

ROMANO'S



Photo front cover courtesy Romano's Hotel.

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Acknowledgments.

My sincere thanks to Nick Tinning, Adrian Herrick, Andrew Conkey, and Belinda King.

My thanks to Luke Grealy, Michelle Maddison, Genevieve Mott, and Jennifer Palmer, at the Museum of the Riverina.

Thank you too to Paul O'Donnell, Wayne Doubleday and Jillian Kohlhagen at CSU Regional Archives.

My thanks to the National Library and the NSW State Library for their support and development of the Australian Newspaper Digitisation Project. Trove continues to be the most fantastic resource.

I gratefully acknowledge the collection of Tooth & Co. records as held by the Noel Butlin Archives, ANU Canberra, it being an invaluable source.

My thanks also to NSW Land Registry Services, or the old Lands Department. Their digitisation of parish maps and other land records constitutes another invaluable resource.

Thank you to John Roy who is not only a great barber but also a fantastic repository of stories.

Introduction

This article is a continuation of a project to record the history of all hotels in Wagga Wagga.

There is no doubt that Romano's hotel is by far the most celebrated hotel of all Wagga Wagga hotels, because of its location, its longevity, and most importantly its various owners, most notably Romano Orlando Azzalin.

What was originally named the Commercial hotel has been rebuilt numerous times, and each of these events contributed to the ongoing success of the hotel.

The hotels connections with high society, with Bernborough, "*Steak Diane*," and many other stories and events, have made it a pleasure to research its story.

The COMMERCIAL HOTEL (2)

AKA: Bellair's Commercial, Romano's.

This is the history of the second Commercial hotel in Wagga Wagga. The first Commercial hotel was located in Gurwood Street, behind the Australian hotel, and it had closed before this second hotel was given the same name.

Location:

The site where the hotel was constructed was originally a swamp, known as Todhunter's Lagoon. The site was drained, into the river, and the hotel erected thereon.¹

The hotel is situated at the corner of Fitzmaurice Street and Sturt Street [formerly Little Gurwood Street] and the site was originally part of Frederick Anslow Tompson's Waterview property. The latter originally existed as allotment 1 of section 45A, town and parish of South Wagga Wagga.

Licensees

In May 1864 Hardy & Hodson were busy constructing a new hotel at the corner of Fitzmaurice and Little Gurwood Streets, the design of which was based on Taylor's hotel at Deniliquin. A brief description read as follows,²

"the building of brick is to have a raised frontage of two feet, showing two faces to Fitzmaurice and Little Gurwood Streets, and an obtuse corner, with surrounding verandah & balcony."

In November 1864 the new Commercial hotel, described as, *"the best house between Sydney and Melbourne,"* was advertised for sale.³

The Commercial hotel was first licensed, in 1865, to Frederick Gasse.⁴ Gasse placed an advertisement in the Tumut paper, in May 1865, to notify his friends in that district that he had taken up the role of a publican once again, at the Commercial hotel, Wagga Wagga. He apologised for not holding the customary *"house warming,"* explaining that his entry into the hotel had been a bit of a rush.⁵

¹ James J Baylis. The Murrumbidgee and Wagga wagga. RAHS Journal.Vol.13, part 5. 1927, p296.

² Yass Courier. 11th May 1864, p2c6.

³ Border Post. 16th November 1864, p3c5.

⁴ NSW Government Gazettes. Publican's Licenses. 1865, p2059.

⁵ Tumut & Adelong Times. 29th May 1865, p1.

Frederick Gasse Margat

Frederick was born in France c.1815, and arrived in Australia in 1842, aboard the vessel “*Alfred*.” His correct name was Frederick Gasse Margat. He was naturalised in August 1850, and then in 1851 he married Mary Ann Ashe, at Sydney.⁶ The couple had one adopted child, and in 1857 the family visited France and other parts of Europe. He subsequently conducted businesses as both a store keeper and a publican, in Gundagai, before coming to Wagga Wagga in 1865.

On the 19th November 1866 Mary Ann, passed away at the age of thirty eight.⁷ Frederick passed away in August 1879, at Gundagai, aged 74.⁸

Frederick renewed the license in 1866,⁹ but when it was renewed for the period from the 1st July 1867 till the 30th June 1868, John Charles McAlister, was the new licensee.¹⁰ McAlister had actually taken possession in 1866, and by the end of October, in that year, he was advertising his move from the Commercial hotel at Goulburn, to the Commercial hotel at Wagga Wagga. The latter featured “*hot, cold, and shower baths*,” along with a first class billiard room, and first class stabling.¹¹

For his part, Frederick Gasse took over the license of the Prince of Wales hotel, Wagga Wagga [1867], then the Mundarlo Inn at Mundarlo [1869], and then the Star hotel at Adelong [1870].

In November 1868 John Cox was staying at the hotel and was awoken by a person “*feeling*” around his head - believed to be searching for Cox’s waistcoat. Cox seized the hand, which belonged to a thief who was leaning in through the window of the room, but was compelled to release the thief when the sash fell on his [Cox’s] neck, allowing the culprit to escape.¹²

The hotel always featured shops and or offices within its complex, and in 1869, Fitzhardinge & Sons, solicitors, occupied an office within the building.¹³ The Australian hotel would have been in direct competition with the Commercial, but during John’s occupation, the former was licensed by his brother, Peter James McAlister, which would have avoided any price competition.

In January 1870 it was reported that John Varney had taken over the license from McAlister, and that he had hired John Clark, late of the Royal hotel to manage the hotel.¹⁴ Clark was a very popular publican, with a solid reputation in the industry. When the license was officially renewed in June 1870, it was in the name of Sarah Varney.¹⁵ Sarah was John Clark’s sister in

⁶ NSW BDM’s. Marriage registration # 59/1851 V185159 97.

⁷ Sydney Morning Herald. 27th November 1866, p1.

⁸ Wagga Wagga Express. 9th August 1879, p5.

⁹ Wagga Wagga Express. 21st April 1866, p2.

¹⁰ NSW Government Gazettes. Publican’s Licenses. 1867, p1893.

¹¹ Wagga Wagga Express. 27th October 1866, p1.

¹² Maitland Mercury. 3rd November 1868, p3.

¹³ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 4th September 1869, p2.

¹⁴ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 15th January 1870, p2c3.

¹⁵ NSW Government Gazette. Publican’s Licenses. 1870, p1935.

law. There is no knowledge of a John Varney, and this possibly was John Clark, or Sarah Varney.

The largest flood since 1853 struck in May 1870, and the Commercial hotel was totally surrounded by water, which came up as high as the, "*front door keyhole.*" The waters surrounding the hotel were calm, but to the north the water formed a number of rapid moving streams, one of which tore down Gurwood Street with great force. The inhabitants of the hotel were forced to the first floor and were able to view the scene from the balcony of the hotel. The Australian was above the flood level, and according to one report the bar, "*was doing a roaring trade.*"¹⁶

On the morning of the 24th June 1870 the Criterion hotel, which was located immediately to the north of the Commercial hotel, was destroyed by fire. The Commercial hotel was saved thanks to the efforts of the townspeople. Charles Hardy [the legal owner] and John Clarke [manager] both placed notices in the local paper to thank all those that helped.¹⁷

The Commercial hotel suffered damage from the large amount of water that was thrown on the building to prevent the fire from spreading, and, as was common in such events, much of the furniture and utensils were damaged by the rough handling they received in being hastily removed from the building. Damage to the Commercial was estimated at four hundred pounds, which was covered by insurance.¹⁸

The license was renewed, for the period 1st July 1871 till 30th June 1872, but was now in the name of John Clark.¹⁹ This was a last minute change and was due to the death of Sarah, on the 26th June 1871. She was, at that time, sixty one years old.²⁰ Clark's insolvency [1869-1870]²¹ indicates that it was Sarah providing the necessary capital for the Commercial hotel venture. John still retained his reputation and in 1872, was elected as an alderman (south ward) of the Wagga Wagga Municipal Council.²²

Floods and fires were followed by death. On the 9th January 1872, a guest at the hotel, Herbert Edwards, was found dead, in his bed, by one of the hotel waiters. Edwards had contracted an unidentified illness, during his three week stay, and had consulted two different doctors as to what medicines he should be taking. Against their advice, he purchased a large quantity of "*morphia,*" said to be enough to kill ten men. This he mixed with warm water and a little brandy, and drank the concoction just before retiring to bed, and never awoke. His body was discovered around lunch time on the following day.²³

By February 1872 Matthew Callaghan had purchased the freehold of the hotel and had also taken over the license.²⁴ He officially took over from John Clark on the 1st February 1872.

¹⁶ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 7th May 1870, p4.

¹⁷ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 27th July 1870, p3.

¹⁸ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 27th July 1870, p2.

¹⁹ NSW Government Gazette. Publican's Licenses. 1871, p1964.

²⁰ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 28th June 1871, p2.

²¹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 15th January 1870, p2.

²² Wagga Wagga Express. 10th January 1872, p2.

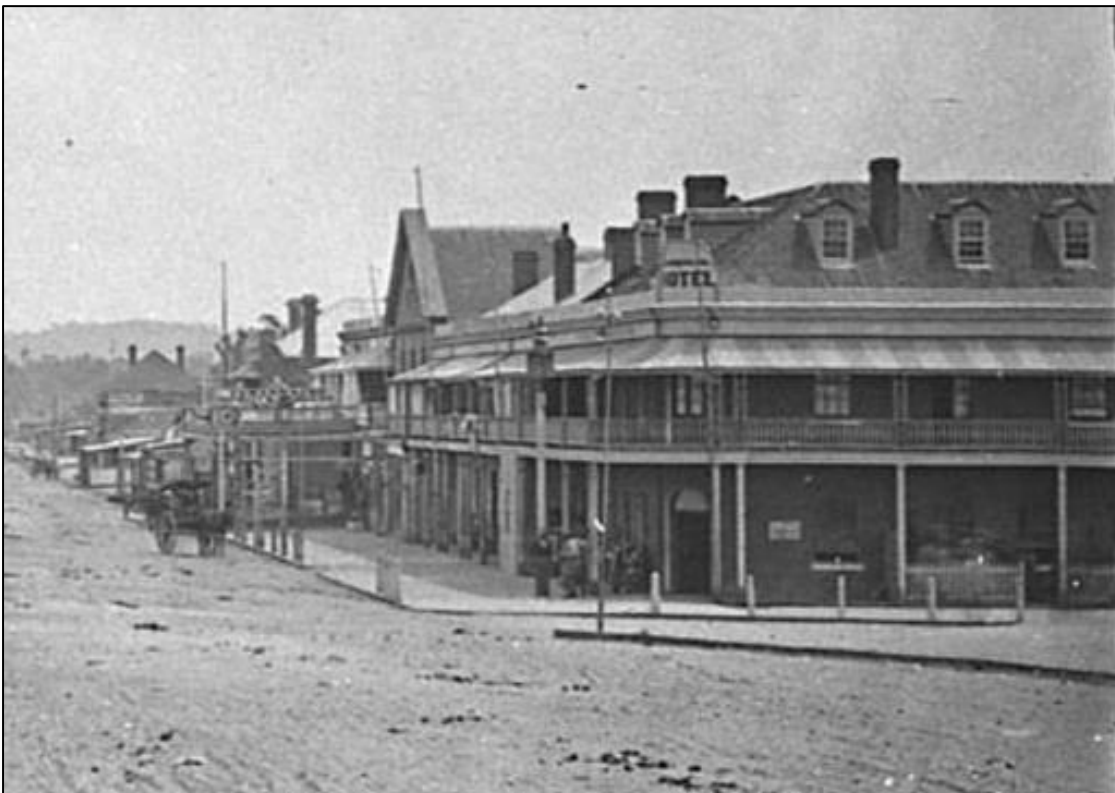
²³ Wagga Wagga Express. 10th January 1872, p2.

²⁴ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 7th February 1872, p4.

On the 30th May 1872 the license was transferred from Matthew Callaghan to Peter James McAlister.²⁵ McAlister was well known as the former licensee of the Australian hotel [1868-1872], which he returned to again in 1877, and stayed there for the next fourteen years [1877-1892].

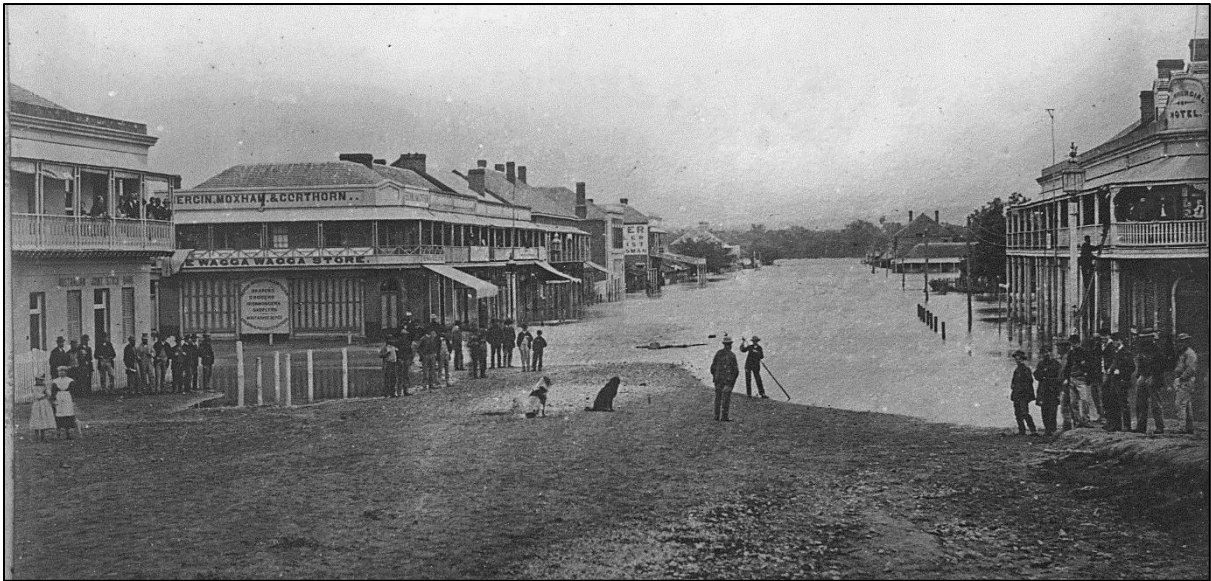


Left: The Commercial hotel [to the right of photo] in the 1870's. This would have been as it was when first built.



Above: A zoom shot of the same photo. The verandahs have yet to be extended out towards the street line.

²⁵ Wagga Wagga Express. 1st June 1872, p2.



Above: The hotel (right) during the 1870 flood. Courtesy CSU Reginal Archives [RW98/25-26]



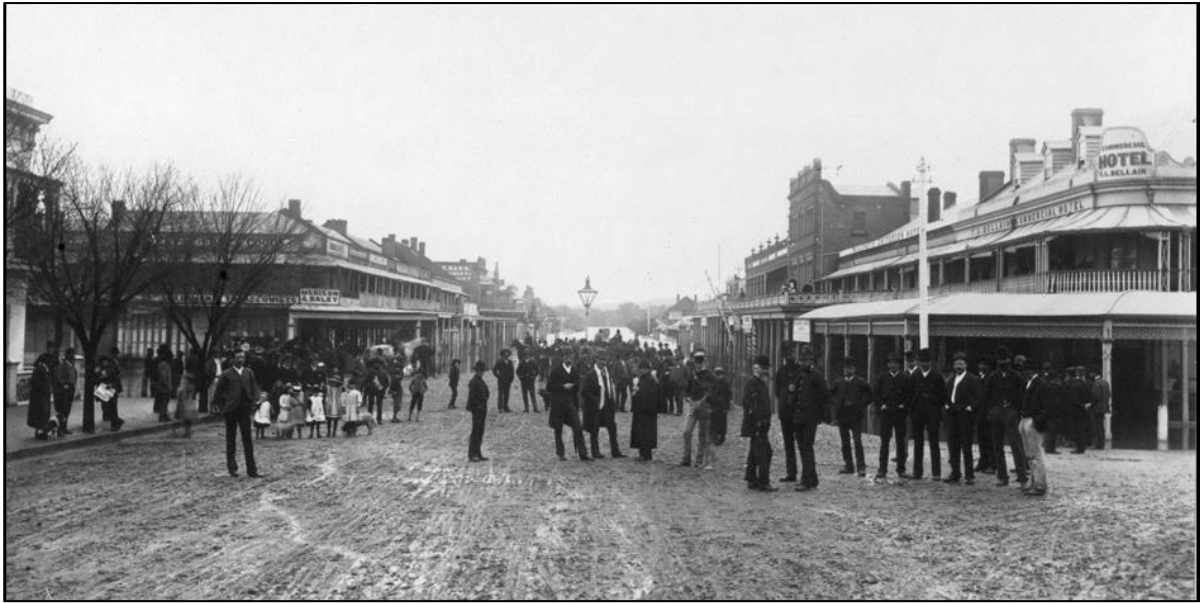
Above: Looking east along Gurwood Street, to see the Criterion hotel and the Commercial hotel in Fitzmaurice Street.

Wagga Wagga hotels commonly employed Chinese cooks, and in 1873, McAlister employed a Chinese man named Billy Sam. Billy lent three fowl, belonging to McAlister, to a compatriot, John Ah Yun. When John only repaid two fowl Billy remonstrated with John, who responded by beating him with a stick. The offence took place in an opium den. The matter went to court, where Billy was vindicated and John was fined three pounds plus 2s. 6d. costs.²⁶

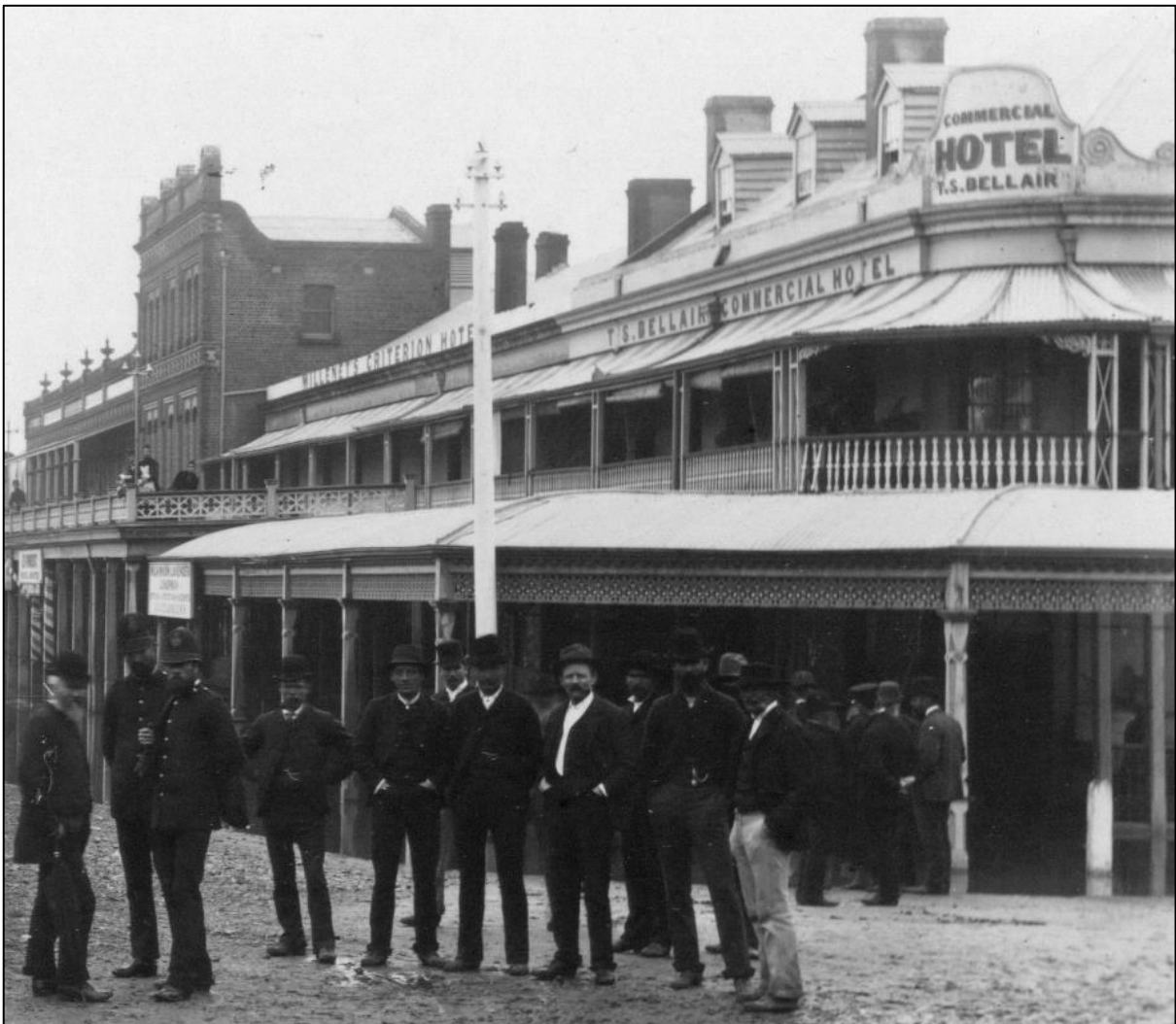
McAlister added to the attraction of the hotel in May 1873, when it was reported that he had imported a new billiard table from Alcock & Co.²⁷

²⁶ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 11th January 1873, p3. / Wagga Wagga Express. 11th January 1873, p2.

²⁷ Wagga Wagga Express. 17th May 1873, p2.



Above & Below: Another flood shot, in 1891. A canopy has now been extended out towards the street line.



