

I *Ghosts of the Past*

There are some things which possess form but are devoid of sound, as for instance jade and stones; others have sound but are without form, such as wind and thunder; others again have both form and sound, such as men and animals; and lastly, there is a class devoid of both, ghosts and spirits.

(Han Wen-Kung)

Do ghosts really exist or are they merely a projection of our own fears? A figment – or in the case of Chinese ghosts hailing from times of racial prejudice, a pigment – of the imagination? Chinese wisdom decrees that if you believe in them, they exist, and if you don't, they don't.

We have chosen to take an anthropological approach to the question in order to gain further insight into the mind-set of a community that helped lay the foundations of the state of Queensland. The Chinese prisoners executed at Boggo Road Gaol and other Queensland prisons – who, it must be said, were heavily outnumbered by European prisoners meeting with the same fate – brought with them their own beliefs and left us with the ghosts of their own Hell.

What's in a name?

The stories in this publication are based upon actual fact. Some of the names have been changed – not to protect the innocent, or even the guilty, but because nobody knew what the true names of the Chinese prisoners actually were.

Chinese family names are placed before given names and this often led to confusion between the two. A clear example of this is the name of the Chinese vegetable gardener Jimmy Ah Sue who was executed at Brisbane Gaol in 1880 (cf. Chapter 12). In Cantonese names the diminutive 'Ah' is placed before the given name, which in Jimmy's case has taken on the guise of a family name. What is more, the names

recorded on prisoners' sheets and elsewhere would have been romanized' according to a subjective interpretation of what to the untrained ear must have been completely unintelligible syllables. As a result we find a man hanged at the Brisbane Gaol in 1852 variously identified as An, Ang, An Gee and Angee (cf. Chapters 4 and 13).

In days gone by the Chinese accumulated a whole string of names during their lifetime and even after death. They had a family name, a generation name corresponding to a predetermined character in a generation poem, a given name matched to their horoscope, an alias (which boys could choose on becoming adults), and a style or courtesy name to be used in place of their given name. Posthumous courtesy names could also be used to honour the deceased. To these men of many names the conversion of a given name into a family name – which was then often discarded altogether and replaced with a Western one – would have been less of a problem than it is now to descendants trying to track down their origins. Rather, it would have been an earnest attempt to be like everybody else and fit in.

II *The Ancestors*

The first person from the Flowery Land whose presence in Australia is attested was a carpenter by the name of Ahuto who arrived in 1803. The diminutive 'Ah' in his name would indicate that he was Cantonese. The next name that crops up is that of Mak Sai Ying (John Shying) who between 1818 and 1829 worked the land and in the following years kept *The Lion* inn in Parramatta. We also have the names of four Chinese from Canton who arrived at Sydney on the *Ephemina* in 1827. Three of them, Ahchun, Ahfoo and Ahlong, were employed by T.G. Pitman of Sydney, and the fourth, Ahchoey, a carpenter, was employed by G. Hewitt of Parramatta. This brief list of 'ancestors' also includes three domestic servants employed in New South Wales in 1821 by John and Elizabeth Macarthur.