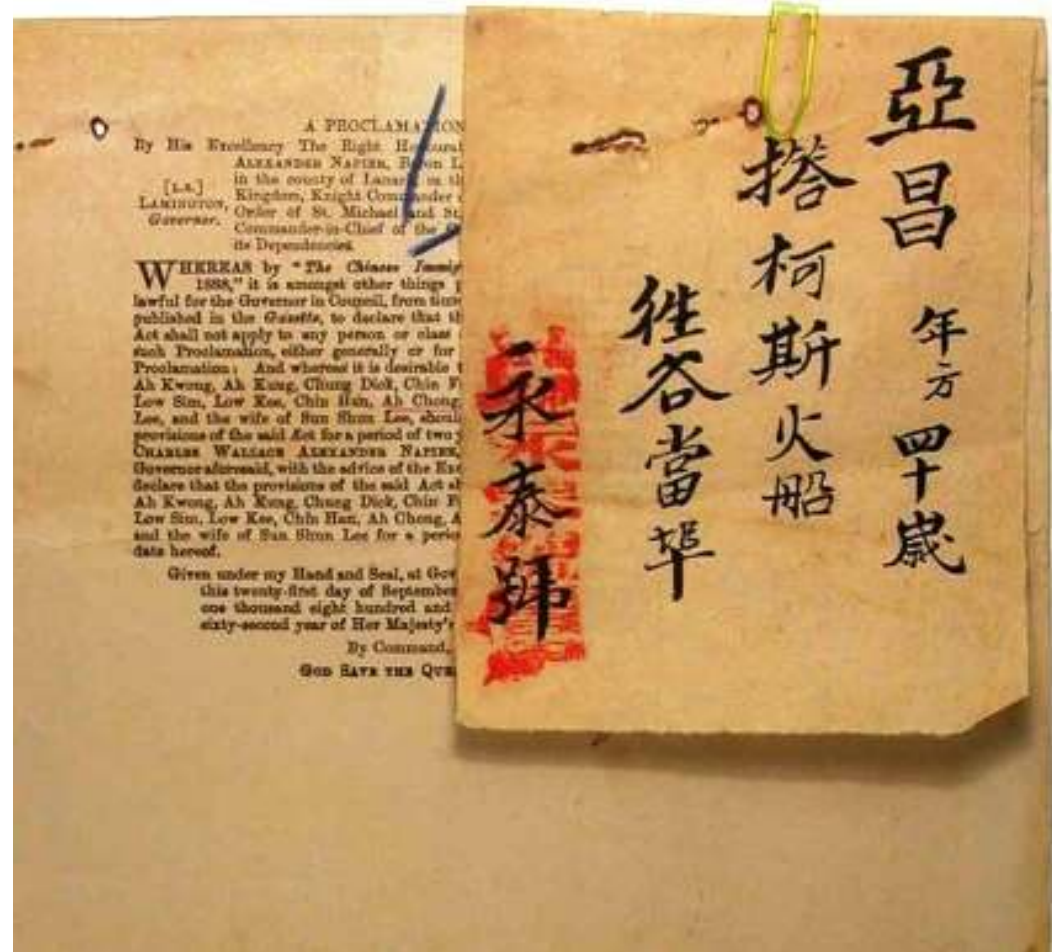
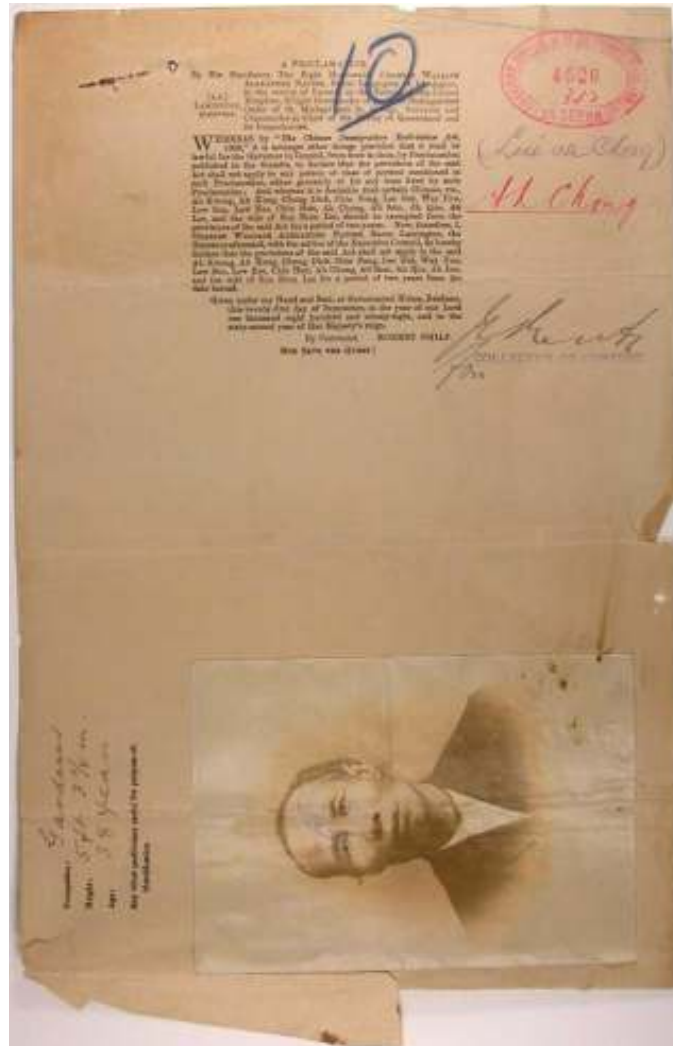
Another story: Ah Chong

# Ah Chong c.1860-1922

- Ah Chong came to Camden about 1908. He died in a train accident in Camden in 1922.
- The *Camden News*, 1 June 1922 said Ah Chong had lived in the district as a market gardener for about 14 years.
- The first reference to Ah Chong is in the *Camden News*, 30 September 1915. Along with other Camden identities Ah Chong donated one shilling to the farewell of soldiers going to World War 1.

