In a quiet residential street in the inner-city Sydney suburb of Glebe, on a large grassy block that stretches down towards the harbour, sits the Sze Yup Kwan Ti Temple. Built between 1898 and 1904, the Sze Yup Temple is one of two heritage-listed temples in Sydney. The second, the Yiu Ming Temple in Retreat Street, Alexandria, was opened a few years later, in 1909. In contrast to the Glebe temple, the Yiu Ming Temple is tucked away at the end of a double row of terraces, also owned by the Yiu Ming Society, all of which are now surrounded by busy commercial buildings and apartment blocks.

Cantonese connections

The origins of Australia’s early Chinese migrants

By Dr Kate Bagnall

For Australians researching their Chinese family history, discovering their ancestors’ hometown and Chinese name is significant.
In the early years of the 20th century, when the two temples were built, the Chinese population in Sydney and surrounding suburbs was just over 3800, of whom about 200 were women and girls. In Australia as a whole, there were about 33,000 people of Chinese ancestry. Chinese communities around Australia were diverse – in occupation, politics, class and religion, as well as in dialect and hometown. Most Chinese people in Australia traced their origins to the province of Kwangtung, often referred to as Canton, but the two temples reflect the significance of particular hometown ties. The Glebe temple was for people from the Sze Yup, or Four Counties, region of Kwangtung, while the Alexandria temple was for people from the counties of Koyiu and Koming.

For Australians researching their Cantonese family history, knowing their ancestors' hometown in Kwangtung is also significant. Unlike Australia and Britain, in Kwangtung there were no official records of birth, death and marriage, nor were there parish records. Genealogies of the male line were kept within families and clans, which were tied to particular counties, towns and villages. To trace Cantonese ancestry back beyond an immigrant ancestor therefore requires identifying their county and village of origin in China, as well as their name in Chinese.

Most 19th-century Chinese emigrants were from the southern coastal provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien. Around 3500 Fukienese came to the Australian colonies from the port of Amoy as indentured labourers in the mid 19th century, but by far the majority of Chinese who arrived in Australia were Cantonese from Kwangtung. They primarily came from rural counties in the densely populated Pearl River Delta, which surrounds the provincial capital of Kwangchow, also known in English as Canton. The Delta is a maze of rivers, canals and streams, and until the 20th century, these provided the main form of transportation. Emigrants would make their way from their village to a local river port, then to a larger river or seaport – such as Kongmoon, Shekki, Canton, Kwanghoi or Macau – from which they would travel on to Hong Kong for the voyage to Australia.

Immigrants to Australia came from counties across the Pearl River Delta. Close to the provincial capital of Canton were the wealthier Sam Yup, or Three Counties, of Namhoo, Panyu and Shuntak. To the east of Canton were Tsengshing and Tungkun. To the south was Heungshan (later Chungshan), with the Portuguese colony of Macau at its southernmost tip. To the west were Koyiu and Koming. And to the south-west were the Sze Yup counties of Sunwui, Sunning (later Toishan), Hoiping and Yanping. Within these counties a number of different dialects were spoken,

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Mandarin pinyin</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Amoy</td>
<td>Xiamen</td>
<td>廈門</td>
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<td>Chungshan</td>
<td>Zhongshan</td>
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<td>Fukien</td>
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<td>Heungsan</td>
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<td>Hoipin</td>
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<td>Kongmoon</td>
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<td>Koyiu</td>
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<td>Sam Yup</td>
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<td>Shekki</td>
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<td>Shuntak</td>
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<td>Sze Yup</td>
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<td>Toishan</td>
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<td>Tsengshing</td>
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<td>Yanping</td>
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<td>恩平</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
This improvised handcrafted leather ankle cuff was made to protect a convict’s ankle from leg irons, which were extremely painful and caused bruising and skin lesions.

The cuff features a serrated edge for comfort, and holes for lacing together. The straps either side attached over the leg iron ring. Because it does not feature the broad arrow stamp of government property, the cuff was probably made illegally by a convict who had leatherworking skills. Made between 1819 and 1848, the guard was found during restoration works at Hyde Park Barracks in 1979. It is the only known leg guard that survives in Australia.

About the author
Dr Kate Bagnall is a Canberra-based historian who specialises in Chinese Australian history. Currently an ARC DECRA Research Fellow at the University of Wollongong, she has written widely on the history of Chinese Australian families, women and children. For the past three years, Kate, together with Dr Sophie Couchman, has led a ‘roots searching’ tour to Guangdong and Hong Kong for Chinese Australian family historians. Her website is www.katebagnall.com.

Kate’s research tips:
In addition to her ‘roots searching’ tour to Guangdong and Hong Kong, Kate recommends the following websites for Chinese Australian family historians:

- Chinese Genealogy Forum: http://siyigenealogy.proboards.com
- The Tiger’s Mouth (Kate Bagnall’s Chinese Australian history blog): www.chineseaustralia.org
- Chinese Australian Family Historians of Victoria: http://www.cafhov.com
- Golden Dragon Museum in Bendigo: https://www.goldendragonmuseum.org
- Chinese Heritage Association of Australia in Sydney: https://www.chineseheritage.org.au
- Chinese Australian Historical Society in Sydney: https://chineseaustralianhistory.org

What’s that thingamajig?
Answer: Convict leg iron guard