

James Soden

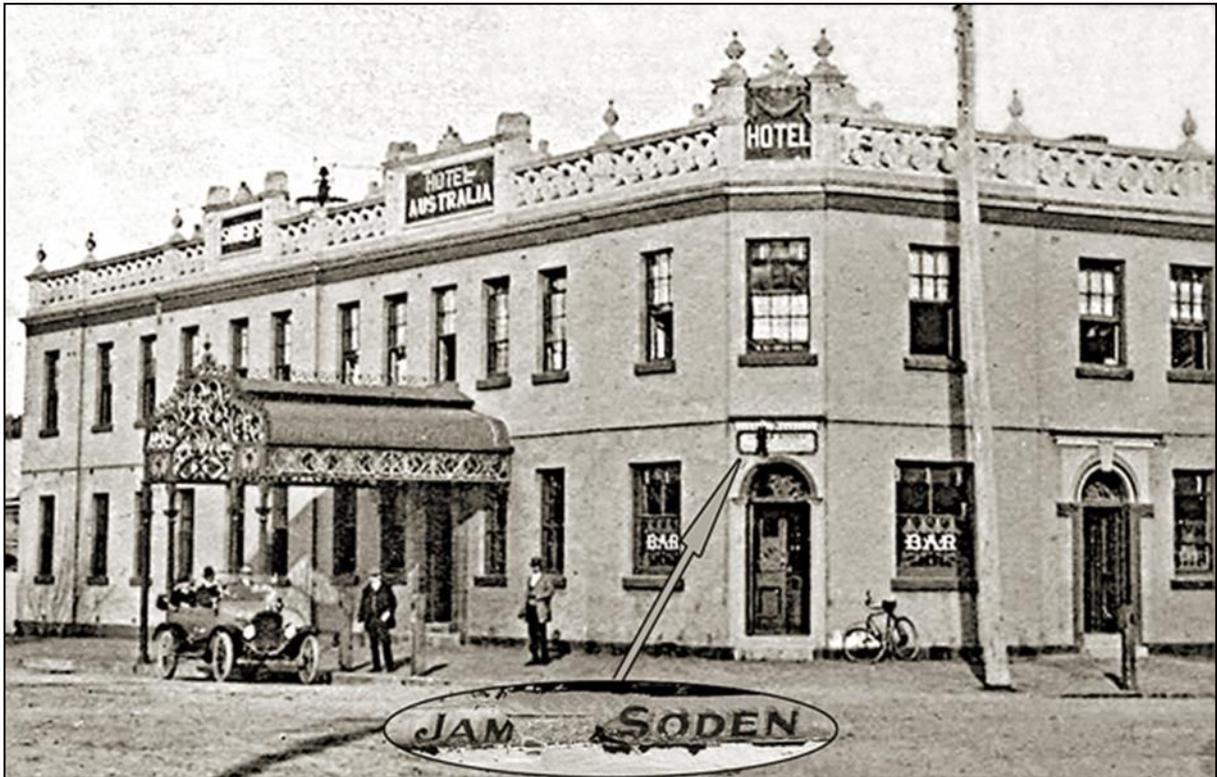
Ray Gear

In November 2020, part of the historic verandah on the 'Hotel Australia' sustained significant damage, exposing the name James Soden above where an original corner door was positioned.

At the time that James Layton began building his two-storey public house, Wilson Street was the main northern entry into Albury. First licensed as a hotel in December 1858 to Arthur Walker under the name 'Advance Australia Hotel' the building was later converted to Police Barracks for thirteen years.

In January 1877 the premises were relicensed and were operated over the next seventeen years by several different licensees until 1894 when the license was transferred from Mary Crisp to Irishman James Soden.

Little is known of when and why James Soden came to Albury. In the early 1890s it is said he cleaned boots at Charles Schmiedt's Albury Hotel. In 1894 he held for some seven weeks the license of the Market Hotel on the corner of Dean and Olive Streets.



A photo of Soden's Hotel Australia in the 1920s. Inset below is the sign that was revealed after the damage done in late 2020.

James Soden, then aged thirty-five became licensee of the Advance Australia Hotel in September 1894, purchasing the hotel in February 1899 from James Layton. For nearly forty-eight years he held the hotel's license, renaming it in 1919 the 'Hotel Australia'.

Under Soden the hotel was extensively enlarged providing quality accommodation for visitors to Albury, rooms for commercial travellers, dining rooms, and commodious stable

facilities. Some of the hotel's more famous equine guests were on their way to compete in the Melbourne Cup, including the great Phar Lap.

A feature of the extensions to the hotel during Soden's era, are the post-supported verandas and porches, added over time to the hotel. An early photograph of the hotel shows that the first section of the hotel's verandas and porches was a porch on the western end of the hotel facing Wilson Street. Later extensions included the Wilson Street verandah in the early 1920s, and in 1925 a verandah and porch erected along the hotel's David Street frontage.

The ironwork associated with the verandas and porches have been described, as "a spectacular feature and are some of the most beautiful in the country" with "leadlight adding to their charms."

In 1942 Soden transferring the hotel's license to George Carter. Soden died on May 21, 1944 at age 85. His wife Mary, née O'Loughlin, predeceasing him by nearly six years.