

# TRASH OR TREASURE

*reconnecting our past*

Kira Brown

My talk is about the collection of family material that I've inherited from my *Chinese* ancestors. It addresses how I've tried to make sense of the items and my growing awareness of their value. I've come to understand the need for the collection's preservation and how important it is to share and make my material accessible to a wider community.

I inherited objects, photographs, documents and correspondence relating to: mining, personal effects, household items, family portraits and photographs depicting life and business in the Tingha and New England region. There are albums of postcards and greeting cards and letters of personal and business correspondence.

*I apologise in advance for my mispronunciation of Chinese words or names*

The title of my talk is  
**Trash or Treasure: Reconnecting our Past**

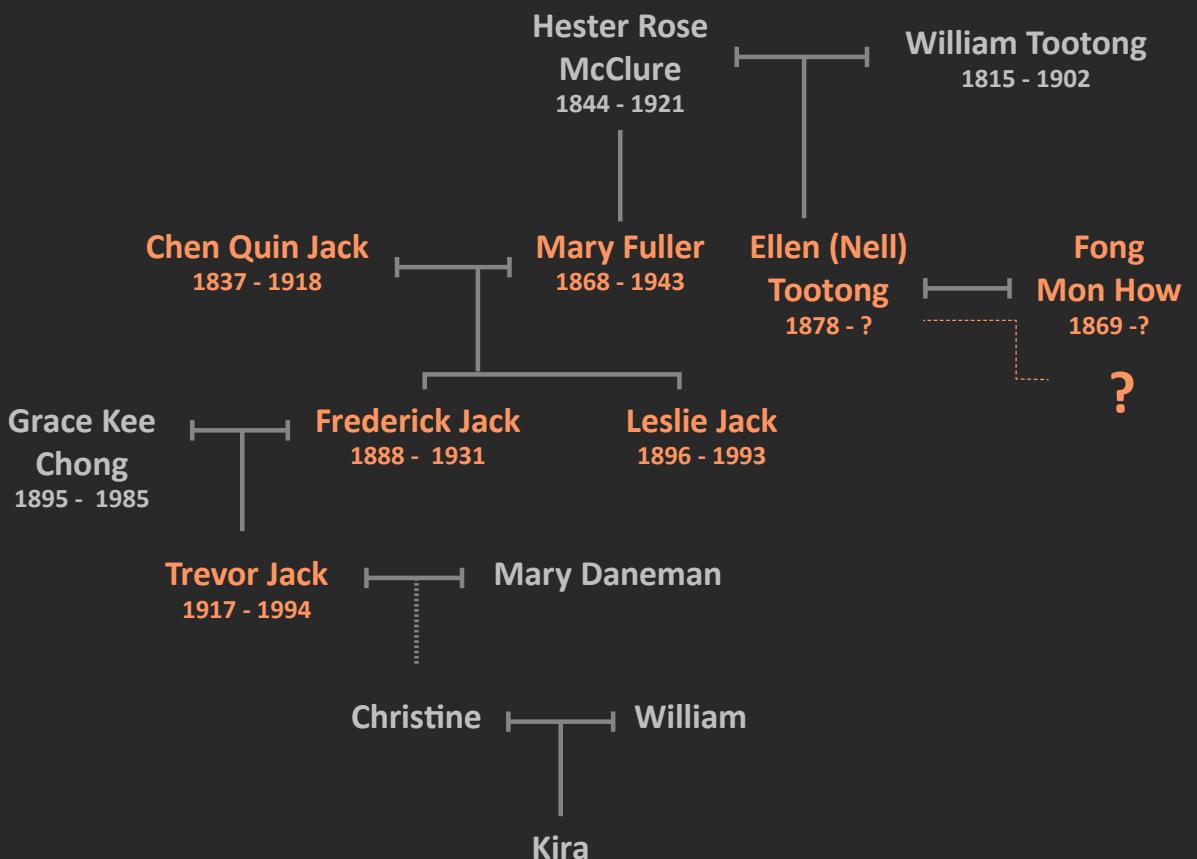
I'm a 5<sup>th</sup> generation Australian; Anglo-Celtic and *Chinese* on my mother's side. Anglo-Celtic on my father's side.

I've often been told: "**You don't look very Chinese**"

Here is the relevant\* family tree which outlines my maternal Chinese ancestors. The individuals highlighted in orange are the family members I'll be talking about.

They are: Quin Jack - our progenitor, his wife Mary Fuller, their children: Fred and Les and Quin's grandchild Trevor - my grandfather.

Also, Mary's half-sister - Ellen Tootong, her husband Fong Mon How and one other.



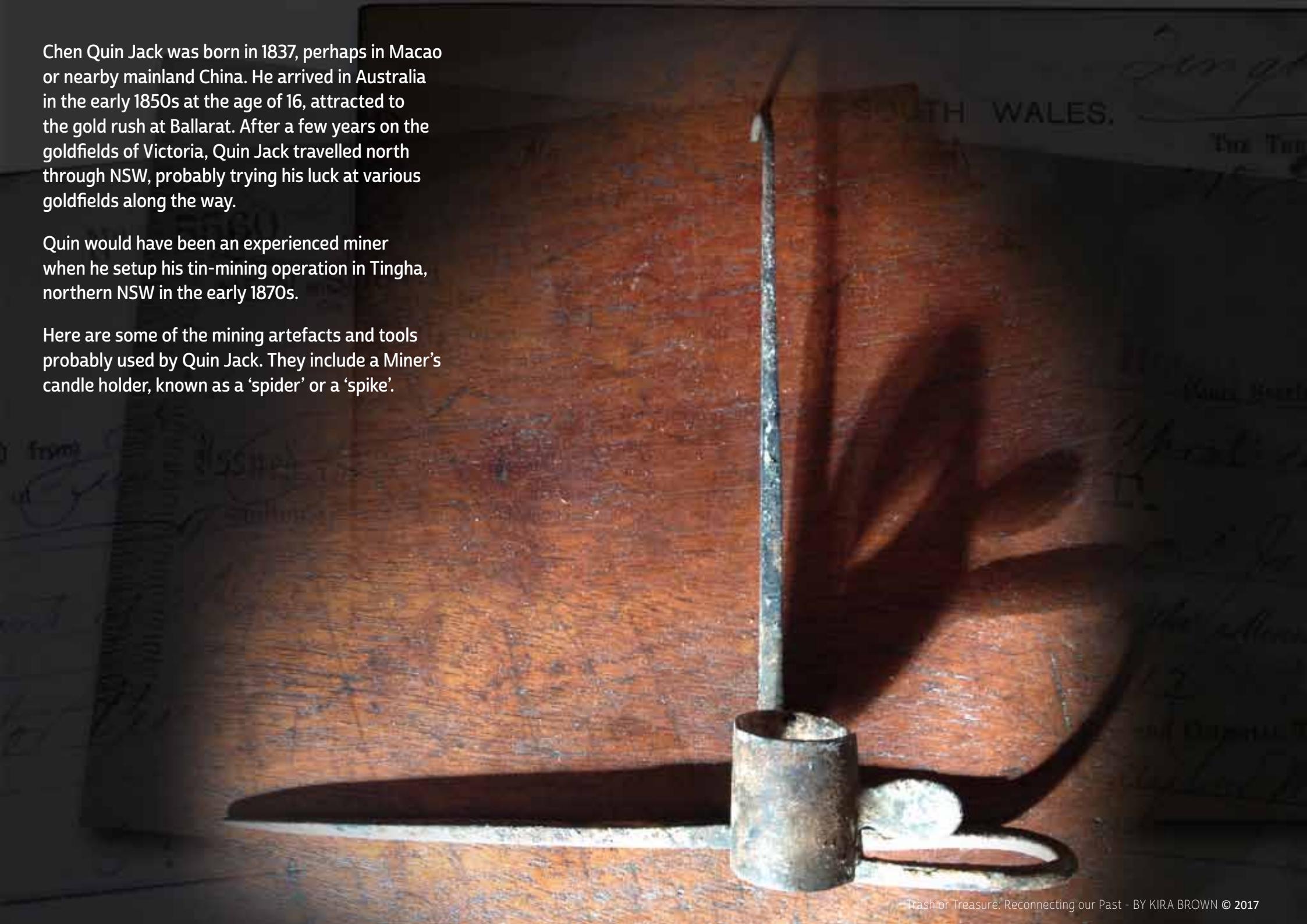
\*PLEASE NOTE THIS IS A SIMPLIFIED FAMILY TREE

