

Chinese market gardeners Gordon Hughes OH0018

Vegetables ...they were all run then by Chinese gardeners. We always thought it was strange - they always had a very big fat horse. They liked horses apparently and the horses seemed well-fed. They were very kind fellas and they were very good customers of us kids. Of course we used to snare turtles in the Lake [Monger] and trap them and then we'd take them down to the Chinese and they would give us sixpence and nine-pence each, which was big money then. So they really loved turtles apparently.

JD: What sort of things did they grow in the gardens?

HUGHES: Oh purely vegetables: lettuces and garden carrots and...it was wonderful soil apparently. Big...whatever you wanted in vegetables, you could get it from there. Not fruit. It was all just vegetables – celery and cabbages, lettuce and ...they done it by hand-watering. They had a well in the ground and they'd have two big watering cans and a yoke across the back of their neck with the watering cans supported on one each... And then they'd walk between the vegetables with the...just spraying these vegetables. And they'd go back and get another load of water. Yes, but they were wonderful workers and they were there seven days a week at any time. Generally there was two, working together, at the time. But, it's just phenomenal now to see them watering with the way they water now. It was all done by hand.

JD: And did the Chinese people have their homes on the same land?

HUGHES: Oh yes, yeah. Just sort of made themselves, sort of business. Just a rough old one. Yes, they lived on the job and, as I said, they were there seven days a week. You could go down any time. No electricity – there was lamps, table lamps, and things like that. But they'd be out late at night and early in the morning. You'd see them out there watering. And I don't think they had all the spraying that they've got now. So, I can't remember any acids and things being used that they use now. It was just the swamp water. They...well that's how ... they just put a well in the middle of their yard and a slope down so they could walk down and fill their two cans up. They were big cans and they'd be out walking between the rows of the vegetables, spraying them.