McAlister, in partnership with Bowen, also conducted a horse and buggy hire service from the hotel.²⁸ William John Bowen had married Peter McAlister's sister, Susan Mary McAlister, and like Peter, he had a deep affection for horse racing. One of his horses, *Riverina*, came third in the 1865 Melbourne Cup. The same horse came third in the famous Ten Mile Race at Wagga Wagga, in 1868. William Bowen died, at the Australian hotel,²⁹ on the 24th May 1876, at the relatively young age of forty one.³⁰

In February 1877, Matthew Callaghan's firm [Stock & Station Agency] called for tenders to lease the Commercial hotel, for a term of five years, with immediate possession.³¹

By mid-March it was reported that McAlister's lease on the hotel had expired and the new lessee and licensee was Percival Sydney Francis Stephen of Adrah.³² Stephen actually took over in the first week of April.³³ He was a well known businessman, both in Wagga Wagga, and the surrounding districts.³⁴

A report in November 1878 noted "*extensive additions*," to the Commercial hotel, but did not provide any details.³⁵

James Otis Phillips succeeded Percy Stephen, and it seems he did so as early as January 1879.³⁶

The Commercial hotel proved to be a popular abode for travelling, or itinerant, salesmen and professionals – dentists, insurance representatives, et al. Its main attractions were its location and the quality of the establishment. The hotel's reputation would have been significantly enhanced when it secured the right to host a new Tattersall's Club, under agreement with the Murrumbidgee Turf Club, for a period of two years.³⁷ The first meeting of the new club took place at the Commercial hotel, on Monday the 15th September 1879.³⁸

In the early hours of Saturday the 16th October another disastrous fire destroyed a number of buildings along the eastern side of Fitzmaurice Street. The Masons' Arms hotel was one of those destroyed. The Criterion hotel caught fire, but was able to be saved, thanks to the work of the fire brigade and volunteers. It was feared at one point that the whole block, including the Commercial hotel, would be lost, but that did not eventuate, and the Commercial escaped, unscathed.³⁹

In March 1881, Messrs Wark Bros. were busy installing gas works for the town. On Saturday 26th March, a temporary light at the intersection of Gurwood and Fitzmaurice Streets was ceremoniously lit by the wife of the mayor, Mrs Fitzhardinge. The lamp had the power of "*100 candles*," and lit up the front of the Commercial hotel, where a number of the crowd

²⁸ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 3rd January 1874, p5.

²⁹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 24th May 1876, p2.

³⁰ Sherry Morris. Biographical Listings. William John Bowen.

³¹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 10th February 1877, p2. / 21st February 1877, p2.

³² Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 17th March 1877, p2.

³³ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 4th April 1877, p2.

³⁴ Sherry Morris. Biographical Listings. Percival Sydney Francis Stephen.

³⁵ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 30th November 1878, p4.

³⁶ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 1st January 1879, p3.

³⁷ Wagga Wagga Express. 20th August 1879, p2.

³⁸ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 17th September 1879, p2.

³⁹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 16th October 1880, p2.

subsequently adjourned to, for a celebratory toast.⁴⁰ The gas supply had also been connected to the hotel at this time, to provide lighting to the hotel rooms.⁴¹

In December 1882 Phillips appeared in court charged with allowing music to be played in a part of his licensed premises. Phillips stated that as a member of the band committee, he allowed the newly formed Town Band to use the balcony of the hotel, to practice their playing. He argued that bands had played on the balconies of hotels prior to this and no actions had been taken. He claimed that he was unaware of breaking any law. A new Act of parliament had recently been enacted and the judge had no hesitation in recording a conviction and fining Phillips 20s plus 4s. 10d costs.⁴²

From August 1883 a verandah was being added to the Commercial hotel. By October not everyone was pleased with the new structure, and a number of them voiced their concerns to the mayor, which generated a large amount of discussion at council meetings, concerning the positioning of the verandah support posts, which according to some, encroached upon the footpath.⁴³ The matter was brought before the police magistrate, on the 5th October, who ruled that the posts were not an obstruction.⁴⁴ Several aldermen questioned the authority of the court, suggesting it should be the Town Surveyor who decided such matters,⁴⁵ and at a subsequent meeting it was resolved, on the advice of the Borough Solicitor, to initiate proceedings against the owner of the Commercial hotel, Matthew Callaghan.⁴⁶ This was the canopy type structure that extended out from the original narrow verandah.

November 21st 1883 was the opening day of the Murrumbidgee Turf Club Spring Meeting. On the previous evening [Tuesday 20th] the town was awash with visitors, many of whom gathered under the gas lit verandah of the Commercial hotel, providing an ambience not known in previous years. The Pastoral hotel had also taken advantage of the new gas works to light up its façade.⁴⁷

In January 1885 the visiting English cricket team, known as Shaw's Cricket Eleven, arrived in Wagga Wagga, for a match with a team of twenty two local and district cricketers. The English team stayed at the Commercial hotel.⁴⁸

After some six years at the hotel, Phillips transferred the license to Thomas Smith Bellair, on Thursday 12th March 1885.⁴⁹ Bellair had previously been the first licensee of Lester's hotel, at Ballarat, and then, for eleven years, the licensee of the Pastoral hotel at Newmarket.⁵⁰

⁴⁰ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 29th March 1881, p2.

⁴¹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 19th March 1881, p3c3. / 29th March 1881, p2c8.

⁴² Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 16th December 1882, p5.

⁴³ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 2nd October 1883, p2.

⁴⁴ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 6th October 1883, p2.

⁴⁵ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 13th October 1883, p3.

⁴⁶ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 27th October 1883, p2.

⁴⁷ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 22nd November 1883, p2.

⁴⁸ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 8th January 1885, p3.

⁴⁹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 14th March 1882, p2.

⁵⁰ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 31st March 1885, p3.

James Otis Phillips

Phillips was the recipient of a farewell dinner in March 1885, and a local press report provided the following biographical details,⁵¹

“Prior to making Wagga his home Mr. Phillips was for thirteen years lessee of the Club House Hotel at Bathurst, during which period he was three years a member of the Borough Council there, and two years a member of the Committee of the local hospital. It is not surprising, therefore, that on his arrival here his experience was sought in most of our local institutions. Mr. Phillips has been a member of the Committee of the Wagga Hospital ever since he arrived, and it is admitted on all sides that he has proved himself to be one of the most indefatigable amongst the many gentlemen who have worked so hard in the interests of that, admittedly, model institution. Mr. Phillips was also an Alderman of the Borough in the years 1881-2-3, during which he did good service, especially upon the Works Committee. For 2 years he has been a painstaking member of the Progress Committee, and for 3 years he was on the Commoners' Committee. In all demonstrations in the town he has taken an active share, and we feel that, in his departure for Sydney, where he will reside for a short time before returning to his native land, America, we are being deprived of a liberal and energetic townsman. It is not only Mr. Phillips who will be missed, but his estimable wife also, whose works of an ostentatious benevolence will long be remembered by scores of people who have found a friend in need in her, and who will hope that Mr. and Mrs. Phillips, and their family, may be prosperous and happy in the future.”

It is not known if Phillips did return to America for a period, but certainly by 1889 he was residing in Sydney and was a director of the Burwood Land, Building and Investment Company, Limited.⁵² He was also conducting a business with his son, William Edgar Harold Phillips, trading as the Austral Banking and Land Proprietary (Phillips and Company). By July 1892 the company was insolvent and the matter was before the bankruptcy court.⁵³ James' son was convicted of fraud and sentenced to four years imprisonment, but his father evaded such a fate. The Official Assignee declared that, *“During his 14 years' experience in bankruptcy matters he could not remember any charges made against a bankrupt, more serious than those in this instance.”* He also testified that James had been, *“drawing money out of the business and placing it in his own private account.”*⁵⁴

On the 7th December 1895, James Otis Phillips passed away at his residence, *“Tranby”*, Mansfield Street, Glebe, aged sixty five.⁵⁵ In his more prosperous times he had resided in Neutral Bay.

The local press provided an impressive resume for the new licensee of the hotel,⁵⁶

“Mr. T. S. Bellair, is calculated to prove a worthy, successor of the departing man. Mr Bellair will be remembered by old Victorians as a sterling actor, who made his first appearance in Melbourne, at the Royal, as ‘Gratiano’ in the ‘Merchant of Venice,’ when G. V. Brooke and George Coppin were the lessees, When the latter couple dissolved partnership, Mr. Bellair joined Mr. Coppin in the Olympic Theatre (then ironically termed ‘The Iron Pot’), and afterwards became joint lessee with Mr. W. Hoskins (who has recently retired from the stage) of the Theatre Royal, Ballarat. After that, Mr. Bellair was the first lessee of Lester s Hotel, Ballarat, which he kept for 8 years, on leaving which he took a dramatic company to Calcutta. On his return, he occupied the Pastoral Hotel, at Newmarket,

⁵¹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 10th March 1885, p2.

⁵² Daily Telegraph. 10th August 1889, p12.

⁵³ Evening News. 16th July 1892, p6.

⁵⁴ Daily Telegraph. 27th May 1893, p10. / Australian Star. 24th July 1894, p6.

⁵⁵ Daily Telegraph. 9th December 1895, p1.

⁵⁶ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 10th March 1885, p2.

near Melbourne, for 11 years. During this time he was for 7 years a member of the Essendon and Flemington Municipal Council, and for 3 years was unanimously elected Mayor, or Chief Magistrate, of the municipality. On the 27th of last month he was entertained at a banquet by the members of the Essendon Dramatic Club, to whom he had often given valuable assistance, and presented with a very flattering illuminated address, written by the well-known litterateur of Melbourne, R. P. Whitworth."

A fire on the roof of the hotel, in May 1888, caused concern, but it was quickly extinguished thereby avoiding a tragedy. A new corrugated iron roof had only just been installed over the top of the old shingles, and it was suspected a spark had somehow got under a sheet of the corrugated iron and set fire to the shingles. There was no evidence of a fire from within the hotel. The water thrown on the fire caused, "*a good deal of damage*" to the upper rooms.⁵⁷

In August 1888 there was an issue with the drain that ran along Little Gurwood Street, in front of the Commercial hotel, not carrying away water in an efficient manner. The matter was raised at the September meeting of the council, where Alderman Hardy, as one of the longer serving representatives, advised that the original proprietor of the hotel [himself] built a drain there before the council existed. When the council was formed it removed the drain, with the result that the street was regularly flooded. The council then put in a new drain, but it was at a higher level than the old drain, and consequently regularly failed to clear any excess water. He suggested council had an obligation to fix the problem, at the rate payer's expense.⁵⁸

Bellair continued to make improvements to the hotel. After replacing the roof he proceeded to add a new three storey wing to the hotel, which in May 1889, were well underway.⁵⁹

Matthew Nicholas Callaghan

Matthew Callaghan, the previous owner of the freehold of the hotel, passed away in August 1890, and an obituary appeared in the local press,⁶⁰

"On Sunday evening Mr. Matthew Nicholas Callaghan, an old resident of Wagga, died at his residence in Newtown. Deceased was a resident of the Gundagai and Wagga districts for nearly forty years, and is well known in Riverina. He opened the Squatters Hotel at Wagga many years ago, and subsequently kept the Pastoral Hotel. After the lapse of some time he bought the Commercial Hotel (which he let to Mr. P. J. McAlister), and retired from business. About five years ago Mr. Callaghan was ordered a change by his medical adviser, and accordingly went to Sydney, where he found the climate unsuitable, returning to Wagga about two years ago. For a long time Mr. Callaghan owned the Bolygamy Run near Wollongough, but did not reside there. Since his return from Sydney he shewed signs of great deterioration in health, and despite all care and attention succumbed to phthisis on Sunday evening. Mr. Callaghan was a justice of the peace, and since his return from Sydney was elected a member of the Wagga Land Board. He was a widower at the time of his death; Mrs. Callaghan, sister of Messrs. J. and W. Rudd, having died some years since. A general decline in health prevented Mr. Callaghan devoting much time to Land Court duties at later dates, he having sank rapidly during the past few months. Mr. Callaghan's family consists of four sons and four daughters; he was a native of Campbelltown, and 62 years of age at death. His remains will be interred this afternoon at the Wagga cemetery."

⁵⁷ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 17th May 1888, p2.

⁵⁸ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 11th September 1888, p2.

⁵⁹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 18th may 1889, p2.

⁶⁰ Wagga Wagga Express. 19th August 1890, p2.

Thomas Bellair experienced his first major flood in July 1891, when the hotel was inundated with water to a depth of two feet and three inches. The cellar was also flooded causing considerable damage to items stored therein.⁶¹ This was the single biggest flood since 1870, and its impact would have been a surprise to many of the younger inhabitants of Wagga Wagga.

Thomas Smith Bellair

On the 14th May 1893, Thomas Smith Bellair passed away at the age of sixty eight. His death took place at the Commercial hotel.⁶²

An obituary provided some details of his early life,⁶³

“Mr. Bellair was born in Wellington, Salop, England on the 23rd May, 1825, and was consequently almost 68 years of age at the time of his death. At a very early age he showed a preference for the stage and joined the dramatic profession rather than enter upon any other line of life. He very soon secured a good place in theatrical circles, and was much esteemed as an actor in England before coming to Australia. He arrived in the colonies by the well-known clipper James Baines in 1855, to fulfil a two years' engagement to Mr. Andrew Forning, who was the lessee of the Victorian Theatre, Sydney. He was acting stage manager for Mr. Forning, and at the termination of his engagement took a company on his own account to Auckland, New Zealand. After playing a short season there he went to Melbourne.”

Tom, as he was popularly known, was survived by his wife and nine children – six sons and three daughters – the youngest of whom was then about ten years old.⁶⁴ Part of his legacy were the substantial additions and improvements he had made to the Commercial hotel.

On the 19th May 1893 the hotel license was transferred to Rachel Bellair, the widow of Thomas.⁶⁵ Rachel renewed the license each subsequent year, including in June 1896,⁶⁶ but some five months later, on the 16th November 1896, the license was transferred to Rachel's second eldest son, James Alfred Bellair.⁶⁷ The change had been brought about by the demise of Rachel, on the 9th November 1896.⁶⁸

In October 1897 there were fifteen subscribers connected to the Wagga Wagga telephone exchange, including the Commercial hotel.⁶⁹

Richard Bellair, James' brother, entered into a partnership in February 1898, with Thomas Loughlin, to conduct a new firm to be known as Loughlin & Bellair, and formerly known as the Albion Brewery. Richard had previously worked for Goldsborough Mort, in their Melbourne warehouse, for a number of years.⁷⁰

⁶¹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 2nd July 1891, p2.

⁶² Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 16th May 1893, p2.

⁶³ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 16th May 1893, p2.

⁶⁴ Wagga Wagga Express. 16th May 1893, p2.

⁶⁵ Wagga Wagga Express. 20th May 1893, p3.

⁶⁶ Wagga Wagga Express. 2nd June 1896, p2.

⁶⁷ Wagga Wagga Express. 17th November 1896, p2. The change had been brought about by the demise of Rachel, on the

⁶⁸ Wagga Wagga Express. 10th November 1896, p2.

⁶⁹ Wagga Wagga Express. 9th October 1897, p2c2.

⁷⁰ Wagga Wagga Express. 5th February 1898, p2.

There was another serious fire in April 1898, when on the evening of the 27th of that month, flames destroyed the hotel stables, killing ten well bred horses.⁷¹ The rooms above the stables were used as sample rooms by travelling salesmen, but at the time of her fire the rooms were empty. In May 1898, George Sheppard (architect) accepted the tender of Charles Hardy, to rebuild the stables at a cost of £197.⁷²

Thomas's second eldest surviving daughter in 1899, was Ethel. On the 1st of August 1899, Ethel took a lethal dose of strychnine, which resulted in her death, at the Commercial hotel. An inquest into the tragedy found that her death, "*resulted from strychnine self-administered whilst temporarily insane.*" Ethel was only twenty two years old, but had been afflicted with "*spinal curvature,*" for many years, and periodically experienced bouts of depression. Ethel's younger sister, Edith, heard her screaming and found her suffering severe pain, as a consequence of having swallowed the strychnine, and within half an hour Ethel had passed away, despite prompt medical attention.⁷³

In July 1900, on the 27th of that month, James Bellair transferred the hotel license, and the associated billiard room license, to his brother, George W Bellair.⁷⁴

Wagga Wagga had a new doctor in January 1901 – Dr Vinson Dossetor, said to be, "*a young man who has had a large experience with one of the leading nerve specialists of Victoria, making a special study of women and children's diseases, and all nervous disorders.*" His place of business and his residence, was the Commercial hotel.⁷⁵

An editorial comment, responded to some who may have questioned his qualifications – possibly the registered doctors of Wagga Wagga. The item in the press explained that Doctor Dossetor was unable to publish any testimonials, due the personal nature of such correspondence. In fact all such personal correspondence was, "*immediately destroyed,*" by Dr Dossetor, once he had replied.⁷⁶ The police shortly afterwards charged Dossetor with illegally using the title of "*doctor.*" The later hastily packed and headed back to Melbourne, but police were made aware of his activities and arrested him at Uranquinty. When he appeared in court, Dossetor admitted he was not a qualified doctor, and was fined fifty pounds⁷⁷ – quite a hefty sum.

Wagga Wagga was now free from Dossetor's subterfuge, but the imposter had not reformed. As late as eight years later he was still falsely claiming qualifications he clearly did not have.⁷⁸

Motor vehicles were a rarity in 1903, and when a group of three men pulled up in an automobile, at the Commercial hotel, on their way to Melbourne, it would have attracted a lot of interest. The three men, GS Lane, AC Jewett, and AC Johnson (representatives of Smith & Lane of Sydney) had lunch at the hotel and then resumed their journey.⁷⁹

The hotel property was up for sale in August 1906, and the complex was described as a, "*three and four storied brick cemented building,*" with wide verandahs and balconies. The hotel contained public and private bars; an office; six sitting rooms and parlours; a large public dining room; two smaller dining rooms; a billiard room; six commercial travellers' sample rooms; forty five bedrooms; eight linen presses or storerooms; eight servants' rooms; a large, modern kitchen, complete with scullery and serving room attached; a cellar; bathrooms and lavatories.

⁷¹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 28th April 1898, p2. / Wagga Wagga Express. 30th April 1898, p2.

⁷² Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 17th May 1898, p2c4.

⁷³ Goulburn Herald. 3rd August 1899, p4. / Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 3rd August 1899, p2.

⁷⁴ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 28th July 1900, p2.

⁷⁵ Wagga Wagga Express. 1st January 1901, p2.

⁷⁶ Wagga Wagga Express. 5th January 1901, p2.

⁷⁷ Wagga Wagga Express. 12th January 1901, p2.

⁷⁸ Australian Star. 23rd January 1909, p15.

⁷⁹ Wagga Wagga Express. 15th December 1903, p2.

A portion of the Fitzmaurice Street frontage was leased to a hairdresser and tobacconist, while an office facing Little Gurwood Street was also let.

To the rear of the hotel were a paved yard; extensive stables, featuring eighteen stalls; a feed room; a harness room; and a large covered area for vehicles.⁸⁰

In February 1907 it was Ernest Bellair's turn to manage the hotel, and on the 4th of that month the licence was transferred into his name [from George Bellair], as was the billiard license.⁸¹

Ernest Bellair had previously worked in the Wagga Lands Office. In July 1905 he was the recipient of a presentation, where he was presented with a "gold sovereign case and a gold pencil case," by his fellow workers, prior to his relocation to the head office in Sydney.⁸²

In December 1908, George announced his engagement to Miss BM Wiseman, matron of the Wagga Wagga District Hospital.⁸³

A month later, at the end of January 1909, Ernest left for Melbourne, where he too would be married [to Mabel Florence MacLean].⁸⁴ Within a couple of weeks the hotel license had been transferred from Ernest Bellair, back to George Whiteman Bellair [on the 25th January 1909].⁸⁵ This latter report conflicts with the official records that show Ernest held the license up until 1911, when it was then transferred to George.⁸⁶

James Alfred Bellair

James Alfred Bellair, the licensee from 1896-1900, passed away at a private hospital in Melbourne on the 27th January 1911,⁸⁷ following a hernia operation. An obituary appeared in the Wagga Wagga press, as follows,⁸⁸

"The deceased was a member of the well-known local family of that name, and came to Wagga with his parents as a boy. He was originally an articled clerk in one of the local offices but soon after drifted into commercial pursuits and was for a time a partner in the well-known Temora Brewing firm, now carried on by Mr. A. Tewksbury. Mr. Bellair also for a considerable time held the license of the Commercial Hotel, which is still carried on by Messrs. Ernest and George Bellair. He was later on in business with Mr. A. Cumming in Wagga. Always a spirited townsman the deceased was associated with a number of local bodies, his taste in this connection leaning distinctly to sporting institutions. In conjunction with the late Mr. C. H. Croaker, he acted as hon. secretary to the M.T.C. during a period when the old club badly needed assistance, and in such popular hands the institution's affairs were revived in a remarkable manner. On the death of Mr. Croaker the late Mr. D. R. Irvine joined Mr. Bellair in the management of the club with the same happy results. At a later period Mr. Bellair was appointed a paid secretary to the M.T.C., a position he held for some time previous to taking his departure for Melbourne. Possessed of a winning personality and a kindly disposition deceased won great popularity and endeared himself to everybody with whom he came in contact. Mr. Bellair, who was married some five years ago to Miss Leonard, of Melbourne, took up his residence in the Victorian capital about two years ago. On the eve of his departure he was given a

⁸⁰ Wagga Wagga Express. 14th July 1906, p5.

⁸¹ Wagga Wagga Express. 5th February 1907, p2.

⁸² Wagga Wagga Express. 25th July 1905, p2.

⁸³ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 3rd December 1908, p2c7.

⁸⁴ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 21st January 1909, p2c4.

⁸⁵ Wagga Wagga Express. 26th January 1909, p2c3.

⁸⁶ NSW Government Gazette. Publicans' Licenses. 1911, p4725.

⁸⁷ Daily Advertiser. 30th January 1911, p2.

⁸⁸ Daily Advertiser. 28th January 1911, p4.

farewell by the townspeople of Wagga, and presented with a memento of his long residence in Wagga and the public spirit and generosity he displayed as a citizen. Mr. Bellair was only 44 years of age at the time of his death. His wife and one child survive him."

