

A short history of the Jolly Frog Hotel, Windsor ~ Cathy McHardy March 2020

A survivor of inundation by countless floods over the years, this Windsor icon was known affectionately as 'The Frog' to a loyal clientele for over 40 years, the burnt out shell of the once prosperous Jolly Frog Hotel still stands empty in Bridge Street, Windsor on the northern bank of South Creek.

Hotels at this location have a long history, with the first dating from the early days of the town of Windsor. On this site stood an inn known by the sign of The Currency Lass from 1833 to 1848. It was first licensed by James Cullen, then James Gosper, Margaret Gosper, John Shearing and Michael Egan. The building was also used as a school and private residence until severely damaged by surging torrents from South Creek which inundated low lying areas of Windsor during the epic flood of 1867 [Early Days of Windsor (1909), James Steele, p. 150].

Seizing the business opportunity, the vacant and rundown hotel building and adjacent houses were purchased in 1883 by Robert and Emily Huggins. The pair set about reinventing, modernising and redecorating the once popular hotel. Open for business in 1886, it was renamed 'The Carrington' after Lord Carrington then Governor of New South Wales. The small Georgian windows were replaced with large double hung versions and upstairs a pair of French doors opened on to an elegant verandah adorned with cast iron lacework. Land was filled at the rear of the block. [Hawkesbury Chronicle and Farmers Advocate 11 Dec 1886, p. 3].

The *Hawkesbury Chronicle* reported the building to be 'comfortably furnished and in good taste. At the rear of the bar and extending to the rear of the house is a fine large dining room, and close by is the entrance to commodious cellar.' After Robert's death in 1900, Emily continued to manage the hotel until 1908.

Throughout the early years of the 20th century the hotel continued to be operated by various publicans including George Robert James, Patrick Francis O'Connor and Mrs. N. Robson. The structure changed very little from that created by the Huggins' and continued under the sign of The Carrington Hotel. In 1936 the licence was transferred from James Meehan to Edith Vera McHugh.

McHugh was a community minded citizen and took an interest in local affairs, sponsoring a first prize of £20 in the Carrington Hotel Open Handicap horse race in the 1939 Hawkesbury Show. The hotel was known to be a well-run establishment proving comfortable accommodation for travellers and genial atmosphere for locals. Organisations such as the local RAAF hosted 'splendid dinners' at the hotel for visiting RAAF clubs.

Vera McHugh continued until November 1941 when the licence was transferred to John Schaffer. At the hearing before the Windsor Licensing Court Sergeant Dawes said he wished to mention that Mrs McHugh had been the licensee of these premises during the last six years, during which time she had 'conducted the hotel in a very satisfactory manner', the premises always being 'spotlessly clean.' Over the next 2 years there were at least six changes of licensee until stability was restored again under the management of McHugh from 1943 to 1946.

By the early 1950s, the late Victorian façade and interior were considered old fashioned and past their prime. The premises were purchased by the Podesta family in 1955 who

remodelled the exterior removing the verandahs and iron lace and giving the façade a modern streamlined appearance. The interior was also refurbished in 1950s style. The name Carrington Hotel which had been in place since 1886 was changed to Podesta's Hotel [Macquarie Country, Bowd, p. 54; Hawkesbury Directory 1956].

Apart from the traditional hotel amenities, Podesta's offered more for locals and travellers alike. There was a children's playground, morning and afternoon teas served in the Verandah Café and the Podesta's Hotel Band entertained on Saturday evenings. In 1961 a huge flood reached the first floor and caused extensive interior damage.

From the late 1970s to the early 1980s the hotel was a popular venue for live music featuring premier Australian bands such as Cold Chisel, Skyhooks and INXS. The hotel attracted large crowds drawn from both Sydney and the local area. During 1973 the hotel management of the time changed the name to The Jolly Frog. The building incurred extensive flood damage during the floods of 1978, reopening in September that year. [Windsor and Richmond Gazette, 9 September 1978].

During the 1980s it became known as the Hawkesbury Tavern and in the years that followed the structure was subject to many changes and refurbishments. The site was acquired in 2001 by Hawkesbury Valley Holden as part of its expansion program [Hawkesbury Gazette, 21 March 2001, p. 33].

In 2004, Norma Needham owner of both the Jolly Frog Hotel and Hawkesbury Valley Holden displayed plans for the future of the combined site which to include refurbishment of the hotel as a coffee shop and mini museum [Hawkesbury Gazette, 7 January 2004, p. 9].

In 2004 the building opened as Verandah Restaurant and Bar [Hawkesbury Gazette, 16 June 2004, p.15] and in 2006 reopened as Jolly Frog Family Hotel following a million dollar refurbishment [Hawkesbury Courier, 30 March 2006, p 3; Hawkesbury Gazette, 12 July 2006, p 87].

In 2006 Hawkesbury City Council produced a Development Control Plan for the site including the former hotel which had been purchased by the adjacent car sales business. The plan stipulated that the property was to be landscaped and the former hotel building restored to its 1900s appearance.

This proposed renovation did not eventuate, however the hotel did reopen in 2007 as the Jolly Frog Family Hotel and was known as The Windsor Tavern at the time of its final closure. The hotel had ceased trading for about three years before the devastating fire in January 2014 destroyed much of the fabric of the building.

The following year plans were submitted to Hawkesbury City Council for the removal of damaged sections of the building. The go-ahead for the proposed works were given by Hawkesbury Council in March 2016.

In 2019 work began on rebuilding and reinstating the roof, stabilising the remaining structure. So, the hotel may one day again be a popular gathering place for visitors and locals.