# Ah Chong: 1898

Exemption from the Chinese Immigration Act of 1888 for two years. (National Archives of Australia)



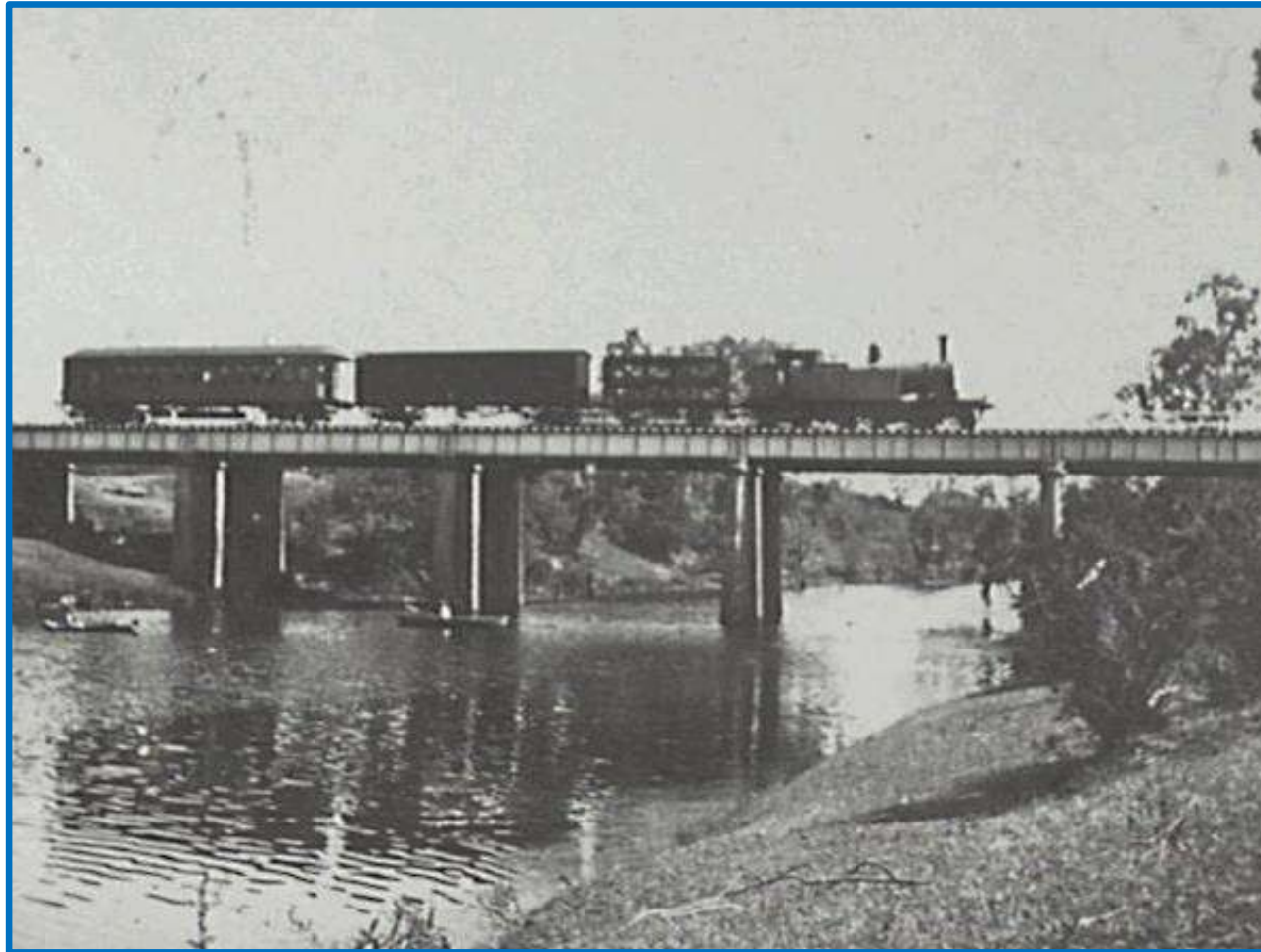
# Ah Chong - Train Accident



*Camden News* 1 June 1922

“ Early on Monday morning last the body of a Chinese named Ah Chong was found on the railway line between the Camden Vale Milk Depot and the Camden railway bridge. The deceased, who was familiarly known as Willie, was aged 62 years. It is quite evident from the condition of the body that he was struck and killed instantly by the Camden tram the previous evening. How he came to be on the line, though he had to cross it to reach the home of his Chinese friends, whom he frequently visited, remains a mystery.

He was seen only a few minutes prior to the tram reaching Camden and it is generally surmised that he attempted to cross the line ignorant of the approaching danger. The Camden police had the body removed to the hospital morgue, and it was later taken to Rookwood Cemetery. ”



**'Pansy'**

Cowpastures Bridge, 1920s.



## **The site of the accident.**

### **Camden Milk Depot under construction, 1921**

The Milk Depot was enlarged in 1923, burnt down in 1926, and was replaced. Note the train lines in the foreground.



## **Elderslie Station**

Coroner's Inquiry: Ah Chong had a wife and two children living in Canton, China. Apart from a brother, Ah Lung in Parramatta and a cousin, Ah Sing in Camden, Ah Chong had no other relatives in Australia.

Deceased Estate . State Records at Kingswood show Ah Chong had an estate of £200. Most Chinese market gardeners were saving to send money back to China or to travel back to China.

"B."

Form of Affidavit to be lodged with Application for Administration.  
STAMP OFFICE.

New South Wales }  
1911 No. 1000 }

In the Matter of the Estate of Ah Chong deceased  
late of Camden in the State of New South Wales  
I, the undersigned, being a Justice of the Peace for the County of Camden do hereby certify that the above named person was deceased on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of July 1911 at Camden in the State of New South Wales, and was at the time of death aged 61 years, and was at the time of death a Chinese.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> day of July 1911 at Camden in the State of New South Wales, I, the undersigned, being a Justice of the Peace for the County of Camden do hereby certify that the above named person was deceased on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of July 1911 at Camden in the State of New South Wales, and was at the time of death aged 61 years, and was at the time of death a Chinese.

Being duly sworn, each of us, and each of us as follows—

I, the undersigned, being a Justice of the Peace for the County of Camden do hereby certify that the above named person was deceased on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of July 1911 at Camden in the State of New South Wales, and was at the time of death aged 61 years, and was at the time of death a Chinese.

2. The amount payable under the will of the deceased is £200.

3. To the best of my knowledge, information, and belief, there is no property liable to be included in the estate of the said deceased, for the purpose of estate assessment of the duty, except that which is stated in the schedule attached to this affidavit.

4. In the event of any additional assets being discovered which would make further duty payable, I will advise the Commissioner of Stamp Duties and will pay further duty found to be payable to me.

5. The deceased having been domiciled in the State of New South Wales, and the real estate of the estate being under the care of the undersigned, I declare an assessment of the duty payable to me in full of the estate duty on both in the Schedule to the Stamp Duty Act, No. 47, 1900, and the amount set out in the schedule annexed to this affidavit after deducting the respective of the estate chargeable thereon as the said proprietor may be entitled to.

Done by the applicant on the day first above mentioned at Camden

John Skelton  
PUBLIC TRUSTEE

STATEMENT.

Showing the basis of the Assessment of the Estate Duty in the Estate of Ah Chong deceased.

