

Register of Historic Places and Objects

SHI Number
4671015

The PHA NSW Heritage Register

Item Name: **Yiu Ming Temple**

Location: **16-22 Retreat Street, Alexandria**

Address: 16-22 Retreat Street

Corner:

Suburb / Nearest Town: Alexandria 2015

State: NSW

Local Govt Area: Local Government Area:
South Sydney City

DUAP Region:
Sydney South

Historic region:
Sydney

Property Identifier:

Boundary:

Item Type: Built

Group: Religion

Category: Shrine

Owner: Religious Organisation

Owner Codes:

Code 2:

Code 3:

Current Use: The temple is a place of worship, community activity and celebration.

Former Uses: Temple

Assessed Significance:

Endorsed Significance:

Statement of Significance: The Yiu Ming Temple is significant because of its association with Chinese migration to Australia, having been continuously associated with the Chinese community since the 1870s. Its design, location, orientation and layout demonstrate principal characteristics of Chinese temple design from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the Chinese traditional philosophy of feng shui. The introduction of Australian design features, such as Federation detailing demonstrates the process by which cultural practices were modified by immigrants in response to Australian conditions and materials, resulting in a uniquely Chinese-Australian style.

The temple is associated with the continuity of traditional Chinese religious practices, customs and traditions including rituals, festivals and celebrations.

The temple is also significant because of its association with various individuals and Chinese business activities that have led to the establishment of important organisations in NSW commercial and agricultural history.

The temple significant as a rare example of its type, a 'village' temple. It is one of only a small number of Chinese temples that survive in Australia and contains fittings and objects which are becoming increasingly rare, even in China.

Historical Notes or Provenance: 1870's Earliest temple records (of the Yiu Ming Hung Fook Tong) list members. Members then, as now, come from two counties, Gaoyao/Gouyiu and Gaoming/Gouming, in the province of Guandong (formerly known as Canton). 1880's Alexandria council rate books list many Chinese community members. By 1890 it was estimated that about 100 Chinese community members lived in Retreat Street. In 1908, construction of the temple begins. In 1907, 1909 and 1917, the commissioned works for the interior of the temple date from these years. The figurative ceramic roof tiles were imported from Foshan ceramic works. Two private companies, Tiy Loy and Co. and Wah Hing and Co. were established by society members, with premises on Botany Road, adjacent to Retreat Street. In 1910 Society records list members in Rose Bay, Botany, Waterloo, Kogarah, Northern Sydney, Canberra,

Professional Historians Association (NSW) Inc

Date: 18/08/2001

Full Report

Page 1

Register of Historic Places and Objects

SHI Number
4671015

The PHA NSW Heritage Register

Item Name: **Yiu Ming Temple**

Location: **16-22 Retreat Street, Alexandria**

Bombala and Newcastle.

In 1949 Chinese Revolution bans return of the bones of Chinese who die overseas. In 1950 Society members are able to apply for Naturalisation and are able to bring family members to live in Australia. 15 years residency in Australia is a prerequisite. In 1980's Society membership increases dramatically as a result increasing immigration. This growth pattern continues. In May 1981 Addition of pailou and tile capped wall , enclosing Retreat Street. In 1990 Committee for the Yiu Ming Society is formed and the committee members are elected. Previously officials were not elected. The name of the Society was changed and shortened from Yiu Ming Hung Fook Tong Society to Yiu Ming Society.

In 1995/6 Conservation documentation of the Temple and Retreat Street is done. In December 1996 a fire at the temple is quickly extinguished and smoke and water damage minimised by fire brigade crew who recognise the special nature of the building and associated objects. In 1996 the Women's Committee is formed and members are selected/ elected by the Yiu Ming Committee. In 1997/8 building and associated objects are restored and cleaned. Project worked on by community artisans and architects as well as Powerhouse Museum staff. Conservation documentation informs this work. In 1998/99 temple re-opened around Chinese New Year. The terrace houses are refurbished, improving living conditions for the elderly residents (Xhao, 1999.).

