

**Stag Hotel,
High Street (Sunraysia Highway)
Learmonth**

Report on Heritage and Conservation Aspects

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1.0 Heritage Registers and Town Planning Overlays

- 1.1 The building is within the Interim Heritage Overlay for Learmonth on the City of Ballarat Planning Scheme. This means that any changes to the building beyond routine maintenance will require a planning permit from the City of Ballarat.
- 1.2 The Building is not on the Victorian Heritage Register
- 1.3 The Building is not on the Register of the National Estate
- 1.4 The National Trust has a file on the building (File B1740). The building is classified as of local Significance

2. History of the Stag Hotel

2.1 The Development of Learmonth¹

The Learmonth district and township takes its name from the Learmonth Brothers, John, Thomas, Andrew and Somerville Learmonth, (four of the five sons of Thomas Livingstone Learmonth who was an excellent sheep breeder). They settled in the area together with Thomas Bath and others, in the late 1830s, attracted by the good grazing land and the permanent waters of Lake Learmonth and the creeks, which supplied the lake. Reports from Major Mitchell who had passed by the country when it was in full grass praised the region and encouraged these early settlers to follow his tracks.

The discovery of gold in Ballarat in September 1851, and elsewhere in the district in subsequent years, brought a rapidly increasing population to the district hungry for meat and fresh produce. The rich volcanic soils made the district a natural food production area and the pastoral properties were able to supply both fresh meat and other supplies. The availability of fresh

¹ The History of the development of Learmonth is based on the historical overview prepared for the Ballarat Heritage Study 2002 for Hansen Partners.

water and good grass encouraged settlers, many of them who saw an opportunity to make money supplying the goldfields rather than digging for gold, and they soon established a settlement at the location of the present Learmonth township. The area is bounded by the ancient volcanic cones of Brown's Hill, Saddleback Hill, Weatherboard Hill and Bankin Hill with Lake Learmonth being located roughly in the centre of the four hills. The present township site is located astride the current Sunraysia Highway, which was originally a busy road north west from Ballarat to Avoca cut between the lake and Bankin Hill, and adjacent to Lake Learmonth.

This location, some 18kms from Ballarat, was an easy day's ride on the way to the Avoca goldfields and beyond and placed it as an overnight stopping place. Hotels, stables and boarding houses met the demand. When the gold rushes ceased and deep mining became more common the now established town of Ballarat still required servicing and Learmonth was well placed.

In 1859 Assistant Surveyor John Carruthers formally surveyed the Learmonth township and set out the allotments and the reserves, which make up the township layout as it can still essentially be seen today. He had to work around several buildings that were already in place such as a Presbyterian Church, a Wesleyan Church and a Catholic Church, as well as two hotels - the Stag Hotel and the Lady of the Lake. The first allotments went on sale in Ballarat in November 1859 with a second, and larger sale on the following February.

The original subdivision clearly demonstrates its focus and reliance on the main thoroughfare that passed through the middle of the early settlement. The formal layout of public buildings and commercial premises all face the present highway. The housing blocks nearly all face the highway and extend no further than one block back. The town subdivision stretches westwards along the highway from its intersection with Queen Street to the corner of Morton Street where the historic Stag Hotel, which was established in 1854, is situated.

Through the 1860s and well into the 1870s Learmonth became a busy township with 4 blacksmiths making agricultural implements for the growing numbers of farms, several hotels, 2 bakeries, a doctor and 4 general stores as well as saddler's shops kept busy supplying the needs of horsemen. A number of these commercial buildings are still standing.

After the turn of the century Learmonth continued to grow in importance as a focus for the surrounding district. In the 1930s further renovations and alterations were made to the Stag Hotel, which had already seen many changes since it was first established.

2.2 The Development of the Stag Hotel

Excerpt from the report *Shire of Ballarat Learmonth Residential Development Potential*, August 1986, Meldrum Burrows and Partners.

p.10 Stag Hotel

The history of Learmonth is evident by the Stag Hotel which was established in 1854. It has been alleged to be the second oldest Hotel in the Ballarat district. The Mackenzie family held the licence for 68 years. The hotel is the only survivor of many hotels opened in the Learmonth district. Its central location on the junction of Weatherboard and Avoca Roads has made it a popular place for all traffic to Ballarat.

The early years of the gold boom saw twelve coaches [daily] leaving the Stag Hotel daily carrying miners from Avoca, Talbot and Fiery Creek rushes to Ballarat.

The hotel then comprised a large stables and dozens of horses. The billiard room was the bar and booking office for all the coaches.

The Stag Hotel was also a popular meeting place dating back to 1858 for the Cemetery Trusts and Roads Boards and in 1870-80 for champion ploughmen. The Ballarat Sire Council also held its annual President's Dinner at the hotel.

