

PLD ESSAY: Hotels and Licencing in Wonthaggi and District Part Continued

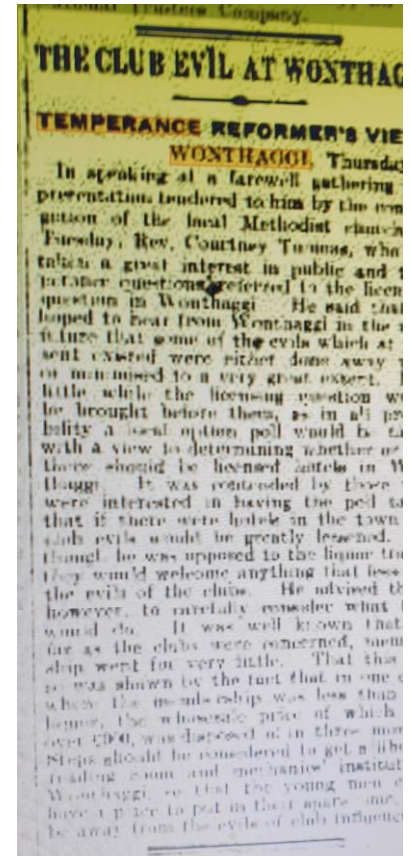
Wonthaggi

Wonthaggi exists because of the need for coal by the Victorian Railways and Melbourne's electricity. It was set up in a hurry and was from the start a Government town. Thus the usual land speculation and unrestrained and corrupt development did not occur. At the same time Model Town theories were prevalent amongst prominent politicians and bureaucrats.

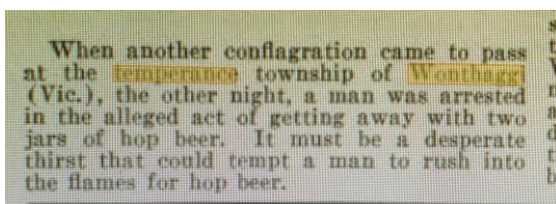
Similarly the Temperance Movement in its various forms and groups were prominent in public policy. From 1909 until May 1912, the so-called Liberal Government was led by John Murray as Premier. He was a reformed heavy drinker, who often preached of the evil of alcohol. He fervently held that no public licences should be issued for Wonthaggi. The parties in those parliaments were by no means philosophically united, with Murray being the leader of the conservative country faction. Murray was undermined by his colleague William Alexander Watt, of the more progressive urban faction and was replaced as Premier in May 1912. Watt held the premiership until November 1917 except for a short 14 days in December 1913. So his more liberal views obviously would have become more influential within parliament.

It should be noted that from 1910 the State Government had established the Licence Reduction Board to reduce the number of public licences, which had exploded from the Gold Rush period. So for new licences to be issued in Wonthaggi would seem contrary to general public policy. However, Wonthaggi was a new town.

Even after the establishment of the Borough Council in April 1911, Wonthaggi was still very much a State run town. There was considerable feeling within the town that it should be dry so there was a policy that no public licences would be issued.



The Age 1913



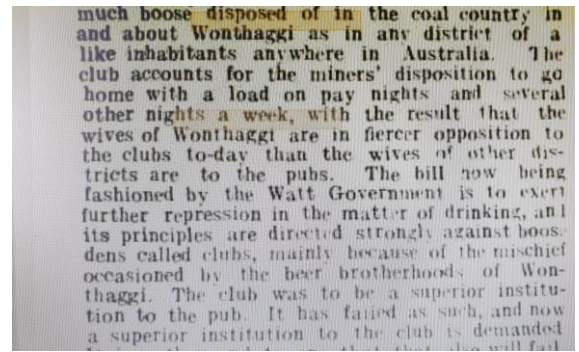
The Bulletin 1912

However there seemed to be no similar restrictions on private club licences and 2-gallon licences. These were supposedly taken away. Two were noted as being on the road in Hicksborough being the "Swan" and the "Blue Pig". There may have been more Swans and Pigs elsewhere.

A reporter for the "Melbourne Leader" on November 17, 1910 stated he found 32 places to get a drink with 3 rail wagons of empty kegs to go back to Melbourne on Saturday Morning.

