
Richmond Park



G13143 Richmond Park
Entrance S.W. Corner



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Location

Yarra Blvd, BURNLEY VIC 3121 - Property No G13143

Municipality

YARRA CITY

Level of significance

State

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - March 28, 2008

Richmond Park, set aside as the Survey Paddock in 1836-37 for the agistment of the surveyor's horses, gazetted as Richmond's first public park in 1862, location of experimental horticultural gardens (1861) and Australia's first School of Horticulture (1891), traversed by the Yarra Boulevard built in the 1930s Depression by sustenance labourers, and maintained in continuous use as public parkland since its initial reservation, is of historic, aesthetic, social and scientific cultural significance to the state of Victoria.

It is historically significant

-- for its very early (1836-37) reservation, one of the earliest reserves of open space in Melbourne's history;

-- for its close association with Robert Hoddle and Clement Hodgkinson, whose work was fundamental to the surveying and settlement of Victoria ;

-- for its riverside location which makes it rare amongst Melbourne's early parks and gardens;

-- as a place which contributes to a 140-year European tradition of recreation along the Yarra River, initially demonstrated by the construction of a railway station solely for picnickers in the Park (Pic Nic Station), the popularity of the Park's river frontage for tea gardens (in which the almost-encircling Yarra River played an integral role), recently reinforced by the construction and use of the Main Yarra Bike Trail, and by the uninterrupted public use of the Park for a great variety of organised sports from the 1880s to the present day;

-- for its caretaker's cottage, the earliest section of which is likely to date from the 1860s (and which is located on the site of the cottage used by the first caretaker, employed in 1852 by Hoddle), and which was in continuous use until 1961 and a now-rare early example of this building type;

-- as the site of experimental gardens (now known as Burnley Gardens) from 1861 which were instrumental in the development of the international fresh produce trade in Australia, and whose grounds formed the basis of Australia's first School of Horticulture in 1891. The tradition of experimentation and horticultural education on this site has continued unbroken to this day (please refer to Heritage Victoria's classification of Burnley Gardens for details);

-- for its many mature trees, including elms, palms, sugar gums and river red gums, which are a reminder of Richmond Council's vigorous policy of planting both native and exotic trees in the Park;

-- for an intact section of the greater Yarra Boulevard scheme ? a 30-kilometre scenic tourist drive beside the Yarra River ? constructed as part of a range of major public works to generate employment during the Great Depression in Australia.

It is aesthetically significant

-- for its natural scenic beauty, enhanced by its close proximity to the Yarra River, and officially acknowledged by the routing of the Yarra Boulevard around the Park in the 1930s and the construction of the Main Yarra Bike Trail in the 1980s. While large tracts of open parkland evoke the Park's early history as a red gum woodland, the Park also features a collection of intensively designed and cultivated landscapes in the form of the historic Dutch Elm Avenue, Yarra Boulevard and Burnley Gardens;

-- for an outstanding and remarkably intact example of a public landscape, predominantly exhibiting a design style and vegetation theme popular in the inter-war years, and constructed and planted as part of the building of the Yarra Boulevard. Enriching this landscape is part of the original nineteenth-century carriageway (Dutch Elm Avenue) and early path layout;

-- for the ornamental section of Burnley Gardens, first formally designed as pleasure grounds in 1861, partially remodelled in the naturalistic style in the late nineteenth century, and maintained and sympathetically developed over the past 100 years to present a landscape of considerable individuality and diversity (please refer to Heritage Victoria's classification of Burnley Gardens for details);

-- for the earliest surviving section of the former Richmond Park caretaker's cottage, apparently built in the 1860s in a manner consistent with contemporary Public Works Department dwellings and notable for its simple form and highly unusual semi-circular entry vestibule reminiscent of Regency pattern-book cottage plans.

