

# Princess Hotel

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Standing on the footpath near the roundabout in Princess Street at the intersection of Eglinton Street, Wills Street, Willsmere Road and Main Drive and gazing down across the Yarra Valley, you can see, in addition to the Yarra Valley, a row of contemporary white homes stretching down towards Hutchinson Drive. These are merely the latest development to occur on this stretch of land, once part of the grounds of the Kew Mental Asylum, and later, of the Kew Cottages.

If you can imagine stepping back in time almost 150 years, the view would have been markedly different. Apart from the farmland and bush bordering the Yarra, the stretch of land previously mentioned was a hive of activity. This resulted from the construction of the Kew Mental Asylum.

When large buildings are now constructed, workers use Melbourne's public transport system or cars to reach their place of work. Such movement was impractical in 1860s Kew as no form of mass public transport yet existed. The answer was for the workers to live on site.

Francis Barnard, in his *Jubilee History* of 1910, records that:

'The reserve became a busy scene for many years. Dozens of families resided round about the works, and a hotel, the 'Princess', sprang up near the entrance gates. The adjacent streets were terribly cut up by the cartage of the building materials, though the stone for the foundation was quarried in the Yarra Bend grounds and brought across on the high bridge.' (1)

Barnard assumes that his readers would understand his references to the Yarra Bend grounds, the fragile streets that were damaged by cartage, and the 'high bridge' that was used to cart the quarried stones for the new Asylum's foundations.

The creation of the Mental Asylum in Kew, on what had previously been designated as a 'Village Reserve' (2), resulted from chronic overcrowding in Victoria's first asylum (1848-1925) on the other side of the river. In 1854, a mere six years after the creation of the 'Yarra Bend Asylum', the Victorian Government commissioned a report to identify appropriate locations for a new asylum. The report recommended the land opposite the Yarra Bend Asylum as an appropriate location. Predictably there was outrage from the small population of Kew at this proposal. They were to maintain their objections for most of the next 100 years.

The building of the new Asylum on its solid foundations from across the river was to continue from 1864 to 1872, not surprising given the size and extent of G. W. Vivian and Frederick Kawerau's plans for the new Asylum.

A number of maps of the Parish of Boroondara (1864, 1884) represent the 'Extension' to the grounds of the Kew Mental Asylum on which residences and businesses were to be built; fronting what was later to become Princess Street. The 1864 map (3) shows the allotments that fronted Princess Street in the Extension. These stretched as far as the Yarra. The writing on these allotments is, unfortunately illegible.

Which takes us in a circuitous way back to the Princess Hotel mentioned by Barnard. Prior to the granting of a license for the Princess Hotel, five hotels had already been built in Kew: The Woodman Inn (1854), The Harp of Erin (1855), O'Shaughnessy's Kew Hotel (1855), the Prospect Hill Hotel (1858) and the Council Family Hotel (1860). In 1861, the Victorian Census identified that there were 1439 persons living in Kew (4); a ratio of 1 hotel to 288 residents, including women and children.

An activity such as the building of the Asylum brought new residents to the suburb, and the buildings on the Extension facing Princes Street must have seemed like a small independent town.

On 23 November 1864, George Stevens applied for, and then requested a deferral of his application for a publican's license 'for a house at the corner of the Government Paddock at Kew' (5). The request for deferral was because building works had not yet been completed. The Court agreed to defer the application for a week. While a record of the granting of the license has not been identified, the Princess Hotel was up and running by February 1865 when an advertisement appeared in *The Argus* for a 'stout active lad, with character' who should apply at the Princess Hotel in Kew. (6) That there were no suitable stout lads available necessitated a subsequent advertisement in March. This time the advertisement specified 'A stout active LAD, accustomed to a hotel' (7). Presumably, there may have been many stout lads applying, but without the necessary experience. No subsequent advertisements appeared in *The Argus*, so obviously the licensee found the lad that he wanted, reduced his expectations, or perhaps gave up on hiring a lad altogether.

That the Princess Hotel was a functioning establishment is evidenced by the holding of 'the annual supper of the Kew Cricket Club' at 'the Princess Hotel, Princess Street', following an afternoon match at the Cotham-road ground where the 'first eleven will take on all newcomers'. (8)

On 10 January 1866, George Stevens successfully applied to the Kew Police Court to transfer his license to Charles Henry Kershaw (9). Kershaw was perhaps unsuited to the trade, or received a better offer, as the period in which he held the license only lasted for six months; 12 January to 10 August 1866 (10). On the latter date, the magistrates of the Police Court approved a liquor license transfer to Christopher Carroll.

