

# HISTORIC ELECTRIC SIGNAGE IN VICTORIA

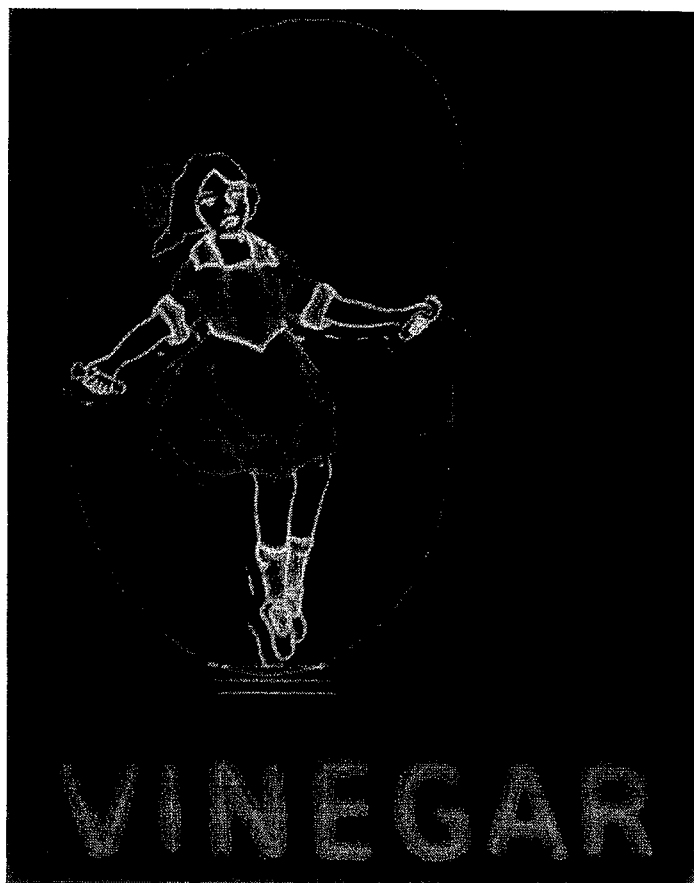
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A Study of Historic Illuminated Signs

prepared for

Heritage Victoria and the City of Yarra

August 2001



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1995 the Historic Building Council of Victoria (now the Heritage Council) added the PELACO electric sign in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond to the Victorian Heritage Register. As part of the assessment process, a windscreen survey of historic neon signs was carried out to give a typological context to the PELACO sign. The survey suggested that the number of surviving historic neon signs in Victoria is minimal and there are few which remain in operation. A number of signs are currently protected under municipal planning schemes, and others through the Victorian Heritage Act 1995. This statutory protection is usually by default as the signs are often attached to a historic building. The PELACO sign and a number of others have recently been recognised as having high cultural values in their own right.

In order to ascertain which signs have cultural value and should be retained, a survey was commissioned in August 2001 by Heritage Victoria and the City of Yarra. The survey was required to identify the importance of the surviving signs and to ascertain the preservation options for them.

A number of sky signs such as *PELACO*, *Skipping Girl*, *Slade Knitwear* and *Nylex*, have importance to the City of Yarra and are recommended for protection in the planning scheme.

Other skysigns of importance which should be individually protected in the local planning scheme are *Victoria Bitter* sign Elsternwick Hotel, City of Port Phillip, *Borsaris Corner* sign, Lygon Street, Melbourne City Council, *Apex Belting* skysign Ballarat Road, City of Maribyrnong.

A number of signs should be recognised within the existing heritage registration details for the following heritage places:

- **Newspaper House**, Collins St Melbourne (requires a change to the extent of registration)
- **Salvation Army**, Salvation Army Building Bourke St (requires inclusion in the statement of significance)
- **Princess** lightbulb sign Princess Theatre (requires inclusion in the statement of significance)
- **Herald Sun** skysign on former Herald Sun building Flinders Street, Melbourne (requires inclusion in the statement of significance)
- **Myer** lightbulb sign (whole site presently under consideration for the Victorian Heritage Register and sign should be mentioned in statement of significance)

This study as concludes that there appear to be only a small number of avenues for funding the repair of historic signs viz:

Signs may be repaired by owners where there is a continuing client for the sign and a desire to keep the sign lit (eg *Victoria Bitter*, *Borsaris Corner*),

Signs may be repaired with assistance from grant-in-aid programmes such as the Melbourne Heritage Restoration Fund or the Heritage Council's fund where the sign is on the Victorian Heritage Register (eg *PELACO*, *Salvation Army*),

Signs may be repaired as part of an overall works and development programme being undertaken at the site (eg *The Comedy* and the *Herald Sun* signs when substantive upgrade of the site is undertaken) or

Signs may be repaired and maintained through a sponsorship scheme (eg appropriate candidates would be the *Slade*, *Pelaco*, *Skipping Girl* signs).

