

Historical justification

It is proposed to name the two lanes to recognise the presence and contribution of Chinese Australians to Sydney's history and culture. The names recognise the evolution of Sydney's original Chinatown around Lower George Street and The Rocks from 1850s – 1880s. Here you could find Chinese cook shops, grocers, general stores, chemists dispensing Chinese medicine, furniture workshops and lodging houses, alongside tobacconists and gambling houses. The wharves and maritime workers brought trade, world ties and opportunity to this bustling area of town. The multicultural nature of the area was also reflected in other business names such as the "All Nations Restaurant" and the "Oriental Hotel".

Ah Toy Lane

It is proposed that the lane with a northeast-southwest alignment be named Ah Toy Lane.

The proposed name specifically recognises the contribution of Chinese cabinetmakers manufacturing furniture in Sydney and celebrates the multicultural history of Sydney. According to Peter Gibson (2018), aside from market gardening, furniture manufacture was the largest post-gold rush Chinese economic activity in Australia. It was the only manufacturing activity that involved a substantial number of Chinese people, and a significant proportion of those people were based in Sydney city.

At least two Chinese cabinetmakers were operating on the site in the 1880s: Loon Cheong & Co and Way Hap & Co. Way Hap & Co was located at 164 George Street in 1880. Loon Cheong & Co was a furniture manufacturer based at 168-170 George Street in the 1870-80s. Loon Cheong & Co's furniture was represented in the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879, held in the Garden Palace; the only Chinese cabinetmaker to be represented.

Nearby was Ah Toy, who had an extensive furniture factory on Lower George Street just south of the site. Ah Toy was first recorded as a carpenter and joiner at 115 George Street in 1865, Ah Toy's showroom was at 192 George Street (earlier 204 George Street) from 1877 to 1893. He had a timber yard and factory at 202–08 George Street from 1869 to c1880. It was described on the 1880 Doves Plan as a 'Chinese timber yard and cabinet factory'. Ah Toy came to Sydney in the 1850s and was in business for over 30 years. Ah Toy's factory produced up-market furniture for David Jones as well as cheaper lines.

A successful businessman, Ah Toy's store was a high-profile target of anti-Chinese violence in 1878. This year saw increased violence against Chinese traders and labourers, fomented by trade unions, such as the Seamen's Union and the Furniture Trade Union. The unions were campaigning against competition and low wages, and for greater immigration restrictions against Chinese merchants and traders.

A torchlight protest rally took place on the evening of 4 December 1878 at Hyde Park which attracted between 10,000 and 15,000 people. At the conclusion of the rally, union man Thomas White led a march on Parliament House to demand the dissolution of parliament and a vote on the "Chinese issue". A mob of 2000 protesters carrying torches separated from the main group and descended on the premises of Ah Toy. The mob pelted the workshop with stones and attempted to throw a torch into the building. Fortunately, the attempt to burn down the building was unsuccessful, and police along with some outraged citizens dispersed the crowd. But this vicious,

racially motivated incident is a reminder of the discrimination and violent racism many Chinese families and workers encountered in Sydney.

Ah Toy continued making and selling furniture at 192 George Street until around 1893. A 1886 newspaper article about Sydney's furniture trade described Ah Toy's factory as having an entrance at 192 George Street "...through a small shop in the street, but behind the "show room" the factory branches out to a considerable size in the shape of the letter T." Ah Toy employed 40 men at the factory in 1886, with an average wage of £2 10s per week, The establishment was described as being "quite extensive, with steam-engine, turning machines, and band circular saws".

Chinese furniture makers in Sydney produced products that were competitively priced and popular. Their products retailed in department stores such as David Jones and Marcus Clark. Many Sydney households were furnished with local Chinese-manufactured hall stands, washstands, bookcases and tables. Competition and exclusion from the mainstream union movement led Chinese furniture workers to form their own union in 1890. Their contribution to furniture manufacture and the decoration of domestic households is largely forgotten.

Sai Ying Lane

It is proposed that the lane with the east-west alignment from Pitt Street be name Sai Ying Lane. Mak Sai Ying is recorded as one of the first Chinese people to arrive in Sydney, disembarking on 27 February 1818.

