

Clifton Hotel

Of the eight hotels established in Kew since European settlement, The Hotel Kew, known for most of its existence, as the Clifton Hotel was the seventh to be built in 1868.

Its location on the corner of Studley Park Road and High Street at Kew Junction makes it a prominent landmark. Its current name is confusing for local historians as its main rival for the first 52 years was O'Shaughnessy's Hotel (1855), later renamed the Kew Hotel, on the corner of High Street and Denmark Street.

Looking at the façade of the Hotel Kew, it is hard to imagine its mid-nineteenth appearance. There have probably been at least four renovations or rebuilding(s) of the structure. The documented renovations have occurred in the 1930s when the late Victorian façade was given an Art Deco update. In about 1970 its façade was again 'improved'.

The many publicans who have held the licenses of the Clifton Hotel have been identified in the 'Tetlow Index' and on the 'Boroondara Local History Wiki'. The most significant of these are Henry Madden (1880-87); Michael O'Donnell (1902-1920); and the Cronin-Ryan family (1935–53ff).

When compiling the list of licensees, it is apparent that a significant number were women. Sometimes this was due to the death of a male license holder but, more typically, a woman bought a license in her own right. Many licensees were also Catholic.

During the nineteenth century it was not uncommon for inquests to be held at the Clifton Hotel (1876, 1879, 1882 x 3). These ended with the opening of the new Police Station and Court House at the junction in 1888.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the local police launched a number of proceedings against the publican of the Kew hotels for illegal Sunday trading. Few successful prosecutions against the licensees of the Clifton Hotel were reported in the press of the day.

Inevitably, histories of hotels concentrate on licensees and the events that take place at them which are recorded in contemporary newspapers. The Clifton Hotel is also interesting in its associations with brewers. On one side of the hotel in Bulleen Road (now High Street), Alfred Fuller's 'Kew Brewery', operated from 1873-79, presumably supplying the Clifton and other local hotels in Kew. In 1880, the brewery was abruptly converted into an organ building business, Fuller's other craft. Following the closure of the Kew Brewery, the hotel must have been forced to source its ale from elsewhere. In 1904, the freehold of the Clifton Hotel, as well as many other hotels in Melbourne, was put up for sale. The sale resulted from the death of Thomas Aitken, the founder of the Victoria Brewery. Included in the sale of the Clifton in 1904 were the three double fronted brick terraces at numbers 5, 7 and 9 Studley Park Road.

In 1908, a number of newspapers reported a 'painful accident' that befell an American sailor when the American fleet was visiting Melbourne. Apparently, he was cycling down High Street at high speed, and in attempting to avoid a car hurtled through 'five ways' and crashed on his bike head first through the window of the hotel.

A JACKY'S MISHAP

"I was ridin' downhill on a bike, and I met a buzz-cart," explained a "Jacky" yesterday to Dr. J. Murphy, of High street south, Kew, at whose surgery the sailor called to have a long scalp wound stitched up. "Yes, sir," continued the American; "I tried to dodge the buzz cart, and I rode through an hotel window. The mishap occurred in High street, Kew, and the window was a big plate-glass bar window in the Clifton Hill Hotel. The sailor, who was riding down-hill, in avoiding the motor-car, ran violently against the kerbstone, and was shot head foremost

through the window. He fell at the foot of the bar counter, and lay there for a moment, with blood streaming from a long cut at the top of his head. He soon picked himself up, however, and inquired where he could "locate the nearest doctor in this mountainous country." Jacky would not give the doctor his name. "There are 12,000 men in the great American fleet," he said. "Am I going to give them my name? No sir. They get no chance to brand me as the guy that tried to loop the loop. I am very much obliged to you doctor. God afternoon."

Border Watch, 9 September 1908.

The National Library of Australia's *Trove* website includes digitised newspapers dating from the 1800s to the mid-1950s. Many of these include additional stories that illuminate the lives of the publicans and 'patrons' of the Clifton Hotel. You can view a 'public list' on Trove, which includes annotated newspaper references to the hotel between 1868 and 1953.

The information in the public domain about the Clifton Hotel ends in 1953. If you have additional information about the hotel in the second half of the twentieth century, the researchers at Kew Historical Society would like to hear about it. Please contact us on info@kewhistory.com.au.

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