

part of the arcade (shops 1 and 2) to make way for the installation of a new Saloon Bar and Lounge Bar (Cricketers' Bar area). A Ladies' Boudoir was introduced on the first floor landing.¹¹⁶ When applying to the Licencing Court for permission to make the alterations, Mr F G Carter, on behalf of Melbourne Hotels Ltd, said that the existing situation with the bar at the corner of Little Collins and Spring Streets was 'not convenient, and that it was desired to make the position [of the bar] more central'. A cellar was constructed underneath the new bar.¹¹⁷

In the early 1920s a number of schemes to infill or bridge the light court were proposed, but these were not carried out.

2.6.2 Alterations 1928-1980

A number of relatively major alterations have been made to the main public spaces in the hotel since 1930.

In 1947 architects R.H. McIntyre & Associates carried out works to the south east corner of the building. In the course of these works the Lounge was substantially extended out to take in the arcade space to the east. In a second extension to the lounge area carried out in 1954 the extension originally planned by Robertson & Marks and H H Kemp in 1921 was installed to the south of the existing lounge. This extension took in the adjacent corridor and two bar areas.¹¹⁸ The 1954 works were carried out in a style similar to the 1947 alterations. Another major series of works undertaken in 1955, again by R H McIntyre and Associates, involved the partitioning of some of the bedrooms on the third and fourth floors to create bathrooms for adjoining bedrooms.¹¹⁹

In 1957 further alterations were made to the ground floor, this time by Harry A Norris. The main change which took place was the extension of the foyer space. In the process, the existing Saloon Bar, installed in 1928 by Sydney Smith Ogg and Serpell was extended to its present length (the Cricketers' Bar) and the filling in of the arcade. The barber's and chemist's businesses, which had traded from the ground floor shops for many years were removed.¹²⁰ To the rear of the Cricketers' Bar a function room and new lifts replaced the Private Dining Room, Coffee Room, Billiard Room and Smoking Room. The 1957 Norris works also involved the removal of the archway over the main entrance and its replacement by double action glazed doors.¹²¹ In 1959 new bathrooms were installed in various locations throughout the building.¹²²

The next major series of works to the hotel was undertaken in 1961, when the Old White Hart Hotel, now much modified from its original structure, was finally demolished.¹²³ The new Windsor Hotel Annexe was designed by Norris, at a cost of £600,000.¹²⁴

In 1971 alterations were made to the basement of the hotel.¹²⁵

2.7 A Luxury Hotel: The 1980s Restoration and Refurbishment Works

Recent attempts by journalists and others to describe (usually briefly) the history of the hotel from 1920 to the present have been limited to the repetition of a number of oft-quoted generalisations about the hotel's image and status in Melbourne and Victoria, as well as by references to the visits to the Windsor of famous personalities. While it is likely that the very acceptance of these generalisations and time-honoured stories bears witness to their reliability, it is also clear that a great deal of research would be required in order to satisfactorily verify them and to build up a complete picture of the twentieth century history.

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Figure 26 Advertisement for the Hotel Windsor
Source: *The Home*, April 1925



Figure 27 The Hotel Windsor, c.1948

Source: State Library of Victoria Pictures Collection, Image No: pc004100

The following remarks, therefore, should be considered in this light.

Since the 1920s and the grand refurbishment of the Hotel Windsor, the business has had mixed fortunes, though the hotel retained its status as one of the largest and finest hotels in Melbourne. The total refurbishment and alteration of the Menzies Hotel in 1935 might suggest that the Windsor had assumed a degree of pre-eminence in terms of luxury hotels in the city as a result of its 1920s modernisation and upgrading.

