

FORMER LEITRIM HOTEL



Little Lonsdale St 31 Aug 2010 (53).jpg



Leitrim Hotel



Leitrim Hotel



Little Lonsdale St 3 small.jpg



Leitrim hotel rear



Leitrim hotel rear



Leitrim hotel interior ground floor looking north



Leitrim hotel interior ground floor looking south



Leitrim Hotel



leirim hotel plan.jpg

Location

128-130 LITTLE LONSDALE STREET MELBOURNE, MELBOURNE CITY

Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2242

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO989

VHR Registration

December 9, 2010

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

The former Leirim Hotel was designed by the architect Henry E Tolhurst and built in 1888 for the Victoria Brewing Co Ltd by Jason Fraser of West Melbourne. The site had been occupied from 1852 by a four-roomed brick house and stable, which by 1855 was owned by Martin Rooney and used as a shop. The first Leirim Hotel was built on the site by Rooney in the mid-1860s, and was named after a hotel of the same name in Dublin where an historic meeting was held in 1850 to express sympathy with the dismissed Orange magistrates. By 1882 the hotel was described as dilapidated and dirty, the license was in doubt and in 1888, at the height of Melbourne's boom, the building was replaced. The architect Tolhurst had been Town Clerk and Surveyor for the Borough of Eaglehawk, where he had designed the old Town Hall (replaced in 1901) and the Mechanics Institute (1865, VHR H713). In 1884 he became Surveyor for the Municipality of Collingwood, but also practised as a private architect and surveyor and was involved with a number of works for brewing companies. The hotel was in the part of Melbourne known as 'Little Lon', notorious in the second half of the nineteenth century for its supposed poverty, crime and debauchery, where hotels abounded. The hotel was taken over in 1906 by Carlton & United Breweries, which closed it in 1907. A Chinese cabinet-maker, Lim Wing War & Co occupied the building until the 1920s, joining other Chinese who pursued similar occupations in this part of the city. The building was converted into offices in the 1980s and later into a residence.

The former Leirim Hotel is a three storey brick building with an unusually intact unpainted stuccoed facade ornately decorated with classical motifs. At the ground level the pilasters dividing the central bar window from the former bar entrance on the right and the former residential entrance on the left are decorated with rustication, incised fluting and foliated patterns. Decorated panels, pilasters and stucco roundels also adorn the stucco on the upper levels. The building is surmounted by an elaborate entablature, a balustraded parapet and a central segmental-arched pediment with 'LEIRIM HOTEL 1888' written in the raised letters. The exterior is intact apart from the replacement of the bar window. The interior has been completely rebuilt.

This site is part of the traditional land of the Wurundjeri people.

How is it significant?

The former Leirim Hotel is of architectural and historical significance to the state of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The former Leirim Hotel is architecturally significant for its ornate and unusually well preserved boom period stucco facade, which displays many of the elaborate decorative devices used in the Renaissance revival of the nineteenth century. It is unusual as a particularly fine and intact example of a smaller city hotel of the period which retains its original appearance with separate bar and residential entrances either side of a central bar window on the ground floor.

The former Leirim Hotel is historically significant as a reflection of the many smaller hotels which were once common in Victoria and particularly in this area of the city of Melbourne, which was once part of the notorious 'Little Lon' district.

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or

consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible. Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable. Minor Works : Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works may submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

Construction dates	1888,
Architect/Designer	Tolhurst, HE,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	LEITRIM HOTEL,
Hermes Number	149565
Property Number	

History

[Based on information in 'Heritage Assessment of Buildings at 116-132 Little Lonsdale St, Melbourne', Graeme Butler & Associates 2010.]

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

The population boom in Melbourne following the gold rushes of the early 1850s saw increased subdivision in Melbourne's 'Little' streets and lanes for residential use, particularly in the north-east part of the town. By the early 1850s most of the sites between the ubiquitous corner hotels had been occupied by small shops, offices and homes. Over the next thirty years the gaps were filled in and existing buildings added to or face-lifted. In the lanes were an increasing number of new, small cottages and shops, sometimes of only one or two rooms.

