

Village Belle Hotel 1855 -
202 Barkly Street, St Kilda
MEL: 58 B11



Village Belle Hotel, 1881

So deeply embedded in the local consciousness, the area surrounding this hotel (Acland Street) became known as the Village Belle precinct, even officially recognised as such by the local council.



Village Belle Hotel, 1912

It marked the depot for the first local trams – Gunn’s Railway Cars – that ran there from the St Kilda Terminus on the arrival of each train, and was a favourite among luminaries including the literary Dyson brothers – writer and poet Edward (1865-1931), cartoonists and artists Will (1880-1938) and Ambrose (1876-1913) as well as Australia’s most celebrated printmaker Lionel Lindsay (1874-1961).

Its name is apparently ironic given that it was the last stopping point before the ugly Elwood swamps, on the way to the Dendy settlement at Brighton. In its early days, it was similarly burdened by a less-than-savoury reputation.

South of the Village Belle was a bush racecourse, where boxers and spectators held fights, and apparently the hotel was used by these men as a meeting place to plan their covert activities. The premises were originally deemed so unsuitable that Henry Peel’s application for a public license in 1854 was rejected, although, less than a year later, on April 15 1855, a license was granted to Edward Stead. Architect John Vardy designed a new verandah in 1876. The present brick hotel, built in a restrained conservative style, dates back to 1891. As the parapet proudly attests, architect William Pitt (1855-1915) was responsible for the design.

In the 1920s, SP bookies, including Wally Myer, who were refused entrance into the hotel, began operating in the Peanut Farm behind Acland Street, with radios on the ground and speakers in the trees. Regulars included local criminals Squizzy Taylor and Bradshaw.

Like the Wimpoles of the George Hotel, three generations of men named Barlow Telford, (the latter with his sister Sarah), have consecutively managed the hotel since 1945. The Telford family took over the lease from a Mrs. Meredith. They bought half of the twelve shares of the hotel from the Mahoney family in 1957, and bought the remainder a decade later. Barlow Telford 1st was president of the Hotel Association in the sixties and was instrumental in effecting developments in licensing laws, including the closing time change from 6pm to 10pm.

Since 1998, more than a million dollars has been spent on renovations to the Village Belle.



Village Belle Hotel, 2004