

# JOHN CURTIN HOTEL



2022 east elevation



2022 view to trades hall



2022 north elevation



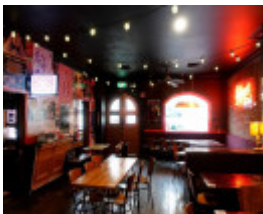
2022 ground floor bar



2022 ground floor bar looking to dining room



2022 board



2022 ground floor dining room



2022 stained glass window

## DIAGRAM 2426

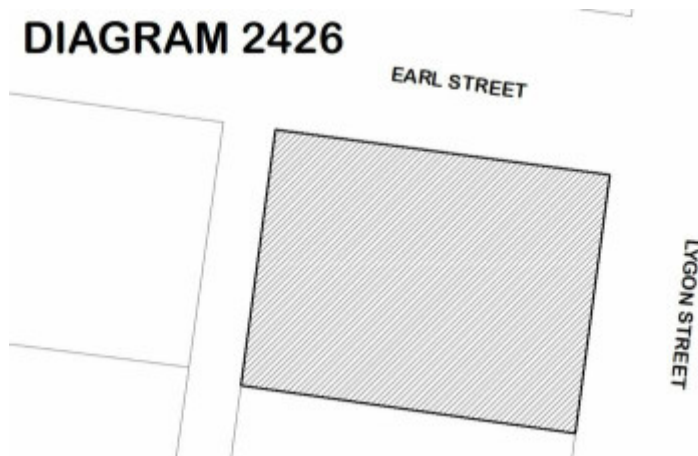


DIAGRAM 2426

---

## Location

27-31 LYGON STREET CARLTON, MELBOURNE CITY

## Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2426

## VHR Registration

April 6, 2023

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

---

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 6, 2023

### What is significant?

The John Curtin Hotel, at 27-31 Lygon Street, Carlton, designed by Billing, Peck and Kempter in 1915. Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include:

- The original external form, materials and detailing of the building
- The building's high level of external integrity to its original design
- Internally, the general arrangement of main bar/dining room/kitchen and ancillary spaces
- The panelled timber bar with inset mirrors to the pelmet
- The decorative stained-glass windows, installed in the ground-floor lightwell, depicting views to the Working Mens' College (now RMIT University) and the main entry portico of the Victorian Trades Hall
- The original and ongoing use of the place as a public house.

### How is it significant?

The John Curtin Hotel is of historical and social significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

#### Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

#### Criterion G

Strong or special association with a particular present-day community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

### Why is it significant?

The John Curtin Hotel is historically significant for its association with the trade union and labour movement in Victoria. Built in 1915 to replace an earlier hotel constructed in 1859-60, it has been closely associated with Victoria's trade unions since its establishment, due in large part to its proximity to the Victorian Trades Hall. Unionists, left-wing activists and members of the Labor Party have used the current establishment for over 100 years to conduct informal gatherings, meetings, hold celebrations and presentations, and accommodate interstate officials on visits to Victoria. Trade unions have played a fundamental role in shaping the working lives of Victorian (and Australian) society and the John Curtin Hotel has provided one of the principal venues for unionists to gather and disseminate ideas. It has provided an obligatory dropping in spot for Labor Party politicians on the rise, including Gough Whitlam, Bill Landeryou, and Bill Hayden and it has a close association with Robert (Bob) James Lee Hawke, a key figure in the Victorian and Australian labour movement in the twentieth century (and later Australia's 23rd Prime Minister), who used the John Curtin Hotel as his 'home away from home' during his time as President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). The John Curtin Hotel has been an important venue for working-class politics and activism in Victoria for over 100 years [Criterion A].

The John Curtin Hotel is socially significant for the strong attachment Victoria's trade unions and the labour movement have with the place. The attachment is particularly strong given the place's proximity to the Victorian Trades Hall, union offices and other left-aligned organisations. The John Curtin Hotel has acted as an informal meeting place for those involved in working-class politics and activism in Victoria since its establishment and it continues in this capacity to the present day. The John Curtin Hotel remains as a 'centre of left politics', a place where people from progressive politics gather. It is seen as an integral part of a labour "precinct" in the heart of Melbourne, which encapsulates Trades Hall and the Eight Hour Monument. The John Curtin Hotel has, and continues to be, a meeting place for the trade union and labour movement community beyond the immediate locality with those involved in trade unionism and the labour movement travelling to the hotel to attend meetings, training or political demonstrations from across the State. The outcomes of these political activities have had ramifications for workers and other affected groups from across the State by bringing about legislative changes through political actions. The ongoing use of the John Curtin Hotel by the trade union and labour community for meetings, networking, celebrations and commemorations resonates into the broader Victorian community [Criterion G].

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

## Specific Exemptions:

The following permit exemptions are not considered to cause harm to the cultural heritage significance of the John Curtin Hotel.

