

## REMEMBERING HAINING STREET: With both eyes open

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With both eyes open

I would like to begin by acknowledging the following: Vonnie Nunns and the Wellington Historical and Early Settlers Association for their vision, trust and generosity; the interviewees, who have been so generous with their time and knowledge; the Haining Street Oral History Committee - Raymond Young, Nigel Murphy, Kirsten Wong, Hugo Manson and Linda Evans; the Oral History Centre at the Alexander Turnbull Library; Australian Sesquicentennial Gift Trust for Oral History; New Zealand Lottery Grants Board/Te Puna Tahua; Wellington City Council; Victoria University of Wellington's Asian Studies Institute and History Programme; and my family. I've called this paper "Remembering Chinatown", because I'm working primarily with people's recollections of a much-changed area. "Both eyes open" comes from something one of the people I have interviewed, Jimmy Gow, said about the attitude of the police - they "open one eye, shut one eye". But it also refers to my trying to look, in a more balanced way, at a topic that has previously been given one-eyed treatment.

This paper deals with Haining Street - its representation, and the community who lived around there, the latter largely based on interviews recorded for the Haining Street Oral History Project.

Haining Street is located at the southern edge of the central city, part of the Te Aro flat. This area was a swamp, until it was raised by the 1855 earthquake. By the 1870s and 80s, Te Aro was Wellington's fastest-growing district. It's a short, narrow, and nowadays fairly unprepossessing street.

To Chinese, Haining Street was Tong Yan Gaai, Chinese People's Street. Though some scholars have denied the existence of a Chinatown in New Zealand, for generations, both Chinese and non-Chinese, here was the centre of Chinatown.

Wellington became an important centre for Chinese after the depletion of gold in Otago and on the West coast, in the late 1800s. The miners and others, who moved northwards, were drawn from mostly the Poonyu, Jung Sheng, and Seyip counties of Guangdong, Southern China. A population of less than 1,000 Chinese up to 1956 meant that this Chinatown could never grow to rival those in other countries. Both New Zealand and Australia became known as Sun Gum Saan, New Gold Mountain, after the original Gum Saan in North America.

There have been other comparable streets in N.Z. such as Auckland's Grey's Avenue, and to a lesser extent Walker Street in Dunedin. Just like them, there's practically nothing left in Haining Street now which would give any indication of its past.

Reputation

Despite its meek appearance and size, Haining Street had a big reputation.

Even Frederick Street, just one block over and just as small and narrow, didn't seem to suffer from the same stigma.

Here, still remaining today, are three buildings built by Chinese: the Chinese Mission Hall, built in 1905 by the Anglicans, but shared in the 1940s with the Baptists; the Tung Jung Association, a county organisation, built in 1926; and the Chi Gung Tong building, 1925. The latter, originally formed in 1905 as a political group, later became a sort of welfare society, and was sometimes referred to as a Masonic society.

Auckland Weekly News of 1911 called Haining Street "The most notorious slum area in New Zealand". Photos from that time show us small wooden cottages, closely huddled, with their frontages to the street.

Pat Lawler wrote in his book *Old Wellington Days*: "We were told that even if we went near that drab, narrow, little street with its congestion of tumbledown houses, we might be kidnapped, boiled in a copper and made into preserved ginger".

There were rumours of warring tongs, of white slave traders. Non-Chinese people have told me that when they were young they dared each other to run down the street.

In the late 1800s it was the job of the Wellington City Council Inspector of Nuisances to regularly inspect the houses of Chinese. One Saturday night in June 1896, the inspector visited Chinese houses in Taranaki Street (around the corner from Haining Street), accompanied by two NZ Times reporters and a JP. In his report, after noting the absence of females, he states:

"Discussing the matter afterwards the reporters and Mr Arnold expressed surprise and disappointment - surprise to see clean bedding in so many of the houses - and disappointment because there was nothing sensational.

"I may say that I visit these houses at least once every month - and I have seen nothing whatsoever to justify the sensational rumours that occasionally gain currency to the effect that the Chinese houses are dens of infamy etc."

J. Doyle, Insp.

Yet here is the headline above the corresponding article from the journalists:

"WELLINGTON'S CHINATOWN.

