

## Mt Alexander Road places

### Laurel Hotel

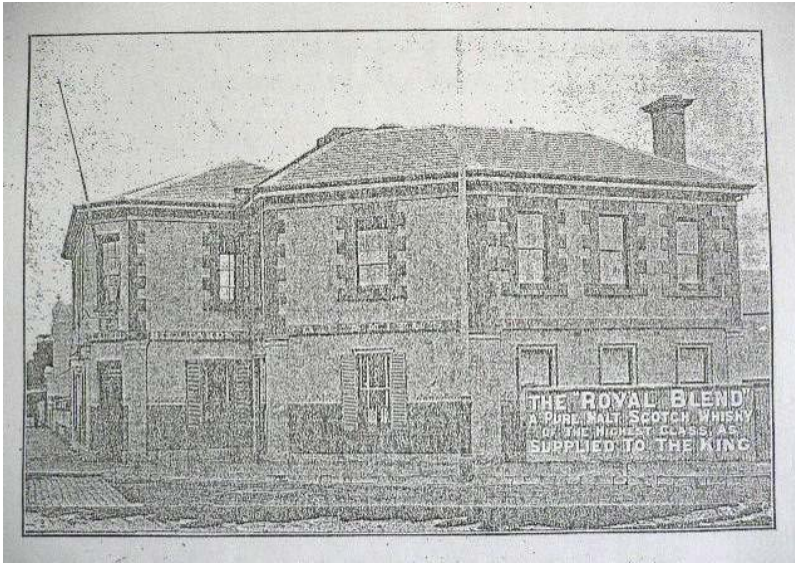
289 Mt Alexander Road, Ascot Vale



### Description

The Laurel Hotel stands on the south-west corner of Mt Alexander Road and Middle Street. This corner has an oblique angle, which is reflected in the irregular plan of the hotel.

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century extent of the hotel is two-storeys, with no setback from the footpath (apart from a small jog where two wings meet on Middle Street). It has a hipped roof covered in slates. The plan suggests that the two-storey extent of the hotel was built in two stages, with two distinct hipped roofs which meet at a parapet wall. Both wings have chamfered corners addressing its corner site. While the earliest part of the building is believed to date from c1857-62, the later wing may date from 1867 when accommodation for jockeys was created.



*The Laurel Hotel around 1907. Note the absence of a verandah. (McJuncin, The Story of the Trams, c.1906)*

The external details, however, are largely consistent between the two wings. The walls are rendered with ruling to imitate ashlar. The ground floor is without other embellishment apart from simple pilasters at the multiple corners, and a render beltcourse at the top. The first floor is embellished by bold quoins to the multiple corners and quoins of a similar scale to the windows (one-over-one double-hung sashes, as had been installed by 1907). The windows appear to have bluestone sills (overpainted). The ground-floor pilasters and the first-floor quoins may also be bluestone, as seen at a c1860 terrace with similar details at 434-438 Queens Parade, Clifton Hill (Individually Significant to precinct HO330, City of Yarra).

The only significant external difference of note between the two sections is the chimneys. The larger two-storey wing, which fronts onto Mt Alexander Road, has two simple corbelled chimneys that appear to have been facebrick originally and given a simple render coat later in life. In contrast, the smaller wing, fronting onto Middle Street, has a chimney on its west wall that retains its original decorative render, with ashlar ruling and a moulded cornice, typical of the 1870s and 1880s, suggesting that this wing was the later phase of construction.

Alterations to the building, when compared to the 1904 MMBW plan and 1907 photograph, include: the installation of a posted verandah to the east elevation, the removal of louvered shutters to some ground-floor windows and replacement of the double-hung windows with single fixed panes, replacement of the corner door with a window, enlargement of one window opening facing Middle Street to create a doorway, demolition of the stables at the rear construction of a c1930s single-storey extension to the south side which has apparently enveloped the small residence seen on the 1904 plan (its gabled roof is still visible), and more recent single-storey extensions to the rear (west side).

