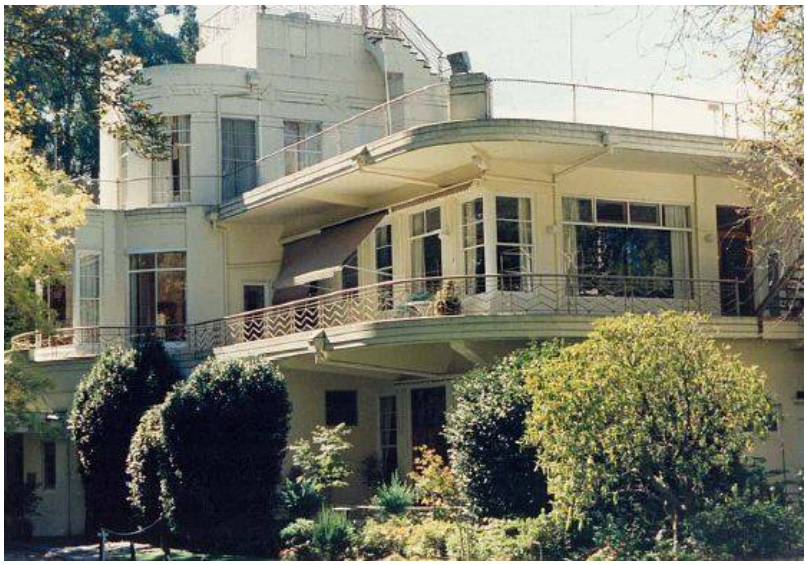
Victorian Heritage Database Report

Burnham Beeches



Location:
1 Sherbrooke Road, Sherbrooke VIC 3789 - Property No 58672

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:
Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number:
Listing Authority: HI

Heritage Overlay Number: HO5

Statement of Significance:
One of the finest examples of the Art Deco Mansion in Australia; built in 1930-1933 for the Nicholas family. The design by Harry Norris sits uniquely at the midpoint between the decorative zig zag moderne of the 1920s. Burnham Beeches is a period exemplar of the up-to-the-minute high style living and entertaining of the 1930s in Australia. (NT, 4929)

Burnham Beeches was constructed in 1930-33 as a rural retreat for the wealthy aspro king Alfred Nicholas. The property was taken over by the Nicholas institute for medical and veterinary research in 1955, and in the early 1980s converted to provide guest-house accommodation. (VHR, H868)

1.Burham Beeches is a significant example of a retreat built in the tradition of a colonial hill station. The property includes sporting recreational facilities, utilitarian outbuildings and picturesque gardens and farmland in addition to the main house. Of hill station type homesteads in Victoria, only Duniera at Mt Macedon has comparable gardens and no other example has farmlands on the same scale.

2. The use of the modern style at Burnham Beeches is a particularly early example in Victoria and reflects contemporaneous developments in American architecture. It is a successful synthesis of the ornament and styling of the 1920's jazz period with streamlined modern which was to become popular in the 1930's in Australia.

3.Burnham Beeches is a rare domestic example of the modern genre and was designed by Harry Norris, one of the leading commercial architects in Melbourne between the wars.

4.The use of advanced reinforced concrete technology at Burham Beeches is significant in that it generated the unusual streamlined appearance of the main house and allowed architectural devices such as cantilevered balconies, wide spans and continuous windows to be achieved.

5. The use of the design analogy of a ship in the sea was particularly appropriate for the retreat. The house sits in a contrived garden landscape with farmlands and outbuildings conveying modernity, reflecting a belief that progress and technology were necessarily good. In contrast, the utilitarian outbuildings suggest confidence in a self-reliant future. Such a successful design analogy is rare in Australian architecture.

6.The Burham Beeches estate is historically important for its associations with the wealthy business man Alfred Nicholas, co-founder of the Nicholas company which developed the famous aspro formula. The estate is able to provide evidence of the aspirations and values of the first generation Australian who 'made-good'.

7. The mansion provides an example of 'up-to-the-minute' high style living and entertainment of the 1930s in Australia, contrasting with the traditional nineteenth century layout of the estate. The estate also demonstrates the social demarcations which existed in pre second World War Australia and those changes which occurred following world war ii with the development of secondary industry and a trend towards reduction in social barriers. (VHR, H868)

Description

Built in 1939 by A.M. Nicholas in Art Deco style. Extensive gardens of 13 acres were professionally

landscaped. Planning Scheme Am. L94 recently approved for a major accommodation development and restaurant.

The main drive is approached through an impressive entry with wrought iron gates (bearing a pair of leaping deer) suspended from large stone pillars. To the left of the entry drive the planting consists of towering indigenous EUCALYPTUS REGNANS (mountain ash) interplanted with CRYPTOMERIA JAPONICA, ULMUS XHOLLANDICA PURPURESCENS, ACER SACCHARINUM, PITTOSPORUM EUGENIOIDES var, FAGUS SYLVATICA, ACER PSEUDOPLATANUS, ULMUS GLABRA LUTESCENS, PICEA SITCHENSIS, THUJA PLICATA, THUJOPSIS DOLABRATA var, ACER NEGUNDO and CEDRUS DEODARA. These trees have an understorey of kalmia, rhododendron and azalea. To the east of the drive, the construction of the new depot and creation of a lawn and garden have greatly opened the area. (RNE, 100526)