Signs that are major 'spectaculars' such as Nylex require a different approach. The Nylex sign and the air rights are 'owned' by a signage company and produces substantial income for that company and the building owner on which the sign is located.

There are two problems with this site: the possible future demolition of the building supporting the sign and the proposed alterations to the sign itself which would update the client company's name and product type but radically alter the sign in the process thereby devaluing the heritage significance and iconography of the place.

By not undertaking these changes the client company may feel that the sign is no longer relevant to its business. In this circumstance the only apparent solution is to convince the client company of the value of maintaining its sign as an historic and a well known icon of the city. Apart from discussion between the owners of the Nylex sign (the tenant company), Whiteway Neon (the lease holder of the air rights) and the City of Yarra as to a *quid pro quo* arrangement, there would need to be no other actions on the part of the City of Yarra apart from proceeding with a Planning Scheme Amendment to include the sign as a heritage place. A possible *quid pro quo* arrangement would be to allow an updated Nylex sign elsewhere on the site provided that the existing sign continued to be maintained.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 The Commission**

This study of neon and electric signage has been jointly commissioned by Heritage Victoria and the City of Yarra in order to identify, compare and assess the heritage importance, cultural significance, management issues and retention strategies for this type of signage within Victoria. It was brought about in response to issues surrounding the Slade Knitwear sign 105-155 Dover Street Richmond. The intention is to establish recommendations for the future management of significant signs and to identify illuminated signs in Victoria that require state or municipal level statutory protection.

The study is to also identify actions in relation to statutory planning, and assistance that the City of Yarra may be able to offer owners of historic electric signs in order that they be preserved. The report should also demonstrate the importance of historic signs to owners and provide avenues for assisting in the preservation of the signs.

The report is to contain actions for:

- Heritage Victoria in terms of recommendations for statutory protection of signs,
- City of Yarra in terms of recommendations for statutory protection of signs as well as actions to preserve signs in the municipality
- Other municipal authorities where significant historic electric signs exist.

### **1.2 Acknowledgments**

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of

David Caan, Major Media Melbourne. Major Media is contracted to Whiteway Neon to provide maintenance services on their outdoor signage sites.

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Carol Thompson, Administrator for Melbourne Heritage Restoration Programme

### **1.3 Limitations of the Study**

Throughout the course of this study it has become clear that the disappearance of the major players of the signage industry (in particular Claude Neon and Whiteway Neon) has led to a loss of corporate memory and records of the industry. Assessments of signage condition and repair costs are now obtained through outsourcing to consultant engineers rather than through in-house works staff. This makes repair and running costs for signs difficult to determine as there has been no ongoing monitoring of signage condition or likely repair and costings undertaken across a large number of existing signs by experienced company works staff.

### **1.4 Abbreviations**

HV Heritage Victoria

CoY City of Yarra

MCC Melbourne City Council





## 2.0 CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

### 2.1 The Development of Electric Signage

#### 2.1.1 The Electric Light Bulb

The electric light bulb was independently invented and made public by Joseph Swan in England and Thomas Edison in the USA within a very short time of each other in 1879. For this to have been possible, however, required a series of earlier inventions which began as early as 1835. James Bowman Lindsay made the earliest claim when he apparently produced electric light via the flow of electric current through wire. The remaining descriptions of this event however are relatively inconclusive.

In 1845, J. W. Starr patented a filament lamp in the USA. He believed filaments of carbon could be used to transmit the electricity and produce heat, located within a bulb that had been emptied of air. In 1860 Joseph Swan further developed this idea using strips of carbonised paper as the filament. These lamps however were short lived as the filaments burned away quite quickly and the lamp required the production of a better vacuum pump to remove all the air. This was developed in 1865 by the German chemist Hermann Sprengle. Swan continued with his experiments and in 1878 presented his model to the Newcastle Chemical Society. In January 1879 Swan gave a demonstration of his lamp.

In 1898, Edison was also close to success with his development of the electric lamp. In October 1879 he presented an electric lamp that burned for 13 ½ hours by using a sewing thread converted to carbon by baking as the filament. The following year Edison started using carbonised paper filaments and was able to sell bulbs, enabling him to open his factory in 1880.