Since its establishment the hotel has undergone extensions earlier this century and more recent renovations. The early 1930s showed a decorative border around the edge of the verandah canopy. Today illuminated advertising is located above the verandah.

The basis for the above review was "The History of The Stag Hotel by Mrs Murtaugh" published in the "Back to Learmonth" Centenary Celebrations October 29th, 30th & 31st, 1937 Souvenir Program.

"The Stag Hotel has been closely associated with the early history and progress of Learmonth. It is the second oldest hotel in the Ballarat district, Craig's Hotel (originally known as Bath's Hotel) being the oldest. The Stag Hotel was established in 1854, the first license being granted to a Mr Mackenzie and the licence was held by a member of the Mackenzie family continuously for 68 years; surely a record for any hotel in Victoria.

There are on record meetings of the Cemetery Trust, Roads Boards, and other pioneer bodies being held at the Stag Hotel as far back as 1858. Today it is the only survivor of the many hotels opened in the Learmonth District. Situated at the junction of the Weatherboard and Avoca Roads it has always been the centre and calling place for the traffic to Ballarat, and the older generation, and perhaps some of the Come-backs, will remember the gold mining boom days, with twelve coaches leaving the Stag Hotel daily, carrying the miners from Avoca, Talbot and Fiery Creek Rushes to Ballarat.

What a busy place it must have been in those days, with its large stables and dozens of horses. What is today the billiard room was in those the bar and booking

office for all the coaches. In the early days most of the land surrounding the hotel belonged to Mr Mackenzie, and what is now Alexander Park and the recreation ground belonged to the hotel. Race and sport meetings were held there regularly, horses coming all the way from Melbourne to compete. There was also a bicycle track, and bike races were held at a later date. The last of the Mackenzies to hold the license of the Stag Hotel sold the sports ground to the Shire Office, so that the people of Learmonth should have a sports ground for all time.

Back in the seventies and eighties, when ploughing matches were booming, the Stage Hotel was the meeting place for champion ploughman, and many matches were arranged here. Some of the older folk will remember the interest taken, when men came from as far afield as New South Wales to compete in the champion ploughing matches. The earlier licensees seem to have taken a great interest in sport of all kinds, and participated in the boat races and regattas on Lake Learmonth. One of the last boats used on the lake was owned by one of the member of the family.

For very many years the Ballarat Shire Council held its annual President's dinner at the Stage Hotel, and numerous Presidents, long since departed, presided over large gatherings on those occasions, when members of parliament and visitors came from far and near; and the Stag has had many notable men under its roof.

Many changes have been made since the first license was granted, and the big stables are not used so much now that the motor car has supplanted the horse. Still the hotel serves a large district. The proprietor, Mr. H.T. Murtaugh, extends a cordial invitation to any of the Home-comers to come and have a look through this old landmark of early Learmonth. A hearty welcome awaits you."

In 1938 the Ballarat architects, P.S. & G Richards, undertook alterations to the Stag Hotel.² The extent of these alterations is not known.

Two early photographs have been located on published in the *Ballarat Stock and Station Agent* 1913 and one published in "The History of The Stag Hotel by Mrs Murtaugh" published in the "Back to Learmonth" Centenary Celebrations October 29th, 30th & 31st, 1937 Souvenir Program." These two photographs show that the building had not changed substantially, externally in the intervening 24 years. The major alteration being the replacement of the timber picket fence shown in 1913 with what appears to be a post and wire fence in 1937.

3. Notes on the physical development of the building

3.1 Comparison with early photographs

As can be seen when comparing the 1913 photograph (illustration 1) and the 1937 photograph that for the first part of the twentieth century, the building remained very similar to its turn of the century configuration. The roof form remains today as it is seen in the photographs. Many of the chimneys remain. The chimney behind the front gable has been removed. There is clear physical evidence of its position in the existing store room where the fireplace base remains. The major alterations are blocking up of the corner hotel bar entry door and its conversion to a fixed window, the late twentieth century addition to the dining room on the western side of the

² Final Certificates issued by PS and G Richards from Dr Gay Sweely, Personal and Professional Relationships in Architecture: The Practice of Percival Selwyn Richards: 1865 –1952. Phd Thesis, Departments of Fine Arts and Architecture and Planning, University of Melbourne, 31 August 1997

building, the removal of part of the verandah which once ran all along the west side of the building, the replacement of the square timber verandah post with circular metal posts, and the loss of the simple shallow arched timber valance and brackets which once adorned the verandah. The main western long roof gable shows as a deeper colour on the photographs. This may indicate a change in roofing material or a change in roof paint colour.