By 1861 the population of Melbourne was 125,000, and there was a boom in construction of housing, schools, churches and public buildings. By then most of the township Crown lots had been sold and specific districts with special types of occupancies began to form: the eastern end of Collins Street attracted the medical profession; the central and western parts the insurance companies, banks and building societies; the western end of Little Collins Street the legal profession. Bourke Street had its theatres and music halls and from this sprang the reputation of the nearby Little streets such as Little Bourke and Little Lonsdale. 'The theatres and dance halls were in Bourke Street, and the brothels in Exhibition Street. By the 1880s . the brothels were Stephen [Exhibition] Street and the areas opening off it, until the time of the clean-up preparatory to the 1880 Exhibition, when they were displaced to Fitzroy and elsewhere.' (Bates, *Essential but unplanned*, pp 93, 12.)

The area around Little Lonsdale Street became a focus of reformers' attention. The various mission halls and churches located nearby served their needs, notably today the Wesleyan Church complex on Lonsdale Street (begun in 1858), the Hebrew Congregational Synagogue, later the Salvation Army Mission, at the Exhibition and Little Lonsdale Street corner, and others which have now disappeared: the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Latrobe Street and Baptist Church on the Lonsdale/Exhibition Street corner.

Central Melbourne was still to a significant extent a residential area, and it was occupied largely with terraces, lodging houses and medium density accommodation, whose occupants occupied much of their leisure outside the home. The hotels, which were very numerous and mostly very small, played a much greater role in social life than they were to do in the twentieth century. (Lewis, *Melbourne*, chapter 4)

Its early dubious reputation and the later absorption of the area into a greater Chinatown area led in part to the singling out of the district as distinct from others in the city, and the naming of it as 'Little Lon'. This was the name covering the streets running through the then notorious north-east corner of Melbourne during the 1860s, with recent emphasis on that part east of Exhibition Street. Gradually the area began to be seen as a 'world apart', known for its 'crime and debauchery'.

Greater Chinatown

While today's Chinatown is centred along Little Bourke Street between Swanston and Exhibition Streets, research has shown that during the period c1891-1907 Chinatown extended over a large area, reaching north beyond Little Lonsdale Street. By 1907 the Sands & McDougall Directory recorded what is thought to be the greatest number of Chinese-occupied buildings in the city: a total of 378, 122 of these in Little Lonsdale Street and the lanes running off it. The buildings along Little Lonsdale Street between Russell and Spring Streets were almost all occupied by people with Chinese names.

The building at 132 Little Lonsdale Street was built in the Edwardian period for the furniture trade and was occupied over a long period by Chinese cabinet-makers, as were the other converted buildings in the group at 116-132 Little Lonsdale Street, into the inter-war period. Chinese cabinet-makers had been located in this part of the city since the 1880s, sometimes renting workshops from European furniture dealers, who then sold their produce.

The growing numbers of Chinese Australians in turn created a feeling of trepidation nationally among some members of the European population, culminating in the 1901 *Immigration Restriction Act*.

The Chinese had numbered some 25,000 in Victoria at the beginning of the 1870s, declining with the decrease of alluvial gold in the Colony to about 5,000 in the early 1880s. In 1891 there were about 2,500 in Melbourne, or about 30% of the colony's Chinese population, showing that they had retired to an urban environment to serve the boom time prosperity in such occupations as cabinet making and laundries.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Little Lon was an area of great diversity, with cramped housing for dozens of families of the multi-cultural poor community mixed with brothels, pubs, workshops and small warehouses. Following the passing of the *Immigration Restriction Act* in 1901 there was a gradual shift of Chinese businesses and residents out of the city. By the 1930s the Chinese population had declined and what had been the greater Chinatown was occupied by later waves of immigrants of differing nationalities in search of

cheap housing. The area evolved into a patchwork of different communities and activities in the inter-war period.

