

'Notorious' old watering hole goes on the market in Waitara

TARA SHASKEY

The 'last man standing' of Waitara's original hotels is up for sale.

Masonic Hotel Waitara manager Denise Mackle said while the establishment, built in the 1880s, was steeped in notorious history, it had in recent years undergone a huge face-lift and business had gone from strength to strength.

"It used to be typical New Zealand pub accommodation, now it's the jewel in the crown," she said.

"We're the last remaining establishment in Waitara and that's pretty huge."

More than 130 years ago, people looking for a place to spend the night or for a cold brew to down were flush for choice, with a trio of establishments creating a hub of activity in the North Taranaki township.

The Bridge Hotel was destroyed by fire three times and was rebuilt twice and the Waitara Hotel was demolished less than a ten years ago, leaving the Masonic the only hotel in the town to have survived

the test of time.

Publican Wayne Young, who had been involved in hotel ownership and management for many years, at one time owning 10 establishments, bought the business in the mid-1980s.

Young, who also once owned both the Bridge and the Waitara hotels, invested up to half a million dollars into a complete revamp of the historic Masonic, transforming it from a rundown state into boutique accommodation.

In December 2014, Wayne, aged 87, died and the hotel, in the town's centre on McLean St, was now owned by his estate and recently put on the market.

The building and business are for sale by tender with Bayleys real estate.

Mackle, who took over management of the hotel from Pat Corrigan about two years ago, said it would be ideal if the future owner was somebody from Waitara.

"That would be beautiful.

"It would be absolutely ideal if it were somebody who knows the town, knows the people and has an appreciation for this establish-

ment," she said.

Mackle said there was a lot of history within the building's walls.

She said the back bar, soon to undergo development, often roused memories for the locals.

"It's really fascinating.

"People really like having a look in here.

"The stories that I've heard... I've had people go 'I saw so and so get their head bashed into a leaner over there and someone else got a bottle put into their head over there'."

Corrigan, who managed the establishment for about 30 years, said the hotel, which now boasts eight modern rooms, a dining area and bar as well as a gaming room, meant a lot to the Waitara community.

There were too many memories for him to share, saying most of it was "small town stuff".

"We made the newspaper a few times, mostly for the wrong reasons," he quipped.

But the recent modernisation and the focus on accommodation had seen the patronage grow again, he said.



Former manager Pat Corrigan and current manager Denise Mackle said the Masonic Hotel Waitara has grown in strength.

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