



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES- ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

11.1. AESTHETIC VALUE

The fully and accurately reconstructed exterior of the building, occupying a prominent corner position, is a notably attractive feature of the area.

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The hotel, through Clarke, Treffene and Coulter, was involved in one of the most notorious murder cases in the state -- the murder of Inspector Walsh and Sergeant Pitman.

The Osmetti brothers, sons of the owner, were famous sportsmen of their time. Jack Osmetti, an outstanding football player, ran the hotel for almost half a century.

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

The *Cornwall Hotel* contains in its fabric evidence of the 1934 riots which resulted in the burning and subsequent extensive reconstruction of the building.

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

The *Cornwall Hotel* was for many years a centre for sporting activity in the area. It was also a meeting place for people of varied ethnic backgrounds and it is said to have popularised the sport of bocce in the district.

12 DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

The *Cornwall Hotel* is typical of the early small pubs of the era.

12.3 CONDITION

Reconstruction of the fabric of the *Cornwall Hotel*, in 1987, has replicated that of the 1934 fabric. The building is in excellent condition.

12.4 INTEGRITY

The integrity of the building is high. It has always been used as a hotel and continues to be used for this purpose today.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Original combustible fabric was extensively lost during the 1934 riots and fire, but the exterior stonework and masonry is original, and the bulk of the remainder is as replaced in the 1934 reconstruction. Recent reconstruction is sympathetic to the original design intent.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The *Cornwall Hotel* was built in 1898 from locally quarried stone by Cornish men from the Moonta and Burra Goldfields in South Australia.¹

The hotel is particularly noted for its association with the murders of Detective Sergeant Alexander Pitman and Inspector John Walsh by William Coulter and Phillip Treffene when they were caught treating illicit gold on the outskirts of Boulder in 1926. The incident is well documented, as the daily proceedings of the trial were published in the *Daily News*. The murders caused quite a sensation at the time due to their gruesome nature. Clarke, the licensee of the Cornwall Hotel was heavily involved in the incident and Phillip Treffene was his barman.

There are conflicting reports concerning the nature of the *Cornwall Hotel's* involvement in the incident. However, extracts from the newspaper reports shed some light on the happenings. "In this case you have also the Statement made by Clarke in the witness box that on April 28 about 5.30 pm Coulter and Treffene and he were in the parlour of the Cornwall Hotel, and Clarke swears that Coulter told him, 'Pitman and Walsh came upon us today. Phil shot Pitman before I knew what happened and I then shot Walsh.'" ²

The gruesome nature of the murders relates to the fact that the bodies were cut up and partially burnt in an attempt to cover up the evidence. One particular description of the events asserts that this activity took place in the hotel.³ However, the proceedings of the trial show that, "The knife and the saw were obtained at the hotel, being part of the hotel property..."⁴ It is then reported that the bodies were taken elsewhere to be disposed of.

Supreme Court records document the final verdict: "We find that the human remains found in Miller Shaft about 6 miles west of Kalgoorlie on 12 May last, were those of John Joseph Walsh and Alexander Pitman and that they met their death on the 28 th April

¹ Information from present owner, Mr Charlie Hunter.

² *Daily News* 15 September 1926.

³ *Newsbeat* Vol 1/91 January.

⁴ *Daily News* 15 September 1926.

last, at a spot about 17 miles south-west of Boulder, and that they were wilfully murdered by William Coulter and Phillip John Treffene and that Eva Clarke was an accessory after the fact.”⁵

In 1927 Mrs Furia purchased the hotel, though it took some time before people started returning to the venue.⁶ She was helped by one of her sons, Jack, who ran the pub for around fifty years. Jack Osmetti was one of the outstanding football players of his time, as well as being a successful cricketer and State champion lawn bowler. His brothers Charlie and Cyril also had great sporting ability and both played league football for East Fremantle. Together they were drew a lot of people to the hotel. Out of this involvement, a Cricket Club was formed and the Cornwall also became the headquarters of the Mines Rovers Football Club for a number of years until their own club rooms were built.⁷

The *Cornwall Hotel* provided a social outlet for the many working class people in the area. Tess Epis, daughter of Mrs Furia recounts the lively activity that used to take place: “‘Saturday nights were great nights here. They used to have an accordion and a guitar playing and it would be packed with dancers... the working-class sort of people. Mainly Italians really...there were a lot around then. They used to come in from the woodlines and outlying areas, hard-working people...good drinkers!’”⁸ The hotel was also used for accommodation.