The first house in Britain to be fitted out with electric lighting was for Sir William Armstrong in Northumberland in 1880. It was a long time before the trend for property electrification took off however, as the establishment costs were high and for some time electric lighting was considered to be quite crude. By 1882 the electric light globe had arrived in Australia, from America, brought out for a special exhibition in Sydney of the Edison Electric Light system held that year.<sup>1</sup>

The next major development in electric lighting occurred in 1908 when tungsten was introduced as a filament. This was made possible when American inventor William D. Coolidge demonstrated that tungsten powder could be compressed into a mould to form a rod, which could then be drawn into a filament. Then, in 1913, Irving Langmuir filled the bulb with a chemically inactive gas, which prevented the rapid evaporation of the filament under the intense heat conditions. Langmuir's invention of the coiled filament lamp, where the tungsten wire was wound into a very tight coil, also reduced the heat loss and evaporation of the filament causing far greater energy efficiency.

The development of neon lighting in 1910 dramatically altered the possible uses of electric lighting and greatly increased its efficiency. Neon light was produced when an electric current was passed through neon, a chemically inactive gas, producing a bright red glow. Neon lights had no need for a filament therefore they could be produced in any shape and the use of other gases allowed light of different colours; for example, mercury vapour produced a blue glow and low-pressure sodium vapour produced yellow.

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1 Fin Stewart, as quoted in *Panorama* [Ansett Airlines inflight magazine], No 35 (April/May 1985), p10. Stewart curates a small museum in the Blue Mountains NSW and has an electric bulb collection of some 25,000 items.



The progression of this type of lighting led to the development of the fluorescent light in 1939, where the inside of the tube filled with mercury vapour was lined with phosphors. Fluorescent lights produced about four times as much light as the incandescent lights.

### 2.1.2 Lightbulb Signs

A small number of historic lightbulb signs are known to be extant in Victoria and these are all associated with institutions. These include the 'Sailors Rest' sign in Geelong (1926) and the 'MYERS' bulb sign of 1925-26, which has since been altered to read 'MYER' through the removal and filling of the space for the letter S. The MYER sign was manufactured from metal trough letters with rows of lamp holders following the perimeter of each letter.

Others—such as the 'PRINCESS' sign on the Princess Theatre, Spring Street Melbourne—were manufactured after circa 1900 (figure 1a). Prior to the erection of the PRINCESS sign, there had been a series of illuminated signs atop the central roof, which may have been oil lamp illuminated.<sup>2</sup> The largest surviving enterprise using light bulb signage is Luna Park constructed after 1912. Thousands of bulbs have been used to illuminate the Luna Park face and various sections of the architectural features and perimeter walling of the site.

### 2.1.3 Neon Lighting

Neon lighting is the name for the use of the rare gas, neon (from the Greek *neos*, or new), as a conducive medium within a glass vacuum tube, where the conducive medium is electronically excited by high voltage differential between two electrodes. Rare gases used in this patent lighting system also include Argon, Helium, Xenon and Krypton. Neon gas used in this way produces a natural red colour and has its greatest output at 635 millimicrons, the same wavelength at which maximum light transmission occurs in rainy weather.



Figure 1 The Princess Theatre Melbourne, showing an early illuminated sign "COMEDY" on the central mansard roof prior to the introduction of the current light bulb sign above central pediment. (Source: [www.PictureAustralia.org](http://www.PictureAustralia.org))