It is socially and spiritually significant

-- as a site of deep spiritual value to the Wurundjeri people and the Kulin nation, symbolised by the Corroboree Tree;

-- as a valued area of open space for the people of Richmond, surrounding suburbs, and wider Melbourne, providing sporting facilities and seamless linkages to the recreational opportunities of the Yarra River.

It is scientifically (botanically and horticulturally) significant

-- for a number of river red gums and a sweet bursaria which survive from pre-European settlement and are remnants of the original red gum woodland;

-- for its collection of mature elms which date to the 1880s ;

-- for a selection of plants in Burnley Gardens comprising a small collection of remnant fruit trees planted in the experimental orchards between 1874 and 1934; a large collection of Australian native plants, including possibly the largest single collection of Western Plains ground flora in Victoria; and an impressive and diverse collection of mature ornamental trees and shrubs which includes trees listed on the National Trust's Register of Significant Trees of Victoria and specimens rare in cultivation (please also refer to Heritage Victoria's classification of Burnley Gardens for details).

Note:

The Yarra Boulevard may also be of some scientific significance for its ability to demonstrate construction techniques specific to large public works programmes in the Depression years, however this aspect has not been researched in preparing this submission for classification.

Other Names University of Melbourne Burnley College, Survey Paddock (1836-7 TO 1862);, Melbourne Girls College, Kevin Bartlett Sporting & Recreation Complex, Burnley Public Golf Course, AMRAD & GE Complex,

Hermes Number 71661

Property Number

Intactness

Close inspection of the entire area known in the past as Richmond Park, and an understanding of its long history, reveal a surprisingly intact site.

Richmond Park continues to retain its overall, partly geographically-determined, boundaries to the present day. Incursions (Belgrave-Lilydale rail line 1858-1860, horticultural experimental gardens 1861, extension of Swan Street 1882, Heyington rail line 1889), which are frequently cited as evidence of fragmentation, occurred relatively early in the Park's history. While council and residents vigorously resisted the first of these incursions, ultimately they were minor inconveniences and did not affect the functioning or treatment of the Park as a single entity by Richmond Council which was responsible for its management.

Of the later changes within the Park, such as the construction of the Yarra Boulevard (1934-38), public golf course (1960s), re-routing of part of the Yarra River and construction of the South-Eastern Freeway (1969), construction of Richmond High School (1960s) and development of the General Electric complex on what was experimental land belonging to Burnley Gardens in the late 1990s, it is only the further increased development of the AMRAD/G.E. complex which has the potential to reduce the Park presenting as one.

Vegetation includes a number of trees remaining from the replanting the early Dutch Elm Avenue in 1880, a number of sugar gums from the late 1800s, heritage listed trees and shrubs located in Burnley Gardens, an osage orange dating back to the 1860s, a largely intact roadside landscape planted at the time of the construction of the Yarra Boulevard in the 1930s, and a sweet bursaria and remnant red gums (including the landmark Corroboree Tree) which pre-date European settlement.

Lost elements include the fabric of Pic Nic Station, the buildings associated with the survey department's work, the fabric of Murphy's Hut, fencing and layout of paddocks, early dressing sheds and toilets associated with sporting facilities, and the cycling track originally designed by Sir Hubert Opperman.

Historical Australian Themes

The Depression Years

As early as June 1928, in response to the rising rate of unemployment, the State Govt. established unemployment relief camps in country Victoria to construct capital works projects, including the construction or rebuilding of roads and bridges (Country Roads Board Correspondence File - Unit 45 File 28/9782). However, alarmed by further rapid increases in unemployment since 1929, it became clear that a more concerted, long-term effort would be required.

Around 1930, local councils were informed that to provide work for the unemployed, the State Govt. would make available money raised from the Unemployment Relief Tax at a rate of £1 for every £1 provided by the council. Approved projects which attracted this money were the beautification of parks and gardens, improvements to beach fronts and similar works. (Country Roads Board Correspondence File - Unit 86 File 33/9910).