## General

- Minor repairs and maintenance which replaces like with like. Repairs and maintenance must maximise protection and retention of fabric and include the conservation of existing details or elements. Any repairs and maintenance must not exacerbate the decay of fabric due to chemical incompatibility of new materials, obscure fabric or limit access to such fabric for future maintenance.
- Maintenance, repair and replacement of existing external services such as plumbing, electrical cabling, surveillance systems, pipes or fire services which does not involve changes in location or scale, or the introduction of additional infrastructure.
- Repair to, or removal of non-original items such as antennae; aerials; and air conditioners and associated pipe work, ducting and wiring.
- Works or activities, including emergency stabilisation, necessary to secure safety in an emergency where a structure or part of a structure has been irreparably damaged or destabilised and poses a safety risk to its users or the public. The Executive Director must be notified within seven days of the commencement of these works or activities.
- Painting of previously painted external surfaces in the same colour provided that preparation or painting does not remove all evidence of earlier paint finishes or schemes. This exemption does not apply to areas where there are earlier hand-painted signs.
- Cleaning including the removal of surface deposits by the use of low-pressure water (to maximum of 300 psi at the surface being cleaned) and neutral detergents and mild brushing and scrubbing with plastic (not wire) brushes.

## Events

- The installation and/or erection of temporary elements associated with short term events, including music events, providing the installation does not fix into or alter the main bar or the dining room leadlight panels and minimises external fixings. This includes:
  - Temporary stages, seating, lighting, sound systems and the like.
  - Temporary security fencing or surveillance systems.
  - Temporary promotional banners and signage.

## Interiors

- All works to maintain or upgrade existing bathrooms, kitchens, and back-of-houses facilities, including installing new appliances, re-tiling, repainting previously painted surfaces and the like.
- All works to the first-floor level that do not impact on the structure or external presentation of the building.
- Removal or replacement of carpets and flexible floor coverings, window furnishings, and wall coverings.
- Installation, removal or replacement of light fixtures, tracks and the like.
- Installation, removal or replacement of existing electrical wiring, light switches, power outlets, security systems, speakers and sound systems.
- Installation, removal or replacement of smoke and fire detectors, alarms and the like.
- Installation, removal or replacement of existing heating and cooling systems provided that the central plant is concealed (both internally and externally), and that the work is done in a manner which does not alter building fabric.
- Installation of plant within the roof space, providing that it does not impact on the external appearance of the building or involve structural changes.
- Installation, removal or replacement of bulk insulation in the roof space.

## Theme

7. Governing Victorians 8. Building community life 9. Shaping cultural and creative life

Construction dates	1915,
Architect/Designer	Billing Peck & Kemter,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	THE CURTIN HOTEL, FORMER LYGON HOTEL, LYGON HOTEL,
Hermes Number	208812
Property Number	

---

## History

### The history of trade unions and the labour movement in Victoria

In Victoria, unions emerged from the 1850s labour movement, where labour shortages and the prosperity of gold-rush era Victoria gave workers the opportunity to agitate for better conditions.

Early unions represented craft-based workers such as stonemasons and carpenters, as well as informal combinations of craftsmen and other workers such as shop assistants, labourers and miners. These skilled workers formed benefit societies and trade unions to provide mutual protection for their members against the insecurities of wage labour and to campaign collectively over pay and working conditions.

Improvements to working conditions were aggressively pursued by skilled workers in the 1850s, who fought for an eight-hour workday across their respective industries. The heat of summer and need for more leisure time to provide opportunities for education, self-improvement and developing the cultural life of Victoria were argued in the campaign for set working hours. By April 1856, Victorian stonemasons had negotiated a workday of no more than eight hours (down from ten hours), without a reduction in wages. The push for 'eight hours labour, eight hours rest, eight hours recreation' without loss of pay was a world first and became emblematic for workers' rights.

As described by Andrew Reeves and Simon Booth in the Encyclopedia of Melbourne:

This landmark of industrial reform stimulated union organisation and emphasised the benefits of centrally managed and collaborative action, with these trends being consolidated by the formation of the Victorian Trades Hall Council (THC) two years later. The eight hours' day movement, with its inherent emotional appeal, became a talisman for unionism and the basis for organisation across Australia. An annual procession of unions that had attained the eight hours' day became one of Melbourne's popular holidays.

The Victorian Trades Hall Committee was formed in 1856 as a representative body of trade union organisations. With the establishment of more and more unions, the need for a centralised space was quickly recognised. This would provide a venue for meetings, as well as opportunities for the working classes to study and improve their quality of life. By 1859, unions had raised the necessary funds to establish a Trades Hall and Literary Institute on a block of land granted by the government at the corner of Victoria and Lygon streets in Carlton. The first permanent Trades Hall building was erected in 1873 and the complex was progressively expanded over the years.

As headquarters for the unions, Trades Hall offered meeting and office space, enabling discussion and debate between trades as well as providing for large social gatherings, which further increased the connections between trade groups and their union delegates. As the centre of left-wing politics, a number of union-related businesses and businesses attractive to unions, began to emerge in the area around Trades Hall. The Dover and John Curtin (then known as the Lygon) hotels in Lygon Street were frequented by factions of the union movement, and both the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Builders Laborers' Federation (BLF) constructed their

offices opposite Trades Hall in the 1950s, between the two hotels. The Eight Hour Monument was also relocated to a nearby location in 1923. As noted by academic, Peter Love, 'in formal organisational terms, Melbourne was the geographical centre of Australian labour for the first quarter of the 20th century'.

