



BURNES HOUSE (VILLAGE FAIR) [1887]

516 Bastion Square

ARCHITECT: JOHN TEAGUE

This handsome three storey brick building and the adjoining old Beaver Building, built earlier in 1882, were both the property of hotelier Thomas J. Burnes. Burnes, a resident of Victoria from 1858, settled in Victoria after coming West with the California gold rush. In 1886 he bought the entire block of land between Yates and Bastion Streets for \$9,500 then erected one of Victoria's earliest luxury hotels to serve successful gold miners and English remittance men. Burnes cut a somewhat colourful figure amid the confused assemblage of tackboard buildings and muddy streets in those early days—presiding over Burnes House with singular Irish charm and walking the streets in his top-hat, flowing cape and gold nobbed cane.

The chequered history of the building provides a profile of the fortunes for this particular area of Victoria. A very typical Victorian building with its strong verticality emphasized by the paired narrow ground floor windows and the second and third storey oriels overlooking the square—it stands rather uncomfortably beneath a bold bracketed Italianate cornice. The building cost Burnes \$20,000 and served as a fashionable hotel close to such public amenities as the Court House, Customs House, H.B.C. warehouses, and waterfront. The smallpox epidemic of 1892 seriously damaged the hotel business however; no ship anchored in the harbour for months. After the epidemic Burnes House became a rooming headquarters for lawyers and business men. After the first World War the area degenerated further; the house is reputed to have served for some time as a high class brothel and since 1930 as a rather undignified warehouse. In 1967, the building became a part of the Bastion Square revitalisation programme and relocation of the Maritime Museum. Under the direction of architects Peterson and Lester the exterior of Burnes House was restored and the interior was redeveloped into the rather charming series of multi-level specialty shops now known as 'The Village Fair.'