Closer to the residence, ornamental ponds are located on either side of the drive and a new link now connects the entry drive to the main lake drive. Stone paved paths encircle the ponds and small bridges cross the water. The smaller of the two pools (on the west of the drive) is sited beneath huge EUCALYPTUS REGNANS and several exotic trees, ACER PALMATUM and ACER PSEUDOPLATANUS, THUJOPSIS DOLABRATA var and CHAMAECYPARIS LAWSONIANA. A middle layer of planting comprises DICKSONIA ANTARCTICA (soft tree fern), RHODODENDRON ARBOREUM, AZALEA, FATSIA JAPONICA, EUONYMUS EUROPAEA and ACUBA JAPONICA. (RNE, 100526)

The dividing line between the Alfred Nicholas Memorial Gardens and Burnham Beeches is marked by a cyclone wire fence. The original flight of steps runs perpendicular to the terraces. The terraces on the east side of the fence are now dominated by trees rather than low plants. A stone retaining wall divides the terraces from the main drive to the lake and within the terraces rockwork is included to create planting pockets. The main drive to the lake follows the contours with a sharp bend at the western extremity of the site. The main drive is augmented by two secondary tracks: one runs directly from the horseshoe bend to the north end of the lake and another bisects the main woodland area and doubles back to rejoin the main drive above the waterfall. Pedestrian paths also cross the area and permit a wide variety of routes to the lake to be chosen by the visitor. Numerous red brick structures dot the area and its is assumed that these were early compost bins. (RNE, 100526)

The dominant tree planting of this area is EUCALYPTUS REGNANS and ACACIA MELANOXYLON with specimens of SEQUOIA SEMPERVIRENS, ACACIA ELATA and ACACIA DEALBATA, CRYPTOMERIA JAPONICA ELEGANS, PRUNUS SERRULATA, PICEA SMITHIANA, CATALPA BIGNONIOIDES, PITTOSPORUM EUGENIOIDES, PITTOSPORUM EUGENIOIDES var, ULMUS GLABRA CAMPERDOWNII, PSEUDOTSUGA MENZIESII, CUPRESSUS MACROCARPA, FAGUS SYLVTICA and CORYNOCARPUS LAEVIGATUS var. Under the trees are RHODODENDRON, DICKSONIA ANTARCTICA, CORNUS sp (dogwoods), ACER PALMATUM, HYDRANGEA cvs, KALMIA LATIFOLIA, LIGUSTRUM sp, COTONEASTER PANNOSUS, sycamore seedlings, camellia, euonymus, viburnum and acer species. (RNE, 100526)

The lake is currently the best maintained area of the garden and forms a focus for the design. To the west is a terraced garden with some of the most consistent rock walling currently found in the garden, to the south-east is a waterfall (over which the first glimpse of the lake is obtained), to the south are public toilets (erected c 1965) and to the east is a section of cleared bushland. The main trees around the lake are ACER PALMATUM, CARPINUS BETULUS, GINGKO BILOBA, SALIX BABYLONICA, BETULA sp, SCIADOPITYS VERTICILLATA, MICHELIA FIGO, CHAMAECYPARIS OBTUSA AN CHAMAECYPARIS OBTUSA var among terrace planting of CLIVIA sp, CHAMAECYPARIS LAWSONIANA (a pair either side of south-eastern entrance to lake), ULMUS GLABRA LUTESCENS, LIQUIDAMBAR FORMOSANA (rare), NOTHOFAGUS FUSCA, METASEQUOIA GLYPTOSTROBOIDES, CORNUS, SORBUS and POPULUS species. Peripheral planting amongst these trees includes KALMIA LATIFOLIA, RHODODENDRON, PHOTINIA AND CORNUS. The islands are planted with GINGKO BILOBA, PRUNUS SERRULATA CULTIVARS and the bridges are festooned with WISTERIA CINENSIS. (RNE, 100526)

The Blackfish Pond is located approximately 50m north of the main lake. It is fed by a small creek which runs along the northern boundary of the property. The centre of the lake has a large circular inlet which acts as an

overflow outlet and water is conveyed under the roadway via a pipe. A timber jetty extends from the south-eastern edge of the pond to the centre. The pond is surrounded by DICKSONIA ANTARCTICA, PHYLLOSTACHYS AUREA (fishpole bamboo), ACER PALMATUM, CORNUS sp, HOHERIA POPULNEA, RHODODENDRON, PITTOSPORUM EUGENIOIDES var. (RNE, 100526)

A long triangular area bounded on the north and west by the property boundary and to the south by a small creek, a tributary of the Sassafras Creek, is densely covered with EUCALUPTUS REGNANS (mountain ash), ACACIA MELANOXYLON (blackwood), ACACIA DEALBATA (silver wattle), with a dense understorey of DICKSONIA ANTARCTICA (soft tree fern) and the ground fern POLYSTICHUM PROLIFERUM (mother shield fern). To the east of the gardens is a large cleared triangular space sloping from south to north.

The approach to Alfred Nicholas Memorial Gardens passes to the north of the Sherbrooke Forest and this native bush forms a dense barrier when looking out of the garden and Burnham Beeches property. Two large FAGUS SYLVATICA (beech) flank the main entry to Alfred Nicholas Memorial Gardens while smaller specimens (FAGUS SYLVATICA and FAGUS SYLVATICA LIVERSII) form a row on the road verge. The road adjacent to the Burnham Beeches estate is planted with CUPRESSUS MACROCARPA (Monterey cypress) and PSEUDOTSUGA MENZIESII (Douglas fir), planted in two rows, with remnant mountain ash, silver wattle and pomaderris complementing the mature tree canopy. (RNE, 100526)

Heritage Study / Consultant	Yarra Ranges - Shire of Yarra Ranges Heritage Study, Context Pty Ltd, 2000
Construction Date Range	1931 - 1933
Architect / Designer	Norris, Harry A
Municipality	YARRA RANGES SHIRE
Other names	
Hermes number	115180
Property number	58672

This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online