Assessed 28<sup>th</sup> July 1911

NET VALUE of Estate	£	<u>200</u>
FULL RATE of <u>2</u> per cent. on £ <u>200</u>	£	<u>4.0.0</u>
HALF RATE, viz. <u>1</u> per cent. on £ <u>200</u>	£	<u>2.0.0</u>
TOTAL amount of Duty	£	<u>4.0.0</u>

Assessment Notice issued 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1911



Ah Chong died in Camden, aged 62

- Ah Chong was buried in the Chinese section at Rookwood in 1922.
- Ah Chong lived a life of quiet industry and hard work in Camden. It was sad for his wife and two children in China that he met his death in a train accident here, so far from home.

# 25 Chinese Deaths in Camden (BDM)

- CHUN YUEN Died 1921, aged 51
- AH CHONG Died 1922, aged 62
- CHONG HING Died 1925
- WONG LOO HIM Died 1935
- GARN ON Died 1935, aged 59
- LOWE KUM MING Died 1935, aged 55
- LOO HIM WONG Died 1935
- WING LEE Died 1938, aged 65
- WON WAH Died 1938, aged 45
- CHONG SING Died 1939, aged 70
- KUM GEE Died 1939, aged 58
- GEORGE CHONG Died 1940, aged 73
- JOE YOUNG FOO Died 1940, aged 64
- PANG FOOK Died 1940, aged 68
- KUM HOW Died 1941
- JOE LONG Died 1943, aged 72
- LEE GUM Died 1944
- AH KONG Died 1945
- HONG TONG Died 1945, aged 64
- WONG QUAY Died 1949
- TUNG SING Died 1951, aged 70
- CHUNG SING Died 1955, aged 70
- YUEN THONG Died 1956, aged 45
- YEW GEE Died 1956, aged 78
- SOW WONG Died 1966, aged 86



## Camden Hospital Honour Board

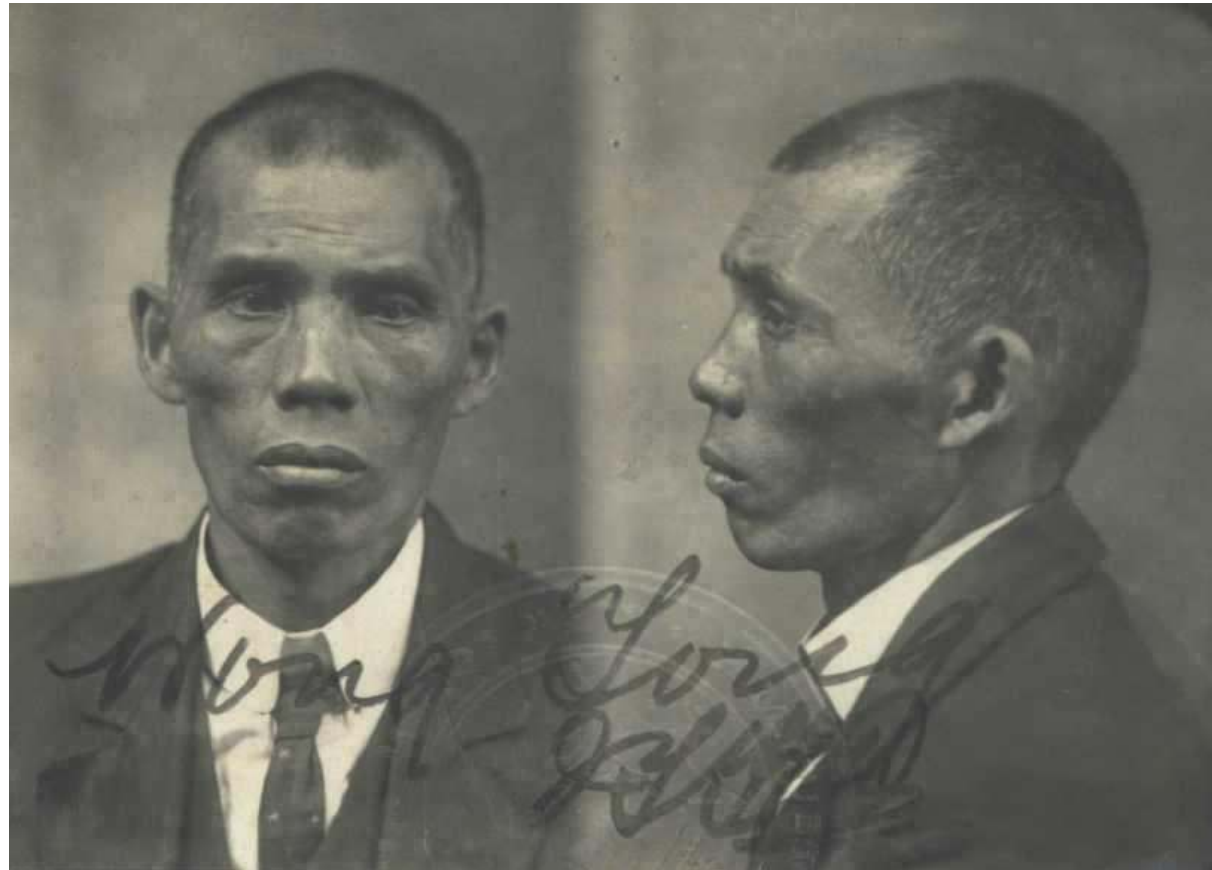
There are 2 names of Chinese market gardeners on the Hospital Honour Board. Who were they?

# One of the names on the Honour Board:

## Camden's Wong Tong (NAA,1922)

Wong Tong was a Chinese market gardener who was born in Canton about 1873 and probably came to the colony in the 1890s. According to Dick Nixon Wong Tong worked at Sheil's garden, on the flats beneath 'Caernarvon' in the 1920s and 30s.

In 1947 Wong Tong donated the considerable sum of £50 to Camden Hospital.



## Certificate of Exemption from the Dictation Test

The National Archives show that Wong Tong made a trip back to China in 1922 when he was 49 years old. To do this he had to obtain a Certificate of Exemption from the Dictation Test (CEDT), to make sure he could return without being subject to a dictation test which could be in *any* language.


FEE PAID WARRANT No. 490 of 2/9/22  
Book No. 333 C22 75mt  
Form No. 21. COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA. No. 100  
DUPLICATE. Immigration Act 1901-1912 and Regulations.

### CERTIFICATE EXEMPTING FROM DICTATION TEST.

I, WILLIAM HENRY BARKLEY the Collector of Customs for the State of NEW SOUTH WALES in the said Commonwealth, hereby certify that Wong Tong hereinafter described, who is leaving the Commonwealth temporarily, will be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (a) of Section 3 of the Act if he returns to the Commonwealth within a period of THREE YEARS from this date.