By the end of 1932, Richmond Council had employed painters, listed on the Unemployed Register and receiving sustenance, to paint the Barkly Gardens Bandstand, the Richmond Park park keeper's residence, and Richmond Park fencing in Swan St. Similarly registered carpenters were employed erecting an angle rail fence in front of the residences in Park Grove, abutting the Park (Richmond Council Parks and Gardens Committee minutes 19.12.1932).

It was against this social background that the Richmond section of the greater Yarra Boulevard came into existence.

During these early Depression years, Richmond City Council had continued to make improvements to Richmond Park. Tree planting went on as usual, with the exception that the trees required were now propagated at Richmond Park, rather than Barkly Gardens as had happened in the past. Proposals included more seating for the Park, and improvements to dressing sheds, sewered conveniences, and maintaining the several entrance gates to the Park (Richmond Council Parks and Gardens Committee minutes in Miscellaneous Reports Vol. 1, 17.6.31). A new football ground was formed in the ground in 'the big bend of the river' by defining it with a post and angle rail fence (Richmond Council Parks and Gardens Committee minutes 15.3.32). A hard-ground cricket pitch for the use of the Kiwi Girls' Club was proposed between Swan Street and the Hawthorn railway line, adding to the 15 existing concrete pitches in the Park at this time (Richmond Council Parks and Gardens Committee minutes 12.9.32). Baseball was being played in the Park north of Swan Street, and women's hockey in the enclosed ground near the Horticultural Gardens (Richmond Council Parks and Gardens Committee minutes 8.5.33, in Miscellaneous Reports Vol. 1), and part of the Park was wanted for cycle training (Richmond Council Parks and Gardens Committee minutes 5.10.33).

Around this time, Richmond Council Parks and Gardens Committee decided to enclose the ground used by the Burnley Football Club north of Swan Street (later to become Burnley Oval) by using either a post and angle rail fence or a post and cable fence (Richmond Council Parks and Gardens Committee minutes 10.4.33, in Miscellaneous Reports Vol 1.).

The Yarra Boulevard -early work

In 1934, work commenced on the Richmond-Burnley section of the Yarra Boulevard, having been authorised as early as 1930, by the member for Kew and Minister for Sustenance, the Hon. W. S. Kent Hughes, as one of Richmond's sustenance programmes. Work on the Yarra Boulevard near Kew had commenced after World War I (Winzenreid, 1991). The new section would run through Richmond Park from Loyola Grove to Bridge Rd, generally following the course of the Yarra River, as part of the greater Yarra 'Boulevard Scheme'. The intention of the scheme was to create a world class scenic drive, by eventually joining up the existing Kew section of the Boulevard with proposed new sections between Bridge Rd and Walmer St, Johnson St Bridge and Heidelberg, and on the city side, with the extension of Alexandra Ave from Chapel St to Grange Rd.

From the very beginning of this project, there was division in the Richmond Council about the merits of the proposed road. Fundamental ideological differences were to play a major part in Council discussions regarding the Boulevard for many years. However, one of Richmond Council's original concerns was that the road would destroy the integrity of Richmond Park, considered to be one of the rare beauty spots available to the Richmond residents. The Council was particularly concerned that the proposed road not 'spoil the finest avenue in the Park' (Richmond Guardian, 16.1.1933) by following the alignment of the early carriageway which ran between the 1859 avenue of Dutch Elms known at this time as the Avenue. (The northern-most section of this avenue remains intact today as one of the major landscape features of the Yarra Boulevard.). Despite the Council's continued opposition, work on the Boulevard was finally underway by August 1934, with construction commencing from Loyola Grove. The boulevard was built in two stages, with the first section from Loyola Grove to Swan Street exit, and the second section from the Swan Street exit to Bridge Road.

Although unsurfaced, it seems that the road had been surveyed and excavated all the way to Bridge Rd by 22 February 1937. A Parks and Gardens Committee report at this time states that the roots of the 1859 Dutch Elm avenue towards Bridge Rd had been severed by the Boulevard works. The Committee recommended that raised rockeries be built to protect the tree roots. These raised rock beds near Bridge Rd remain intact on the western side of the Boulevard today.

