



Chinese Market Gardeners, c. 1901

Chinese Heritage

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More than two hundred men were buried in the Chinese section of the Coburg Cemetery between 1908 and 1922. Mostly they were middle-aged men from the impoverished Canton region of southern China, who arrived in Australia before the overthrow of the last Chinese emperor and before Sun Yat-Sen declared China a republic in January 1912.

Since gold-rush times the Chinese had been subjected to anti-Chinese sentiment as from time to time resentment flared up over their different customs and traditions. Many of the men buried here were market gardeners, men who worked using traditional methods refined over thousands of years to provide produce for markets and stores. They were well-known in the Coburg community as many of them also sold their goods door to door.

Chinese women were not permitted to migrate to Australia, and so the men found themselves alone, isolated by their limited English and their lack of knowledge of Western customs. They were homesick and many had come simply to make enough money to support their struggling families at home. They always intended to return home one day. For the men buried here, that did not happen.

Translations reveal that they were all from the Canton area and in every case the district and village that the man came from is recorded, reminding us of the importance of their ancestral homes. The joss sticks burned in recent times at the end of Hong Ah Youey's grave (#152) remind us, too, of the continuing respect for ancestors in Chinese culture.

Working together to preserve our history



The above information is based on research conducted in 2011-2012 and is presented in good faith by the Friends of Coburg Cemetery. Should family members wish to upgrade existing monuments within this cemetery please email enquiries@gmct.com.au