2 These signs appear in photographs of the site circa 1900.

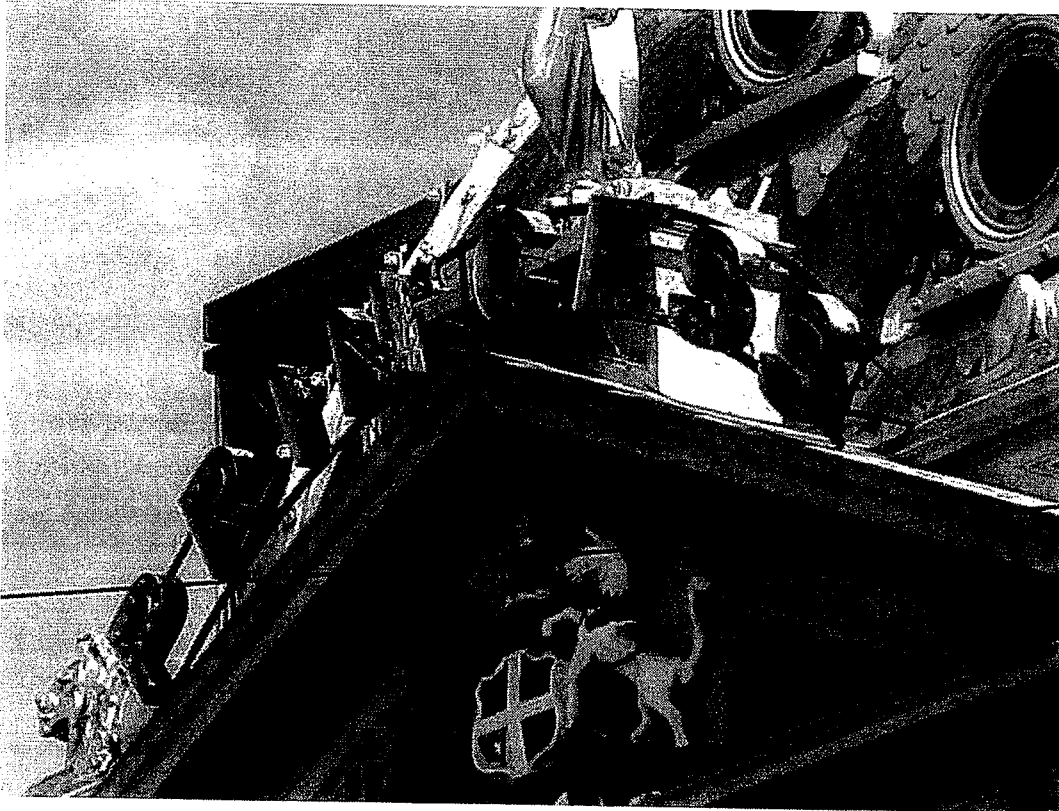


Figure 2 The Princess Theatre Melbourne, showing the lightbulb sign

In 1709, Englishman, J F Hawksbee discovered that light could be produced in a sealed glass tube by using electrodes to stimulate a contained gas.<sup>3</sup> The evolutionary nature of the production of electricity, rare gases and vacuum tubes meant that further advancement in this field was slow. D F Moore, also an Englishman, had some success in the use of glass discharge tubes and the 'Moore' tube went into production between 1893 and 1910, however, difficulties in large scale production and use prevented large-scale adoption.<sup>4</sup>

In France, Georges Claude, in 1910, contained rare gases, by-products of his pure oxygen distilling process, within the 'Moore' tube to produce a clear strong light. Initially, the electrodes burnt-out quickly, which was problematic as the glazing around them broke down. Claude resolved these problems with his patent voltage regulation system. As the problems of electrical supply, an appropriate conducting medium and vacuum tube production (also the subject of a Claude patent) were overcome, the commercial 'neon' illumination and advertising tube was realised.

Neon was first used sign for signage on the Boulevard Montmartre in 1912, advertising a barber's shop, Le Palace Coiffure.<sup>5</sup> Thereafter followed a number of signs in Paris, the most noticeable being that for CINZANO.<sup>6</sup> The potential for advertising was immediately realised and Claude established a signage factory in 1914, operating under the names Claude Neon and Air Liquide.<sup>7</sup> These companies continue to be the trade names operated by Georges Claude for his lighting and air distilling processes. In 1924, Claude

3 M Crowe, *Neon Signs: Their Origin, Use and Maintenance*, p1.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Reader's Digest, *The Inventions That Changed the World*, p 99.

6 R Stern, *The New Let there be Neon*, p 23.

7 *Ibid.*

franchised his signage manufacture and, more importantly, his electrode patent techniques to a number of agencies across the United States of America, South America and Shanghai.

The patent for Claude's neon illumination and advertising tubes arrived in Australia in 1924 and a patent was granted the following year.<sup>8</sup> In 1925, Mr Hack of Collins Street, Melbourne applied for a patent for improvements to Claude's system.<sup>9</sup> Hack was probably seeking to have his refinements incorporated into any neon signs manufactured or erected in Australia and the diagrams accompanying his patent, indicating the use of animation, tube lettering and figurative applications, clearly demonstrate that he understood the potential for using neon as an advertising medium.

These patents were concurrent with the introduction of on-line power supplies in Victoria. The State Electricity Commission had been formed in 1918 and power from its first large generator plant in Yallourn started to flow in 1924. Until that time power had been supplied via smaller plants such as the North Melbourne Electric Tramways and Lighting Co. Combined with other similar plants, there was now a reasonable coverage of the inner suburbs, although not all households were supplied. This was changed when the Commission began supplying a continuous flow at a standard voltage.

