The Golden Fleece Hotel, Surry Hills

John W. Ross

Cover photograph (2018):
Former Golden Fleece Hotel, 538 Crown Street, Surry Hills.

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Foreword

Land grants were made in Surry Hills in the 1790s, and by the 1820s the area was being subdivided into villa estates. By the 1850s, large gentlemen's villas with wide verandahs surrounded by gardens sat side by side with more flimsy workers' cottages. The Europeans who first colonised Sydney came from a society in which drinking was ubiquitous and the pub was central to everyday life. But drunkenness was condemned, and authorities have long sought to limit the problems with alcohol by licensing its sale and controlling when and where it was consumed.

The builder John Bluck erected a large sandstone villa in 1840 on the present site of 538 Crown Street and named it Victoria House. The solicitor William Henry Moore arrived in Sydney in 1815 as the first free (that is, not an ex-convict) lawyer in the colony. He built up a lucrative private law practice and by 1840 was affluent enough to purchase Victoria House. However, the severe economic depression of the 1840s ruined his business, as it did many others, and he was bankrupted in 1843. He sold the house back to John Bluck for a fraction of the amount he paid in 1840.

John Bluck and his brother James decided to turn Victoria House into a family-oriented hotel, and in 1848 James was granted a publican's licence for Bluck's Family Hotel. Frederick Somers came into the family in 1869 when he married James' daughter Annie Maria. In a few years Somers was managing the hotel, and on James' death in 1876 he became the owner. But in 1878 he sold the hotel to John Walsh in order to take over a newly-constructed hotel on the corner of Devonshire Street (the present Trinity Bar). Walsh decided to demolish the aging sandstone villa and erect a brick building in 1880, which he named the Golden Fleece Hotel. Larger stables were constructed, and were frequently rented out, often to racehorse owners attending Randwick Racecourse. John Walsh died in 1894, and his widow Charlotte became the owner. The brewer Tooth & Co. leased the hotel from about 1907 as an outlet for their products.

In 1920, the NSW Government bowed to pressure from the temperance movement and established a Licences Reduction Board to deregister up to a quarter of the state's hotels, based on factors such as licence violations, conduct and suitability to the area. Many hotels in Surry Hills were called before the Board to show cause why they should not lose their licences, and among them was the Golden Fleece. The owner and licensee failed to convince the Board of the hotel's viability, and its licence was cancelled. From 1923 until the present, the building has been used for commercial and residential purposes. In the 1950s, Sister Mew advertised infrared radiation and massage to cure the body, and the Reverend Frank Abbott promised to cure the spirit with uplifting meetings. Most of the building is presently used as studios or one-bedroom apartments. The stables on Davies Street were converted into three townhouses in 1992.

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Early European settlement

Land grants

Soon after the establishment of the colony of New South Wales in 1788, land grants were made by successive governors to civil servants, army officers, soldiers, and some emancipated convicts. Depending on the status of the grantee, this could be a hundred acres or more around Sydney, or thousands of acres in country areas. Most grants in present suburban Sydney became large country estates and, where the land was fertile, farms were established. Early governors were concerned that the colony needed to feed itself, so cultivation of the land was greatly encouraged. But many of the early settlers regarded the vast amounts of land they acquired as simply an investment to hold onto until land prices boomed, when they would sell at a profit.

The area that became Surry Hills was not very suitable for agricultural purposes. Its topography was mostly scrubland on sandy soil, along with sandstone, shale and clay, and an enormous sandhill between Devonshire and Cleveland Streets. Much of the suburb shown on the parish map consists of 200 acres in the names of John Palmer (70 acres granted in 1793, called George Farm), Captain Joseph Foveaux (105 acres granted in 1793, called Surrey Hills Farm) and Alexander Donaldson (25 acres granted in 1795). Palmer, the Commissary General, had also received 100 acres in Woolloomooloo in 1793. He became a successful farmer and grazier.

Donaldson soon sold his holding to Palmer, who in 1800 purchased Surrey Hills Farm when Foveaux was posted to Norfolk Island. In 1808, Palmer had to return to England to face an enquiry into the Rum Rebellion, and during his absence his land was leased to Alexander Riley. Palmer did not return to the colony until 1814, heavily in debt. The Sheriff sold the Surrey Hills Estate that year, after it was subdivided into 27 allotments by Surveyor-General James Meehan.

Figure 1 Parish map over a modern street map (HIS, 537 Crown Street)

Edward Smith Hall acquired one of these allotments in 1814 and established a farm. Hall was deeply concerned with social issues and freedom of the press. At times he was a general merchant, grazier, editor and proprietor of the newspaper the *Monitor* and public servant. In 1822, Governor Lachlan Macquarie granted Hall 185 acres bounded by present Cleveland, South Dowling, Phillip and Elizabeth Streets. The same year, he subdivided the grant and sold 75 acres to Solomon Levey, who became a major landholder in the eastern suburbs. The balance was later sold to Jemima Jenkins, wealthy widow of Robert Jenkins who died in 1822. The present site of 538 Crown Street is on the border of Palmer's 200 acres and Hall's 185 acres, as shown on the parish map overlaid on a modern map of the area.