The importance of the trade union and labour movement to Victorian, and Australian, society has been observed by historians and other commentators. Historian Helen Doyle, writing on trade unions in the Oxford Companion to Australian History, commented that 'unionism has been a critically important movement in Australia' while historian Weston Bate noted in 2010 that 'Victoria had a profound influence on the labour movement in New South Wales...as the birthplace of Australian unionism'. At a local level, Peter Love, writing in the Encyclopedia of Melbourne, noted that the labour movement has been 'one of the most significant social movements in Melbourne for much of its history, the trade union movement has played a prominent role in the economic, political and civic life of the city' while Maryanne McCubbin has commented that unions 'have played a fundamental role in shaping the working lives of Melbourne's inhabitants'.

## Early development of the John Curtin Hotel

The John Curtin Hotel, located at 27-31 Lygon Street, Carlton was originally constructed in c1859-60 as the Lygon Hotel. The subject site, located at the corner of Lygon and Earl streets opposite the Victorian Trades Hall, was sold as Crown Allotment 1 of Section 17, in the Parish of Jika Jika, as part of the earliest land sales of Carlton. In 1852, survey plans were prepared by Charles Laing for the first residential allotments north of Victoria Street.

In December 1859, an application for a license for the 'Lygon Hotel, Lygon Street, opposite the Trades Hall' was granted to Michael O'Meara, the same year that the Victorian Trades Hall was erected at the corner of Victoria and Lygon streets to accommodate the newly-established Trades Hall Council.

The erection of a public house in this location was strongly contested by members of the Licensing Bench, a number of who were opposed to the institution 'chiefly [due to] its contiguity to the Trades Hall' and because 'the chief object of the trades in building the hall in Lygon street had been to escape from public houses'. Two petitions, signed by approximately 200 operatives of the Trades Hall and 100 local residents, supported the application however and it was ultimately granted. The following year, the Sands and McDougall Directory listed the site at the corner of Earl Street as 'hotel erecting' and in 1861, the municipal rate books described the hotel, now owned by Henry Miller, as a brick and stone hotel with 12 rooms and a net annual value of £220. A plan of the Port Phillip Area by Henry L Cox shows the hotel at the corner of Lygon and Earl streets in 1865 with a simple L-shaped footprint.

In 1880, a tender notice was placed in the Argus for 'additions, repairs, painting etc. to Lygon Hotel and adjoining house' with George Wharton listed as architect. The rate books of the same year recorded the hotel as 'brick Lygon Hotel' with 'bar, stables, billiard room'. In 1888, the hotel was advertised for sale. The sales notice in The Age described the hotel as 'containing in all, with the part let off as a dwelling, 14 rooms, standing on land having a frontage of 52ft 9in to the west side of Lygon-Street, by a depth of 68ft 2in along the south side of Earl-Street, at present under a lease to Mr Thomas Gallettly'.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the hotel was described in the municipal rate books as a brick hotel with 11 rooms plus offices. It also encompassed the four-roomed brick house at the neighbouring no.27. The combined net annual value for both properties was £140, with the recorded owner at the time being the Victoria Insurance Company, indicative of the impact of the 1890s depression. The hotel and adjacent brick dwelling are shown on the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) plans of 1896.

In the early twentieth century, increased regulation of licensed premises under the Licensing Act 1906 resulted in the closure of a substantial number of hotels by the Licences Reduction Board. In an effort to reduce the number of operating pubs, the Board closed 1,054 Victorian hotels between the years 1907 and 1916 alone. Those inner city and suburban hotels that remained open were required to upgrade or rebuild in order to improve their standards for public health and alcohol consumption. The Lygon Hotel was one such institution. In 1915, an application was made to the City of Melbourne for the construction of a two-storey brick hotel to replace the existing hotel. The new hotel was designed by architects, Billing Peck & Kempter, with Seccull Brothers of High Street, Northcote as builders. The hotel was owned by Carlton & United

Breweries by this date.

## Early associations with trade unions and the labour movement

The site has had a long and enduring association with the trade unions and the labour movement. A meeting of the 'operative bakers short hours committee', held at the Lygon Hotel in January 1873 for the 'purpose of arranging for holding a monster meeting of all operative bakers at the Trades' Hall' appears to be one of the earliest mentions of the use of the hotel by the unions. In the ensuing years, many unions used the hotel as a regular informal meeting place. In one particular instance in 1886 it was reported that a meeting of 200 members of the Pressers' Union, originally called for at the Trades Hall, was adjourned to the nearby Lygon Hotel 'owing to there being no room at the Trades Hall to accommodate the meeting'. Proprietors of the hotel were also seen as supporters of the trade union movement. An article in Labor Call in 1910 advised that the new host of the Lygon Hotel, Michael Collins, had taken 'a very active part in Labor matters' in Western Australia while his mother, Mrs Collins, was 'well known amongst unionists and Trades Hall officials'.

