This historical walk through Perth city will highlight the ‘boom’ created by gold and the surge of growth, wealth and prosperity in Western Australia that followed. The city’s population swelled from 8,500 to over 27,000 in a decade and it seemed Perth would ‘bust’ as this remote town turned into a buzzing cosmopolitan city.

The Perth Town Hall was officially opened on June 1, 1870 and is the only capital city town hall in Australia to be built by convicts. Major restoration works completed in 2019 have revealed the original brickwork, undercroft and arches of the Victorian Free Gothic style building. The Perth Town Hall has served numerous roles over the years including as a government meeting place, marketplace, canal stable for explorer Ernest Shirreff and fire station. From the late 1870s the city’s firefighting equipment including a 12-man carriage was stored in the undercroft, although the firefighters were located some distance away and the horses were tied to taxis. In the event of a fire, the Town Hall bell rang out and the busy firefighters would dash up to the Town Hall while the tax drivers harnessed their horses to the fire equipment. This economical arrangement meant the service was not entirely efficient.

Head north up Barrack Street to view the Albany Bell Tea Rooms from the opposite side of the street.

Albany Bell Tea Rooms 91 Barrack Street

Still recognisable in Barrack Street is the classically inspired façade of the Albany Bell Tea Rooms (c. 1895). Australian born Albany Bell capitalised on the opportunity of the rapidly expanding population and went from a small confectionery business to a large factory. Eventually running 16 tea rooms in Perth, Tea Rooms were one of the few venues where working men and men could mix respectfully at the turn of the century and the popularity of the rooms was an indication of the extra spending money available in the newly wealthy society. Albany Bell introduced the delights of the American-style soda fountain and the ice-cream ‘sundae’ to Perth which he had learnt about on a trip to New York.

Albany Bell provided some sweet conditions for employees in his confectionary factory in Maylands. He established the factory riverside to provide pleasant employees in his confectionary factory in Maylands.

McNESS ROYAL ARCADE

Next door to the Theatre Royal, this mock Elizabethan reproduction of an old London street was built in 1897 as a gift to Perth by the charismatic and debonair millionaire Claude de Bernales. This arcade is a true reflection of his attachment to England and features ornamental mechanical clocks depicting two justing knights at the Hay Street entrance and St George slaying the dragon at the St George Terrace entrance.

The Metropole Hotel & Theatre Royal

Built in 1897, the Theatre Royal was the first purpose built theatre in Western Australia. The locals considered the theatre exceptional for its time, with its red plush and glitz, and a roof that could slide open on hot nights. Thomas Molloy built the Theatre next to his Metropole Hotel, and went on to create the landmark His Majesty’s Theatre less than a decade later. Molloy, the son of a Presbyterian guard, started his working life as the manager of Cooperative Stores in Perth, then became a baker in Goodrich Street. He grew to be a prominent member of the community, serving terms as Town Councillor, Mayor and as a member of the Legislative Council. However, many believed that his greatest achievement was the introduction of barracks to Perth.

Molloy was determined to be brigaded and in 1858 became a patrol captain of the Order of St George after he used his title “Sir”. He began calling himself Sir Thomas and insisted all who did business with him did likewise. He ensured this dream lived forever when, scandalously, he married his wife under a headstone reading ‘Lady Mary Molloy’.

By the mid-1890s, there were so many gold miners looking for a place to stay that hotels could not be built quick enough to accommodate everyone. The Palace Hotel was built in 1897 by John Du Brau who was determined to build one of Australia’s most significant hotels. No expense was spared in the construction of the Palace, which upon opening was considered one of the most beautiful and elegant hotels in the country.

Henry Lawson, a famous Australian writer, and his wife Bertha honeymooned in Perth during 1911. While walking around Perth knocking on the doors of hotels and guesthouses, the already celebrated author discovered no book was available due to the accommodation shortage.

Tired and desperate, the honeymooners camped for a night. They were then told that there was no room available at the Metropole Hotel as it was being renovated. In the meantime, the couple was granted the use of the Metropole Hotel’s roof terrace and the bed of hay.

The Metropole Hotel’s design interior and exterior. The owner of the building, Charles McGee, was a scrap metal trader and rumrunner who made his fortune during the gold boom by purchasing property, eventually expanding into mortgage broking. Proceed 10 metres west along the Hay Street Mall to the building left of London Court.

His Majesty’s Theatre

First known as King William Street after King William IV, the uncle of Queen Victoria, this street served as a major thoroughfare for the camel trains that supplied the Goldfields. The trains, harnessed with between 20 and 30 camel, were unable to reverse and had to carefully manoeuvre to change direction. Look down William Street and imagine a 100 strong camel train loaded with supplies performing a U-turn to return to the Goldfields. This procedure influenced the width of the street. The same wide streets are found at the end of the supply route, in Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie.

