

The Beehive

Recent news on the famous Beehive building is encouraging, with further restoration on the former Stock Exchange section about to take place. The following is some of the history of the Beehive.

As one writer pointed out well over a century ago, 'almost every city has some particular building or buildings known to all its inhabitants. That part of the city receives some special designation which is a household term. In Bendigo the Block is represented by the Beehive, which has historical importance and whose name is familiar. It is at the Beehive where the principal storekeepers have conducted their businesses and it is at the Beehive where the mining speculators – the makers to some extent of Bendigo's mining history – have congregated. The Beehive is the busiest portion of the city and has been for more than twenty years. The names Pall Mall and Beehive go together, for the latter is situated in the centre of the great thoroughfare. One can hardly pass down the Mall at any time of the day, or night, or week without seeing bands of people standing in front of the Beehive.'

When that was written, the block of buildings was owned by James Buick. On 25 August 1871, the old Beehive was destroyed by fire and Buick had the present building erected. Then, the buildings comprised of portions devoted to drapery and other businesses and the rooms of the Bendigo Mining Exchange, the offices of sharebrokers, and a large hotel all adjoining. William Meader opened the hotel and bars, but in 1874 Harry Burridge took it over and he became a most familiar face to Bendigonians.

An Englishman, Burridge came to Bendigo at the height of the mining boom, which caused tremendous excitement, and the Beehive daily saw a seething, roaring mass of men, jostling, elbowing, gesticulating and bargaining with each other for money. It was, as one writer pointed out, the greed of fortune, for all wanted to get rich quickly. The moods of the stock exchange represented nearly every mood of human life, of hope, despair, excitement and depression, the practical joke and even the charitable instinct.

William Meader, the pioneer, before very long, saw the Stock Exchange almost deserted as the boom ended, but success came quickly to Harry Burridge. His Mining Exchange Hotel and cafes extended from Pall Mall to Hargreaves Street. When people entered from Pall Mall, they encountered first the vestibule where the brokers worked, then the tobacconist's and to the left, a bar and further on another bar where Burridge kept his special liquors. These were saloons, where rested, in comfort, the weary brokers. Upstairs, near where the brokers held their exchange meetings, were larger rooms with lounge chairs for resting, smoking cigars, pipes and imbibing. On the second floor was a café, with a full menu. Nearby was a large billiard room, a chess room and reading room. On the third floor were the bedrooms, which commanded views of Pall Mall, Rosalind Park and all points north and south. A most important facility was the cellar below the basement, which stored the liquors. A specialty of Harry Burridge for his friends was beef tea and afternoon tea. Harry was busily engaged in many enterprises, including mining, farming and coursing. One of his champion dogs, Rob Roy MacGregor, won a Derby. He was a freemason and member of many sporting and philanthropic institutions.

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