National Themes:

State Themes: Commerce
Cultural sites
Ethnic influences
Migration
Persons
Religion
Social institutions

Study Themes:

Designer:

Maker / Builder:

Year Started:

Year Completed:

Circa: No

Physical Description: The temple remains much as it was when originally built. Most of the internal fittings date from this time. The temple walls are of red-faced brick, originally tuck pointed. The internal floor is of tessellated tiles with a white marble edging. Many internal details are of timber. The area is lit and ventilated by a "roof lantern" over a sunken floor section designed for burning incense and oil. Doors and fittings, including the main altar, are original (Karl Xhao, NSW Heritage Office, State Heritage Inventory, 1999.).

Physical Condition: The physical condition of the Temple is sound and most associated objects are in stable condition. (Xhao, 1999.).

Professional Historians Association (NSW) Inc

Date: 18/08/2001

Full Report

Page 2

Register of Historic Places and Objects

SHI Number
4671015

The PHA NSW Heritage Register

Item Name: **Yiu Ming Temple**

Location: **16-22 Retreat Street, Alexandria**

Modification Dates: The following modifications to the temple and objects have been identified: Following fire damage (Dec '96) the temple and some associated objects were restored (during 1997). The temple roof was replicated using imported Chinese tiles. Damaged timber panels from the temple interior were restored. Undamaged wooden items were cleaned. The main light fitting of the temple was reconstructed around the original frame. The altar table, which was completely destroyed, was replaced. The altar itself was cleaned and the central painting was re-painted. The temple was re-wired and repainted. The garden was tiled. The main burner of the temple has been moved outside to minimise smoke damage and the sunken floor area which housed it has been filled in by the addition of removable timber panels. A number of earlier modifications have also been identified: The roof of the temple was repaired, incorporating quad and square metal down pipes on the east and West sides, addition of concrete angled tiles and decorative ceramic tiles over the gateway. This is estimated to have been done in the 1950" Or 60"s. Electricity was fitted to the temple, most likely in the 1960"s or 70"s Cracks in the external brickwork of the temple appear to have been repaired and patched, perhaps a number of times. The tiled surfaces of the temple show evidence of repair. Cement was used at some stage to repair the decorative ridge tiles. The community room and kitchen, built as an extension to the rear of the terrace closest to the temple, shows evidence of repeated modification, in 1930"s, 1950"s 1970"s and most recently in 1996, when the kitchen area was refurbished. The building was documented before the last modification. The pailou and tile capped perimeter wall were added in the 1980s. The terrace houses and street are currently being refurbished 1998-9 (Xhao, 1999.).

Recommended Management:

Further Comments: Associated objects that were not restored after fire damage in 1996, still show evidence of oil and smoke staining as a result of long exposure to burning oil and incense (Xhao, 1999.).

Historical Significance: (a) The site's history demonstrates continuous occupation by Chinese (a significant group in NSW and Australian history) since the 1870s.

The physical design of the temple demonstrates the continuity of Chinese design principles, being based on a standardised building code used for Chinese village temples, for example, the roof is typical of the roof structure of many Chinese buildings. The use of Federation detailing demonstrates the process of migrants' adaptation to their new Australian environment, and the cross cultural influences that have played a major role in Australian history.

The siting, orientation and layout of the temple demonstrate Chinese philosophies, following the principles of Chinese cosmology known as 'feng shui.'

Interior fittings and objects were commissioned from artists and craftsmen in Guandong and demonstrate aspects of Chinese decorative arts at the time the temple was built. The fact that many similar pieces have been destroyed in China adds to their significance.

Art work and iconography represent various religious and cultural philosophies, including Daoism and Buddhism.

Painted panels on the inside of the temple list donors at the time of the temple's construction and express sentiments of loyalty, brotherhood and the wish for happiness, prosperity and

Item Name: Yiu Ming Temple**Location:** 16-22 Retreat Street, Alexandria

longevity, thus demonstrating important elements of Chinese philosophy. They also demonstrate continuity of Chinese occupation of and association with the site in that current Society members are able to identify the names of their forebears on the panels and in written records of the Society.

The activities and ceremonies carried out in the temple demonstrate the continuity of Chinese customs and traditions including religious observance and rituals; festivals and celebrations.

