

1 December 2025 Bulletin Rotary News

Christmas Lunch 15 December

Rotary Christmas lunch for members and partners on Monday 15 December – bar operating. Please advise Mary on mary@davegaynor.co.nz for catering numbers.

Brew Union Friday Drinks

Next Brew Union is Friday 27 February 2025.

Next Year

First meeting next year is lunchtime Monday 2 February 2026.

Meeting Monday 8 December

Guest Speaker: Stefan Speller

Topic: "Impact of proposed changes to Local Bodies."

Intro/Thanks	President Dave
Sergeant	John Freebairn
Corporal	John Brunsdon
Parting Thought	Aaron Tait
Bulletin Editor	Steve Parsons
Attendance	Martin Townend

Meeting Monday 15 December

Guest Speaker: Danu Sefton

Topic: "The contribution to the community by MASH Trust"

Intro/Thanks	Norelle Ward
Sergeant	Liam Hehir
Corporal	Allan Ford
Parting Thought	Lesley Boulton
Bulletin Editor	Steve Parsons
Attendance	Stu Schwartz

Report on Monday 1 December 2025 Summary of Rodney Wong's Talk

1. Opening Remarks & Christmas Parcel Project

Rodney began by wishing everyone a **happy first of December**, wearing his Christmas-themed attire. He then reflected on the big

day Awapuni and friends had just completed preparing the Christmas parcels. He explained:

- They packed **over 500 parcels**,
- The **majority have already been delivered** to the various community organisations,
- The day was very hot, extremely busy, and physically demanding Rodney estimated he walked **over 20,000 steps**,
- But most importantly, it was **a rewarding and enjoyable experience**, full of teamwork and community spirit.

He thanked everyone who helped with the load-in, packing, organising, and delivering, and acknowledged how vital the volunteers were to the success of the event.



2. Update on the Palmerston North Hospital Foundation

Rodney then moved into an update on the Hospital Foundation, reminding the audience that he had spoken to the club a few years earlier when the Foundation was first established. He noted:

- The Foundation's **first major project**—the **Children's Emergency Department**—has now been **completed, opened, and fully operational**.
- Over the past year, the Foundation asked hospital clinicians what major project they believed should be tackled next.
- Clinicians identified **20 possible projects**, narrowed them to **three**, and then selected the top priority.

That priority is the acquisition of a **robotic-assisted surgical unit** for Palmerston North Hospital. Key points he highlighted:

- This will be **only the second** robotic surgical system in a New Zealand **public** hospital (the other is in Auckland).
- The robot will allow surgeries to be performed in **half the time**,
- Patients will have **twice as fast recovery**,
- It will help attract and retain talented **surgeons** to the region,
- The first area of focus will likely be **prostate cancer**, and the **Cancer Society** is supporting the project,
- The system will cost **between \$2–4 million**, depending on the model and the timing of purchase.

He described it as a **transformational project**, one that will significantly advance the region's surgical capacity.



3. Introduction to the New Zealand Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust

Rodney then shifted to a more personal and historical topic. He explained that he serves as the **Chair of the New Zealand Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust**, and this was the **first time** he had ever spoken publicly about the Trust in this context.

He asked the audience how many had heard of the Poll Tax or the Trust; only a few hands went up, confirming the need for greater awareness.

He noted the challenge in speaking about this history—because it can sound like a “victim narrative”—but emphasised that the goal is **accurate history**, not pity.

4. Early Chinese Arrival and the Road to the Poll Tax

Rodney gave essential historical background:

- The first Chinese migrants arrived in New Zealand **around 1866**, brought to the Otago goldfields.
- At that time, New Zealand's population was small: around **11,000 Pākehā** and **70,000 Māori** in the 1840s.
- By the early 1880s, there were around **5,000 Chinese residents**, only about **1% of the population**.

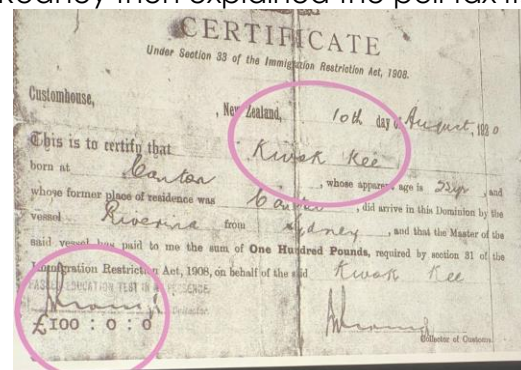
Despite the tiny percentage, anti-Chinese sentiment grew rapidly, especially **after the gold ran out** and unemployment increased. Rodney explained the political dynamics:

- **Labour unions** didn't want Chinese migrants because they feared job competition,
- **Right-leaning groups** didn't want them because they believed it diluted the “purity” of European society,
- Influential figures such as **Richard Seddon** amplified fear, mistrust, and racially charged rhetoric.

