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# Hawthorn Bridge



B6649 Hawthorn Bridge



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## Location

Between Bridge Road and Burwood Road,, RICHMOND VIC 3121 - Property No B6649

## Municipality

YARRA CITY

## Level of significance

State

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0050

## Heritage Listing

National Trust

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 14, 2005

What is significant? The Hawthorn Bridge is a substantial riveted, wrought-iron, lattice-truss bridge with bluestone abutments and piers. It is one of the oldest metal bridges in Australia. This crossing was one of the earliest Yarra River crossing points and a major communication route in early Melbourne. The present bridge was constructed in the early wave of major new infrastructure funded by the gold rushes. The design reflects the standards of engineering and craftsmanship of the British Empire at its height. It survived due to the complex politics of the early 20th century and despite apparent concerns over its safety.

How is it significant? The Hawthorn Bridge is significant for aesthetic/architectural, historic, and technical reasons at a State level.

Why is it significant? The Hawthorn Bridge is of historical significance as the earliest surviving major metal bridge in Victoria and the oldest surviving truss bridge in Australia. It is important as the oldest surviving bridge spanning the Yarra River, and was only the third non-timber bridge to be erected over the Yarra (following the first Princes Bridge, and the Chapel-Church Street Bridge). It formed an important early link to Melbourne's Eastern Suburbs and beyond to the rich agricultural land of the Yarra Valley where some of the first squatters took up land in the Port Phillip District. Its construction cemented the eastern suburbs, and especially Hawthorn, Kew and Camberwell as the preferred abode of Melbourne's middle class, and so influenced the social and geographic growth of Melbourne.

The later history of the political machinations over repairs to the bridge in the 1920s and 30s was a significant event in Victorian and local government history. The Hawthorn bridge controversy was a defining moment in the power struggle between State and Municipal government, and between the various government departments responsible for infrastructure and planning, including the Public Works Department, Railways Construction Branch, Country Roads Board and Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works. While the resolution of the impasse did not solve the disputes between these groups, it demonstrated the need for a co-ordinated road construction body for the metropolitan area.

It is of technical significance as a rare example of mid-nineteenth century British Colonial engineering, demonstrating the close ties between the infant colony and British industry and engineers. While the designer is not known, it is likely that it was influenced by the Board of Land and Works Engineer in Chief, Thomas Higginbotham. The bridge is significant for its association with the development of engineering design in Victoria, being the first bridge of its type and the first metal truss or lattice girder bridge. At 45.7 metres, Hawthorn Bridge has the longest span of any surviving nineteenth century bridge in Victoria, and is the fifth longest span metal road bridge of any age in the state. As such it provides evidence of the development of metal truss and girder bridges in the formative years of bridge design engineering in Victoria and Australia.

The bridge is also significant as a test case for pioneering of electric welding as a method for reinforcing bridges, although the presumed benefits may have been shown to have been less than expected.

Hawthorn Bridge is of aesthetic significance for the unique architectural qualities of the finely executed monumental design, with features such as tall, triple-arched perforated bluestone piers (originally twin arches) and rusticated stone abutments, towering over the Yarra. The pattern created by the web-like lattice of the trusses and the later more delicate tram stanchions balance the heavy masonry. The setting against steep banks with lush exotic and native vegetation contributes to the appreciation of the bridge as part of the Yarra river landscape.

Classified: 06/10/2003

Hermes Number 66935

Property Number

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*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*