Plague Spots of Asiatic Vice in our Midst.

DIRT, OPIUM SMOKE AND VEGETABLES.

What a New Zealand Times Reporter Saw on a Midnight Round."

This is just one example of sensational misreporting and stigmatisation over the years. It is an irony that while several trees' worth of newspapers were dedicated to the Chinese of Haining Street, they were all but ignored in the otherwise extensive contemporary street directories.

Murder

Probably the most notorious incident in the street took place in 1905, when Joe Kum Yung was shot by Lionel Terry outside no 13, to draw attention to his anti-Asiatic views.

In his statement to the duty officer when he handed himself and his revolver in, he said: "I have to tell you that I am the man who shot the Chinaman last night. I take an interest in alien immigration and I took this means of bringing it under public notice."

The previous evening, the evening of the murder, he had written to the governor: "I will not allow my rights and those of my brother Britons to be jeopardized by alien invaders, and to make this decision perfectly plain, I have this evening put a Chinaman to death in the Chinese quarters of this city known as Haining Street".

Terry was also an immigrant, but because he was English, was not an alien. Rather than being a lone voice, he was expressing, though in an extreme way, what others were thinking.

A huge national outpouring of public sentiment sympathetic to Terry followed his sentencing. His death sentence was commuted on the grounds of insanity by one of the prominent Anti-Chinese of the day, Premier Dick Seddon. After being recaptured following one of his escapes from Seacliff Mental Asylum, the police commented that they were sorely handicapped in effecting his recapture by the level of assistance he had received, and that almost every person was in sympathy with him.

Immigration issues, ghettoisation

This public feeling against Chinese was reflected in a huge range of legislation and policy, including poll taxes and tonnage restrictions, which related ONLY to Chinese. The following are a small sample of some of this:

- 1881 Chinese Immigrants Act no. 47: ten pounds poll tax to be paid by each Chinese entering the country, and a ratio of one Chinese to ten tons of cargo.

- 1888: the tonnage was raised to 1:100 tons of cargo.

- 1896 Chinese Immigrant Amendment Act no.19: Poll tax raised to 100 pounds, ratio 1 Chinese:200 tons of cargo.

- 1898 Old Age Pensions act: No pensions for Chinese whether naturalised or not.

- 1901 Opium Prohibition Act: No permits for importing opium to be given to Chinese, police able to enter Chinese homes without search warrant, not repealed until 1965.

- Naturalisation denied to Chinese February 1908 - 1952

- 1925: Chinese women no longer granted permits

- 1926 Family Allowance Act: Not to apply to Chinese families

- 1939: Japan had invaded China; Chinese who were permanent residents of New Zealand were permitted to bring to New Zealand refugee wives and children less than 16 years of age on temporary permits, with a deposit of 200 pounds, lodgement of an unlimited deed of covenant and a 500 pound bond. At the end of the war these women and children and any subsequent children born were to be repatriated back to China. But even this crucial lifeline was cut, when subsequent war in Europe brought 'more deserving' cases.

This year, on February 12, Prime Minister Helen Clarke, on behalf of the government, apologized to those who paid the poll tax and suffered other discrimination imposed by statute and to their descendants. The Government thereby recognized the hardship it had imposed and that the cost of the Poll Tax and the impact of other discriminatory legislation practices had split families apart.

The Prime Minister also expressed regret that such practices were once considered appropriate, saying that while previous governments were acting in a manner which was lawful at the time, their actions were seen today as unacceptable.

Now the exciting task lies ahead of the community together with the government to work on the process of reconciliation.

A receipt for poll tax paid for by my grandfather, Young Shing, or Yeung Sun Yen, is a typical family memento. It contains many details, including the date of arrival and the name of the ship. On the back are his fingerprints.

His crime: to want to enter New Zealand.

Using details off a similar receipt for my grandmother, Joe Yuk Quen, I was able to check the shipping lists at National Archives for her name. Eagerly scanning the pages of names and details of arrivals from England, Scotland, Australia and other countries, I finally found her, towards the end, after Miss Banks, adult female, domestic from England: The entry read simply "13 Chinese". The following 2 entries were for cattle and sheep. As well as the sensational headlines mentioned earlier, newspapers also periodically featured cartoons of Chinese as voracious dragons or octopi, or buck-toothed squinty-eyed masses.