## History

The government road heading out of Melbourne through James Watson's Flemington Estate was initially known as the Flemington Road or the Macedon Road. This began to change after 1851 when it became the principal route for heading off to the goldfields at Mount Alexander (Castlemaine) and other diggings in the region. Flemington thronged with traffic, land changed hands and new goods and services businesses clustered along the rapidly developing streetscape. In 1854 Alexander McArthur subdivided land on Flemington Hill and sold the allotment on the south corner of Middle Street and Mt Alexander Road to Richard Guest.[1] The following year Guest obtained a licence to open the Bright View Hotel on the 'Mount Macedon Road'. [2] This short-lived establishment on Mt Alexander Road possibly stood on the Middle Street corner as the first hotel on this site, and a newspaper description of 1857 records the presence of a large wooden building on the land.[3] Guest ran into financial

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difficulties in 1856 and was declared insolvent in December,[4] and it would appear that by then he had already sold the property to Irishman Patrick Dolan.

The Dolan name is firmly associated with the early history of the Laurel Hotel. Former proprietors of the hotel have claimed that Patrick Dolan purchased the building as early as 1853 for £232.16.0.[5] Title information held by the Essendon Historical Society, however, would appear to indicate that Guest sold it to Dolan in 1854 and the mortgage was discharged in 1857.[6] When Patrick Dolan died at the age of 52 in March 1860, he was leasing the Laurel Hotel to William Horton [7], and residing at the Olive Branch Hotel in Little Collins Street, Melbourne, where his widow, Mary continued to live afterwards.[8] Their eldest son, James, inherited the Laurel Hotel, but in January 1862 he was declared insolvent due to 'falling off in business and pressure from creditors'. His liabilities were £454.7s, and assets just £97, a predicament perhaps worsened by the family's decision to remodel the hotel, changing it from a wooden structure to one built of rendered brick.[9] While the precise construction date is not known, the works were probably undertaken between 1857 and 1862.

James Dolan died at the Laurel Hotel on 2 January, 1863 aged 30,[10] and in May his widow, Mary applied for a licence to run the hotel. However, by July she had married Dominick Doherty, who had recently sought a licence for the Prince Albert Hotel (later the Cricket Club Hotel), also on Mt Alexander Road. The Licensing Bench decided to grant just one licence and this was to Doherty for the Laurel Hotel.[11] Money evidently was still a problem, and that same month the mortgagee forced the auction of the hotel's contents. The items not only included furnishings such as 'tables, chairs, iron and wooden bedsteads and bedding, looking glasses, washstands and ware, clock, decanters and glasses, measures, oilcloth, kitchen utensils', but also the bar counter and fittings as well as the 'four-pull beer-engines etc'.[12] Doherty and his family stayed on at the Laurel, but by June 1864 they were renters not owners of the hotel, which he described as 'built of brick, containing two sitting rooms and four bedrooms exclusive of those required for my family'.[13] By August 1864, Patrick and Mary Dolan's second son, John was apparently running the Laurel Hotel, but that month he too, was declared insolvent.[14] He died of consumption in May 1865 [15] and in December all of the Laurel Hotel's 'household furniture, fittings, beer-engine, horses, cows, pigs etc' were auctioned on site.[16] Late in 1867 the hotel was advertised for sale by Mr J.G. Shea, a solicitor who had previously acted for the Dolan family.[17]

It is not known who purchased the hotel, but in July 1866 the licence transferred to Thomas Chadwick, who enjoyed a long leasehold until his death in August 1880, and which was continued by his widow, Emma until 1884.[18] A billiard room was added in 1881, but it is not known what other works were undertaken during their occupation.[19] Before coming to Flemington Hill, Chadwick had held the licence for the Broadmeadows Hotel for ten or so years, [20] where a strong interest in horse racing and coursing events prevailed amongst its patrons. This continued at the Laurel, where Chadwick was closely associated with the Flemington Racecourse and the Port Phillip Farmers Association. Soon after transferring to the Laurel, he provided refreshments in a marquee at Royal Park for the association's ploughing matches.[21] By 1867 he had set up loose boxes and feed rooms for horses and also accommodation for jockeys both on the hotel premises as well as on land he purchased next door with a 56 feet frontage to Middle Street.[22] Champion horses visiting for the Melbourne Cup and other local race meetings at Flemington were regularly accommodated on the hotel premises, and in October 1868 a rumour spread that Melbourne Cup winner, the great Queensland colt 'North Australian' was stabled at the Laurel.[23] Other famous names associated with the hotel include 'The Barb' (1866), 'Glencoe' (1868), 'Pearl' (1871) and 'The Quack' (1872), and the Laurel also served as a venue for viewing prize racehorses displayed for sale.[24]

