

Dear Reader,

I admit I wasn't a history buff when I was at school. I felt like history was something that was related to other people, not me. That changed when I found out that around 140,000 Chinese men were recruited by the British and French to help in the war effort during the First World War. I saw a news segment and a museum curator held up a golden-coloured shell casing that had an engraved dragon on it – a Chinese dragon. In that moment I felt intrigued. Who had engraved it? Where had he come from? What were conditions like for Chinese men in the trenches who were so far from home? I wanted to know more.

I did write a short story for a children's magazine about a child who is contacted by a ghost who hands over an engraved shell casing, but I felt like the story wasn't done there. I wanted to research more and tell others about what I had discovered. Writing *Nate Yu's Blast from the Past* has been both fun and enlightening. I read some books about the Chinese Labour Corp and watched various documentaries about the men and their descendants. I didn't want to write a straight historical novel, but I did want to share with the reader a lot of nuggets of information that I found out about the Chinese Labour Corps.

I was also interested in how Liverpool has been a city where historically the Chinese have settled; and today, it still has a vibrant Chinese community with thousands of people celebrating the Lunar New Year.

Nate was the perfect character to explore what it feels like being far from a place you called 'home', and whose identity shifts and changes depending on who you are with and how you feel about your culture (or lack of it). A lot of Nate's feelings about his name, and about 'Chinese stuff', mirrors my own as a child, as I had non-Chinese parents just like my character. I hope you enjoy the story!

Very best wishes,

Maisie

MAISIE CHAN