At the turn of last century, New Zealand was in a process of building itself as a nation, away from England. The cartoons were part of an Oriental 'Othering', creating a stereotypical whipping-boy, serving to unite an otherwise diverse population of local-born, Australians, English, Irish, Scottish and other Europeans as 'New Zealanders'. This process also conveniently put the diverse Chinese population under the one label. Differences in dialects, class and gender were papered over. Yet all this affected the community's interactions with each other, and their perceptions of the street.

Another feature of the cartoons was the laundries of Haining Street. Earlier last century gossip was going round of white slave traders, where tender young white women were lured into Chinese laundries in Haining Street, fed opium and forced into prostitution. There has possibly been only briefly a single laundry in Haining Street, that of Hee Yong. Yet police records do not show any arrest or conviction. What is more likely is that the powerful combination of Chinese men, their association with laundries and opium, and the name Haining Street all added up to a powerful urban myth. It shows the attitude towards relationships with Chinese, particularly between the sexes. Unlike South Africa, or Samoa, New Zealand had no overt miscegenation laws. Instead there were warnings such as these to women that they shouldn't mix. The myth was also useful for the families of those women who did form relationships, to excuse them.

The restrictive immigration laws mentioned earlier, combined with economic and cultural factors, meant that until the 1930s there were few Chinese women in Wellington. Chinese men were separated for many years, often decades, sometimes for the rest of their lives, from their wives or eligible Chinese females.

Police view  
It's hard to imagine illegal activities proliferating when there were two police stations within a few hundred meters' radius.

I interviewed David Paterson, who was a policeman in the 1930s-1940s. To him, Haining Street was a 'storied' place where newspapers made things up to sell their papers. There was opium and gambling, but it did not greatly concern them. But when complaints were made, the police would have to investigate. One person I interviewed considered the payment of fines for gambling as akin to buying a permit. Tales abound of police corruption.

Opium addicts, inevitably elderly, were arrested and charged, but those badly addicted were given opium in the cells to prevent withdrawal, and later released to carry on their lives, as they kept to themselves and didn't harm anyone or cause trouble.

Bob Silk, another retired policeman told me "There was nowhere lower to go than in a Chinese opium den in the 60's". He was present one evening in 1961, when the final opium raid was carried out in Haining Street. The raid made revolutionary use of chainsaws to gain access, circumventing the customary barricaded windows and reinforced doors.

I would like to stress that it was only a small minority of residents who had any involvement in opium.

Until 1901, opium had been widely used by both Chinese and Non-Chinese New Zealanders.

Chinese, such as Louis Kitt, were also prominent in the fight against opium, petitioning the government for its prohibition and forming unions to discourage its use and importation.

Many also resented what they saw as hypocrisy on the part of the authorities, when it was the British who had imposed opium on the Chinese in the first place, in the Opium wars of the previous century.

Morris DeTerte, a property developer active in the 1950s and 60s that I spoke to, told me the council should have stepped in much earlier and demolished the lot, as they were all rotten and in a state of collapse.

But when he asked with help in evicting some tenants, a magistrate told him that the police preferred to keep the Chinese and their activities in one place where they could keep an eye on them.

Pakapoo

For non-Chinese, one of the main attractions to the street was pakapoo (sometimes spelt pak-ah-pu). The ticket is comprised of ten rows of eight columns of characters or words in green ink. These words are the first part of the Chian Ji Mun, a primer that long ago all Chinese primary school children learnt to read and write from. They come from an ancient prose poem basically describing the world and its creation, with no two words repeated. For instance, it says that the seas are always salt water but the river will always be fresh water. Things with wings fly, things with scales go in the water.

The name pakapoo comes from bak gap biu, white pigeon lottery. It's been compared by many to Lotto or Keno, except the odds were much better. You marked your choices, usually ten, with a brush dipped in ink, and a copy was made and kept by the agent. There were several draws a day and winnings were proportional to the number of characters that corresponded with the twenty characters marked on the master ticket, drawn elsewhere at a place called the "bank". The bank also referred to any particular draw, e.g. You could participate in the five

o'clock bank at any of several premises.

