
FORMER BELMONT HOTEL

Location

22-38 WELLS ROAD THOMASTOWN, WHITTLESEA CITY

Municipality

WHITTLESEA CITY

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7922-0523

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 17, 2022

What is significant?

How is it significant?

Why is it significant?

The following information provided is based on Heritage Victoria's *Framework of Historical Themes*, which have been established to ensure that objects, places, and events, can be understood, assessed, and presented within the context of a broad theme, rather than as a singular item of interest. The Former Belmont Hotel is relevant to four major themes presented in Heritage Victoria's *Framework of Historical Themes*.

The first relevant theme to the Former Belmont Hotel is: *Building Victoria's industries and workforce*. This site has the potential to provide insight into how 19th to 20th century residents of Thomastown operated hotels. This specifically relates to the themes: *Markets and retailing*, in relation to serving local needs, *Entertaining and socialising*, in relation to Victorians meeting and socialising in rural Victoria and dining out, developing Victoria's culinary, cafe and bar culture, and to theme *Catering for tourists*, in relation to accommodating tourists.

The second relevant theme to the Former Belmont Hotel is: *Governing Victorians*. This site has the potential to provide insight into the formation and operation of the Epping District Road Board. This specifically relates to the themes: *Developing institutions of self-government and democracy*, in relation to the development of local government authorities, as well as theme: *Maintaining Law and order*, in relation to administering resources and services including indigenous affairs.

The third relevant theme to the Former Belmont Hotel is: *Shaping cultural and creative life*. For many decades the Belmont Hotel hosted a variety of races for the community. This site has the potential to provide insight into the 19th to 20th century Thomastown residents' sporting and recreational cultural identity. This specifically relates to the theme: *Participating in sport and recreation*, in relation to pursuing individual sports and enjoying leisure activities.

The Burra Charter defines 'cultural significance' as 'aesthetic, historical, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations' (2013). The Former Belmont Hotel has been assessed against these values and is considered to be of high historical significance as one of the earliest hotels on the northern fringe of early Melbourne. The Former Belmont Hotel is considered to be of moderate-high social significance as it served as a place for meeting and recreation for the community of Thomastown for at least 135 years. The Former Belmont Hotel may contain archaeological deposits and features of moderate scientific significance. The site has no known spiritual or aesthetic significance. Overall, the site is considered to be of moderate-high significance at a local level.

Hermes Number 208893

Property Number

History

The Belmont hotel was built by Peter M'Coy in 1852 and would have been one of the first hotels on the fringe of north Melbourne at the time (The Herald, 1939 p. 19). The first known recorded reference to the Belmont Hotel was on 19 April 1855, when *The Argus* published a list of names, including: "Peter M'Coy, Belmont Hotel, Dry Creek", for licenses granted in the district of Bourke (The Argus, 1855 p. 6). The Epping District Road Board, "the earliest form of local government in Darebin", used the Belmont Hotel as a meeting place, which is first evidenced in 1855, when a call for tenders was advertised in *The Argus*, for road works, with the "plans and speculations to be viewed at the Offices of the Board, Belmont Hotel, Thomas Town" (Darebin Heritage, n.d.), (The Argus, 1855, p. 6).

In 1864, in what was described as the largest private funeral of the era, the original owner, Peter M'Coy, and his son were laid to rest in Melbourne cemetery after Peter died unexpectedly in a tragic incident in a Melbourne hotel from a heart attack after witnessing the sudden death of his son (The Herald, 1864 p. 2). After his younger son, who was also named Peter M'Coy, took over the hotel, a series of incidents and misfortunes lead to the ill repute of the hotel.

The Belmont Hotel fell out of favour with the board in 1867 when the publican John Devne went broke, and the members of the Board arrived to conduct a meeting only to find that the furniture had been repossessed and the members' only option was to sit on old boxes (Darebin Heritage, n.d.). Despite this, Belmont Hotel remained a prominent part of the community and was the meeting place for local farmers (Darebin Heritage, n.d.).

The original two-storey hotel was a predominately timber structure with a bricked chimney, based on the 1870s photograph of the Belmont Hotel. The location of Belmont Hotel and its associated outbuildings were depicted on the 1887 Victorian Railways Fitzroy and Whittlesea line plan, in reference to High Street. Payne states the hotel was rebuilt and relocated several times (1975). Several instances of rebuilding have been identified, however the hotel is depicted on the west side of High Street in the 1887 Victorian Railways Plan and maintained this position until it's demolition (see below). No record was identified for alternative locations of the Belmont Hotel prior to 1887. It is unclear whether Payne is suggesting the hotel was relocated across different areas of the same property or whether the hotel occupied a different property prior to 1887.

In the 1880s, the license was passed to the Larmers. Francis Larmer inherited the license upon the death of her husband, Michael Larmer. However, Francis died a year later from alcohol related illness (Darebin Heritage, n.d.).

On the 8 August 1890, the main building was lost in an explosion and resulting fire due to someone dropping a lit match into a bucket of gasoline. At this time, the building was described as a two-storey iron building with a wooden lining (The Argus, 1890 p. 9). The contents of the hotel and the outbuildings were saved, and the timber structure was replaced by a more modern brick hotel, depicted in the 1890s photograph. This brick building became "the nucleus" of the modern hotel (Payne, 1975). Whilst not specifically mentioned in any sources, a cellar is a standard feature of a brick or stone 19th century hotel and it is believed the Belmont Hotel would have had one.

Between the 1890s and 1928, the Belmont Hotel appears to have fallen into disrepair based on the 1928 photograph.

Belmont Hotel appears on the 1931 aerial image; however, the main brick building cannot be seen due to the poor resolution of the image. In 1934, the niece of Peter M'Coy (Jr.), Mrs. Goodwin, bought the hotel after it once again, went bankrupt (The Herald, 1939 p. 19). An advertisement from 1939 in *The Herald*, provides an illustration of the hotel with a description of renovations including: the reconstruction of the bar, a renovated lounge, parlour(s), and entrance hall, and new modern veranda with a cream stucco facade planed for the front of the building (The Herald, 1939 p.19).

The Belmont Hotel is clearly depicted on the 1945 aerial image, with a potential garden to north of main brick building, a series of out buildings at the back of the property and a driveway to the south of the building. The 1958 aerial demonstrates that the main building has remained relatively unchanged; however, the area north of fenced garden appears to be a more established racetrack. The Belmont Hotel famously hosted many races throughout the decades, hosting events such as: a Maiden's race and Boy's race, hurdles, high jumps, and greasy pig races, where the object of the race is to chase and capture a pig (Darebin Heritage, n.d.).

Between 1958 and 1968, an extension was added on to the main brick building, the original rear outbuildings were demolished, the racetrack was replaced with a building and car park, a large building was constructed to the south of the Belmont Hotel, and road was widened and modernised.

Between 1968 and 1970 several modifications were undertaken within the property. An extension was added to north of the main brick building, and an additional large structure was constructed to the rear of the property, within the Belmont Hotel's car park. It is unclear what the purpose was for this additional structure. Aerial images from 1988 and 1991 were reviewed; however, other than the surrounding area becoming more developed, no obvious changes were observed.

The Belmont Hotel was demolished between March 1991 and 1994 when the section of the Metropolitan Ring Road from the Greensborough Bypass to Plenty Road was opened (VicRoads, 1994). The section of the Metropolitan Ring Road from Edgars Road to Plenty Road was upgraded in 2014 (M80 Upgrade, n.d.).

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/>