PRESENTATION BY:	<b>KIRA BROWN</b>
FOR:	<b>Dragon Tails 2017: Hopes, Dreams and Realities</b>
DATE:	<b>23-26 November 2017</b>

Chen Quin Jack was born in 1837, perhaps in Macao or nearby mainland China. He arrived in Australia in the early 1850s at the age of 16, attracted to the gold rush at Ballarat. After a few years on the goldfields of Victoria, Quin Jack travelled north through NSW, probably trying his luck at various goldfields along the way.

Quin would have been an experienced miner when he setup his tin-mining operation in Tingha, northern NSW in the early 1870s.

Here are some of the mining artefacts and tools probably used by Quin Jack. They include a Miner's candle holder, known as a 'spider' or a 'spike'.



Also shown are samples of tin ore and iron pyrites, a fine timber sieve with handmade nails and a small vial of mercury.



This is a collection of mining leases, there are 27 in total. There are 2 with Quin Jack's name as 'Ah Jack'.

No. 5560

NEW SOUTH WALES.



Ah Jack

from

of Quin

Shillings and

Post Office

Zongha

THE TREASURY,

15th Jan<sup>st</sup> 1915.

Pounds

Pence Sterling, for

ent of General Tax (66ac) No 695.

Year ending 12th January 1915

5:0:0

Entd.

for the Colonial Treasurer.

These receipts are possibly the earliest documents I have that connect directly to Quin Jack, and date from 1887-89. There is a reference to Tin sold and the amount.

