

In 1907, the Victorian Government launched a concerted campaign to reduce the number of hotel licenses in the state by at least a third.

The Licenses Reduction Act empowered a Board to examine on a district-by-district basis every hotel in the state to assess the history of compliance with liquor laws, its necessity for the general public, and, in later years, whether there was an adequate service in providing meals and accommodation.

Given neither Northcote nor Preston had ever seen an excessive number of hotels, the examination locally didn't come until 1921, by which time over 1,000 licenses in inner Melbourne had been revoked.

Two locals were de-licensed, the [Bridge Hotel](#) on the bank of the Merri Creek in Northcote and the Prince Albert on the south-western corner of High and Showers Street in Preston.

The Prince Alfred didn't go down without a fight, however.

After the owners were given notice that the license was to be withdrawn from 31 December, they appealed for a rehearing, their representative claiming that the Licenses Reduction Board had not sufficiently considered the accommodation available at competing premises (almost certainly the junction and Gowerville Hotels) and that it had not followed the procedures set own in the 1915 Act. No fresh evidence was tendered, however, and the Board after outlining the procedures it had followed in reaching its decision refused the application for a new hearing.

The owner of the Bridge Inn (Gustav Beer), received a compensation payment of £1000, the licensee, Laura Regan £300; the Prince Alfred (Mrs M. Macnamara), £1,250 and (Catherine Mulqueeny), £400. The combined total for the Prince Alfred was the second highest of 18 hotel premises de-licensed in 1921, Mrs Mulqueeny taking over and rebuilding the Preston Arms Hotel in later years.

As well as examining individual hotels, the Act enabled the holding of Local Option polls

1930 saw the last of the so-called Local Option Polls, but one with two major differences.

Early polls were held by local electorate and presented voters with three options - removal of all licences from their district, a reduction in the number of licenses, or continuing with the existing number subject to the rulings of the Licences Reduction Board.

Booroondara and Nunawading in Melbourne's east had earlier opted to eliminate licenses entirely.



There had been no poll in the Darebin district, but in 1930, the Act was modified to allow a state-wide poll, the options simply Yes to allow the Board to continue (although it had virtually outlived its purpose) or "No license" which would mean all licenses would be revoked.

Given the legislation required a 60% "No license" vote, few if any commentators gave the abolitionists any chance of success, nor did they in practical terms support the proposal.

At a time when the Great Depression was starting to have a major impact on the community, a "No license" vote across Victoria would have meant hotel, wine, railway refreshment rooms, club, grocer's, merchants and steamship packet license all would have been eliminated; some 2,500 in total with an estimated 12,000 people directly employed likely to be added to the rapidly growing unemployment figures and with the virtual elimination of the growing of hops and barley in the state.

There would also have been a loss of around £329,000 in revenue, estimated at £61,000 currently distributed from the licensing funds to municipal councils, £23,000 from the police superannuation fund, and £245,000 from consolidated revenue.

Other than Booroondara and Nunawading, the only other licenses that were not to be affected by a "No license" resolution were 12 hotels in the Mallee and a handful in other country areas that were exempted through improvements previously ordered by the Licenses Reduction Board.

Although the practicality must have been open to question, the legislation allowed brewers and distillers to continue to manufacture for export purposes and to supply the exempted licenses.

Under the proposed legislation, wine could still be exported, although the shipping of spirits to the U.S.A., then with prohibition laws in place, was banned.

Liquor could be imported privately and "drinking clubs" established provided the premises were kept in good order, and perhaps something more of a worry, liquor could be manufactured at home for personal consumption.

The other variation for the 1930 poll given that it was a State referendum was that voting was made compulsory with a potential £2 fine for those failing to express their opinion (perhaps opting to spend the afternoon in the pub)!

At the time the 1930 results were published, there were 1,029,220 voters on the roll, 497,531 male and 531,689 female, and it was estimated some 93% had voted.

By comparison, in 1920, the year of the previous major Local Option Polls, it was estimated that 62.2% of around 868,850 of voters lodged their option, the "No License" ticket registering 40.3%, continuation of the existing numbers 52.9%, and perhaps surprisingly the License Reduction Board's activities which were generally favoured, just 6.8% for a reduction in their local district.

The License Reduction Board's work, first commence in 1907, was nearly at an end.

The Board's 1930 report claimed that in 1907 when it was formulated - remembering that the number of hotels had already been reduced but over one-third since the

introduction of the 1885 Licensing Act - the number of hotels had been reduced from 3,507 (or roughly one per 360 people) to 1,814, or one per 974.

Perhaps equally significant (although somewhat subjective in terms of police and community attitudes), the number of arrests for public drunkenness had dropped from 8.93 per 1000 to just 4.03 in 1930.

As to the local figures, most of today's Darebin was split across three State electorates - Northcote, Heidelberg and Clifton Hill.

There were few surprises.

The number of female voters was somewhat higher than the State average, 52.9% as opposed to 51.6%, but of 28 polling booths in the three electorates (around ten of which did not relate to today's Darebin), just four returned more than a 50% "No License" vote - predictably the leafy areas of Ivanhoe and Alphington, rather less so the Tyler Street school in Preston by a comparatively narrow margin and strongly bucking the trend in other areas of Preston, and Delbridge in Fitzroy, the area from the Edinburgh Gardens south-east to Queen's Parade.

The Tyler Street booth in Preston was the only one officially in the boundaries of Northcote and Preston of the time to record a "No License" vote.

Northcote Electorate	Total	22105	
	Male	10,622	48.1%
	Female	11,483	51.9%
	No Licenses	No Change	
Croxton	1,795	2,472	42.1%
Dennis	847	1,200	41.4%
Northcote	2,386	3,822	38.4%
Northcote South East	323	371	46.5%
Thornbury	1,850	2,199	45.7%
Thornbury West	1,095	1,429	43.4%
Postal	108	140	43.5%
Total	8,404	11,633	41.9%
Informal	112		

Heidelberg Electorate	Total	25,753	
	Male	12,114	47.0%
	Female	13,639	53.0%
	No Licenses	No Change	
Preston	1,689	2,856	37.2%
Hotham Street school	825	1,238	40.0%
Murray Road school	1,138	1,321	46.3%
Sylvester Grove school	252	353	41.7%
Tyler Street school	1,489	1,427	51.1%
Reservoir	673	998	40.3%
Ivanhoe	2,733	1,709	61.5%
Heidelberg	1,018	1,061	49.0%
Heidelberg West	201	238	45.8%
Mont Park	38	81	31.9%
Bell	516	792	39.4%
Austin Hospital	47	51	48.0%
Postal	148	177	45.5%
Total	10,767	12,302	46.7%
Informal	137		

Clifton Hill Electorate	Total	22,801	
	Male	10,766	47.2%
	Female	12,035	52.8%
	No Licenses	No Change	
Alphington	812	739	52.4%
Fairfield	1,724	2,033	45.9%
Clifton Hill	1,139	2,492	31.4%
Spensley Street	706	1,179	37.5%
Fitzroy North	502	1,736	22.4%
Delbridge	822	785	51.2%
Miller Street	700	1,142	38.0%
St. George's Road	307	569	35.0%
Northcote South	800	854	48.4%
Simpson Street	521	736	41.4%
Postal	112	142	44.1%
Total	8,145	12,407	39.6%
Informal	147		

The published figures represented approximately 93% of the total votes with some absentee and non-enrolled votes still to be counted, but with little impact on the overall result expected.

Given the small but still significant majority of female voters, it would be fascinating to know just how the fairer sex voted compared with their male counterparts, but of course, voting cards could not identify the voter's gender, so we will never know!