Date 1 Sept 1922 W. H. Barkley  
Collector of Customs

DESCRIPTION	
Nationality <u>Chinese</u>	Birthplace <u>Canton</u>
Age <u>49 years</u>	Complexion <u>Dark</u>
Height <u>5ft 7 1/2 in in boots</u>	Hair <u>Black</u>
Build <u>Melancholic</u>	Eyes <u>Brown</u>
Particular marks <u>st</u>	

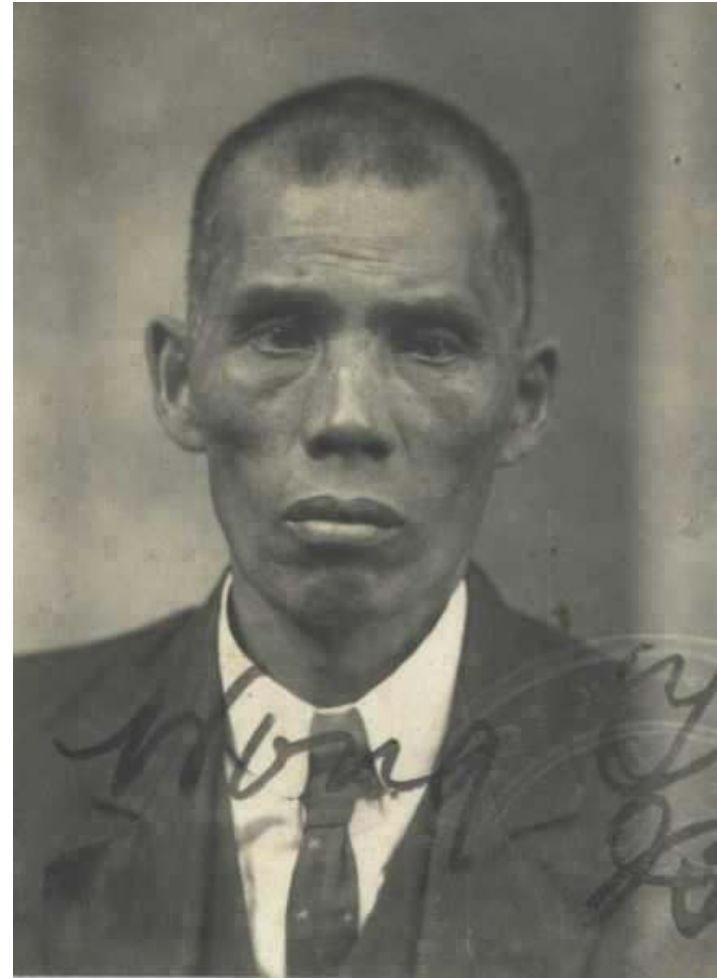


Date of departure 5/9/22 Port of Embarkation Sydney  
Ship Victoria Destination China  
Date of return 23/6/23 Ship Ed. Ross  
Port Sydney M. P. ...  
...  
Customs Officers.

4314/127-0300.

# Wong Tong from Miss Davies' garden

- Two other Chinese men from Camden applied for CEDTs for the same trip. All three left Sydney on 5 September 1922 on the VICTORIA. **Wong Tong** returned to Sydney on the EASTERN on 23 June 1923, after 9 months. The others (**Ah On** and **Willie Chung**) returned on different ships.



## Camden market gardeners and floods

A rare photo of Camden Chinese gardeners, washed out by a flood in 1925. There are many stories in *Trove* about floods in Camden and the Chinese market gardeners needing to be rescued.



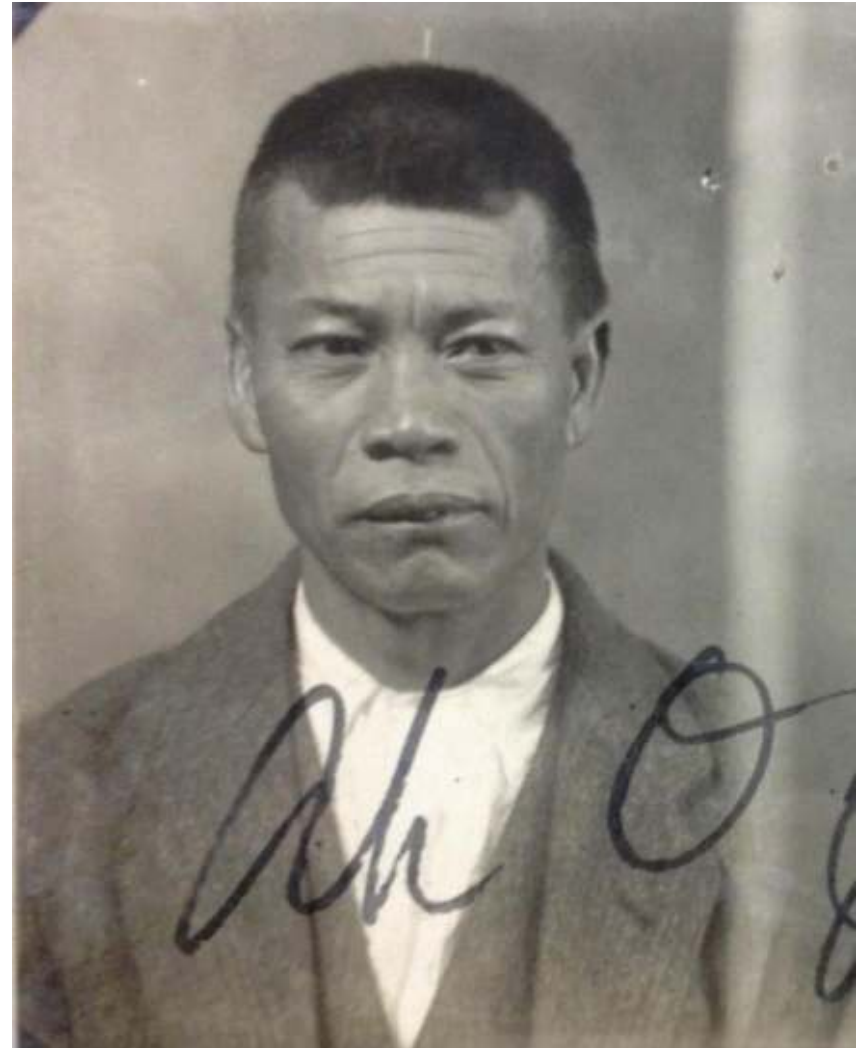
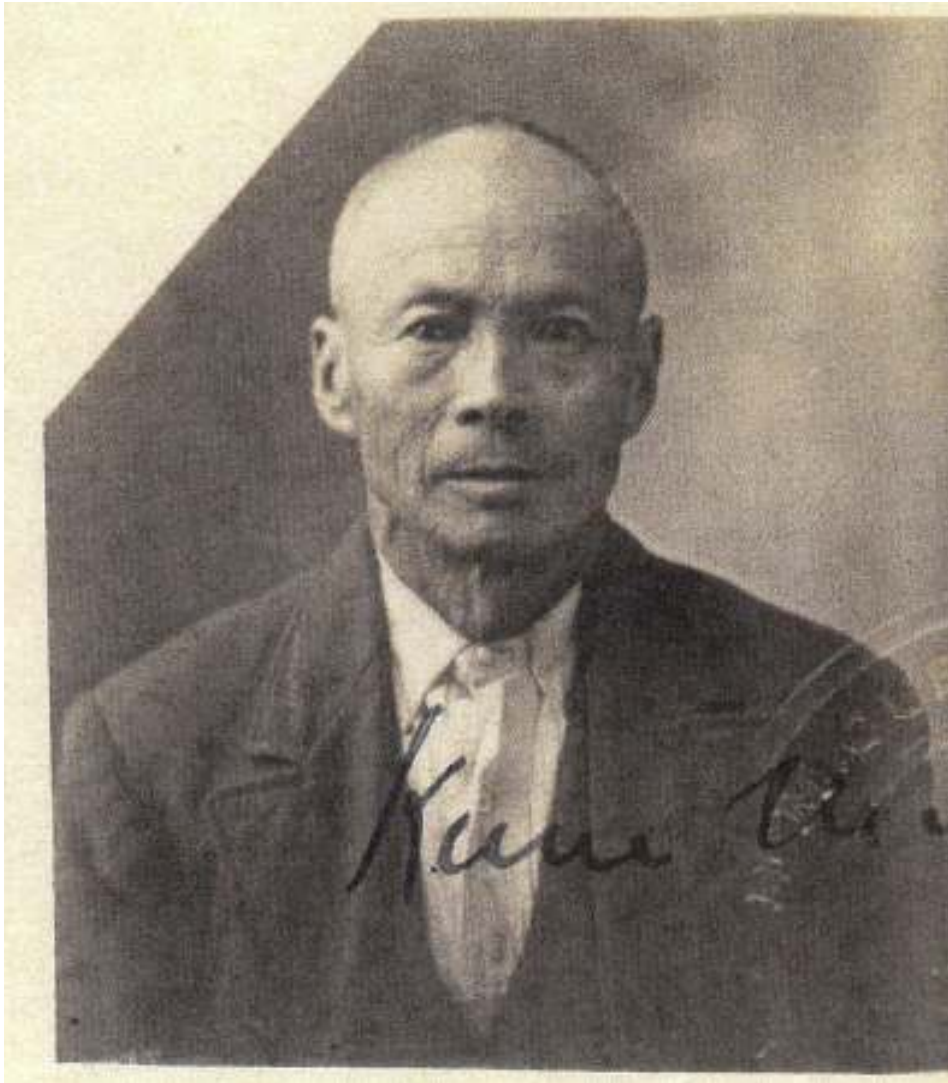
## The Chinese were given food and shelter in the Town Hall (the School of Arts, now the Library.)