Keep

Jan 2nd

8½ Pounds

10. 0. 11

Apr 1/1887. £14. 2. 9

3 - 0 - 13 Lbs of Tin

£12. 9. 0

WL

2/2/88

Feb 6th

£14. 2. 9

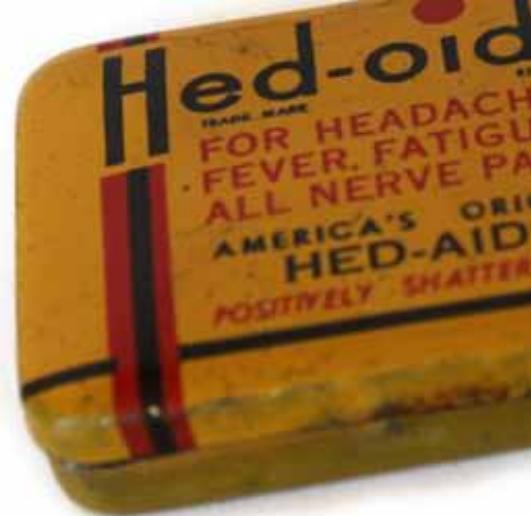
Quin Jack  
Les's Father  
& my Dad

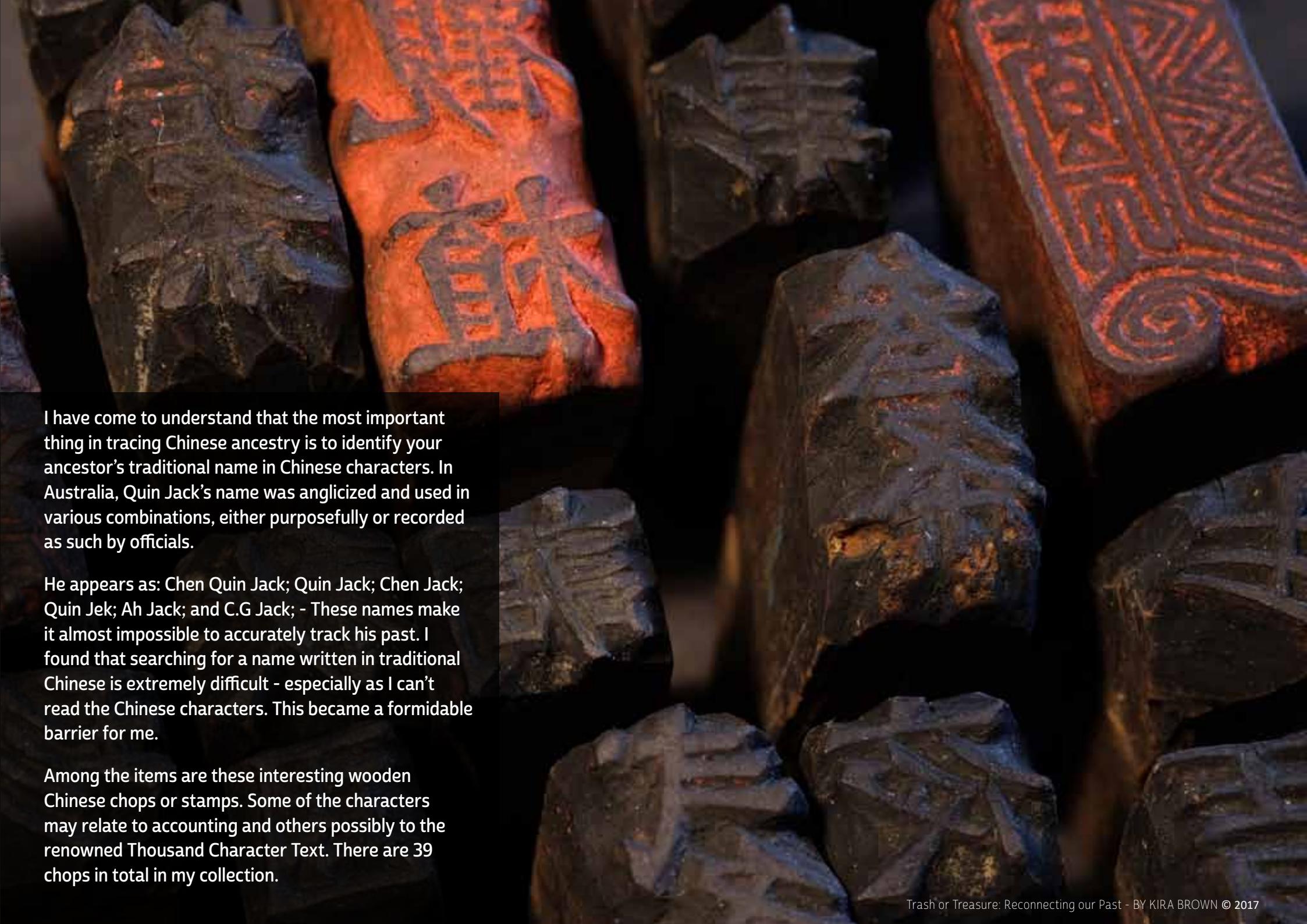
This receipt  
over 100 yrs  
old

5 - 3 - 24 £22. 19. 0  
Dec 24<sup>th</sup> 1887

WL

Quin Jack has always been a bit of an enigma, we don't have any photographs of him – But I think we have some of his gold teeth, which is evidence that he must have had some success on the gold fields. It begs the question of who reclaimed the gold teeth after Quin's death.





I have come to understand that the most important thing in tracing Chinese ancestry is to identify your ancestor's traditional name in Chinese characters. In Australia, Quin Jack's name was anglicized and used in various combinations, either purposefully or recorded as such by officials.

He appears as: Chen Quin Jack; Quin Jack; Chen Jack; Quin Jek; Ah Jack; and C.G Jack; - These names make it almost impossible to accurately track his past. I found that searching for a name written in traditional Chinese is extremely difficult - especially as I can't read the Chinese characters. This became a formidable barrier for me.

Among the items are these interesting wooden Chinese chops or stamps. Some of the characters may relate to accounting and others possibly to the renowned Thousand Character Text. There are 39 chops in total in my collection.

Recently, I met sisters; Brenda, Cathy and Gaynor Wong in Orange, who happen to be Chinese speakers and were able to decode one of the chops. It turned out to be a signature. It was, in fact, Chen Quin Jack's traditional Chinese name.

Learning the correct pronunciation is another challenge for me as birth location and different dialects play an important role...

I've been told by Ely Finch our illustrious translator, that his name could be:

*Chan Kwun Chik, or*

*Chan gwin-tsack, or*

*Ten Gwin Cak*

Finding the key to Quin Jack's Chinese name made me much more aware of the potential importance of each item in the collection.



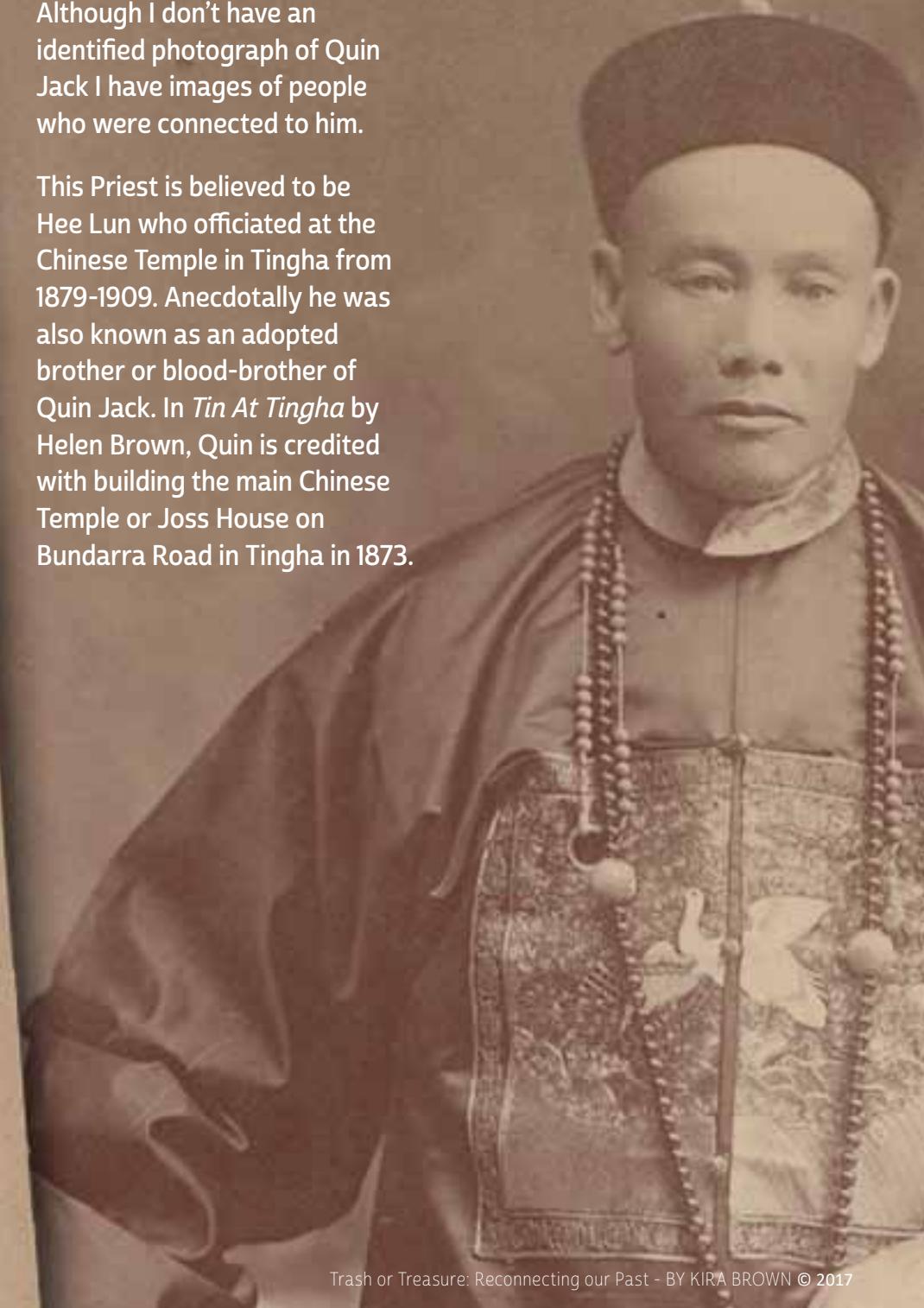


The object that is probably the most personal to Quin Jack is this Abacus. According to my great-great uncle Les this Abacus was owned and used extensively by Quin Jack. The configuration of this particular abacus – two beads on the upper deck and 5 on the lower deck – was a style used up to the 1850s. The abacus may even have been a family heirloom at the time Quin Jack left China.