By 1912 there were 12 licenced clubs. In 1913 William Thomas Mason of the Ozone declared bankruptcy blaming: "the 13 clubs in Wonthaggi for taking his business". With that many clubs and 2-gallon licences around it was not long before the people changed their mind about how drinking alcohol should take place.

A push was made by the Miners Union and others for a state owned hotel. But the Temperance Lobby, Presbyterian Ladies Committee, Women's National League and Ministers Association remained against all licences during 1910 to 1912. By 1913 public meetings and letters to newspapers from wives began to push for more transparent venues for drinking. Even the Police Magistrate, Cole, criticised the lack of accommodation in town. A poll of residents in September 1914 called for public houses rather than private clubs to ensure proper policing. So late in 1913 the Licensing Commission called for applications for Public Licences for the town, which included Dudley, Hicksborough and Edgarton. Apparently there was room for 7 licences for the town given the population.



Punch 1913

The process was an initial application to establish a hotel and then after the Licencing Inspector had reviewed the premises a licence to trade was issued. Mrs Jessie Allen showed admirable foresight in 1910 and built the two-storied Powlett Hostel, which operated as a Coffee Palace and a boarding house with shop fronts. By 1913 she also had a wine licence there.

On December 13, 1913 the Phillip Island Licencing Court heard initial applications – 14 for Wonthaggi, 3 for South Dudley, 2 for Kilcunda, 1 for Corinella. Additionally several club licences for Wonthaggi were renewed.

Applications were received from a range of people including Samuel Abraham, Owner/Manager of the Melbourne Furnishing Co, Henry Jolly, Manager Wonthaggi Theatre (Wonthaggi Soldiers then Plaza) and Nellie McGrath – Boarding house in Murray Street. Nellie's relationship with John McGrath is unknown. Some other interesting applications – James Shugg, an ex schoolteacher, wanted to build a pub in McKenzie Street near the railway crossing. Another application was by Thomas Skipworth Reilly who was the manager of Timber and Trading in Wonthaggi who applied for a licence for a hotel on the corner of Deakin and Reid Street, Edgarton (North Wonthaggi). I do not know which corner. Police Sgt Tennant vehemently opposed it and also the Ministers Association on the basis it was too close to St James Church of England (100 yards) and Methodist Church (500 yards). Today, the logic puzzles me as pubs were closed on Sundays.

Provisional licences were granted to

George Howe	South Dudley
Jessie Allen	Powlett Hostel – an existing premises
James Webb	Manager of Caledonian Club
C D Taberner	McBride Avenue
John McGrath	Corner of Graham & McKenzie St – an existing premises.

They were granted on the provision that the premises would be built. Jessie and Lou Allen obviously had an advantage.

Applications for licences to trade were heard on Friday 8th January 1915. Mrs Jessie Allen's Powlett Hotel was granted and opened within the hour. On October 14 1915 licences to trade were granted to the Caledonian, which opened that afternoon; the State Mines Hotel, which opened November 1 and Taberner's Wonthaggi Hotel on November 2 1915. McGrath obviously did not proceed with his project but in 1927 is noted as having a wine licence in Hicksborough.



Sometime years later, in the 1920s, Frank Nesci and his wife built a wine bar, with a residence at the rear, in McKenzie St, seemingly on the block where Shugg had proposed to build a hotel in 1914. They operated it until the early 1970's when they retired. The building was demolished and the PMG built the automatic telephone exchange on the block.

Only 2 of the original plethora of private club licences remain in existence today, being the Wonthaggi Workers Cooperative Club and The Wonthaggi Club.

Tilley's ran a licenced grocery in McBride Ave for many years up to the 1970's.

With the loosening of licencing laws under the Cain government in the 1980's the supermarkets took up take away licences. Later came Dan Murphy's. With the advent of poker machines in the 1990's both the Wonthaggi Bowls Club and the Wonthaggi Golf Club took up licences as did the Rovers Football Club. The golf club licence is now held by The Wonthaggi Club.

The Town Hotels:

THE CALEDONIAN HOTEL

The first publican, Webb, an ex-miner came to Wonthaggi from Outtrim mines. He was active in the miners union. In 1914 he was the manager of the Caledonian Club next door to the current hotel. John Wren of Melbourne financed the Caledonian Hotel building but I don't know the connection between him and James Webb.