In 1928, the Australian and New Zealand patent rights for the Claude inventions were vested in Claude Neon Lights of Australasia, registered in Vancouver, Canada. The Melbourne operation of Claude Neon commenced circa 1931;<sup>10</sup> Claude Neon Lights (Victoria) was the only neon company operating at this time.<sup>11</sup> By 1935, there were six neon sign companies manufacturing in Melbourne, a number that appears never to have been exceeded.<sup>12</sup>

In America, the bastion of consumerism, the tidal wave of neon signs started with the importation of two neon signs from Paris in 1923 for a Packard Motor vehicle dealership in Los Angeles.<sup>13</sup> These were simple signs, which spelt out Packard in orange letters with a blue border. Each of the two signs cost US \$1200 and were an instant attraction: Los Angeles police reported both traffic and pedestrian congestion as crowds came to see the signs in operation. One of the pair was still operating as late as 1974. A number of franchised concerns set up neon manufacturing from 1925 with the licensing of the Claude patent rights. The resultant boom in outdoor advertising lasted until 1929, and the Stockmarket Crash.<sup>14</sup>

Before the advent of neon, advertisers had used billboards, flood-lit by bulbs, or had signs created from bulb lighting. This had not been a successful form of advertising for several reasons. The wattage had to be high to give an appropriate illumination and therefore the

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8 "A device for feeding rarefied gas tubes and particularly neon tubes intended for lighting and illuminating advertising." Patent 16038/24, granted to Georges Claude and Jean Marie Edouard de Beaufort, Engineers of Boulogne-sur-Seine, 1924. Australian Industrial Property Organisation, Melbourne and "Process for the shaping of glass tubes particularly rarefied gas tubes intended for lighting and illuminating advertising." Patent 16039/24 granted to Georges Claude and Jean Marie Edouard de Beaufort, 1924 AIPO, Melbourne.

9 "Vacuum Tube Illuminating Device." Patent 25530/25, granted to Hack of Collins Street, 1925 AIPO Melbourne.

10 Claude Neon Australia, publicity brochure, n.d. (1976).

11 *Sands and McDougall Directory*, 1931. Claude Neon Lights (Victoria) were the only neon company listed in 1931 in the alphabetical pages. There was no listing under the Trades section.

12 *Sands and McDougall Directory*, 1935. Six companies were listed in the Electric Signs section of the directory. In 1945, Neon Advertising Displays appeared for the first time as a trade category in the directory. This category continued for more than 35 years but there were rarely more than six companies in the industry. Of these six, only Claude Neon Lights and Neon Electric Signs both of South Melbourne have a continuous history.

13 Stern, *op cit*, p24.

14 D Fink & S Miller, *Neon Signs*, p 1.

running costs were also high. The filaments regularly burnt out, and the number of bulbs needed for any signboard was large. The bulbs also made it difficult to represent a logo or unusual shape and large letter signs could be up to three feet high with bulbs set some three inches (7.5cm) apart. The neon tube solved many of these problems with its lower running cost, ability to conform to unusual shapes (such as company logos), visual intensity, and eye catching use of multiple colours and animation. The number of electrical contact wiring points needed was also substantially lowered.

On 19 January 1932 the fundamental Claude (US) patent which covered the cold electrode expired,<sup>15</sup> thereby opening up business to anyone who could set up a small manufacturing room. The resultant boom in sales of neon signs was astronomical, with 16,254 erected in the Boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn in 1933, and a further 19,550 in 1934<sup>16</sup>. This period also was concurrent with the ending of the Prohibition era, when, after years of closure, nearly every brewery, distiller and beer house wished to modernise and promote their business by ordering a new electric sign<sup>17</sup>.

As well as advertising, neon signage lent itself to the vogue for Moderne architecture. Building details were enhanced with electric lighting: "architects have included in the plans for new buildings various provisions for permanent tube lighting to emphasize [sic] the features of the architecture at night."<sup>18</sup>

Neon was ideally suited to signage because of its intense natural colour, which was highly visible in all conditions, and was particularly well-suited to navigation beacons for boats and aeroplanes. A neon light had five times the visibility of an incandescent lamp but consumed far less wattage, and therefore its economy was an added attraction.

## 2.2 The Heyday of Neon: 1930s to 1950s

### 2.2.1 Neon as Icon

For the majority of the twentieth century, Hollywood has relied upon a number of clichéd representations in its filmmaking. Tall buildings indicated a big and vibrant city, as did the bustle of traffic and the pulsing of neon signage. For example, in the 1953 film 'How to Marry a Millionaire', these images were all incorporated, although the snarling traffic was ships on the Hudson River.<sup>19</sup> Neon was used to represent the modern city.

In Frank Capra's 1947 film, 'It's a Wonderful Life', neon was used to portray an alternate, evil, city.<sup>20</sup> Clarence, a ghost, took our hero George Bailey on a tour of his hometown to show how it would have been if George had not been born. The town had been corrupted by sleaze, two-bit whisky joints and dance-hall parlours, all of which were announced by flashing light-bulb and neon signs.

