

Oakleigh Motel
1650 Dandenong Road, Oakleigh East

Heritage Council Registrations Committee Hearing – 26 March 2009
Members – Associate Professor Renate Howe (Chair), Mr James Norris, Mr
Robert Sands

DECISION OF THE HERITAGE COUNCIL

After considering a recommendation and the submissions and conducting a hearing into those submissions, pursuant to Section 42(1) (b) (i) the Heritage Council has determined that the Oakleigh Motel is of cultural heritage significance and should be included in the Heritage Register.

**Assoc Prof Renate
Howe (Chair)**

Mr James Norris

Mr Robert Sands

Decision Date – 20 April 2009

APPEARANCES

Executive Director, Heritage Victoria

Dr Kerry Jordan on behalf of the Executive Director.

Ms Frances O'Neill, Manager Assessments, was available for questions from the Committee.

Nominator

Mr Simon Reeves and Ms Michele Summerton on behalf of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria).

Owner

Mr Chris Taylor, Lawyer, Planning & Property Partners on behalf of Oakleigh Development Pty Ltd.

Mr Bryce Raworth was called as an expert witness.

INTRODUCTION

The Place

- 1 The place subject to consideration is known as the Oakleigh Motel, located at 1650 Dandenong Road, Oakleigh East. The place consists of three single-storey buildings constructed in 1957 consisting of a main building facing Dandenong Road containing a restaurant, manager's residence, office, and adjacent drive-in entry, with two buildings containing forty-three motel rooms located behind and associated land.

Nomination

- 2 In June 2008, Ms Tracey Avery on behalf of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) nominated the Oakleigh Motel for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register for its historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

Recommendation of the Executive Director

- 3 The Executive Director has recommended that the place be included in the Victorian Heritage Register.
- 4 Proposed permit policy and permit exemptions were circulated with the recommendation.

Preliminary Matters

- 5 In a letter dated 18 March 2009 the appellant, the City of Monash, advised that they would not be appearing at the hearing and wished to rely upon their written submissions. All parties were informed of the City of Monash's decision.

Site Inspection

- 6 The Committee undertook an unaccompanied site inspection of the property on 20 March 2009.

SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

The Executive Director

- 7 The Executive Director has recommended that the place be included in the Victorian Heritage Register for its architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.
- 8 Dr Kerry Jordan appeared for the Executive Director. Dr Jordan submitted that the place has:
 - Historical significance as the first motel built in Victoria and as an example of a new type of building associated with the economic and social changes occurring in Victoria after World War II, particularly the dramatic rise in family travel by private car.

- Architectural significance as an unusually intact example of 1950s modernism in Victoria. It was submitted that the motel units are a stylish example of Modernist design. Dr Jordan also submitted that the motel is significant as the earliest example in Victoria of a new building type, based on an American model and designed to be visually striking using prominent signage and lighting to advertise the place and its function.
- 9 Dr Jordan presented the committee with a considerable amount of contextual history relating to the site itself, early motels in Australia, ‘Googie’ architecture, ‘Featurism’ and modern signage. It was contended that ‘Googie’ architecture had been reconsidered by architectural historians and architectural theorists such as Robert Venturi in the light of post-Modernism.
 - 10 In relation to the motel landscaping, Dr Jordan submitted that it was not of particular significance and that a later swimming pool has supplanted the majority of the original landscaping.
 - 11 Comparisons were made with other early motels such as the Bairnsdale Motel (1957, demolished); Garden View Lodge, Wangaratta (c1959) and the Highland Haven Motel in Maryborough (late 1950s) and examples of architecture related to the post-war boom in car ownership on the Victorian Heritage Register such as the Underground Car Park at the University of Melbourne (H1004) and the Beaurepaire Motor Garage in Bendigo (H1736).

