

## Barry McGowan – A Life Well-Lived

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### Obituary

Friend and colleague Barry John McGowan was born on 18 June 1945.<sup>1</sup> Barry's first degree, and his first career, were in economics. After gaining a Bachelor of Economics at the University of Adelaide in 1967, Barry spent two years as "Assistant to the Economist", South Pacific Commission, Nouméa, under the Australian Volunteers Abroad Scheme. From 1970 to 1996, he worked in the Commonwealth Departments of Health, Territories, Trade and Industry, Prime Minister and Cabinet, and finally as a Director in the Department of Industrial Relations.

Barry's inner archaeologist and historian, however, fought to break free of the bureaucracy, and after completing a Bachelor of Arts at the Australian National University (ANU) in 1995, he left the public service and set himself up as a historian and heritage consultant. He had done a little moonlighting on leave before then, in 1993 and 1995 undertaking two major studies under the New South Wales component of the National Estate Grants Program (NEGP). As a consequence of that work he published two books, *Lost Mines* and *Bungonia to Braidwood*, the former of which was revised and republished as *Lost Mines Revisited*. Barry's desire to change direction was in part a result of extensive family holidays in the outback, which had led to his writing articles for *Australia Post* and *4X4 Magazine*.



Barry McGowan in the field in 1999. Photo: Graham Tidy

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6002814/barry-mcgowan-obituary-passionate-historian-of-chinese-australians/>

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Barry was a quiet and unassuming man, balancing a vibrant mix of disorderliness, unconventional approaches to challenges, energy and determination, faith and passion, with a healthy good humour. He had a deep interest in how people individually and as communities negotiated life in mining areas, and how they went about the physical activities of mining. As a subset of this interest, he developed a great empathy for Chinese communities and wished to see their histories and life experiences better understood and promoted as a valuable part of Australia's history. His generosity of spirit towards local communities, his local informants and assistants, and to his wider network of professional colleagues, was a hallmark of Barry's second career, as was his infectious enthusiasm for this work. In 2001, in conjunction with Lindsay Smith and Michael and Bronwen Van Leeuwen, Barry designed an exhibition at the Canberra Museum and Gallery, *Southern Gold*, on the continuous contribution of the Chinese in the Canberra region. Barry wanted the information he had gathered and its analysis to get to the communities he was working with, and, experiencing the publishing difficulties many have experienced at some time, he initially self-published a series of regional mining studies (see the publications list below). Most of his later books (he wrote 17 in all, if I count correctly) were published by commercial or government publishers. I had the pleasure of working with him on two of these.

Barry became a Research Associate at the College of Asia and Pacific at the ANU, and in 2011 was awarded a PhD from ANU for his thesis, "Dust and Dreams: A Regional History of Mining and Community in South-East New South Wales 1850–1914", which consolidated his exhaustive work on mining and community over the previous years.

I know Barry was immensely happy that he was able to work on a series of studies of the history of Chinese communities in southern New South Wales over the past few years, under the title "Tracking the Dragon", commissioned by the Museum of the Riverina in Wagga, the reports of which are now available online (see below). Barry was awarded a well-deserved Medal in the Order of Australia (OAM) for his services to community history in June 2018. The Governor-General, Sir Peter Cosgrove, conferred the medal on Barry at his hospital bedside. Barry was touched – "I'll send him a book!".

Barry was active till the end – he always had plans. The last time we had a long talk was earlier this year when he was planning a trip to Nagasaki for an International Society for the Study of Chinese Overseas meeting. Barry had been negotiating prostate cancer for twenty years with characteristic determination and unconventional methods, but it came back with unexpected virulence over the last few months, and on 1 September 2018, Barry lost the battle and passed away peacefully with his loved ones by his side. He is survived by his partner, Chong, and sons Andrew and Douglas, step-children Sean and Genie, brother Chris, and his much-loved grandchildren. Thanks to Andrew for providing family information.

Ave atque vale Barry.

## Publication List

The following list of publications was compiled by Michael Pearson, Sophie Couchman and Kate Bagnall. It may not be a complete record of all of Barry McGowan's published work.

- Barry McGowan, "Convicts and Communards: French-Australian Relations in the South Pacific, 1800–1900," *The French Australian Review*, 64 (Winter 2018): 3–26.
- Barry McGowan and Genevieve Mott, *True Australians and Pioneers: Chinese Migration to the Orange Region of NSW – A Thematic Study of the Chinese People in the Orange, Blayney and Cabonne Shires, and the Town of Wellington* (Orange, NSW: Orange City Council, 2017).
- Barry McGowan, "Marcus Clarke and Felix Meyer's Cameo Roles in the Paris Commune," *La Trobe Journal*, 99 (March 2017): 24–34.
- Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: The History of the Chinese in the Narrandera District of New South Wales*, Museum of the Riverina, 2016, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/251213571>.
- Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: The History of the Chinese in the Hay, Deniliquin and Hillston Districts of New South Wales*, Museum of the Riverina, 2016, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/251213572>.
- Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: The History of the Chinese in the Tumut and Adelong Districts of New South Wales*, Museum of the Riverina, 2016, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/251213575>.
- Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: The History of the Chinese in the Temora District of New South Wales*, Museum of the Riverina, 2015, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/251213573>.
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- Barry McGowan, "Shoulder Yokes and Moon Cakes: The Chinese Diaspora in the Riverina District of New South Wales, Australia, 1850 to the present," *Historic Environment*, 24:1 (2012): 26–34.
- Barry McGowan, "Broadwater National Park: Plan of Management," unpublished report, Office of Environment and Heritage, New South Wales, c. 2012.
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- Barry McGowan, *Tracking the Dragon: A History of the Chinese in the Riverina* (Wagga Wagga, NSW: Museum of the Riverina, 2010).
- Barry McGowan, *Dust and Dreams: Mining Communities in Southern New South Wales* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2010).
- Michael Pearson and Barry McGowan, *Mining Sites in New South Wales: History and Heritage*, New South Wales Department of Industry and Investment, Orange, 2009.
- Barry McGowan, "From Fraternities to Families: The Evolution of Chinese Life in the Braidwood District of New South Wales (NSW), 1850s–1900s," *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies*, 2 (2008): 4–33.
- Barry McGowan and Lindsay Smith, "Tracking the Dragon through Southern NSW and the Riverina," unpublished report, New South Wales Heritage Office, 2008.
- Barry McGowan, "Hegemony, Localism and Ethnicity: The 'Welsh' Mining Communities of Currawang and Frogmore in Southern New South Wales," *Journal of Australasian Mining History*, 5 (September 2007): 39–66.
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