

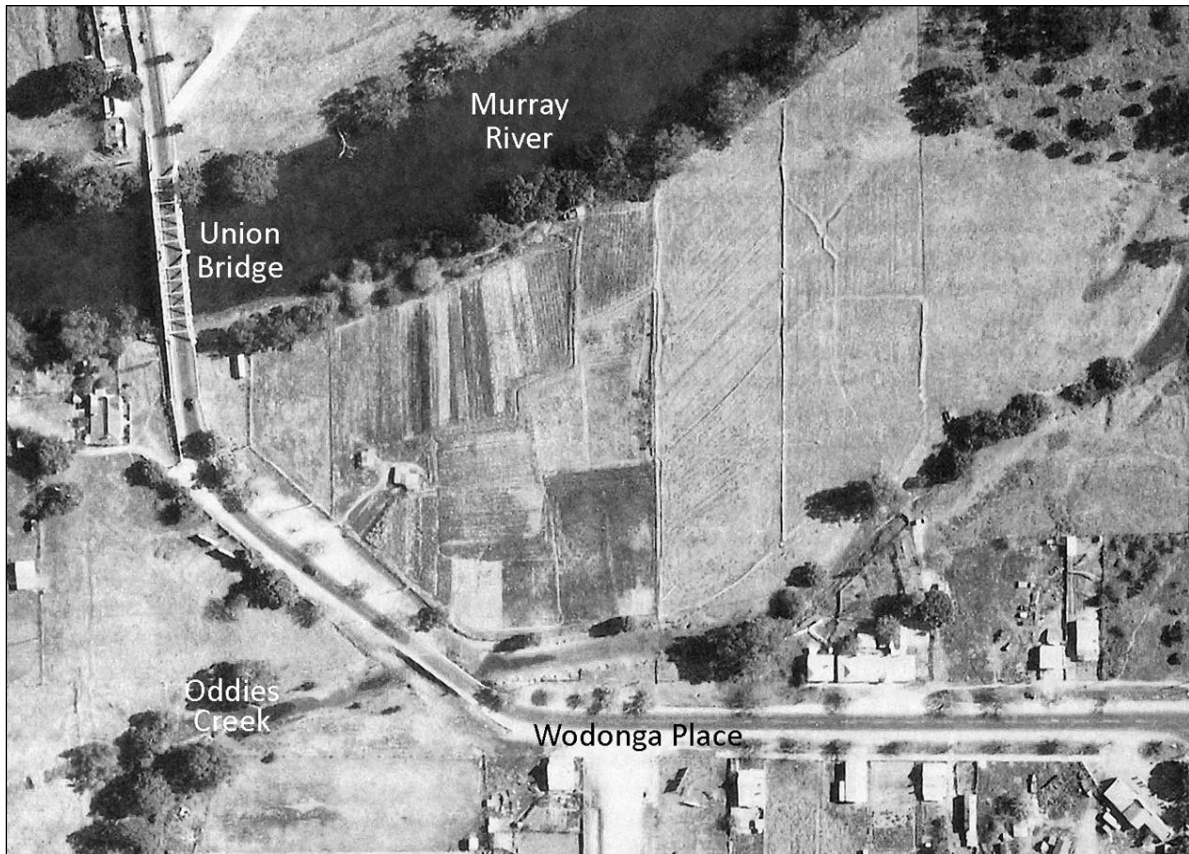
Albury's Chinese Market Gardens

Greg Ryan

Chinese market gardens operated locally from the 1860s to the 1950s. Gardens were in South Albury in what is now Oddies Creek Reserve, on the east side of Wodonga Place, at Mungabareena and at Black Range where land near the top of Prune Street on the Bungambrawatha Creek was known as Chinaman's Flat.

Most Chinese had originally come in search of gold but found there was more money to be made from planting fruit and vegetables. Chinese working the South Albury gardens seem to have lived in the Chinese settlement at the bottom of Townsend and Kiewa Streets.

Gardeners hawked their produce in the streets of Albury and Wodonga, some with hooded spring carts, others "balancing baskets on a rod over their shoulder." Driving spring carts had its perils. In March 1880, Chee Chow was accidentally killed when his cart lurched crossing a rut near Mate's store in Hume Street. In 1893, Ah Ping, driving his vegetable cart back from Wodonga, tried to cross a swollen creek. He was saved but his horse was drowned and the cart washed away.



An aerial view from May 1949 of Chinese market gardens in the area that we now know as Oddies Creek Reserve.

The *Border Post* reported in 1866 that "the Celestials arrive in Albury three or four times a week, freighted with lettuces, onions, radishes, cabbages, cucumbers, vegetable marrows and other articles."

Being on the floodplain and close to the Murray River, the gardens were repeatedly flooded leading to the loss of crops. The Chinese erected a system of levee banks, but they were either too low for large floods, or inadequately designed.

The *Albury Banner* reported in October 1917 that all the Chinese market gardens in Albury and at Mungabareena “were ruined, the temporary bridges erected by the Chinese were swept away, and the Celestials were to be seen camped with their chattels on the side of the road.”

Many Chinese were averse to banking with bad consequences in 1938 for twelve gardeners near the river at Albury. They lost £400 in notes hidden under the floor in tins when their house and stables were destroyed by fire. Trying to grab the notes from the flames, both Ah Quock and Fu Hook suffered severe burns.

The gardens were still in use after World War II, but were abandoned when Albury City resumed the land for recreation purposes and cancelled the leases. The aerial image from May 1949 shows the extent of the market gardens near the Union Bridge and abandoned market gardens further north.