

**City Gallery**

Melbourne Town Hall

Gallery Times

Monday 10am–2pm

Tuesday–Thursday 11am–6pm

Friday 11am–6.30pm

Saturday 10am–2pm

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**Melbourne  
Breweries**  
The First &  
Last Factories

MB



'Poster', 1967, photo  
Mark Strizic, courtesy  
Gallery 101.

Until a decade or so ago, the Carlton Brewery topped Swanston Street, while the opposite view was framed by the Shrine of Remembrance. The prominence of these two secular shrines was emphasised by journalists and other pundits, anxious to portray the Southern capital as a down-to-earth metropolis, defined by an idiosyncratic mixture of pleasure and solemnity.

That Melbourne's main drag was topped by a brewery is more than a cultural talking point. Breweries became part of Melbourne's identity partly because they have been around for so long. Brewing has a strong claim to be the first large-scale manufacturing industry. Breweries increased output through enlarged scale, rather than new production techniques.

A small number of breweries maintained a manufacturing presence in and around the city centre long into the twentieth century, outlasting other city factories and sustaining the presence of industrial life among the retail and office workplace of the city. Apart from occupying some prime real estate, the architecture of the breweries proclaimed their function unambiguously. In its final decades, Carlton capped its brewery with giant neon advertisements, making the point even clearer. The breweries have been anchors on the landscape, not least because their massive masonry perimeter walls ran up to the street frontage, creating a secretive shield into which hundreds of men would disappear and emerge, while aromatic smells and fleets of beer trucks were regularly sent forth.

Until the 1950s there was little automated labour at Melbourne's breweries. Although the workforce included many skilled workers, from biochemists to coopers, most of the work was repetitive, back-breaking or both. Sacks of barley and other materials were loaded, carried and unloaded by a small army of labourers. Another legion washed, inspected, packed and carried bottles. The structure of command was hierarchical and strict, reflected in workplace signs barking from the walls.

Despite this, many unskilled workers stayed for decades, partly because of relatively generous wages and job security. Free bars open 24 hours a day helped to generate loyalty. Also important was the centrality to working class life of beer, before it became another drink, another leisure option. The advent of forklifts, steel casks and 10 o'clock closing all signalled the decline of this brewery work culture.

### **The drinking capital**

Within a few decades of its foundation, Victoria led the Australian colonies in beer consumption. 84 litres per person was the annual Victorian average during the 1870s. This thirst was slaked by 126 commercial breweries spread across the colony; transport was poor and colonial beer spoiled quickly, so any town of substance boasted at least one brewery.

But Melbourne was already established as the drinking and brewing capital. By 1878, Melbourne boasted more than one thousand hotels, one hotel for every 247 people. Many city intersections had hotels on two or three of their four corners. The booming Melbourne market financed the construction of a new generation of large breweries. During the 1880s and 1890s these breweries forced imported beer from the mainstream market and overwhelmed their smaller rivals, taking advantage of improved transport and brewing technology. About twenty breweries were operating in Melbourne during these years, the number varying with mergers, new entrants and the demise of others from fierce competition. The names of the survivors are still familiar – Carlton, Victoria, Fosters and Abbotsford.

The breweries were also familiar, and not merely from their size and locations. The distinctiveness of brewery architecture was created largely by their production layout, notably the need for a multi-storeyed brewing tower. The brewing tower was the common architectural element of these buildings, setting them apart from more generic factories. Generally of five levels or more, the brewing tower placed the different steps in the brewing process sequentially from top to bottom. Steam provided the power to hoist and pump materials to the top floor of the tower, gravity took them back down through the brewing process. The steps in the brewing process and the brewing tower are outlined in the centre pages.

### **Landmarks**

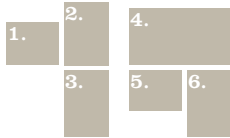
The height of the brewing tower was exploited by the breweries' architects. Before modern communications media developed, factory architecture was a major marketing form, frequently depicted in commercial art. Prominent city locations encouraged this practice. Some of Melbourne's leading architects designed breweries, notably William Pitt, creator of the Victoria Brewery's battlements and turrets.

Melbourne's brewing towers were usually capped with a mansard roof, a steeply sloped structure culminating with a decorative balustrade, platform and flagpole. The roof and its ornamental openings provided space and ventilation for the mill and vats within. However during the 1870s and 1880s the mansard roof was also an emblem of French Second Empire architecture. The rebuilding of Paris at this time gained the attention of architects everywhere, with particular attention focussed on its flamboyant centrepiece, Charles Garnier's Paris Opera. Mansard roofs also topped the towers of many Australian public buildings completed at this time – Collingwood Town Hall is an example, but brewing towers were a favourite location.