Nominator

- 12 The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) nominated the place for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register for its historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.
- 13 Mr Simon Reeves and Ms Michele Summerton appeared for the National Trust of Australia (Victoria). They submitted that the place has:
 - Historical significance as the first motel built in Victoria (completed in 1957), one of a very small number of known surviving examples of motels from the 1950s in Victoria and the only surviving example of the initial boom of motel development in the Melbourne metropolitan area between 1955 and 1959. Mr Reeves also submitted that the motel is the only surviving example of a motel accredited by the Motel Federation of Victoria in the 1950s. It was also contended that the motel has significance as a material response to the so-called accommodation crisis prior to the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games. Mr Reeves submitted that the motel is significant as evidence of the American influence in Victoria and as an icon of the profound change in the development of cities in the 20th century associated with the post-war boom in car ownership.
 - Architectural significance as possibly the best example in Victoria of the colourful, eye-catching roadside architecture seen as typical of the 1950s. It was submitted that the motel is visually striking and dominated by an illuminated billboard-style sign. Mr Reeves submitted that the motel is of considerable aesthetic significance as a rare, early and substantially intact

example of the American ‘Googie’ style of architecture and that the variety of angles and lightweight structure of the buildings are designed to impress with their modernity. It was also contended that the motel is significant as an example of the phenomenon of American motel design being freely adapted by local draftsmen.

- 14 Material relating to the history of motels in Victoria, a comparative analysis of early motels and material outlining the history of the ‘Googie’ style in America and illustrating comparative examples of the style’s manifestation in Australia were also submitted.
- 15 In relation to the landscape, it was submitted that it is not crucial to the significance of the place and is evocative of the era at most. Mr Reeves referred to a 1978 description of the place that noted the gardens were overgrown.

Owner

- 16 Mr Chris Taylor appeared on behalf of the owner, Oakleigh Developments Pty Ltd and called Mr Bryce Raworth to provide expert evidence. Mr Raworth submitted that the owner is supportive of the proposed registration of the place and does not wish to object to any aspect of the extent of registration or the draft Statement of Significance.
- 17 Mr Raworth stated that he concurred with the views expressed in the Statements of Significance for the motel prepared by Heritage Victoria and the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) and in the Monash Heritage Study (1998/1999).
- 18 It was submitted that the Oakleigh Motel is one of the most influential of the city’s early motels and that it represents the emergence of a new type of building associated with the economic and social changes that occurred in Victoria after World War II - especially the dramatic rise in mass car culture.
- 19 In relation to the architectural significance of the place, Mr Raworth submitted that the motel is an unusually intact example of 1950s modernism in Victoria. He contended that the design self-consciously embodies key characteristics of the motel as a building type directly modelled on American precedents and is an important example of the motel architectural aesthetic.
- 20 According to Mr Raworth’s submission, the landscape is sympathetic but not a significant feature of the place.
- 21 Mr Raworth also submitted a history of the site and a brief history of the construction of the motel.

Other written submissions

City of Monash

- 22 In a letter to the Executive Director dated 19 December 2008 the City of Monash advised that it opposed the inclusion of the Oakleigh Motel in the Victorian Heritage Register.
- 23 The City of Monash made a written submission to the Registration Committee which included:

- the relevant section of the *Monash Heritage Study* (1998) which assessed the place as being of State significance and recommended it for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay in the City of Monash Planning Scheme.
- a report entitled *Recommendation for Inclusion in the Heritage Register, Oakleigh Motel, 1650 Dandenong Road, Oakleigh East* presented as item 5.4 at the Monash City Council meeting held on 16 December 2008
- the relevant minutes of that meeting where the following Substantive Motion was carried:
 1. *That the Heritage Council be advised that the Council opposes the inclusion of the Oakleigh Motel at 1650 Dandenong Rd Oakleigh East, in the State Heritage Register.*
 2. *That the Council review the inclusion of the Oakleigh Motel at 1650 Dandenong Rd Oakleigh East, in the Heritage Overlay of the Monash Planning Scheme.*

