

# DROMANA DRIVE-IN



Dromana Drive In\_13 May  
2009\_mz\_Site 01



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Dromana Drive-In\_Plan\_August 2009\_mz

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### Location

133 NEPEAN HIGHWAY DROMANA, MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE

### Municipality

MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE

### Level of significance

Registered

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2219

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO407

### VHR Registration

September 23, 2010

### Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 11, 2009

What is Significant?

The Dromana Drive-in cinema opened as the 'Peninsula' in 1961 with a single screen and parking available for 485 cars. It was built by the Whitaker family who have continued to operate the drive-in since it opened. A second screen, which came from the Hoyts Altona drive-in, was added in the early 1990s. A third screen was added in 2001 and a new projection booth was built over the diner to accommodate the three projectors, giving each a clear line of sight to its screen.

The significance of the Dromana Drive-in is in the layout of the fields, berms and screens that immediately identifies the place as a drive-in cinema.

The layout of the drive-in has changed to adapt to the introduction of the later screens. It is now divided into three fields separated by white picket fences. Berms have been constructed in each field to elevate the noses of cars toward each screen. Sound was originally delivered to the cars via a small speaker that clipped onto a side window of the car. The speakers were attached to posts located to the side of each parking space. In 1999 the speakers were removed, though the posts remain.

The site includes a diner/projection booth building. Originally a simple skillion-roofed timber-framed fibro-clad structure, this building has been much altered. Two simple fibro-clad ticket booths joined by a flat roof are located at the end of the drive. These are recent structures. An original 'Peninsula' neon sign is attached to the rear of the original screen.

How is it Significant?

The Dromana Drive-in is of historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it Significant?

The Dromana Drive-in is of historical significance as a reflection of the mid-twentieth century rise of the influence of the car on Victorian society and culture. Along with motels, service stations and other places and urban forms associated with the rise in private car ownership, surviving drive-ins are significant for their association with the development of a car culture in Victoria during this period.

The Dromana Drive-in is of historical significance as a reflection of the Americanisation of Victorian cities and country towns in the mid-twentieth century. Drive-ins were most popular in the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, Canada and Australia. Inspired by American cultural trends, drive-ins functioned like mobile extensions of the family living room, and were consistent with a trend in personal behaviour to be less formal and inhibited in public spaces. Drive-ins grew out of the extraordinary popularity and increasing affordability of cars, and provided a novel and easy form of entertainment.

The Dromana Drive-in is significant as a rare surviving example of a drive-in cinema. It is one of three that remain in operation in Victoria out of approximately sixty at the height of drive-in popularity

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

### **Specific Exemptions:**

#### **General Conditions: 1.**

All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. **General Conditions: 2.**

Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible.

Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component. **General Conditions: 3.**

If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. **General Conditions: 4.**

Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. **General Conditions: 5.**

Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable.

#### **Building Exteriors:**

All external works to registered buildings, other than demolition works or works that increase the building envelope, are permit-exempt, including:

- . Modification of existing or introduction of new door and window openings as required.
- . Replacement of roof cladding.
- . External painting.
- . Replacement, upgrading or introduction of new external signage.
- . Replacement, upgrading or introduction of new externally mounted services, fixtures, lighting, and any other equipment and plant.

#### **Building Interiors:**

All internal works are permit-exempt.

#### **Fields:**

The following works to fields are permit exempt:

- . Repair and maintenance of the bitumen surface and kerbing and gutters.
- . Painting of line and other marking on the bitumen surface.
- . Relocation of speaker stands on the site.

#### **New Structures:**

The following works are permit exempt:

- . Construction of new light towers or poles.
- . Construction of new structures to carry services or equipment associated with the operation of the place as a drive-in.
- . Construction of new fixed or free-standing signage structures.
- . Replacement of existing playground equipment or introduction of new playground equipment elsewhere on the site.
- . Construction of new perimeter fencing.
- . Construction of additional fencing within the site providing it is of the same or similar design to the existing (low brick and/or timber fencing).
- . Introduction of outdoor seats and tables.

**Minor Works:**

Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works must submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

**Regular Site Maintenance:**

The following site maintenance works are permit exempt:

- . Regular site maintenance works provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground features or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits.
- . The maintenance of an item to retain its condition or operation without the removal of or damage to the existing fabric or the introduction of new materials.
- . Cleaning including the removal of surface deposits, organic growths, or graffiti by the use of low pressure water and natural detergents and mild brushing and scrubbing.
- . Repairs, conservation and maintenance to plaques, memorials, roads and paths, fences and gates and drainage and irrigation.
- . The replacement of existing services such as cabling, plumbing, wiring and fire services that uses existing routes, conduits or voids, and does not involve damage to or the removal or significant fabric.