Although Flemington was now firmly established as 'the head-quarters of the racing fraternity', its celebrated racecourse was located on flat land alongside the Maribyrnong River, and was frequently water-logged and slow to dry. For this reason, trainers gravitated to the higher parts of Flemington and Ascot Vale, which developed a distinctive trackside culture in the 1860s. The *Argus* reported that 'Amongst the oldest and best known trainers in this neighbourhood'

was Samuel Waldock, 'whose quarters are situated on top of Flemington hill, a short distance from the Laurel Hotel'. By 1869 he had built up 'the most complete training establishment in Victoria'.<sup>[25]</sup> In addition to the Laurel Hotel, facilities were offered at the nearby Prince of Wales Hotel, which in 1870 had just built 'very comfortable boxes' for horses, and more boxes were available at the Newmarket Hotel over in Racecourse Road.<sup>[26]</sup> Both Chadwick of the Laurel, and Waldock also kept their own hounds and brought in foxes, kangaroos and deer for coursing events, and at some point Waldock ventured into more intense competition with Chadwick by opening Waldock's Hotel on the corner of North and East streets, Ascot Vale. Known later as the Polo Club Hotel, it was rebuilt in 1928 and in recent years was decommissioned and recycled for apartment and café use.

J.H. Germain was the next publican at the Laurel. This former manager of the Ararat Meat Preserving Works held the licence between 1884 and 1891 and became owner of the hotel in 1886. He was followed by Arthur Markille who held the licence for ten years.<sup>[27]</sup> Next was George E. Smith, whose name is readily identified in a photograph of the corner façade taken in about 1907.<sup>[28]</sup> It shows the rendered brick, slate roofed building addressing the Middle Street corner in much the same way that it does in 2012. The text accompanying the photograph advises readers that 'it is a well-appointed modern hotel with excellent accommodation for boarders', and at the rear 'there is excellent stabling accommodation' where 'many favourite racehorses have frequently been housed'. The MMBW detail plan drawn in 1904 indicates the long L-shaped stable block at the rear and the additional structure on the land in Middle Street. The hotel is oriented to the street corner, and the south wing on Mt Alexander Road is adjoined by a conservatory, pond and trellised area. The horse trough outside was later moved around the corner to Middle Street when the Essendon council either relocated or removed local troughs in 1915.<sup>[29]</sup>

Between 1907 and 1930, the licence for the Laurel Hotel was held by eight publicans, six of them women.<sup>[30]</sup> In 1934, the licence transferred from Frederick Martin to Mrs Catherine Manwaring and under her occupancy, the owner, L. Woods, commissioned alterations to the hotel from notable architects Sydney Smith, Ogg & Serpell of 349 Collins Street, Melbourne.<sup>[31]</sup> The relatively minor works, estimated to cost £300, were largely internal and associated with new openings to the saloon bar, liquor store and parlour. The Licensing Court approved the plans in November 1935 and the work was completed in about three months.<sup>[32]</sup> The long-established firm of Sydney Smith, Ogg & Serpell had worked on a large number of hotels between the 1890s and 1930s, and in 1934 they also completed alterations for the Port Phillip Club Hotel and the Cathedral Hotel in the City of Melbourne.<sup>[33]</sup> In the previous year they were awarded the prestigious Royal Victorian Institute of Architects Street Architecture Medal for their design for Melbourne's Port Authority Building.<sup>[34]</sup> During the 1930s, Nancy O'Sullivan and her brother, Bill Manwaring became the owners, and they held the title for 50 years, until 1987.<sup>[35]</sup>