While Mak Sai Ying ultimately settled in the Parramatta district, working as a carpenter and builder, several of his sons' established businesses in the city area. The Chinese name Sai Ying was Anglicised to Shying.

Three of Mak Sai Ying's sons were cabinet makers, carpenters and undertakers in Sydney. John J & George H Sai Ying operated J & G Shying & Co, Undertakers in George Street South and Abercrombie Place (now Abercrombie Street). J Henry Sai Ying (aka Henry James Shying) was a cabinetmaker at 477 Pitt Street, between Liverpool and Goulburn streets, from around 1863 until 1879. A fourth son was a butcher.

Mak Sai Ying had 31 grandchildren and the family is believed to be one of the largest Chinese-Australia families in Australia today. His descendants are believed to number in the thousands

Commemorating one of the first-known Chinese immigrants and their descendants is a meaningful way to celebrate this important story of Sydney, as well as highlighting the wider historic contribution of the Chinese community to Sydney's economic development.

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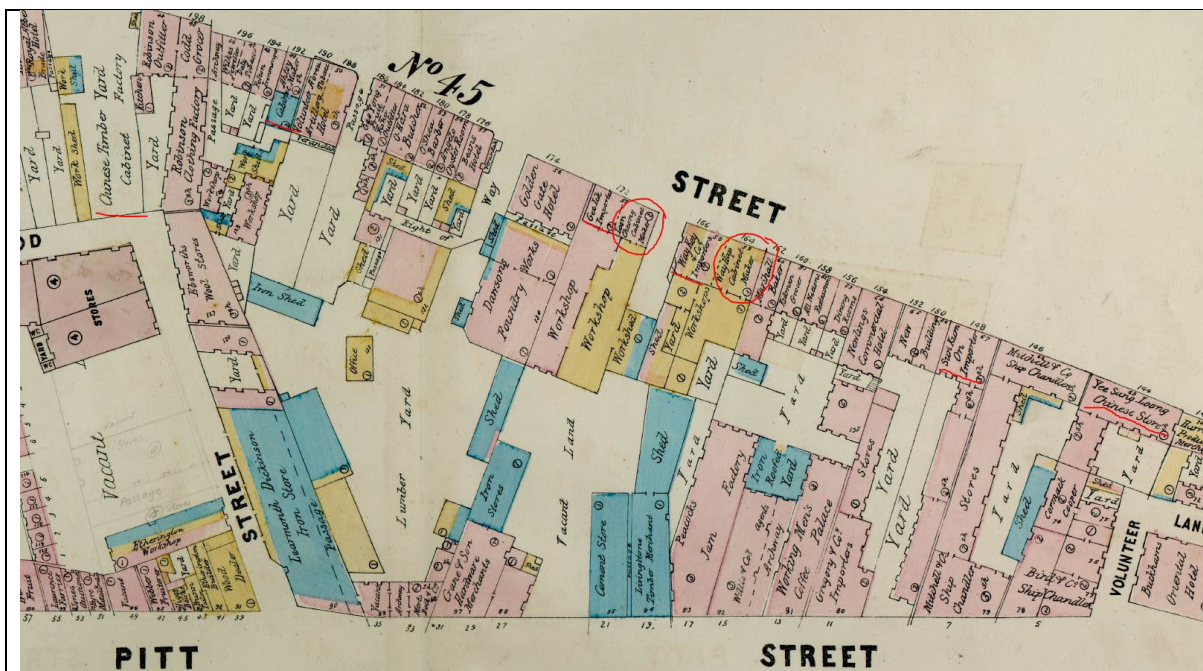
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Cabinetmakers Way Hap and Loon Cheong on Lower George Street are circled. The large timber yard and workshop of Ah Toy can be seen to the left. Other stores and merchant businesses are also highlighted in red.

Source: H Percy Dove, *Plans of Sydney*, 1880 Block 45 (Map 19) [detail]

City Archives, A-00880118, <https://archives.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/nodes/view/1709045>



Ah Toy's Cabinet Factory, 192 Lower George Street.

Date: c.1885 Source: State Library of NSW,

<https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/1JkmAW5Y/8re5BkaGP2ALz>