Although I don't have an identified photograph of Quin Jack I have images of people who were connected to him.

This Priest is believed to be Hee Lun who officiated at the Chinese Temple in Tingha from 1879-1909. Anecdotally he was also known as an adopted brother or blood-brother of Quin Jack. In *Tin At Tingha* by Helen Brown, Quin is credited with building the main Chinese Temple or Joss House on Bundarra Road in Tingha in 1873.



Among the many photos in my collection are some documenting the Chinese-owned businesses in the New England area. One of these is the Wing Hing Long in Tingha. Besides mining, Quin Jack is reputed to have built or helped build the Wing Hing Long Store. Today the building is a museum and houses many cultural and historic objects of Tingha.



One of the proprietors of the Wing Hing Long was Charlie Hing, also known as Kwok Mon Hing. I have postcards and envelopes addressed to and from him to other family members. Correspondence also comes from the Sincere Company, and the Wai Yuen Bank - later renamed the Wing On Bank. According to *The Big White Lie* by John Fitzgerald, start-up capital for these international corporations was raised through businesses and families in Australia.



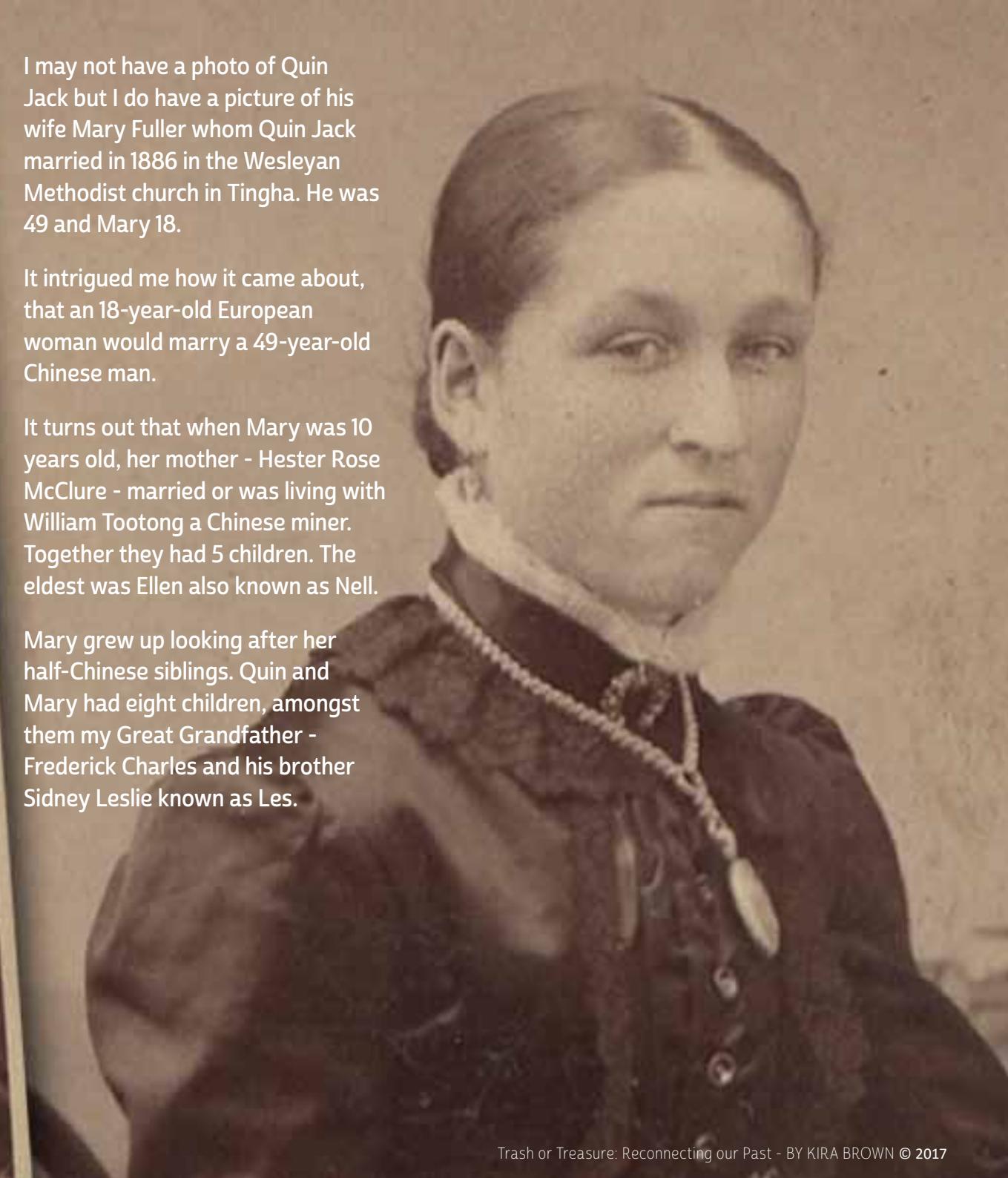


I may not have a photo of Quin Jack but I do have a picture of his wife Mary Fuller whom Quin Jack married in 1886 in the Wesleyan Methodist church in Tingha. He was 49 and Mary 18.

It intrigued me how it came about, that an 18-year-old European woman would marry a 49-year-old Chinese man.

It turns out that when Mary was 10 years old, her mother - Hester Rose McClure - married or was living with William Tootong a Chinese miner. Together they had 5 children. The eldest was Ellen also known as Nell.

Mary grew up looking after her half-Chinese siblings. Quin and Mary had eight children, amongst them my Great Grandfather - Frederick Charles and his brother Sidney Leslie known as Les.





This photograph is of the Tingha Public School in 1899 and has the inscription that three of the Jack siblings are in the picture: Ethel, Cecil and Billy Jack.