The economic boom of the 1820s stimulated residential development and the area began to be subdivided, initially into villa estates. Edward Riley attempted to reassemble the Palmer Estate in the 1820s, but committed suicide in 1825, leaving two conflicting wills and many claimants to his estate, which was frozen by the Government. The Riley Estate finally became available in 1844 after the Sheriff divided it into small lots and distributed them by ballot to Riley's second wife and children. 538 Crown Street is just south of the estate, whose southern border is at present-day Rainford Street[1].

Surry Hills develops

From 1850 to 1890 there was sustained development in Surry Hills, mainly housing for workers in the many local industries. Lots were sold by the Riley Estate Trustees on a flexible time payment system, drawing many lower middle-class artisans to the area. By 1858, gentlemen's villas and workers' cottages were equally represented along Bourke, Crown and Riley Streets. The villas were graciously laid out with two storeys, large verandahs and surrounded by flourishing gardens. The cottages were mostly weatherboard and often very wretched. Newer dwellings were in rows of two-storey brick or stone houses and detached one-storey cottages which were small but generally well built. The dwellings that have survived to the present are solidly built on sandstone foundations, and only differ from their nineteenth century appearance in that wooden shingle roofs have been replaced by galvanised iron or terracotta tiles.

The 1860s and 1870s saw the decline of the gentry class and the rise of mechanics, artisans and shopkeepers. By the end of the economic boom of the 1880s, Surry Hills was largely built out with terrace houses. But many lacked running water and sewage, so that sanitary problems became widespread. The council struggled to provide these services in the unplanned narrow, winding streets and lanes that filled the suburb. By the 1920s and 1930s, defective housing, disease and the construction of the new Central Station led to several slum clearances and the construction of factories, commercial premises and street extensions (such as the Devonshire Street extension to Bourke Street and the Albion Street extension to Flinders Street).

But by the late 1930s, the Sydney City Council tried to stem the erosion of the city's housing by declaring large areas of Surry Hills, Darlinghurst and Woolloomooloo as residential districts, prohibiting any new factories or conversion of houses to commercial purposes. After World War II, an influx of European and Middle Eastern migrants resulted in the beginning of a substantial gentrification of the area. For the previous hundred years, Surry Hills was populated by working class tenants in poorly maintained houses owned by absentee landlords. But the post-war migrants from Mediterranean countries traditionally put a high value on property ownership. They set about

buying the old houses cheaply and renovating them, gradually improving the area so that it was attractive to white collar workers and professionals who wanted to live close to their workplaces in the city.

This new breed of inner city dwellers in the 1980s and 1990s were well educated and knew how to lobby the government for improved services. Surry Hills acquired a library, a neighbourhood centre, pre-school centres, medical centres, and several small parks. A thriving restaurant, art gallery and retail clothing scene developed to the extent that the suburb now rivals any part in Sydney as a desirable place to live and visit[2].

Bluck's Family Hotel – 1848-1878

Hotel licensing in New South Wales

Since the earliest days of British colonisation, authorities have sought to limit the problems associated with alcohol by licensing its sale and limiting the times and places of its consumption. The people who first colonised Sydney, namely the convicts, military and officials all came from a society in which drinking was ubiquitous and the pub was central to everyday life, but drunkenness was condemned by the social elite[3].

A booming trade in smuggled rum soon developed, and Governor Arthur Phillip was forced to issue the first liquor licences in 1792 in a vain effort to control it. Successive governors also tried and failed to limit this trade. Licensed pubs had strict conditions on their licences, including closing at the nightly curfew of 9pm. But drinking continued in the many sly grog shops whose owners brazenly flouted the curfew by bribing police. The Illicit sale of alcohol was eventually stopped by a combination of looser rules, including longer hours, and more professional police to enforce them. By the late 1830s, pubs were open until midnight and liquor was widely available. This was probably the peak era of alcohol consumption in Australia's history[4].

Victoria House

In 1840, the builder John Bluck erected Victoria House, a large villa on the corner of Crown and Victoria Streets, and advertised it for sale in March that year. The building had nine rooms over two storeys, with verandahs on two sides, a frontage of 120' on Crown St and 118' to Victoria St (an area of 1/3 acre), a large kitchen and servants' room, and a three-stall stable and coach house. The auction advertisement boasted that "the house and premises are well adapted for the residence of a family of the first respectability"[5]. It was purchased by the solicitor William Henry Moore for £1,400[6].

William Moore had arrived in Sydney in January 1815, and was notable as the first free solicitor in the colony, on a salary of £300 (that is, the first solicitor who was not a former convict). Until then, participants in court cases had been represented by ex-convict attorneys, such as Edward Eagar and George Crossley, but the newly-arrived Chief Justice Jeffery Hart Bent refused to admit them to his court, so the caseload built up until two free solicitors were available. Frederick Garling duly arrived as the second free attorney in August 1815, and normal court hearings resumed[7].

Moore built up a lucrative private law practice in Sydney, but had a chequered career as the Crown Solicitor. Governor Lachlan Macquarie terminated his salary and privileges after Moore continually let the Crown down in criminal cases. However, he retained the confidence of the Earl Bathurst, the British Colonial Secretary, who reinstated him in 1817 and censured Macquarie. Moore continued as Crown Solicitor until 1834 when Governor Richard Bourke finally suspended him for neglect of his duties.