3.2 Notes on Site Visit concerning building materials and building development

- The building is of weatherboard at a short set back from High Street Learmonth.
- The roof is clad in short length lapped corrugated steel which indicates that the cladding dates from earlier than the 1960s.
The building would appear to have been constructed in two distinct main parts. The northern section which comprises a double gabled section facing west. This has a central doorway with a four panelled door with glazed upper panels and a transom window above the door. To the north is an original timber, double hung window and to the south is an introduced glazed door and fixed sidelight which would appear to have replaced a matching double hung window to that on the north side. The facade is divided by wide timber pilasters, with a pair of pilasters on each side of the door and at the corners and alongside the north window. This facade is marred by an introduced infilled section on the south side of the verandah, the introduced metal verandah posts and the loss of the verandah decoration. The facade of this section facing the rear street has a narrow parapet. On the south end of this section is a wide, corbelled rendered brick chimney. It would appear that this was the earliest section of the building.
- The front section comprises a number of intersecting gables and unusual shaped weatherboards, which have a small scotia shape at the overlap. The exposed decorative truss infills of the gable ends indicates that this section may have been reconstructed or remodelled c1900. . The chimneys in this section are face red brick with corbelled brick bands.
- The building has had a number of additions and alterations over the years. The corner bar door has been filled in with square edged weatherboards and an odd shaped window but retains original/early architraves. The dining room has been extended on the west side in a modern late twentieth century style. The central window in the south facing gable has been replaced in the mid twentieth century. The early photographs show this to have been a pair of double hung windows with a timber cornice above.
- From limited inspection in the roof section there was evidence of painted Hessian lining to the top of the battens. The batten spacing was wide and the trusses of a relatively light construction size and spacing. The roof timbers appear to indicate the roof has been clad in corrugated metal roofing for many years. There was no indication that the roof had been

clad in slate. By 1852-53 large shipments of corrugated iron were being made to Australia.

- From a limited inspection of the sub floor structure from the cellar, the floor joists/bearers are at or near ground level and appear to have been constructed from second hand material. Some were noted as having earlier mortice holes.
- No lifting of floor coverings was undertaken but it is apparent that there is serious degradation of the stumps and floor structure. It would appear that the entire floor will need to be restumped, some excavation of sub soil will be required to give any sub floor ventilation and air flow, an allowance will be necessary to replace damaged and faulty floor structure and cladding. This will cause major disruption to the operation of the hotel as restumping requires complete access to the floor area and cannot be done with equipment in place and operational. I suggest that the timber stumps be replaced with concrete stumps and concrete pads.
- The internally illuminated circular pole sign above the verandah is intrusive and should be removed. The use of painted signs and well placed floodlighting can improve the appearance and provide appropriate night time signage for the hotel.
- A number of defects were noted during the inspection:
 1. The timber cover panel next to front entry was effected by rot and requires replacement and flashing/remaking of sill to redirect water away from cover strip.
 2. The timber verandah posts on the west side are showing rot at base. They appear to be untreated pine and should be replaced with more durable timber.
 3. The lower glass panes in the west wall of the dining room appear to be 6mm ordinary annealed glass, which does not conform to the current glass standards. This should be replaced with glass to the current safety standards.
 4. There is very limited perimeter sub floor vents which has lead to the degradation of the subfloor structure. More sub floor ventilation should be introduced.
 5. The north windows are showing rot in the base of the architraves. The rotted sections should be replaced with scarfed in sections of matching profile timber.
 6. The storm water system is not directing the water away from the building. Some down pipes are not connected to a system but empty adjacent to the building. These should be connected to a working storm water system discharging to a legal point of discharge.

The above is not an exhaustive list but notes taken during the site visit.

3.3 Resume of Building History

The Stag Hotel, Learmonth would appear to have been constructed on the site in 1854 and has traded ever since. The Stag Hotel is the last remaining operating hotel in Learmonth. It would appear that the section to the north is the earliest section with the southern section, which now faces High Street being a later addition or remodelling. Later additions include the hipped roof section on the north east corner which would appear to date from the interwar period, the late twentieth century addition to the west side of the dining room, infilling of the western verandah, and the mid twentieth century alterations to the original verandah on the south, west and north sides. The building retains its roof form, most chimneys, many windows and door opening, most wall cladding and the decorative trusses in the gable ends.

4. Conservation Comments

4.1 Roof

The roof is in poor condition and requires repair or replacement. The box gutters are in poor condition and require replacement. The roof to be reclad in heavy gauge galvanised steel corrugated sheeting. The sheets to be laid in long lengths. This will give longer life but will alter subtly the appearance of the building. All roofing and roof plumbing materials to be of galvanised steel. The ridge, barge and hip cappings to be of a rolled profile similar to the existing profile. The eaves gutters to be of quad profile with round galvanised steel downpipes OR Ogee profile galvanised steel eaves gutters with rectangular profile galvanised steel downpipes. An acceptable but less preferred option is to use Colorbond corrugated roofing, rolled ridge, barge and hip cappings, eaves gutters and downpipes in Gull Grey colour. Care must be taken not to use a mixture of the two materials, galvanised steel and zincaluminum based metals, as this will lead to galvanic reactions and cause differential rusting of the materials.