The *Camden News* May 1943: *"The Mayor [Mr. 'Stan' Kelloway] reported that during the flood he had given permission for a number of the Chinese market gardeners to sleep in the Town Hall as they had been driven from their own quarters. These Chinese, said the Mayor, were very grateful, and they contributed as an expression of their thanks, a donation to the hospital and a donation to the council for cleaning purposes."*



CONSTABLE A. E. NEALE handing out food to some of the market gardeners after helping to evacuate them from their gardens by rowing boat. 20.5.43  
CONST ALAN NEALE

In all the time the Chinese gardeners were in Camden there was only one serious crime – a murder in 1935, but based on a misunderstanding, and leading to a suicide. Lowe Kum Ming (L) was killed by Ah On (R), who drowned himself 3 days later.



The two were buried in Rookwood side by side.  
The murdered man, Lowe Kum Ming,  
is in the lower right corner.





## **Rookwood Graves, 1935**

Victim, Lowe Kum Ming (R), was killed by  
Ah On (L), who drowned himself 3 days later.

## Hop Chong c.1880-1940

Some of the Chinese market gardeners did not speak much English and kept to themselves. Others such as Hop Chong engaged with the community.

Photos from the National Archives of Australia:

Hop Chong in 1916, aged 36 (L) and in 1928, aged 48 (R).



# Hop Chong in Camden

- Hop Chong was born in Gao Yao, one of the districts in the province of Guandong, about 1880, and came to New South Wales via Queensland. He probably came to the colony about 1900 before the restrictions of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901.
- From Australia he applied to visit China in 1917, when he was 36 years old. He left from Cairns, departing for China on the ship *SS Taiyuan* in November 1917, and returned to Cairns on the same ship a year later.
- He came to Camden about 1914 and at first was one of Thurn's Chinamen working in Elderslie.



# The Best Known Chinese Name in Camden: Hop Chong

Newspaper records show that Hop Chong contributed to the Camden community. He made generous donations of funds and vegetables to the Camden Cottage Hospital Appeal from 1914 to the 1920s. Possibly about 1930 Hop Chong moved from Thurn's garden in Elderslie to Camden at Whiteman's garden, where the Italian *Trattoria La Vigna* is now.

Hop Chong died in 1940. The name **HOP CHONG GARDEN** was used as a company name, which lasted in Camden for about 50 years. Many local residents remember HOP CHONG gardens.



Hop Chong's grave in the Chinese section of Rookwood.





**Mr. Jack Dunk ploughing Miss Davies' paddock.**

Jack is ploughing near the Sewage Treatment Works on the Grove Road, for the Chinese market gardeners to use. (Photo from Joy Riley, Jack's daughter.)