Neon was notable in its absence in the 1959 Stanley Kramer film 'On the Beach', set in Melbourne as the last city to survive a nuclear holocaust overtaking the Northern Hemisphere.<sup>21</sup> The city Gregory Peck comes to visit in his submarine the USS Sawfish, was one in which the neon lights were out and the city was dying, if not already dead. The switching-off of neon advertising became a metaphor for death.

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15 *Ibid*, p 6.

16 *Ibid*, p 1.

17 *Ibid*, p 6.

18 *Ibid*, p 3.

19 "How to Marry a Millionaire", directed by Jean Negulesco, 20th Century Fox.

20 "It's a Wonderful Life", starring Jimmy Stewart and directed by Frank Capra.

21 "On the Beach", a MGM film directed by Stanley Kramer, based on the book by Neville Shute.



Figure 3 The Allen's Sweets sign, Southbank South Melbourne  
(source: Claude Neon collection)

### 2.2.2 Neon as an Icon in Melbourne

Melbourne's most recent fascination with neon was re-sparked in 2001 when a small number of residents of Cremorne, a local area of Richmond, banded together to fight the proposed removal of the 1970s Slade Knitwear sign. Various press articles on the SLADE sign and the decline of neon were run by the Age, the Melbourne Express and the Melbourne Times over the period May to July 2001.<sup>22</sup>

Neon had last featured in the Melbourne press when the Allen's Sweet sign was being removed from Southbank in 1986. This newsworthy story was reported nationally in Time Australia in August that year.<sup>23</sup> The ALLEN's sign had been constructed across scaffold originally erected for a Holden Car advertisement.<sup>24</sup> Allen's had acquired the rights for the site in 1955 and erected an initial simple neon sign 'Allen's-Your Favorite Sweets'. The 1969 replacement sign was extravagant and it dominated the Southbank area for the following twenty years. Efforts by the Ministry for Planning and Environment to save the sign were futile and it was demolished.

Two of Melburnians other favourite neon signs were both erected in St Kilda junction. 'Ethyl', of Atlantic Ethyl fame, had her hair blowing in the breeze as she advertised the Atlantic brand of petroleum. Across from her was Shell Petroleum's Tumbling Dice of 1958. The dice were famous for their fall down a fifty-seven foot drop with the outcome impossible to predict.<sup>25</sup> This proved not only to be free entertainment but also provided a chance for those who were inclined to place a wager.

22 *Melbourne Express*, 1 May 2001, p8; *Melbourne Times*, 2 May 2001, p11; *Melbourne Express*, 4 June 2001, p4; and *Age*, 27 June 2001, 'Today' supplement, p1

23 *Time Australia*, 4 August 1986, pp3-4.

24 The Allen's sign featured six overlays and the whole cycle lasted thirty-five seconds. It was some 30m wide x 12m high.

25 *Shell House Journal*, April 1958, p17.

'Little Audrey', the Skipping Girl Vinegar Company's icon, was erected in 1936 atop the company's late 19<sup>th</sup> century factory on Victoria Street in Abbotsford. Audrey skipped until 1968 when Whelan the Wrecker was contracted to demolish both the factory and Audrey.<sup>26</sup> Melburnians rallied to have Audrey reinstated and in 1970, the charitable Crusader Plate Company installed a slightly smaller 'Little Audrey' on their Victoria Street building (figure 4). The sign was then owned by the food company Mauri Bros. and space on the Crusader Plate building was leased for an agreed rental from Neon Electric of \$173.80 / month<sup>27</sup>. Audrey had lost her 1930s innocence in the make-over, which saw her wearing a new dress and sporting a longer hairdo.<sup>28</sup> When Audrey was relit for the first time, a folk song was written, and a party held, in her honour.

Audrey made a movie appearance in the Melbourne made-for-television film 'Bachelor Girl' (1987).<sup>29</sup> In the film, Audrey was seen against the darkened, deserted roads as the heroine, Dot Bloom, cycled across town late at night from her flat in the Casa del Mare apartments in St Kilda. The owners of the sign, a Sydney based food manufacturer (Buchan Foods) have recently discontinued her lighting and the sign remains unlit awaiting a decision on her fate.



Figure 4 (left) the Skipping Girl, as it now exists in Victoria Street, Abbotsford. (right) a) The original 1895 logo of the Skipping Girl Vinegar Company, b) the 1936 neon sign atop the original factory; c) the 1970s miniature neon sign made by Whiteway Neon as an exhibit. (Source: Cozzolino and Fysh. Symbols of Australia)

<sup>26</sup> Port of Melbourne Quarterly, October-December, 1980, Volume 29, No 10, p26.