Ensure that the box gutters have a good free board and are well flashed under the roof cladding and in matching material to the roof cladding.

Ensure all chimneys, roof lights and other roof penetrations are well flashed in matching material to the roof cladding. Retain all roof lights in situ.

Any repairs to the roof framing should retain the existing roof framing including evidence of earlier materials and penetrations in the roof.

Ensure that all gutters drain to downpipes. Add new downpipes as required for adequate roof drainage. The introduction of new downpipes is encouraged to ensure the long term water tightness of the building. Place new downpipes in inconspicuous positions in places similar to the existing downpipes.

4.2 Sub floor

The subfloor structure has failed and the floors are currently undulating. The entire subfloor requires restumping. It is advised that the whole building be restumped at the one time. Prop the building at the current level. Excessive lifting often results in further damage to the building.

Use 100 by 100 concrete stumps. If possible leave some examples of the existing stumping system in situ. Ensure that the timber sub floor structure is protected by a moisture barrier from moisture transmitted by the stumps.

Repair any subfloor structure as necessary, leaving as much of the original sub floor structure as possible.

Where possible ensure that the soil level is 150mm below the bearer. Take care to ensure that sumps are not created and that all sub floor water can drain away from the building. This may require the construction of drainage channels through the sub floor area.

Introduce as much sub floor ventilation as possible. Screen the vents to prevent the ingress of vermin.

If removal of floorboards is required to gain access to the sub floor area, the flooring should be laid aside for reuse where possible. All repairs to flooring should be in matching material to the original flooring. Introduced new material should be clearly marked with the date of the new work.

4.3 Storm Water Works and External Grading

Ensure all new and existing retained downpipe are connected to a working underground storm water system which discharges to a Council approved point of discharge.

Ensure that all external soil levels are below floor level and grade away from the building. Ensure that no water is directed under the building.

4.4 Upgrade Water Supply System

Remove all superfluous pipes and fittings and upgrade the existing system and install any new pipes required to modern standards. Use existing wall penetrations where possible and conceal as much of the pipework as possible.

4.5 Upgrade Electrical Installation

Remove all superfluous wiring and replace with concealed new wiring to modern requirements. Care to be taken in placement of meters and fuse boxes. Install in inconspicuous situations and construct any necessary covers and cabinets in appropriate materials and style.

to "The Ballarat Stock and Station Journal." December 16, 1913.

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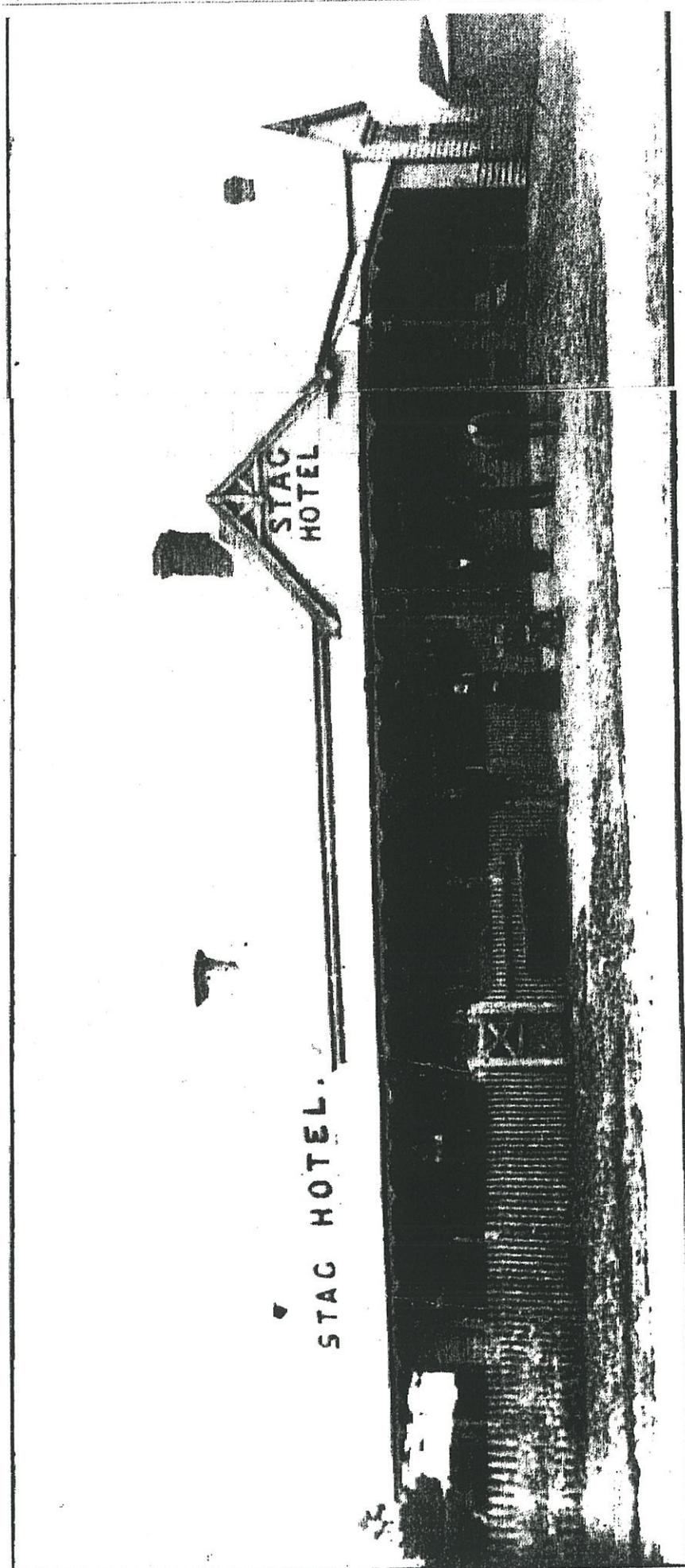