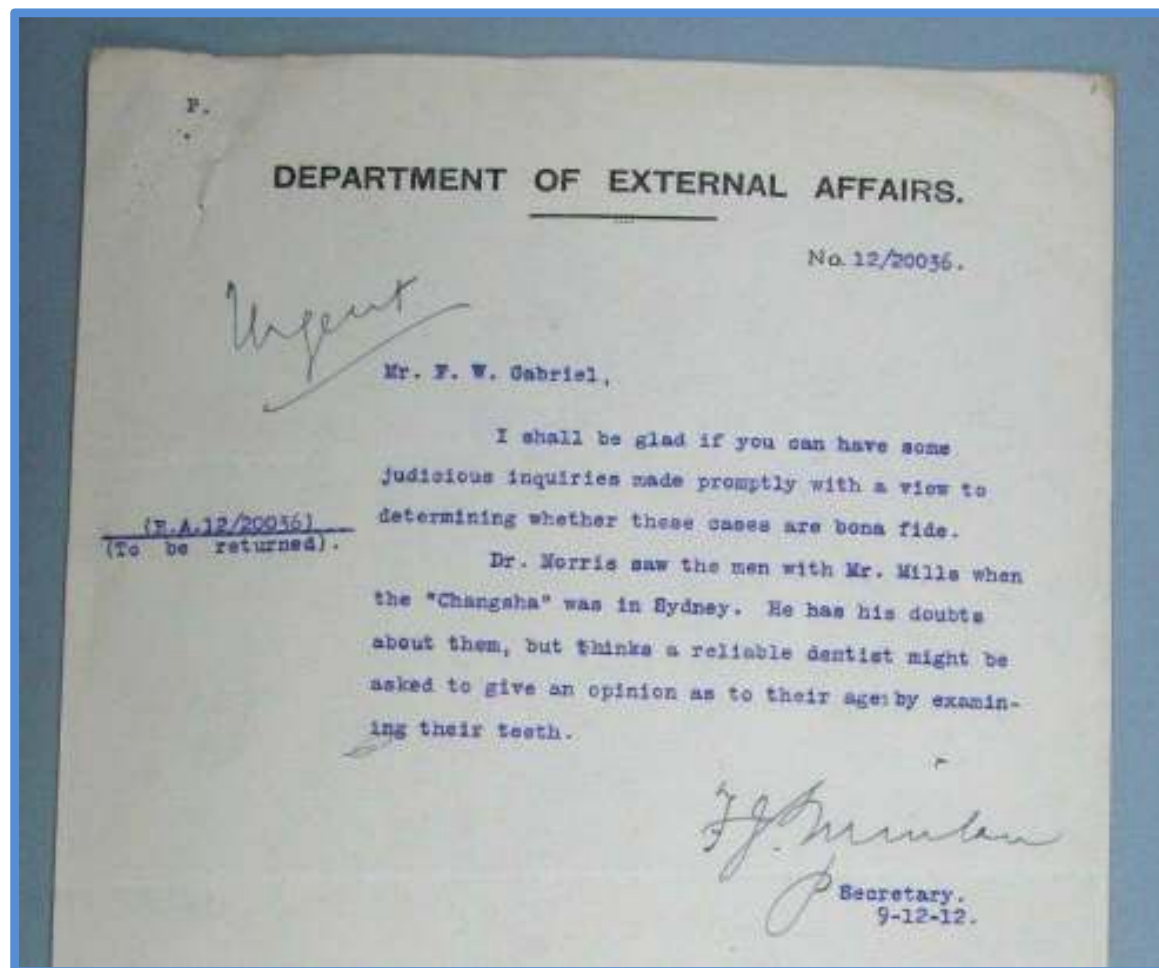
## Willie Chung (1897-1966): Australian-born Chinese Leader

- Willie Chung was born in 1897 at Tamworth, NSW.
- His father was Charlie Chung, a well-respected Chinese tobacco grower and gardener of Tamworth, aged 32. His mother was Mary Hilda Brown, aged 19.
- In 1899, when Willie was 2, his father sent Willie and his brother with his uncle to China. Willie's father, Mr. Chung, gave a Statutory Declaration in 1912 that he sent his sons *'to be educated in the Chinese language and customs by his father and mother'*.

*Willie Chung, aged 15, in 1912.*



The re-admission of Willie and his brother Charlie to Australia in 1912 caused a great deal of red tape between Customs and the Department of External Affairs who were concerned to find out if these boys *were* the ones who left Australia in 1899. The Customs even suggested that a dentist be consulted to check their teeth (just like checking the age of a horse!)



# Willie Chung in the years before Camden

- When the boys arrived in Sydney they barely spoke English. Willie worked on his father's farm for four years before he returned to China in 1916 for another 3 years. During those years Willie married Toong Goon in Canton and she bore him three sons: Leon Poy (June 1917); Hom Poy (July 1918); and Ah Lum (April 1919). On a later trip in 1931 he had a daughter Ah Hoe.



# Willie Chung in Camden

RECEIVED WARRANT No. 4473 of 12/1/31  
 Book No. **486**  
 Form No. 21. COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA. No. **083**  
 DUPLICATE. *Immigration Act 1901-1925 and Regulations.*  
**CERTIFICATE EXEMPTING FROM DICTATION TEST.**  
 I, WILLIAM HENRY BARKLEY the Collector of Customs  
 for the State of NEW SOUTH WALES in the said Commonwealth  
 hereby certify that Willie Chung  
 hereinafter described, who is leaving the Commonwealth temporarily, will be exempted  
 from the provisions of paragraph (a) of Section 3 of the Act if he returns to the Com-  
 monwealth within a period of **THREE YEARS** from this date 14 JAN 1931  
 Date 12.1.31 *W. H. Barkley*  
 Collector of Customs  

DESCRIPTION.	
Nationality <u>Chinese</u>	Birthplace <u>Tamworth NSW</u>
Age <u>30 yrs</u>	Complexion <u>Dark</u>
Height <u>5' 4 1/2"</u>	Hair <u>Black</u>
Built <u>Medium</u>	Eyes <u>Brown</u>
Particular marks <u>None on left hand</u>	

(For impression of hand, see back of this document.)

PHOTOGRAPHS

Full Face:— Profile:—



Date of departure 14 JAN 1931 Port of Embarkation Sydney  
 Ship Yanda Destination China  
 Date of Return 19 JUNE 1931 Ship Yanda  
 Port Sydney *Thy Hwang*  
 Customs Officers.

- Willie Chong came to Camden and joined the Chinese market gardeners in the 1930s. Richard Nixon wrote about Willie Chung [or Chong]:
- *“He was an honourable and very respected Chinaman, in charge of Sun Chong Key’s garden for about 30 years.”*

# Willie Chung in 1946

- In April 1946 Willie applied for a Certificate of Exemption to allow him to visit China for 36 months and be re-admitted to Australia.
- At this time in 1946 he had been in China 5 times already. He had left Australia in 1899 for 13 years (to be educated); left in 1916 for 3 years (to marry and start a family); left in 1922 for a year (to continue his family); left in 1931 for 6 months; and in 1937 left for 6 months.
- His application was supported by a letter, dated 5 January 1946, from the Mayor of Camden, H.S. (Stan) Kelloway:

159 Argyle Street,  
CAMDEN,  
5th. January 1946.

To Whom it may concern.

This is to certify that I have known the bearer of this reference, Willie Chung, for a period of about eight years. During the whole of this time I have been very closely associated with him in both business and private life and have seen him almost daily. He bears an excellent character. Is energetic, industrious, strictly honest and his integrity generally is beyond question. I might add that he is an abstainer. The respect in which he is held by his countrymen is fully shared by his European friends and acquaintances. I know him to be worthy of every confidence.