<sup>27</sup> Skipping Girl Classification Report National Trust of Victoria file FN 6017.

<sup>28</sup> National Trust of Australia (Victoria) File No 6017. Reported in a two page undated note produced by Whiteway Neon.

<sup>29</sup> "Bachelor Girl", 1987, directed by Rivka Hartmann.





Figure 5 The PELACO sign of 1939 atop the company's former factory on Richmond Hill.

Within visual distance of Audrey is the massive PELACO sign. In 1939, *Pelacograms*, the in-house journal of the PELACO shirt manufacturing company, announced the erection of a large neon sky-sign atop their building on Richmond Hill.<sup>30</sup> (fig. 5) It survives today, the largest, and almost the oldest extant neon sign in Victoria. The PELACO sign still dominates the suburb of Richmond and its nineteenth century lanes and workers cottages. The sign survived a dispute between the current building owner and the then Claude Neon company. The building owner had opposed the sign's listing on the Victorian Heritage Register but withdrew the objection after Claude Neon held that they retained ownership of the sign through an original lease contract.

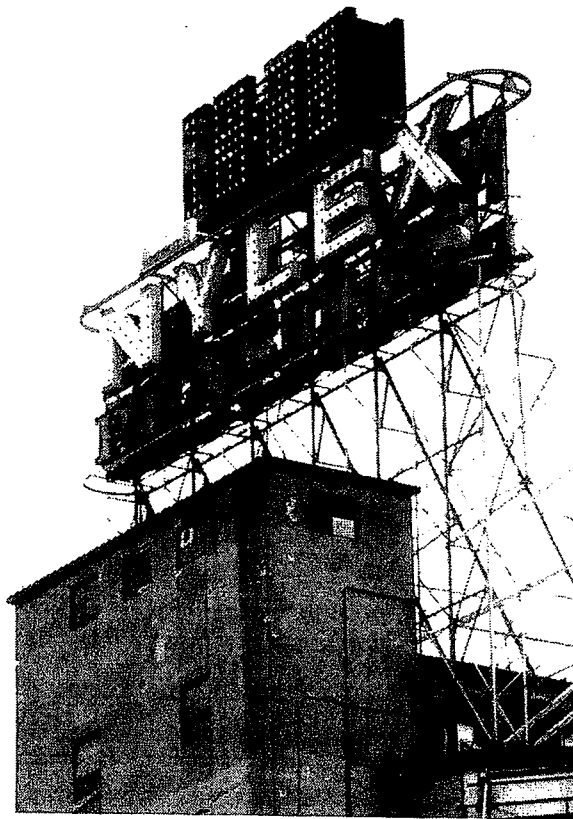
Another dominant Neon sign located in Richmond is the Nylex Plastics sign, erected in 1967, and known as Derham's Folly due its exorbitant cost (fig. 6). It is located high above the Smith Mitchell maltster towers on Punt Road near the Yarra River. Its associated digital temperature-clock caused it to become a Melbourne landmark. Paul Kelly has recently celebrated the iconography of the sign, both referring to it in his song 'Leaps and Bounds' - "...and way up high the sign on the silo says eleven degrees..." - as well as portraying the sign graphically in his recent Video Compact Disc (VCD) 'Somewhere in the City'.<sup>31</sup> This VCD was distributed nationally by The Weekend Australian newspaper in August 2001.

Richmond's collection of large historic neon - PELACO, NYLEX, SLADE and the Skipping Girl sign - collectively make the former City of Richmond (now the City of Yarra) one of the last strong holds of neon and do much to portray Richmond's former industrial base.

Historic neon in Melbourne's Central Business District area typically advertised entertainment rather than commerce. Signs such as Pelligrini's, Florentino, The Society and The Latin signalled the important and long-standing presence of the Italian community in the restaurant industry, particularly in the district below Parliament. Their historical sub-text, the Italian influence on Melbourne dining, is perhaps more important than the text on the signs themselves. Similarly Melbourne's collection of signage associated with theatres is also important. The Regent, the Comedy and Her Majesty's are all associated with the transition of vaudevillian theatre and silent era films to the talkies. In the suburbs two purpose built picture theatres retain their large animated signs; the Astor in East St Kilda of 1936 (figure 7) and the Sun Theatre in Yarraville of 1938. Both have been recently restored.

30 *Pelacograms*, August 1939, page unknown.