In May 1911, the citizens of Wagga Wagga could hire a "reliable Russell motor-car," at Bellair's Commercial hotel, for the price of 1s per mile.⁸⁹ At the same time horses, buggies and sulkies could be hired at Jacob's Livery Stable, at the rear of the hotel.⁹⁰

In July 1911, George Bellair applied for permission to enlarge the hotel, by erecting a new three storey section on the site of the old stables in Little Gurwood Street. The plan featured a number of sample rooms on the ground floor, with a private residence plus three public bedrooms on the first floor. The second floor would consist of ten public bedrooms. Permission was granted.⁹¹

The works were still being carried out in October 1911, when a young man named, Samuel Collis, fell through the joists on the first floor and dropped twelve feet into the basement below. Fortunately Collis was not seriously injured, although he was shaken and had suffered extensive bruising.⁹²

It was in this month that police cracked down on men loitering around the front of the hotel, following numerous complaints, mainly from women. The court made an example of "two well-known sporting pencillers," John Thomas Campbell and Henry Robinson, who were each convicted of loitering and fined £1 plus costs (each).⁹³ Loitering was an ongoing problem and men were regularly charged with the offence for a number of years later, and the usual place where the offence took place was in front of the Commercial hotel. It is apparent that many of the situations were related to the activities of book makers.⁹⁴

The municipal lamp which stood in the middle of Fitzmaurice Street, in front of the Commercial hotel, was removed in October 1911, due to the traffic congestion it caused. A new larger lamp was being erected at the court house corner, to compliment another lamp at the ABC corner. It was stated that the lighting would be enhanced and the disruptions to traffic minimised.⁹⁵

In February 1912 George Bellair was in preparation for his wedding, in Sydney, to Miss Wiseman. The couple planned a honeymoon, and on their return to Wagga Wagga, planned to live in the new quarters' recently erected in Little Gurwood Street.⁹⁶

In May 1912, local architect, George Sheppard, invited tenders for the erection of additions to Bellair's Commercial hotel.⁹⁷

In 1913, works were commenced to replace the old hotel building at the corner of Fitzmaurice and Little Gurwood Streets. By August 1913, the first component of the project was completed, consisting of the public and private bars, which were opened on Saturday 9th of that month. A description of the works read as follows,⁹⁸

⁸⁹ Daily Advertiser. 2nd May 1911, p2.

⁹⁰ Daily Advertiser. 23rd June 1911, p4.

⁹¹ Daily Advertiser. 4th July 1911, p2. / Wagga Wagga Express. 4th July 1911, p4.

⁹² Daily Advertiser. 7th October 1911, p4.

⁹³ Wagga Wagga Express. 31st October 1911, p3.

⁹⁴ Daily Advertiser. 19th June 1915, p3.

⁹⁵ Wagga Wagga Express. 12th October 1911, p2.

⁹⁶ Wagga Wagga Express. 3rd February 1912, p2.

⁹⁷ Daily Advertiser. 21st May 1912, p2.

⁹⁸ Daily Advertiser. 12th August 1913, p2.

“The new building is of bold and striking design. From the level of the cellars four large arches are carried out in reinforced concrete, the arches being fitted with massive lead lights of ornate design. The art of the plasterer has been responsible for rich mouldings and artistic embellishments, over the doors and windows, and the general external appearance of the building is most attractive. But it is in the internal treatment and furnishing that the various trades have the greatest scope for their handiwork. The work is not yet completed, but is sufficiently advanced to afford a good indication of what the final result will be. The bar counters, fittings, doors, etc., are made of heavy oak, richly carved. The work has all been carried out locally, and is a triumph of the joiners’ art and a credit to the designers and tradesmen. The steel ceilings, enamel tiling and lead lights have been selected with good taste. The main public bar is commodious and conveniently arranged, with an entrance from the corner of the two streets. Opening off the Fitzmaurice Street entrance is another bar, also handsomely fitted. A private entrance from Gurwood Street leads directly into a semi-private bar parlour, which communicates with the main bar by means of a slide. The main staircase will start from opposite the Gurwood Street entrance, and at the foot of the stairwell a very large vestibule is to be provided, when the walls of the old building are removed. When completed a handsome three storied building with a heavy dome roof will stand where the original building did service during the past forty years and more.”

You can't go wrong in asking for
AULD JOCK WHISKY.
TOOTH & CO. LTD., Proprietors,
KENT BREWERY, SYDNEY.

There is evidently good profit in beer. The profits of Tooth and Co. for the past half year were £144,000. A dividend of 10 per cent. has been declared, and £10,000 will be carried to the employees' benefit fund, as the nucleus of a fund to help employees in the event of death or disablement. How about the disabled beer drinkers!



Above: The Commercial hotel, c.1910's, with the three storey additions to the east, facing Little Gurwood Street [aka Sturt Street].

BEER DRINKERS!

MAKE —
YOUR —
CHOICE —
FROM —



“OLD KENT” ALE

— AND —

“Country Special” Ale

THE PRODUCTS OF TOOTH & CO., LIMITED.

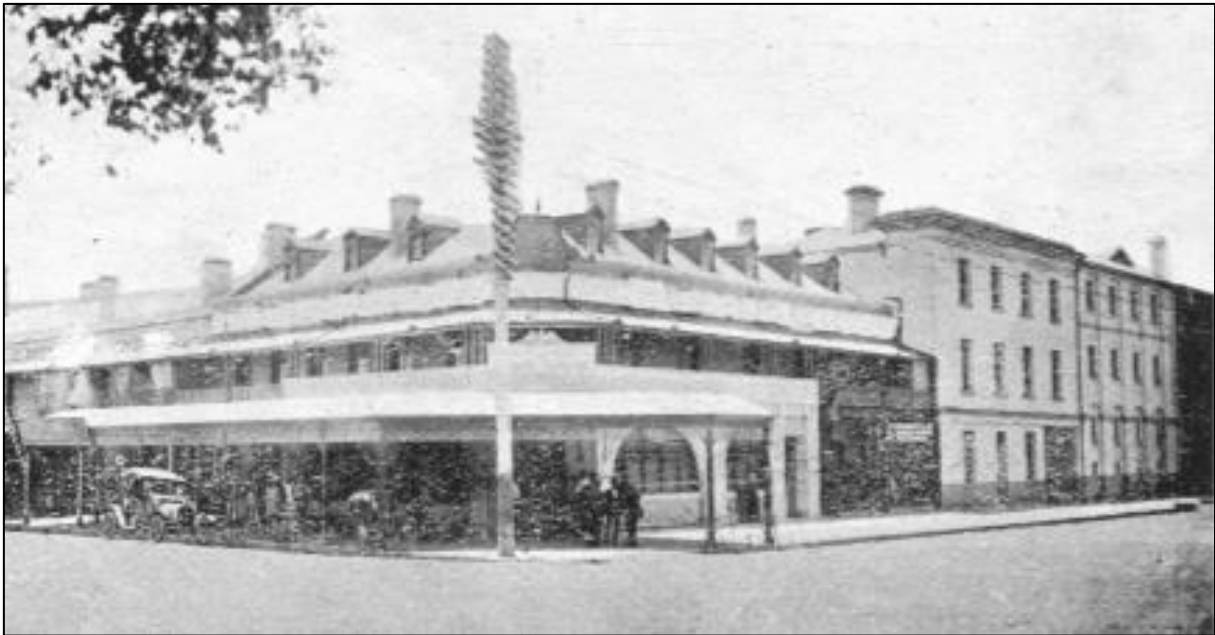
THESE HEALTH GIVING PRODUCTS ARE BREWED FROM MALTING BARLEY,
GROWN IN THE RIVERINA, TOGETHER WITH THE FINEST HOPS AND
CLEAR CRYSTAL WATER.

BOTH ALES WILL BE SUPPLIED FRESH DAILY FROM THE BREWING WORKS
OF THE MURRUMBIDGEE CO-OPERATIVE DAIRY CO. LTD. WHERE THEY
ARE CHILLED IN A SPECIALLY CONSTRUCTED REFRIGERATING CHAMBER.

SUPPORT YOUR OWN STATE AND INCREASE EMPLOYMENT.

Above: An advertisement for *Old Kent*, Wagga Wagga’s own unique brew.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Wagga Wagga Express. 22nd October 1932, p9.



Above: The Commercial hotel c.1914. Courtesy "Progress of Wagga Wagga."

ITEMS OF NEWS.

HOTEL MANAGEMENT.

In our business columns to-day Mr. M. E. Mongan announces that the Commercial Hotel, Wagga, is now under his management as licensee. Mr. Mongan is well known throughout this district, having conducted in the past 20 years his tobacconist and hairdressing saloon, and during that time he gained an enviable reputation for sound business principles. He has identified himself with sporting and other public bodies, and his management of the Commercial Hotel will, no doubt be popular with the resident and travelling public.

Above Left: Mark Mongan is the licensee in 1919.¹⁰⁰

MAURICE M'GRATH,
STOCK, STATION AND PRODUCE
AGENT, AUCTIONEER,
LAND & PROPERTY SALESMAN.

BIWORTNIGHTLY SALES OF STOCK
 CONDUCTED IN MUNICIPAL
 YARDS, WAGGA.

CLEARING SALES IN ANY PART
 OF THE STATE.

INSURANCE AGENT: FIRE, LIFE,
 ACCIDENT & LIVE STOCK.

LOANS NEGOTIATED ON LANDED
 SECURITY.

Local Agent for:
 Nunan Spray System of Irrigation
 Jersey Milking Machines
 And Tubular Separators.

OFFICES: LITTLE GURWOOD ST.,
 Commercial Hotel Building
 WAGGA WAGGA.

Right: One of the tenants of the hotel complex in 1910.¹⁰¹

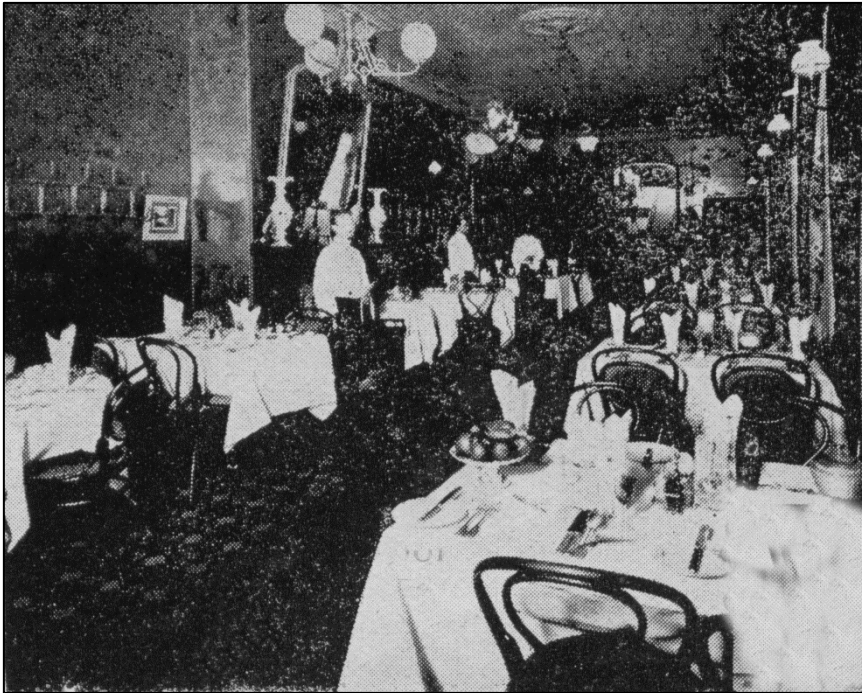
¹⁰⁰ Daily Advertiser. 22nd August 1919, p2.

¹⁰¹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 25th June 1910, p7.



Above & Below: The main bars, c.1914. Courtesy "Progress of Wagga Wagga."





Left: The main dining room, c.1914. Courtesy "Progress of Wagga Wagga."

Right: The beautiful cedar staircase, c.1914. Courtesy "Progress of Wagga Wagga."





Left: The private entrance in Little Gurwood Street, at the eastern extremity of the hotel complex, c.1914. Courtesy "Progress of Wagga Wagga."



Above: Commercial hotel, 1926, showing private entry off Little Gurwood Street. Courtesy Museum of the Riverina. [BGS1988_82].

In October 1913, George Bellair and the well-known distillers, Johnny Walker and Sons, sponsored an appearance by Frank Lillian, known popularly as “*the Australian Blondin.*” On the 15th of the month Lillian proposed crossing the Murrumbidgee, on a wire, strung up not far from the Hampden Bridge. . All funds raised were going to the hospital fund. This was not Lillian’s first performance in Wagga Wagga. In his younger days he was a member of a travelling circus troupe, and in 1896 he had given a performance at the old skating rink, in Kincaid Street.¹⁰² As it eventuated, strong winds forced Lillian to cancel the performance, but despite this the sum of £6. 12s. 6d. was collected for the hospital. There was a large crowd in attendance and Lillian was, “*picturesquely attired after the style of a Georgian dandy, as frequently appearing in the advertisements of Messrs Johnny Walker and Sons Ltd.*”¹⁰³

George renewed the license on the 16th June 1916,¹⁰⁴ but then on the 4th August 1916, the hotel license was transferred from George to his brother Ernest.¹⁰⁵

George Whiteman Bellair

Following on from an extended period of poor health, George Bellair passed away on the 14th January 1942, at a private hospital in Neutral Bay [Sydney]. An obituary read as follows,¹⁰⁶

“The late Mr. Bellair was a son of the late Mr. and Mrs. T. S. Bellair, who for a number of years conducted the Commercial Hotel at Wagga. In partnership with his brother the late Mr. Ernest Bellair. Mr. George Bellair also carried on the business of the hotel for many years. He was a native of Melbourne, where he was educated and spent his early boyhood, and qualified in accountancy. When the goldmining boom was at its height in West Australia, Mr. George Bellair went over to the gold State and remained for some time. In the meantime Mr and Mrs. T. S. Bellair came to Wagga, having purchased the Commercial Hotel, which they so successfully developed that it became one of the most popular in the southern part of the State. Mr. T. S. Bellair was in his younger days, a notable Shakespearean actor, and several members of his family inherited his love of music and drama. When Mr. and Mrs. T. S. Bellair came here from Melbourne, they brought their family of young boys and girls. The sons James, Dick, Ernie and Jack – established themselves as popular members of Wagga's Younger Set and associated themselves with the musical circles of that time. Later, Mr. George Bellair came to Wagga and joined in the management of the Commercial Hotel, and later partnered his brother Ernest, in the business. Whilst a resident of Wagga Mr George Bellair proved himself a good citizen and supporter of all movements for the advancement of the town. He was a cricketer of no mean order and when his side was in a tight corner George Bellair could be depended upon to play a straight bat and stonewall against any bowling. He was a member of that club of young Wagga men who were noted for their happy fishing parties and river picnics. He was also a noted bowling enthusiast, and was for some time secretary of the Bolton Park (now South Wagga) Bowling Club, Mr. Bellair married Miss B. Wiseman, matron of the Wagga District Hospital, and there were three children, two of whom, and their mother survive. Mr. Ian Bellair is on the staff of the Commonwealth Bank at Yass, and the daughter, Mrs Parkinson (Sue), is a trained nurse resident in Sydney. Two sisters also survive - Mrs. Piddington of Cremorne and Mrs. Haves of Melbourne. The funeral, a Masonic one, will take place in Sydney to-day.”

¹⁰² Daily Advertiser. 15th October 1913, p2.

¹⁰³ Daily Advertiser. 16th October 1913, p2.

¹⁰⁴ Daily Advertiser. 17th June 1916, p3.

¹⁰⁵ Daily Advertiser. 5th August 1916, p4.

¹⁰⁶ Daily Advertiser. 15th January 1942, p2.

In May 1918, Ernest transferred the license to Hugo Anderson, taking it outside of the family for the first time in many years.¹⁰⁷ Ernest was moving to Dubbo, to take up a position with the draughting branch of the Local Land Board, at that place.¹⁰⁸ Anderson's son, Lieut. AW Anderson was seriously injured at Bullecourt [France] in the month that he [Hugo] took over the hotel, and the young man was convalescing in a British hospital, pending his return to Australia, being now classified as permanently unfit for service. The valiant soldier had been fighting at the front since 1915. The following account was given of his service,¹⁰⁹

"Lieutenant Anderson left Australia as a gunner of No. 2 Battery, with the First Division, in October, 1914, and landed at Anzac with the first guns on April 26, 1915. On the Peninsula he saw service at Shrapnel Gully, Lone Pine, and Walker's Ridge, and was for some time with the French at Helles. He served throughout the Gallipoli campaign, and was among the last troops to leave Anzac. On his arrival in France he was awarded his commission at First Lieutenant, and was attached for duty with the Medium Trench Mortars in the Fourth Division. He fought with his battery at Mouquet Farm, Flers, Bapaume, and Bullecourt. On May 3, 1917, he was awarded the Military Cross— 'for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty, in rescuing wounded when his battery of three trench mortars and all his ammunition had been blown up by a German shell, and for reorganising his command.' Lieut. Anderson was the recipient of letters of congratulation on his gallant action from Generals Birdwood, Holmes and Rosenthal."

It may have been his son's condition that caused Anderson to surrender the license in August 1919, to Mark Edward Mongan.¹¹⁰ Mongan was well known in the district, having conducted a tobacconist and hairdressing business, in Wagga Wagga, for some twenty years. In recent times he had conducted the business in a part of the Commercial hotel [facing Fitzmaurice Street].

Hugo Anderson

Hugo Anderson passed away on the 17th November 1936, and an obituary provided some details of his life after leaving the hotel,¹¹¹

"The death occurred at Darlington Point yesterday morning of Mr. Hugo Anderson, aged 73 years, who was for many years one of the best known and most highly respected residents of Wagga and district, and who was very widely known throughout Riverina. About 20 years ago he was the licensee of the Commercial Hotel, Wagga. Later he went in for dairy farming and had a fine property, "Rivernook", on the Narandera road Wagga. He sold out his interests in this property a few years ago, however, and of late, assisted by his son, Sydney, had been conducting the Darlington Point Hotel. Mr. Anderson and his wife were both ill together and Mrs. Anderson is still a patient in the Griffith Hospital, while Mr. Anderson had the attention of a trained nurse at the hotel. He leaves a widow and two sons, Sydney and Alan. The body was brought to Wagga last night, and the funeral will move from St. John's Church of England' at 3.30 o'clock this afternoon for the Wagga cemetery."

¹⁰⁷ Daily Advertiser. 2nd May 1918, p2.

¹⁰⁸ Daily Advertiser. 22nd May 1918, p2.

¹⁰⁹ Daily Advertiser. 7th May 1918, p2.

¹¹⁰ Daily Advertiser. 22nd August 1919, p2.

¹¹¹ Daily Advertiser. 18th November 1936, p4.

Additional details were provided in a second obituary,¹¹²

“Mr. Anderson was born, at Gerangemetete [Victoria] and was married at Darlington Point to Miss Margaret Hodson. He is survived by his widow and two sons, Messrs. Sydney Anderson, of Darlington Point and Allan Anderson, of Melbourne. The deceased came to New South Wales in his early twenties and was overseer on Yancannia Station at Wilcannia for the late Thomas Shaw, of Weroverie (V.), and later was manager of Benambra Station, Mountain Creek, Holbrook, for the late Mr. C. L. Griffith, of Albury, for 12 years, and was manager of Warragong Station, at Cowra, for four years for the late Mr. J. C. Syme, of Melbourne.

After leaving station life he was the proprietor of the Globe Hotel, West Wyalong, from 1913 to 1919. On leaving there he took over the management of the Commercial Hotel, Wagga, and later acquired the lease of O'Donnell's Hotel at Junee, where he stayed for three years. He then decided to live on his property, "Rivernook," Narandera road, Wagga, where he carried on dairying, fat lamb raising, and cattle fattening. This property was known for its fat stock, which often topped the Wagga markets. His property was always open to fishing and picnic parties.”

Three months after Mongan took over, the licensing court served notice on a number of local hotels, including the Commercial, to install an external fire escape. The licensing inspector, Mr Duprez, was critical of Mongan, the latter having demolished the old stables and having commenced the construction of a garage, without the consent of the court, as was required by the act.¹¹³ Mongan was given permission, from the council, to erect external stairs [fire escape], in July 1920.¹¹⁴



Above: The Commercial hotel in 1924. Courtesy Tooth & Co. Records.

¹¹² Daily Advertiser. 19th November 1936, p6.

¹¹³ Daily Advertiser. 25th November 1919, p1.

¹¹⁴ Daily Express. 20th July 1920, p4.



Above: The Commercial hotel, c.1920's, featuring the unique arches and new entry, facing onto Little Gurwood Street.

Mark Edward Mongan was the licensee from 1919 through till 1928.¹¹⁵

Dixieland opened in November 1921,¹¹⁶ and was a very popular night spot, which no doubt resulted in additional business for the hotel.

