

Dr Foon Kee – well known Chinese citizen of early Wagga Wagga.

Dr Foon Kee.

Dr Foon Kee came from China to Wagga Wagga in the 1870's at the age of sixteen. When he arrived the main street, "*comprised principally buildings of bark.*" He resided with On Yuen Lee, a herbalist with a shop in Fitzmaurice Street, near the Wollundry Lagoon. He was well liked by the early settlers and had formed friendships with locals such as Robert Emblen, the town clerk. He was described as, "*one of Wagga's most picturesque and familiar old figures,*" and, "*the best known member of Wagga's Chinese community.*"

He was always ready to support others in need.¹ As an example Foon Kee, along with Jack Goon, Quan Nam Lee, Mow Shing, Charlie Gee Why, Jimmy Len Hoong and William Wing Shing donated the sum of £15/11s to the Wagga District Hospital in 1919.² In 1922, a group of some thirty local Chinese donated a total of £13/10s – this included £1/1s from Foon Kee.³ In 1931 the latter donated £2 to the Unemployed Relief Committee.⁴



Above: On Yuen Lee's General Store, near the Wollundry Lagoon, not in Fitzmaurice Street, but in Baylis street, opposite where Myers now stands. Presumably On Yuen Lee had moved from Fitzmaurice Street.

¹ Daily Advertiser. 19th June 1935, p2.

² Daily Advertiser. 22nd December 1919, p2.

³ Daily Advertiser. 18th September 1922, p2.

⁴ Daily Advertiser. 2nd October 1931, p2.

Dr Foon Kee – well known Chinese citizen of early Wagga Wagga.

After five years in Wagga Wagga Foon Kee returned to China then came back to establish a business as a herbalist. Dr Foon Kee remained in Wagga Wagga for more than sixty years, after which time (in 1935) he returned to China, never to return, spending his last days in Canton where he had originated from. He was genuinely sad to leave Wagga Wagga as he had learnt to love Australia and Wagga Wagga, and had many friends he left behind.⁵

Foon Kee acted as an interpreter when Chinese persons appeared in court, doing so on a number of occasions.⁶ When sworn in he practised the usual Chinese method of, “*blowing out a match.*”⁷

Foon Kee’s Shop.

Although described as a *herbalist* Foon Kee’s business was broader than that. In January 1899 he advertised his business as “*Grocer and General Produce Dealer,*” being located in Fitzmaurice Street. He also gave notice that Yin Kee, a Chinese doctor, could be seen daily at the shop.⁸ Mr Yin Kee came from Albury and had been offering his services from Foon Kee’s shop for some years.⁹

The 1901 census records a Charley Foon Kee in Fitzmaurice Street, with nine Chinese persons residing in that residence. Neighbours included Charley Sin Lee Gee (3 x Chinese occupants), Lim Sing (3 x Chinese occupants), and Bo Smey (8 x Chinese occupants). It is not known if the nine persons at Foon Kee’s residence were family or tenants.

A report in January 1913 placed Foon Kee’s shop adjacent to that of Quong Fat’s with Sing Lee Gee’s shop, “*another five or ten paces away.*”¹⁰

The condition of Foon Kee’s premises, and many others in Chinatown, was poor and in February 1914 the Council’s Sanitary Inspector recommended that Foon Kee be served notice to make his shop and dwelling in Fitzmaurice Street “*habitable.*”¹¹ Foon Kee subsequently wrote to the Municipal Council requesting an extension of time for works to be carried out, but the Council’s Health Committee rejected his application and in March 1914 recommended that the property be condemned and that the owner be given twelve months to commence building operations.¹²

It would appear that any improvements by Foon Kee were limited as in September 1916 an authorised officer of the Board of Health certified a number of Wagga Wagga premises as, “*unfit for human habitation or occupation,*” and the Council declared that after the 2nd October 1916 these buildings, “*shall not be inhabited or occupied by any person.*” The certified buildings included Foon Kee’s premises in Fitzmaurice Street.¹³

Whatever improvements Foon Kee made over the aforementioned years, the condition of the premises must have deteriorated again as in September 1925 they were demolished by Messrs O’Shannessy and Anderson. The building was described as, “*one of the oldest Chinese shops in the town,*” it having been originally occupied by Mr Charlie Sin Gee, as a fruiterer’s shop, for many years and then by Foon Kee, as a herbalist.¹⁴

⁵ Daily Advertiser. 19th June 1935, p2.

⁶ Daily Advertiser. 25th July 1911, p3.

⁷ Wagga Wagga Express. 25th July 1911, p2.

⁸ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 3rd January 1899, p1.

⁹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 18th November 1897, p3.

¹⁰ Wagga Wagga Express. 14th January 1913, p4.