The exterior of the Laurel Hotel, with its rendered walls and slate roof, remained largely unchanged over succeeding decades. In October 1989, it was announced in the *Essendon Gazette* that new owners Kris and Peter Nicholls, proposed to extensively renovate the hotel in consultation with the City of Essendon's heritage advisor. After spending \$2 million on the works, they opened 'Bluey's Bar and Bistro' in September 1990, which in July 1991 was awarded the 1991 Australian Hotels Association (Victorian Branch) 'Best Hotel Bistro' award from 1,500 entries. It introduced gaming machines in 1993.<sup>[36]</sup>

### References:

- [1] Cited from notes on the land title held by the Essendon Historical Society.
- [2] *Argus*, 18 and 19 April 1855, p5.
- [3] *Port Phillip Herald*, 8 September 1857, cited from notes held by the Essendon Historical Society.
- [4] *Argus*, 20 December 1856, p2.
- [5] 'Essendon Historical Society Ascot Vale Walk', March 1993.
- [6] Typed research notes held by the Essendon Historical Society, n.d.

- [7] 'Laurel' handwritten research notes held by the Essendon Historical Society, n.d.
- [8] *Argus*, 23 March 1860, p4; VPRS 28, P0, Unit 34, file 3/569 (Will and Probate Papers for Patrick Dolan).
- [9] *Argus*, 4 January 1862, p5.
- [10] *Argus*, 24 January 1863, p4.
- [11] *Argus*, 1 July 1863, p4.
- [12] *Argus*, 17 July 1863, p2.
- [13] *Argus*, 15 June 1864, p7.
- [14] *Argus*, 23 August 1864, p6.
- [15] *Argus*, 10 May 1865, pp4, 8.
- [16] *Argus*, 6 and 7 December 1865, p2.
- [17] *Argus*, 12 October 1867, p6; 17 December 1864, p8; VPRS 7591, P1, Unit 21, file 5/141 (Will and Probate Papers for Mary Dolan, widow of Patrick Dolan).
- [18] *Argus*, 6 July 1866 p5; VPRS 28 P0, Unit 242, file 21/092 (Will and Probate Papers for Thomas Chadwick).
- [19] Typed research notes held by the Essendon Historical Society, n.d. They indicate that John Glover was the owner of the Laurel Hotel in 1881.
- [20] *Argus*, 19 April 1855, p5; 16 April 1856, p6; 18 April 1860, p1s; 17 April 1861 p5.
- [21] *Argus*, 6 July 1866, p5.
- [22] VPRS 28, P2, Unit 108, file 21/092.
- [23] *Argus*, 22 September 1869, p6; 9 October 1868, p6.
- [24] 'Laurel' handwritten research notes held by the Essendon Historical Society, n.d.; *Argus*, 22 September 1869, p2.
- [25] *Argus*, 22 September 1870, p5.
- [26] *Argus*, 1 October 1870 p7.
- [27] 'Essendon Historical Society Ascot Vale Walk', March 1993; and typed research notes held by the Essendon Historical Society, n.d.
- [28] The image was published in McJunckin, *The Story of the Trams*, c.1906, a copy of which is held by the held by Essendon Historical Society.
- [29] R.W. Chalmers, *The Annals of Essendon Volume 1 (1850s to 1924)*, p172, cited from *Essendon Gazette*, 29 July 1915.
- [30] Typed research notes held by the Essendon Historical Society, n.d. The notes provide a list of licensees to 1930.
- [31] *Argus*, 19 June 1934, p4; and copy of 1935 plan of proposed alterations held by the Essendon Historical Society.
- [32] *Argus*, 5 November 1935, p4.
- [33] *Argus*, 26 June 1934, p4; 3 July 1934, p6.
- [34] *Argus*, 7 September, 1933, p5.
- [35] R.W. Chalmers, *The Annals of Essendon Volume 4 (1986 to 2000)*, p207, cited from *Community News*, 29 June 1993;
- [36] 'Essendon Historical Society Ascot Vale Walk', March 1993; R.W. Chalmers, *The Annals of Essendon Volume 4 (1986 to 2000)*, p126, cited from *Community News*, 31 October 1989; Chalmers, p145, cited from *Community News*, 4 September 1990; Chalmers, p164, cited from *Community News*, 24 July 1991; Chalmers, p207, cited from *Community News*, 29 June 1993.