Note: Surface patina which has developed on the fabric may be an important part of the item's significance and if so, needs to be preserved during maintenance and cleaning.

Note. Any new materials used for repair must not exacerbate the decay of existing fabric due to chemical incompatibility, obscure existing fabric or limit access to existing fabric for future maintenance. Repair must maximise protection and retention of fabric and include the conservation of existing details or elements.

Construction dates	1961, 1990,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	DROMANA DRIVE IN,
Hermes Number	26683
Property Number	

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## History

### CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

Drive-ins were a relatively short-lived mass cultural phenomenon that occurred in modern western countries in the mid 20th century. The first were developed in the US in the 1930s, using primitive technology. After WWII, with the phenomenal growth in car ownership, suburban living, and drive through convenience, they mushroomed across the US and Canada (the first there was constructed in 1945). Along with Australia, these two countries took to the novelty with gusto, while they appear not to have developed at all in the UK or Europe, and to a smaller extent in other colonial countries such as South Africa (from 1952 - refer <http://www.drive-in.co.za/home.htm>) and the South Pacific, such as Papua New Guinea.

Graeme Davison in *Car Wars: How the Car Won Our Hearts and Conquered Our Cities* (2004) gives a good outline history of Drive-ins in Australia :

'Like the motel, the drive-in theatre was heralded long before its arrival in Australia. As early as 1950 Australians were reading that American drive-ins were growing at a rate of almost a thousand a year. "The drive-in", it was reported, "appeals to a different audience from that of the indoor theatres. Many of its customers are elderly people, cripples, and 'shut-ins'. They also attract people who dislike dressing for the movies, and couples who bring their children and thus save the cost of a baby-sitter.' Like the motel, it represented a step away from the formality and inhibition of personal behaviour in public places. "You can talk, smoke, chew peanuts, eat sandwiches, and nobody cares a hoot", observed Australian journalist Keith Dunstan from California.

The first Australian drive-in at Burwood on Melbourne's suburban frontier, opened in July 1954, just two years before the arrival of television, and a second at Ringwood had opened by Christmas. Hoyts announced plans for drive-ins in Dandenong Road, Moorabbin and Preston, and others were planned for Maribyrnong, Malvern and Geelong. At Bulleen local residents objected to the lease of public land on the river flats for a drive-in. It was better, they argued, to keep the reserve for pony rides ('a healthy outlet for the young people of the district') than to "ruin" it with a drive-in. But the rush to drive-in was apparently irresistible and the locals' protests were overruled. In 1956 MGM commenced work on Australia's first twin drive-ins, the Metro, in Clayton. With space for 1500 cars, double-size driveways, a superior meals service, even a "nappy nook" for changing babies, it claimed to be the biggest in the Southern Hemisphere.

In their first years of operation, before the little screen began to undercut the appeal of the big one, visiting the drive-in became a popular family outing. Like the motel room, the parked car was a new kind of domestic space, a mobile extension of the family living room. Burwood drive-in claimed to have improved upon the American prototype by offering a superior standard of service, similar to that of an old-fashioned cinema. As the motorist drove through the entrance gates, he is shown to his parking space by an attendant waving a torch, like a cinema usherette, and as he stopped, another attendant handed him a loudspeaker to hang inside the car. A switch on the top of the speaker enabled the driver to call an attendant for hot refreshments, hot water for the shivering children or to clean the fogged-up windscreen. Raw steaks, hamburgers and hot-dogs could be purchased at a central cafe and barbecued while the family warmed themselves by coke braziers. Below the screen was a special children's playground with swings and toys and a doorkeeper dressed as a frog who welcomed the pyjama-clad youngsters with free sweets as they entered. Ringwood added new attractions - a swimming pool, merry-go-round, open-air dance floor and miniature golf course.

The golden age of the drive-in was short-lived. The competition of television soon forced proprietors to cut the level of services and seek a more specialized audience. By the 1960s, most young families preferred the superior comfort and privacy of the family room and the television screen. Only as they acquired cars of their own, and a need for entertainment of a kind not supplied by the small screen, did the younger members of the family again resort to the drive-in. Soon the playgrounds, and family barbeques were shut down, cartoons and musicals gave way to rock-and-roll and horror movies, and as car-ownership spread among the young, the family playground was turned into a "passion pit".'