An 1888 sales notice for the hotel, published in The Age, promoted its close association with the Victorian Trades Hall:

The admirable situation of this hotel directly opposite to the Trades Hall or Parliament of Industry, the rallying place of those who watch over the interests of labor, and whose earnest discussions have the natural effect of provoking thirst, which is patriotically quenched with colonial beer, renders it the very best stand for a publican to be met with in the whole of the suburbs of Melbourne.

Once the hotel was rebuilt in 1915, its connection with the trade unions and labour movement strengthened through the twentieth century. Presentations, meetings and commemorations were held at the hotel, and visiting unionists were frequently accommodated there. The annual event held by the Operative Masons' Society to entertain the pioneers of the Eight Hours Movement was 'carried out with great success' at the Lygon Hotel in May 1921 and in 1938 it was reported that the NSW president of the Builders Laborers' Union, Mr Downie, and his wife stayed at the hotel during an 'extensive holiday to the State'. In 1951, the Lygon Hotel was publicised in the Argus as 'the Trades Hall hostelry'.

The patronage of the hotel became highly politicised in the mid-twentieth century as a result of the Labor Party schism of the mid-1950s. Animosity between right and left-wing members of the labour movement over their position towards communism spilled into the traditional union pubs, with the left taking to the Dover Hotel down the road and the right to the Lygon Hotel. This division remained staunchly in place even after the Dover Hotel closed its doors in the 1980s, with the factional allocation playing out within the walls of the Lygon Hotel: 'Inside the bar on the left as you walk in... is the Right. Inside the right bar is the Left. If you are unsure whether you are Left or Right, there is the back bar.' By 1969, the hotel had been renamed the John Curtin Hotel in honour of former Labor Prime Minister, John Curtin, who served from 1941 until his death in 1945.

Also in 1969, feminist activist and unionist Zelda D'Aprano aimed to break down social barriers by frequenting the John Curtin Hotel. As she describes in her memoir *Zelda*:

... I noticed that I was the only woman there. I didn't feel out of place or uncomfortable for I considered myself to be conversant in matters pertaining to trade unions, but I did wonder why there were no women in the hotel. I began to call into the hotel regularly and decided to invite other women so I could enjoy women's company. It wasn't long before women became regular customers of the John Curtin Hotel.

## The ACTU and Bob Hawke

In 1971, it was reported that the Australasian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) had expressed an interest in purchasing the John Curtin Hotel, which had 'long been known as the trade union pub'. The ACTU was established as the Australasian Council of Trade Unions in May 1927 at the Melbourne Trades Hall as part of an attempt by trade unions to form 'one big union'. The establishment of the ACTU was an important step towards greater cooperation among trade unions. Representing the majority of Australian trade unions, it became (and remains) the peak governing body for the trade union movement in the country. It has played an important role in agitating for equal pay, standardising working hours and seeking wage increases. It became the Australian Council of Trade Unions in 1947.

The ACTU originally had its offices in Trades Hall. In 1953 a new building was erected opposite Trades Hall at 17-25 Lygon Street to accommodate offices, research offices and an executive meeting room. At its opening, ACTU President, Percy Clarey noted that the building was a 'symbol of an ideal'. The building has since been acquired by RMIT.

The ACTU headquarters adjoined the John Curtin Hotel and members of the ACTU were frequent visitors – unsurprising given the close physical connection between the two buildings. In the early 1970s, the ACTU showed interest in purchasing the hotel. Though the sale never eventuated, members of the ACTU continued to frequent the John Curtin Hotel.

The president of the ACTU at the time of the proposed purchase of the John Curtin Hotel was Robert (Bob) James Lee Hawke. Hawke, who would go on to become Australia's 23rd Prime Minister, was a significant figure in Australian politics in the twentieth century, in particular the labour movement and the Labor Party. Born in December 1929 in Bordertown, South Australia, Hawke studied arts and law at the University of Western Australia before spending three years at Oxford University studying economics. Following his return to Australia in 1956, he moved to Melbourne with his wife Hazel to work as a research officer and advocate with the ACTU. In 1969, he was elected as ACTU President, and fast became a prominent public figure known for his ability to negotiate solutions to difficult issues, particularly in the pursuit of economic growth. He resigned from his role as ACTU President in 1980 in order to enter parliamentary politics.

The John Curtin Hotel was considered Hawke's 'second home' during the formative years of his career and as ACTU President.

On the night of Hawke's death in May 2019, the John Curtin Hotel was crowded with 'old trade unionists and ex-journos', as well as Victorian premier, Daniel Andrews, former Labor premier, Steve Bracks, and then federal Labor leader Bill Shorten, who gathered at the 'natural place for mourners' to remember and honour the former Labor Prime Minister.

## **The Builders Laborers' Federation (BLF)**

The John Curtin Hotel also became the stomping ground for the BLF following the closure of the nearby Dover Hotel in 1980. The BLF, a trade union established in 1911, sought to represent the interests of less skilled building workers.