Quin Jack continued working the mining leases at Tingha into his 70s - this postcard is dated September 6, 1908 from his daughter Sylvia to her mother Mary Fuller "...Poor dad he's getting pretty ancient now ... I hope Billy's Reef will last".

Billy was one of Quin's sons.

Quin Jack died in 1918 at the age of 82 and is buried in the Chinese section at Tingha cemetery. His Obituary stated ... 'The funeral was largely attended, brother Chinese Masons being well represented.'

By the end of his life Quin Jack had, after coming to Australia from China, assimilated into Australian Chinese culture. He had converted to Christianity and had links with the Chinese Masonic Society.



#### The Miner's Dream of Home. I.

It's ten weary years since I left Englnnd's shore,  
In a far distant country to roam,  
How I long to return to my native land,  
To my friends and the old folks at home.  
Last night as I slumbered I had a strange dream,  
One that seemed to bring distant friends near,  
I dreamt of Old England the land of my birth,  
To the hearts of her sons ever dear.

THE RAPID PHOTO PRINTING CO., LTD., LONDON, S. E. 1.  
Sept 6. 8.  
Dear Mother  
Your ever  
Welcome letter to hand  
& few days ago  
Glad to hear you are  
quite well and hope  
This will find Dad  
Better yes Poor old <sup>the Andrew Jackson Head</sup> DAD  
dad he is getting  
Pretty Ancient Now.  
we must get brabing  
I hope Billy's Reef <sup>Printed</sup>  
will last they

Among the surviving objects probably belonging to Quin Jack are this early collection of Chinese medicine bottles.



As well as this opium tin. I've come to understand that it's rare to find them in this good condition with the labels mostly intact.



And there's also a small pipe ...not sure yet what it was used to smoke as it's so small. Possibly tobacco or opium?





Mary Fuller's half-sister, Ellen Tootong was also known as Nell. She was born in 1878 and was sister-in-law to Quin. She's a significant figure as a large portion of the collection appears to have originated from her life in Tingha and her travels abroad.

In the 1890s Ellen met Fong Mon How also known as Jimmy in Tingha.

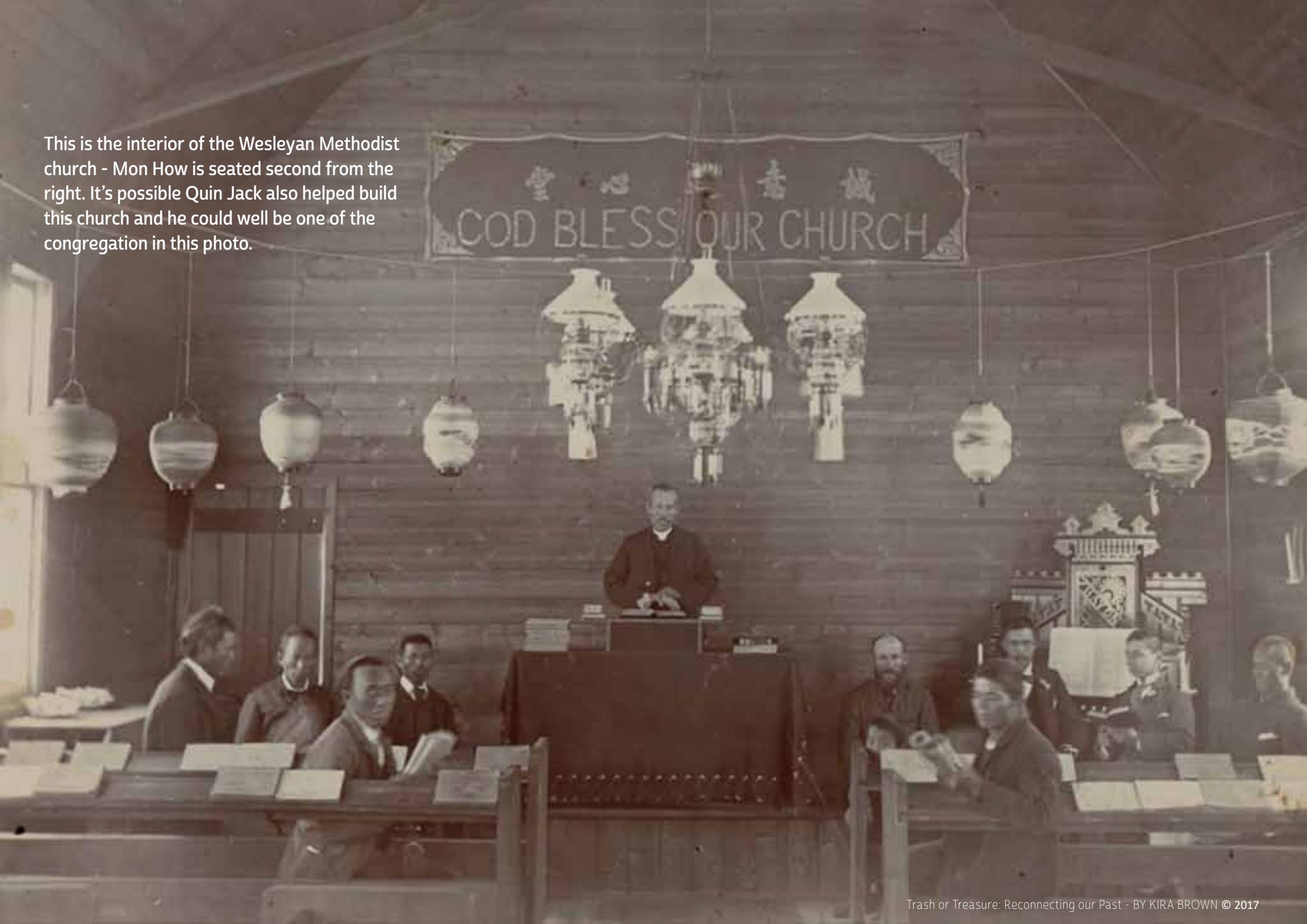
It's interesting to note that Ellen who is half-Chinese, is photographed in traditional Chinese dress, while Mon How who is Chinese-born, has chosen Western dress. He appears with a studio prop, this state-of-the-art bicycle - adding to his prestige.





Ellen and Fong Mon How were married in 1899, most likely in the Tingha Wesleyan Methodist church. Mon How was well connected with the early congregation lead by Chinese-born Reverend Joseph Tear Tack.

This is the interior of the Wesleyan Methodist church - Mon How is seated second from the right. It's possible Quin Jack also helped build this church and he could well be one of the congregation in this photo.



This interesting and very formal document written by Mon How to the Minister for Lands Sydney is a request to exhume the bodies of Ah Sayer from Tingha cemetery and Sha Tin from Inverell for repatriation to China.