The severe economic depression during the 1840s saw the ruin of many people in the colony, and William Moore file for bankruptcy in 1843 with liabilities exceeding his assets of £66,000. All of his country estates totalling more than 1,000 acres (most of them grants from successive Governors) were advertised for sale. Victoria House was also offered at the knockdown price of £600[8]. It must have been snapped up by John Bluck (who, in his own Alan Bond moment, had sold it to the now-insolvent Moore three years earlier for £1,400), because in January 1844 he was advertising the

house for rent as the proprietor, "lately occupied by W. H. Moore Esquire"[9]. Moore's country estates were still unsold in April[10].

Bluck's Family Hotel

John Bluck's brother James (c1819-1876) married Maria Steel (c802-1867) in Sydney in October 1847[11]. They were the sons of the late John Bluck Senior of Herefordshire, England. His father was probably the convict who arrived in Sydney in May 1821 on the convict ship *Speke* with a 14 year sentence. John senior was born in c1802 in Kingsland, Herefordshire, England and was a farmer. He received a Ticket of Leave in 1827 and a Certificate of Freedom in 1834[12].

The brothers evidently decided to turn Victoria House into a family-oriented pub, as James Bluck was granted the licence of Bluck's Family Hotel, on Crown Street Surry Hills, in June 1848[13]. In the Sydney Council Rate Assessment Books, John Bluck was listed as the owner, with James the ratepayer. Then from 1858, James was the owner and occupant[14].

The first political meeting held at the hotel was reported in October 1849 to decide on a candidate for Cook ward in the next City Council election[15]. Because of a lack of halls and other suitable public buildings, it was normal for election candidates to address the voters in pubs, either from the upstairs balcony or in the largest room.

The next year, the first inquest was held at Bluck's Family Hotel. The South Sydney morgue was not in use until 1881[16], so in the event of a death that was unexplained, suspicious, or of an unidentified person, the body was taken to a nearby pub where it was presumably stored in the cool cellar. Within two days, a coroner was summoned (normally a government medical practitioner), a jury of some 20 or more men was assembled, and the cause of death was investigated. In the Bluck Hotel's inaugural inquest, a man had fallen to his death 18 feet down an embankment in the area. The jury found the cause was accidental death while intoxicated[17]. The other inquest in 1850 was for a 36-year-old woman who was found at the bottom of a well after reportedly drinking heavily for up to three weeks and threatening suicide in the past. The jury duly returned a verdict of "felo de se" (suicide)[18].

Selling alcohol out of licensing hours was a perennial problem for the police in the nineteenth century, especially on Sundays, when only residents of the hotel were allowed to drink in a hotel. James Bluck was one of three publicans who were fined 10 shillings with 3/6d costs in August 1860 for selling alcohol out of hours[19].

James's wife Maria died in May 1867, aged 55[20], and in March the following year he married Eliza Jane, the daughter of Adam Roxburgh of Bourke Street, Woolloomooloo[21]. Then in 1869, James' daughter Annie Maria, a midwife, married Frederick Payn Hawkins Somers (c1836 - 1889), a Railway Department employee[22]. Somers must have taken over the management of the pub from his father-in-law after a few years, because his is the only name listed in *Sands' Directories* from 1873[23].

In 1874, James Bluck was fined 10/- plus costs for allowing card playing in his hotel, and in 1876 he applied for a licence to run "billiards and bagatelles"[24]. James died in November 1876, aged 57, at his residence 187 Bourke Street, Woolloomooloo[25], and Frederick Somers became the licensee. But in October 1878 he put the building up for sale. The agents Richardson & Wrench advertised the hotel as a profitable investment "from which a large fortune could be made in a short time"[26].

RICHARDSON and WRENCH have received instructions to sell by public auction, at the Rooms, Pitt-street, on

FRIDAY, 18th OCTOBER, at 11 o'clock.

CROWN-STREET, SURRY HILLS.

ALL THAT favourably situated valuable corner block of City land, having the following large frontages:—

129 FEET to CROWN-STREET,

238 FEET to VICTORIA-STREET,

upon portion of which is that well-known old ESTABLISHED BUSINESS HOUSE,

BLUCK'S FAMILY HOTEL,

substantially built of stone, and containing the following extensive accommodation—large bar, 2 bar parlours, sitting-room, dining-room, fine billiard room, 5 good bedrooms, kitchen, store, pantry, wash-house, wine and beer stores, &c.

☞ This is a favourably-situated city investment, in the best part of Crown-street, Surry Hills, surrounded by a dense population. The hotel is now in full trade, and in the hands of a suitable person who understands the business, would prove a profitable investment, and one from which a large fortune could be made in a short time.

Figure 2 Sale of Bluck's Family Hotel (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 October 1878)

Golden Fleece Hotel – 1880-1923

The new hotel

John Walsh purchased the property, although it is not clear when, because in 1880 Frederick Somers was still listed in *Sands' Directory*[27] and the *Rate Assessment Books*[28] as the ratepayer and owner of the old building. However, in March 1880 John Walsh notified the City Council that he was erecting a new two-storey brick hotel fronting Victoria and Crown Streets, and applied (unsuccessfully) to add an overhanging balcony[29]. Construction was completed by October 1880, it was renamed the Golden Fleece Hotel and John Gough became the first licensee[30].