From the 1970s the BLF played a pivotal role in the movement to protect Victoria's heritage from demolition and inappropriate development. These campaigns, which became known as green bans, included blocking plans to redevelop the Regent Theatre, the City Baths and the Hotel Windsor in Melbourne and the Bakery Hill historic site in Ballarat. The BLF offices, which were constructed in 1958, were located at 11 Lygon Street, three buildings away from the John Curtin Hotel and directly opposite Trades Hall.

Norman ('Norm') Leslie Gallagher, who was the Victorian State Secretary of the BLF from 1961, was one of Victoria's most significant union leaders in the latter decades of the twentieth century and a key driver of Victoria's heritage movement in the 1970s. On his death, former assistant secretary of the ACTU Garry Weaven recalled: 'He was one of the most powerful guys in the union movement in the early '70s and '80s. He was probably the best-known leader of his day'.

Following the closure of the Dover Hotel in 1980, the BLF moved to the John Curtin Hotel down the road, with newspaper articles recounting that 'Norm and Co' soon claimed 'pride of place' in the front bar. By 1983 it was reported that:

There on most nights is the colossus Norman Gallagher, surrounded by a muddle of his colleagues from the Builders Laborers' Federation...Mr Gallagher...presents a grandfatherly image in a hotel which is indeed unique. At least once a week they meet to discuss tactics and policy. Many nights a week they drink and talk together in the John Curtin Hotel.

When Gallagher was found guilty and convicted of receiving bribes in 1985, 'dozens of loyal builders' laborers met in the John Curtin across from the Victorian Trades Hall Council' to watch reports of the event. The BLF was deregistered in Victoria in 1986.



## Continuing association with trade unions and the labour movement

The John Curtin Hotel remained popular with the trade unions into the 1980s with countless newspaper articles asserting that 'it is the trade union inner sanctum where monumental decisions have been made...' and that it 'lies deep in the Labor heartland. It is an obligatory dropping-in spot for ALP politicians on the make, and even those who have made it, but in need of a little support'. 'Gough Whitlam dropped in on the odd occasion', and various ALP politicians including Bill Hayden and Gareth Evans have 'all made the pilgrimage over the years'. It was even noted that on more than one occasion in the mid-1980s the John Curtin Hotel attracted more union officials than council meetings at the Trades Hall across the road.

The 'Grand Old Lady of Lygon Street' was put up for sale in 1987, at which time it was reported that 'the Carlton watering hole has passed through the hands of many lessees in recent years but has remained the focus of political dealing and wheeling.' It continued in this capacity in the ensuing years, with reports continuing to label it the 'resort of union officials', 'the spot where more deals are done than in Wall Street' and 'about as close as you can get to the inner sanctum, holy of holies, in the ALP.'

It appears that the trade union and Labor Party's association with the John Curtin Hotel had diminished somewhat by the mid-1990s. By 2000, it was reported in *The Age* that the nearby union-owned Comrades Bar at 514 Swanston Street had 'replaced the old John Curtin Hotel in Lygon Street as the place where many of the movement's left-wing identities go to relax and talk politics'. This has since been demolished and an apartment complex constructed in its place.

Today the John Curtin Hotel maintains strong ties with members of the trade unions, and Trades Hall in particular. During a discussion with Victorian Secretary of the National Tertiary Education Union, Colin Long, and Victorian Trades Hall Council Strategic Advisor, Mairead Lesman, in May 2022, it was evident that the Curtin continues to be seen as 'the centre of left politics', a place where people from progressive politics gather and a place where 'everyone can go'. It is seen as an integral part of a labour precinct, which encapsulates Trades Hall and the Eight Hours Monument. To this day, both formal and informal union-related groups will meet socially at the John Curtin Hotel for an after-work drink or after large events, such as campaigning or demonstrations. Recent examples include the marriage equality campaign in 2017, with the John Curtin Hotel hosting the celebrations on the day the vote result was announced. It also acted as the meeting point during the 'Wage theft is a crime' campaign, and remains the 'go-to' meeting place for those involved in State and Federal elections. With the revitalisation of Trades Hall over the past decade, Mr Long considers that the 'connection [with the John Curtin Hotel] is stronger now than at any time'.

## Live music at the John Curtin Hotel

By the late 1980s, the John Curtin Hotel had diversified to become a live music venue. The upstairs space, which had originally accommodated hotel rooms for guests, was gutted and transformed into a conference venue for hire. This was later converted into a band room for live music performances. Since the 1980s, the hotel has become a mainstay of Melbourne's live music scene and has served as a key launching pad for emerging local and international music acts. Artists including The Libertines (UK), Marlon Williams (New Zealand), King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard (Melbourne) and Big Thief (USA) have played at the John Curtin Hotel.

The hotel was also one of the first places in Melbourne where emerging Aboriginal artists could play in the 1980s. Alf Bamblett, from the band Stray Blacks, broke down racial barriers when he established a regular fortnightly event at the Curtin to spotlight Aboriginal bands. This was at a time when many venues restricted attendance on the basis of race.