This environment laid the foundation for discriminatory policies.

5. The Chinese Poll Tax

Rodney then explained the poll tax itself.



The **Chinese poll tax** was:

A **race-based entry fee** imposed only on Chinese migrants,

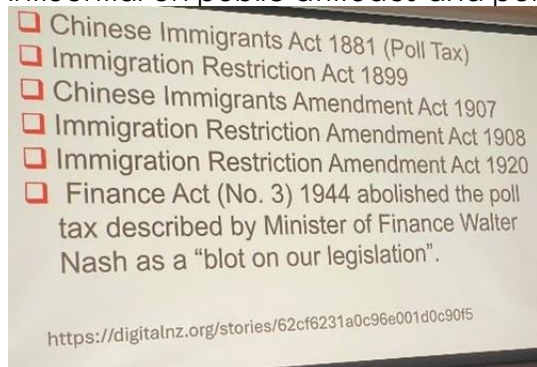
- Designed to **discourage Chinese immigration** rather than raise revenue,
- A key tool in enforcing a form of **legalised discrimination**.

Practically, it meant:

Many Chinese men lived in New Zealand without their families for decades,

- Family reunification was extremely difficult or financially impossible,
- Chinese communities remained overwhelmingly **male and isolated**,
- Social prejudice became legally sanctioned and culturally normalised.

Rodney said that even though the community wasn't large, the prejudice was **widespread**, deeply embedded, and highly influential on public attitudes and policy.



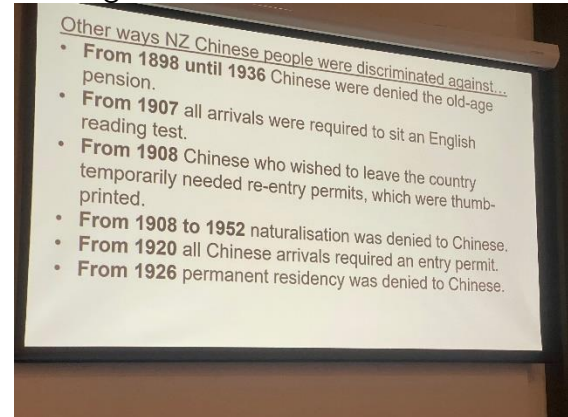
6. Preserving History – The Role of the Trust

Rodney explained that the New Zealand Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust exists because of the **government's formal apology** in 2002.

The Trust's mission includes:

- Documenting and preserving the early history of Chinese New Zealanders,
- Supporting projects that commemorate or record poll tax-era experiences,
- Ensuring the injustices of that period are understood so they are **not repeated**,
- Maintaining heritage materials, archives, and historical narratives for public awareness.

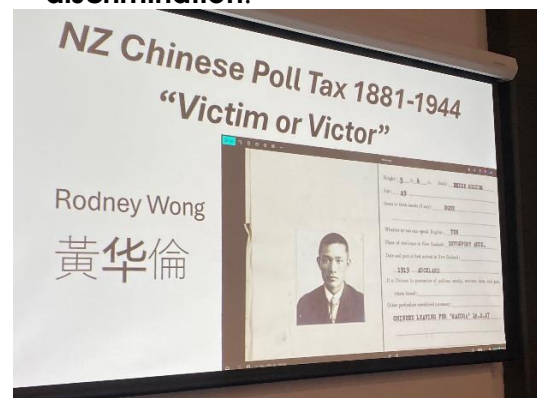
He emphasised that the Trust focuses on **truth-telling**, historical clarity, and community healing—not victimisation.



7. Closing Remarks

Rodney ended his talk by inviting the audience to reflect on the story and decide for themselves whether what they heard represented:

- A history of **victimhood**, or
- A history of **resilience in the face of discrimination**.



He welcomed questions and thanked the audience for their interest.

Parting thought: John Brunsdon.

"Being positive isn't pretending that everything is good; it's seeing the good in everything "
&
"A smile will give you 10 more years of life "

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GOOD**