Pakapoo, along with other 'Chinese games of chance' was illegal from 1881-1974. This was despite non-Chinese games such as poker and two-up being openly played elsewhere. Yet they came in their hundreds, from all over Wellington and all walks of life to play. There is a Dominion headline from 1914 of a raid netting a ton of tickets.

Places to shop, eat, stay

But there was more than opium and pakapoo. A 1907 newspaper tells us that there was a doctor practising in the street, who was also popular with European clients.

There were also the first Chinese restaurants. Doris Chung recalls following her father in the 1920s to certain Haining Street houses where those with culinary skills made noodles in soup, dim sims and other Chinese snacks, for others to buy and either eat on the premises or take home. For many non-Chinese, it was their first opportunity to try Chinese food. Chinese and non-Chinese alike remember the fresh noodles prepared daily by the Ngan family.

Queues would form for Wong Gam Yiu's whole roasted pig, which was sold by the pound on Sundays. His wife made trays of snacks for her sons to sell around the neighbourhood.

Sundays also saw open air services conducted in the street, run by the Baptist, Anglican and Salvation Army churches. The Open Brethren were also active in the area.

There were maybe half a dozen shops selling Chinese groceries and other goods in the area. These stores often sold medicinal herbs and advised on their use. More importantly, they operated as focal points for community life, operating as unofficial banks and places where mail could be sent to local residents. For the illiterates in the area, the proprietors were among those able to write letters home, and to read to them in return the replies. Joe Lai Choy's shop 'Yeun Dung Gung Si' was one of these grocery stores. He was nicknamed after a tile in Mah Jong, a game he loved to play.

The building was one of the last to go from the street; it burnt down in 1982, though it had been empty for years. Joe Lee Wah had another grocery shop, on Taranaki St, by the Haining Street corner. But he also ran next door a hostel for new arrivals and out-of-towners to stay in while visiting Wellington, especially at weekends and festival times, such as Chinese New Year. This one was just one of a few hostels in the area. On it's site, covering the block, is now a large building. It has recently been renovated as part of the current trend for urban renewal and gentrification, but in 1959 Mayor Frank Kitts said at its opening:

"Wellington planning formerly suffered from this street. Now it is one of the best in any town in the country, largely through the building of this handsome block".

Haining St was the first point of contact for many new immigrants to New Zealand. Many of them were sojourners, intending to eventually return to China. Jimmy Gow probably speaks for many when he expresses his horrified shock at conditions here, not just in Haining Street, but also in Wellington in general, that contrasted with the sophistication of the Guangzhou he had left behind. I particularly enjoyed his story, as it challenged my previous assumptions about Wellington, being the West, as being superior. Haining St as social centre

As a child in the 1940s, Raymond Young, remembers the pakapoo shop as also a meeting place where friends could sit and talk. There was always a fire in winter, and during the Sino-Japanese war people would gather, and get news on the short-wave radio of home. This was a time remembered as when the community was particularly close.

Other interviewees remember up to sixty people regularly coming home for dinner each weekend. It wasn't just the Chinese who would gather in the street. Jim Gow tells of a warm, convivial place to go to, particularly after the pubs closed at six o'clock. You could bring a couple of beers; maybe fill out a pakapoo ticket for fun. He says that rather than being a den of vice, Haining Street offered visitors a warm, safe place off the streets, and kept them out of trouble.

Raymond Young recalls Dai Nan Guon, drop in centres for Chinese men, the equivalent of a Working Men's Club, where the men could play mah-jong or fan-tan, and help themselves to a cup of tea. As a young boy, he was permitted to enter to fetch his father, though his sisters were never allowed to go.

Mah-jong is a game most people probably know something about. Fan-tan used counters or old Chinese coins. A handful was placed under an upturned cup or bowl. The object was to guess how many counters, from one to four, would be left after they were drawn out four at a time.