John Walsh is not directly referred to as the owner of the Golden Fleece in the press, but other evidence is available to build a picture of his tenure at the hotel. A John Walsh, of Crown Street Surry Hills, married Charlotte Carter in July 1880[31]. The *Rate Assessment Books* (which were only compiled every few years) list John Walsh as the owner from 1882 until 1891. John Walsh, of Bunnerong Botany, died in August 1894, at age 63[32]. The next Rate Book in 1896 lists Charlotte Walsh as the owner until 1927. Charlotte Walsh, relict (widow) of the late John Walsh of Bunnerong Botany, died in June 1928[33]. Her age was 76[34]. This is the only Charlotte Walsh to die in NSW during the period 1927-1930[35]. The remaining books from 1930 to 1948 list the estate of the late Charlotte Walsh as the owner[36]. From the above, it is most likely that John Walsh was the proprietor of the hotel from 1880 until his death in 1894, after which ownership passed to his wife, Charlotte. On her death in 1928, ownership transferred to her estate, and was retained by her heirs until at least 1948.

After selling the new building to John Walsh in about 1880, Frederick Somers began to construct a new pub across the road on the corner of Crown and Devonshire Streets. Having given up his publican's licence to John Gough, in January 1881, he advertised for a licence that could be transferred to the new premises[37]. Construction was completed in 1882, and it was known as Somers' Hotel. In March 1882, his licence was transferred to Mrs. Annie O'Sullivan[38]. This hotel has subsequently been named the Hotel Victoria from 1898, the Surry Inn Hotel from 1973, the Elephant's Foot from 1982, and the Trinity Bar from 1998[39]. The first newspaper mention of the new pub was in October 1880, when a political meeting was advertised to take place there[40]. The large brewer Tooth & Company leased the hotel from about 1907[41], and the company was still listed as a lessee in 1927, after the pub closed[42].

Rotten eggs and political aspirants

Election rallies at pubs were normally reported as being sedate and respectful events, but it was not always so. A newspaper article in 1922 contained reminiscences from some 20-odd years earlier, when rotten eggs, flour and other missiles were the dread of any candidate. One election campaign included an address given by a political aspirant from a loft at the rear of the Golden Fleece Hotel in Crown Street. His well-prepared election committee wore chaff bags with holes cut out for their heads and arms, and stood behind sheets of galvanised iron.

The chairman began with "Ladies and gentlemen (bang – a rotten egg hit the iron), allow me to introduce Mr. So-and-So (another bang)". He finished with an aside of "don't spare the eggs and flour". The candidate, a condiment maker, was then pushed forward in his Sunday best. At the end of his speech, the hapless fellow was completely splashed with eggs and flour, and the scene

resembled a pantomime. The candidate couldn't have impressed anyone at all, because despite his supporters on the committee, he eventually polled only one vote[43].

Bookies in the bar

Like the sale of alcohol, gambling remained largely unregulated until late in the nineteenth century, much of it going on around pubs. When gambling occurred in streets and back alleys, gamblers could be arrested as vagrants, so it moved indoors to the bars. Horse racing was by far the most popular form of gambling at the end of the nineteenth century[44]. Having a flutter on the horses provided an escape from the working class life in Surry Hills during hard times. For those who struggled from week to week, the occasional quick quid at the bookie's expense meant that shoes could be bought, or overdue rent could be paid up, or the slate wiped clean at the corner shop.

A bookie in the Golden Fleece Hotel took bets from the men having their weekly shave on Saturday afternoon at the nearby barber shop in Crown Street. The busy shop was wallpapered with Tattersall sweep tickets and the club-like atmosphere within was presided over by a framed picture of the racehorse Lord Cardigan, the 1903 Melbourne Cup winner[45]. John Gough left the Golden Fleece in July 1883, and his licence was transferred to Henry W. Stebbings (or Stibbings)[46]. Stebbings, who formerly served in the 11th Prince Albert's Own Hussars, married Eva Antoinette Rapp in May 1885[47]. Soon after this, the licence was transferred to Edward Simes[48]. The new hotel contained several stables along the Davies Street frontage, and these were frequently advertised for rent. In 1893, vacant horse stalls were promoted to trainers coming from the country for Randwick race meetings[49].

The Golden Fleece Hotel kept the court system busy on a regular basis, as did other pubs in the area. In April 1905, William Freebairn, the licensee since 1896[50] was fined £3 and costs for selling liquor unlawfully on Sunday, and a patron was fined 10/- after being caught leaving the hotel with liquor in his possession[51]. Then in March 1913, Michael Leahy, the licensee since Fairbairn's death in 1912[52], pleaded guilty to selling watered-down brandy, which was 26.8 degrees under proof, corresponding to 2.3% of added water. The defendant, who tried to claim that the hydrometer was not reliable, was fined 30/- with 6/- costs[53].

The Licences Reduction Board – 1920-1923

Temperance and the six o'clock swill

Liquor law has been an important regulator of life in NSW from the earliest days as a British penal settlement, and reflected the ongoing debate between the role and frequency of drinking in everyday file. From the outset, home duties, family life, sobriety and a strong work ethic were goals of state control, with drinking presented as the enemy of home and industry.