## Social value

The current building known as the John Curtin Hotel has a strong and enduring association with trade unions and the labour movement in Victoria, an association that has developed for over 100 years.

The hotel provides a well-known meeting place for members of trade unions, and those who are associated with the labour movement, either formally (such as through membership of unions and associations), or informally (such as a meeting place prior to, or following, political demonstrations related to workers' rights or social justice

related to the labour movement). The hotel provides a convenient location across the road from the Victorian Trades Hall and close to other union or left-aligned organisations as a meeting place for celebration, commiseration and commemoration for those supportive of left and progressive politics.

As a place of celebration, the hotel was a focal point of a huge street party in November 2017 following the announcement of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey result supporting marriage equality. More recently it was a site of celebration on the night of the federal election in May 2022. Mr Colin Long and Ms Mairead Lesman from the Victorian Trades Hall Council reported when interviewed that approximately 2,000 people congregated at Trades Hall and moved between the Hall and the John Curtin Hotel to celebrate the election results. Similarly, the hotel has been the place where those from the movement will gather following an election loss. As Bob Hawke's 'watering hole' during his tenure as ACTU President in the 1970s, the hotel was seen as the natural meeting place to commemorate his life following his death in May 2019. Mr Long notes that following the annual commemoration at the Eight Hour Monument 'comrades' will walk the short distance from the monument to the hotel to continue in commemoration of trade unions winning an eight hour work day.

Mr Long and Ms Lesman note that the hotel is a meeting place for people regardless of union affiliation, membership or factional divide. Mr Long stated that the connection to the hotel with those in the labour movement is stronger than at any other time, in part owing to the diminished factional divides within the labour movement and in part due to the strength of the Trades Hall Council, which in the past decade has experienced a period of renewal and growth. The hotel continues to be a regular meeting place for those within the labour movement, including being the location of the monthly Young Workers Centre meeting and for marking the conclusion of Trades Hall internship programs, with attendees making their way to the hotel.

Responses provided in petitions following the 2022 sale of the hotel (detailed below) provide similar examples of use and association. Responses were received noting the association with the activities of a number of groups or events, including the People's Climate Strategy, Workplace Health and Safety Representative Training Courses at Trades Hall, International Women's Day, the ALP Labor Club of the RMIT Student Union, the Renters and Housing Union (Victoria), and as a venue where award ceremonies for union members takes place.

In response to the announcement of the sale of the hotel in early 2022 a widely publicised media campaign was launched to 'save' the hotel from possible redevelopment and closure as a hotel. This campaign was led by the Victorian Trades Hall Council – representing the Victorian trade union movement and 500,000 Victorian union members – and the National Trust Australia (Victoria), with input from others including politicians and others affiliated with the labour movement or left-aligned organisations.

The hotel is visited by those from across Victoria, many of whom are involved in political activities, attend union meetings or training at Trades Hall. These organisations represent and have membership that is State-wide, and which seek political changes that have implications for the wider Victorian community.

## **Evidence of social value**

The 2022 sale and fears of possible redevelopment of the John Curtin Hotel has attracted media attention nationally (for example, in The Guardian, ABC News online, Meanjin Quarterly), in regional Victorian and metropolitan media (The Age, Herald Sun, Ballarat Courier, 774 ABC Radio Melbourne, 3AW, Radio 3RRR, 9 News), and locally (RMIT Catalyst Magazine, Inner City News). Media coverage has focussed on the sale of the hotel and efforts to maintain the place as a hotel. The sale has been reported in the context of the hotel's enduring and strong connection to trade unions and the labour movement. Coverage in the media has also referenced the hotel's place as a live music venue and historical associations to Bob Hawke as well as other left-aligned political figures. Commentary in the media following the sale announcement includes references to the significance of the hotel to the labour movement, as detailed in published letters to the editor in The Age (17, 18 and 24 February 2022) and opinion pieces focussing on the loss of cultural heritage (The Conversation, 17 February and 2 March 2022).

A Facebook post on the 'The Curtin' Facebook page announcing the sale of the hotel was made on 15 February 2022 and has garnered 3,300 reactions, 915 comments and 362 shares. A further post on the page provided a link to the 'share your stories' online form created by Trades Hall Council (detailed below). This post was shared 21 times, with 136 comments. A number of prominent people connected to politics, unions or the labour movement made media appearances or reposted on social media news of the sale and commentary related to

the sale, including Adam Bandt (Federal Member for Melbourne and leader of the Australian Greens), Ellen Sandell (State Member for Melbourne), Rohan Leppert (Melbourne City Council Councillor) and Nicholas Reece (Deputy Lord Mayor, Melbourne City Council), Sue Pieters-Hawke (daughter of Bob Hawke) and Luke Hilakari (Victorian Trades Hall Council Secretary).