Oakleigh & District Historical Society

- 24 The Oakleigh & District Historical Society lodged a written submission supporting the Executive Director's recommendation.
- 25 The Society submitted that the place has:
- Historical significance as the first building of its kind in Victoria. It was submitted that it represents a way of life from fifty years ago and is an iconic part of the community of Oakleigh and Clayton. The Society further submitted that the motel is historically significant as it was built near the turning point for the marathon at the 1956 Olympics held in Melbourne and at the site of the Mulgrave Arms Hotel.
 - Architectural significance as a typical American-styled motel with unique signage.
- 26 The Society's submission also included letters in support of the registration from:
- Waverley Historical Society
 - Monash Ratepayers Association
 - Several members of the Oakleigh community

REASONS

- 27 The Committee is impressed by the quality of submissions presented at the hearing and is of the view that the Oakleigh Motel is of State significance and that its inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register is warranted.
- 28 The Committee finds that the Oakleigh Motel is of architectural, historical and aesthetic significance to the State of Victoria. It meets the significance threshold for inclusion in the Victoria Heritage Register according to the Heritage

Council's criteria A, B, D and E for assessing cultural heritage significance (as identified in Attachment 1 to this report):

- Criterion A – the Oakleigh Motel is of historical significance as the first motel built in Victoria.
- Criterion B – the motel is significant as the only surviving example of the initial boom in motel development in the Melbourne metropolitan area between 1955 and 1959.
- Criterion D – the place is significant as an example of a new type of building associated with the economic and social changes occurring in Victoria after World War II, particularly the dramatic rise in family travel by private car.
- Criterion E – the motel is of aesthetic significance as an example of 1950s Modernism in Victoria and American ‘Googie’-style architecture.

29 The Committee is of the opinion that the material presented had not fully considered the significance of the interiors of the motel rooms and reception area and of surviving external features such as the air conditioning plant, the phone booth and linen room. On its inspection, the Committee noted that the purpose-designed fittings of most motel rooms and the reception area had largely survived intact. The Committee was impressed by these aspects of the place.

30 The Committee also noted that the landscaping, although not original, complemented the heritage significance of the place.

31 In response to questions on these issues, Dr Jordan agreed that the Statement of Significance had focused exclusively on the exterior of the motel building. Mr Raworth responded that his report had also focused on exteriors and that if the interiors and surviving external features were judged to contribute to heritage significance this could have implications for any future renovations required for adaptation and reuse.

32 After consideration of these issues the Committee concludes that the interiors and surviving fittings such as the air conditioning plant, telephone box and linen room contribute to the heritage significance of the place and should be referred to in the Statement of Significance to ensure they are considered in future permit applications for adaptive reuse of the place. A revised Statement of Significance is provided at Attachment 2.

33 Given that the appellant, the City of Monash, did not appear at the hearing and did not provide any reason for their appeal in their written submission, no further issues of contention were identified with the registration of the place.

34 The Committee wishes to express its disappointment with the conduct of the City of Monash in this matter. The City of Monash was the only objector to the proposed registration and requested that the matter be heard by the Registrations Committee of the Heritage Council. A few days prior to the hearing taking place, the City of Monash advised that its representative would not be appearing and that the City would instead rely solely upon written submissions made to the

Committee. These written submissions provided no basis for the objection on cultural heritage significance grounds.

- 35 In light of these events, the Committee believes that Heritage Council protocols relating to registration hearings should be reviewed, in so far as possible, to require the party requesting a hearing to provide reason/s for their appeal consistent with s.38(3) of the *Heritage Act* 1995.

CONCLUSION

- 36 The Committee finds that the Oakleigh Motel is of architectural, historical and aesthetic significance to the State of Victoria. It meets the significance threshold for inclusion in the Victoria Heritage Register according to the Heritage Council's criteria A, B, D and E for assessing cultural heritage significance.
- 37 The Committee has noted from the submissions presented to it and its own inspection of the property that the place is substantially intact and many original features remain in-situ. The Statement of Significance has been revised to reflect this.