Ernest Bellair

Ernest Bellair passed away on the 10th May 1926, at a private hospital in Dubbo, which town he had resided in for a number of years. The following biographical details appeared in the Dubbo press,¹¹⁷

"Today the community is the poorer by the death of Mr. Ernest Bellair, which took place at a private hospital in the town last night. "Ernie," as he was popularly called, was the personification of courtesy, sincerity, and honor. To know him was to respect him. Nobody who had anything to do with him in his capacity as Crown Land Agent's officer in Dubbo, but felt indebted to him for his courtesy and attention. In private life it was the same. To associate with him was to feel the tender touch of his humanity and manliness. Many young officers in the service have reason to feel grateful for his helpful advice, and his good example had an influence on everybody about him. Mr. Bellair, who was 51 years of age, was a Melbourne native, and was educated at Scott's College. He spent the greater part of his life at Wagga, where he entered the service of the Lands Department. On the death of his father, he resigned from the Department to become associated with his brother in the conduct of Bellair's Commercial Hotel in that town. About eight years ago he re-entered the service, and since then he has been stationed at Dubbo. Mr. Bellair took a prominent part in the public life of Wagga, and had been president of both the Murrumbidgee Turf Club, and the Wagga District Hospital, in

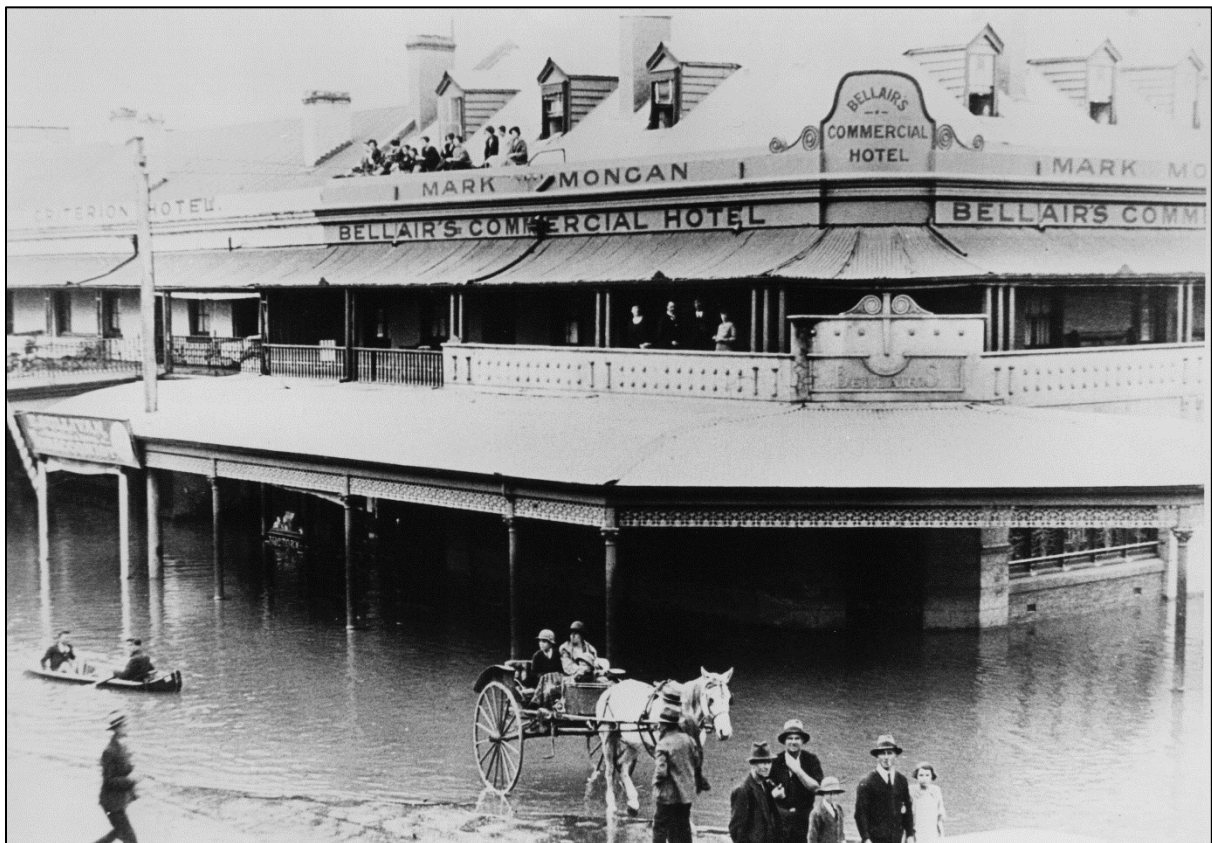
¹¹⁵ Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's.

¹¹⁶ Daily Express. 24th November 1921, p2.

¹¹⁷ Dubbo Dispatch. 11th May 1926, p2. [see also Daily Express. 12th May 1926, p2.]

addition to many other positions of service. In Dubbo he was a leading Church of England worker, and was prominent in the Bowling Club, of which he was vice president. He was also a past master in the Masons. He leaves a widow and one son, who is a student at the Dubbo High School. A brother, Mr. George Bellair, of Wagga, has been in Dubbo since his last serious illness, which began on Sunday week. Mr. Bellair has been in ill health for a couple of years, and when on leave recently consulted a Melbourne specialist, but to no avail. The funeral will leave the Church of England this afternoon for the Dubbo cemetery. He will be accorded a Masonic burial.”

There was a serious flood in May 1925, and on the 29th of that month the river broke its banks and submerged large parts of Wagga Wagga.¹¹⁸ On the following day, the 30th May, the Fire Brigade engine was used to pump the water out of the cellars of the Commercial hotel. There was 54,000 gallons of water in the main cellar, and another 13,500 gallons in the back cellar. The engine was capable of pumping 12,000 gallons an hour.¹¹⁹



Above: Mongan's Commercial hotel in the 1925 flood.

¹¹⁸ Daily Advertiser. 30th May 1925, p4.

¹¹⁹ Daily Advertiser. 1st June 1925, p1.

In 1926 the business was leased to Tooth & Co., and this ended the trade with the Victorian breweries (from the 31st August 1926). The hotel was, at that time, the “*best house in town*,”¹²⁰ and the exclusive arrangement would have been a feather in the cap for Tooth & Co.

The Commercial hotel was not just somewhere to have a drink. It was the best accommodation in town [where the most prestigious guests would stay], it was a place for doing business, it was a place where community groups met, and it was a place where illegal betting was carried on. Many political speeches were delivered from the balconies of the hotel, especially after the 1913 remodelling. Visiting specialists [dentists, doctors, optometrists, et al], and travelling salesmen conducted their business out of the hotel premises. It was a constant hive of activity, with a cab rank facing the Little Gurwood Street façade, and probably the busiest intersection in town facing the Fitzmaurice Street façade.

Other hotels shared similar activities but at nothing like the volume or quality experienced by the Commercial – it was the premier hotel.



Above: The intersection of Little Gurwood and Fitzmaurice Streets – a hive of activity.

In April 1927 the Commercial Motor Service Station opened in Little Gurwood Street, next to the Commercial hotel [separated by a laneway]. The business was very much appreciated by the many travellers who stayed at the Commercial hotel, and those who were visiting or driving through the town.¹²¹ A feature of the business was the latest wireless radio, installed in the rest room, allowing customers to hear the latest news.¹²²

¹²⁰ NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's.

¹²¹ Daily Advertiser. 30th April 1927, p4.

¹²² Daily Advertiser. 7th May 1927, p5.



Above: The Commercial hotel, c.1920's [probably 1925], with several business premises to the right and the swollen river in the background.

In February 1928 a syndicate of Wagga Wagga men reached an agreement to purchase the Commercial hotel. Mark Edward Mongan and James Joseph Scott were both members of the syndicate, and had been selected to manage the hotel for the syndicate. The new owners planned to completely remodel the hotel.¹²³

James Joseph Scott took over the license, from Mongan, on the 19th March 1928.¹²⁴ The new owners were no longer bound to Tooth & Co., and once again the Commercial hotel was a free house.

The architects for the redevelopment were WJ Monks & Jeffs, and in May 1928 they sought tenders for "*additions and remodelling of the Commercial hotel.*"¹²⁵ The licensing court approved the plans in June 1928, and it was stated by one of the architects that the works would take nine months and would cost in the vicinity of £21,000. Construction was to commence immediately.¹²⁶ The Council approved the plans in July 1928, with the mayor, Alderman WF Day, and Alderman Shoemark, voting against the approval, believing it did not address the issue of lighting and ventilation adequately.¹²⁷

The successful tenderer for the construction of the new hotel building was Charles Hardy & Co., the same firm that had built the original building.¹²⁸

¹²³ Daily Advertiser. 23rd February 1928, p1.

¹²⁴ Daily Advertiser. 20th March 1928, p2.

¹²⁵ Daily Advertiser. 12th May 1928, p5.

¹²⁶ Daily Advertiser. 19th June 1928, p2.

¹²⁷ Daily Advertiser. 6th July 1928, p2.

¹²⁸ Daily Advertiser. 10th October 1928, p16.



Above: The Commercial Motor Garage, to the east of the Commercial hotel, facing Little Gurwood Street. Courtesy Museum of the Riverina [BGS2007_202].



Above: Commercial hotel [centre left] after 1929 but pre 1949.



The new building was designed to accommodate up to one hundred and twenty guests – double its previous capacity. A prominent feature were the balconies on both the first and second floors, extending over the full width of the footpath, along both the Fitzmaurice Street and Little Gurwood Street facades. Both balconies were constructed of steel with cast iron posts, hand rails and friezes. The verandah floors were, of course, timber.¹²⁹

Left: Charles Hardy – whose firm built the original Commercial hotel and the new 1928 building.

On the ground floor the main bar space had been doubled in size, and a new saloon bar extended along the Fitzmaurice Street frontage. The private bar, which was called the “Dickens’s Bar,” had also been enlarged. A new

entrance hall, off Fitzmaurice Street, provided access to the new saloon bar, measuring 36ft by 20ft, and to a spacious lounge area measuring 38ft by 15ft. Space was reserved for the installation of an electric lift, and a new private residential entrance was created off Little Gurwood Street, which opened into a large foyer, from which the booking office, the manager’s office, and the commercial room could all be accessed. The main staircase, to the upper floors, was also accessed from the foyer. The existing commercial travellers’ room was enlarged and several new sample rooms were created.

On the first floor the existing smoking room, plus the sitting and lounge rooms were all enlarged, by moving the external wall out to the street alignment. The dining room, which had an area of some 1,300 square feet, was on the first floor and was accompanied by a wash and toilet room. Immediately to the rear of the dining room were the serveries, kitchen and scullery. The remainder of the first floor consisted of a number bedrooms and bathrooms. A mezzanine level catered to the hotel staff, and contained bedrooms, a sitting room and a bathroom. The entire second floor was devoted to bedrooms and bathrooms.

¹²⁹ Daily Advertiser. 10th October 1928, p16.

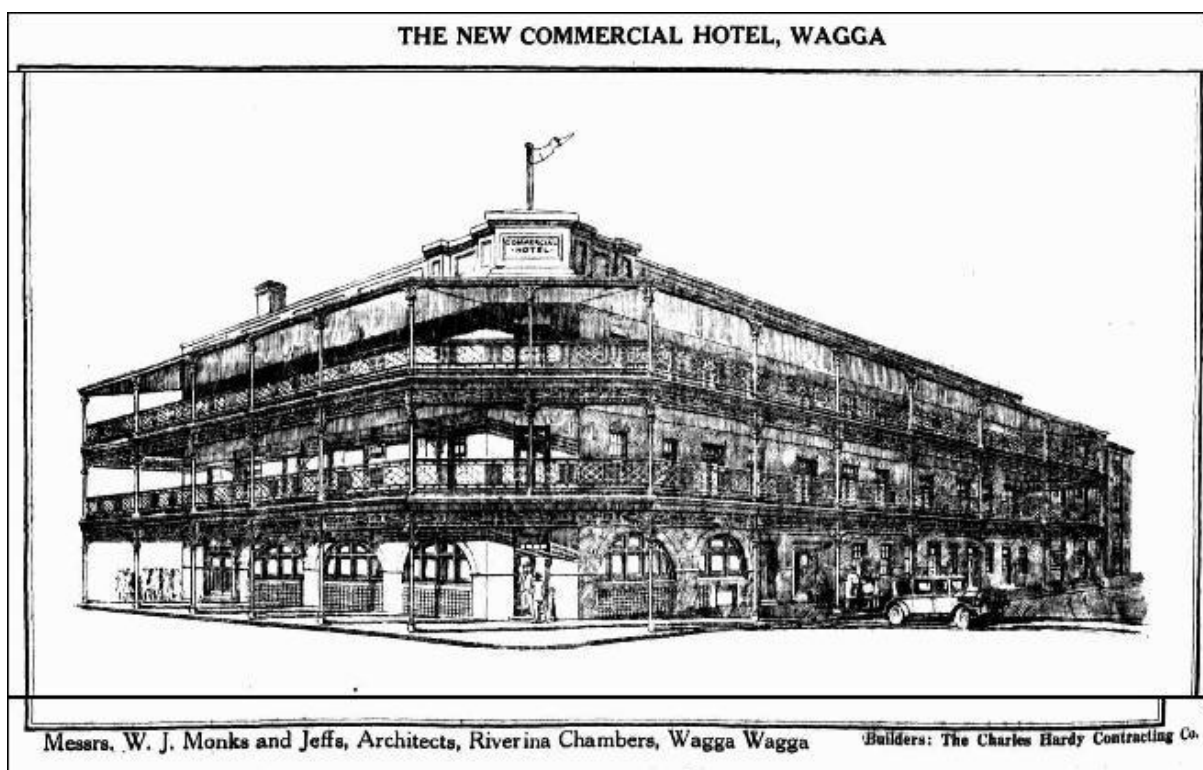
The new building featured ten new bathrooms, plus five shower rooms and toilets, with separate rooms for ladies and gentlemen. The toilets had reinforced concrete floors, finished with tiles, and the walls were covered with white glazed tiles.

All bedrooms in the hotel included a hand basin with hot & cold water.

The hotel would now feature two external fire escape stairs, leading down to the courtyard, and prominent throughout the building were the art metal ceilings, installed by Messrs Wunderlich Ltd.¹³⁰

Tooth' records list seventy three bedrooms in the 1920's, along with four lounges, and a sixty foot bar. Following the remodelling in 1928, the number of bedrooms was reduced to fifty, but each room featured hot and cold water, a radio, and a telephone. Several suits resembled small flats, with a lounge, bedroom and shower recess.¹³¹

Businesses within the hotel complex, in the 1930's and 1940's, were an agent's office, a barber's shop, the Paterson, Laing & Bruce Depot, a motor garage, and Dixieland [1930's].¹³²



Above: A sketch of the new 1929 Commercial hotel. Courtesy Daily Advertiser.

The hotel had nine bathrooms – four men's and four women's, plus one private. Toilets were more common, with seven for women, and eight for men, plus one private. There was also an elevator serving all floors.¹³³

¹³⁰ Daily Advertiser. 10th October 1928, p16.

¹³¹ NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's.

¹³² NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's.

¹³³ NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's.

Emily Mary Scott.

In June 1929, Emily Mary Scott, the wife of James Joseph Scott, and the mother of Lionel Scott, passed away, at Sydney.¹³⁴ She had only recently returned from a trip to Britain with the Australian-Scottish delegation, and had suffered from poor health while away. An obituary provided the following details,¹³⁵

“Mrs. Scott, who was about 57 years of age, had lived practically all her life in Wagga and district. She was the daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. John A. Manton who lived in Wagga for many years, conducting several of the hotels, including the Royal, Tattersall’s, and the Wagga hotel. Mr. Manton, who had been an alderman of the Wagga Municipal Council, died only a few years ago. Mrs. Scott was educated at Wagga schools, and she and Mr. Scott were married about 32 years ago. Their only son is Mr. L. Scott of Wagga, and their only daughter, Miss Emily Scott, died about five years ago. Mr. and Mrs. Scott have conducted hotels in and around Wagga. For a brief period they had the Loftus Hotel at Junee, and Mr. Scott built the Australian Hotel, Wagga, in its present up-to-date form, and conducted it for many years. Then for a number of years, they were at the King’s Own Hotel, The Rock, and latterly have been in charge at the Commercial Hotel, Wagga. Mrs. Scott was known throughout the Commonwealth, particularly in South Wales and Victoria, as a splendid and very popular hostess. She was actively connected with, and substantially supported practically every charitable institution in Wagga. During the war she was an indefatigable worker in everything that was done in Wagga to help the fighting force, and she was an enthusiastic worker for the Red Cross Society, for the Wagga District Hospital, for the Country Women’s Association, and for the Benevolent Society. Of most kindly and generous disposition, she gave a helping hand in many other directions, and, in fact was never known to turn a deaf ear to an appeal. Mr. Scott was for some time president of the Wagga District Hospital, and his wife was associated with him in the very fine efforts which resulted in the erection of the large extension known as the ‘Scott Ward.’ When at The Rock, Mrs. Scott organised many functions in aid of the funds of the Wagga Hospital. In addition to her husband and son, to whom is extended the sympathy of the whole community, Mrs. Scott leaves one brother, Mr. John Manton, of Maitland, and, three sisters, Mesdames, Hickey (Temora), P. Shelley (Macleay River), and Capron (Melbourne).”

The new building was almost completed by January 1929, when the first ever public function was held in the new dining room on the second floor.¹³⁶

In July 1929, Mr Syd Gardner, late of Myers in Melbourne, opened a hairdressing saloon in the new hotel building, in premises facing onto Little Gurwood Street. An advertisement highlighted the innovations therein,¹³⁷

“A feature of the service is the innovation of having hot water continually running into the basins. This obviates the use of shaving mugs altogether. Right throughout, the color scheme of the saloon is white, and everything looks clean and hygienic. A steriliser is supplied for each chair, and all the articles used in the process of shaving and hairdressing are kept in the sterilisers until required. Handsome mirrors are attached to the wall.”

On the 1st December 1930 Scott transferred the license to Mark Edward Mongan.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Daily Advertiser. 24th June 1929, p5.

¹³⁵ Daily Advertiser. 24th June 1929, p5.

¹³⁶ Daily Advertiser. 23rd January 1929, p4.

¹³⁷ Daily Advertiser. 16th July 1929, p3.

¹³⁸ Daily Advertiser. 2nd December 1930, p4.

James Joseph Scott

James Joseph Scott passed away on the 29th June 1944, at his residence in Johnstone Street. His death was sudden – on the morning of the 29th he took a taxi to his farm, opposite the race course. He was let off at the gate and dropped dead while walking up to the farmhouse. His life was summarised in the following obituary notice,¹³⁹

“Mr. Scott was born In February, 1860 at Prahran (Vic) and at an early age his family went to New Zealand to reside. He returned to the mainland when 16 years of age. On July 26 1899 he married Miss Emily Mary Manton, eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs J. A. Manton, of Wagga. Mr. Manton was in business in Wagga for a number of years and was for some time an alderman of the Municipality of Wagga. Mrs. Scott predeceased her husband in June 1928. There were two children of the marriage, Mr Lionel Manton Scott, of Wagga, and the late Miss Eileen Scott. Prior to entering into business in Wagga Mr. Scott was a noted bush contractor and shearer. He was known over a wide area of this State and Victoria, were he was admired for the splendid manner in which he pushed through every contract with which he was associated. In 1902 Mr. Scott took over the license of the Wagga Hotel from his father-in-law, Mr. J. A. Manton, and later he kept the Loftus Hotel at Junee. In 1906, the late Mr. P. J. Mahon induced Mr Scott to become interested in the Australian Hotel, Wagga, and these two gentlemen eventually became the owners of the freehold title of that old and well known hotel. In 1912 the Australian Hotel was rebuilt. The plans were drawn by the late Mr. W. J. Monks of Wagga, but the work was carried out as a day labour job under the personal supervision of Mr. Scott. Mr. Scott carried on the Australian Hotel in a most successful way for a great number of years. The Australian became known far and wide as the best managed hotel in this State. This reputation was largely due to the splendid personal supervision of the late Mrs. Scott. The Australian Hotel business was a wonderful success financially. A lease of the Australian Hotel was sold in 1920 and Mr. Scott retired into private residence at 'Monteray,' Tompson-st., Wagga. While in private residence Mr. Scott was persuaded to enter the Wagga Municipal Council and he served one very useful term as an alderman. During his term every effort was made to induce Mr. Scott to become Mayor of Wagga, but he declined on account of the state of his wife's health.

About 1922 Mr. Scott was offered and accepted a lease of the King's Own Hotel, The Rock, and while in residence at The Rock his daughter, Miss Eileen Scott, died from injuries received in a motor accident. Mr. Scott was very interested in the development of The Rock and was one of a syndicate which was responsible for at least one subdivision in that town. Some of the streets in The Rock are named after the Scott family. In 1927 Mr. Scott took over the management of the Commercial Hotel, Wagga, having acquired an interest in the proprietary syndicate, and he held the license of that hotel for many years. During that time he retained his interest in the Australian Hotel, and in the course of time became the owner of the hotel with his son, Lionel. In 1941 they disposed of their interest in the Australian Hotel to Mr. C. W. Toy, of Wagga. When the war broke out in 1914 and a drought overtook the district. Mr. Scott showed his versatility by acquiring river frontage country which he successfully conducted. He established a reputation for himself as a most experienced all-round farmer, and in cattle and pigs especially, he was highly successful. Mr. Scott lately acquired what is known as Monk's paddock at the rear of the M.T.C. race course and was engaged in a very extensive scheme of improvements there. He was actually engaged with the work at the time of his death He was the primary mover in the formation of the Murrumbidgee Co-operative Dairy Co. Ltd, and was chairman of directors for a great number of years. He occupied that position at the time of his death. Had Mr Scott and several other good citizens of Wagga had their way, Wagga would have had a flourishing woollen mills established during the 1914-18 war and these would have been an asset to Wagga ever since. One of Mr. Scott's greatest public activities in Wagga was his work for the wagga Base Hospital, with which his name will always be associated. The Children's Scott Ward at the

¹³⁹ Daily Advertiser. 30th June 1944, p2.

hospital was named after him as a tribute to his work. If Mr. Scott did nothing else as a citizen of Wagga his work for the Wagga Base Hospital over a great number of years would stand as a monument to him. All Mr. Scott had to do was to announce his intention of supporting any public activity and all sections of the community would rally to his support. No better proof of this could be quoted than the wonderful success that attended several annual carnivals which were conducted by Commercial Travellers, Licensed Victuallers and Old Buffers at the Wagga, Cricket Ground. All of these showed splendid financial results. Mr. Scott was also prominently associated with the Caledonian Society. Jim Scott was a great sportsman and for a great number of years rarely missed a big race meeting at Randwick and Flemington. He was not a big better but took a very keen interest in the turf and owned and raced a few horses. He was a former chairman of the Murrumbidgee Turf Club and was a life member of that body. He was also a president of the Licensed' Victuallers' Race Club when that body was in existence in Wagga many years ago. Mr. Scott was associated' with almost every Wagga sporting organisation during his lifetime. He was the first president of the Wagga Bowling Club, being president in 1912 and 1913, and was also a life member of that club. He was a member of Lodge Harmony, Wagga. An illustration of the great confidence exhibited in Mr. Scott was the fact that he was executor for many wills and this referred particularly to the wills of many of the older families of Wagga and district. He is survived by one son. Mr Lionel Manton Scott, of Wagga, and one brother, Mr. Charles Mountney Scott, of Melbourne. A brother, Mr. Emor Harpe Scott predeceased him some years ago.”