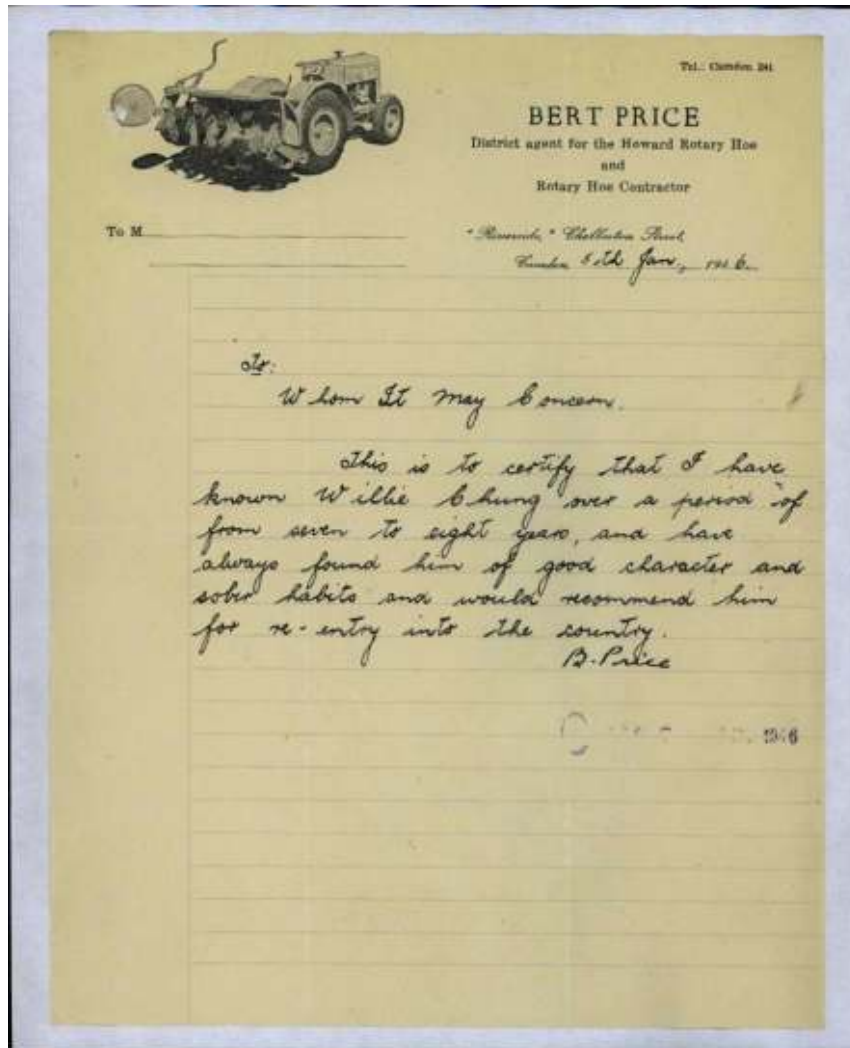
Signed *Stan Kelloway* J.P.  
(Mayor of Camden)

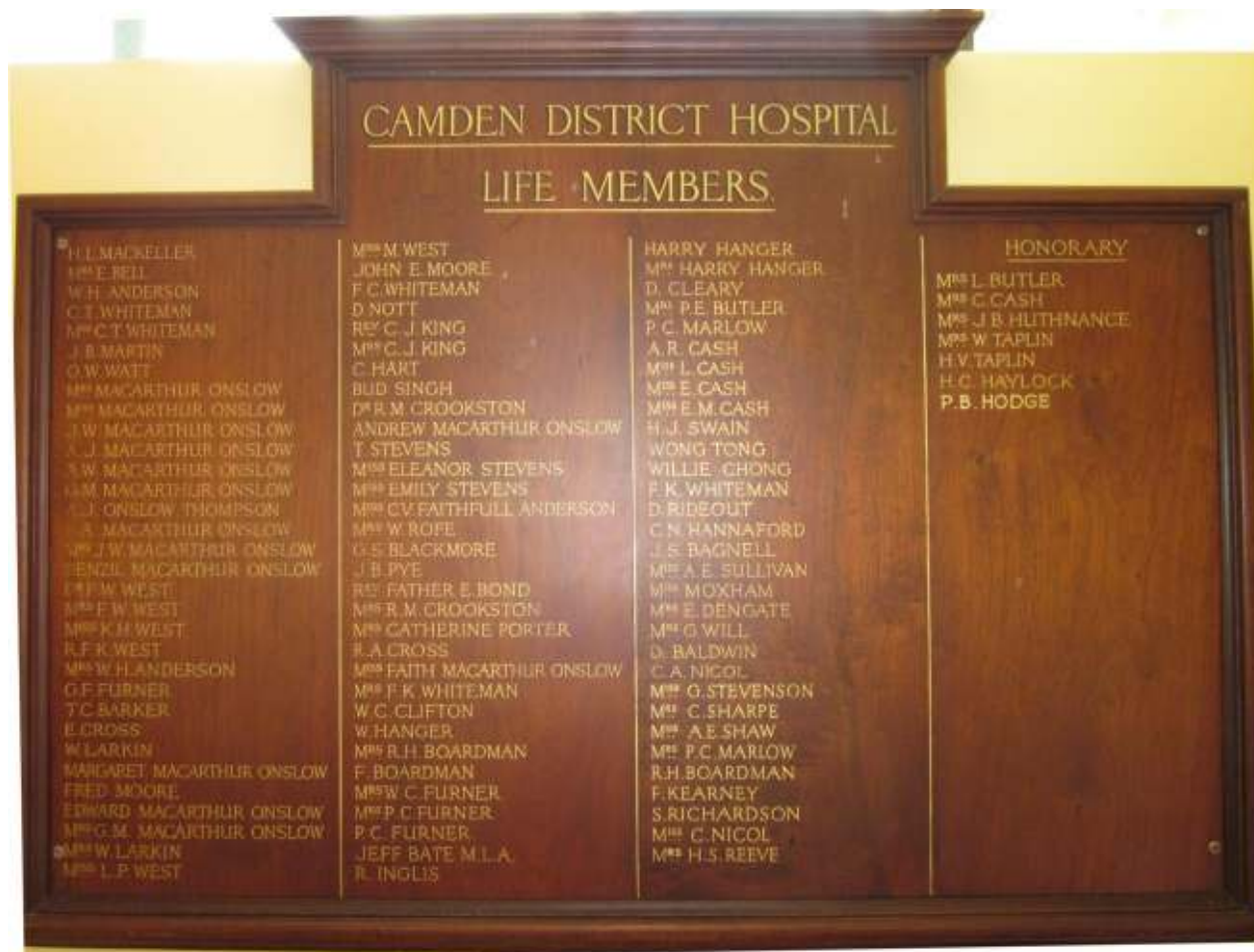


## **Stanley and Minnie Kelloway**

Stanley Kelloway, Camden's Mayor from 1939 to 1953, supported Willie Chung's application for a CEDT. His granddaughter Nola Cornhill, remembered Willie Chung coming to the house of the Kelloways.

