City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name:	**Village Belle Hotel**	**Citation No:**
Other names:	-	**294**
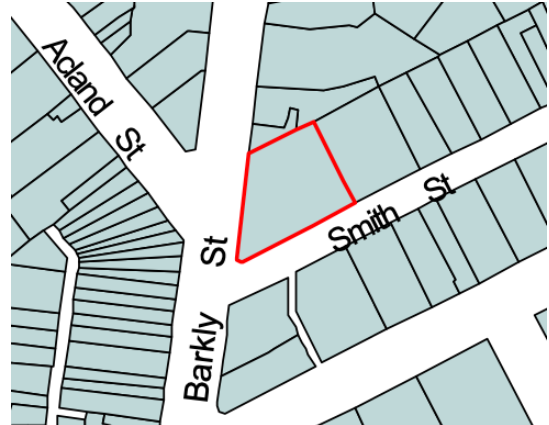
Address:	**202A Barkly Street, St Kilda**	**Heritage Precinct:**	**TBC**
Category:	**Commercial: Hotel**	**Heritage Overlay:**	**HO33**
Style:	**Victorian: Italianate**	**Graded as:**	**Significant**
Constructed:	**1891**	**Victorian Heritage Register:**	**No**
Designer:	**William Pitt**		
Amendment:	**TBC**		
Comment:	**Revised citation**		

Significance

What is significant?

The Village Belle Hotel, designed by architect, William Pitt and constructed in 1891, at 202A Barkly Street, St Kilda is significant. It is a two-storey, rendered brick, late-Victorian, Italianate-style hotel, situated on a prominent corner site.

Non-original alterations and additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

The Village Belle Hotel is of local historic, representative, aesthetic, and social significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

The Village Belle Hotel is of historic significance as one of the oldest continuously operating hotels in St Kilda. A hotel of this name has traded from this site since the 1850s, and has operated from this building for 130 of these years. It is a hotel that is a landmark in St Kilda, due, in part, to its prominent siting opposite the junction of Barkly and Acland Streets. As well as a venue to eat and drink, and for accommodation, the hotel was often used in its early years for various community meetings and events. So synonymous is the hotel with this area, that the shopping centre became known also as the Village Belle. (Criterion A)

The Village Belle Hotel is of representative significance, as a nineteenth century hotel that was designed by the eminent architect, William Pitt. It forms part of a fine body of work of Pitt in the late-nineteenth century, and within this tableau are many commercial buildings including hotels and coffee palaces. (Criterion D).

The Village Belle Hotel is of aesthetic significance as an intact and well-detailed hotel composed in an Italianate design, in a relatively restrained application of this style for the Land Boom. Street-facing elevations are rendered, detailed with a rusticated ground floor; and at centre on the Barkly Street elevation, is a loggia recessed behind three arches. The parapet, with a raised broken pediment on each elevation, was reinstated as part of recent alterations and additions to the hotel. The Village Belle has aesthetic significance also in its prominent siting, closing the vista along Acland Street and its shopping centre, when looking southeast towards Barkly Street. (Criterion E)

The Village Belle Hotel is of social significance to St Kilda as a landmark in the district. It has for generations been known, used and valued by the local community, and to visitors to St Kilda, as a place to stay, eat, drink, meet and socialise. (Criterion G)

Thematic context

Victoria's framework of historical themes

5. Building Victoria's industries and workforce: 5.6 Entertaining and socialising

Port Phillip thematic environmental history

3. People: 3.5 Expressing identity and culture

8. Community life: 8.4 Gathering places

9. Cultural life: 9.3 Tourism

History

Thematic context

3.5 Expressing identity and culture

3.5.1 Social clubs and meeting points

Social venues, including nightclubs, cafes, restaurants, and other community meeting places have played an important role in providing people with spaces to express themselves.

Hotels, churches and town halls have been important meeting places for societies, lodges and other community groups, particularly in the early years of settlement, before the construction of purpose-built facilities. Many are still used for those purposes today. Providing food, refreshments, entertainment and accommodation, hotels – or pubs – have been popular places to eat, socialise and stay in the City of Port Phillip since the arrival of European settlers. Wilbraham Liardet was the first to open a hotel in the area, the Brighton Pier Hotel, in October 1840. During the gold rush period from 1851 to 1876, 51 new hotels were opened in Port Melbourne alone.

