
Burwood Drive-In Site



B7374 Burwood Drive-In

Location

Burwood Highway,, BURWOOD VIC 3125 - Property No B7374

Municipality

WHITEHORSE CITY

Level of significance

Local

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 19, 2008

What is significant? Inspired by a visit to the USA in the early 1950s, Hoyts' Southern Division manager George Griffith Jnr, formed a syndicate to build Australia's first Drive-in. They found a site in Burwood on the rapidly growing eastern fringe of Melbourne's burgeoning suburban sprawl and commissioned a design from architects A C Leith Bartlett & Partners, in conjunction with RCA Australia. Construction proceeded through the latter half of 1953 and it opened on 17 February 1954 as the 'Burwood Skyline' with On the Riviera. It was an immediate success and cars were banked up along the Burwood Highway in both directions, and down McComas Grove, a residential side-street, which provided entry access. The site was a natural amphitheatre, with the screen located on a rise across a small creek. It could accommodate 652 cars, and had two sessions per night. The exit was on the Highway alongside a modest neon Hoyts sign. A simple rectangular shed-like building in the centre was the diner, but for the first few years, car-hops (attendants) would take orders and deliver food to the cars. Facilities for families were a high priority, such as the provision of a large playground in front of the screen. The site was expanded within a couple of years to accommodate 700 cars, the diner was enlarged, an elaborate western themed barbeque area with lake and steak-house was added on the southern boundary, a cream-brick sided 'walk-in' was built for those without cars near the barbeque area and screen, and a merry-go-round was added to the playground. Side panels were added to the screen in later years as the land behind was developed for suburban housing. The drive-in continued successfully in this form for many years, with the only change being the replacement of the ticket box with a brick version in c1975. However, like so many other drive-ins in the early 1980s, in the face of declining attendances, it closed in 1983.

The site became the home of the local Council's electricity supply yard, and the diner and car ramps were replaced by a large industrial building and yards. The entry area was divided off and has become a small park, where the ticket box now serves as a barbeque shelter. The barbeque area, lake (now drained) and steak-house remain more or less intact within the site, along with the 'walk-in' structure.

How is it significant? The Burwood Drive-in site is significant for historic and social reasons at a Local level.

Why is it significant? The Burwood Drive-in site is historically and socially significant as the location of the first Drive-in to be built in Australia, one whose immediate popularity ushered in a wave of Drive-ins across the country. It is one of five Drive-in sites to remain at least partly intact (three are still operating) out of the 60 that once existed in Victoria. These are the last remnants of a once extremely popular cultural phenomenon, one that appears to have had a real impact only in the US, Canada and Australia.

Inspired by American cultural trends, drive-ins, like motels, were a new type of private or domestic space, a mobile extension of the family living room, and characterized a trend in personal behaviour to be less formal and inhibited in public spaces. They grew out of the extraordinary popularity and increasing affordability of cars and provided a novel and easy form of entertainment. They catered to a wide range of audiences, allowing a whole family with young children the convenience of staying in their car, for teenagers to socialize apart from their parents and especially for young adults who were attracted to particular film genres and the intimate private space provided by the car.

The Burwood site was particularly popular and catered to families to a greater extent than many others, as evidenced by the large playground (now gone) and the extensive barbeque facilities (which still remain partly intact).

The 'walk-in' building, for patrons without cars, is one of only two to survive in Victoria.

Classified: `28/04/2008

Other Names Burwood Skyline,

Hermes Number 71756

Property Number

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/>