James (Paddy) Webb operated the hotel until 1938. He sold the freehold and licence to Jack Williamson. Webb retired to Inverloch and then Burwood. Jack Williamson ran it until 1954 when Bill Tucker had the licence for 4 years. When I was a little boy it was known as "China's", after China Williamson. I was in Grade 3 and 4 with the son of Bill Tucker. Then it was known as "Goldie's" after Goldie and Charlie Guthrie. It was known as "McRae's" when Jack and Gwen McRae (nee Williamson) ran it with son Gary and Erin following them. Several licencees have followed up to the present. Only recently has the Caledonian been known as "The Cally".



THE POWLETT HOTEL

Built in 1910, it originally had no veranda and balcony. It was an imposing building and major landmark being in the centre of town.

I do not know when Jessie Allen finished at The Powlett but she and her husband were still there in 1934. I believe it was bought by the Richmond Brewing Company and was known by many as "The Richmond". There was a Tiger Ale sign painted on the south wall facing an empty block. Carlton United Breweries (CUB) would have gained the freehold when they bought Richmond out in the 1950's. The Trevaglia's ran it for some years in the 60's before they went to Porepunkah. Later CUB had managers until the licence was transferred to the Miner's Rest over New Year 1969/1970. The building had deteriorated, due to lack of maintenance under CUB's ownership, and was demolished.



TABERNER'S, THE WHALEBONE HOTEL, WONTHAGGI HOTEL



Photo of Hotel being built

The Taberner family owned and ran it until Charlie died in 1945. It was then sold to CUB with Wally and Vi Taberner running it. The family bought the freehold back in the early 1980's when CUB sold most of their pubs. Brian and Helen Lindsay ran it for 13 years. There have been several licencees since.

STATE MINES HOTEL



After Howe, there must have been a regular change of ownerships as every time it appeared in the local press for after-hours-trading it was a different licence. - For example 1930, Mr A Bishop; 1933, Lillian Regan and 1934 Mrs O Sullivan. It was delicensed in 1956, I think, as part of the licence buy back policy. The premises have had many different uses – flats and caravan park, private house, school, and Bocce Rink. The Brusamarello's applied for a licenced restaurant permit. At a local poll South Dudley residents voted against it. More recently it has been extensively renovated internally as a B&B.

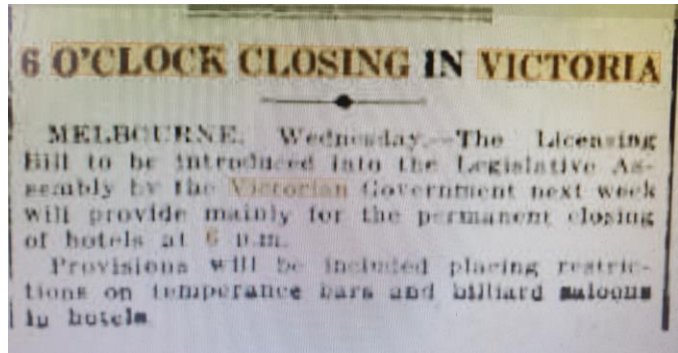
THE MINER'S REST HOTEL MOTEL

The Wright family built the pub in 1969. It opened for the New Year in 1970 with the licence transferred from The Powlett. Jim Donovan and his wife were the first publicans. Pat Barry and Susan Macaulay ran a very successful business for many years with an emphasis on live music events. There have been several licencees since, Phil Hewlett being the last. He still holds the licence. The total complex was demolished in 2020.



6 O'clock Closing

In 1915 Victoria enacted a law that saw hotel closing times move from 11.30pm to 9.30pm then to 6pm. This was pushed by the Temperance Movement groups and justified as a wartime austerity measure.



Daily Telegraph 1919

Although originally a temporary measure it was made permanent in 1919 in Victoria and New South Wales. Queensland adopted it in 1917 but abolished it in 1941. A similar law was passed in New Zealand. Private clubs were exempt from the rule in Australia. NSW moved to 10 o'clock closing in 1955. 6 O'clock closing was abolished in Victorian in 1966, SA and NZ in 1967.



The term "6 O'clock swill " was used in Australia and NZ to describe the last minute rush to get as many drinks down before closing time.

Jim Quilford

A version of this paper was delivered at the 100-year celebrations of the Caledonian Hotel, 1915