

For King and Country Benjamin Moy Ling

With the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914, young men from all over Australia answered the call to fight for king and country. But for Benjamin Moy Ling, Australian born and the son of a Methodist minister, the path to war service was not an easy one.



Image source:

Private collection of Serena Cheung and Chris Shai-Hee

Benjamin (Ben) Moy Ling was born in Castlemaine in 1885, the youngest son of Reverend James and Kim Moy Ling. James Moy Ling arrived in Australia from China in 1855 and worked on the Victorian goldfields. He converted to the Methodist religion and ministered to his fellow countrymen in Castlemaine and Bendigo. As a probationary minister, he was appointed to the new Chinese Methodist Mission in Little Bourke Street Melbourne in 1872. James was fully ordained in January 1877 at Wesley Church in Lonsdale Street Melbourne, one of only two Chinese Methodist ministers ordained in Australia at the time.^{1 2}

Four of Ben's siblings - Lucie, Samuel (who died in 1876), Josiah and Laura - were born in Melbourne. The Moy Ling family lived initially upstairs above the Chinese Methodist Mission, then in George Street Fitzroy and later in Lyttleton Street Castlemaine. Ben and his sister Esther were born in Castlemaine, where their father James took the oath of allegiance on 27 July 1883 and became a naturalised Australian.³

The family returned to Melbourne in 1886 and began a long association with Carlton, living at 142 Princes Street North Carlton and 35 Drummond Street Carlton, while James conducted services at the Chinese Methodist Mission in the city. Ben was educated at Wesley College, on a scholarship awarded as the son of a Methodist minister. After completing school, he worked as a law clerk and remained a bachelor. Ben's brother Josiah was clerk of courts at Collingwood. The sisters Lucie, Laura and Esther married and moved to new houses in North Carlton, all within a short distance of each other. They lived at *Kimoie* at 864 Drummond Street, *Canton* at 871 Rathdowne Street and *Sunwin* at 969 Rathdowne Street. The five houses, together with the Chinese Methodist Mission (now Uniting Church) still exist today, a lasting memory of the family and James Moy Ling's service to the Methodist Church. James died at *Canton* on 2 February 1911 and his wife Kim died a year later on 4 March 1912. Both were buried in Melbourne General Cemetery.^{4 5}



Photo: CCHG

"Canton" at 871 Rathdowne Street North Carlton

During World War 1 Ben made several attempts to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). However, he was rejected as unfit on the grounds that he was "not substantially of European origin & descent". At the time, he was living at *Canton* with Laura and her husband Samuel Sue. While denied the right to fight for the country of his birth Ben, as a practising Methodist, would have prayed for his fellow Australians serving overseas. Ben was finally successful in enlisting on 4 May 1917, when the embargo on his non-European origin was lifted by special permission of Brigadier General R.E. Williams. Ben was quoted as saying: "If Australia is good enough to live in, it is good enough to fight for. I hope to live in it again after the war". On enlistment Ben nominated Laura as his next of kin and he also made a will, dated 7 October 1917, naming her as executrix and sole beneficiary of his estate. Ben spent several months at a training camp in Bendigo before embarking from Sydney on board HMAT A14 *Euripides* on 31 October 1917. He served with the 60th Battalion and later the 4th Divisional Signals Company, and he was in France when the war ended. He was discharged on 23 July 1919.^{6 7 8 9}

True to his word, Ben fulfilled his wish to live in Australia after the war. He worked at Victoria Market in later life and lived at *Canton* in Rathdowne Street with Laura and Samuel Sue (who died in 1923). His widowed sister Lucie Lem was just around the corner at *Kimoie* in Drummond Street, while Esther and her husband Thomas Chung were a block further north along Rathdowne Street. He played an active role in Methodist Church activities and in 1925 was presented with an inscribed watch in recognition of his service. Ben was a founding member of the Young Chinese League and served as Vice President. His fine baritone voice was heard at church services, Wesley College reunions, public performances and on the new broadcast medium of radio.

Benjamin Moy Ling, the man who was once considered unfit for war service, lived through two World Wars and died on 8 October 1946, aged 61 years. He was farewelled with a service at the

Chinese Methodist Church and sadly missed by his family, friends and the church community. Ben was buried in Melbourne General Cemetery, together with his parents James and Kim Moy Ling. His sister Laura, who outlived her younger brother and died in 1950, was buried in the adjacent plot, with her husband Samuel Sue and brother in law Thomas Lem. Lucie and Thomas Lem's daughter Gladys Esther, who died in 1954, was buried with her grandparents and her dear uncle Ben. Ben's sister Esther died in 1965 and was buried with her baby brother Samuel, who died in 1876. Lucie, the eldest of the Moy Ling children, outlived all her siblings and died in 1976, aged 102 years. She was buried in Melbourne General Cemetery, not far from the final resting place of Ben.

Susan C. Crowe
Carlton Community History Group
April 2015

Acknowledgement:

CCHG thanks Serena Cheung for sharing the story and family photos of her great uncle Benjamin Moy Ling.

More information on the Moy Ling Family:

The story of Ben's sister Lucie is available on the CCHG website at:

www.cchg.asn.au/lucie.pdf

Notes and References:

- ¹ Biographical information sourced from Victorian birth, death and marriage records and contemporary newspaper accounts.
- ² The Methodist Chinese Church, Ian Welch, Department of Pacific and Asian History, ANU, 2010
- ³ Naturalisation record of James Moy Ling (NAA: A712, 1883/Y7284)
- ⁴ Building ownership and occupancy information sourced from land title records and Melbourne City Council rate books (Smith and Victoria wards)
- ⁵ Melbourne General Cemetery burial records
- ⁶ Attestation paper of Benjamin Moy Ling (NAA: MT 1486/1)
- ⁷ Attestation paper of Benjamin Moy Ling (NAA: B2455)
- ⁸ Every Week, 10 May 1917, p. 7
- ⁹ Probate file of Benjamin Moy Ling (VPRS 28/P3/4447/385/107)