¹¹ Wagga Wagga Express. 21st February 1914, p6.

¹² Wagga Wagga Express. 21st March 1914, p6.

¹³ Wagga Wagga Express. 16th September 1916, p3.

¹⁴ Daily Advertiser. 5th September 1925, p4.

Dr Foon Kee – well known Chinese citizen of early Wagga Wagga.



Above: Foon Kee’s shop and residence in Fitzmaurice Street c.1925. The sign to the left reads as follows: “These shops are being erected for Dr Foon Kee. O’Shannessy and Anderson, builders. E. E. Giles, architect.”

In February 1926 Foon Kee was given permission, by the Wagga Wagga Municipal Council, to erect canvas blinds at the front of his shop in Fitzmaurice Street.¹⁵ A few months later, in July 1926, Foon Kee applied and was granted permission to make additions to his shop and to erect stables – both in Fitzmaurice Street.¹⁶

The Chinese Joss house stood north of Foon Kee’s premises and there was a big fanfare in June 1954 when new premises opened in Wagga Wagga – for the Grand Garage. The new building was erected on the site of the old Joss House and Temple where hundreds of Chinese once met to smoke opium.¹⁷ According to a local report several hundred Chinese inhabited Wagga Wagga in the early days and they formed a Masonic order called the Chinese Free Mission and erected a hall for their purposes [aka the Joss house]. A church was subsequently erected at the rear of the hall, in the early 1900’s. The hall was demolished in 1939 but the church survived and was incorporated into the Grand Garage complex, serving as a storeroom, in which Chinese drawings and motives were still faintly visible. Adjacent to the church was a small building which was to serve as a home for the caretaker of the Grand Garage. The article claimed that the opium dens stood next to this latter building and that during a recent flood water seeped into the dens causing them to collapse.

¹⁵ Daily Advertiser. 5th February 1926, p2.

¹⁶ Daily Advertiser. 9th July 1926, p2.

¹⁷ Daily Advertiser. 26th June 1954, p5.

Dr Foon Kee – well known Chinese citizen of early Wagga Wagga.

Chinatown

Chinatown was an area at the bottom of Fitzmaurice Street where Wagga Wagga's Chinese population, along with their residences and shops, were concentrated. It was within the section of Fitzmaurice Street that lay between Kincaid and Crampton Streets.

A description of the area in 1887-1888, by John H. Skudder, firstly described the premises on the eastern side of the street: At the corner of Kincaid and Fitzmaurice stood the Prince of Wales hotel [incorrectly identified as the Terminus by Skudder]. This was a weatherboard building occupied by Henry Croaker. Travelling north, a billiard room adjoined, then followed Tattersall's Hotel kept by John Manton. Next came the Chinese section – Harry Kong Fat, Dr Foon Kee, the bank which did a good trade in tickets (Chinese lottery/gambling), Charlie Sin Lee Gee's fruit and vegetable store, followed by the Chinese Masonic Hall and temple. These were followed by Mrs Purcell's properties – the Golden Fleece hotel, residences, and a shop.

On the western side of the street at the corner of Crampton and Fitzmaurice was the Bridge hotel kept by Michael Byrnes. Next to this was, *“more of Chinatown, a row of weatherboard buildings comprising fruit shop, laundries, etc., and then the old weatherboard Squatter's Hotel. Adjoining this was a two storeyed brick building owned by Chinese. Well remembered is Sin Gee who married the Chinese woman. He had a ticket store here. Next was Mrs. Johnstone's bakery. This shop was kept by her son, Harry. Two more weatherboard shops, a butchery and the shop of Howard, the boot repairer, brings us to the Home Hotel at the corner.”*¹⁸

Opium was readily available in Chinatown and police raids and arrests were common. In one such instance on 27th September 1923 a woman, Florence Emma Lelliott [or Elliot], a twenty one year old domestic, was found unconscious in front of Foon Kee's premises. She was taken to hospital and found to be suffering from, *“morphia poisoning.”* An empty bottle labelled, *“paregoric”* [a medicine consisting of opium flavoured with camphor, aniseed, and benzoic acid, formerly used to treat diarrhoea and coughing in children] was found near her unconscious body and was presumed to have been the cause of her illness.¹⁹ Florence had appeared in court a week earlier charged with stealing three £1 notes from a fellow domestic at the Pastoral Hotel, where they both worked. She pleaded guilty and was fined £6 or three months in in gaol. This was her second conviction.²⁰

There was no evidence to suggest that Foon Kee bore any responsibility for the above tragedy, but his premises were in the area known as Chinatown and opium was commonly available. Florence was charged with *“attempted suicide,”* and appeared in court on the 4th October 1923. She pleaded guilty but was released on condition she go into a Salvation Army Home, which she agreed to.²¹

The numbers of Chinese in Australia was impacted by government legislation and their population in Wagga Wagga, like the rest of Australia, declined with time, to the extent that when the Mayor, Alderman H. Oates, met with Mr Foon Kee, in February 1925, to ask if the Chinese residents could assist with the Wagga District Hospital Easter Carnival procession. Foon Kee pointed out that, *“scarcely any of the Chinese of the town were under sixty years of age, and could therefore not be expected to take a very active part in such a display.”* He did though indicate that they would assist in other ways.²²

¹⁸ Daily Advertiser. 12th October 1938, p14.