On 8 September 1937, the Mayor of Richmond, Cr. J.A. Loughnan, opened the first section of the Boulevard (Richmond Council Annual Report, 1937-38). Reported in the Richmond, Hawthorn and Camberwell Chronicle (10.9.1937 & 17.9.1937), the Mayor cut the ribbon which spanned the new road, and later distributed pieces of it to the wives and children of the sustenance workers whose labours built the Boulevard. The Mayor remarked on the beauty of the river revealed by the road. Councillor Ryan (Chairman of the Parks and Gardens Committee) also commented that the Boulevard made Richmond Park more beautiful and accessible, acknowledging the already beautiful sections of the greater Boulevard. He declared that when the trees, shrubs and trailing plants grew, it would be 'part of one of the finest scenic drives in the world' (p.3). With the opening of this section, about 4 miles of the Yarra River from Princess Bridge to Swan St was now accessible to the public.

The final section of the Richmond section of the Yarra Boulevard was opened on 18 February 1939. This section ran from Swan Street, under the new span of the Hawthorn Railway Bridge, to Bridge Rd. The three miles of river drive afforded by the Boulevard through Richmond Park was greatly appreciated by motorists, with as many as 100 in 10 minutes passing through on a Sunday. The rockeries and flower beds on either side of Hawthorn Bridge (Bridge Rd) were full of many seedlings, and Golden Poplars were planted in a walk along the river bank (Richmond Council Annual Report, 1938-39).

On completion, it was estimated that a total of £250,000 would have been spent on the Richmond section of the Yarra Boulevard (Richmond, Hawthorn and Camberwell Chronicle, 26.11.1937).

The War Years

During the early 1940s, Richmond Park continued to be heavily used by Richmond residents and visitors alike. The cycling legend, Sir Hubert Opperman, helped design a bicycle racing track for the Park. This was amended to a less expensive fair weather practice track, and was built by unemployed workers (Richmond Council Surveyors Reports, 29.3.1939). The Yarra River around the area was cleared of snags and reefs, and its course straightened (Richmond Council Parks and Gardens Committee minutes, 19.3.1940).

Richmond Park nursery raised all its own seedlings, proudly announcing a 97% strike rate in the open beds. These plants were used to ornament the various rockeries and Boulevard borders - using 10,000 seedlings in addition to dahlias, flowering shrubs and other herbaceous plants. The Curator of the Park, A.T. Carter died on 19.11.40. One of the longest practising curators in metropolitan Melbourne, he had worked in the Park since the early 1900s. Heyington Oval was renamed the A.T. Carter Oval in his honour (Richmond Council Annual Report, 1939-40). (This is now named the M.E. Fletcher Oval).

During World War II, areas of Richmond Park were used for a major American Army encampment.

Richmond High School

In 1958, Richmond Council resolved to press for a high school in the district (Richmond Council minutes, 6.1.1958 - 15.12.1958). The Education Department as far back as 1940 had restricted Richmond schools to providing education to 6th grade level only. Richmond Council at that time had lobbied for the provision of post primary education in Richmond, but had been unsuccessful (Richmond Council Surveyors Reports 30.1.1940). In a meeting in February 1967, Richmond Council made the unanimous decision to give top priority to the erection of the Richmond High School on a site on the Boulevard near Bridge Rd, to serve the best interests of children for years to come (Richmond Council minutes 28. 2.1967). The Richmond High School Building Location Plan was drawn up by November 1968, and the Site Works and Site Plan by March 1970 (Drawing numbers 68/779.1 - 68/779.5).

However, falling primary and secondary school enrolments from 1972 to 1983 led to the eventual closure of Burnley Primary School, and the amalgamation of Richmond High and Richmond Technical School to form the Richmond Secondary College (City of Richmond - Study of schools and education in Richmond - File 1410, 5.1.1988). This became the Melbourne Girls' Secondary College in 1988, amid great public protest.