The other common feature of brewery architecture was the combination of closed arches and arched windows with polychromatic brickwork. This industrial interpretation of the Romanesque style may have been introduced to Melbourne by the leading architect James Wood after a visit to Italy during the 1860s, some time before the Romanesque revival in the USA began to influence commercial and public buildings in Australia. Most of the surviving brewery buildings in Melbourne express this distinctive aesthetic, as do several other industrial and warehouse buildings.

### **The survivors**

By 1900 several breweries had been forced from the Melbourne market through closures and amalgamations. The economic depression of the 1890s also made its mark. With only a few exceptions the major brewery sites at 1900 remained as such for much of the twentieth century.

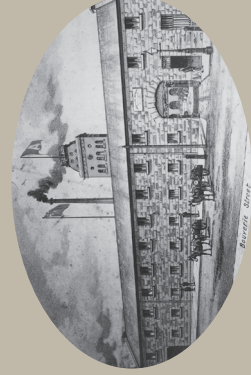


1. Carlton Brewery about 1960, courtesy CUB Archives.
2. Castlemaine Brewery 2004, photo C Pickett
3. Yorkshire Brewery 1989, photo C Pickett.
4. Victoria Brewery about 1920, courtesy R. Corporation.
5. Carlton Brewery about 1940, courtesy CUB Archives.
6. Castlemaine Maltings (Malthouse Theatre) 2004, photo C Pickett.



4

Fourth (top) floor: Malted barley, the main ingredient of beer, was crushed through a roller mill, while hot water was pumped to the hot liquor tank from boilers below.



3

Third floor: Malt and hot water was mixed in the mash tun to convert the starch into fermentable sugars. The spent malt grains were removed.

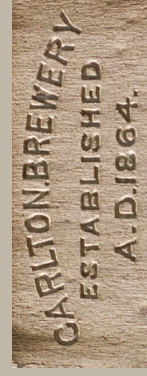
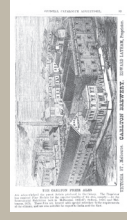
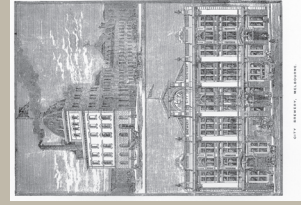


### VICTORIA BREWERY - QUART BOTTLE & CAN STOCKS - DATE:

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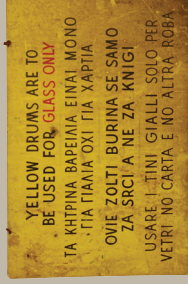
2

Second floor: The resulting 'wort' liquid was mixed with hops.



1

Ground floor: The hops were separated, the wort was cooled and yeast was added to begin fermentation. Excess yeast was skimmed from the beer, hops and other cleansing materials were added and it was run into fermenting tanks.



Images (from top left to right)

Carlton Brewery 1873, courtesy CUB Archives.

Carlton's Hotel, Spencer Street, 1964, photos Corporation staff, City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection.

Blackbeard and sign, Victoria Brewery, courtesy R. Corporation.

Victoria Brewery 1990s, courtesy R. Corporation.

Delivery trucks, Carlton Brewery 1950s, courtesy CUB Archives.

Carlton Malt Store about 1920, courtesy CUB Archives.

'City Brewery, Melbourne', AC Cooke, 1883, courtesy University of Sydney Library.

Carlton advertisement about 1880, courtesy CUB Archives.

Foundation stone, Carlton Brewery 2004, photo C. Pickett.

Sign, Victoria Brewery, courtesy R. Corporation.

Victoria Brewery 1889, photo C. Pickett.

**1. Carlton Brewery and Melbourne Brewing and Malting Company,**  
Bouverie and Swanston Streets.

Brewing took place on this site from 1858 to 1987. Theodore Rosenberg established the North Melbourne Brewery there, renamed Carlton Brewery in 1864 by its new owners.

The bluestone office buildings on Bouverie Street were constructed in 1865, and extended during the 1880s for the Melbourne Brewing and Malting Company, one of the business names used during this period of expansion and amalgamations. These are the only brewery buildings still standing on the site, apart from the Malt Store built on Swanston Street in 1904-5. The Malt Store kept hops and sugar as well as malted barley, while its basement contained fermenting tanks for new beer from the brew tower.

**2. Castlemaine Brewery,**  
Queensbridge and Sturt Streets,  
South Melbourne.

Melbourne gained a Castlemaine Brewery in 1871, part of an interstate network of sister breweries in Sydney, Newcastle, Brisbane and Perth.

Built in 1888, the Castlemaine brewing tower in Queensbridge Street worked until 1907, when the brewery became one of the six amalgamated to form Carlton and United Breweries (CUB). The tower now houses offices, while its peaked roof supports a massive advertising billboard.