¹⁹ Daily Advertiser. 28th September 1923, p2.

²⁰ Daily Advertiser. 15th September 1923, p4.

²¹ Daily Advertiser. 5th October 1923, p2.

²² Daily Advertiser. 24th February 1925, p2.

Dr Foon Kee – well known Chinese citizen of early Wagga Wagga.

In 1883, Sub-Inspector Brennan, of the NSW Police, presented a report that had been commissioned by the state government, detailing the condition of various Chinese camps in the colony. The largest of these was at Narandera and the next biggest was at Wagga Wagga. The population of the latter was said to consist of one hundred and ninety four Chinese, six European married women, one Chinese married woman, sixteen children and seven prostitutes – a total of two hundred and twenty three people. Their occupations were: shop keeping (12), opium shops (13), gardeners (30), lottery room proprietors (6), fruit dealers (6), labourers and ticket sellers (124). The report claimed that it was the usual practice for a couple of prominent Chinese to own or lease the majority of premises, and for them to then sublease to their fellow countrymen. Education was seen as important by the Chinese and of the sixteen children present, five attended the public school, two had received a “fair education,” and the other nine were not of school age.



Above: South Wagga Wagga town map showing location of Chinatown.

Dr Foon Kee – well known Chinese citizen of early Wagga Wagga.

The Inspector was not impressed with the living conditions in general, reporting as follows:

“All the camps visited are situated on the banks or near to the banks of the rivers mentioned, on flats; no natural drainage, and no artificial means appear to have been employed to carry off stagnant waters or putrid substances which accumulate around all camps, and which are so well calculated to generate fevers. The wonder therefore is that more sickness does not prevail in hot weather amongst persons residing in the camp. The camps at Wagga Wagga, Albury, Hay, and Deniliquin are situated within the municipality of the respective townships, yet their surroundings do not present any noticeable features which would indicate that the Chinese themselves, the owners of the property, or the municipal authorities had taken any steps to improve in a sanitary point of view the condition of those places. The sanitary condition of the Wagga Wagga camp is extremely bad, as in addition to the absence of drainage the water closets are allowed to become neglected, and as a consequence in hot weather the effluvium which those places give forth is sickening - the houses for the most part are good, and the sleeping accommodation fairly decent and sufficient - some of the rooms attached to the cookshop are divided into tiers of shelves, with a passage of about 3 feet between, and when an influx of Chinese takes place from the country all the shelves are used as beds, and consequently the air space necessary for five men would be occupied by at least 20. The same may be said in general terms of all the camps visited - no drainage of consequence, rooms too small, and maze-like in arrangement, ventilation defective, and neglect of water-closets. The buildings at the Albury camp are decayed, dilapidated, and their interior displays the least comfort and the worst accommodation of all the camps inspected. There are in each of the camps, however, a few nicely furnished rooms occupied by some well-to-do Chinese or some married Chinese, but they are few compared with the many tenements which, in hot weather, must breathe pestilence because of the neglect of all hygienic law.”

The report blamed the majority of the problems that arose at the camps on the European wives and prostitutes stating that, *“There were 37 prostitutes residing in the five camps when inspected, whose ages were all between 19 and 30, but on some occasions the camps contain double that number. It is those females and most of the disreputable married women already alluded to who are the principal cause of all the disturbance, robberies, and crimes which have transformed the Chinese camps into dens of immorality.”*

The report opined that nearly all of the Chinese smoked opium, including the European women, and that the cost of the habit kept many of them poor. Gambling was endemic, which also contributed to keeping most of the Chinese poor.

The Inspector presented data showing that for a two year period ending 31st October 1883, the Wagga Wagga Police had made 192 prosecutions for offences related to Chinatown. Of these 44 were Europeans, 108 European females, and 40 Chinese. This information reinforced the opinion of the Inspector that the Chinese themselves were not responsible for the majority of offences that occurred in the camps.

The following two pages detail the owners and occupiers of the various allotments encompassing Chinatown, as sourced from the Wagga Wagga Municipal Council rate books for the period 1870-1908.