George Nipper's original conception of the 'Grand' as a 'family hotel' catering for visitors from rural Victoria and interstate as well as from overseas rang true during this time. After Scott's 'the farmer's delight' Hotel in Collins Street closed in the 1930s, the Windsor was the main hotel for well-heeled rural Victorians in town for shopping or business. As one recent commentator expressed it,

With its quintessential atmosphere of Victorian England, the great all-leather lounge of the Windsor has been the traditional rendezvous for thousands of Victorian and Riverina families as long as they can remember.¹²⁶

Apart from this service, the Windsor was also a home away from home for a regular clientele. Its guest list is said to have rivalled that of the Menzies, reading a little like an international *Who's Who*. The Cricketers' Bar became a regular 'watering-hole' for politicians, journalists and visitors from the country. The bar gradually accumulated its once famous collection of cricket memorabilia.¹²⁷

The Windsor was well known for offering traditional service.

Discreet service, civility and old world charm soon became the Windsor's hallmark. Staff turnover was minimal, so much so that as late as 1971,

more than 110 of the 180 full time staff had five or more years with the hotel.¹²⁸

By the beginning of the 1970s, however, the Windsor and its fine reputation for providing luxury accommodation and service were both under a cloud of doubt and speculation. Shareholders in Windsor Holdings Ltd., the owners of the business, became unhappy with the poor return they were receiving on their investment. In 1976 it was reported that the last dividend paid to shareholders had been in 1972.¹²⁹ The building was badly in need of refurbishment and its accommodation and facilities were no longer considered to be of an international standard.¹³⁰ This fact, combined with an increasing surplus of hotel and motel accommodation in Melbourne led to a decrease in occupancy rates and a decline in profits.¹³¹ At the time much of the blame for the hotel's plummeting fortunes was levelled at the National Trust, which had classified the building in 1974. At that time George Frew, of the Commodore Group, had just put in a \$4.15 million bid for the Windsor. When the Trust's classification became known, Commodore withdrew its bid.¹³² For years, it was suggested that the Trust's classification of the building made the site less likely to attract 'the cupidity and imagination of developers'.¹³³ The 1976 *Annual Report* of the holding company contained a statement from the directors which read:

It is iniquitous to expect 534 shareholders of a public company to bear the intolerable costs of historic building preservation. If the community wishes to see the building preserved it should clearly be responsible for bearing the cost and compensating the owners for foregoing the right to redevelop in the future this prime one-acre site.¹³⁴

For its own part Windsor Holdings Ltd filed a building permit application for the demolition of the building and its replacement with a thirty-eight storey 475 foot (143 m) office block.

This proposal was opposed by a number of parliamentarians and the Melbourne City Council, as well as the National Trust. The Trust filed a 15 point *Statement of Objections to Grant of Permit* with the Melbourne City Council. Its main objection to the development, apart from the loss of the hotel building, was that:

The erection of the said Office Tower will prejudicially affect the surrounding environment which is of outstanding architectural and historical importance.

The proposed Office Tower will dominate, overlook and overshadow surrounding buildings. It will be out of scale and out of character with the surrounding environment and thereby destroy the design integrity of this historic precinct.

From the end of 1974 rumours abounded that the State Government would purchase the building. A refurbishment costing \$200,000 was carried out in 1975-6 and the value of shares increased while there was talk that a Government offer would be forthcoming.¹³⁵ Finally, in December 1976, the State Government made a firm offer of \$4.5 million.

Following the offer and its acceptance, rumours regarding various possibilities for the Windsor's redevelopment intensified. At the time of the Government's purchase of the building, a number of parliamentarians, led by Mr Roberts Dunstan, a senior Government minister, favoured the conversion of the hotel into the state's first legal casino in the city centre.¹³⁶ This idea was strenuously opposed by others in Parliament, however, and it was

eventually decided that the hotel would continue to operate either by the State Government itself, or by professional hoteliers. The latter course of action was pursued, and the successful lessees were Federal Hotels Ltd. who took possession of the building in June 1977, at which time 200 employees were retrenched. The lease was only for three years. Federal Hotels seem not to have done very well on the premises since in October 1979 the Liquor Control Commission threatened to withdraw the hotel's liquor licence because the management had been lax in performing necessary repairs to the building.¹³⁷ With the expiry of the lease in 1980, interest in the hotel was again revived, this time from international hoteliers. A. Khashoggi, of Southern Pacific Hotels, was interested at one stage, as was another Saudi Arabian, Abdulla Fouad, who was a backer of Oberoi International Hotels. Oberoi eventually acquired the lease, for an initial two year period, but with the option, subject to Government approval, of a further twenty.¹³⁸