There are tales that gold was smuggled out together with the remains. The Chinese characters, refer to facilitating exhumations.

the Hon Ministers for lands  
Sydney

Min Chow

I have the honor to apply for permission to exhume the bodies of Ah Sayer buried in Tingha Cemetery and Sha Tin buried in the Inverell Cemetery. I have inclosed certified copies of the death of each

Ah Sayer  
Sha Tin

I have the honor to be  
Sir  
your obedient servant

H. Mon How  
90 Wing Hing Long St  
Tingha

Ellen Mon How, while still married to Fong Mon How, left Australia in 1907 and travelled to Hong Kong and Macao. She took up a teaching position at the Ming San School in Macao.

We don't know what prompted this move, perhaps she was involved with missionary work.

However while I was looking through the postcard albums, this tiny passport-size photo, which had been tucked secretly behind one of the postcards suddenly dropped out.





This is Ellen and the dashing Harry H Cheong  
... another teacher perhaps?

Wishing  
you many  
happy returns  
of the  
day.



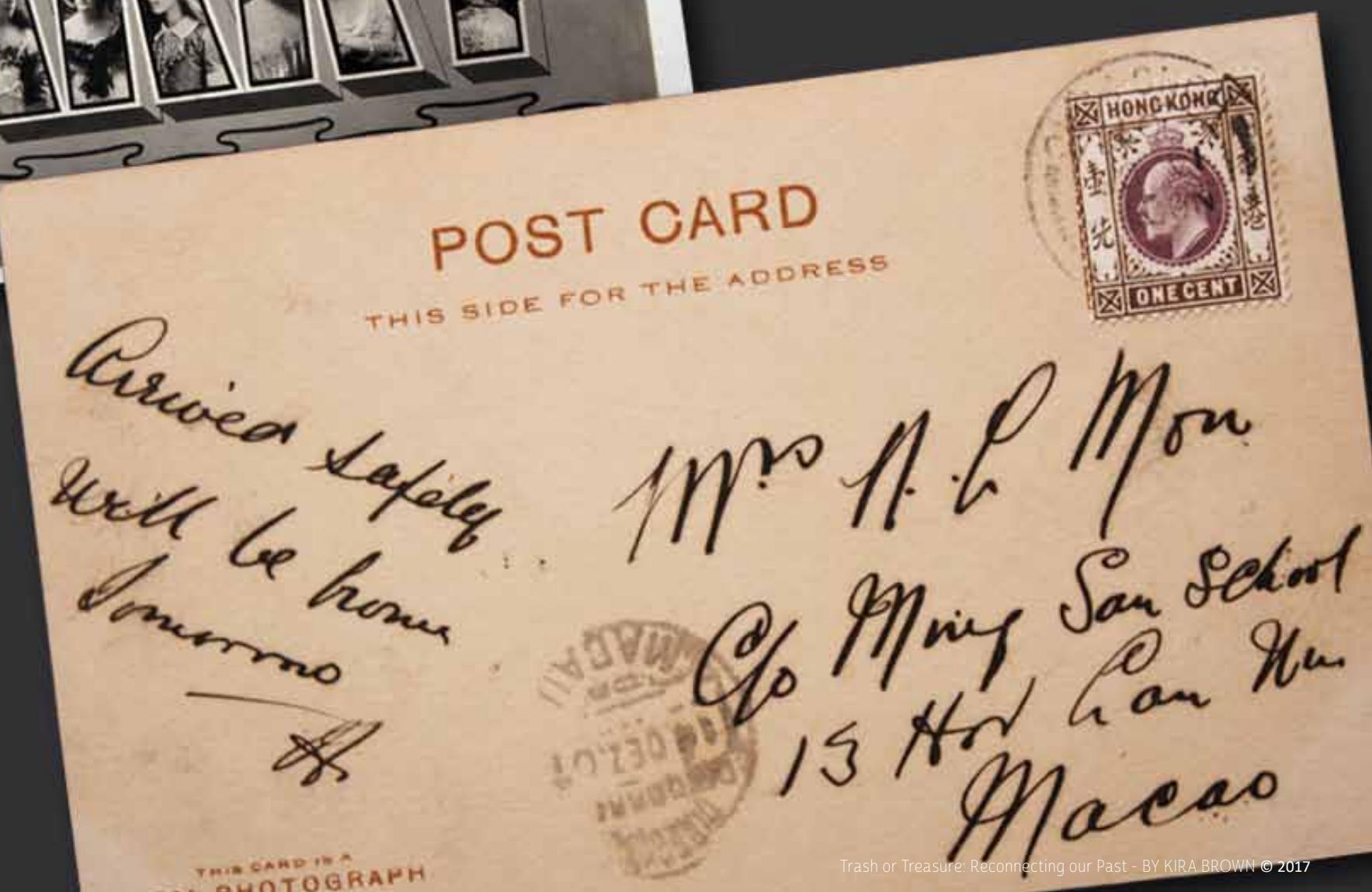
From the following correspondence it seems likely that they had started a love affair.

Here the heart on the front of this Post Card says it all...





This one simply emphasizes the name “**HARRY**”





Meet me at  
P. O. corner  
at 3 PM if possible

Mrs. M.  
Co Mrs. James  
49 Pottinger St.  
Hong Kong

TH. E. L. SERIE 994



*"Meet me at P.O. corner at 3PM if possible - HH"*

Interesting how one could depend on the punctuality of the Hong Kong Post Office.

Do these postcards remind anyone of a modern day text message?

There were postcards suitable for any romantic occasion.

*"Trust Me"*



Postcard. Briefkaart.  
Union postale universelle. Unione postale universale.  
Всемирная почтовая союз. Письмо. Открытое письмо.  
Karta korespondencyjna. Korespondenční lístek.  
Cartão postal. Brefkort. Brevkort. Tarjeta postal.

For the scene I've drawn so well

Took me back to sweet & swell  
From the picture then I turned  
As my heart so fondly yearn'd  
For the other picture was so  
far away

And I long once more to be  
With my swell a'ir the sea

*Mrs. A. L. Leeson*

*Macao*



Meet me at  
( inscribed) '7PM'

7PM



Besupianovská karta  
Karta korespondencyjna.  
Cartão postal. Brevkort. Korespondenční lístek.  
Brevkort. Tarjeta postal.

Wishing you a  
Prosperous  
and  
Happy New Year  
Harry

Mrs. J. S. Colton

Moaca



Levelező-Lap — Postkarte — Correspondenzkarte  
Cartolina postale — Carte postale — Briefkarte  
Union postale universelle - Weltpostverein - Unione postale universale  
Tarjeta Postal — Postcard — Cartão Postal

Fix Bayonets Charge - H.H.  
Mrs. N. L. Moon  
Ch. Ching San School  
13 Hoa Lan Hu.  
Macao.  
China.