Section 4 > period 1870-1881

Section 5 > period 1870-1881

Crampton Street

Allot. 9	Bridge Hotel – brick. Owned by Thomas Turvey
Allot. 8	Bridge Hotel – brick. Owned by Thomas Turvey
Allot. 7	Brick cottage – residence of Thomas Turvey Opium shop – wood & bark. Brick cottage – surgery & residence of Ah Mie All lots owned by Turvey
Allot.6	Hut – owned by Thomas Turvey
Allot.5	Initially a building site owned by Thomas Townsend. Owned by Quong family by 1878 and they erected a wood and iron store by 1880.
Allot.4	Squatters Hotel in 1870 but cordial manufactory and residence in 1878. Owned by John James Ryan in 1878.
Allot. 3	2 x brick buildings. Initially let as residences and then as lodging houses. Owned by Joseph Rich.
Allot. 2	1 x Brick cottage 1 x solicitors office 1 x wooden bakery and dwelling 1 x w/board boarding house 1 x brick & wood store Various owners and occupiers. A busy allotment
Allot.1	Originally the Bank of NSW then a shop and then the Home hotel. Owned by Daniel Boon and then Rebecca Boon when a hotel.

FITZMAURICE STREET

Allot. 1	2 x brick cottages and a weatherboard shop. Golden Fleece Hotel erected c.1878
Allot. 2	Weatherboard shop belonging to James Gormly
Allot. 3	Weatherboard and shingle boarding house belonging to Susannah Brown
Allot. 4	Shop and two dwellings – all wooden. Owned by William Scissons.
Allot. 5	Wood shop with dwelling. Owned by Matt Best
Allot. 6	Weatherboard and iron shop with dwelling. Owned and occupied by Chinese tenants. Primarily Mr Ah Yoo.
Allot. 7	Wood and bark smithy – occupying allotments 7 & 8. Owned by George Talbot
Allot. 8	Wood and bark smithy – occupying allotments 7 & 8. Owned by George Talbot
Allot. 9	2 x brick shops with dwellings. One of these becomes Tattersall’s Hotel. Owned by Thomas Darlow initially and then William Walsh.
Allot. 10	Prince of Wales Hotel. Weatherboard building. Owned by Henry Croaker

KINCAID STREET

Above: Details of owner/occupants of sections 4 and 5 in town of South Wagga Wagga as sourced from the Wagga Wagga Rate Books 1870-1908. Chinatown was concentrated in the middle of this block, on both sides of Fitzmaurice Street.

Section 4 > period 1905-1908

Section 5 > period 1905-1908

Crampton Street

Allot. 9	Bridge Hotel – brick. Owned by Wildman’s Estate.
Allot. 8	Bridge Hotel – brick. Owned by Wildman’s Estate.
Allot. 7	1 x brick shop 1 x brick residence Owned by Charles Alfred Cannon. [These appear to have been spread across allot’s 6, 7 & 8]
Allot.6	Brick shop and residence. Owned by Charles Alfred Cannon and let to Sarah Ah Kem
Allot.5	A variety of wooden dwellings. Owned by Mrs Choy – Rate books list ten tenants. All Chinese. [May have been a single building split into units]
Allot.4	Squatters Hotel – brick. Owned by Patrick Moran
Allot. 3	2 x brick shops with residences plus 1 x wood shop with dwelling. All owned by Johanna Sar Sin and let to Chinese tenants.
Allot. 2	2 x brick shops with residence. One owned by Henry Johnstone the other by John Lennon(?)
Allot.1	Home Hotel plus 3 x brick shops with dwellings. All owned by Henry Johnstone but let to various people.

FITZMAURICE STREET

Allot. 1	Golden Fleece Hotel – brick Owned by Julia Purcell
Allot. 2	2 x Brick shop and residence. Owned by Julia Purcell
Allot. 3	Wooden hall belonging to the Chinese Society.
Allot. 4	Shop and two dwellings – all wooden. Owned by Foon Kee
Allot. 5	2 x Wood shops with dwelling. Owned by Foon Kee.
Allot. 6	Brick shop & residence owned by Quong Fat
Allot. 7	Building lot and stable – across allot’s 7 & 8. Owned by George Talbot. Occupied by Michael Byrnes
Allot. 8	Building lot and stable – across allot’s 7 & 8. Owned by George Talbot. Occupied by Michael Byrnes
Allot. 9	Tattersall’s Hotel - brick. Owned by Michael Byrnes
Allot. 10	Prince of Wales Hotel - brick. Owned by James McClure and then James Lynam.

KINCAID STREET

Above: Details of owner/occupants of sections 4 and 5 in town of South Wagga Wagga as sourced from the Wagga Wagga Rate Books 1870-1908. Chinatown was concentrated in the middle of this block, on both sides of Fitzmaurice Street.