Mark Edward Mongan

Mark Edward Mongan passed away on the 4th December 1935. His death was sudden and unexpected. Some biographical details were provided in his obituary notice,¹⁴⁰

“The late Mr. Mongan was a native of Yackandandah, Victoria, second son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Mark Mongan. Old residents recall his father as being the licensee of the Rose Inn, an hostelry in Baylis Street on the site at present occupied by Messrs Anderson Bros., plumbers. An uncle, the late Mr. Daniel Mongan was one of the best known men in North-Eastern Victoria, as chairman 30 years ago of the Mining Board with headquarters at Beechworth. Going through his early schooling in Wagga, Mark matriculated at St. Michael's school and went on to St. Patrick's College, at Goulburn. Returning to Wagga later, his first engagement was with Messrs. Hunter Bros. Subsequently, he opened in his own interests a sports depot, tobacconist and hairdressing business in the Commercial Hotel buildings. Later, when the hotel was re-built, it took in his shop site and Mr. Mongan was installed by a syndicate taking over the hotel as its managing director. Eventually, he purchased a controlling interest, which he retained until his death; acting also in the capacity of licensee and general manager. In his young days, Mark Mongan took an active interest in sport, joining in football, cricket and tennis, but he delighted in boating and fishing on the river. In more recent years he was a Committeeman of the Murrumbidgee Turf Club. He was a generous donor at all time to all branches of sport, and to the many public movements locally. He married Miss Plunkett, daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. G. F. Plunkett, of Yerong Creek, and he is survived by his wife, three daughters, Misses Frances, Marie and Hope, and three sisters, Miss Kathleen Mongan, Mrs John Gallagher, and Miss Gertrude Mongan, of Sydney. There were also two brothers, Messrs. John and Thomas Mongan. Another sister, Miss Susie Mongan (of the Education Department) died some years ago — a victim of one of Wagga's early typhoid epidemics. To be with her daughters during their schooling, Mrs. Mongan had made her home at Kirribilli Point, Sydney, over the past year or two. One daughter had been visiting Wagga, and Mr. Mongan, at the weekend, had taken her back to Sydney. When news of his collapse was conveyed to them, Mrs. Mongan, and daughters motored to Wagga on Wednesday night. Although never actually participating in politics, few men were better posted than Mr. Mongan on Australian political history. He followed political development with a keen interest, and few

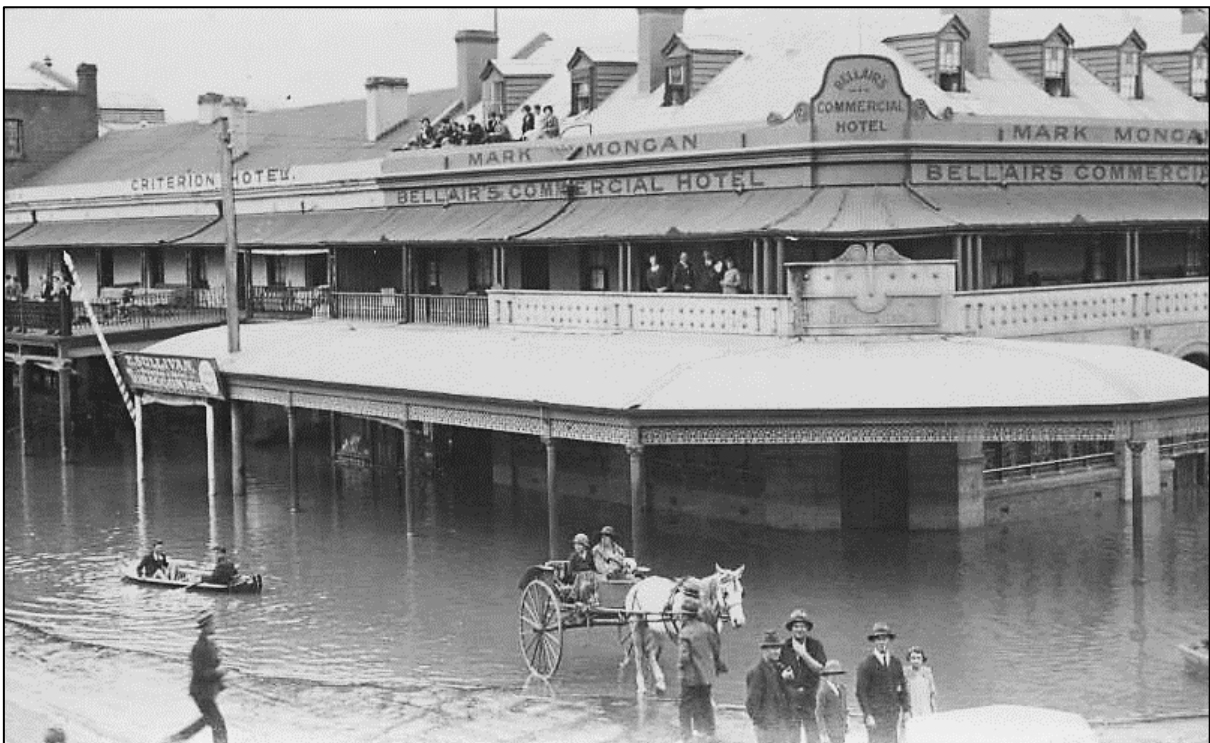
¹⁴⁰ Wagga Wagga Express. 7th December 1935, p2.

enjoyed more than the discussion on movements of the day - and his views on the country need were always very soundly based. He would smile when reminded that even Ministries had been formed in the parlors of his hostelry. There was one notable instance in this respect, when in the river flood of 192? the North Wagga poll was postponed for a fortnight, and practically the whole of the subsequent Lang Cabinet spent that fortnight at the Commercial awaiting the result of the deciding seat."

In the Licensing Court meeting, held on the 9th December 1935, James Joseph Scott was authorised to act as an agent and licensee of the Commercial hotel, for the executors of Mongan's estate.¹⁴¹

The syndicate that owned the hotel started to look for a manager to run the hotel, and advertised for a suitable person. Some 350 people applied for the position. The person chosen was John A Huston, of Sydney, a man with a long experience in hotels, as his background revealed,¹⁴²

"His mother is the proprietress of the Launceston hotel [Tasmania], and he assisted her in its management for 17 years. Later he was manager of Usher's Hotel, Sydney, for two years, and manager of the Brisbane Hotel, Brisbane, for one year. For the last five years he has been in business on his own account as proprietor of the Castlereagh Hotel, Dubbo. Mr. Williamson [of the syndicate]'said that Mr. Huston was considered to be the best man available in the trade. Mr. Huston is keenly interested in various branches of sport. He has won three State bowling championships in New South Wales and Queensland, was the president of the Dubbo Trotting Club and delegate to the Western District Trotting Association, a member of the Dubbo Race Cub, and president of the Citizens' Band at Dubbo."



Above: Mark Mongan's Commercial hotel, with the Criterion hotel immediately to the north, or left. Courtesy Museum of the Riverina [BGS2007_204].

¹⁴¹ Daily Advertiser. 10th December 1935, p6.

¹⁴² Daily Advertiser. 20th February 1936, p4.

John Huston did not stay long, and some eight months later, on the 16th November 1936, Patrick Hennessy, took over the license.¹⁴³

In June 1937 further improvements to the hotel, costing an estimated £3,000 were planned. The works were expected to be completed in two months, and a description of the works revealed the following details,¹⁴⁴

“The entrance doors will be new and modern in design and will lead into the hallway facing the office, which will be re-modelled in handsome maple. The lounge will be extended to embrace the office premises, until recently occupied by Mr. J. A. Harrison, and will be beautifully furnished and carpeted. The commercial room will also be re-modelled and refurnished. A new building will be erected for the laundry, which will have a special drying room, ironing equipment, and be in every way modern. The public bar and the Dickens bar, now separated by a wall, will be made into one, and the entrance to this will be via two beautifully bevelled plate glass doors. New carpets and runners will also be fitted on the first floor, and the smoke room on that floor will be re-decorated. Modern electrical fittings will be installed and the scheme when completed, will make the Commercial Hotel the last word in luxurious appointments. The contractors are Simmie And Co.”

The project was completed in August 1937 and the new private bar was opened on the 14th of that month.¹⁴⁵ Hennessy was still the manager, but he had been ill since mid-June, and was still convalescing when the new private bar was re-opened.¹⁴⁶

It was probably his health that caused him to relinquish the license, when, on the 7th March 1938, it was transferred to Thomas N McClelland.¹⁴⁷

In May 1938, an old building at the rear of the Commercial hotel was being demolished. The building was the original home of FA Tompson [Waterview]. Mr BC Nixon, of Trail Street unearthed a number of old coins during the process, an account of which provided the following details,¹⁴⁸

“With one exception all the coins were in an excellent state of preservation, the lettering on the remaining one, a copper coin, having been completely obliterated. The 5/ piece was minted in 1821 in the reign of George IV. The oldest coin is a penny, minted in 1797 when George III was King. A florin was made in 1826, and a one-shilling piece in 1834, both during the reign of George IV., and two other shillings were minted in 1844 during the regime of Queen Victoria. Several pennies which Mr. Nixon found, were made in 1846, 1848, 1850 and 1854, and the figurehead of Queen Victoria is still most legible. Mr. Nixon also found two bronze tokens on city firms. One, dated 1855, was Issued by A. Toogood, merchant, Pitt and King streets, Sydney, and the other was issued by Annand, Smith and Co., family grocers, Melbourne.”

The old building was probably being replaced by seven garages, which had been approved back in February, as additions to the Commercial hotel.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³ NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's.

¹⁴⁴ Daily Advertiser. 12th June 1837, p10.

¹⁴⁵ Daily Advertiser. 14th August 1937, p3.

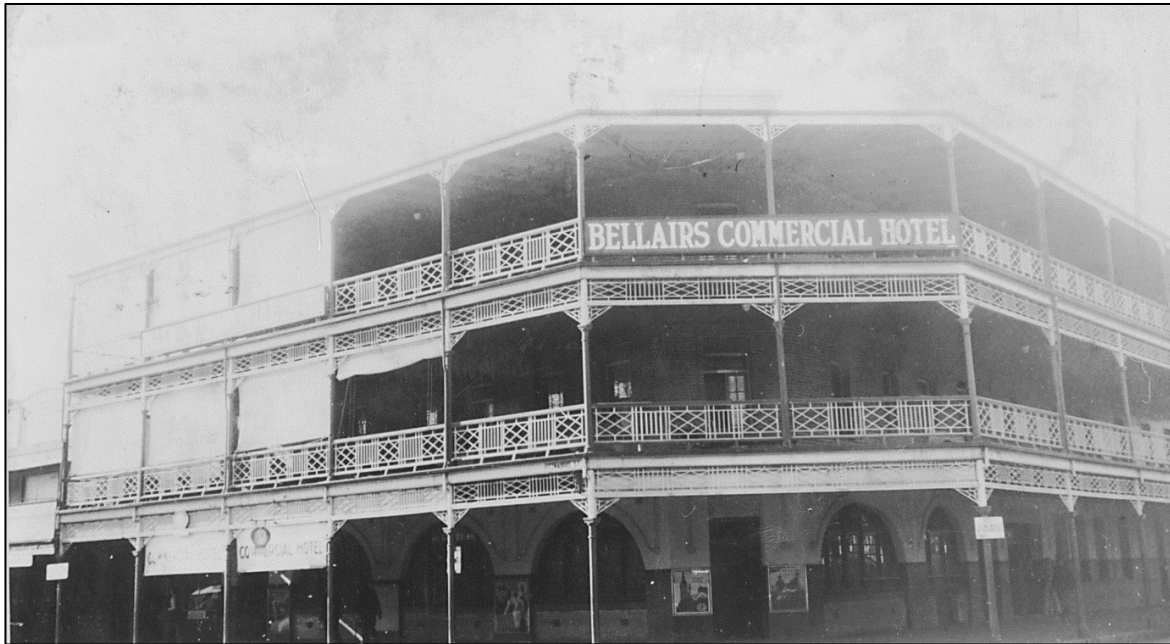
¹⁴⁶ Daily Advertiser. 14th August 1937, p6.

¹⁴⁷ NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's.

¹⁴⁸ Daily Advertiser. 14th May 1938, p8.

¹⁴⁹ Daily Advertiser. 25th February 1938, p4.

Mr & Mrs McClelland held the license for a couple of years, before deciding to take a long holiday, visiting Melbourne and Tasmania. On the 14th November 1939 the license was transferred to Bertie Edye Duff, formerly of the Royal hotel, Orange.¹⁵⁰



Above: The three storey building in 1941. Courtesy Tooth & Co.

Various businesses occupied offices or shops within the hotel complex, throughout its life, and in the 1940's these included an agent's office, a barber shop; and the depot of Paterson, Laing & Bruce.

Bertie Duff's son, also named Bertie, was fighting at the front with the air force, and his parents would have been very proud of him when he took on a number of Italian planes. An account of the incident read as follows,¹⁵¹

"Flying Officer Bert Duff, son of Mr. and Mrs. Bert Duff, of the Commercial Hotel, Wagga, when returning alone from patrol duty in the Middle East on October 31, suddenly found himself confronted by 18 menacing Italian planes. Instead of making for safety he immediately gave fight. His plane caught fire, but before baling out continued the fight and brought one down. With characteristic modesty Flying Officer Duff dismissed the whole incident in a letter to his parents in a few lines, in an earlier letter he had told his parents that he was in hospital suffering from 'stomach trouble,' but it now appears that his injuries, necessitating six weeks in hospital, consisted of burns to the head, face, neck, arms, and legs and two bullet wounds. The fight, according to Flying Officer Duff, was pretty lively while it lasted. The 18 enemy planes attacked him together and immediately his own plane caught on fire. He waited his opportunity in the burning plane, however, and when it came he sent his guns roaring into an Italian plane which crashed. He then parachuted to safety - and to hospital - from 12,000 feet. Friends of Mr. and Mrs. Duff will be pleased to learn that their son is now fully restored to health and is again on duty in the Middle East. Aged 24 years, Flying officer Duff has been attached to the Royal Air Force for three years. He received his training in England and has been doing duty in the Middle East for the last 10 months."

¹⁵⁰ Daily Advertiser. 1st November 1939, p4.

¹⁵¹ Daily Advertiser. 11th February 1941, p2.

On the 5th February 1942, Bert Duff moved on and the license was transferred to Ernest Albert Broadhurst, formerly of the Griffith hotel, at Griffith.¹⁵²

Bert Duff

Bert Duff died on the 3rd June 1945, aged fifty eight years. His death took place at Wollongong. A brief obituary provided the following details,¹⁵³

“[The] Eldest of the six noted Duff sporting brothers, Bert, aged 58, died at Wollongong last night. He was a good amateur swimmer in his day, having been champion of Eastern Suburbs Club. He was also a fine boxer. A pupil of George Seale, he sparred with men of the calibre of George Johns. In more recent life Mr. Duff was popular licensee of hotels at Gunnedah, Orange, Wagga and Wollongong. Well-known brothers of his in Sydney are the secretary of the NSW Boxing and Wrestling Association (Mr Les Duff) and Mr. "Fob" Duff, licensee of the Golden Sheaf Hotel, Double Bay.”

In May 1942, a large part of the hotel was taken over by the Air Force, to accommodate Air Force personnel.¹⁵⁴ Such matters were not commonly reported in the press, for security reasons, but the arrangement prompted a sale of all of the hotel's furniture on the 25th May. There was so many items to dispose of that the sale had to be extended into a second day [the 26th].¹⁵⁵

The owners of the hotel still retained the bar area of the hotel, and Broadhurst continued on as licensee for a short period, up until the 7th October 1942 when it was transferred to John Roderick McDonald.¹⁵⁶ Broadhurst subsequently held licenses for a number of hotels around the state, and died at Rockdale (Sydney) in September 1955.



Above: The taxi rank opposite the hotel [in front of the courthouse]. Courtesy Museum of the Riverina [BGS2008_34].

¹⁵² NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's. / Daily Advertiser. 6th February 1942, p2.

¹⁵³ The Sun (Sydney). 4th June 1945, p12.

¹⁵⁴ NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's.

¹⁵⁵ Daily Advertiser. 25th may 1942, p3. / 26th May 1942, p2.

¹⁵⁶ Daily Advertiser. 8th October 1942, p5.

COMMERCIAL HOTEL FURNITURE SALE

TO-DAY — MONDAY — TO-DAY

Commencing at 10 a.m. Sharp

AT WONDERLAND THEATRE, WAGGA

Balance of Furniture, including Beds, Bridge Chairs, Dressing Tables, Wardrobes, etc., Blankets, Floor Rugs, Curtains, Quilts, Bedspreads, Linen, Glassware, etc., etc.

THE Auctioneers announce that time did not permit disposing of the whole of the Furniture as catalogued on Saturday, and therefore further quantities of same, including Beds, Bed Chairs, Dressing Tables, Wardrobes, etc., will be offered to-day. To-day's catalogue will also include a huge offering as follows:—

- 138 PAIRS DOUBLE BLANKETS
- 38 PAIRS THREE-QUARTER BLANKETS
- Also big quantity ODD BLANKETS, Three-quarter and Double
(All Blankets are in excellent condition)
- 42 PAIRS SINGLE and THREE-QUARTER SHEETS
- 33 ODD SHEETS
- 24 EIDERDOWN QUILTS
- 43 DOUBLE and THREE-QUARTER BEDSPREADS
- 44 HONEYCOMB QUILTS, Single, Three-quarter, and Double
- 57 FLOOR RUGS, in varying sizes and colors, all in excellent condition
- 2 HALL RUNNERS, each 3ft x 60 ft long
- 9 PAIRS VELVET and CHENILLE BURGUNDY CURTAINS, practically new
- 104 PAIRS CURTAINS, Madras Muslin and Curtain Net
- Large quantity GLASSWARE and KITCHEN UTENSILS

Owing to the extraordinarily large offering the agents find it necessary to commence the sale at 10 a.m., and a charge of 6d per head for adults will be made for admittance to the hall (children not admitted). Admittance money will again be handed to local charities

Above: An advertisement for the furniture sale in May 1942.

Rats were a problem in 1944, in an area extending along the western bank of the river, from the rear of the Commercial hotel through to the rear of the premises of the Douglas Body Co., such area being regularly used to dump rubbish. A letter to the editor, signed by “*I Would like to Know,*” declared,¹⁵⁷

“I do not think, but I am quite sure that no other breeding grounds in Wagga than those of the council's, namely, the rubbish tip and the river bank tip from the Commercial Hotel to Douglas Body Co., breed more rats. One can go to the above places, night or day, and see numerous rats. The movements are real earth tremors and the rattling of tins, etc., on other places would shame any jitterbug orchestra.”

In May 1944, the Commonwealth Compensation Board met in Wagga Wagga to hear claims by local people who had been impacted by the war time actions of the federal government. Various individuals and businesses tried it on, including the Commercial hotel syndicate who claimed an amount of £3,078/10s per annum for rent of the top two floors of the hotel, and a further amount of £551/2/3 for removal expenses. The government had previously agreed to pay an annual rental of £1,748, and a sum of £343/7/7 to cover removal expenses.¹⁵⁸ A decision on this claim was eventually deferred, pending a further meeting, to be held in Sydney.¹⁵⁹

On the 5th November 1944, the third floor of the hotel caught on fire and caused extensive damage. This area was occupied by Australian Air Force personnel, at the time. The fire caused extensive damage to the third floor and the second floor was also damaged, by water. The fire appeared to have started in a section of the third floor that was originally occupied by the Bellair family as their private residence. An early estimate of the damage was put at £15,000.¹⁶⁰ An enquiry was unable to determine the cause of the fire.¹⁶¹

An immediate decision by the RAAF was to vacate the premises, handing them back to the syndicate, effective from the 29th November 1944.¹⁶²

In January 1946 the syndicate placed the property on the market,¹⁶³ and the sale took place on the 6th February 1946. The property was sold to Mr AO Romano at £35,000. Romano was well known throughout Australia as the owner of the champion race horse, *Bernborough*.¹⁶⁴ The arrangement took some time to conclude and it was August of 1946 before the contract was finalised, at a lower price. Due to a shortage of building materials [brought about by the war], it had not been possible to repair the damaged building and the only part of the hotel open was the bar area.¹⁶⁵

The Wagga Wagga licensing board met on the 17th September 1946 and issued a directive for the Commercial hotel to be demolished and rebuilt, under section 40A of the Liquor Act. The directive stipulated that the new hotel was to contain at least seventy bedrooms for public accommodation.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁷ Daily Advertiser. 16th March 1944, p3.

¹⁵⁸ Daily Advertiser. 31st May 1942, p2.

¹⁵⁹ Daily Advertiser. 1st June 1944, p2.

¹⁶⁰ Daily Advertiser. 6th November 1944, p2.

¹⁶¹ Daily Advertiser. 14th December 1944, p2.

¹⁶² NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's. / Daily Advertiser. 1st December 1944, p2.

¹⁶³ Daily Advertiser. 31st January 1946, p3.

¹⁶⁴ Daily Advertiser. 7th February 1946, p2.

¹⁶⁵ Daily Advertiser. 15th August 1946, p1.

¹⁶⁶ Daily Advertiser. 18th September 1946, p1.

Romano visited Wagga Wagga on several occasions in 1946, to conclude the sale and make other arrangements pertaining to the hotel. It was his intention to travel overseas and study the latest developments in the hotel sector. One of the changes concerned the licensee of the hotel, and on the 11th November 1946, Frederick George Gawler took over, as manager for Romano.¹⁶⁷ Gawler was reasonably well known in the Riverina through his film interests and as a competitor in a number of golf tournaments.¹⁶⁸ Gawler was granted a six months extension of the license on the 20th January 1947.¹⁶⁹

Progress on the rebuilding of the hotel was slow, but in March 1947 council received an application, from Romano, to renovate the hotel at a cost of some £25,000, which they approved, with conditions.¹⁷⁰

Work on the roof commenced at the end of April 1947, and by this time some three thousand feet of carpet had arrived from England, destined for the hotel. The architect for the project was Reg Grout, ARAIA, and the builder was Mr Max Cooper.¹⁷¹

By October 1947 progress had forced the establishment of a temporary bar, above the cellar.¹⁷²

In May 1948 the Department of Building Controls charged Romano with a breach of the relevant act, claiming he had spent too much money on the rebuilding of the hotel. Romano, himself, and his two building supervisors – Ernest Moore of Wagga Wagga, and Reginald E Grout of Sydney – were all summoned to appear in court.¹⁷³ The court heard that Romano had spent £50,000 on the hotel, far in excess of the £25,000 approved. Romano pleaded guilty and was fined £50. His supervisors also pleaded guilty and were each fined £25.¹⁷⁴

In June 1948, there was good news for Gawler. His only son, Neville Gawler, announced his engagement to Miss Patricia Sheekey, the daughter of Mr & Mrs TS Sheekey, of Wagga Wagga.¹⁷⁵ Neville was the manager of the Minerva Theatre in Sydney, but travelled to Wagga Wagga in November 1948, to wed Patricia, in St Michael's Church.¹⁷⁶ The reception was held in the home of the bride's parents, at 102 Gurwood Street.