The Circus Site

The section of Richmond Park directly north of Swan Street became known, and still is today, as the 'Circus Site'. Bulleen, Sole Bros, and Ashton's Circuses regularly held events here in the years after World War II (Richmond Council minutes, 10.10.1960). As a large, flat site with excellent public visibility, it was in high demand, occasionally being also used for other events (City of Richmond - Circus site - File 314, 5.12.1960). However, growing public opinion against circuses which featured performing animals eventually led to Coburg, Fitzroy, Preston and St Kilda Councils banning them by 1986 (City of Richmond - Circus site - File 314, 30.1.1986). Richmond followed shortly afterward. At the direction of the Commissioner of Richmond, Alex Gillon, a policy was adopted preventing circuses with live animals from playing in Richmond, with the Circus Site no longer available for such purposes (City of Richmond - Circus site - File 314, 13.5.1986). A proposal by the Commissioner to upgrade the site over the next 3-5 years with a view to developing yet another sports complex here, complete with pavilion and sewerage toilets, did not eventuate (City of Richmond - Circus site - File 314, 26.5.1986). The original park-keeper's cottage (built on the site of Murphy's Hut) together with associated stores, sheds and additions, became a council depot, and a new caretaker's cottage was built on the northern part of the site by the early 1960s.

Public Golf Course and South Eastern Freeway

South of Swan St, Richmond Park underwent several changes. A public golf course, first proposed in early 1938 (Richmond Council Parks and Gardens Committee minutes, 21.2.1938), was finally constructed by the 1960s. In 1969, the Yarra River at Richmond was diverted to facilitate the building of the South Eastern Freeway through the southern section of Richmond Park. One third of a mile of the river directly south of Burnley Gardens was re-routed through a newly dug canal 1400 feet long, 160 feet wide and 50 feet deep. The old river bed was then filled to create an area of new land, later occupied by the City of Richmond Sports Reserve (Winzenreid, 1991). As a result, the adjacent section of the Boulevard was re-routed to its present course.

Burnley Primary School

Early in 1978, Burnley Primary School students were housed in temporary classrooms near Burnley Oval while their old school building in nearby Madden Grove was demolished and a new one constructed (City of Richmond - Study of schools and education in Richmond - File 1410, 15.2.1982). However, as estimates for the new building exploded to \$105,000,000 and the population of primary aged children in Richmond continued to fall, the students remained in their temporary building while the Education Department sought to extricate itself from the debacle in which it found itself. Ministerial intervention was sought by Richmond residents to delay a Richmond Council proposal to turn the northern environs of Burnley Oval into a school car park for 73 cars (Richmond Council VPRS 9989/P1 - Unit 1, File 106). Eventually, the original primary school site in Madden Grove was turned into passive recreation parkland, now known as the Golden Square Bicentennial Park. The pupils were eventually dispersed to amalgamated primary schools in the area, and the Richmond Park site was restored around February 1989 (Drawing number 89 567 C1).

Corroboree Tree

The Aboriginal Land Claims Bill of 1983 focussed attention on the Corroboree Tree in Richmond Park. (By now, this area north of Swan St was becoming known as Burnley Park). Saved from fire by the quick actions of a nearby resident in 1959 (Richmond Council minutes, 16.11.1959), the tree was one of the subjects of a 12 month archaeological survey of the Melbourne metropolitan area in 1983-84 (Richmond Council Special File - Aboriginal sites, File 106.1). As a result of this survey, the Corroboree Tree was gazetted by the AustraliaHeritage Commission to be placed on the register of the National Estate (Special Commonwealth Gazette No. S.92, in File 106.1 as before). The City of Richmond and the Aboriginal Advancement League worked together to carry out preservative work on the tree, and landscape its surrounds to better reflect the past natural environment and the Wurundjeri's relationship with it (City of Richmond - Aboriginal sites in Richmond - File 106.1, 14.4.1986).