The 1892 maltings building is a few blocks away in Sturt Street, converted in 1990 to the Malthouse Theatre. Malthouses have large floors and kilns for germinating and roasting barley grain.

**3. Yorkshire Brewery,**  
Wellington Street, Collingwood.

Yorkshireman John Wood built a small brewery in 1861 next to his Yorkshire Hotel in Wellington Street, and was sufficiently successful to finance the construction of a six-story brewing tower in 1876.

A successful architect of residences, factories and hotels, Wood's son James excelled himself with his father's brewing tower, creating one of the most visible landmarks of inner Melbourne.

The Yorkshire Brewery worked until the financial crisis of 1892 sent the business into liquidation. Purchased by CUB in 1909, it was used as a cooperage until the 1950s, when most of the brewery buildings were converted for use as a maltings; the concrete grain silos were constructed as part of the conversion.

**4. Victoria Brewery,**  
Victoria Parade, East Melbourne.

Founded in 1854, the Victoria Brewery was floated on the stock exchange during the 1890s and its new London owners financed the construction of a new brew house and lager cellars to the design of William Pitt, who introduced the distinctive castellated exteriors. This was repeated by the architects of later additions to the brewery, most of which were built after 1907, when Victoria became part of CUB.

Victoria Brewery closed in 1983, and after some years of neglect is being redeveloped for residential and commercial use. Tribeca is Melbourne's highest profile redevelopment of an industrial site. Although this profile was heightened through the involvement of French designer Philippe Starck, the prominence and character of the former brewery played its own part.

**5. Fosters Brewery,**  
Rokeby Street, Collingwood.

Australia's best-known brand name originated in 1888 when New Yorkers William and Ralph Foster opened one of Australia's first lager breweries. Instead of the English-style ales produced by its competitors, Fosters offered the European lagers which would become the Australian favourite during the twentieth century. Lager brewing required newly developed refrigeration technology, and the Foster brothers quickly sold their expensive project, returning to US obscurity. Not so their namesake beer, which was brewed by CUB at Victoria Brewery after Fosters closed in 1910.

The brew house was converted to use as a maltings, and was finally demolished in 1997.

**6. Abbotsford Brewery,**  
Bent Street, Abbotsford.

Abbotsford Brewery was established in 1904 as the Melbourne Co-operative Brewery, financed by a group of 'free' hotelkeepers. At this time most publicans were 'tied' to the major brewers, selling only one brewery's products, a situation which allowed the breweries to fix prices. Exploiting publicans' discontent, Abbotsford competed successfully until the 1920s, when it amalgamated with CUB. Since 1987 it has become CUB's sole Melbourne brewery, the largest in Australia.

## 7. City Brewery,

Collins and Little Collins Streets.

Scottish brothers Robert and Peter McCracken founded a small brewery in 1851. During the 1880s their City Brewery was floated as a public company with 130 employees, its buildings dominated the western end of Collins Street and its output (500 barrels per brew) was surpassed only by the Carlton Brewery.

Affected by the 1890s depression, the City Brewery became part of Carlton and United Breweries. It was the first of these to cease brewing, and leaves no architectural or brewing heritage.

7.

Panorama of Melbourne with City Brewery in foreground about 1900, photo by R. Scott. City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection.



As breweries became fewer in number, so did hotels. The temperance movement created numerous 'dry' hotels, and tougher laws for the rest. Almost one third of Melbourne's hotels were closed between 1907 and 1917. By the later date they were also required to close at 6pm, a restriction that lasted until the 1960s.

Despite this, beer production and consumption increased steadily for most of the twentieth century. CUB rebuilt most of its hotels with larger bar areas, and took advantage of the lack of competing retailers. CUB also built many new hotels including the Sir Robert Peel Hotel, which in 1914 replaced the Yorkshire Hotel as the brewery local on the corner of Wellington and Peel streets. As breweries borrowed the fashionable architecture of their time, transformed by industrial function to something new, so did the hotels designed for CUB and other hoteliers.

City redevelopment destroyed many more hotels, focussing the trade on the CBD fringes and inner suburbs until a new generation of city bars sprang up during the 1980s. So did a few small breweries, breathing new variety into the brewing scene.

In the midst of accelerating urban change, the surviving breweries remain as opportunities and questions. Will the Yorkshire Brewery tower crumble away, Sphinxlike, over centuries? Will the Tribeca tranformation of Victoria Brewery spark similar projects? What will replace Carlton Brewery at the top of Swanston Street? It's hard to imagine that it could create a similarly resonant urban mythology.

**Dr Charles Pickett** curator