From 1954 until 1958 sixty-three drive-ins were constructed in Australia. Television had a far greater impact on 'hard-top' cinemas - by 1960 over 230 cinemas had closed in and around the leading cities - while the number of Drive-ins continued to grow. In 1965 the national total topped 182. Attendances began to fall from the 1970s, and declined greatly in the late 1970s with the impact of VCR machines and multi-screen cinemas. In response many

of the drive-ins were twinned, while others were earmarked for closure. The increasing land value of many of the sites also made their closure and sale a sensible option. Very quickly, it was apparent that Drive-ins had had their day, and by the mid 1980s, most had closed for good.

### Drive-in Style

While Burwood Skyline was the first, and operated as the Hoyts flagship, but like most drive-ins in the US, the structures avoid architectural pretension. The ticket box, diner and projection booth were simple lightweight structures, but the site was enlivened with a neon entry sign, 'western' style playground, pencil lines flanking the screen, and a jaunty 1950s style interior of the diner.

Other 1950s drive-ins were similarly styled, with simple buildings, cheery diner interiors, and neon signs at entry points. Some were built by small operators, and were somewhat less elaborate.

Many drive-ins were built or re-built in the later 1960s, by which time a more 'environmental' style predominated, featuring brown brick and more restrained signage, usually internally illuminated. Some, especially those designed by Sydney architect Peter Muller for the Hoyts chain in the 1960s, were good examples of this type.

### HISTORY OF PLACE

The Dromana Drive-in opened as the Peninsula in 1961, with a capacity to accommodate 485 cars.

In the 1990s it was twinned, using a screen from the closed Hoyts Altona drive-in, and the projection beam requires a periscope assembly before hitting the screen. After 2000 a third screen was added.

In 1999 the old speakers were retired, and replaced with sound via your FM car stereo.

Geoff Cox of "Coxy's Big Break" TV program gave a short history of the place in the *Sunday Herald Sun* of 8 May 2005:

'I did something the other day that I had not done for about 20 years.

I went to the Drive-in. Remember them - big white screen, speaker clipped on your car window, popcorn and burgers? Some of it is still the same, but these days, there are a few mod cons. It's still a fun night out. When I was a little tacker, there were dozens of Drive-ins dotted across the state. Those were th days when you rugged up, with the kids in pyjamas and dressing gowns, to go to the Drive-in. When the big multi-theatre complexes came along and land prices soared, Drive-ins almost faded into the past. Today you can count them on one hand.

One of the survivors is the Dromana Drive-in on the Mornington Peninsula. Paul Whitaker's dad built it 43 years ago and Paul took over in 1989. His wife, Shelly, "cooks up a storm" in the diner. A son, Matt, is a whiz up in the projection room, while Matt's younger brother, Daniel, helps most weekends. Grandma Gwen still pops in to keep an eye on things. Paul can still remember the first screen being built. Over time, a second screen went in. Then a third on the 40th anniversary. Paul has lost track of how many movies he has seen over the years. He says it would have been hundreds.

Do the local lads still try to smuggle in a mate or two in the boot? You betcha, although not so often. Next time you fancy a night at the flicks, why not go to the Drive-in. Many of the locals take portable barbies and a few drinks. Or there's a great menu in Shelly's diner.

The Dromana Drive-in is open throughout the year, with special early bird sessions in summer. These days, there are no more speakers on the windows - sound comes through the radio. You learn something every day."

The Dromana Drive-in maintains its own website that promotes programs and "Shel's Diner", fitted out 1950s style, and Sunday market stalls.

### Plaque Citation

#### Dromana Drive -In

Originally opened as the 'Peninsula' in 1961, this is a rare surviving example of a drive-in cinema . At the height of their popularity in the 1960s, there were about 60 drive-ins in Victoria.

Words: 35/192

## **Extent of Registration**

1.All of the buildings shown as:

B1: Diner /Projection Building

B2: Ticket Booths

on Diagram 2219 held by the Executive Director

2.All of the features shown as:

F1: Screen 1

F2: Screen 2

F3: Screen 3

F4: Field 1 including driveways, berms and speaker stands

F5: Field 2 including driveways, berms and speaker stands

F6: Field 3 including driveways, berms and speaker stands

F7: "Peninsula" Neon Sign

on Diagram 2219 held by the Executive Director

3. All of the land shown L1 on Diagram 2219 held by the Executive Director being all of the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 08510 Folio 546.

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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/>*