*"Fix Bayonets Charge - HH" ...*

Could Harry be making an erotic reference here?

With his best regards to you all.

POSTCARD  
UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE

Hong Kong  
June, 8th, 1911

For Address.

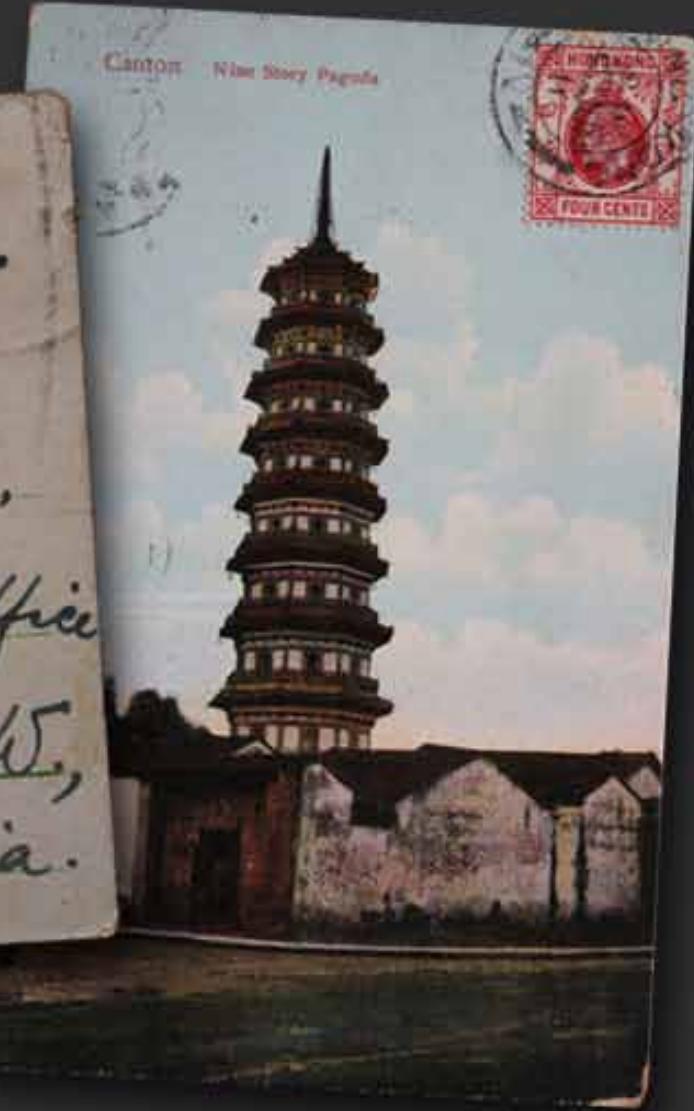
Dear Mr. How,

Received your letter  
of the 8th May, 1911. Very  
pleased to hear from  
you. Very busy at  
present. Will write  
a letter (not very long)  
by next mail & talk  
all about ~~arem~~  
skirts (those delight-  
ful designers. They  
were indeed serving  
God when they designed  
~~arem~~ those ~~arem~~ skirts  
Yours sincerely, W. J. W.

Mr. A. M. How,

of Lingha Post Office

Lingha, N. S.W.,  
Australia.



Among the items there are interesting references to fashions of the day, momentous current political events as well as catastrophic natural events, which had an impact on everyone.

This first postcard relates to fashion:

Hong Kong June 8<sup>th</sup> 1911, sent to Tingha

*"Dear Mrs How, ... talk all about Harem skirts those delightful designers. They were indeed serving God when they designed those Harem skirts".*

Harem skirts were introduced to Western female fashion in 1910, to reinvent and 'liberate'.

This letter refers to the social effects of the  
revolutionary uprising of 1911 that overthrew the  
Qing imperial dynasty:

Canton, Dec 21<sup>st</sup> 1911, sent to Ellen Mon How in  
Tingha,

“...Well Dear Nell to change the subject. China  
is in a terrible state now since the revolutionists  
started the revolt. It is not a bit safe to walk  
the streets here in Canton. There is always  
someone getting shot in the street for one  
offence or another and besides lookers on  
sometimes get shot or those passing by. I never  
go[t] out now much unless I can't get out of it.  
We are not living in the city now as it was not  
safe there when the revolutionists started the  
uprising so we removed over the water ...”

4  
her letter on as I have no time now  
for Xmas. tell her I received her letter & can  
not get things ready for same. Canton  
Dec 21<sup>st</sup> 1911

you how delighted I was to hear  
is such a long time since I  
have had a letter from you. I sent you five letters  
since you you & Walter sent the hats home but I  
did not get a reply so I was wondering if you had  
left Lingha & I was not game to send cards to you  
for Xmas so am sending them now. I also received the  
cards you sent quite safely & have gave the others  
to you because the letter you said



The N. S. Rosario & Hospital Ship Hygiene of Sum  
of the 18th of September

don't forget come over for next sundays  
trip

Dear Mrs Moon, I received your  
very welcome letter yesterday we were  
all glad to hear from you. Will you try  
& come over we are going on sunday for  
an outing in the Launch don't fail to come  
& stop a few days then Willis will go home  
with you. I heard from Mrs M. E. Good  
last week she sent Ada a lovely blue silk  
blouse. There was a typhoon here last Friday  
night did you feel it over there & last Thursday  
part of the Long Long Hotel fell & killed a  
lot of Chinese. Send you the paper  
with the account in it. Mrs Farmer can't get the  
patterns the girl has nine. Don't rely on her  
promises she is as bad as can be. Greeting  
you & all are well love to you dear Mrs Moon  
& kind regards to Mr. Ellis & wife & daughter  
Love from Ada Willis M. Jones & C. Your friend from

Typhoons - these extreme and sudden events -  
were often mentioned in the postcards and letters.

*"By the way how did you all fare in the typhoon  
Friday night, it was most terrible here. Write &  
tell us all about how you felt it, by the papers  
Macao fared very badly. Roll-on till we get the  
hell out of this cursed hole I'll be ready when you  
are, Your true chum Jessie ..."*

SECOND EDITION.

# TYphoon Edition

of

"SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST"

Full Report of Typhoon.  
July 27-28, 1908.



This commemorative publication on the 1908 Typhoon was sent to Nell.

*Dear Mrs Mon, ... There was a Typhoon here last Friday night did you feel it over there & Last Thursday part of the Hong Kong Hotel fell & killed a lot of Chinese I am sending you the papers with the account..."*

I now turn to Frederick, son of Quin Jack

My Great Grandfather Frederick Charles Jack was born in 1888 in Tingha, and spent his early life there. He moved to Glen Innes for employment in a Chinese general store, Kwong Sing's. It was there that Fred met a fellow employee, Esther Grace Kee Chong.