A number of actions to 'save' the hotel following the sale announcement have been led by Trades Hall, as representatives of trade unions and the broader labour movement. Reference to the long and enduring association the hotel has to trade unions and the labour movement is stated as a rationale for action. On 29 April 2022 a 'green ban' was announced regarding any redevelopment of the site by the Building Industry Group of Unions. This was supported by representatives from the Victorian Trades Hall Council, National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Music Victoria, the City of Melbourne and the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

Mr Colin Long and Ms Mairead Lesman from the Trades Hall Council have provided further evidence of the contemporary association the hotel has to trade unions and the labour movement. Mr Long recalled that prior to the sale of the hotel being announced in February 2022, the hotel's publican approached the Victorian Trades Hall Council to enquire if the Council, unions or others from the labour movement would be interested in purchasing the hotel so that it may continue to operate. A bid was put together by the Trades Hall Council attracting media attention; however, this was unsuccessful at the time of sale. Mr Long noted that this was not the first time an attempt had been made by those in the labour movement to purchase the hotel – in the 1970s it was reported that the ACTU, then led by Bob Hawke, was interested in the purchasing the hotel.

It was noted by Mr Long and Ms Lesman that while this association remains strong, informal events or gatherings for those in the movement tend not to be formally organised or publicised, as it is assumed that 'JCs' [as the hotel is referred to informally] will be the 'go to' place for people to meet. Notwithstanding this, numerous recent examples of the association have been identified, including recurring events such as meetings of the Young Workers Centre and meeting at the hotel at the conclusion of internship programmes delivered by the Trades Hall Council. Ms Lesman notes that for those people involved in union-led campaigns, such as marriage equality, 'Change the Rules' (2019) and 'Wage Theft is a Crime' (2020), a ritual activity is to congregate at the conclusion of the day's activities at the hotel to relax, discuss ideas or debrief. Photographs from events at the hotel attended by those from the labour movement have been provided by Ms Lesman and event details are accessible on public Facebook pages.

A petition was established on the platform [meagaphone.org.au](https://www.megaphone.org.au), which is administered by the Victorian Trades Hall Council: <https://www.megaphone.org.au/petitions/save-the-john-curtin-hotel>.

The 'Save the John Curtin Hotel' petition reads:

The John Curtin hotel is for sale and we need to save it from being turned into another soulless apartment block. The Curtin is a vital landmark live music venue for emerging artists. Melbourne needs more live music spaces, not less.

The Curtin has also for 150 years been a second home and unofficial meeting place for the Victorian labour movement. There is not a Labor Prime Minister or Premier in modern memory who hasn't enjoyed a beer at the front bar. We don't want to see it turned into apartments by developers, we want it to remain as the iconic Melbourne pub that it is.

As of 14 June 2022, the petition had 2,014 signatures.

Additionally, an online form was created by the Trades Hall Council following the announcement of the sale of the hotel. A total of 205 responses were received in response to the following callout:

We need your help right now to save the John Curtin Hotel.

The Curtin Hotel is a special place. That's why the Victorian union movement is working with pub staff to save it.

To save the pub we need to get it protected under Victorian heritage laws. To prove that it is historically and socially important, we need your stories.

Whether they're stories of union organising, gigs you've been to, or drinks with your family and friends. Together we will make the case to save this iconic Melbourne establishment.

Expressions of interest to buy the pub close soon - so we've only got until Monday 14th March to collect stories. Fill out this short form to share your story now

Approximately a third of respondents (37.3%) mentioned the connection of the hotel to trade unions and the labour movement. Of these responses, most noted and provided examples of contemporary associations to the movement (20.7% of the total responses), such as gathering at the hotel following demonstrations, going to the

hotel with to meet others involved in the labour movement or celebrating successes following political campaigns. A key theme that emerged related to the current association of the hotel with live music and the arts scene (64.2%), university students (18.1%) and as a welcoming place for specific communities or groups (for example, women or those from CALD or the LGBTIQ community; 6.2%).

Comments included historical and contemporary associations to trade unions and the labour movement, particularly as a well-known 'union pub', as the following respondents describe:

After I finished my "Union Winter" internship at Trades Hall, the other participants and I all celebrated by going to the Curtin. There was no debate, or discussion as to where we'd go, it had to be "JCs". We weren't being original, we were taking part in a tried and tested Union tradition. It's obligatory, almost to the point of an enforced law that you go to the Curtin after doing anything Trades Hall related. In doing this, taking part of this small ritual, you feel that you are continuing an old legacy. It also helps that it's a really good pub in addition to the historical significance. (LM)

As a Melbourne Uni student around in the 2000s, I would regularly come here to debate politics. I remember meeting major union figures here and discussing whether or not marriage equality would ever be achieved. I've sung Solidarity Forever more than once at this pub. It still gives me goosebumps. The comradeship. I could always feel the history in the walls at this place. Knocking this building down would be like knocking down Flinders St Station or the State Library. You can't do it... (EW)

I spent many years working at RMIT and me and my union colleagues would frequent this place. It is quintessentially an iconic pub steeped in union history and Melbourne history. It is a very special pub. Its position opposite Trades Hall, near the Eight Hour monument, near the original Working Men's College tells a story. Think of a union walking tour and a labor movement tour without this pub. This pub is integral. The John Curtin has its stories to tell. Mine is a small one but together these stories add up to signify how important and special this place is. (RV)