Master plan recommended

In 1987, the Urban Land Authority stated that the Burnley Public Lands - that is all the land in the general locality, especially the Horticultural College, recreational land, golf course, circus site and land remaining from the South Eastern Freeway development, should have a masterplan to conserve the natural and Aboriginal heritage elements and community uses. In the absence of this, ad hoc and piecemeal developments were occurring (City of Richmond - Richmond river flats - File 1530.2, 6.3.1987). This sentiment was echoed by the Richmond Golden Square Residents' Association, who considered that this whole area should be masterplanned with its metropolitan and possible state significance in mind (Richmond Council VPRS 9989/P1 - Unit 1, File 106). In 1984, the Richmond Urban Conservation Study investigated areas of historical significance in the city. In that study, a brief history of this area was compiled (O'Connor & O'Connor, 1985), and in 1998, a City of Yarra Heritage Review examined the area, concluding that most of the area of the original Richmond Park be accorded a Streetscape Level 1 Category - the highest rating possible, such was its importance (Patrick & associates, 1998). However, no complete study had been undertaken of the site at this time.

1995 to 2004

In 1995, a large section of the northern-most section of the land occupied by the original School of Horticulture and its public gardens (known collectively as Burnley Gardens) was sold to the private pharmaceutical company Amrad, and then General Electric. On 1 July 1997, the remaining area of Burnley Gardens became part of the University of Melbourne, with its official title changing to the University of Melbourne, Institute of Land and Food Resources - Burnley Campus. This caused considerable concern among Burnley staff and students who feared that the unique educational qualities of the college would be compromised and the historic gardens jeopardised. In recognition of the potential heritage importance of Burnley Gardens, in 2001 the University of Melbourne commissioned a landscape conservation analysis for the Gardens to ascertain the site's cultural significance. This study found that the site was of historical, aesthetic and scientific (horticultural) significance to the people of Victoria and Australia.

As a result, Burnley Gardens was registered with Heritage Victoria in December 2003. However, with the sale of the AMRAD site to developers earlier that year, Burnley Gardens came under threat from further development. The planned multi-storey development by United States-based finance giant G.E. on the site indirectly threatened the Gardens with overshadowing and encroachment by new buildings and inevitable over-use of the grounds by an anticipated additional 1500 staff. The proposed development also compromised the many valued

environmental and recreational qualities of the surrounding Yarra River corridor and parkland. Efforts to object to the planned development by concerned residents and other interested parties were effectively stopped, with the normal state planning process bypassed and planning authority resting solely with the Victorian Planning Minister (Slamet 2003). In February 2004, the Minister approved a development plan for the redevelopment of the site.

In March 2004 the AMRAD/GE site was nominated for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register but was rejected by the Executive Director on the grounds that it did not have sufficient cultural heritage or demonstrate, through its built fabric and its landscape elements, the role played by the Plant Research Laboratory in the history of scientific research in Victoria.

This decision was appealed to the Registrations Committee of the Heritage Council but was again rejected in September 2004 on the basis that it did not reach the threshold for state significance in relation to the criteria for inclusion on the Victorian Heritage Register. However the Committee did find that within the AMRAD/GE site, the former Plant Research Institute building, the former Egg Laying Competition building and several of the trees along the driveway were of local cultural significance. It did not consider the merits of the arguments concerning the heritage significance of the entire Richmond Park or Survey Paddock area, except to the extent that they might be aspects of the significance of the nominated place.

Taking this on board, the National Trust, on landscape grounds, then applied to Heritage Victoria to allow the extent of the registered site of Burnley Gardens to be increased to include the Plant Research Laboratory buildings together with the trees lining the eastern drive. In November 2004 this application was rejected under Section 24 of the Heritage Act, as it was less than 12 months since the Heritage Council had refused the original registration request. Further action is being considered.

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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/>