Before the creation of civic buildings, hotels were often used as meeting places for early councils, social groups and committees, as well as general socialising. Some of the oldest buildings in the City of Port Phillip are hotels that have stood the test of time, such as the Golden Gate Hotel (1853), Prince of Wales Hotel (1863), the George (which began as the Terminus in 1857), the Esplanade (which began as the New Bath Hotel in 1856), the Golden Fleece Hotel (1872) and the Balaclava Hotel (formally Carlisle Hotel 1869). Some, like the Hotel Victoria built in 1888 on Beaconsfield Parade, Albert Park, remain but no longer used as hotels. Others, like the Greyhound Hotel (1853) have been demolished. Hotels have been particularly associated with working-class people as centres of Australian drinking culture, and continue to provide vital social venues for the community today.

9.3 Tourism

The City of Port Phillip has a long history as a magnet for tourists, including both day trippers from Melbourne and holiday makers. The many diverse accommodation options throughout the area – from hotels to guesthouses – have

been central to the development of tourism. There is also a strong link between tourism and the development of public transport networks and entertainment and food venues, which have encouraged visitors to the area. St Kilda in particular developed a reputation as a major pleasure resort and tourist hub. The reclamation of the St Kilda foreshore, which was predicated on entertainment venues, has played a crucial role in this.

9.3.1 Hotels, cafes and restaurants

The City of Port Phillip's food culture – represented in its iconic hotels, cafes and restaurants – is a defining and unique feature of its cultural history, particularly in St Kilda, and is strongly associated with the development of tourism in the area.

Each of the grand hotels and tourist venues of the nineteenth and early twentieth century featured a dining room, providing an appealing menu of food and drink for hotel guests, as well as locals and travellers. Examples include the George Hotel and Esplanade Hotel in St Kilda, and the Hotel Victoria in Albert Park. These former dining spaces have been converted for different uses over time, such as the Esplanade Hotel's Gershwin dining room, which was transformed into a live music performance space in the 1970s and a comedy venue in the 1990s.

Village Belle Hotel

The first Village Belle was established on this site in the early 1850s. At that time, to the south was a racecourse, where boxers and spectators held fights and reputedly the hotel was used by these men as a meeting place to plan their covert activities (Aizen). Perhaps because of the hotel's 'less-than-savoury' reputation the first application in 1854 by Henry Peel for a public license was rejected, but less than one year later, in April 1855, a license was granted to Edward Stead (Aizen).

The first hotel was a long building with a steeply pitched roof for which architect John Vardy designed a new verandah in 1876. The growth of St Kilda during the boom years of the 1880s led to the construction of a new building in 1891 for publican James Gillespie. This was designed by eminent architect William Pitt, who invited tenders in February 1891 (Tender notice, *The Argus*, 7 February 1891, p.5).

The Village Belle Hotel in 1881 (Source: Aizen)

Situated on a prominent corner of a main road, the Village Belle was an important reference point and landmark for local residents from the earliest days of settlement and Cooper in his 1931 history of St Kilda noted 'frequent mention is made in the early minute books of the Council to the location of the Village Belle Hotel' (Cooper, Vol. 1, 1931:266).

Like many hotels, the Village Belle was used for meetings by local community and political groups. For example, in 1899 the Elwood Railway League was formed following a meeting at the Village Belle with the object of the 'revival of agitation for the extension of the St Kilda railway to Elwood' (*The Prahran Telegraph*,

24 June 1899, p.5 'The Elwood Railway'). While the railway did not proceed the Victorian Railways did in 1906 establish an electric tramway from St Kilda Station to Brighton via Elwood.

In 1906, the Victorian government established a Licensing Reduction Board with set ratios, different for rural and urban Victoria, for the closing of hotels. The Board investigated one licensing district after another and recommended closure of hotels, principally those older and smaller establishments typical of the inner suburbs and the older mining towns. Those older hotels that did survive often did so purely through extending the building or adding second or third storeys of accommodation (McConville).

Village Belle Hotel in 1912 (Source: Aizen)

Major additions to the Village Belle were constructed in 1926. Constructed by Caddy & Son, builders, of Caulfield South, these included a new two storey wing on the north side of the 1891 hotel facing Barkly Street (BP).