First time out at a pub in a long time in April 2021, after the launch of the People's Climate Strategy across the road at Trades Hall. So great to have a place with such great atmosphere and different spots to mingle, to go with everyone directly following an awesome event to relax and continue conversations. (EW)

JCs is special for so many reasons. I went to RMIT ALP Club meetings there, I had beers after countless International Women's Day events there one special one with Stella Young. I celebrated winning student elections, especially in 1999 the night before Steve Bracks beat Jeff Kennett. I've sung karaoke there. I've mentored young people, I've pre-caucused, I've commiserated. JCs is a living treasure of memories but of a stable go to in the heart of union and uni town. Carlton thrives on both. No building can replace a bar where everybody knows your name. Save the John Curtin. (CD)

A second petition was created on change.org.au; 'Save the Curtin from development!':

<https://www.change.org/p/daniel-andrews-save-the-curtin-from-development>

This petition was made to Victorian Premier, the Victorian Trades Hall Council and Melbourne City Council. The rationale for the petition reads:

The John Curtin Hotel on Lygon St - one of Melbourne's oldest pubs and best live music venues, with a rich cultural heritage associated with the labour movement - has announced that its landlord is selling the premises for commercial development. The likely end result of this would mean it is turned into apartments.

This would be a devastating blow both to Melbourne's music scene, which has suffered greatly from the lack of support during the Covid-19 pandemic, and to Melbourne's architectural heritage, which has not been protected by the grossly inadequate heritage listing system.

...

We demand the Victorian state government, City of Melbourne and Victorian Trades Hall Council to do everything in their power to ensure The Curtin stays open as a public bar and music venue. If necessary, it should be compulsorily acquired using public funds and turned into a community-owned space.

We call upon community groups, musicians, unions and everyone who cares about Melbourne's cultural life to campaign together to save The Curtin, whatever it takes.

The petition has 3,632 signatures as of 14 June 2022 and approximately 110 signatories have publicly commented on their 'reasons for signing'.

There's so much history in that pub. The Curtin is synonymous with Trades Hall and the great union movement. It's the focus of working class activism, achievements & a tribute to John Curtin our great wartime Prime Minister. The Curtin is an icon and so deeply entrenched in the history of the Labor movement

## **Selected bibliography**

ABC News.

*The Age.*

*Australasian.*

'Australian Builders Laborers Federation (1911-1972)', Australian Trade Union Archives, <https://www.atua.org.au/biogs/ALE0132b.htm>, accessed 26 May 2022.

*Argus.*

Bate, Weston, 'Why is Victoria different?', *Victorian Historical Journal*, Volume 81, No 1, June 2010.

'Bob Hawke', *National Museum of Australia*, <https://www.nma.gov.au/explore/features/prime-ministers/bob-hawke>, accessed 2 June 2022.

Central Plan Office, via <https://www.landata.vic.gov.au/>.

City of Melbourne Building Application Index, Public Record Office Victoria, accessed via [www.ancestry.com.au](http://www.ancestry.com.au).

City of Melbourne, Notice of Intent to Build, via Miles Lewis Australian Architectural Index, <https://www.mileslewis.net/australian-architectural/>.

City of Melbourne Rate Books, Public Record Office Victoria.

D'Alpuget, Blanche, *Hawke: The Early Years*, Melbourne, 2010.

D'Aprano, Zelda, *Zelda*, North Melbourne, 1995.

Doyle, Helen, 'Trade Unions' in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Melbourne, 2001.

*The Guardian.*

History of Australian unions', *Australian Council of Trades Unions*, <https://www.actu.org.au/about-the-actu/history-of-australian-unions>, accessed 28 June 2022.

*Labor Call.*

Love, Peter, 'Australian Council of Trade Unions', <https://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00120b.htm>, accessed 7 June 2022.

Love, Peter, 'Builders Labourers Federation', <https://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00253b.htm>, accessed 26 May 2022.

Love, Peter, *Labour*, via eMelbourne, via eMelbourne.net.au.

McCaskie, Gordon, 'Trades Hall and the Union Movement', in Peter Yule (ed.), *Carlton: A History*, Melbourne University Publishing, Carlton, 2005, p 426; *The Age*, 30 June 1982, p 2.

Museum Victoria, collection.

National Museums Australia.

Personal communication with Colin Long & Mairead Lesman, Victorian Trades Hall, Carlton, 24 May 2022.

Public Record Office Victoria, Public Building Files.

Reeves, Debra, Liquor, temperance and legislation: the origins of six o'clock closing in Victoria during WWI, via <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/publications/research-papers/download/36-research-papers/13740-2016-2-liquorlaws-hn>.

Serle, Geoffrey, *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria 1851-1861*, Melbourne, 2014.

State Library of Victoria, map collection.

## Extent of Registration

### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 2017**, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including a place in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2426

Category: Registered Place

Name: John Curtin Hotel

Location: 27-31 Lygon Street, Carlton

Municipality: City of Melbourne

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2426 encompassing all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 534713.

Dated 6 April 2023

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*