The hotel project suffered a further setback in September 1948 when the Wagga branch of the Building Workers' Industrial Union, declared the works, "*black*."¹⁷⁷ Within 48 hours, Romano capitulated to the union demands and the ban was lifted. The work, which began in April 1947, was expected to be completed by the end of the year [December 1948].¹⁷⁸

The prediction was overly optimistic and work continued well into 1949. In March of that year ANA [Australian National Airways] opened new offices within the hotel complex, they having previously relied on their agent, WB Davies & Co., for some fourteen years.¹⁷⁹

¹⁶⁷ NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's. / Daily Advertiser. 1st December 1944, p2. / Daily Advertiser. 13th November 1946, p2.

¹⁶⁸ Daily Advertiser. 20th September 1946, p2.

¹⁶⁹ Daily Advertiser. 21st January 1947, p2.

¹⁷⁰ Daily Advertiser. 8th March 1947, p2.

¹⁷¹ Daily Advertiser. 30th April 1947, p1.

¹⁷² Daily Advertiser. 15th October 1947, p2.

¹⁷³ Daily Advertiser. 15th May 1948, p1.

¹⁷⁴ Daily Advertiser. 3rd July 1948, p2.

¹⁷⁵ Daily Advertiser. 23rd June 1948, p2.

¹⁷⁶ Daily Advertiser. 22nd November 1948, p2.

¹⁷⁷ Daily Advertiser. 3rd September 1948, p1.

¹⁷⁸ Daily Advertiser. 4th September 1948, p2.

¹⁷⁹ Daily Advertiser. 1st April 1949, p2.

Work was almost complete by May 1949, and on the 10th of that month the lounge was opened for the first time.¹⁸⁰ A brief description read as follows,

“The lounge, which is luxuriously appointed, provides accommodation for 130 people. Decorated in a color scheme of cream and maroon. It has at one end a servery bar with waiters in attendance. Chairs and tables are in natural polished wood, walls in cream, and the carpeting in maroon. Italian tapestry curtains at the windows repeat the cream and maroon color scheme. Indirect cornice lighting bathes the room in a soft, clear glow. The lounge is centrally heated, comfortable and spacious.”

The completed works were finally officially opened on the 13th June 1949, with a short description appearing in the local press,¹⁸¹

“The handsome public end saloon bars have been open for some time, and are well-known to most Wagga people. Not so well-known are the impressive, beautifully carpeted main entrance hall and the ground floor lounge, bright and cheerful, and with its own servery. A neat example of functional utility in this lounge is the transparent glass topped tables, which leave guests no excuse for inadvertently leaving hats or handbags on the small shelves underneath.

There are 50 bedrooms of varying sizes on the first and second floors. They are reached by an automatic lift. The upstairs halls are richly carpeted, as are all rooms. In the guest quarters there is no element of sameness, as a great variety of color schemes and furnishings have been adopted for

the bedrooms. Included in the guest quarters are several suites - in effect small flats with lounge, bedroom and shower recess - beautifully furnished in every respect, warm and comfortable. Hot and cold running water, radio and telephone extensions are found in every room. The dining room is on the first floor, a large and cheery room, properly arranged for rapid service.

Adjacent is the completely modern kitchen, where cooking is done on a slow combustion coke stove. Also communicating with the kitchen is the 'White Hall' banqueting hall, something sadly needed in Wagga, where public functions and private parties can be held. The fine hotel is completed by comfortable lounge and writing rooms for house guests. In charge of catering arrangements at the hotel is Mr. Umberto Nazarri, who served in a similar capacity at the world famous Gaulle Face Hotel, in Colombo, Ceylon.”

**ROMANO'S
HOTEL OPENS
OFFICIALLY**

Although Romano's Commercial Hotel opened officially yesterday for business, the manager (Mr. F. Gawler) has been busy for some days past showing people around the building.

Much interest has been displayed in the hotel.

It is equipped to cater for anything from a drink to a banquet, and contains a drinking lounge, guest lounge, coffee lounge, writing room and dining room, among other conveniences.

“Whitehall”, the hotel's public hall, is equipped to cater for receptions, parties, and all kinds of public gatherings.

This hall has already been booked as far ahead as September for private functions of all kinds.

**ROMANO'S
LOUNGE
OPENS TODAY**

The lounge at Romano's Commercial Hotel, Wagga, will be open for business today.

This was announced by the manager of the hotel (Mr. F. Gawler) yesterday.

The lounge, which is luxuriously appointed, provides accommodation for 130 people.

Decorated in a color scheme of cream and maroon, it has at one end a servery bar with waiters in attendance.

Chairs and tables are in natural polished wood, walls in cream, and the carpeting in maroon. Italian tapestry curtains at the windows repeat the cream and maroon color-scheme. Indirect cornice lighting bathes the room in a soft, clear glow.

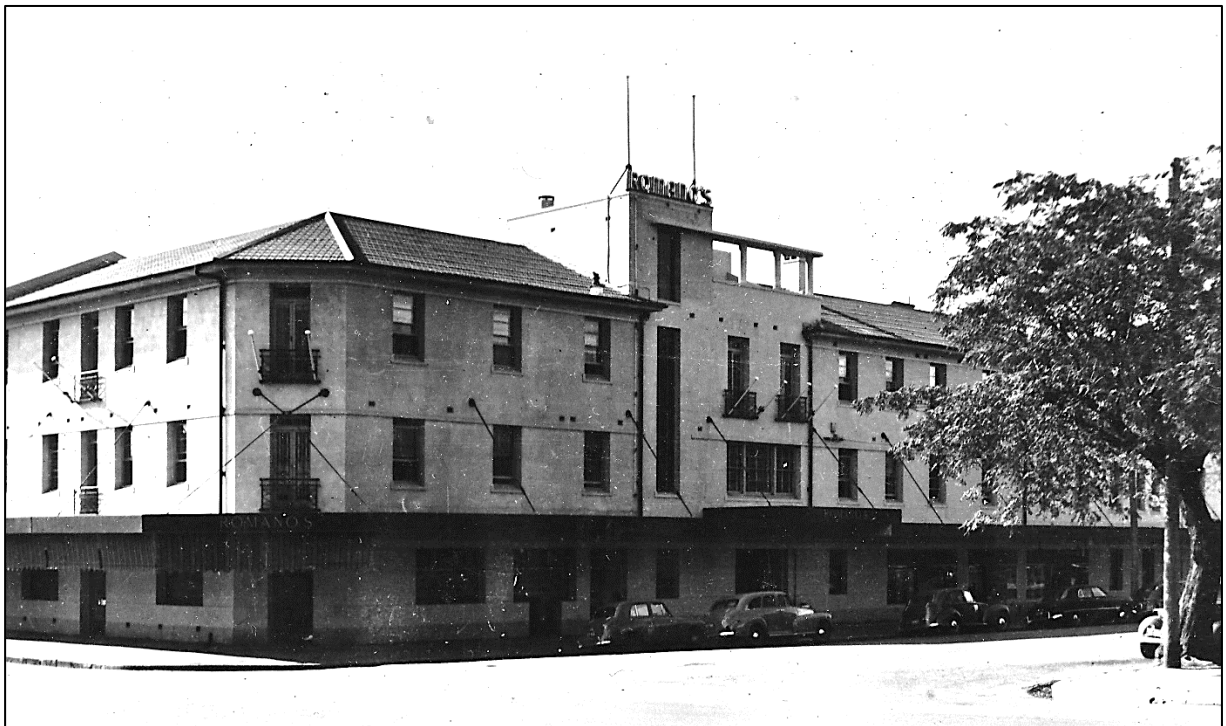
The lounge is centrally heated, comfortable and spacious.

¹⁸⁰ Daily Advertiser. 10th May 1949, p2.

¹⁸¹ Daily Advertiser. 11th June 1949, p2.



Above: Stripping the external façades back ready to remodel the hotel in 1949. Courtesy Tooth & Co.



Above: Romano's new hotel building after the rebuild in 1949.

On Friday the 3rd February 1950, Fred Gawler hosted a farewell dinner at the hotel. After three and a half years as licensee, and manager for Mr Romano, he was retiring to Sydney. The group also welcomed his replacement, Mr Maurice Xavier Collins, a former army man.¹⁸² The licensee was

AT AFTERNOON TEA

Romano's Commercial Hotel yesterday started a new service—afternoon teas in the hotel lounge. A representative gathering of local residents attended the first service, the food for which had been prepared by a Dutch pastrycook. Among those who attended were Mesdames Francis, Gordon, Cox, D. Croyden, M. Mitchelmore, H. McMeeken and V. Harrison; Messrs. and Mesdames Drury, Holland and Shaw, and Misses Ellie and Mercy O'Regan. The teas are to be a daily feature between 3 and 5 p.m.

officially transferred on the following day.¹⁸³

Fred got out just in time to avoid the flood in March 1950, which was the biggest since 1925. His replacement, Collins, stated that he had spent in excess of £1,000 in an effort to prevent the flood waters entering the hotel.¹⁸⁴ Part of this involved the construction of a brick wall, three feet high, around the hotel.¹⁸⁵ In addition all ground floor coverings and electrical equipment had been moved. Stock was stored in the cellars – and food etc., had also been removed.

Left: A new service at the hotel. No doubt quite a popular social event.¹⁸⁶



Above: Roman's hotel with Collins' brick wall surrounding it, and Wal Higgins' business to the right. Courtesy Tooth & Co. records.

¹⁸² Daily Advertiser. 6th February 1950, p2.

¹⁸³ Daily Advertiser. 8th February 1950, p2.

¹⁸⁴ Daily Advertiser. 25th March 1950, p2.

¹⁸⁵ Daily Advertiser. 23rd March 1950, p1.

¹⁸⁶ Daily Advertiser. 2nd June 1950, p2.



Above & Below: More photos of the brick wall protecting the hotel from flood waters in 1950. Courtesy Sherry Morris.





Above: Another flood photo. Pumping water out of the hotel – presumably from the cellars.
Courtesy Museum of the Riverina [BGS2013_1016b].

SYDNEY, Tuesday: Azzalin Orlando Romano told the Liquor Royal Commission he understood that until recently he paid blackmarket prices for his beer.
Romano was being asked by Mr. W. R. Dovey, Q.C. (assisting the Commissioner) about evidence given to the Commission in February regarding prices he had paid for liquor at Romano's restaurant and his hotel at Wagga.

Above: Romano called to give evidence at a Royal Commission into the Liquor Industry, in April 1952.¹⁸⁷

Romano Azzalin appeared before various courts and commissions over the years. It seems that he was not afraid to push the boundaries of the various regulations and laws that applied to the conduct of hotels, nightclubs, cafes and restaurants, in order to ensure his businesses were not compromised by same. He appears to have been a practical man, who was not intimidated by autocratic bureaucrats.

¹⁸⁷ Daily Advertiser. 9th April 1952, p1.

The International Flavour

On a brighter note, one of London's leading restaurateurs, Charles Gallo-Selva, arrived in Wagga Wagga [in 1951], in preparation for taking over the license of the Commercial hotel, which he had agreed to manage on behalf of Mr Romano. His credentials were impeccable, and along with his intentions, were reported in the local press, as follows,¹⁸⁸

“Former manager of the famous Quaglino's and San Marco, London, Mr. Gallo, as he is popularly known, has catered for Royalty so often that recently a suggestion was made in the Sydney Press that he should be put in charge of catering arrangements for the Royal tour of Australia in 1952. But, yesterday in Wagga, Mr. Gallo, bespectacled and silver haired, said in his slight French accent: 'I don't want people to set the impression I have come here to revolutionise Australian eating habits. Australian Food, 'Australians like their steaks and lamb chops. There's nothing wrong with that. The reason the more delicate dishes are not so popular is that most Australians have not had the opportunity of sampling them. 'I think Australian food is marvellous — it is only a question of cooking it in the proper way.' Mr. Gallo's aim in Wagga is to make Romano's the leading hotel in New South Wales. He believes Wagga is a city with great potentialities in a nation with a big future. And, he says, there are tremendous possibilities for the catering trade here. Mr. Gallo should know. Born in Savoy (Italy) of French parents, he served his kitchen apprenticeship in Paris and afterwards was employer at the Savoy, London, for 14 years. Then he joined the Midland Railway Company and was manager of its Queen's Hotel in Leeds. From 1930 to 1936 Mr. Gallo was manager of the fabulous Quaglino's Restaurant in Bury Street, London, and often entertained Royalty. Leaving Quaglino's he opened London's most exclusive restaurant, the San Marco, (now Ferraro's Bagatell), decorated by the notable Oliver Messel. The establishment was a favorite nightspot for the Duchess of York and is now frequently visited by Princess Elizabeth. Mr. Gallo later returned to the L.M.S. railway company and managed their hotels at Gleneagle and Perth (Scotland). It was in London that he met Mr. Romano, whom he had known for 35 years, and was persuaded to come to Australia with his wife.”

His full name was Carlo Gioachino Stefano Gallo-Selva, and the license was transferred into his name on the 15th May 1951.¹⁸⁹

Romano continued to lift the image of the hotel, and in September 1951 he arrived in town with a collection of art works, with which to decorate the hotel.¹⁹⁰ The changes were amplified in 1952, when on the 6th February, the name of the hotel was officially changed to Romano's.¹⁹¹ Locally it had been referred to as such since 1949, with the name becoming more familiar with each successive year.

Romano brought a cosmopolitan flavour to Wagga Wagga. His background meant that he had many friends and acquaintances overseas, and his choice of employees was influenced by his experiences. He was able to attract a quality of peoples not usually seen in rural cities like Wagga Wagga. In December 1954 Carlo Gioachino Stefano Gallo-Selva was still the licensee. The head chef was

¹⁸⁸ Daily Advertiser. 4th May 1951, p1.

¹⁸⁹ NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's. / Daily Advertiser. 1st December 1944, p2. / Daily Advertiser. 16th May 1951, p2.

¹⁹⁰ Daily Advertiser. 3rd September 1951, p2.

¹⁹¹ NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's.

Peppino Schinella, and the head waiter was Guiseppe Polese.¹⁹² The reputation of Romano's hotel in that period far exceeds that of any contemporary hotel in Wagga Wagga. In November 1953, Sir Charles and Lady Lloyd Jones visited Wagga Wagga for a few days, and they stayed, of course, at Romano's. Mr & Mrs Warwick Fairfax visited in the same month, and they too stayed at Romano's.¹⁹³ Romano's was synonymous with high society and luxury.

In December 1954, Gallo-Selva announced plans to add a third floor to the hotel at a cost of some £50,000. The additional space was to contain forty bedrooms, each with its own toilet and bathroom.¹⁹⁴

Another European employee was Alipio Taddeucci, who migrated to Australia in 1952, from Italy.¹⁹⁵ He was living in Wagga Wagga from 1963, and probably earlier, up until the time of his death in 1981.¹⁹⁶ For most of that period he resided at the Duke of Kent,¹⁹⁷ but worked as a waiter at Romano's.



Left: Alipio Taddeucci, the waiter. Courtesy CSURA.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹² Daily Advertiser. 14th December 1954, p6. [See Sydney Morning Herald. 25th March 2016, re Beppi Polese (1925-2016)]

¹⁹³ Daily Advertiser. 17th November 1953, p2.

¹⁹⁴ Daily Advertiser. 23rd December 1954, p3.

¹⁹⁵ Western Australia, Passenger Lists: 1897-1963. [Ancestry.com]

¹⁹⁶ NSW BDM's. Death registration # 2227.

¹⁹⁷ Australian Electoral Rolls. 1963, 1968, & 1980.

¹⁹⁸ CSU Regional Archives. [RW.2976]



Above: Charles Gallo-Selva [left], and Alipio Taddeucci [centre] in Romano's cellar. The man on the right is not known. Courtesy CSURA [RW2976].

Steak Diane

There are varied accounts as to the origins of “*steak Diane*,” but certainly the claim of Tony Clerici is prominent amongst those.

Clerici claimed that he invented this dish one evening at his restaurant, Tony’s Grill, in Mayfair [London], in 1938. His guests that night included Lady Diana Cooper, the wife of a cabinet minister, Alfred Duff Cooper. Diana was formerly Lady Diana Manners, a prominent society beauty of her time. In order to impress, Toni offered to make a new dish, and named it “*Steak Diane*,” in honour of his distinguished guest.

There is one suggestion that Toni had learnt the recipe from Charles Gallo-Selva, which is of interest because the latter was the manager and licensee of Romano’s for a number of years.

Another prominent claim is that the dish was invented by Beniamino Schiavon [aka Nino] and Luigi Quaglino, when the pair were working together at the Plage Restaurant, in Ostend, Belgium, in the 1920’s. In the 1940’s Schiavon worked at the Drake hotel, in New York, and is credited with introducing the dish into the USA.

Tony Clerici met Romano Azzalin when the latter was working in London. When Romano came to Australia he brought Clerici with him to work at the Ambassador restaurant, in Sydney. Clerici returned to England in the 1930’s, but returned to Australia again in 1939 to work at Romano’s new restaurant in Castlereagh Street. The house speciality was *Steak Diane*.

In October 1954 the following item appeared in a Sydney magazine,¹⁹⁹

Tony’s famous steak Diane

STEAK DIANE, created some years ago by noted restaurateur Tony Clerici, director of the Colony Club, quickly became the most talked about dish in Sydney.

Its fame spread to other cities and other countries. Over the years, Tony has had countless requests for his recipe, but his invariable reply has been, “It’s just a little secret of mine.”

Under husbandly direction,

many housewives have tried to make steak Diane by using “a bit of steak, some sauce and garlic, and a spot of butter.”

Now Tony, who has consented to give us a luxury dish every week, divulges his secret recipe for steak Diane. Here it is:

Ten ounces undercut beef, 3½oz. sweet butter (unsalted butter), 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce, 5 fresh ground peppercorns, ½ teaspoon salt, ¼ clove garlic, 1 tablespoon chopped parsley.

Have your butcher cut the

beef 1¼in. thick and then pound the steak to about ½in. in thickness. It must not be any thinner. Shape the steak into an oval. Put the butter in a frying pan. Add the Worcestershire sauce, rub garlic on the steak with a wooden spoon, season each side of steak with salt and pepper and lightly cook for four minutes on each side. Garnish with parsley before serving. Fried potatoes and fried beans or any other vegetables can be served with the steak Diane.

¹⁹⁹ Australian Women’s Weekly, 21st October 1954, p74.

MINE HOST BRINGS WORLD TO WAGGA

Mr. Charles Gallo-Selva, host, executive, world-traveller, and connoisseur, is almost symbolic of Wagga's subtle change to a more worldly, cosmopolitan city.

Mr. Gallo-Selva, or plain "Charles," as he prefers to be called, manages one of Wagga's leading hotels with a truly international touch.

Charles is proud of having learned his profession "from the bottom up" after hard and exacting training.

Born in northern Italy, he began his career as a page-boy in the famous Monte Carlo Casino at the age of 12½.

After a spell in Paris Charles went to England in 1907.

There he became a junior waiter in London's superb Piccadilly Hotel.

Slowly but surely he worked his way up, and from 1930 to 1936 managed Quaglino's Restau-

rant one of London's most exclusive eateries.

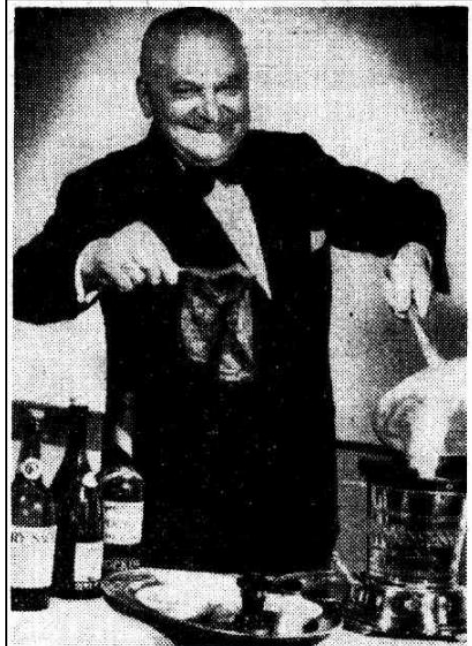
After marrying an English girl, Charles came to Australia on a world tour in 1950.

A year later he settled in Wagga, where he took over the management of the city hotel he now runs.

Mr. Gallo-Selva introduced a new note to Wagga, an old-world "service plus" flavor that has lifted his establishment to world tourist standards.

He has great plans for further improvements on his already lush premises.

With a new "wintergarden style" glassed-in roof lounge he eventually hopes to put Wagga's accommodation on a par with the best Sydney and Melbourne can offer.



MR. CHARLES GALLO-SELVA, globe-trotting Wagga hotel manager, preparing one of the dishes for which his hotel is famous.

Left & Above: A Sydney press article extolling the credentials of Charles Gallo-Selva, in 1954.

Charles loved Australia, and Wagga Wagga, but there was one thing he didn't like about Wagga Wagga. In December 1954, he wrote the following letter to the editor of the local paper,²⁰⁰

"SIR— I have read the letter that you published in your paper (December 1) above the signature of 'Old Digger Resident'. It is really remarkable how sometimes people express opinions that are completely beyond the proportions of the subject under discussion.

The people of Wagga, including your correspondent, should be grateful that a man like Mr. A. O. Romano should have had the pluck to come to this city and establish a hotel that compares with the best anywhere. Our hotel is concerned with high standards of catering, not only with bar trade, and we provide food and accommodation to a great number of travellers and tourists. Every visitor who stays at Romano's spends money in Wagga, thereby adding to the prosperity of this city. Since Wagga is a half-way house between the two capitals -Sydney and Melbourne - most of the people arrive in the afternoon after a 300 mile journey. Many of these people have an early dinner and retire early to bed with the intention of making an early start the next day. What a wonderful surprise is in store as they start their slumbers. In the stillness of the night the clock strikes 11.