They married in 1916, and had 2 sons; first, Trevor my grandfather then Russell. While living in Inverell, Fred was employed in the store Hong Yuen as an ironmonger.





Fred Jack died tragically in 1931 while rescuing two people from drowning in the Mac-In-tyre River in Inverell. He was aged 42.

Both young Trevor and Russell witnessed the tragedy unfold.

Several news headlines reporting the event stated: Chinese Hero; Sacrificed His Life; and Deserved a VC.

Where many families experience a gradual drifting apart, this sudden and traumatic event contributed substantially to the disconnect with Fred's side of the family - the Chinese Tingha Jack's and our decedents.

From my perspective, the Tingha Jack's didn't seem to feature in our usual family gatherings around births, deaths and marriages... That is until the arrival of Fred's brother Les Jack.



Here is a photograph of a young Les Jack, son of Quin, of Tingha. He was born in 1896 and died in 1993.

At the age of 89, my Great-Great Uncle Sidney Leslie Jack or Uncle Les, came to live with my grandparents, Mary and Trevor Jack in Coonabarabran. I was about 12 at the time and we lived around the corner from them.

Uncle Les, a consummate accumulator, didn't just arrive with the usual suitcase; he brought with him a vast collection of family treasures. He had outlived most of his contemporaries, and everything had passed to him.

Uncle Les who was quite a character, quickly became an integrated part of our family and I was close to him.

I can remember when Halley's Comet was blazing across the sky one night in 1986, my grandparents dragged the by-now old Uncle Les from his bed to witness the event. ***"it was much better the first time"*** he said - which was way back in 1910!



PHOTOS OF LES JACK





PHOTO OF LES JACK



In his younger days Les had taken over the mining operation from his father Quin Jack. This photo shows Quin or Les Jack's party of miners and their workings around Tingha.

Les also traded in rough diamonds  
and gemstones. This is a list of  
diamonds he bought in 1930 - 31.

## Diamonds Bought 1930

Nov 3 <sup>rd</sup>	P. McNeil	7 diamonds	1 7/8 carats	£1 10 0
"	B. McNeil	3 diamonds	1 1/2 carats	£1 10 0
Nov 14 <sup>th</sup>	J. Page	21 diamonds	3 3/8 carats	£2 1 0
"	J. Cox	15 do	2 2/8 carats	£1 11 3
"	McNeil	9 stones	1 7/8 carats	£1 10 0
22 <sup>nd</sup>	A. McNeil	37 sets	12 carats	£10 10 0
23	A. G. Hines	8 sets	<u>2 carats</u>	£1 10 0
			25 1/8 carats	£20 2 0
"	J. McNeil	13 sets	4 3/4 carats	£4 0
"	G. Darby	9 sets	2 3/8 carats	£1 17 0
Dec 1 <sup>st</sup>	The Rose	112 sets	17 carats	£10 0 0
"	McNeil	6 sets	2 carats	£1 0 0
13 <sup>th</sup>	J. McNeil	21 sets	4 1/4 carats	£3. 3. 0
15 <sup>th</sup>	W. Baldwin	11 sets	1 3/4 carats	£1 1 0
"	J. McNeil	22 sets	7 1/2 carats	£5 4 9

P.456 373. Pte. A. Thurling  
A. Coy. 31 Gar. Btr.  
Broadmeadow.

Les.

Received registered parcel  
I am returning same accepting  
offer, of £3-0-0 per carat. for  
two big ones & £2-0-0 per carat  
small ones, making 35cts.  
a carat & 4 carat. off £2 per carat  
total value of £11.1.6.  
also enclosed two extra rough  
diamonds, which I'll allow  
to weigh value & buy.

forward, cash to above  
leaving to day  
Broadmeadow.

There are several letters of correspondence  
with diamond merchants and jewellers.

EST. MANUFACTURER  
AND SILVER-  
GILT OF HIGH-ART  
JEWELLERY

FLEGELTAUB . . .

CLOCKS. SILVER-  
GILT GOODS  
AND ALL PRECIOUS  
ONES . . .

ROYAL JEWELLER.

June 1st

Mr L. Jack.

P. O.

Tingha.

Dear Sir.

Your letter to hand also sapphires for  
pleasure in stating that two of the stones  
as desired and forwarded per post this a  
third stone is really not worth the cutt  
-fore returned same to you with the other  
In answer to your further enquiries we can  
you at a cost of 1/- per carat.

Thanking you for your favors and assuring  
attention at all times,



Finally, I come to Quin's Grandson - my grandfather Trevor Jack - of Inverell and Coonabarabran. He was born in 1917 and passed away in 1994.

Trevor grew up in Inverell. His early childhood was spent with the extended family still living in nearby Tingha. According to Trevor's account, in a transcript from an interview with Janis Wilton, he recalled the yearly Qingming festival which was celebrated in the local cemetery.

Offerings of food, perhaps rice and wine were presented in these tiny bowls.

He said "***A whole pig was roasted, which would attract quite a crowd of gawkers waiting for a feed***". Trevor felt worried that the non-Chinese onlookers would poke fun at them for taking food up to the cemetery to feed the dead. He reflected that he couldn't see much difference between what Chinese did, and other cultures taking fresh-cut flowers to grave sides when the dead couldn't smell them!



Trevor, a second-generation Chinese-Australian, contributed substantially to the war effort by joining 'Z' Special Unit. Initially as an Officer-Trainer and later as an Operative in the field. These are his dog-tags which he wore every day throughout the Second World War. There is also a tiny elephant attached to them, which was given to him as a good-luck charm by my grandmother Mary Daneman, who he had met during the war and married shortly after it ended.





This is a picture of their engagement ... Don't they make a handsome couple?



Trevor Jack died in 1994 and is survived by his wife Mary and their only daughter Christine, who are both here with us today.



# TRASH OR TREASURE

## *reconnecting our past*

**Kira Brown**

To summarise, I've been on a journey of uncovering my Chinese ancestry. It's been made particularly exciting through the inherited artefacts that I am now custodian of. In my research I have encountered difficulties in assessing and ascribing value to these inherited objects. I now believe that in the Chinese-Australia Migration Narrative, they could well be of important historical significance.

It has, at times, been frustrating and challenging, especially dealing with language and cultural barriers, but I've been fortunate to make connections with local and national researchers who have facilitated this task.

Through these contacts, I have begun to make my collection available to the wider community. This has greatly helped me to understand and appreciate their value. It has further emphasized the need to establish broader links with historians and researchers and contribute to fleshing-out our collective historical memory.

Thank you