The *Cornwall Hotel* was a victim of the violence of the 1934 Kalgoorlie race riots. The simmering resentment and threat of unemployment on the goldfields began to be directed at the Italian and Slav community, who stood out from the crowd. An incident between an Australian and an Italian on the Australia Day weekend triggered what was to be three days of fighting. The mob commandeered trams to Boulder. Here they burnt buildings used by the foreigners, “including two more hotels, the Cornwall and the Main Reef and the newly built International Club.”⁹ Mrs Epis also remembers the impact the Kalgoorlie race riots in 1934 had on the hotel. “ ‘Course, then there was the sad time of the riots. I remember those very well, when they burnt all the hotels down. foreign hotels... and the night they came and burnt this place down! The boys were well known in the sporting circles and they really didn't want to burn this place. They stopped just down the road there but there was a few drunks egging them on...like maniacs. They just came in and doused the place with fuel and burnt it right to the ground!’”¹⁰ The government built a temporary hotel next door, in recompense until the *Cornwall Hotel* was able to be rebuilt.

Photographic evidence, however, shows that the hotel was not burned to the ground, and enough of the external fabric survived to enable the exterior of the hotel to be reconstructed, in 1934, to its original form.

The hotel closed, in 1976, when the Swan Brewery transferred the licence to Paraburdoo. Jack Osmetti remained as Licensee until then. In 1987, the

⁵ Supreme Court - Criminal Sittings. ‘Pitman and Walsh’ Acc3473, File 5620, 5621/1926, SAWA.

⁶ Ainslie, T. & Garwood, R. *Chook on Sundays* Plantagenet Press, Fremantle, 1992, p.79 also information from the present owner, Mr Charlie Hunter.

⁷ *Kalgoorlie Miner* 1 August 1992.

⁸ Ainslie & Garwood, p.80.

⁹ de Mori, C. “*Time, Gentlemen*” *A History of the Hotel Industry in Western Australia*. Western Australian Hotels Association Inc, 1987, p.137.

¹⁰ Ainslie & Garwood, p.82.

Cornwall Hotel was purchased by C. A. Hunter and restored to its present condition. Osmetti continued to live next door to the *Cornwall Hotel* and died in 1991.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The *Cornwall Hotel* occupies a corner block, the lower storey being of stone and the upper brick, roofed in corrugated iron.¹¹ A veranda with timber posts and mouldings adorns the two street frontages. It is simple rather than high Victorian in style, and is typical of the early small pubs of the era (eg. *Hannans* and the *Star and Garter*).

The building bears a very close resemblance to exterior photographs taken around 1900 and later after the 1934 riots, supporting the claim that the exterior has been restored to its original condition. The interior layout appears largely unchanged, apart from the upgrading of kitchen areas to meet contemporary health standards. Panelled doors, skirtings and architraves and the generally modest decoration are consistent with the character of the period of construction. The staircase is simple in design and of clear finished timber. The cornices and ceiling roses, picture and dado rails appear to be of a later era, and where almost certainly replaced following the 1934 race riots and fire.

Recent redecorating is sympathetic in its paint colours and the details of door and light fittings. The exterior beer garden has been brick paved with a central glass area, enclosed by a timber pergola with seating below. The toilets have been fully renovated in a sympathetic style.

13.3. REFERENCES

Daily News, 15 September 1926

Newsbeat, Vol 1/91 January

Supreme Court - Criminal Sittings. 'Pitman and Walsh', SAWA Acc.3473, File 5620, 5621/1926

Ainslie, T. & Garwood, R. *Chook on Sundays* (Plantagenet Press, Fremantle, 1992)

Kalgoorlie Miner, 1 August 1992

de Mori, C. "*Time, Gentlemen*" *A History of the Hotel Industry in Western Australia*. (Western Australian Hotels Association Inc, 1987.)

¹¹ Information for the physical evidence section was provided by Shelley Jenkinson who conducted an architectural site report and who also carried out some social history research. (Held on HCWA file).