They wake up, and to many, particularly those not too young, this interruption of their first sleep means a long night of uncomfortable tossing and turning. But the best is yet to come. The clock chimes 12 at midnight - the apex of the night. After that comes the one o'clock, chime with a shattering clang, then two, then three, then four. By then, the traveller, rested and happy is ready to

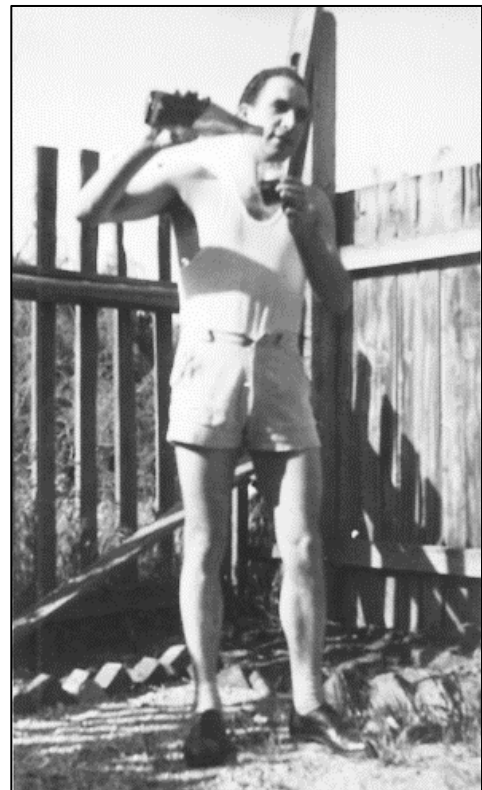
²⁰⁰ Daily Advertiser. 7th December 1954, p2.

remain in Wagga for the rest of his life and listen to the enchanting nocturnal chimes of our clock. As the manager of Romanos I am accustomed to hearing people say in the morning: 'Well, why don't you do something about the clock? Next time you must give me an inside room where the clock is not so noisy.' Yours, etc., CHARLES GALLO-SELVA."

There can be no doubt that Clerici, and Gallo-Selva were both early exponents of this famous international dish, and that it they who introduced the dish to Sydney and Wagga Wagga.



Left: Alipio Taddeuci. Courtesy CSURA.



Above Right: Alipio enjoying a drink.



Left: Alipio's friend, Edith Faileruva. It is thought that Edith may have worked as a domestic in one of the Wagga Wagga hotels. Courtesy CSURA.

Licenses to follow Gallo-Selva were as follows,²⁰¹

1956, 26th September - Reginald Jackson Burry. Burry was another overseas traveller, having had considerable experience in the industry before coming to Australia. He had held licenses for hotels in England, Scotland, and Europe. Before coming to Wagga Wagga he held the license of the West Point hotel, Sandy Bay [Tasmania] - from March 1953.²⁰²

1957, 6th August – Keith Swan Upton – manager for owner. Upton was a navy veteran of WW2, and the recipient of the George Medal for his actions in the disposal of bombs and mines.

1958, 4th February – Ernest Garraway Brack - manager for owner.

1959, 21st April – Renzo Romano - manager for owner.



Above: The bottle shop at the rear [northern face] of Romano’s hotel. Courtesy Lost Wagga Wagga.

1960, 29th June – Thomas Bernard Abernathy – manager for owner [Romano].²⁰³ Graham Gorrell recalled that the Chandelier Room, was the “*in place*” at that time – somewhere to entertain or impress a guest. In those days the staff at the Daily Advertiser used to visit the bar adjoining the Chandelier Room, just after midnight following the printing of the daily edition. Purchasing a packet of Smith’s chips, sufficed to meet the criteria of a “*meal*,” allowing the recipient to drink on until the early hours of the morning.²⁰⁴

1967, 4th April – John Bartholomew Andrea.

1968, 13th November – William Gladstone Morgan – of Farmer’s Home.

Date unknown – Bruce Arthur Robertson ex Royal hotel at Scone.

²⁰¹ NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920’s-1970’s.

²⁰² The Mercury. 6th June 1953, p6.

²⁰³ Wagga Wagga Court House. Premises Cards. Romano’s.

²⁰⁴ Daily Advertiser. 1st November 2018. Graham Gorrell.



Above: The small building to the north of Romano's, facing Fitzmaurice Street – where the Criterion hotel once stood. Courtesy Museum of the Riverina [BGS2010_1319t].



Above: Romano's hotel in the 1960's. Courtesy Tooth & Co. records.



Above: Romano's hotel in 1965. Courtesy Museum of the Riverina. The Criterion hotel had been demolished by this date.

1969, 1st December – new drive in bottle shop opened, by Bill Morgan.

1970, 11th August – Elma Doris Merle Musto.

1972, 20th November – Thomas George Aldous – 1st license.

1973, 15th October – Kevin James Cole – 1st License.

1974, 28th October – Harold Goodwin – 1st license.

1977, 2nd May – Peter Thomas Walsh – ex John MacArthur. [Peter was a member of the group that leased the hotel – the group included Rodney Parsons, an accountant.] – This group later had Randy's and Jackson's.



Above: Romano's hotel in 1968. Courtesy CSU Regional Archives. [RW1574/60].



Above: The public bar in 1968. Courtesy CSU Regional Archives. [RW1574/60].



Above: The dining room in 1968. Courtesy CSU Regional Archives. [RW1574/60].



Above: The dining room in 1968. Courtesy CSU Regional Archives. [RW1574/60].

1979, 6th November – Garry John Weir.

1980, April - Kevin Stanley Webb.²⁰⁵ Father of Gary Webb [a chef].

1982, 8th February – Peter Richard Bolton. Peter held the license up until the time of his death in November 1996.

In April 1989 the good people of North Wagga Wagga turned out in force on a Monday night to farewell Adrian & Mary Herrick, the former licensees of the Palm & Pawn hotel. Adrian was moving to Romano's, as manager for his brother-in-law, Peter Bolton.²⁰⁶

It was during Peter Bolton's time at the hotel that the traffic lights and the nature strips down the centre of Fitzmaurice Street, were installed in front of the pub, thereby making it impractical to access the drive in bottle shop, so Peter chose to close it down. It was never an important part of the business, at this hotel. Accommodation was important at Romano's and was a valued source of income, as was the income generated by functions, in the many rooms available. These income streams weren't subject to license fees and provided better margins than say bottle shops. Romano's never relied on poker machines for its success.

Adrian Peter Windgate Herrick

Adrian Herrick was the twin brother of Anne Patricia Herrick.²⁰⁷ Anne married Peter Richard Bolton. The twins' parents were Francis Norman Herrick [Norm] and Jean Wingate Herrick [nee Turner]. Norm and Jean were married at Hillston in 1941,²⁰⁸ and the twins were born on the 17th July 1943, at Merriwagga.

It is a family tradition that the eldest child's given names include the word Wingate, in honour of Orde Charles Wingate, who was a connected by family through Adrian's mother's paternal line.

Orde Charles Wingate

"Orde Charles Wingate, DSO and Two Bars (26 February 1903 – 24 March 1944) was a senior British Army officer, known for his creation of the Chindit deep-penetration missions in Japanese-held territory during the Burma Campaign of World War II.

Wingate was an exponent of unconventional military thinking and the value of surprise tactics. Assigned to Mandatory Palestine, he became a supporter of Zionism, and set up a joint British-Jewish counter-insurgency unit. Under the patronage of the area commander Archibald Wavell, Wingate was given increasing latitude to put his ideas into practice during World War II. He created units in Abyssinia and Burma.

At a time when Britain was in need of morale-boosting generalship, Wingate attracted British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's attention with a self-reliant aggressive philosophy of war, and was given resources to stage a large-scale operation. The last Chindit campaign may have determined the outcome of the Battle of Kohima. Wingate was killed in an aircraft accident late in the war."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Wagga Wagga Court House. Premises Cards. Romano's.

²⁰⁶ Daily Advertiser. 6th April 1989. [060616/35]

²⁰⁷ Adrian Herrick. 30th November 2019.

²⁰⁸ NSW BDM's. Marriage registration # 23504.

²⁰⁹ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orde_Wingate. Accessed 1st December 2019.

Further comment recorded,²¹⁰

“Wingate was known for various eccentricities. For instance, he often wore an alarm clock around his wrist, which would go off at times, and had raw onions and garlic on a string around his neck, which he would occasionally bite into as a snack (the reason he used to give for this was to ward off mosquitoes). He often went about without clothing. In Palestine, recruits were used to having him come out of the shower to give them orders, wearing nothing but a shower cap, and continuing to scrub himself with a shower brush.”

and

“In a tribute to Wingate, Churchill called him "one of the most brilliant and courageous figures of the second world war ... a man of genius who might well have become also a man of destiny.”



Above: Orde Charles Wingate.

²¹⁰ Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orde_Wingate. Accessed 1st December 2019.

Norm Herrick's first hotel experience was a lease of the Burcher hotel, at Burcher [a small town north of West Wyalong and north-west of Lake Cowal], which he took over on the 3rd October 1951, and held for eleven months before leaving on the 2nd September 1952. The hotel was owned by JV Morgan, but was tied to Tooth & Co., during Norm's occupancy.²¹¹



Above: The Burcher hotel in July 1953. Courtesy Tooth & Co. records. Noel Butlin Archives. ANU Canberra.

After leaving the Burcher hotel, Norm leased the Royal Mail hotel at Goolgowi [10th December 1953 till 9th June 1954],²¹² between Griffith and Hillston [and south of Merriwagga], and then took a lease on the Carrington hotel at Harden [from 29th November 1954 till the 26th February 1956].²¹³

On the 6th October 1961, Norm entered a three year lease for the Commercial hotel at Richmond [NSW].²¹⁴ He subsequently extended the lease for another three years, and then on the 24th September 1965 he purchased the freehold of the hotel, from Eugene Schick and Frederick Lindsay MacQueen, paying £30,000 for the privilege. Norm held the license up until January 1963, after which he leased the pub to various persons up until the time when he sold the freehold, in March 1975, to Lawrence Raymond Thomas, and his wife, Betty Mary Thomas, for \$100,000. Norm subsequently held several licenses around Sydney, including the Broadway hotel, and the Olympic hotel, at Moore Park.

²¹¹ Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-1034, Burcher hotel, circa 1930's-1970's.

²¹² Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-1378, Royal Mail hotel, Cobram Street, Goolgowi, circa 1920's-1970's.

²¹³ Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-1489, Carrington hotel, cnr Neill and Station Streets, Harden, circa 1920's-1970's.

²¹⁴ Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2061, Commercial hotel, Windsor Street, Richmond, circa 1920's-1970's.



Above: The Commercial hotel, Richmond, in January 1970. Courtesy Tooth & Co. records. Noel Butlin Archives. ANU Canberra.



Above: The Broadway hotel, Broadway, in 1960. Courtesy Tooth & Co. records. Noel Butlin Archives. ANU Canberra.



Above: The Royal Mail hotel, Goolgowi, in 1949. Courtesy Tooth & Co. records. Noel Butlin Archives. ANU Canberra.



Above: The Carrington hotel, Harden, in 1949. Courtesy Tooth & Co. records. Noel Butlin Archives. ANU Canberra.

Adrian worked in the Commercial hotel at Richmond for a while, before taking a position with the Commonwealth Bank for two to three years. In 1966 he married Mary Anne Stangelj at Windsor,²¹⁵ and their first child, Michael Ewingate Herrick, was born in 1967.

Adrian's first hotel was Lynch's hotel, at Narooma [from 29th March 1973 till 22nd September 1975],²¹⁶ the freehold of which, at the time, was still owned by Mrs Imelda Mary Lynch.



Above: Lynch's hotel, Narooma, in 1949. Courtesy Tooth & Co. records. Noel Butlin Archives. ANU Canberra.

Adrian then struck it lucky, securing a lease to what he later termed, "*the best pub ever.*" This was the Metropolitan hotel at the corner of George and Bridge Streets, Sydney.²¹⁷ The pub was owned by Tooth & Co., and it was one of those rare pubs that only traded during the week – giving Adrian the weekends off.

The clientele were fantastic – QANTAS, George Patterson [advertising], and Burns Philp [shipping], all had offices nearby, making it a financial success, as well as an enjoyable venture.

After leaving the Metropolitan, Adrian purchased the freehold of the St Leonard's bottle shop, where he stayed for some two years.

His next venture was to purchase the Kurrajong Heights hotel,²¹⁸ which he purchased for his mum to run.

²¹⁵ NSW BDM's. Marriage registration # 33597.

²¹⁶ Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-1858, Coronation hotel [ex Lynchs hotel], Windsor Street, cnr Princes Highway and Montague Street, Narooma, circa 1920's-1970's.

²¹⁷ Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-440, Metropolitan hotel, cnr George & Bridge Streets, Sydney, circa 1920's-1960's.

²¹⁸ Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-1616, Kurrajong Heights hotel, Bells Line of Road, Kurrajong Heights, circa 1920's-1970's.



Above: The Metropolitan hotel, Sydney, in 1960. Courtesy Tooth & Co. records. Noel Butlin Archives. ANU, Canberra.

Jean Wingate Herrick became the licensee of the Kurrajong Heights hotel on the 24th May 1979. The hotel had been destroyed by fire on the 15th April 1975, but a temporary bar was re-established by January 1976, with reconstruction well under way.



Above: The Kurrajong Heights hotel in 1970, pre fire. Courtesy Tooth & Co. records. Noel Butlin Archives. ANU, Canberra.



Above: The Kurrajong Heights hotel in 1976, post fire. Courtesy Tooth & Co. records. Noel Butlin Archives. ANU, Canberra.

Adrian sold the Kurrajong Heights hotel in December 1982 [in response to the introduction of RBT in that same month], and tried hotel broking in Sydney for about eighteen months.

His next move was to Wagga Wagga to help out his brother in law, Peter Bolton, who needed a manager for the Duke of Kent hotel, which Peter then owned.

He subsequently moved to the Palm & Pawn, which he rated as his 2nd favourite hotel. It was a compact little community and the people were just so nice. He never had any fights in the pub, people were honest, and it was just a lot of fun. The motel accommodation was an important component of the hotel business, providing a reliable source of income. Towards the end of his time at the Palm & Pawn, tour buses were an important contributor to the hotel's success.

Adrian next spent some two to three years at Romano's, before spending a period of about one year in the role of a relief publican, at three or four different hotels, including the Royal hotel at Tumut.

He then purchased the Roundabout Store, at the corner of Best & Forsyth Streets, where he and Mary stayed for five years, working seven days a week.



Above: The Roundabout Store building in May 2015 [then a private residence]. Courtesy Google Earth.

In addition to the store Adrian and Mary also owned a bread run, and a delivery service [Woolworths].

Mary passed away in April 1999, while Adrian still resides in Wagga Wagga [in December 2019].

It was during Peter Bolton's occupancy of Romano's that the custom of Xmas Eve revelries was established, and flourished, with crowds of several thousand spilling out into the streets.



Above: Photo of Xmas Eve revelries at Romano's hotel in December 1990. Courtesy Facebook.

Despite the popularity of this traditional event, the decision was made, in 1997, to ban such events in the future. Street fights and other acts of violence had caused concern within the community and a working party group, consisting of Yvonne Braid, Joe Schipp, Peter Dale (mayor), members of the Wagga Chamber of Commerce, the Police & Community Youth Club, the Australian Hotels Association, and others, resolved to ban both the New Years' Eve and Xmas Eve gatherings. The decision was supported by the manager of Romano's, Mark Bolton. According to Mark the tradition had been confined to the inside of the hotel, when it first started, but had spread outside as the numbers grew over the years.²¹⁹ The decision did not stop hotels, including Romano's, from holding such events within the confines of their premises.

²¹⁹ Daily Advertiser. 12th August 1997, p1.



Above: Another photo of the crowd outside Romano's hotel on New Year's Eve. Courtesy Daily Advertiser.

In 1994 Romano's won the best country hotel accommodation award and followed this up with the best country restaurant award (NSW) in 1995. Peter Bolton died in November 1996,²²⁰ and following his death, his son, Mark James Bolton, assumed the mantle of licensee, effective the 3rd December 1996, and held it up until the 3rd October 2000.²²¹

Peter Richard Bolton

Peter Bolton passed away on the 12th November 1996, at Calvary Hospital, following a three month battle with cancer. He was fifty six years old and was best known as the licensee of Romano's hotel. He had initially leased the hotel in 1980, and then some seven years later he purchased the freehold, in 1987. In his time at the hotel he had been a strong supporter of the Waratahs Rugby Club, St Michael's Cricket Club, and the Murrumbidgee Turf Club. He had also owned and raced a number of gallopers. He had been a president of the local branch of the Australian Hoteliers Association for a number of years, and a member of the Calvary Fund Raising Committee. Peter was survived by his wife, Anne, and their sons, Mathew, Andrew, and Mark.²²² He was also the initial chairman of the

²²⁰ Daily Advertiser. 13th November 1996. [010100/22]

²²¹ Independent Liquor & Gaming Authority. Licensed premises report – Romano's hotel.

²²² Daily Advertiser. 13th November 1996, p3.

ASBA [Australian School Based Apprenticeship] program, at Wagga Wagga, and maintained an interest in the activities of that group.²²³

Peter Richard Bolton was born at Chatswood, on the 15th May 1940. His father was a butcher by trade, and his mother's family – the Herricks – were publicans. The first pub that the Herrick family owned was at West Wyalong. Peter attended school at Chatswood, but left school in 1956 to work with Phillip's Industries, as a trainee. At the same time he studied economics part time [evenings] at the University of Sydney, over a period of some five to six years. In 1963 he left Phillip's Industries and went bush [jackarooing], and in 1964 travelled to Western Australia. In 1965 he married Anne Patricia Herrick at St Leonards, and settled down,²²⁴ with a steady job at the Bank of NSW [now Westpac], where he stayed for about seven years.

In 1972 he leased his first hotel, the Wynyard, at Tumut, in partnership with his wife's family. After twelve months he brought his in-laws out, and stayed at this pub for five years. He tried to buy the freehold on several occasions, but the then owner vacillated about selling, and when he [the owner] failed to turn up at an arranged meeting, Peter sold the business and the license, within three hours, and moved on.

Peter and Anne moved to Sydney, leasing a liquor store at French's Forest, and living in St Ives [from 1978-1981]. He had hoped he could spend more time with his family, in the new business, but it didn't work out that way, and he despised, what he termed, the "*penny pinching*" customers. He missed the pub atmosphere, so he sold up.

In 1980, while still in Sydney, he had purchased the lease to Romano's hotel, in partnership with Mr & Mrs Kevin Webb, who had been managing the hotel. After selling up in Sydney he moved to Wagga Wagga in 1981 and settled in at Romano's. He purchased the freehold in 1987, from Bill Morgan. In that same year [in November] he also purchased the freehold of the Palm & Pawn, in partnership with another couple, from Mr Porter. This was the same couple who he purchased the Duke of Kent with around 1983-1984. In 1987 the Duke of Kent was sold to Frank Snow, of the Star hotel at Gundagai.

In April 1989 he sold his majority share in the Palm & Pawn, to Mr Woodhouse, of Wagga Plumbing. He and Anne were now left with just Romano's hotel, a status with which they were very happy. His brother in law, Adrian Herrick, who used to manage the Palm & Pawn, was now the manager of Romano's and Peter was looking forward to spending more time with his family. He had purchased a small property, with a big home, at Shepherd's Siding, and his future plans included restoring the historic hotel [Romano's].²²⁵

In August 2000 Romano's business was up for sale, on account of the estate of the late Peter Bolton [not the freehold]. Peter's son, Mark, took over the license when his dad passed away and had held it for some four years.²²⁶ The business was passed in at \$560,000 and then sold by private negotiation following the public auction.²²⁷ The purchaser was John Hussey, who had previously licensed hotels at Yenda [Yenda hotel], Griffith [Victoria hotel], and more recently at Pambula, on the south coast [Royal Willows hotel].

²²³ Peter Bolton. 7th June 1989. [gb080118/8]

²²⁴ NSW BDM's. Marriage registration # 19557.

²²⁵ Peter Bolton. 7th June 1989. [gb080118/8]

²²⁶ Daily Advertiser. 6th July 200, pp1,4.

²²⁷ Daily Advertiser. 25th August 2000, p3.

The licensee to follow Mark Bolton was Gavin Wayne Brown, who held the license from the 3rd October 2000 until the 9th January 2007.²²⁸

Wayne Timothy Mutton assumed the license on the 9th January 2007, and held it for the next eight years, or thereabouts.²²⁹

Wayne Mutton had a long association with Romano's. He started working there as a twenty year old student [CSU - Business Management], and left fifteen years later. He was employed by Gavin Brown, and it was a natural progression to take over the license when Gavin moved on. Romano's has many fond memories for Wayne and his wife – he was married at the hotel, and the couple's first child was born at the hotel.

In November 2009, on the 30th of that month, a group of nine people were trapped in an elevator when it stopped a couple of feet short of the ground floor at around 1:30am on a Sunday morning. The Wagga Volunteer Rescue Association was able to force the doors open and extract them all safely. It was suspected that the group had been jumping up and down in the elevator, which caused it to malfunction.²³⁰

In May 2013 Wayne announced plan to establish a new outdoor area, featuring a new bar and gaming machines, at a cost of some \$200,000. The new area would increase the capacity of the outside area from fifty people to two hundred people.²³¹

Wayne finished up in 2015, but the license remained in his name, technically, up until 2017, when Belinda King took over the license. This anomaly was brought about by the fluctuations that were occurring in the ownership of the freehold and the business.



Above: Licensee, Wayne Mutton, in front of Romano's hotel in 2011. Courtesy Daily Advertiser.

²²⁸ Independent Liquor & Gaming Authority. Licensed premises report – Romano's hotel.

²²⁹ Independent Liquor & Gaming Authority. Licensed premises report – Romano's hotel. / Daily Advertiser. 28th March 2011. Ken Grimson.

²³⁰ Daily Advertiser. 1st December 2009.

²³¹ Daily Advertiser. 7th May 2013.



Above & Below: Romano's hotel in April 2006.



On the 4th April 2017 Belinda Jane King became the new licensee, superseding Wayne Mutton. The business was owned by two companies - Ashlake Holdings Pty Ltd and Seekvale Pty Ltd.²³² The change in business ownership occurred in August 2016.

The new owners recognised changes in the hotel market and implemented strategies to stay abreast of the market changes. The hotel was the recipient of an extensive renovation – new painting, new carpet, and a new bar. The former ground floor restaurant area was converted to a cocktail and wine bar, and renamed The Hampden. The gaming room was enlarged and made “*smoking compliant*.” The beer garden was enhanced, and changes were made to improve the efficiency of the kitchen.

