

**CHEE GOON TONG (CHINESE MASONIC TEMPLE?)
CHURCH
FINN STREET, EMU POINT**

SURVEY DATE: 1991-2

AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION REGISTER: R

STUDY GRADING: A

CONSTRUCTION DATE: 1865c?

FIRST OWNER : CHINESE MASONIC SOCIETY



CITATION:

History

'The Chinese have an important place in the cultural heritage of Bendigo. We are very fortunate to still have one of their original places of worship as a memorial.

**BENDIGO & EAGLEHAWK HERITAGE STUDY-SIGNIFICANT SITES
GRAEME BUTLER & ASSOCIATES**

Once known as Emu Point, there was a large Chinese encampment here. Both it and the camp at Ironbark are now but distant memories. Still living are the descendants of those few Chinese who settled here and married.

The main altar is devoted to Kwan Gung, a Chinese General who lived c.300AD and a Buddhist altar is in the adjoining room. Many of the original fittings were destroyed before restoration began¹.

Other sources

The building was reputedly never used as a public Joss House but was erected by and for the Chinese Masonic Society². Over the main doorway are the words 'CHEE GOON TONG' (Chinese Masonic Hall) and at the sides are two long wooden panels containing appropriate poetic phrases for its masonic use. The doorways either side of the hall entry are for the caretaker and secondary hall entry, their tripartite nature reflecting the three spirits which arise from a death.

Erected in the 1860s, the temple was used by the Chinese Masonic Society for worship of the God, Kwan Gung³. Kuan Gung was a Chinese general who lived from 221-266A.D. and was the Patron Deity of the Manchu Dynasty⁴. To worshippers he was the wise judge, guide and protector and was believed to make men successful in their undertakings and courageous and daring.

Many Chinese people came to Bendigo after the discovery of gold in 1851. The majority of the Chinese immigrants came from Kuantung Province and were sent on contract or as indentured servants.

However, by the 1890s many remained as political refugees. The area known then as Emu Point had a large Chinese encampment, as did Ironbark. The 1854 census estimated there were 4000 Chinese people in the Bendigo area. 'Bendigo Advertiser' 9/12/1969 in NTA FN1949

There were at least four Joss Houses in the Bendigo area early this century, but all but the Emu Point one were destroyed by fire.

The building is constructed of timber and handmade bricks. It consists of three main sections; the main temple is in the centre with the Ancestral Temple on the right and a caretaker's residence on the left. Many of the original fittings have been destroyed.

The National Trust took over the 'Joss House' in the 1960s, leasing the land from the Commonwealth Government. It took the Central Victorian Branch of the Trust four years to complete the planning stage of the temple restoration, but the restored building was officially opened by Mr. R.W. Hamer on the 2nd April, 1972.⁶

AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION CITATION:

Description

Erected in the 1860's. It was built as the Chinese Masonic Hall and worshipped in by the Chinese Masonic Society. The building is constructed of timber and local bricks, all painted red, a traditional colour denoting strength. It is symmetrically composed and consists of three sections. The main temple is in the centre with a portico entry and is flanked by the ancestral temple on the right and a caretaker's residence.

Condition

The building has been restored to its original appearance.

1 Butcher & Flanders p.158
2 W Sou San letter to NTA 14.5.68
3 NTA FN 1949
4 ibid.
5 H.B.C. FN602014A
6 NTA FN1949

Significance

One of few surviving buildings of its type in Victoria and stands as sole reminder of once extensive Chinese community that flocked to this area during the gold rush. Its symmetrical composition is dominated by ornamental central portico and reflects traditional Chinese design principles. The lantern in centre of interior wall painting in portico. Brick cresting and incised carving of head board are notable features. It is an outstanding feature of this historic city.

Bibliography

National Trust of Australia (Victoria) classified 20.7.67 1949. Principal sources of information:

1. National Trust of Australia (Victoria), File No. 1949.
2. National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Bendigo and the Joss House.
3. National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Tour of Bendigo, Melbourne, 1976.