Illustration No. 1

The Stag Hotel in 1913
Supplement to the Ballarat Stock and Station Journal
December 16, 1913

LEARMONTH HOTELS 1913
ENTICING THE FISHERMEN
AND HUNTERS

is one of the best
family and has always
which gives remarkable
beaches for the children.

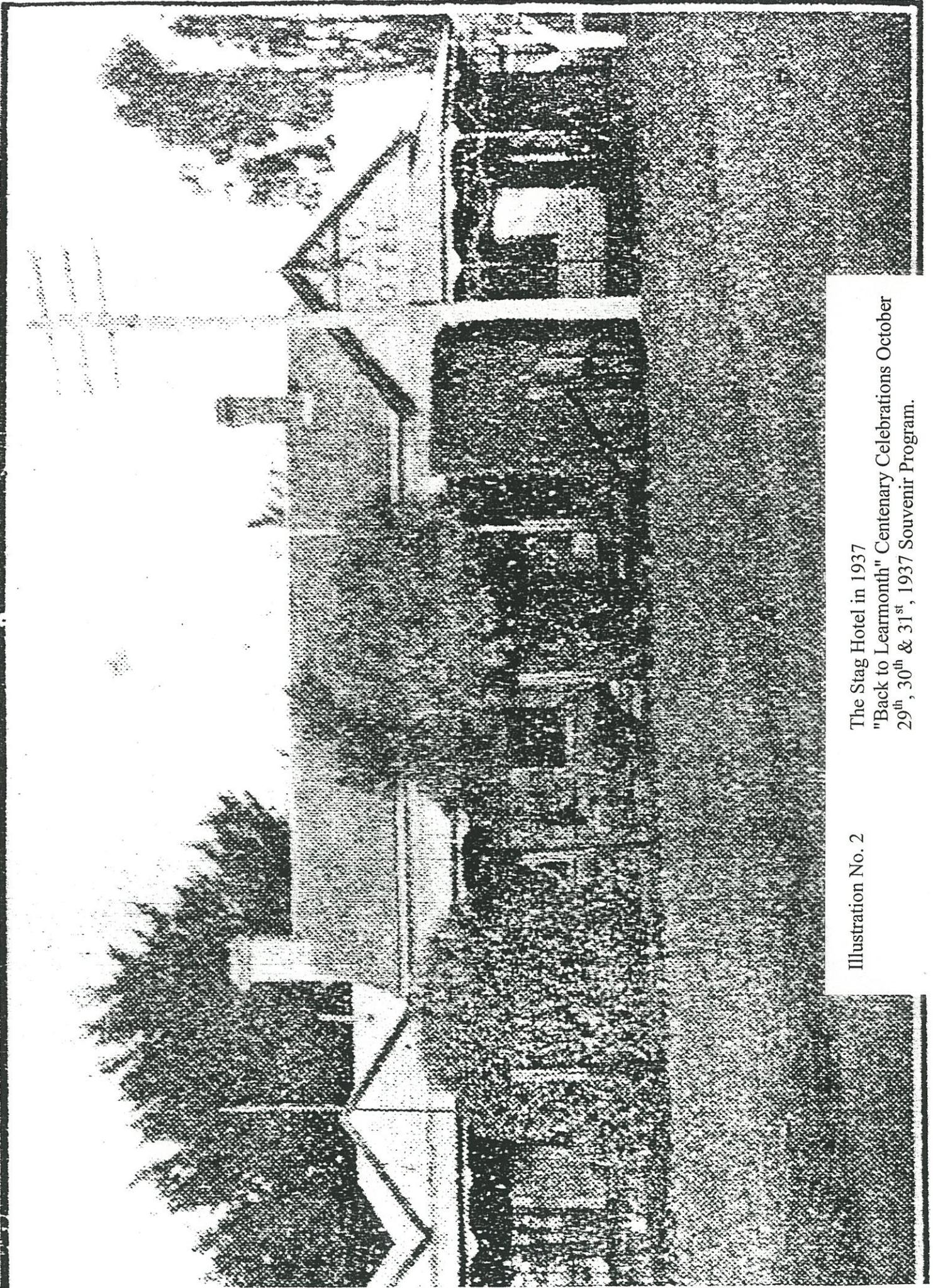


Illustration No. 2

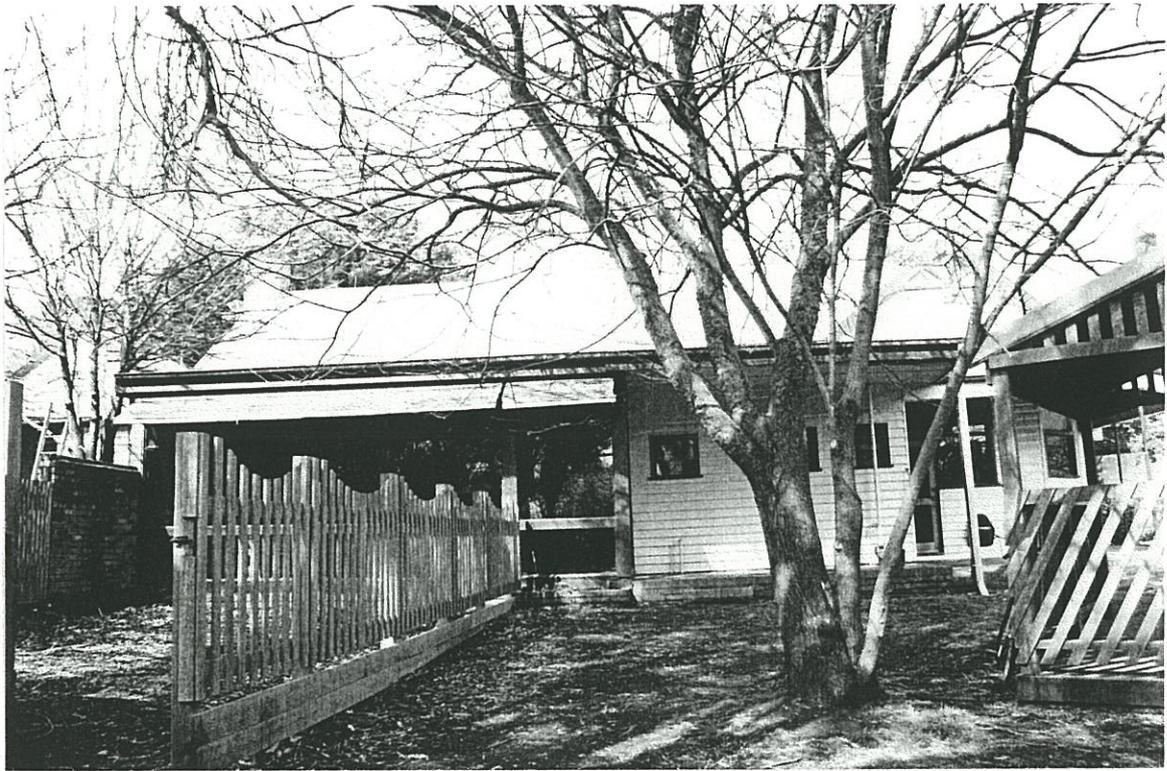
The Stag Hotel in 1937
"Back to Learmonth" Centenary Celebrations October
29th, 30th & 31st, 1937 Souvenir Program.



The Stag Hotel, Learmonth South Facade facing High Street.
 Note corner entry altered to window, introduced new windows, loss of decoration on verandah, intrusive signage.



The Stag Hotel, Learmonth View of south and west elevations
 Showing changes to doors and windows and introduced verandah extension on west.



The Stag Hotel, Learmonth

West elevation showing dining room extension



The Stag Hotel, Learmonth

Southern section of west elevation

Showing double gable section with original entry door, timber pilasters and double hung window. Note introduced concrete verandah slab which would be restricting sub floor ventilation



The Stag Hotel, Learmonth View of west and north elevations.
Note parapet along west section of north elevation.