Some six months after taking over the hotel, additional changes were being put in place. A TAB was being installed, a basement dining room had been opened, the laneway to the north of the hotel had been renovated to include a children’s playground, and the upstairs function room had been repainted, to enhance the atmosphere.²³³

According to Belinda, “*Romano’s used to cater to uni students and it had a nightclub, whereas now we attract sports fans, corporates and families,*” and, “*Within Romano’s, The Hampden bar has developed a “female niche” by boasting the widest spirit and liqueur range in the Riverina.*”

Jack Egan, the licensee of the Duke of Kent, added,

“The biggest change in the industry has been the decline of the “blue singlet drinker.” Brickies and truckies don’t drink at pubs after work nearly as much since the introduction of .05 (blood alcohol concentration driving offence). Instead of catering to blokes knocking off after work, it’s mostly about people chasing a good meal and bottle of wine.”

The changes in the industry were constant. In 2015, hotel broker, Nick Tinning, declared,²³⁴

“Clever hoteliers are creating atmospheres similar to coffee shops. It’s not being lined up at a bar for a 5pm swill. Growth in craft beer and new tastes was significant. People are a lot more discerning, they don’t mind paying more for a good product. This industry has always kept evolving, moving away from the culture we used to have.” and, “You don’t have to own a \$10 million hotel to be successful in this industry, you can start in a small leasehold in country NSW.”

Belinda King was still the licensee in November 2019, and the hotel was enjoying the fruits of its labours, having established a reputation for good food, quality service and a contemporary atmosphere. The hotel supported live music, and was committed to supporting the local community. There was a continuation of the sponsorship of the Waratah’s Rugby Union Club – a relationship that had existed for some forty years – and of netball and other sporting groups.

Romano’s was a common meeting place for a large variety of community groups, with the meeting rooms provided at no cost. Through the Wagga Wagga branch of the AHA, Romano’s supported the annual fund raising dinner that had collected some \$200,000 over the previous three years. These funds supported multiple local charities.

The three function rooms – the Ambassador Room, the Sapphire Room, and the Chandelier Room had all been renovated by the new owners. The installation of modern air-conditioning, and the renovation of the upstairs bar further enhanced these facilities.

²³² Independent Liquor & Gaming Authority. Licensed premises report – Romano’s hotel.

²³³ Daily Advertiser. 9th March 2017. Jack Morphet.

²³⁴ Daily Advertiser. 23rd August 2015. Declan Rurenga.

One of the strengths of the hotel is its popularity for functions. Out of town visitors and a myriad of local groups and families utilise the facilities of the hotel for a large variety of events. Major events such as the Touch Carnival in February, the Gold Cup in May, and Gears & Beers in October, make full use of the hotel's facilities.



Above: Licensee, Belinda King, with manager Nathanael Scott. Courtesy Daily Advertiser.



Above: The new bar in 2019. Courtesy Romano's hotel.



Above: The TAB area in 2019. Courtesy Romano's hotel.



Above: The beer garden in 2019. Courtesy Romano's hotel.



Above: The Hampden cocktail & wine bar in 2019. Courtesy Romano's hotel.



Above & Below: The historic timber staircase in 2019. Courtesy Romano's hotel.





Above: The Chandelier Room in 2019. Courtesy Romano's hotel.

Below: The Cellar in 2019. Courtesy Romano's hotel.





Above: Romano Azzalin at the opening of Romano's Restaurant. Courtesy National Archives of Australia.

Romano Orlando Azzalin [1894-1972]²³⁵

“Romano Orlando Azzalin (1894-1972), restaurateur, was born on 13 September 1894 at Padua, Italy, son of Alessandro Azzalin and his wife Benvegnu'Anna, née Nessuna. Christened Romano Orlando, he spent his childhood at Verona where his father was a postal official. He migrated with his family to England in 1910, and after a brief education Azzalin began work as a page in the Vienna Hotel, Bristol, and attended night school. In 1912-14 he wandered from job to job at hotels and restaurants in Nice, Monte Carlo, Paris, Berlin and Madrid, before returning to England in November 1914. Taking a job as a hotel waiter in London, he married a Belgian, Pauline Roelandt, on 4 September 1915. He rose through a pyramidal structure from receptionist to cook and from waiter to wine butler; he had learned to speak French, German, Spanish and English, in addition to his native Italian, and claimed to have served every king in Europe.

In his early twenties, while officiating as head waiter at London's Ritz Hotel, he adopted Romano as his surname, reflecting his regard for one of the city's most renowned restaurants. When managing the Hyde Park Hotel he met Percy Stewart Dawson who persuaded him to come to Australia in 1923 to run the plush Ambassadors restaurant in Pitt Street, Sydney; he arrived in September and was followed by his wife. Four years later Romano's Restaurant opened in York Street. Throughout the Depression his establishment prospered, largely because of its low cost-structure. In 1938 he moved premises to the basement of the new Prudential Insurance Building in Martin Place, next door to the Prince Edward Theatre in Castlereagh Street. His business flourished with the patronage of American officers and the unlicensed sale of liquor during World War II and in the immediate years that followed. In 1947 he also acquired and lavishly rebuilt the Commercial Hotel, renamed Romano's, at Wagga Wagga. Giving his name as Romano Orlando Azzalin, he reluctantly gave evidence in 1952 to the State royal commission on the liquor laws.

His restaurant employed a staff of 80, and featured an orchestra, concealed lighting, 138 wall-mirrors and a bust of Napoleon by Dr Charles MacCarthy; from his farm at Baulkham Hills, Romano supplied vegetables, poultry and pork for a menu that listed 370 dishes. With its sumptuous elegance, Romano's became a social rendezvous for the wealthy who wore evening dress; its international standards and cuisine attracted such visitors as Prince Philip, Vivien Leigh and Maurice Chevalier. Yet, although equated with bon ton, an evening at Romano's was not beyond the reach of less affluent people celebrating a special occasion. Sydney's only other fashionable night club was James Charles Bendrodt's Prince's Restaurant.

With hair slicked back, an aquiline nose and pencil-thin moustache, Mr Romano dressed in white tie and tails and seldom unbent in his proprietorial role. A member of the Royal Empire Society and Tattersall's and the Royal Automobile clubs, he relaxed with music and song at his Bellevue Hill home and enjoyed golf and motoring. After years of moderate success on the turf, late in 1945 he bought Bernborough which won fifteen successive races before 'Azzalin the Dazzlin' sold him to the American movie-mogul Louis B. Mayer. Having disposed of his restaurant in 1964, Romano saw it converted into a discotheque where go-go girls twisted the night away. Bedridden in his Point Piper flat and subject to heart attacks, he died on 6 November 1972 and was cremated with Catholic rites. His wife, Alice Emma Wyke Brown, a daughter, and a son survived him.”

²³⁵ John Ritchie, 'Romano, Azzalin Orlando (1894–1972)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/romano-azzalin-orlando-8263/text14473>, published first in hardcopy 1988, accessed online 24 October 2019.



Above: Bernborough with jockey Athol Mulley, at Randwick Racecourse. . Courtesy Wikipedia.



Above: Deborah Kerr having lunch at Romano's [Sydney] in 1959. Courtesy Noel Stubbs.



Above: Romano Orlando Azzalin, with Bernborough in the background. Courtesy Sherry Morris.



Above: The entry to Romano's restaurant in Sydney. Courtesy Museum of the Riverina [BGS2009_198].

Freehold

The land on which the hotel stands was a part of allotment 1 section 45, town and parish of South Wagga Wagga. This was the allotment purchased by Frederick Anslow Tompson in January 1859.²³⁶ It was a large allotment and Tompson subsequently subdivided the property.

On the 8th October 1864, he sold off the first piece of subdivided land, to Charles Hardy and Thomas Hodson, builders of Wagga Wagga, for the sum of £800. The area conveyed was one rood and four perches.²³⁷ This would become the site of the Commercial hotel [Romano's in 2019].

1875, 13th March – Conveyance from Hardy & Hodson to Matthew Nicholas Callaghan, a freeholder of Wagga Wagga, for the sum of £2,950. The property had a frontage of sixty two feet to Fitzmaurice Street and a frontage to Little Gurwood Street [now Sturt Street] of one hundred and ninety three feet.²³⁸ The deeds record the transaction as occurring in March 1875, but the sale was reported as early as March 1872.²³⁹ The property now included the Commercial hotel buildings.

1885, 4th October – Conveyance from Callaghan, a commission agent, to Thomas Smith Bellair, an inn keeper of Wagga Wagga, for the sum of £5,250. The size of the land was unchanged.²⁴⁰

It was Bellair who converted the deed to Torrens Title.²⁴¹ The new title was volume 850, folio 217. The land had an area of one rood plus three and three quarter perches. The frontage to Fitzmaurice Street was 94 links and to Little Gurwood Street, 292½ links.²⁴²

1904, February – George Whiteman Bellair, Ernest Bellair, and Thomas William Watkins Burgess, were the legal owners of the property [executors].

On the 24th August 1906 the Commercial hotel property was auctioned off, at the Oddfellows' Hall.²⁴³ The property was knocked down to, "a local syndicate," at a price of £13,000.²⁴⁴ Another report declared the winning bid came from Mr FC Thomas, the local manager of the Commercial Bank, and that he was acting for, "a Melbourne syndicate."²⁴⁵ It was quickly revealed that it was two members of the Bellair family who had in fact purchased the hotel.²⁴⁶

1906, 23rd October – Conveyance from the above to Ernest Bellair and Edith Bellair (spinster), as tenants in common.²⁴⁷

Edith married Charles Henry Hayes on the 17th June 1909, and some two years later she sold her half of the property to her brother, Ernest.²⁴⁸

²³⁶ Geoff Burch. Waterview: A History of Allotment 1 Section 45, town of Wagga Wagga, parish of South Wagga Wagga, County Wynyard.

²³⁷ NSW Land Registry Services. Title deeds. Book 90, number 293. / Book 94, number 428.

²³⁸ NSW Land Registry Services. Title deeds. Book 148, number 645.

²³⁹ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 2nd March 1872, p2.

²⁴⁰ NSW Land Registry Services. Title deeds. Book 324, number 535. / Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 17th September 1885, p2.

²⁴¹ NSW Land Registry Services. Primary Application # 6647.

²⁴² NSW Land Registry Services. Volume 850, folio 217.

²⁴³ Wagga Wagga Express. 23rd August 1906, p2.

²⁴⁴ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 25th August 1906, p2.

²⁴⁵ Wagga Wagga Express. 25th August 1906, p2.

²⁴⁶ Wagga Wagga Express. 11th September 1906, p2c5.

²⁴⁷ NSW Land Registry Services. Volume 850, folio 217.

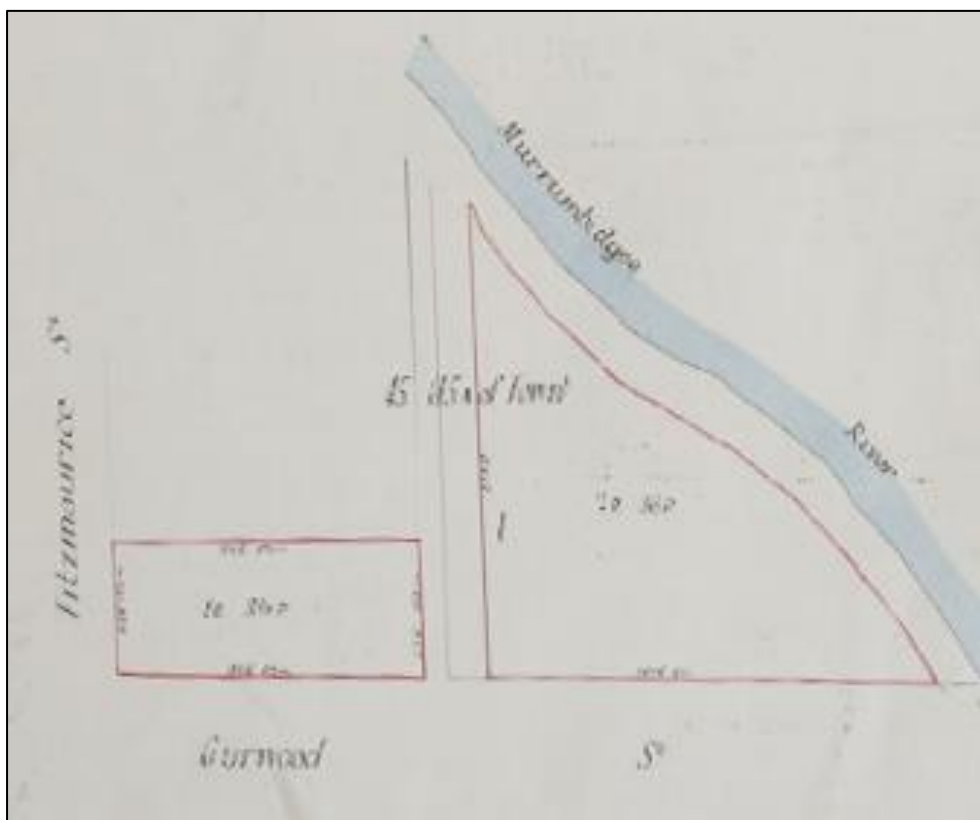
²⁴⁸ NSW Land Registry Services. Volume 1751, folio 71.

1928, 25th January – Conveyance to Blanche Mabel Bellair, the wife of George Whiteman Bellair, a book keeper of Wagga Wagga.²⁴⁹

1928, 15th March – Conveyance to a syndicate consisting of: James Joseph Scott (1/6th share); Percy William Williamson (1/12th share); Mark Edward Mongan (1/4 share); John Ewart (1/6th share); William Edward Waite (1/6th share); and Telacon Lloyd (1/6th share). The syndicate paid £28,000 for the property.²⁵⁰

The syndicate also owned a larger block of land fronting Little Gurwood Street, to the east of the hotel. They owned all of the land fronting the northern side of Little Gurwood Street, except for the laneway [Cadell Place] and a thin strip of land adjacent to the eastern boundary of this lane. This large block had an area of two roods and thirty six perches. Whereas the hotel block had a frontage of 193 feet to Little Gurwood Street, the larger block had a frontage of 282 feet and 6 inches.

The syndicate united the two lots under a common title.²⁵¹



Above: The two lots of land owned by the Commercial Hotel Syndicate.

1946, 7th October – Conveyance of that part of the land featuring the hotel, to Romano Orlando Azzalin.²⁵² This was the block as originally purchased by Hardy & Hodson, from FA Tompson.

²⁴⁹ NSW Land Registry Services. Volume 2179, folio 187.

²⁵⁰ NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920's-1970's.

²⁵¹ NSW Land Registry Services. Volume 4145, folios 177-182.

²⁵² NSW Land Registry Services. Volume 4145, folios 177-182.

By November 1947, Romano had established a new company called Hotel Romano Pty Ltd, with a nominal capital of £50,000.²⁵³

1950, 7th September – Romano sells a piece of the land to Tooth & Co. [an easement, between the Commercial hotel and the Criterion hotel].²⁵⁴

1951, May – Romano leases a shop on the ground floor to the English, Scottish and Australian Bank.²⁵⁵

1955, 30th June – Conveyance from Romano Orlando Azzalin to Hotel Romano Pty Ltd.²⁵⁶

1968, 13th November – William Gladstone Morgan and his wife, Kathleen May Morgan, are now the legal owners of the property,²⁵⁷ for which they paid \$100,000.²⁵⁸

When Romano sold, in 1966, Jeff Williams was the broker and there was a lunch for bidders, at the Duke of Kent hotel. Bill Morgan started the bidding at \$55,000, and went up to \$97,500, at which price it was passed in. Bill went to \$100,000, which Romano accepted [over the phone]. The story goes that Bill was bidding in dollars, but that Romano thought he was getting pounds. The sale took place on the first day that decimal currency was introduced in Australia - the 14th February 1966. Bill was thereafter known, to those in the industry, as “*half price Bill.*”

William [Bill] Gladstone Morgan

William Gladstone Morgan [junior] was born at Narandera on the 14th June 1917,²⁵⁹ the son of William Gladstone Morgan [senior], and Susan Grace Morgan [nee Drum].

William [senior] passed away at Narandera on the 23rd February 1950, aged sixty five. He had lived at Narandera for many years, during which time he had been employed by S Richards & Co.²⁶⁰

An obituary provided the following details,²⁶¹

“As briefly stated in Friday’s issue, the death occurred in the Narrandera District Hospital on Thursday last of a widely known and highly respected resident of Narrandera, Mr. William Gladstone Morgan, at the age of 65 years.

Mr. Morgan was a native of Newport, Monmouth, England. He went to New Zealand about 46 years ago, and was employed by Blythes Ltd., of Napier, for several years. On going to Sydney in 1913 he found employment at Mark Foy’s, but feeling that he would like to reside in the country, remained in Sydney only a few weeks. He came to Narrandera from Sydney and entered the em-loy of S. Richards and Co. Ltd., and remained with the firm until his death.

During his long residence in Narrandera he earned the confidence of his employers and the respect of the customers of the firm, as well as of the public generally. He was possessed of a reserved

²⁵³ Daily Advertiser. 15th November 1947, p2.

²⁵⁴ NSW Land Registry Services. Volume 5691, folio 93.

²⁵⁵ NSW Land Registry Services. Volume 5691, folio 93.

²⁵⁶ NSW Land Registry Services. Volume 5691, folio 93.

²⁵⁷ NSW Land Registry Services. Volume 5691, folio 93.

²⁵⁸ NBAC, Tooth and Company yellow cards, N60-YC-2292, Commercial Hotel, cnr Fitzmaurice and Sturt Streets, Wagga Wagga, circa 1920’s-1970’s.

²⁵⁹ NSW BDM’s. Birth registration # 16874.

²⁶⁰ Narandera Argus. 24th February 1950, p2.

²⁶¹ Narandera Argus. 28th February 1950, p2.

disposition and did not enter into public affairs. He was, however, always interested in the progress of the town, which he had seen grow during a period of 36 years. He was a member of Lodge Leopold for a number of years. Deceased is survived by his widow, who was formerly Miss Susie, second daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. John Drum, of Hay, whom he married about 35 years ago, and a family of two sons and one daughter. The sons are John and William (Coolamon), and the daughter is Mary (Mrs. G. Griffiths, of the Wagga district). He is also survived by his mother, who is aged 92 years, and resides in England, and one brother, Stanley, who resides in New Zealand. A step brother, David Gray, resides with his mother in England.”

Bill Morgan [junior] was well known in the hotel industry. After returning from the war [WW2] he went into a bakery business, but wasn't happy with that so decided to try the hotel game.

His first foray was a lease of the Coolamon hotel with his brother in 1949. They were there for a bit over five years till they split up. His brother went to Toowoomba while Bill went to Sydney. Bill returned from Sydney to the Coolamon hotel for another five years (1958-1963). From there he went to the Farmers Home hotel in 1963. Bill leased the Farmer's Home but during his time there he purchased the freehold of the Coolamon hotel and Romano's hotel. The Farmers home at that time was a better business than it was now [1988]. The installation of the traffic lights had a negative effect as did the general development of the area, including the construction of the Koorinal hotel. The Farmer's Home was owned by Tooths when Bill leased it. The Coolamon hotel was owned by Bill Thomas. Bill left the Farmer's Home in 1968 to run Romano's which he had purchased just a few months earlier. He ran Romano's for about 2.5 years and then his wife got sick so he leased it out. He then spent a few years at the Rules Club as secretary/manager then gave that away and bought into the Tolland hotel, with Paddy Power.²⁶²

In November 1987 Bill Morgan sold to Peter Bolton.²⁶³ The freehold was legally owned by Peter Bolton and his wife, Anne Patricia Bolton.²⁶⁴ William Gladstone Morgan passed away on the 16th August 2005, at the age of eighty eight.²⁶⁵

After Peter Bolton's death the hotel freehold remained with the Bolton family up until the 28th April 2006, when it was sold to a group consisting of John Anthony Hussey, Gina Mariella Hussey, Bree Danielle Brown, and Gavin Wayne Brown.²⁶⁶

In December 2008 the hotel sold for \$1.2 million.²⁶⁷

In March 2011 Romano's hotel was up for sale, on behalf of John & Gina Hussey. Hotel prices had declined in the previous three years but the hotel was still expected to sell in the range from \$6 million to \$8 million. At the time the hotel had fifteen poker machine entitlements, and forty six rooms for accommodation, with an 80% occupancy rate. Weekly takings were in the order of \$75,000.²⁶⁸

The hotel was proving difficult to sell, and was again up for sale in August 2015, with an auction to be held on the 17th September of that year. Agent for the sale was hotel broker, Nick Tinning, acting

²⁶² Bill Morgan. 26th July 1988. [gb virtual 19880726]

²⁶³ Bill Morgan. 26th July 1988. [gb virtual 19880726] / Daily Advertiser. 29th October 1992 – Bridge to Bridge Supplement.

²⁶⁴ Independent Liquor & Gaming Authority. Licensed premises report – Romano's hotel.

²⁶⁵ Daily Advertiser. 18th August 2005.

²⁶⁶ Independent Liquor & Gaming Authority. Licensed premises report – Romano's hotel.

²⁶⁷ Daily Advertiser. 30th March 2017. Stephen Mudd.

²⁶⁸ Daily Advertiser. 28th March 2011. Ken Grimson.

for the owner, John Hussey.²⁶⁹ There was no reported sale and it is assumed the reserve was not reached. Another effort to sell the hotel was made on the 28th April 2016, when it was again passed in at auction, with private negotiations continuing. The market price was \$4.25 million, and the agent was still Nick Tinning.²⁷⁰

By the end of June 2016 the hotel business had been placed under voluntary administration.²⁷¹

2016, July - A price [\$4 million]²⁷² was subsequently agreed upon with a syndicate of three local couples.²⁷³

In 2020, Romano's Hotel is owned by a syndicate with strong ties to Wagga Wagga and the community.

Current title is DP1.1142546

Prior titles are:

DP.1.56647 > vol. 14384, fol. 17 [this is the original hotel block]

DP.1/212028 > 9240-29

DP.3.212028 > 9240-31



Above: Romano's in 1968.

²⁶⁹ Daily Advertiser. 13th August 2015.

²⁷⁰ Daily Advertiser. 12th May 2016.

²⁷¹ Daily Advertiser. 30th June 2016.

²⁷² Daily Advertiser. 30th March 2017. Stephen Mudd.

²⁷³ Daily Advertiser. 19th November 2016

NOTES:

