

When See Hop killed Alexander Shearer in July, 1932 it was his landlord George Hatton to whom he turned for help. Charged with manslaughter, he was found not guilty on the basis of self defence.

In 1936 when Lee Wah ran amok at the Buffalo Road market garden now occupied by the Ryde Bus Depot and was killed by Pang Wong, the leaseholder Willie Hing ran to his neighbour James Ellis for help. Willie called him 'Jim'; James called him 'Fatty', surely indicating at least familiarity, if not friendship. In both cases aid was sought and aid was given.

Despite such murders and the occasional visit by a prostitute to a garden, the discovery of an illegal immigrant in a garden or prosecution for opium smoking, the Chinese market gardeners were law abiding. It was thought they were more 'sinned against' than sinners. This was the opinion of both the police and the general public.

There were Chinese market gardeners living in the area who did not fit the stereotype. Tong Ling, Chinese born, married Louisa Young in 1926 and owned property in Culloden Road for many years which operated as a market garden.

As the Chinese population aged and was, because of immigration restrictions, not being replaced at a suitable rate, the number of Chinese market gardens declined during the 1930s. However, by WWII there were still at least 15 market gardens being operated by the Chinese in the Ryde LGA. It is not known when the last Chinese market garden closed.



Due to population and other land use pressures the sites of these market gardens have now been transformed into parks, significant infrastructure or housing developments.

Maze Park, West Ryde, once the site of a market garden

Examples include:

- Maze Park or Bremner Park
- Ryde Bus Depot or Macquarie Psychiatric Hospital
- Houses along Victoria Road near Arras Parade, Irvine Crescent and Beazley Street.



The Ryde Bus Depot, once the site of a market garden.

The names of several hundred of the Chinese men who worked in our market gardens are known from a variety of source records. If you require more information about an individual or can add to their story with personal reminiscences or photographs please contact the Local Studies Librarian.

## Want to know more?

Contact the Local Studies and Family History Librarian

### RYDE LIBRARY

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# Chinese market gardens and gardeners of Ryde and Eastwood



A market gardener's house in Parkes Street c.1950

Lifestyle and opportunity @ your doorstep



Chinese market gardens in Parkes Street, Ryde. View from Blaxland Road, near Kulgoa Ave c.1925

The first identifiable reference to men of Chinese origin in the Ryde LGA was in the Sands Directory in the late 1880s. Ah Sing in 1887-1888 and Ah Hay 1889-1890 are listed in Victoria Road, West Ryde; Ah Come from 1887-1890 in Providence Road, Ryde.

The 1891 census records 20 Chinese; the 1901 census likewise lists 10.

From 1907 the numbers gradually increased with a significant increase in the number of Chinese in the Ryde Municipality occurring in the 1920s. In the Eastwood Municipality (which had separated from the Ryde Municipality in 1894 and re-united in 1948) the first Chinese market gardens are listed in 1921. By the end of that decade there were 14. By 1928 there were over 60 market gardens operated by men from China in the two municipalities. On average each acre of land required one worker so, for example, a 5 acre garden could employ 4-5 men.

Apart from early references to several fruit growers, one pig farmer, one florist and a herbalist all of the Chinese in the Ryde Local Government Area were market gardeners. This was different to other areas of Sydney where the Chinese were involved in furniture making or as general shopkeepers and merchants.

While most of the Chinese in our area were market gardeners not all our market gardeners were Chinese. In 1929, 58% of our market gardeners were Chinese, 7% were Italian and the rest were of other European backgrounds, British or Australian born.

Generally the Chinese market gardeners leased the land, sometimes from absentee landlords. In many cases locals leased part of the property on which they lived to Chinese market gardeners. Such was the case with Ah Ying and James Stanbury of Twin Road.

The living conditions were harsh. Housing was basic and was often described as a 'humpy'.

6113/6		VALUATION	
VALUATION DISTRICT OF RYDE			
COUNTY	OF	PARTS	
SEC.	LOT 8	ESTATE	TENNYSON
SIDE OF STREET	N	HOUSE NO.	
TITLE-VOL. VOL. BODY NO. DEP. PLAN.			
DESCRIPTION OF LAND AND LOCALITY			
DESCRIPTION OF IMPROVEMENTS WB. HUMPY 3 PAS IRON			
OWNER'S NAME BRENNER, HENRY DONALD & MARY			

1924 land valuation for site of a Chinese market garden in Morrison Road operated by Tong Mow from the 1920s: note the word 'humpy'

The Chinese men lived with other men and the garden was operated generally as a co-operative.

While the market gardens operated in all areas there were concentrations around:

- The Winbourne Street/Brush Road/Darvall Road and Tramway Street area
- Darwin St, Meadowbank
- Parkes Street at Top Ryde (down the hill from the current Civic Centre)
- In the vicinity of Holy Cross College including Buffalo Road, Frank Street, Victoria Road, Aitchander Road and Providence Road
- Bridge Road, Smalls Road, Watts Road, Quarry Road and Lane Cove Road.



Chinese market garden in Winbourne St, West Ryde, 1920s

In addition to these there were many gardens in the Marsfield/North Ryde area along Coxs, Badajoz, Talavera, Culloden and Fontenoy Roads.

Generally the men were unmarried (though they probably had wives and families back in China); grew European vegetables; used labour intensive methods and worked hard. To the Europeans they were rarely known by their Chinese names but referred to as 'Johnnie' or 'Charlie'. They sold their vegetables locally or took them to the market in the City. It was on one such trip in January 1916 that Yin Sue and Yun Lee, gardeners from Winbourne Street, West Ryde (then termed Ermington) were hit by a train near West Ryde Station when the gates had been opened at the level crossing.

## **CHINESE KILLED. RAILWAY ACCIDENT AT RYDE.**

While discriminatory Australian immigration policies limited the number of Chinese, on a local level there was at least acceptance and sometimes warmth between the Chinese and the European locals. Norman Pacey remembered that his parents would give money to the local Chinese market gardener (Old Dan) in Parkes Street to buy pak-a-poo tickets, a form of gambling. Asked whether his parents trusted Old Dan he said, 'He was as honest as the day. He wouldn't have done you out of twopence'.