ATTACHMENT 1

HERITAGE COUNCIL CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT OF PLACES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

CRITERION A	Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history
CRITERION B	Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.
CRITERION C	Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.
CRITERION D	Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.
CRITERION E	Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
CRITERION F	Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.
CRITERION G	Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.
CRITERION H	Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

These were adopted by the Heritage Council at its meeting on 7 August 2008, and replace the previous criteria adopted by the Heritage Council on 6 March 1997.

ATTACHMENT 2

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

What is significant?

The Oakleigh Motel was the first motel built in Victoria. It was designed in 1956 and opened in 1957. It was located on the Princes Highway, the main road into Melbourne from Gippsland, in what were then the outskirts of Melbourne. The motel was designed by builder and draftsman James Miller, principal of the Tec Draft Machine & Drafting Service. The design was likely to have been influenced by the owner, Cyril Lewis, who had travelled in the United States, staying in and inspecting many motels there. The motel was a new building type, inspired by American models, and was associated with the post-war boom in car ownership. The rooms provided more comfort than the old hotels and guest houses, and were self contained and private. Each room had its own bathroom and had air conditioning, sound-proofing, wall-to-wall carpet and Venetian blinds. The single-storey nature of the room blocks and the planning of the site allowed patrons of the motel to park their car at the door of their unit.

Signage and electric lighting were closely tied to modern design in post-war architecture, with businesses such as shops, motels and service stations taking full advantage of both to advertise the place and its function. The excesses of commercialism typified by the Oakleigh Motel's signage were deplored by Robin Boyd in his 1960 book *The Australian Ugliness*, but became more acceptable in the 1980s with movements such as pop art and post-modernism.

The Oakleigh Motel, when built, was a model of 1950s modernity, with its butterfly roofs, sloping window walls, sleek signage and hangar-like entrance. It retains a high degree of intactness and many external and internal features remain in-situ.

The motel includes three separate single storey buildings. The front one on Dandenong Road contains a drive-in entry canopy, an office, manager's residence and a restaurant, formerly the dining room. A high sloping steel roof supported by zig-zag struts covers the drive-in entry next to the reception area, which has the motel's name etched into the glass entry door. Near the door to the reception area is a key return slot and a small glass sign labelled 'OFFICE'. The reception area itself includes original fixtures and fittings and a number of early photographs of the motel. The signage on the office section is a prominent part of the design. Above the office area is a large white sloping panel with the words 'OAKLEIGH MOTEL' spelt out in red letters, illuminated at night, set forward of the wall. After the initial construction a large rectangular neon sign was added on the roof above this with the word 'MOTEL' and an arrow (now removed)

down one side with the word 'OAKLEIGH'. The restaurant has outward sloping glass windows, and later signage on the roof, and it was extended in 1959.

Behind are two buildings containing forty-three similar rooms. The two motel room blocks have butterfly roofs separated by a service core. They contain two parallel rows of rooms, each angled to create a zig-zag facade. The interiors are substantially intact and the bathrooms, with their oblique wall arrangement, retain their original pale grey mosaic floor tiling. The linen room and phone booth remain somewhat intact and the service alley between the parallel rows of rooms contains the remnants of the original air-conditioning system and the centralised toilet flushing system.

How is it significant?

The Oakleigh Motel is of architectural, historical and aesthetic significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Oakleigh Motel is historically significant as the first motel to be built in Victoria and as the only surviving example of the initial boom in motel development in the Melbourne metropolitan area between 1955 and 1959. It represents a new type of building, associated with the economic and social changes occurring in Victoria after World War II, particularly the dramatic rise in family travel by private car in the 1950s.

The Oakleigh Motel is architecturally significant as an unusually intact example of 1950s modernism in Victoria, and is aesthetically significant as an example of the American 'Googie' style of architecture. It is also significant as the earliest example in Victoria of a new building type, which was designed to be visually striking, and used prominent signage and lighting to advertise the place and its function.