### Applicable themes

This place illustrates the following themes, taken from the *Moonee Valley Thematic Environmental History* (Living Histories, 2012):

- 5.6 Entertaining and socialising
- 9.1 Participating in sport and recreation
- 3.1 Establishing pathways

### Comparative analysis

The Laurel Hotel, founded c1853-54, with the main wing of the present building dating to c1857-62, is one of the very earliest surviving hotel buildings in the City of Moonee Valley. It can be compared to:

- Prince Albert/Cricket Club Hotel, former, 85-95 Mt Alexander Road, Flemington (HO195). Constructed in 1865, this is an austere, two-storey rendered building with a hipped roof. The ground floor openings have been altered. It is now the Vincent Liem Centre (a church).
- Farmers Arms, former, 835 Mt Alexander Road, Moonee Ponds. Established in 1853, the present building appears to date from c1870. The ground floor of this simple building is altered.

The remaining hotels identified in the Heritage Overlay were built in the 1880s or later (though many along Mt Alexander Road were founded much earlier and then rebuilt).

In comparison with the two pre-1880s hotel buildings identified, above, it is clear that the Laurel is both the earliest and the most interesting architecturally, with its bold quoining to the windows and corner pilasters. It is of comparable intactness to the former Prince Albert Hotel.

### **Assessment of significance**

The following statement of significance sets out the cultural heritage significance of this place against the Hercon model criteria for the assessment of heritage values:

#### *What is significant?*

The Laurel Hotel at 289 Mt Alexander Road, Ascot Vale. A hotel was first opened on this site in 1853 or '54 and the main part of the hotel – fronting Mt Alexander Road – was constructed between 1857 and 1862. An extension with identical detailing was constructed facing Middle Street, possibly in 1867. The Laurel has operated as a hotel uninterrupted to the present day (2013).

The building is two-storeys in height, with an irregular plan which reflects its corner site and construction in two stages. It has ruled rendered walls an exposed hipped slate roof. The ground floor is articulated by simple corner pilasters (probably of bluestone), while the first floor has massive quoins to the corners and the windows.

The single-storey, 20<sup>th</sup>-century additions to the south and west sides are not of significance. The verandah is also of no significance.

#### *How is it significant?*

The Laurel Hotel is of rarity value, historical, aesthetic and social significance to the City of Moonee Valley.

#### *Why is it significant?*

The Laurel Hotel is a rare early surviving hotel building. The business was started on this site in 1853 or '54 to serve the passing goldrush trade en route to the Castlemaine goldfields, as were many others on Mt Alexander Road. The present building was constructed for publican Patrick Dolan between 1857 and '62, making it the earliest surviving hotel building in Moonee Valley, and one of the longest operating businesses in the area. (Criteria B & A)

Historically, also for its links to the racing industry which characterises the southern part of Moonee Valley. Publican Thomas Chadwick, who took up the license in 1866, had close links with Flemington Racecourse and expanded the premises onto Middle Street to accommodate both jockeys and their horses. Champion horses visiting for the Melbourne Cup and other local race meetings at Flemington were regularly accommodated in the hotel stables. The Laurel also served as a venue for viewing prize racehorses displayed for sale. (Criterion A)

Aesthetically, it is an attractive and intact example of an early Victorian commercial building, distinguished by bold quoins to the first floor. (Criterion D)

Socially, as a focus for community recreation continuously since the early 1850s, particularly for the racing fraternity. (Criterion G)

**Statutory recommendations**

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Moonee Valley Planning Scheme as an Individually Significant place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Moonee Valley Planning Scheme:

No specific controls