Another game enjoyed by Chinese was pai-gou, or tien-ma, using dominoes. If you wanted to bet on the horses, you could always find a bookie in Haining Street.

Community

The area hosted many Chinese community organisations. Apart from the previously mentioned Chinese Mission, Chee Kung Tong and Tung Jung Association in Frederick Street, there were: the Chinese Association (Chung Wah Wui Koon and later the Wah Kiu Leung Hap Wui), the Kuomintang, the CPC or Chinese Progress Club, and the Poonyu and Seyip County organisation premises.

Between them, this network supported the local community by advancing loans, providing accommodation on arrival, and running Chinese and English schools and youth groups. They also organised social, cultural and sporting events, some of which were to celebrate traditional festivals, such as Chinese New Year. Even today,

several Chinese community organisations still have their headquarters within a kilometre of Haining Street. Somehow, despite restrictive legislation and social prejudice, the community grew, particularly during the war with Japan.

Interviewees remember playing in the street with family and friends. There was no traffic out of business hours, leaving a gigantic playground with quiet spots for hopscotch, a slope for trolleys, and the new buildings had concrete walls for practising tennis and other sports against.

The back yards of the cottages often revealed neat gardens growing flowers and Chinese vegetables, and poultry kept in cages.

Many remember elderly male residents sitting on their haunches out on the footpath on warm evenings, calling out across the street to each other.

Overwhelmingly, the Chinese and non-Chinese residents of the area that I have interviewed for the Haining Street Project have protested the public image, instead emphasizing the normality of their daily lives: growing up, eating breakfast, doing homework, making friends.

The end of an era

Finally, Chinatown faded away. There were increased official avenues for gambling, such as the TAB and the Art Union. Chinese restaurants and shops became popular with mainstream New Zealand, and moved elsewhere. As the buildings were demolished, often in the name of slum clearances, residential dwellings became rarer, replaced by businesses. Chinese were being increasingly accepted into New Zealand public life. The newer generations were more occupationally mobile, with increased educational opportunities. Their ambition and increased affluence led them away. Those Chinese tenants able to afford deposits generally preferred to buy houses in the suburbs, especially now public transport was improving. Tong Yan Gaai was no longer needed. By the 1960s, nothing much was left.

Interestingly, the street is beginning to be lived in again, but these new residents are non-Chinese professionals living in newly developed apartments.

The Heritage value of Haining Street has been recognized by the Wellington City Council in the Te Aro Heritage trail.

Reputation Vs reality

One interviewee suggested that increasing globalisation has meant people are probably now more broadminded than they were in the 1930s-50s, when people singled out Haining Street for jokes or derision, through unfamiliarity with Chinese customs and culture.

Until the controversies of the 1980s involving the new wave of Asian immigrants, Chinese had come to earn a reputation as being hard working, and law-abiding. They became good at keeping their heads down. 'The model minority'. To maintain this and because of Haining St's reputation, I've sometimes found people reluctant to be interviewed, preferring to leave it dead and buried. For some, the memories are still too raw. Or sometimes they have imposed long periods of confidentiality. One interviewee told me she didn't want people to go 'oh, you used to live there'. Confidentiality was also wanted sometimes because of the illicit nature of the material.

But despite public interest and my own desire to widely publicise a total picture, I must continue to respect these people's need for privacy, so I can still preserve an inside view of a much-maligned historical community whose members are increasingly becoming lost to us.

The story of Haining Street is for me partly a personal one. I grew up in a family that never spoke of the past, that never acknowledged its history apart from an obvious origin in China. We had great food, but no family stories, no folklore, no whakapapa. So until recently, the rumours and sensational newspaper stories of the last century have been my only heritage.

However, one of the problems of looking at Haining Street again, based on oral history, is that it isn't totally reliable. People's memories are selective, they distort over time. People aren't likely to present themselves in a less than positive light. I become in danger of opening one eye and closing the other, potentially replacing one false collective history with another.

But together with old photos and documents, those old newspapers and these stories I hope to find something that contrasts with the one-eyed, one-dimensional views which have previously predominated, restoring sight to both eyes. By doing this work, voices now gone can also be somehow heard and their dignity restored to them.

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