



# 40 ODD PUBS

Leon Rowley visits the Victoria Hotel in Strathalbyn and finds a true period piece

## The Victoria Hotel

WORDS LEON ROWLEY PHOTOGRAPHY GRANT NOWELL

**T**he Victoria Hotel has looked out over Strathalbyn's Angas Park for nearly 150 years. From the street it appears little has changed since it was built. A balcony was added in the late 1890s, but the narrow façade gives no indication of the major renovations that took place a century after that.

Walking in through the lounge bar, you come to a large dining room that was created by connecting the pub to the old barn out the back with a lofty, lightweight roof. The original stone walls and timbers of the barn were retained, giving the room an unusual combination of solid heritage and light-filled space. A water feature and garden behind a large glass wall gives an almost al fresco feel to the room. A first-floor door remains, far out of reach in what was once the rear external wall of the hotel.

Throughout the hotel are historic

photographs of the town and the pub, which show just how little the streetscape has changed.

Owners Doug and Kate Walters took the helm in 2000. "Over the past 12 years we've tried to make this a place for family and community," says Doug. "We sponsor a lot of community groups like sporting clubs, CFS, SES and so on. We try to spread out and do as much as we can."

One of the first things the couple did was to look into the history of the hotel.

"When we took over, the name had been changed to Victoria On The Park," says Doug. "We went back to the original name, and looked at old photos to try and work out the original paint scheme. We've gone with what we think it looked like around 1900, after the balcony was built. It's a lot of work, trying to find out the history."

He points out a few scattered buckets

collecting drips from the ceiling. "We're re-roofing at the moment," he says. "It still has 1860s roofing in parts, as you can see."

Leaky heritage aside, the historical research turned up a few stories. "There's the usual stuff," Doug says. "Old blokes getting tipsy and putting their horse and cart off embankments and so on. We had a clairvoyant visit us one day who said there was a ghost here – a young woman in 1800s dress. Looking through documents later on, we found a police report of 25-year-old Mary Warring who died of Typhoid in the hotel in 1867."

Doug and Kate haven't seen her themselves, despite living upstairs for four years, so they take the story with a grain of salt.

It's possible that rather than seeing a ghost, the clairvoyant was merely



channelling Miranda, Irma or one of the other Appleyard College girls who disappeared while picnicking at Hanging Rock: the Victoria Hotel featured in the famous 1975 Peter Weir film.

These days the young men and women who frequent the Victoria Hotel tend to be less ethereal, but Doug says the pub enjoys a good-natured crowd in spite of being the only place in town with a 2am licence. "We don't accept drunks coming in late," Doug says. "Any form of antisocial behaviour isn't tolerated and the customers respect that. They understand when it's time to order a glass of water."

The younger crowd congregate in the front bar, which features some unusual décor. The walls around the pool table area are clad to shoulder-height with metal chequer-plate. It stops errant pool cues taking chunks out of the paint and gives a striking, industrial feel to the room.

Acoustic musicians perform in the bar during the warmer months, and karaoke is a popular event on the first Saturday of every month. "It's actually a cross between karaoke and an open-mic

night," says Doug. "There are guitars and microphones, or you can bring your own instruments. You can even get your performance recorded if you want. We always get two or three motel rooms booked for it every month."

The Victoria has 10 motel units, which cater mostly to weekend travellers and people visiting for work. "During vintage we get a lot of people from overseas," says Kate. "We also see a lot of mining people and travelling businessmen."

Bar and accommodation trade is good, but the dining room is the heart of the business as well as the building. Serving an average 1,200 meals a week, it's not fancy but it is filling. "We're known for consistently good pub food," says Kate. "Monday to Friday lunchtimes there's nothing over \$10."

Monday is curry night, with all you can eat plus a glass of Longview wine for \$20, and you can try 14 kinds of schnitzel topping on Thursday nights.

The most popular dishes are the Vic squid and the beer battered fish and chips, both served in traditional fashion on the Vic's in-house newspaper. "We also do a

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16 Albyn Terrace, Strathalbyn  
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**Average price of a main course:** \$18.

**Anything for kids?:** \$6 kids' menu which includes a glass of soft drink.

**Specialty dishes:** The Vic Squid – their version of the traditional salt and pepper squid, served on their in-house newspaper.

**Famous for:** The pub featured in Peter Weir's classic film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*; 500 tonnes of dirt was brought in to cover the asphalt in Albyn Terrace.

**Significant others:** Bigger on the inside than it is on the outside!

great lamb's fry and bacon," says Doug. "We have people that come from Salisbury for it – they reckon it's the best ever."

"We're happy here. It's a beautiful town and the people are friendly," says Kate. "We're firmly entrenched. We've been here 12 years now, so we're almost locals."\*