
Whittlesea Railway Precinct



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Location

Arthurton Road, Merri Parade NORTHCOTE and Normanby Avenue THORNBURY and Bell Street, Murray Road PRESTON and High Street, Regent Street RESERVOIR, Darebin City

Municipality

DAREBIN CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO295

Heritage Listing

Darebin City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

The Whittlesea Railway was opened in 1889 and gradually developed from a semi-rural service to a full suburban service as suburban development continued in the twentieth century. New station buildings were erected in the early twentieth century at Merri, Northcote, Thornbury and Bell to accommodate increasing patronage. The line was electrified as far as Reservoir in 1921 and this included the construction of a sub-station south of Reservoir Station.

The following elements contribute to the significance of this place:

- The up-side station buildings at Merri, Northcote, Thornbury and Bell and the down side station at Northcote to the extent of the c.1910 fabric. The form of platforms at these stations, but not the materials
- The road over rail bridge at Westbourne Grove to the extent of surviving late nineteenth/early twentieth century fabric including the brick abutments.
- The railway bridge over Merri Creek.
- The substation at Reservoir.
- Remnant mature trees within the station grounds such as the Pepper trees (*Schinus molle*) at Thornbury

Later buildings and additions including the station buildings at Croxton and Reservoir, additions to Bell Station, down side station buildings except for Northcote, and the tracks and signalling and safeworking including boom gates are not significant.

How is it significant?

The Whittlesea Railway is of local historic and architectural significance to Darebin City.

Why is it significant?

The Whittlesea Railway is historically significant for its associations with the development of transport systems in Darebin in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the expansion of the suburban railway system by the Victorian Railways in Melbourne during that time. It was of critical importance in enabling the suburban settlement of Darebin during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The electrification of the service in 1921 greatly improved the efficiency of the service and enabled suburban development to extend to the northern parts of Darebin in the inter-war period. (AHC criteria A.4, D.2)

The Whittlesea Railway is historically significant as a representative example of an early twentieth century suburban railway. The stations constructed c.1911 at Merri, Northcote, Thornbury and Bell are architecturally significant as examples of the 'Gisborne' style of station buildings, with the example at Northcote notable for its brick construction. (AHC criterion D.2)

Heritage Study/Consultant Darebin - Darebin Heritage Study, Context P/L, 2011;

Construction dates 1889,

Hermes Number 27354

Property Number

Physical Description 1

The Whittlesea Railway is a dual track suburban railway. Early infrastructure including signalling and safe-working, gate keeper's houses and sidings and spur lines has been removed. Surviving early infrastructure associated with the construction of the line and upgrading in the early twentieth century includes the stations at Merri, Northcote, Thornbury and Bell, the bridge over Merri Creek and the road over rail bridge at Westbourne Grove in Northcote, and the c.1921 sub-station at Reservoir.

As noted in the History, the four stations at Merri, Northcote, Thornbury and Bell were constructed in variations on a similar standard design described by Ward as the the 'Gisborne Style'. The up-side building at Bell railway station and the complexes at Merri and Thornbury are part of a sub-group of the 'Gisborne Style' known as the 'Ripponlea' group (after the station at Ripponlea). Northcote is part of the 'Macedon' group. The stylistic differences between the sub-groups were subtle, but the overall form and layout were very similar. Ward & Donnelly (1982, v.4:37) describe it as follows:

The design of the Gisborne Style is best described as Edwardian, with a characteristic dependency upon the vocabulary of the Queen Anne architects.

The principal of the building plan was to group the major rooms into a central brick, or timber building, consisting of the booking, parcel's and telegraph office, lobby, and the ladies' and general waiting rooms. The office was dominated by a large gabled roof, visually at right angles supported by lower roofs over the waiting rooms on either side of the office. The service functions consisted of the ladies' and men's toilets, the lamp room, the store and the wood yard and were grouped into wings attached to either or both ends of the central block. In some cases, the van goods shed was included in the wings. The end result was a very neatly laid out platform with a minimum of outbuildings. The configuration of the service functions varied, but the plan of the central section was almost always the same.

All four stations fit this description. Of the three 'Ripponlea' stations, the up-side buildings at Merri and Thornbury remain the most intact including the service wings. Thornbury also has a small inter-war pavilion on the down-side which has a rolled steel cantilevered verandah. The service wings on the north side of Bell was demolished and replaced in 2008. Bell station also has a goods/parcel wing addition on the up-end, which was constructed c.1959.

The 'Macedon' sub-group to which Northcote belongs is described by Ward & Donnelly (1982, v.4:41) as a 'full-blown' edition of the other sub-groups. Distinguishing features include:

. The incorporation of the toilet wing into the central section by abandoning the use of corrugated iron in favour of materials selected for the central core. This can be seen in the service wing on the down end of the up-side building at Northcote.

. Special attention paid to the entrance porch, which featured various roof forms and types of posts, beams and decorative detail. This can be seen in the east elevation of the up-side building at Northcote, which a projecting porch with arched timber fretwork, and turned posts set in brick piers.

. The inclusion of a smaller building compatible with the design of its larger neighbour on the opposite (usually down side) platform, which consisted of a lobby, office and general waiting room. This is provided at Northcote, and is the only c.1910 down-side building along the line.

The substation at Reservoir is an austere stripped Classical rendered building. It has four tall windows in the side elevation and two in the end elevations

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