

Attachment B

Heckle Lane – Historical Justification

Historical justification – Heckle Lane

Heckle Lane is named for the historical activity of political candidates in local and state elections holding public meetings on the balcony of the Clarendon Hotel, with members of the public heckling them from below.

Surry Hills was one of Sydney's most densely populated suburbs at the turn of the 19th century. Its population doubled in the 20 years after 1870, with a peak of 30,000 people living there by 1890. In this year, there were 91 Public houses, or pubs, in Surry Hills.¹ Pubs were a focus for social gatherings for the local community, given that many of the houses were small, damp and mean.

Pubs played an important role in political campaigning in central Sydney in the decades from mid-1880 through until the end of World War 1 when 6 o'clock closing was introduced. Political candidates in municipal elections, and sometimes in state elections, visited pubs in their wards or electorates to speak at public meetings where they spruiked their credentials and canvased for votes. Novelist Kylie Tenant observed that municipal elections captured the exclusive interest of Surry Hills locals at the turn of the century, and that a 'rowdy carnival atmosphere surrounded the street meetings.'²

The Clarendon Hotel, on the corner of Devonshire and Waterloo streets in Surry Hills, was the scene of many boisterous political meetings in the lead up to council elections between 1885 and 1915. Candidates used the hotel to broadcast their candidacy for local and state elections. Newspaper reports document that large crowds gathered outside the pub to watch and listen to potential candidates spruik their credentials. The speakers typically stood on the hotel balcony to address the crowds below.

During the late 1880s and 1890s, the messaging at these gatherings focussed on municipal matters like lighting and street formation, as well as trade tariffs.³ In 1886 Alderman William Kippax addressed ratepayers from the Clarendon Hotel balcony, stating that it had been 25 years since he first sought election and that he'd played a role in transforming the ward 'from the wilderness it then was into what it was now'.⁴

Throughout Cornelius 'Con' Ryan's tenure as licensee from 1899 to 1909, the gatherings tended to be addressed by candidates aligned to the labour movement. There were also independent candidates, such as Richard Watkins Richards in June 1904, who although 'not a labor nominee ... was pretty well known as the friend of the workers'.⁵

In July 1904, a 'huge, orderly, enthusiastic meeting' took place at the hotel in support of controversial journalist, newspaper proprietor, state politician and local alderman, John Norton. Norton had been a trade union delegate and leading propagandist for the emergent labour movement of the 1880s, and he was later aligned with the conservative Protectionist movement. (In the 19th and early 20th century, there were 2 political parties in NSW that ran with policies based on trade, taxes and tariffs: the Protectionists and the Free Traders). Norton's newspaper, *Truth*, became increasingly popular among the working classes. At a meeting at the Clarendon Hotel on 31 July 1904, Norton condemned the 'diabolical tactics' of the supporters of rival alderman, John 'Jack'

¹ Christopher Keating, *Surry Hills: the city's backyard*, Hale & Ironmonger, 1991, p. 61.

² Christopher Keating, *Surry Hills: The city's backyard*, Hale & Ironmonger, 1991, p 68.

³ 'South Sydney Election', *Daily Telegraph*, 13 February 1893, 4, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article235947379>.

⁴ 'Alderman Kippax's Candidature', *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 November 1886, p. 6. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/23931879>.

⁵ 'Surry-Hills', *Daily Telegraph*, 11 June 1904, 13, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article236880152>.

Waine.⁶ In 1906 the Clarendon Hotel hosted a meeting of a reported 3,000 people who again gathered to see and listen to Norton.⁷ In November 1915, Lord Mayor R W Richards met with 'considerable opposition' when he addressed a meeting from the hotel's balcony, where he was heckled and assailed with questions from aggrieved returned servicemen.⁸

Pub balconies provided an elevated platform for political candidates of all stripes to demonstrate their oratory skills to address the crowds on the streets below, with meetings often held late at night. The popularity of public political meetings arose because much of the population was illiterate in the 19th century, which meant that many people were unable to read broadsheets or tabloids to get their news first-hand. Aside from the printed and spoken word, there were no other ways to receive information.

Factors that contributed to the decline of public political meetings in pubs including early closing in 1916, a rising literacy rate, increasing motor vehicles on the roads, and the replacement of balconies with suspended awnings.



This elevation plan shows the Devonshire Street façade of the Clarendon Hotel with an outline of the original balcony to be demolished and a new awning. The 'Proposed alterations to Clarendon Hotel...for M Halpin Esq.' by architect Francis P Ryan, were approved October 1924 (City of Sydney Archives, A-00556071, <https://archives.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/nodes/view/1424647>)

Prepared by the City of Sydney History Team

⁶ 'Wednesday Night', *Truth*, 31 July 1904, 9, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167893721>; 'John Charles Waine', *Sydney's Aldermen*, accessed 15 March 2024, <https://www.sydneyaldermen.com.au/alderman/john-waine/>; 'John Norton', *Sydney's Aldermen*, accessed 15 March 2024, <https://www.sydneyaldermen.com.au/alderman/john-norton/>.

⁷ 'Mr. Norton's Candidature', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 July 1906, p. 12, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article14787653>.

⁸ 'Lord Mayor Heckled', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 November 1915, p. 8, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/15622802>.