By 1870, there were 2,400 licensed hotels in a population of 540,000 in NSW, so there was valid cause for the concerns of governments, churches and temperance movements[54]. Local temperance groups were formed, modelled on the existing British and United States organisations, the most prominent of which was the Women's Christian Temperance Movement[55]. The movement's ultimate aim was the complete prohibition of alcohol, which it saw as the root cause of social ills. Temperance alliances were among the most successful lobby groups in colonial politics, and they eventually won the right to the "local option", a policy in which each electorate could vote to increase or decrease its number of licensed premises.

But the movement's greatest success in Australia came in 1916 with the introduction of six o'clock closing in most states during World War I. During calls for wartime austerity, campaigners seized on a drunken riot by soldiers training for the Western Front and persuaded the NSW Government to hold a referendum on closing hours. The majority voted for the earlier hour of six o'clock (nine o'clock was second with around half as many votes) and the *Early Closing Act 1916* was duly enacted. But once the war ended, the policy's real impact became clear. Most workers finished at five o'clock, pubs closed at six, and the hour between became known as the "six o'clock swill", a frenzy of speed drinking in which drinkers consumed as much as they could before closing time. But repression led to deviance from the intended behaviour: sly grog shops proliferated and crime flourished[56].

Victoria culls its dodgy pubs

In response to continuing pressure from the temperance movement in Victoria, the *Licensing Act 1906* resulted in the appointment of a Licences Reduction Board with the stated intention of removing at least one-third of Victorian hotels over the following 20 years. The original board was established on 21 May 1907 with three members, all licensing magistrates. Compensation was paid to the freehold owner and the licensee based on sales over the preceding two years.

The Board in Victoria dealt with all matters pertaining to licences, including licence transfers. It operated until about 1930, when it was effectively wound up. By then, 477 hotels in the metropolitan area and 1,149 in the country had been closed, with a total compensation payout of just under £1,100,000[57].

New South Wales takes up the challenge

In 1919, the NSW Government introduced the *Liquor (Amendment) Act*, which established a Licences Reduction Board (LRB), for an initial period of three years from 1 January 1920, to reduce by up to 25% the number of publicans' licences in the state. A Compensation Board would then determine the amount of compensation paid to owners and licensees of delicensed premises. A compensation fee would be collected from all licensed premises to build up a Compensation Fund.

In determining which hotels would be closed, the LRB would consider any offences against the Liquor Acts, the character and accommodation being offered, the conduct of business, and the distances from other licensed premises[58]. The inaugural members were the Chairman, Sydney Bell Gunn (a Stipendiary Magistrate from Newcastle), Mr. R. Shelton (chairman of the Forbes Land Board) and Mr. R. P. Sellors (a member of the Public Service Board). Sydney Gunn began his tenure with the Board by travelling to Melbourne with the secretary, Mr. Ovington, to learn from the experience of the Victorian Board, which by then had been operating for some thirteen years.

Figure 3 Sydney Gunn (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 October 1922)

A trust fund was created in the NSW Treasury, known as the Licensed Victuallers Compensation Fund, from which hoteliers deprived of their licences would be paid compensation[59]. The fee for each licensed premises was fixed at 3% of the gross amounts paid for liquor over the previous twelve months, based on details submitted by each hotel in a statuary declaration. There was some urgency to collect this information, because the Act stipulated that no licences could be transferred between pubs until the compensation fees of both parties had been paid[60]. To ease the burden of the new fee, a licensee who paid rent on his premises could deduct two-thirds of the compensation fee from the rent payable by him[61].

Other aspects of licensing were mentioned (or not mentioned) in the 1919 Act. Six o'clock closing was to be extended until a referendum on the issue was taken[62]. Also, a date for a referendum on the complete prohibition of alcohol, which the government intended to hold in the next eighteen months, was not yet set[62]. Finally, there was no mention in the Act that the local option would be revived. By comparison, New Zealand had recently held a referendum on prohibition, and it was narrowly defeated by a few thousand votes in a total of some 500,000 votes cast[64].

The licensees go under the microscope

The Government came up with a formula to calculate the statuary number of hotels in each electorate, as the benchmark for determining how many licences could be cancelled. In those days, each electorate held between three and five members of parliament. The basis for the statuary

number of licences was four for each 1,000 enrolled electors and three for each succeeding 2,000 electors in a five-member electorate, or one licence for each 500 enrolled electors in three member (country) electorates[65]. On the basis of this formula, 14 of the 24 state electorates exceeded the benchmark. There were 2,538 in NSW at that time[66].

The LRB held its first public deprivation sitting in August 1920, and 46 hotels were summoned to appear, usually two or three per day[67]. The first few days of hearings were reported in some detail in the press, but after that the only details mentioned were the names of the hotels and then the Board's decisions, normally some months afterwards.

The first sitting day set the pattern of subsequent hearings, apart from an attempt by the barristers for the hotels to pick holes in the Act in the hope of delaying or completely halting the proceedings. Mr. Watt, K.C., appeared for the Clubhouse Hotel (Albion and Commonwealth Streets), instructed by solicitors for Tooth & Co. Ltd, and Mr. Ralston, K.C., appeared for Lloyd's Hotel (Brumby Street), instructed by solicitors for Toohey's Ltd. Mr. Watt's opening gambit was to claim that no licences could be deprived until compensation money was available in the bank. He continued by claiming that under the Act the duties of the Board were indeterminable, and asserted that under the Act the licensing districts and electorates must be similar, whereas the metropolitan licensing district contained a number of electorates or parts of electorates. After listening to these and other more nitpicking objections, the Board considered the learned silks' stalling tactics, and then overruled the lot[68].