Extensive refurbishment work was obviously required at this time. Though the Windsor Hotel had been listed on the Historic Buildings Register, after 1982 as a Government-owned building it became exempt from the provisions of the *Historic Buildings Act*. The Builders' Labourers' Federation, with Norm Gallagher in charge, supported the National Trust by threatening black bans on any restoration work unless it was approved by the Trust.¹³⁹ Oberoi eventually agreed to provide \$550,000 or \$225,000 plus 4.5 per cent of total receipts per year towards appropriate works to the building, and to spend a minimum of \$2.52 million in total.

Oberoi's involvement in one of Melbourne's institutions was initially regarded with suspicion by a small number of individuals, who expressed reservations as to the lessee's ability to restore the Windsor to its former grandeur,¹⁴⁰ despite Oberoi's works in other grand hotels, the Mena House Hotel in Cairo, and the Grand Hotel in Calcutta. When the work was completed, however, the *Bulletin* noted that:

the great satisfaction of all Melburnians who have seen the results roughly matches the great opposition with which they greeted Oberoi Hotels and Sheiks Tanini and Fouad [two of Oberoi's backers] when they first appeared.¹⁴¹

The restoration work was carried out by project coordinator Graeme Holdsworth, interior designers, Davenport Campbell and Partners, and heritage consultants Peter Lovell and Suzanne Forge, under the supervision of the Government Buildings Advisory Council. The State Government had been examining the question of what the priorities of restoration of the hotel should be since 1980, when it had commissioned the architectural firm of McIntyre Partners to prepare a *Historic Structures Report* on the building. Following the preparation of the report, the Government Buildings Advisory Council produced two documents, *The Hotel Windsor Draft Statement of Significance and Conservation Policy* (October 1980), and the *Statement of Cultural Significance* (March 1981). At the time the National Trust expressed major reservations regarding the reports, and indicated that the *Historic Structures Report* did not 'clearly establish what were the [sic] most important features of the interior and exterior and the desirable objectives of restoration', and, following on from this, that the *Statement of Cultural Significance* 'was too vague to be used as a basis for establishing what the priorities of restoration should be.'¹⁴²

Despite this, the works went ahead, and the restoration of the interior spaces eventually cost Oberoi an estimated \$8 million. In the course of the works the lobby area was refurbished

and the original arcade leading to the Grand Dining Room was restored. A feature supplement to the *Age* described the rest of the works.

The main staircase has been restored with its ornate timber balustrade and bronze lamps.

Landings on the third and fourth floors have been re-laid in the original ornate mosaic tiles (this was only discovered during construction, having been covered up by carpet for years). Landings on the first and second will also be relaid in mosaic tiles made by master craftsmen to match the originals.

Octagonal mosaic panels are recessed into the intermediate landings, and the stairs are covered by a deep red carpet runner restrained with brass rods. Walls have been painted in original colours with decorative dados and friezes.

The skylight at the top of the stair has been restored and reglazed and again provides natural light into the main stair and foyer of the hotel.

All three main function rooms have been re-decorated with silk wallpapers and suedes.

All bedrooms have been completely re-furbished with wallpaper, new carpets, repainted and finished with period furniture. All are air-conditioned and have been provided with private bathrooms.

Suites in the old wing have been refurbished in original style with Victorian wallpapers, colour combinations, marble fireplaces, Victorian cornices, ceiling roses, period light fittings, antique furniture, and works of art.

The Grand Dining Room has been restored to its original splendour. It was first built in 1883 to the design of Charles Webb. Since that time there had been a number of alterations carried out in the 1920s and 1950s.