By this time, a shopping centre had developed around the intersection of Barkly and Acland streets and the Village Belle had become so synonymous with the local area that the surrounding district eventually adopted this name. In 1927 local traders formed the Village Belle Trader's Progress Association and in October of that year held its first 'shopping week' to promote the centre, which was emerging as a rival to the historic shopping strip along High Street (now St Kilda Road). This was noted by Cooper in 1931:

Even today the place of the Village Belle has official recognition. Almost unnoticed it appears as if a place name for a municipal district is in the course of evolution, or that the place name is already evolved.

After World War Two the hotel was managed by three generations of men named Barlow Telford (the third Barlow was assisted by his sister Sarah). The first of these was president of the Hotel Association in the 1960s and was instrumental in effecting changes to licensing laws, including extending hotel closing times from 6pm to 10pm in 1966 (Aizen).

In 2016, the 1920s additions to the hotel were demolished and replaced with a semi-enclosed double height courtyard space, operated as a bar and restaurant in association with the hotel. Conservation works were carried out to the 1891 hotel at the same time, which included the reconstruction of some original features including the balustraded parapet, which had been removed in the early 1950s and the reconstruction of arched windows at the ground floor level on the Smith Street elevation (BP). At the rear facing Smith Street apartments were constructed on the site of the bottle shop.

The Village Belle is one of the oldest continuously operating hotels in St Kilda and has been described by one local historian as 'deeply embedded in the local consciousness' (Aizen).

William Pitt, architect

William Pitt (1855-1918), architect and politician, was born in Melbourne and educated in St Kilda and Carlton before serving articles as an architect with George Browne. Commencing his own practice in 1879, Pitt that year won first prize for his design for the Melbourne Coffee Palace, the city's first temperance hotel, which, built in Bourke Street, became one of the tallest buildings in Melbourne. In 1883 another award-winning design of Pitts' was 'Gordon House' a complex of 'improved lodging houses and dwellings' in Little Bourke Street. Pitt was highly sought after during the Land Boom in Melbourne, working almost solely in commercial architecture and becoming one of the most prolific proponents of eclecticism, in particular the Gothic Revival and French Second Empire styles of architecture. He was responsible for such Melbourne landmarks as the Princess Theatre (one of many theatres he designed in Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and New Zealand), the Olderfleet and Rialto Buildings in Collins Street, and the St Kilda Town Hall (ADB).

It has been said 'the most prolific years of Pitt's architectural practice coincided with the boom period in Melbourne and his work, more than anyone else's, reflected the confident exuberance of boom-style architecture' (ADB).

References

Aizen, Becky, 'Pots, punks & punters. A history of the hotels of St Kilda and South Melbourne', St Kilda Historical Society, 2004 viewed on line at http://skhs.org.au/hotels.htm on 17 March 2021

Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB) http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pitt-william-8058 [viewed 17 March 2021]

Chris McConville & Associates, 'Hotels in Victoria thematic typology', prepared for Historic Building Council, n.d.

Cooper, John Butler, *The history of St Kilda. From its first settlement to a city and after, 1840 to 1930.* Volume 1, 1931

'Plan of the Borough of St Kilda Surveyed and Complied under the direction of the Borough Council by J.E.S. Vardy', 1873

Port Phillip Heritage Review (PPHR) Volume 1, Version 17, September 2015

Raworth, Bryce & Allom Lovell & Associates Pty Ltd, 'Inner Metropolitan Hotels. Preliminary assessment and comparative analysis of significant hotels in Collingwood, Fitzroy, Port Melbourne, Richmond, South Melbourne and Williamstown', prepared for the Historic Buildings Council, January 1992

St Kilda Council building permits (BP): 6511, 24 July 1926; 7393, 17 January 1929; U.1463, 17 October 1952 (Demolition of parapet).

Victoria. Surveyor-General (1855) Melbourne and its suburbs [cartographic material] compiled by James Kearney, draughtsman; engraved by David Tulloch and James R. Brown (referred to as the 'Kearney Plan')

Description

A two-storey, rendered brick, late-Victorian, Italianate hotel, situated at the northeast corner of Barkly and Smith Streets, St Kilda. The Barkly and Smith Streets elevations have been altered in places, however much of the early character of the composition and its detailing on both elevations remain.

The hotel is prominently sited opposite the intersection of Acland and Barkly Streets, terminating the vista along Acland Street when looking south. The context of the hotel, in terms of built form, is somewhat altered, with a two-storey addition to its north in Barkly Street, and contemporary apartments to its east in Smith Street. The former Commonwealth Bank of Australia (now Lady of St Kilda), on the opposite corner

of the Barkly and Smith Streets intersection, complements the Village Belle in scale and materiality, and in massing with its curved corner.

The Barkly and Smith Street elevations are relatively restrained for an Italianate-style building of the Land Boom. They have similar detailing, and are expressed in rusticated cement render on the ground floor, above a quarry-faced bluestone base. A dentilated cornice delineates the ground floor and first floor portions of the elevations. The original timber window frames have been removed on windows on the ground floor and replaced with frameless double-hung sashes.

Above a recessed arched entrance, off-centre on the Barkly Street elevation, is an inter-war cantilevered awning with *Village Belle* signage in leadlight glass. A steel screen is fitted above the entrance. A similar cantilevered awning is on the Smith Street elevation. Closer to the corner, a large rectangular window opening has been fitted, replacing three arched window openings (see History). On the curved corner is an arched entrance with a fanlight, the pair of entrance doors may have had timber panels removed and replaced with glass. Above this corner entrance is an arched window with a timber frame window. Another former arched entrance, at the north end of the Barkly Street elevation, is now fitted with fixed glazing.

On the first floor, towards the centre of the Barkly Street elevation, is a recessed balcony that is expressed with semi-circular headed arches that are supported by slender Corinthian columns. A balustrade extends across the balcony with pressed cement balusters. A glazed panelled screen has been fitted behind the balustrade. The single and paired arched windows on the first floor retain their timber window frames, but their glazing has been replaced with tinted glass. Contemporary illuminated signage with *1891 Village Belle Hotel* is fixed to the wall to the right of the recessed balcony.

A dentilated cornice extends along the façade at the top of the first floor. This cornice is more pronounced than the cornice that delineates the ground and first floors on the façade. The entablature of the cornice ceases where there is detailing above the recessed balcony. Above the cornice is a parapet with pressed cement balusters and urns. Towards the centre of the parapet is a raised portion detailed with two pilasters supporting a broken pediment with an urn at its centre. Other detailing on this raised portion of the parapet includes scrolls and vermiculated panels, and rendered signage with *Erected A.D. 1891 Village Belle.*

Alterations to the Smith Street elevation include a former central entrance that is now covered with a fixed glazed panel, and removal of timber window frames on the ground floor and the windows fitted with fixed glazed panels. There is an addition on the roof of the hotel at the east end of the Smith Street elevation, partially obscured by the parapet.

Comparative analysis

This is one of two known hotels in Port Phillip designed by William Pitt. The other is the former Albion Hotel (Clarendon Hotel), 209-215 Clarendon Street, South Melbourne (Citation 1127). Other buildings in Port Phillip designed by Pitt are:

- Hile Terrace, 26-28 The Esplanade (1885) (Citation 2141).
- St Kilda Town Hall (1889-90) (Citation 68).

Many nineteenth century hotels were remodelled in the early twentieth century due to recommendations made by the Licensing Reduction Board and intact examples are comparatively rare. Some other examples of relatively intact late Victorian hotels in the HO include:

- Balaclava Hotel, 123-127 Carlisle Street, 1887, designed by J.F. Gibbins (No citation).
- Beaconsfield Hotel, 341 Beaconsfield Parade, 1880-81, architect unknown (Citation 2114).
- Elsternwick Hotel, 259 Brighton Road, c.1889, architect unknown (Citation 310).
- George Hotel, 123-127 Fitzroy Street, 1889, Harry B. Gibbs (Citation 94, VHR H706).
- Hotel Esplanade, 11 The Esplanade, 1877, Smith & Johnson (Citation 2173).
- Middle Park Hotel, 102 Canterbury Road, 1889, W.S. Law (No citation).

Assessment

This place has been assessed in accordance with the processes and guidelines outlined in the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for Places of Cultural Heritage Significance* (The Burra Charter) 2013, using the Hercon criteria.

Recommendations

2021: Retain in the heritage overlay as an individual place.

1998: Include in the schedule to the Heritage Overlay Table in the Port Phillip Planning Scheme.

Primary source

Peter Andrew Barrett, *HO7 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea heritage review. Individual citations*, 2021

Other studies

Andrew Ward & Associates, *City of Port Phillip Heritage Review*, 1998

David Bick, *St Kilda Conservation Study Area 2*, 1985

Other images

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