Few articles in the *South Bourke Standard* and *The Argus* refer to the hotel between 1866 and 1871. These articles describe a robbery from Mr Ogbourn's butcher shop in Bulleen Road, and an inquest into the death of George Bell.

The first case involved the theft of money from the till of the butcher shop in September 1866. That the shop was obviously a butcher's is verified by the description in the report: 'While they [i.e. two employees] were killing sheep [the] prisoner [William Todd] was eating a leg of mutton which he held in his hand'. After visiting the Prospect Hill Hotel, the accused then progressed to the Princess Hotel. What transpired at the Princess Hotel was recounted by the landlady:

'Mary Carroll, landlady of the Princess Hotel deposed that on the 21st of August the prisoner was taking a drink in her house, when Bryant [Ogbourn's employee] rode up on horseback. Witness [Mary Carroll] asked the latter if he was going to shout, and he replied that he had no money. She then tossed with him for drinks, and he lost. They had drink, including the prisoner, but Bryant did not pay for them then'. (11)

It might be assumed that a hotel that seemed to be associated with criminals might be an unsavoury establishment, but most hotels of the period were only mentioned in the press when there was a license transfer, when they were prosecuted in the Kew Court, or when publicans were called as witnesses to a prosecution.

Five years later, the hotel was in the news again. In an inquest into the death of George Bell after a fight in the garden of his home, the aggressor, Charles Hart was apprehended at the Princess Hotel. Sergeant James McGrath of the Kew Police stated that he finally caught up with Hart 'as he was coming out of the Princess Hotel at Kew. He [Charles Hart] was not drunk at the time, but appeared to be suffering from the effects of drink'. (12)

Apart from a solitary advertisement placed by Whatmough and Winter that 'sought tenders for slating' in *The Argus* on 7 December 1871, where applicants were requested

to apply at the Princes Hotel (13), there were to be no other references to the existence of the hotel in the local or Melbourne newspapers.

Aspects of the newspaper reports in the period are corroborated by the Sands & McDougall postal directories of the period. While the directories date from 1861, the occupation of the hotel by Christopher Carroll between 1869-71 is the sole reference to the hotel. (14) That there is no reference to the earlier tenure of George Stevens is unaccountable.

By 1872, the major construction period of the Kew Mental Asylum was finished. There was probably no further need for construction workers, so a significant proportion of the hotel's clientele moved must have elsewhere. It might also have not appeared politic for licensed premises to continue in such close proximity to the new inmates of the Asylum, especially given that inebriates formed a proportion of the inmates.

The short seven-year history of the Princess Hotel was only rivalled by one of its predecessors, the Woodman Inn, which lasted for only two years. Its contemporaries were to last into the next century.

### References

- (1) Barnard FGA 1910, *Jubilee History of Kew: Its origin & progress 1803–1910*.
- (2) 185\_?, 'Boroondara no. 3', Vale Collection, State Library of Victoria. (<http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/160019>)
- (3) 185\_?, 'Plan of the parish of Boroondara and six portions in the parish'. State Library of Victoria. ([handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/117463](http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/117463))
- (4) 1861 Victorian Census, Historical Census and Colonial Data Archive.
- (5) *The Argus*, 25 November 1864, p.4. Trove, National Library of Australia.
- (6) *The Argus*, 24 February 1865, p.1. Trove, National Library of Australia.
- (7) *The Argus*, 7 March 1865, p.1. Trove, National Library of Australia.
- (8) *South Bourke Standard*, 5 May 1865, p.2. Trove, National Library of Australia.
- (9) *South Bourke Standard*, 12 January 1866, p.3. Trove, National Library of Australia.
- (10) *South Bourke Standard*, 10 August 1866, p.3. Trove, National Library of Australia.
- (11) *South Bourke Standard*, 7 September 1866, p.3. Trove, National Library of Australia.
- (12) *The Argus*, 20 February 1871, p.4. Trove, National Library of Australia.
- (13) *The Argus*, 7 December 1871, p.3. Trove, National Library of Australia.
- (14) Sands & McDougall 1871, 1872, 1873, *Postal directories*.