Some damning assessments

The role of the police at the hearings was to present information they had gathered from inspections, and frequently to give an opinion about the publicans and their establishments. Because the pubs that were summoned to appear were selected because they had violations of the Licensing Act (or any other Act, for that matter), the police usually did not report favourably on them. Acting for the police was the redoubtable Licensing Inspector John Fullerton, whose summing up of the Oxford Hotel in King Street was fairly typical. After presenting the Board with a list of convictions against the hotel, Fullerton reported that it was an old structure of 63 rooms and was somewhat dilapidated. It did not come up to the requirements of a modern residential hotel, although until five or six years ago it was one of the leading residential hotels. The Inspector said he would class it as second-rate, and was very badly conducted in the twelve months to January 1920. When asked what kind of people frequented the hotel, he replied "returned soldiers and the drinking class"[69]. No doubt seeing the writing on the wall, the Oxford Hotel voluntarily closed in October and applied for their licence to be cancelled. The hotel and contents were then put up for sale[70].

By November 1920, the LRB had decided on the first 16 hotels to lose their licences, mainly in the Surry Hills area. The Chairman explained that the first 46 hotels to be considered were grouped into Class A, which had two or more convictions in the last three years, and Class B, which had one conviction. The Board members then considered the convenience of each hotel to the public. The licences selected for cancellation would cease at the end of the current financial year on 30 June 1921[71].

The Golden Fleece is examined

The files of the Licences Reduction Board provide extensive information on the deprivation hearings held for the Golden Fleece Hotel between 1920 and 1923[74].

Between 1 January 1917 and 10 August 1923, the hotel had nine licensees:

William Hamell (1 January to 17 May 1917)
James Henry Clarke (17 May to 30 August 1917)
Eliza Grieg (30 August 1917 to 8 August 1918)
Henry Pope (8 August 1918 to 23 Jan 1919)
Archibald Kennedy (23 January to 5 September 1919)
David James McRitchie (4 September 1919 to 29 January 1920)
Luther Thomas Fears (29 January 1920 to 1 December 1921)
Francis W. Garlick (1 December 1921 to 31 August 1922)
Richard Herbert Kempley (1 August 1922 until after 10 August 1923)

The first deprivation hearing was on 23 August 1920, when the owner Charlotte Walsh and the licensee Luther Fears were summoned to the Water Police Court to show cause why the hotel should not be deprived of its licence. The barrister Mr A. R. J. Watt represented the owner, the licensee and Tooth & Coy (who leased the hotel), while the Licensing Inspector John Fullerton represented the police.

Inspector Fullerton presented a list of convictions against the hotel, but conceded that they were all against previous licensees. The local police Inspector George Mitchell gave evidence based on his knowledge of the hotel. He said the hotel was in a poor structural condition. One of the bedrooms he inspected was “damp and almost unfurnished, with an apology for a bed”. This room was one of three outside bedrooms, built to make the minimum accommodation required. Inside the hotel were five bedrooms, two of which were used by the licensee and staff. There was no bathroom or toilet on the upper level. There were few lodgers, as far as he could see, and the business seemed to depend solely on the sale of alcohol.

Inspector Mitchell thought that the neighbourhood consisted of decent working class people, but that the hotel was frequented by “a fair percentage of the undesirable class”. For many years, it had been systematically trading during prohibited hours, and as a result had received close supervision from the licensing sergeant. There were five hotels within 225 yards, the nearest being the Hotel Victoria (Trinity Bar) at 60 yards away. He thought there were too many hotels for the reasonable requirements of the district. One parlor had a number of elderly men sitting around playing dominoes for the best part of the day (it wasn’t clear if he thought this spoke well or badly of the place). The inspector did not clarify what he meant by “undesirable”, but this definitional deficiency did not stop him from repeating that there were a fair percentage of them among the clientele.

The locals, on the other hand, thought better of the hotel than the constabulary. A nearby shopkeeper testified that people often bought biscuits and cheese from his shop and took them to the hotel. He had a lot of country visitors who stayed at the hotel, and he thought the place was conducted as well as any hotel he had seen. It was “a bit on the rough side” under the previous licensee, David McRitchie. James Moon, who ran a licensed dealers’ yard nearby, stabled two of his horse at the hotel’s yard. He also thought the hotel was “roughly carried” before the present licensee, but it was all right now. He did admit, however, that he and his fellow dealers often drank

enthusiastically in the yard after work, and were the cause of complaints from local residents. "Dealers will be dealers" was all he said by way of explanation.

There was a delay in finalising the case against the Golden Fleece, as Charlotte Walsh and the new licensee (William Garlick) were called to a second deprivation hearing on 2 May 1922. There are no details of the second hearing available, but the Board's decision on 22 December 1922 was to cancel the hotel's licence. The Golden Fleece Hotel finally closed its doors a year later on 8 December 1923, when the licensee was John T. Little. Compensation of £1,440 was paid to the owner, and £1,100 to the licensee[73].

A letter to the LRB from the real estate agents Raine and Horne, dated 19 March 1923, provides a detailed description of the hotel and grounds at the time of its deregistration.

> "The land has a frontage of 29' 5.5" to Crown Street, by a depth along Davies Street of about 158' 5". The premises known as the Golden Fleece Hotel is built of brick on stone, cemented and painted front, iron roof, comprising ground and two upper floors, containing cellar, bar, two parlours, dining room, ten bedrooms, kitchen and bathroom. Also on the first floor is a large room used at one time as a billiard room. On the rear portion of the land built of brick with an iron roof are stable premises containing nine loose boxes and yard".

Raine and Horne estimated the current market value of the unlicensed property to be £1,900.

Closures in Surry Hills

By July 1923, the LRB had closed 210 hotels in NSW, representing nearly 10% of the total in the State. The list of Surry Hills hotels closed is as follows:

> Athletic Club Hotel, Arthur and Alexander Streets.
> Austral Hotel, Bourke & Fitzroy Streets.
> Club Hotel, Albion and Commonwealth Streets.
> McNamara's Family Hotel, Foveaux & Waterloo Streets.
> Farnham Arms, Albion & Bellevue Streets.
> Golden Fleece Hotel, Crown & Davies Streets.
> Golden Lion Hotel, Devonshire & Buckingham Streets.
> Gulgong Hotel, Bourke Street (formerly Emerald Isle/Pelican Hotel).
> Madeira Hotel, Devonshire & Holt Streets.
> Mount View Hotel, Riley & Foveaux Streets.
> Queen's Arms Hotel, Bourke & Campbell Streets.
> Rifleman's Arms, Fitzroy & Marshall Streets.
> Standard Hotel, Cooper & Lacey Streets.
> Te Aro Hotel, Albion & Mary Streets[74].

By this time, the Board had collected £584,907 in compensation fees. 105 hotels had been awarded compensation, with 57 still to be dealt with. The net accumulation in the fund was £430,000. The *Sydney Morning Herald* estimated that in five years' time the fund would be in credit by 2 to 3 million pounds. This would put the State Government in a position to start to fund the huge commitments placed upon it if total prohibition were adopted – the total cost of buying out the liquor trade of NSW being over 12.5 million pounds. The newspaper also thought that the local

option system had been defective in practice, because the electorates with the highest concentration of licences also had the least support for the temperance cause[75].

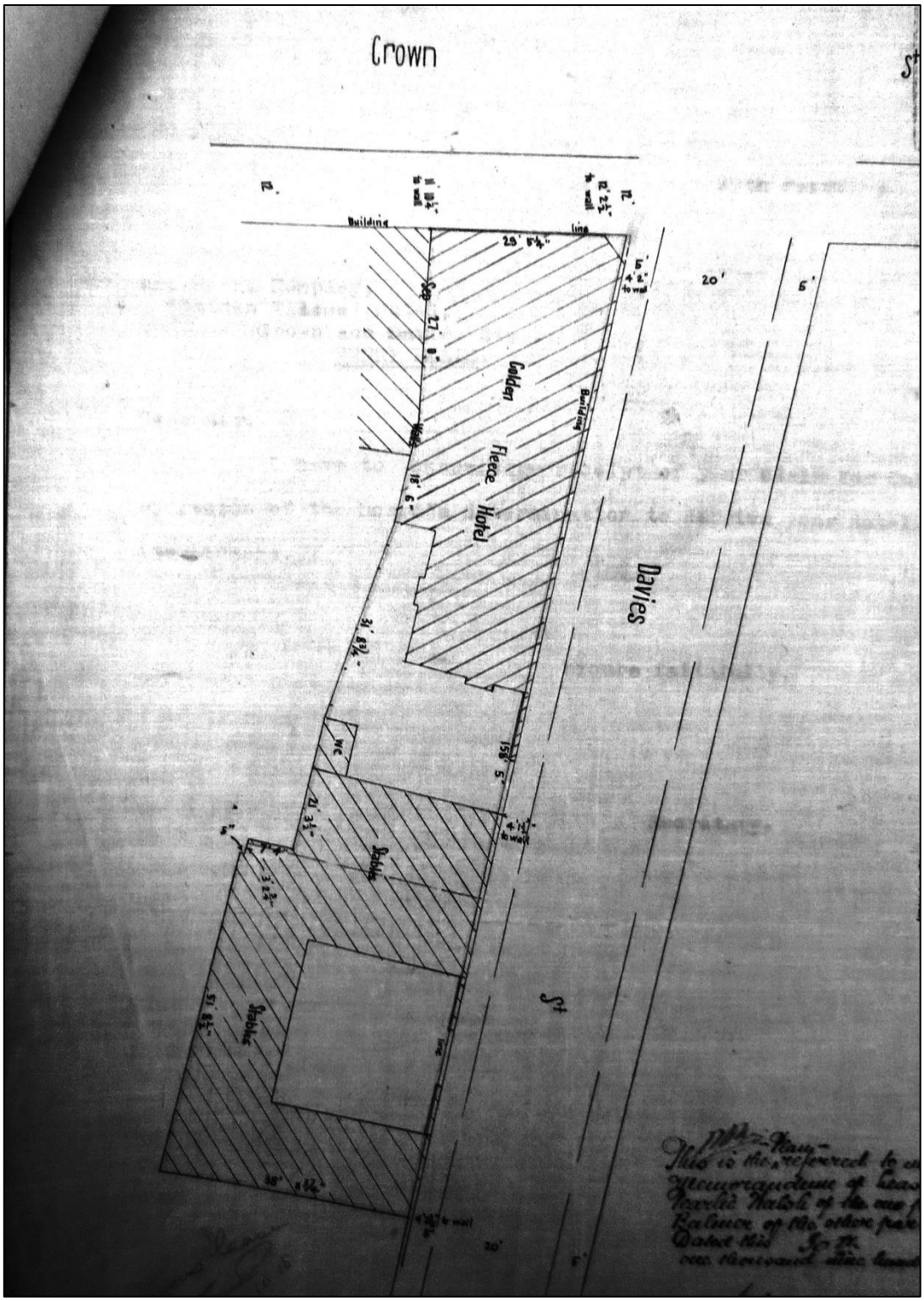

Figure 4 Plan of the Golden Fleece Hotel in 1922

Residential usage – 1923 to the present

Massaging the body and the spirit

After the Golden Fleece Hotel closed soon after July 1923, the building was used for a variety of commercial and residential uses. From October 1924, the Chinese herbalist, Mr. Lee Shohen, advertised that he could treat all classes of disease in males and females, both internal and external. This included the latest treatment for appendicitis, with tumours and cancerous growths removed without operation[76]. Up to the end of the *Sands' Directories* in 1933, the building was listed as "residential", with a different occupant each year.

From 1950, Sister Mew advertised her services as a massage therapist, utilising the latest in "red ray, short wave" radiation (now known as infrared radiation)[77]. Then from 1951, the Reverend Frank Abbott began to advertise spiritual meetings, with "definite spiritual and uplifting lectures" at these meetings[78]. Both the radiating Sister Mew and the uplifting Reverend Abbott were still advertising their respective services in 1954.

The building was purchased by Mr. Said Moussa around the early 1970s, and in 1972 he was prosecuted by the South Sydney Council for unauthorised renovations[79]. Then in 1977, Mr. and Mrs. Said Moussa applied to use the ground and first floors as a continental delicatessen[80]. In 1981, the Moussa family applied for Council permission to sell second-hand amusement machines from part of the premises[81]. The next year, M. Zaiee applied to use the ground floor as an art gallery[82].

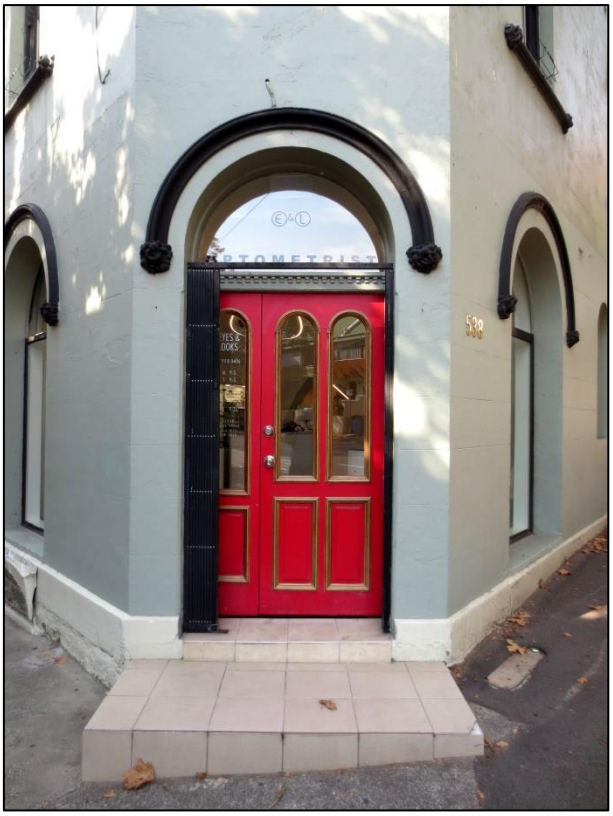

Figure 5 Eyes and Look optometrist's practice

In about 1990, the building was converted to strata title, and the rooms were sold as studios or one-bedroom apartments. Unit 3, entered by the corner door, has been a shop that housed the gift shop Pure Magik for about seventeen years, then the shoe shop The Cook his Wife and Her Shoes. From March 2018, unit 3 has been the location of Eyes and Look, an optometrist's practice operated by Con Georgelos.

Stables to townhouses

The large stables behind the building on Davies Street were frequently advertised for rent. Seven stalls, sheds and yards were available[83]. Horses were also sold from the stables[84]. In July 1989, the builder S. Walters applied to the South Sydney Council to erect three townhouses in the stables area behind the building, at a cost of $150,000. The owner Mr. Moussa submitted a further application to erect the townhouses in September 1990[85]. Three townhouses at 27-31 Davies Street were completed in 1992[86].

Figure 6 27-31 Davies Street (domain.com.au)

Notes

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47. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 May 1885.
48. *Evening News*, 4 September 1885.
49. *Referee*, 30 August 1893.
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