In November 1946 Willie Chung and his syndicate won the First Prize of £5000 in the State Lottery. In 1947 Willie Chung (Chong) and Wong Tong donated £50 each to Camden Hospital and their names are on the Hospital Honour Board for Life Members. *Below: Willie, 1946*





## Camden District Hospital Life Members: Wong Tong and Willie Chung

Willie Chung was grateful to Dr West and Camden Hospital. Dick Nixon wrote, *“Willie suffered a very severe infection on the back of his neck, probably a carbuncle. . . Fifty years ago there were no antibiotics, but by skilful and careful treatment, Willie recovered. His way of saying ‘thank you’ was a substantial donation (for those days) to the hospital – hence his name on the Honour Board.”*

## Willie Chung – highly respected in Camden.

Willie Chung is a good example of a successful life lived by a Chinese market gardener in Camden. Willie was treated with discrimination and racism at a government level, but the Chinese and non-Chinese lived alongside each other in Camden with good will from the residents who appreciated the fresh vegetables the market gardeners provided. Many old-time Camden residents spoke with warm memories of the hard-working Chinese gardeners at Camden.

*Willie Chung, 1937 (NAA)*



# Willie Chung's grave at Rookwood

Died March 1966 aged 69 years





## **Biu Wong (L) and George Fung (R), 1986**

The last surviving Chinese market gardener in Camden was Biu Wong, whose father was a market gardener in Camden before him. Biu brought a young bride from China to marry and live in Camden. He purchased Hop Chong garden about 1968 and worked there with his family and other helpers. He retired about 1993.

## Family of Mr. Biu Wong, about 1969

Before Biu Wong purchased Hop Chong Garden about 1968 it was owned by:  
1. YUNG SUM WONG. 2. WONG TIN. 3. HO JO LING. and 4. LIU CHOW LO.

*(L) Mr and Mrs Wong Snr, Sim and Biu Wong and daughters. (R) Mrs Sim Wong with Anne.*



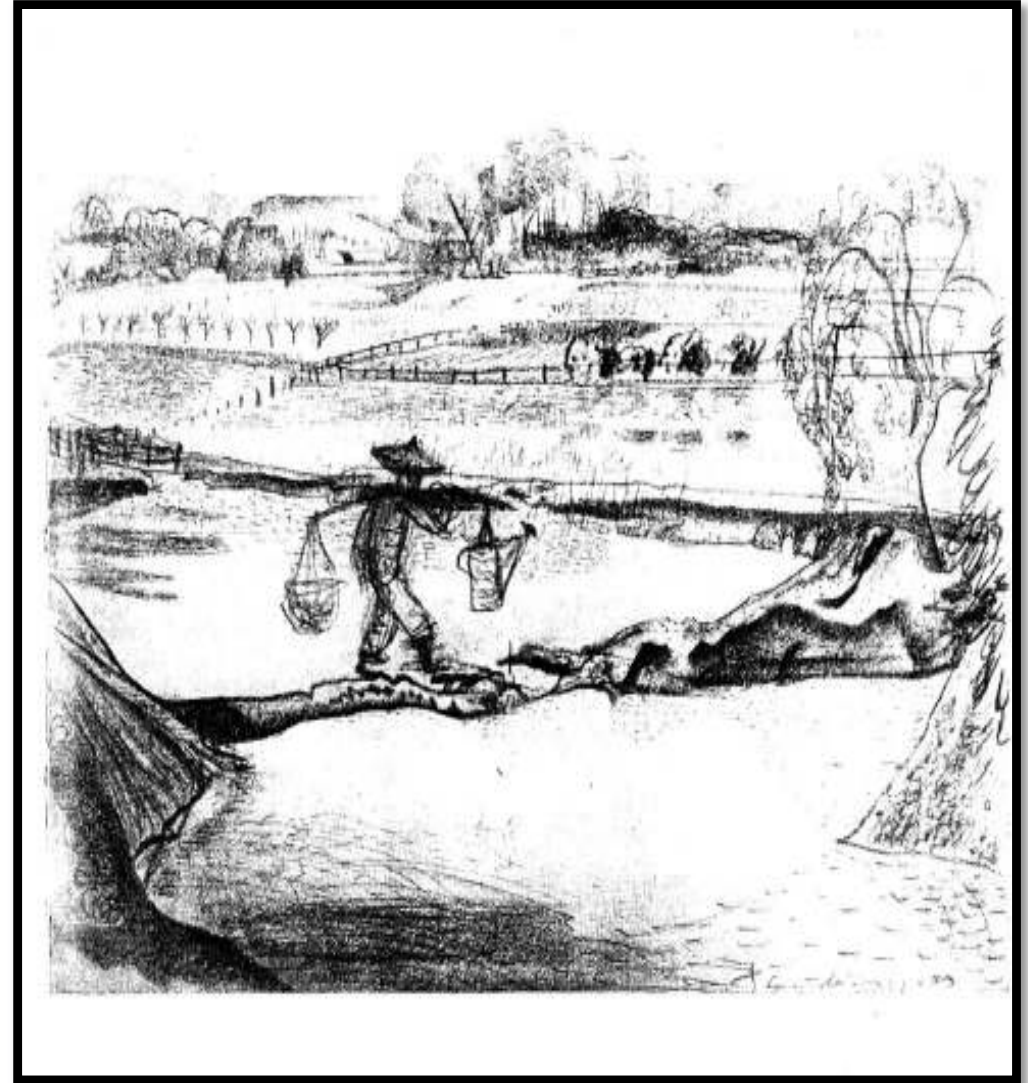
## The End of the Chinese Era

Why did the Chinese decline after the end of WW2?

### **RACISM and DISCRIMINATION at a government level**

Most of the Chinese mentioned had originally entered Australia prior to about 1900, and whilst they themselves were able to go to China and return, *no new ones* were admitted into the country to take their place. The White Australia Policy lasted from 1901 to c.1958.

Locally there was good will for the Chinese market gardeners and appreciation for the role they played in Camden.



*Sketch by Douglas Annand, 1943.*

# Acknowledgements (1)

National Archives of Australia

Chester Hill

Photos and immigration records



# Acknowledgements (2)

- Wen Denaro, Chinese-born Film Maker, whose interest started the project.
- Cheryle Yin-Lo and Camden Council for the grant to the Camden Historical Society for Wen Denaro's project.
- Jo Oliver and Camden Library Services.
- The late Dick Nixon, local historian.
- State Records of NSW – Kingswood.
- *Trove* digitised newspapers.
- Births Deaths & Marriages records
- Rookwood records.