(b) The Yiu Ming Temple is associated with a major phase in Australian and NSW's history, namely Chinese immigration, which began in the nineteenth century and increased following the Cultural Revolution of 1949, then grew in the 1980s. It is associated with one of the oldest and largest Chinese societies, the Yiu Ming Society which played a key role assisting Chinese immigrants, providing practical and spiritual support for members of the Chinese community from various parts of Sydney and extending as far as Canberra, Bombala and Newcastle. This role was particularly important when government policies meant that migrants could not bring family members to Australia until they had resided here for 15 years.

The site and temple are associated with significant members of the Chinese community who were influential in various commercial activities and Chinese organisations. For example, Sam Warley operated a large import business with branches in Perth and Hong Kong; John Hoe operated a large timber business and formed the NSW Chinese Chamber of Commerce; Deen Bong was a successful cabinet maker and an early manager of Tiy Loy and Co., one of two private companies established by Society members.

Many society members were also influential in the introduction, growing, marketing and distribution of Chinese vegetables and food, for example, Wally Har, one-time Director of the Ming Yiu Society was a market gardener of Tiy War & Co, and was Chairman of Australian Chinese Growers Association of NSW. Many Chinese immigrants began working as market gardeners before establishing businesses based on these activities. The site is therefore associated with major commercial and agricultural activities of importance in NSW's history and the history of the Chinese community.

The temple is associated with significant Chinese deities, such as Hong Sheng, 'god of the southern seas', Cai Shen and Guan Di. Such associations demonstrate Chinese philosophies and belief systems and represent the continuity of those beliefs over time and across geographical boundaries.

The temple is also associated with the continuity of traditional Chinese cultural practices as Society members have helped to maintain Chinese festivals and celebrations, including the lion dance.

Aesthetic Significance:

Social Significance: The complex has remained a cultural, religious and social centre for the community. The temple Society has assisted community members, especially those newly arrived in Australia, by providing low cost housing, financial support and employment opportunities. The temple strongly communicates a sense of community identity and continuity (Xhao, 1999.).

Register of Historic Places and Objects

SHI Number
4671015

The PHA NSW Heritage Register

Item Name: **Yiu Ming Temple**

Location: **16-22 Retreat Street, Alexandria**

Technical / Research: The temple illustrates various technical adaptations to local conditions and materials. It also demonstrates the internationally recognised versatility and innovative skills of Chinese carpenters during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Given the scarcity of examples of this scale of "village" temple, even in China, the general adherence to traditional design principles is also of technical interest. Inscriptions on the painted panels inside the temple provide much information about society members enabling further research into the history of the Society and its members. The records and documents of the Society appear to have been maintained. The Society's relationship to business, market gardening and the Chinese cemetery area at Rookwood are all significant areas for further research (Xhao, 1999.).

Representativeness:

Rare Assessment:

Integrity / Intactness: The physical fabric of the temple and its associated objects retain evidence of the historical, architectural, social and spiritual significance of this site. (Xhao, 1999.).

References:	Author:	Title:	Year:
	Powerhouse Museum and the Yiu Ming Society	Yiu Ming temple precinct: a conservation report its architecture and objects	1996
	Stephen, Ann (ed.)	The Lions of Retreat Street: a Chinese temple in inner Sydney.	1997
	Townley, Pat	NSW State Heritage Inventory form	1999
	Xhao, Karl	State Heritage Inventory	1999

Studies:	Author:	Title:	Number:	Year:
	Powerhouse Museum and the Yiu Ming Society	Yiu Ming temple precinct: a conservation report its architecture and objects		1996

Listings:	Name:	Title:	Number:	Date:
	Heritage Act - State Heritage Register		01297	24/09/99
	National Trust of Australia register			22/07/74

Custom Field One:

Custom Field Two: Rosemary Kerr of Sue Rosen & Associates, Heritage Assessment And History

Custom Field Three: 30/08/2000

Custom Field Four:

Custom Field Five:

Custom Field Six:

Data Entry: Date First Entered: 04/07/2001 Date Updated: 04/07/2001 Status: Completed