The main entrance to the Grand Dining Room has been re-constructed in the original arches, with etched ruby glass panels over solid oak doors and original brass door furniture.

The original furniture, plaster cornices, ceiling roses and ornate plaster mouldings have all been replaced. All surfaces have been repainted in the original colour scheme, including much gold leaf. The glazed domed skylights have been restored, the original wrought iron frames also have been restored having been disused for many years. Coloured curved glass panels have been installed in the domes.

Four large gasoliers have been designed and hand-crafted, based on old photographs of the original gasoliers. The four ceiling pendants and 16 wall-bracket lights were crafted in brass by Graham Edwards (from Mount Helen, near Ballarat), under the supervision of Peter Lovell.

Stained glass and leadlight window panels at each end of the diningroom have been re-constructed based on original designs. Two marble fire-places were re-introduced where the old ones had been removed, chimneys have been reopened so that open fires can be enjoyed in winter.

The grand Diningroom is equipped with specially chosen period furniture, clocks, silverware and cutlery, befitting the grand manner of the Victorian era, and the new air-conditioning system is fully concealed so as to be unobtrusive in the ornate ceiling design.¹⁴³

For its part, the Victorian State Government contributed \$3 million for the upgrading of the hotel's fire protection services, roof works and a full façade restoration which was also undertaken at this time and completed in 1984.¹⁴⁴ The restored Windsor Hotel was officially reopened on 24 February 1983, exactly 100 years after construction began on the Grand Hotel.¹⁴⁵

2.8 The Hotel Windsor into the twenty-first century

Redevelopment works at the Hotel Windsor site continued well into the late twentieth century. In 1983, it was proposed to reconstruct the kerb and guttering in front of the entrance to the hotel to make more obvious the space for cars to pull in, and associated works in the form of Spring and Bourke Streets footpath reconstruction and the erection of four luminaries on the footpath to the front of the Hotel Windsor were completed in 1985-86.

Also at this time, in an attempt to raise money during the economic depression of the 1980s, the Victorian Government began selling some of its surplus public buildings and in late 1989 it announced that it would be calling tenders for the sale of the Hotel Windsor. As the management lease that the Oberoi Hotel Corporation held was not due to expire until 2002, the organisation immediately announced that it would be tendering for the purchase and on 24 April 1990 it was announced that it had won the tender for \$17.7 million.¹⁴⁶ In the same year, the Windsor Hotel was added to the Victorian Register of Historic Buildings to provide protection for the heritage significance of the building.

From this time, a variety of restoration and refurbishment works were proposed, including restoration of the principal reception rooms, remodelling and redecoration of guest rooms and the restoration of original internal decorative schemes. Most of the proposed works were later approved but ultimately not undertaken, and it was not until 1994 that the next major refurbishment works were undertaken to the hotel. The works involved the complete renovation of 29 bathrooms and the redecoration of 43 rooms spread over four floors in the north wing (1961 Windsor Hotel Annexe), and the renovation of the seven bathrooms to the old wing suites, the redecoration of 62 rooms, the renovation of two standard bathrooms, and the installation of new air-conditioning units in the original hotel building. No structural changes were involved in any of these works.¹⁴⁷

A further \$10 million refurbishment was completed in just two years later. As part of this refurbishment, the former Lounge on the corner of Bourke and Spring Streets was converted to a Hard Rock Café restaurant which opened in October 1995. This work was undertaken to provide restaurant facilities which were accessible to the public as well as to hotel guests, and to provide the hotel with a less formal dining space than the main dining room. Additional function rooms were also installed at this time and the Winston Room was upgraded.¹⁴⁸

HOTEL WINDSOR

Most recently, ownership of the Windsor again changed hands when it was purchased in June 2005 by Windsor Hotel Holdings for \$35 million. As part of the sale however, the management of the hotel remained the same, with the Oberoi Group maintaining this responsibility.¹⁴⁹