William Street was also known for activity other than the camel variety. Parents only let their children walk down the eastern side of the street due to the issues of SI-repute and gambling dens that were situated on the western side of the street.

Proceed north up William Street and turn left onto Hay Street. Walk west to King Street.
At the time of its construction in 1901, this fire station was one of the oldest operational central train stations in Australia. The original station was built in 1881, but the railway network grew rapidly. The station building and platform facilities quickly proved inadequate and it was replaced by a larger building in 1894. Additional wings to the east and west, completed by 1917, doubled the size of the station and created the building that exists today.

To avoid gold being hijacked, shipments were transported in unmarked carriages with two security guards locked inside with food and beer. It was not uncommon for a gold shipment to go missing when it arrived at the station, as railway authorities would move the unmarked, unclamed carriages to the side of the tracks. Within a few hours, the thieves, Perth Mint staff, would be busy searching for the missing gold. The bright gold could be discovered in a room full of gold dust. The Mint would then ship the gold to Sydney.

Cross back to Forrest Place and walk through Murray Street Mall to Forrest Place. Turn left onto Hay Street.

This is the final destination for the raw product from the Goldfields. The Perth Mint formed the prospectors’ finds into coins to be used as currency in the rapidly increasing economy. The Perth Mint was one of three branches of the British Royal Mint in Australia. It was constructed in 1893 to process the huge amounts of gold that were coming from the Goldfields and was seen as a symbol of Perth’s status in the British Empire. By the time of The Perth Mint’s construction, income from gold was responsible for nearly 50 per cent of the colony’s wealth. The Mint operated under British control until 1970 when ownership was transferred to the Western Australian Government. Today The Perth Mint is renowned as Australia’s specialist precious metals mint and a major tourist attraction. It is one of the oldest mints in the world still operating from its original location and is open to the public daily. Telephone: 08 9421 7222.

Although the Perth Mint tower fell prey to a large robbery throughout the gold boom years, small thefts occurred. One of the supervisors, Mr. William Darke, forced workers to stay late in a number of occasions searching for missing gold which he accused them of stealing. ‘The gold was never found’ and it was later discovered that Mr. Darke himself was the culprit, slipping the gold into his pocket.

Also named after King William IV, King Street is one of the best-preserved gold rush period streetscapes in Perth. First a residential street with working class cottages surrounded by coal yards, blacksmiths and laundries, the wealth brought by gold turned it into a bustling area for small business. Millers, shoemakers, dentists and druggists had shops here and the proximity of the railway made it an ideal site for warehouses and wholesalers supplying the Goldfields. The City Hotel, designed by Henry Tregy, was built on the corner of King and Murray Streets in 1869 and still operates as a pub today. The Belgian Bear Café is the area around King and Murray streets was a well-known location for Chinese businesses. The Chinese were prevented by Government legislation from mining for gold, arresting 24 Chinese gamblers with a grand restrictive immigration policy. Prevented by Government legislation from mining for gold, arrested 24 Chinese gamblers with a grand restrictive immigration policy.

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Forrest Place is named after Sir John Forrest, who was vital in the development of the gold industry in Western Australia. As State Premier during the gold rush period, he instigated the water pipeline from Perth to Kalgoorlie, the railway and The Perth Mint. Forrest Place is Perth’s major civic space and a site for free public events and rallies. The General Post Office built between 1914 and 1923, is one of few large buildings in Australia constructed in the imposing Beaux Arts style and was the tallest building in Perth at the time of its construction. Isolated prospectors would send their gold by post to the General Post Office where it would be forwarded to The Perth Mint. The Mint would refine the gold and then send payment to the Post Office for the prospectors to collect.

Cross Wellington Street to Perth Station at the northern end of Forrest Place.

Perth Station opened in 1894 and is a fundamental location in the story of gold in Western Australia. The station was an unloading point for gold transported from the Goldfields and is one of the oldest operational central train stations in Australia. The original station was built in 1881 but the railway network grew rapidly. The station building and platform facilities quickly proved inadequate and it was replaced by a larger building in 1894. Additional wings to the east and west, completed by 1917, doubled the size of the station and created the building that exists today.

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In the 1840s, almost non-existent health services led to plans for a dedicated hospital building, which were later abandoned due to lack of funds. Planning recommenced in the 1850s and Royal Perth Hospital (RPH) was officially opened in July 1855 with wards for males and females and a basement for the kitchen, store, and services. The hospital quickly became known as a mental asylum, where many people, including famous writers, were admitted. By 1881, the hospital had grown to 400 beds, with many patients suffering from mental illness. The hospital was eventually closed in 1994 and is now a major tourist attraction.

One of the most famous patients was Darcy Oake, who was admitted in 1881. He was a famous poet and writer, and his诗歌 The Roaring Days and The Sleeping Days quickly became popular. His poems were translated into many languages and were even performed by orchestras around the world. Darcy Oake was eventually released from the hospital in 1884 and went on to become a successful poet and writer.