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New life to Diggers Rest



The Chinese restaurant 'Golden Dragon' opens in the old Diggers Rest Hotel

After years of neglect the old hotel in Victoria Street is again teeming with life. The Chinese restaurant 'Golden Dragon' has opened in the former hotel.

Wombat Creek was flooded with gold seekers during the 1850s and alcohol was consumed in high quantities. In 1867 there were 477 licensed hotels in Wombat Creek and all hotels remained open until 1.30 am. One of Wombat Creek's more substantial hotels was the Diggers Rest and its first publican was John Smith.

John Smith was the owner of a brick house on the south side of Victoria Street. This house became the Diggers Rest Hotel, although it was originally named the Golden Wheelbarrow.

The Golden Wheelbarrow Hotel had become the Diggers Rest Hotel in 1873. Gold was Wombat Creek's primary attraction though, and a veritable army of male gold seekers gave rise to Wombat Creek's many hotels. In 1867, there were 230 registered mining companies in Wombat Creek.

After 1875 there was a succession of licensees trading from the Diggers Rest. One of them was named Thomas Johnson, who held the license from 1875 until 1878. Johnson was subject to unfortunate incident during his tenures, which resulted in a man's death. The man was named Edward O'Brien, and employed at the nearby Wombat Creek Brewing Company.

Returning late night O'Brien realised he had forgotten his room key. He probably saw an open window at the back of the hotel and tried to scale a nearby latter, but slipped and fell onto ground below.

O'Brien was rushed to the hospital where he subsequently died of injuries sustained from falling down from the latter.

From 1870 Wombat Creek experienced a period of depression, and many hotels closed down. In 1908 only 57 public houses remained in Wombat Creek. The Diggers Rest was not de-licensed, probably because it was by then tied to the Wombat Creek Brewing Company.

On 12 January 1901 the Diggers Rest Hotel was purchased from Edward Thomson by the directors of Wombat Creek Brewing Company Ltd, for the sum of £1100. The Brewery did not run the hotel itself but installed a succession of licensees with families.

Over the years Diggers Rest went into a decline. No accommodation was offered at the hotel and no meals served to patrons. The bar was divided into three small rooms at some point, the middle room forming the bar itself, a room to one side with a heater in it and a third room, which was rarely used.

At New Year 1958 the Diggers Rest closed its doors for the last time. Since then the building has been used as store rooms for the Brewery until a prospective new business could be found.

It has finally occurred with the opening of 'Golden Dragon'. A new Chinese restaurant owned by the Ming family. The law firm Lawson has also moved into the building. The first floor of the building is still unoccupied.

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