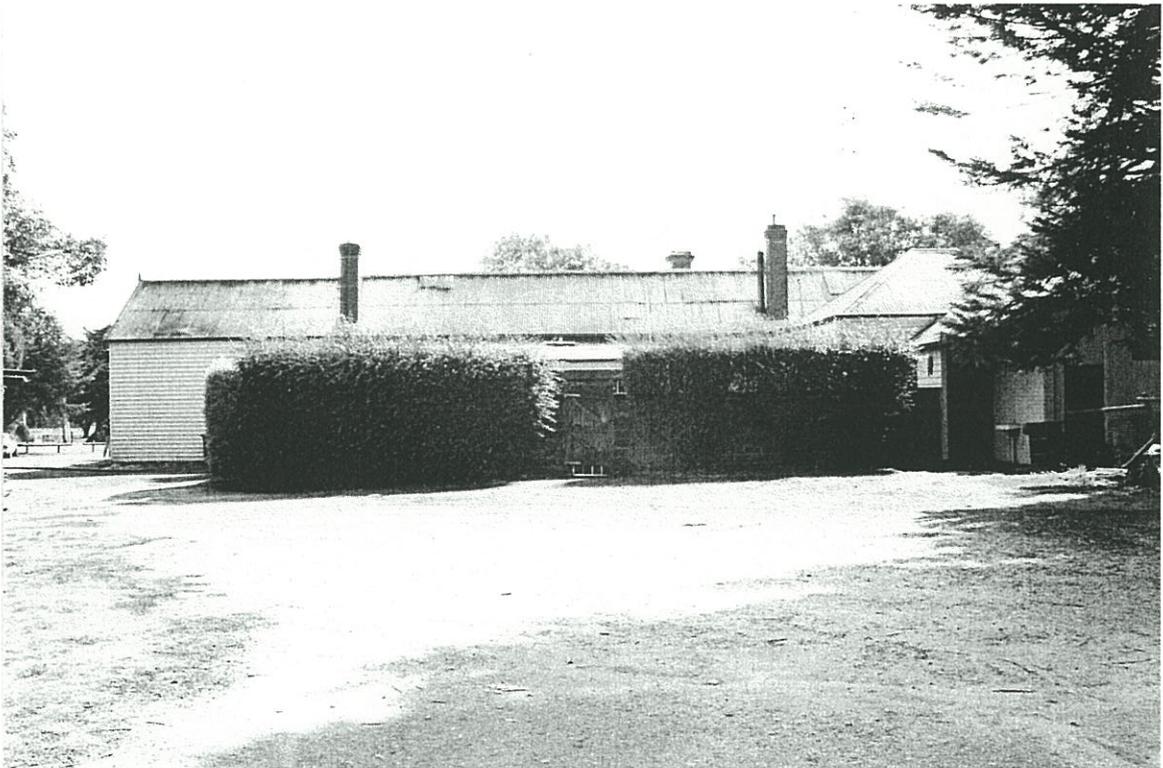


The Stag Hotel, Learmonth North elevation.
Note that east most section is interwar extension.



