Ashfield
suburb of success
in Australian multiculturalism

group tour organised by
Diana Giese
for the Mosman Day and Evening Community College
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Report by
Daphne and Dom Gonzalvez
Chinese immigrants in Ashfield

Ashfield is home for migrants from Italy, Greece, the Middle East, the Philippines, Spain and South America, China, Korea, India and Poland. The latest big wave of migrants came from China.

Thousands of Mandarin speaking Chinese migrants have settled in Ashfield since 1989.

Why did they choose Ashfield? Because Ashfield has a history of good race relations.

More than a century ago, Ashfield had its own Chinese Mandarin, a man named Quong Tart.
Quong Tart
Australia’s first citizen of Chinese origin

Quong Tart (1850-1903) came as a boy to Australia to work in the gold mines, learnt English, became a citizen, embraced Christianity, succeeded in business and settled in Ashfield. He was generous and friendly, accepted by both British and Chinese communities.

The Emperor of China made Quong Tart a Mandarin in 1888.

Quong Tart married an English woman. They had four children. To show open mindedness, Quong Tart had each of his children baptized in a different Christian denomination.
Recent migrants’ integration problems

On arrival at Ashfield, recent Chinese migrants didn’t have two of Quong Tart’s skills: knowledge of English and understanding of local culture.

They opened shops plastered with large Chinese signs on the street front, and over-crowded with goods inside. That was the model of shop they knew back in China.

The locals felt uncomfortable: they couldn’t figure out what a shop sold, and if they ventured in, they couldn’t communicate with the shop keeper. They couldn’t decipher the names of products or prices written in Chinese. They felt alienated in their own suburb.

The solution...

Concerned local citizens, with the help of Ashfield Council, came up with a solution that included:

- communicating with the migrants in Mandarin
- explaining Australian culture to the Chinese, and Chinese culture to Australians
- re-modelling shops to appeal to shoppers from both cultures
- removing fears and increasing understanding by regular meetings and cross-cultural events.

The solution, though it started years ago, is not a thing of the past; it is current, on-going and pro-active.
Movers and shakers of integration and multiculturalism

Three people, true movers and shakers of integration and multiculturalism, spoke to us about their efforts:

Cathy Gao: fluent English speaking Chinese migrant who works in the Council
Rosemary Musson: from the Australian locals

Thomas Jin: successful Ashfield businessman, a migrant himself
A super Supermarket

Thomas Jin leads by example. His supermarket is a showpiece for serving two cultures. It has Australian and Chinese food items, wide aisles, and best of all, descriptive labels and prices written in Chinese and English.
Gift Shop

The gift shop is clearly identified in Chinese and English. The entrance is wide and inviting. It caters to Chinese visitors wanting Australian souvenirs, and Australian visitors wanting Chinese souvenirs.
Breadtop
the bread shop

Our tour members bought extensively in Breadtop, the bread shop that tempted them with fine cakes, breads, biscuits and tasty treats.
Lunch!

We enjoyed lunch at the Taste of Shanghai which served us a banquet of over 10 dishes, each one delicious and presented beautifully. The menu consisted of well-chosen vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes which were remarkable for their taste and variety.
Churches

The suburb’s two main churches, the Ashfield Presbyterian Church, and St John’s Anglican Church, have welcomed migrants.

The Presbyterian Church, located on the main street, next to shops and restaurants, is easily accessible to migrants.
Rev Peter Hastie told us that, in addition to services in English, regular services were held in Chinese for Chinese migrants and in Korean for Korean migrants. Further, the church hall is used for teaching English to migrants who want to improve their language skills.
St John’s Anglican Church conducts Early English Fellowship groups for migrants.

St John’s, the oldest surviving building in Ashfield, was consecrated in 1845. Its long European heritage remains, but its spirit has changed to accept people from many cultures. All are welcome to worship, or to see a movie in the cemetery!
Old Ashfield

A few streets away from the hustle and bustle of multicultural Main Street, old Ashfield continues to exist in and around Pratten Park.

When we visited, a traditional game of Saturday afternoon cricket was in progress in the spacious Oval.

We were treated to tea and an informative lecture on local history by Ann O’Connell of the Ashfield and District Historical Society.
Thirning Villa featured prominently Ann’s presentation, and we were surprised to learn that we were standing in Thirning Villa itself.

Thirning Villa, built 1868 and now part of Pratten Park, has been restored by Ashfield Council as a building of cultural importance.

The original owner of Thirning Villa was a doctor and surgeon, Arthur Martin a'Beckett who arrived in Sydney in 1838. An extremely generous man, he treated many people for no fee. Of course hundreds of sick people flocked to see him, and he is said to have died of overwork in 1871. His premature death left his wife, Emma Louise, in shock: he left almost no money, and now she had to provide for her two sons and three daughters, plus maintain the estate. Without complaining, she took up the duty of managing the farm. She made her family self-sufficient in food – they ate vegetables that they grew themselves, drank milk their cow provided, and enjoyed eggs laid by their hens. Emma Louise did not shirk the hard farm labour. She lived to be 90.
Today Thirning Villa accommodates the Ashfield and District Historical Society, and is also home to the Western Suburbs Lawn Tennis Association.

Grass courts are a rarity in Sydney, and the club specializes in them. The hard work of maintaining the courts is done by the club members themselves. The courts are of historic importance: Australian tennis immortals Lew Hoad and Ken Rosewall played there as youngsters.

Allen Roberts gave us an interesting account of the history of the club, often pointing to the historic photos on the walls to emphasize his story.
Thirning Villa’s new spirit

Thirning Villa, symbolic as it is of traditional Australia, recognizes that times are changing. Works of art on the villa’s grounds promote compassion and multiculturalism.

NO STRANGER SHALL GO EMPTY FROM OUR DOOR, FOR WE OURSELVES HAVE EATEN THE BREAD OF STRANGERS IN OTHER LANDS is carved, in several languages, on a large stone block.

Land of Mine

Artist Ken Hutchinson donated this statue under the Australian Government’s cultural gifts program.

It is in memory of the survivors of the scourge of land mines in wars the world over.

The statue is a symbol of the compassion Australians feel for people of all nations who suffer injustices.
The future of multicultural Ashfield

What lies in the future for multicultural Ashfield?

Long time residents are pleased with the progress of integration of migrants. And new migrants are optimistic that the God of Prosperity will smile, and they look forward to living in harmony with all of Ashfield’s diverse citizens.

The end