The architect: Henry Edmeades Tolhurst

Henry Tolhurst was for eighteen years the Town Clerk, Surveyor, Valuer etc for the Eaglehawk Borough, where he designed the old Eaglehawk Town Hall (1865, replaced in 1901) and the adjacent Mechanics Institute, but resigned in 1884 and became Surveyor of the Collingwood municipality. He was also acting as an architect and private surveyor in the late 1880s and laid out the Yarra View Estate in Alphington in 1888. He was involved with a number of works for brewery companies, including a new brewery for Shamrock Brewing and Malting Co Ltd at Collingwood in 1890, and a bottling department with boiler and bottle washing houses for Foster Brewing Co, Collingwood, in 1894-5. He also designed alterations to the Forester's Hall at 64-6 Smith Street; the drying rooms and other buildings at the Convent of the Good Shepherd, Abbotsford; the Convent of the Good Shepherd and Magdalen Asylum complex at South Melbourne in 1891-2; the South Yarra Fire Station in 1894; a factory at Abbotsford in 1896; and two shops in Johnston Street, Collingwood in 1899. He died in 1902.

HISTORY OF PLACE

The original Crown grantee of the site of the later numbers 124-6 Little Lonsdale Street, was Douglas Kilburn, the crown grantee of Allotments 14 and 15, Section 16. Kilburn subdivided these two blocks and created Bennett's Lane.

Thomas Payne sold the 19 ft by 60 ft block to Frederick Mason in 1850 for £25, Mason sold to Benjamin Constable in 1851 for £41, but within two years Pat Casey had purchased it for £200, reflecting the inflation brought on by the gold rushes. Casey applied to build a house in Little Lonsdale Street in 1852. By 1855 Martin Rooney had acquired the site with a building on it for £835, described in the rate-books as a brick house of four rooms and a stable, which was later referred to as a shop.

The first Leitrim Hotel was built here in the mid-1860s, and was licensed in 1865 to Martin Rooney (who died in 1875). The name derived from a hotel of the same name in Dublin where a historic meeting was held in 1850 to express sympathy with the dismissed Orange magistrates in Ireland. In 1878 Little Lonsdale Street's Leitrim Hotel was the organisational centre of the Hibernian Society's Sports, but by 1882 the hotel's license was in doubt, being described as 'dilapidated and dirty' along with many others in the Little Lon area.

The architect H E Tolhurst designed a new nine-room brick Leitrim Hotel on the site for the Victoria Brewing Co Ltd in late 1888, the peak of Melbourne's boom period. Jason Fraser of West Melbourne was the builder. A fourteen year lease of the hotel began in 1889 with an advance of £1400 by James and Alfred Nation to the estate of Rooney. The licensee in 1896, Pat Barnes, was accused of breach of the license and dubious conduct for sheltering criminals and delaying admission to the police. In 1906 the leaseholder, Emil Resch, released it to the Carlton & Victoria Breweries, who closed the hotel in December 1907. Resch had just purchased the mansion Belmont and 4 acres in Studley Park Road, Kew.

Like the nearby Exploration Hotel the former Leitrim Hotel was used as a factory. The Chinese cabinet maker Lim Wing War & Co occupied the old hotel from early in the twentieth century into the 1920s, joining other Chinese who pursued similar occupations in the north-eastern parts of the city.

The last of the Rooney family, Martin Jnr, died in 1949 and the old hotel was sold to George W Campbell for £3700.

A new concrete stair was added in 1952, but in the 1980s the building was converted into offices, the timber stair was rebuilt, and the facade was restored. Since then the building has been converted into a residence and all of the original interior features, including the staircases, have been removed.

Assessment Against Criteria

a. Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history

The former Leitrim Hotel is historically significant as a reflection of the many smaller hotels which were once common in Victoria and particularly in this area of the city of Melbourne, which was once part of the notorious

'Little Lon' district.

- b. Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.
- c. Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.
- d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.

The former Leirim Hotel is architecturally significant for its ornate and unusually well preserved boom period stucco facade, which displays many of the elaborate decorative devices used in the Renaissance revival of the nineteenth century. It retains its original appearance with separate bar and residential entrances either side of a central bar window on the ground floor. It is unusual as a particularly fine and intact example of a smaller city hotel of the period.

- e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
- f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.
- g. Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.
- h. Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

Plaque Citation

Designed by Henry Tolhurst and built in 1888 for the Victoria Brewing Company in the then-notorious Little Lon area, this former hotel is notable for its ornate and unusually intact Boom-period facade.

Extent of Registration

1. All of the building marked B1 on Diagram 2242 held by the Executive Director.
2. All of the land marked L1 on Diagram 2242 held by the Executive Director being all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 419418.

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>