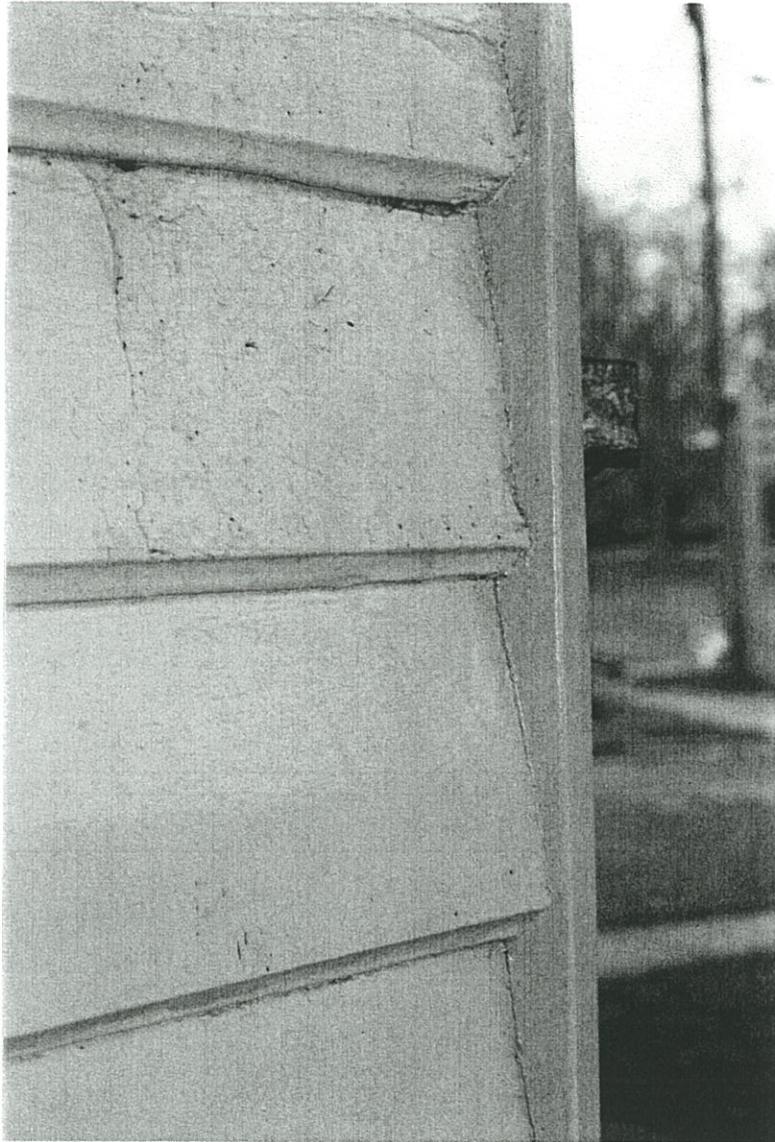
The Stag Hotel, Learmonth

North east corner showing inter war extension.



The Stag Hotel, Learmonth

East elevation



The Stag Hotel, Learmonth

Detail of weatherboard profile on southern section of building.



The Stag Hotel, Learmonth

Detail of roof showing box gutters and roof cladding condition.

VINCENT McDONALD
ARCHITECT

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TIMELINE:

Subject to availability of contractors.

Restumping and Sub-Floor Framing Repairs:

Expected works: March 2003.

*Gailyn Nunn
Smyle date*

Note: local re-stumping firms have ongoing contracts with Dep't of Education for the state-wide relocation of portable school buildings over the summer break. Not available for other work until those contracts are complete in early February.

External Grading and Sewerage Works:

Expected works: March 2003.

In conjunction with re-stumping. Related works associated with stability of building. Sewerage work a priority with local authority (Notice of Nuisance - City of Ballarat MP:tg 16/09/02)

Re-Roofing and Gutters:

Expected works: August 2003.

It is good practice to allow re-stumping works to settle and stabilise for a weather cycle before proceeding with other works requiring accurate levels.

Drainage Works:

Expected works: August 2003.

In conjunction with re-roofing. Related works associated with guttering and stormwater disposal.

Water Pipe Replacement:

Expected works: August 2003.

In conjunction with re-roofing. Likely to be same contractor for economies of scale.

Electrical Upgrade:

Expected works: August 2003

In conjunction with water pipe works. Intention to keep disruptions and making good to a single period.

Architectural:

Expected works: September 2003.

Final certificate and report on completed works.

Heritage Report detailing modifications.

Vincent McDonald RAIA
VINCENT McDONALD ARCHITECT

DISTRIBUTION

Builder

Proprietor

File

Other: DEH-AC

The Anglers' Home at Learmonth.



The STAG is one of the best-known landmarks in the State. For over fifty years the house has been in the McKenzie family and has always been noted for its genuine excellence. Its position is unique, facing the famous Lake Learmonth which gives remarkable hauls of both perch and trout. Several commodious bathing boxes for ladies and gents and fine sandy beaches for the children. The cuisine of the hotel is excellent. First-class shooting and fishing. Lovely drives can be arranged. Tariff moderate—full particulars on application.

STAG HOTEL, Learmonth.

Mrs. McKENZIE,
Proprietress.

THE CAMP HOTEL, LEARMONTH.

Under entirely New Management. Special Arrangements made for Shooting and Fishing Parties. . . . Best of Refreshing Liquids.

A WELCOME AWAITS YOU AT THE CAMP.

A flea and a fly in a flue
Were imprisoned; now what could they do?
Said the fly, "Let us flee."
"Let us fly," said the flea.
And they flew through a flaw in the flue.

An amateur charity worker, visiting a family in the tenement district, was alarmed to see the mother dash a cup of cold water in the face of the baby she had just finished dressing.

Too polite to express her astonishment the visitor held her breath, expecting the air to be rent with screams. When none came, the child merely whimpering, she said: "Dear me, I should think he'd object more than that."

"Wouldn't y now?" said the fond mother admiringly; "sure I've been practising on him for three weeks. He won't yell when he's baptized next Sunday! He'll be used to it."

Holdenson & Nielson Fresh Food Pty. Ltd.

CREAM

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Received at our Factories and Country Depots. Highest Prices and Prompt and Actual Returns guaranteed for all consignments.

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