31 Paul Kelly's CD was distributed free in the *Weekend Australian*, 11 August 2001.



*Figure 6 The 1962 Nylex sign on the Smith Mitchell malster towers, Punt Rd, Richmond. Although constructed as an animated sign reading Nylex Plastics Every Time, only the Nylex section has been maintained in working order. The Nylex sign with its digital clock and temperature gauge is the most visible skysign in Melbourne*

In Carlton, one sign of important social and historical significance is noteworthy; Borsari's Corner sign of 1942 (fig. 8). Nino Borsari had been a champion cyclist in the Italian Cycling team. In 1932, the Italian's won a gold medal at the Los Angeles Olympics. Consequently, Bosari became well-known in Australia and he came here to compete and perform in a number of cycling events sponsored by the Victorian Government.

The outbreak of the World War Two stranded Bosari in Victoria, as a guest of the State Government. Unable to work or compete, Bosari, assisted by friends in the cycle industry, established a cycling shop in Lygon Street, Carlton. Bosari's was one of the first Italians to open a shop in the area and his business soon expanded into an emporium, over which he was able to erect the famous 'Borsari' sign.<sup>32</sup> Bosari, who died some years ago, was known to many Melburnians through this sign.

The recent decline in historic electric signs has caught the imagination of many Melburnians particularly in the industrial areas of the metropolis where bright colourful illuminated signage stands out above an otherwise bleak industrial landscape. The presence of these signs has been more widely remarked on and appreciated by a new audience, the new residents taking up space in warehouses and industrial buildings in these inner suburbs. Action groups such as those in Cremorne seeking to have the Slade sign preserved see the neon sign as a landmark of their community and its removal would lessen one of the few design aesthetics of the area.

<sup>32</sup> Personal communication from Nino Borsari Jnr, 1 August 2001.

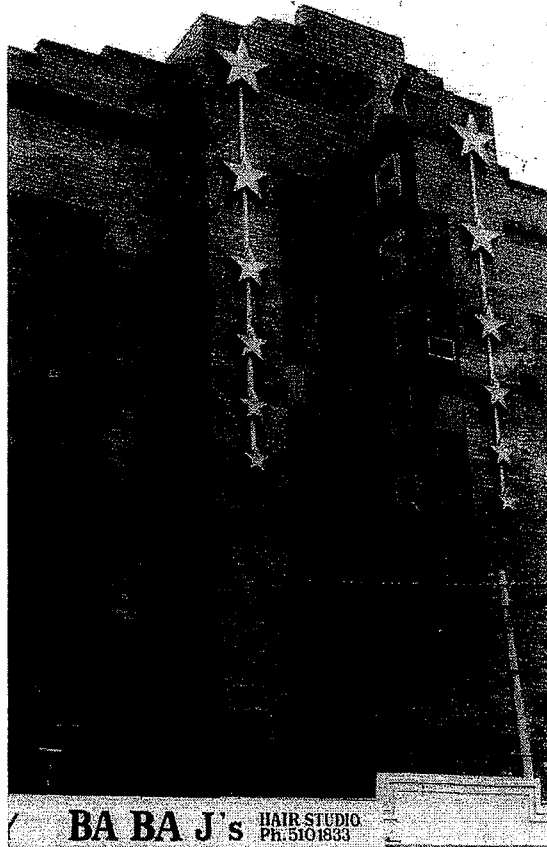


Figure 7 The highly animated Astor Cinema sign of 1936 continues to operate at this popular Art Deco cinema in East St Kilda. The stars on the façade are also outlined in neon. Blade signs similar to the one shown here, are the most numerous survivors of the neon era.



Figure 8 Borsari's Corner sign of 1942 at Lygon and Grattan Streets, Carlton. The sign is in full working order.

Clearly there has been an inculcation of the electric sign as a design icon in the population and this has been reinforced where the industrial landscape has also made it a land marker. Singer songwriters and film makers have also popularised the neon sign and its animated actions suit the graphic and sometimes lyric message of their medium.

### 2.2.3 Selling the Neon Idea

Observation of historic photographs of the Melbourne Central Business District show a small number of neon signs were erected on buildings between 1932 and 1934. One example was the CAPITOL sign on the Capitol Building in 1932. This sign was constructed from individual 2m high metal trough letters with neon tube inside. The sign became defunct almost immediately when the construction of the adjacent Manchester Unity Building overshadowed it.<sup>33</sup>

Another sign from the period was incorporated into the façade of Newspaper House circa 1933 by architects Stephenson and Meldrum. The electric sign 'Newspaper House' (figure 9) was integrated into the upper section of the facade. The sign was shown on the architect's illustrations of the building.<sup>34</sup> It is perhaps the only surviving sign of its type and is possibly the earliest surviving and dated sign in the Melbourne Metropolitan area.

33 Construction photographs of the Manchester Unity building dated 1932., held Museum of Melbourne.

34 *Royal Victorian Institute of Architects Journal*, July 1932, p60.

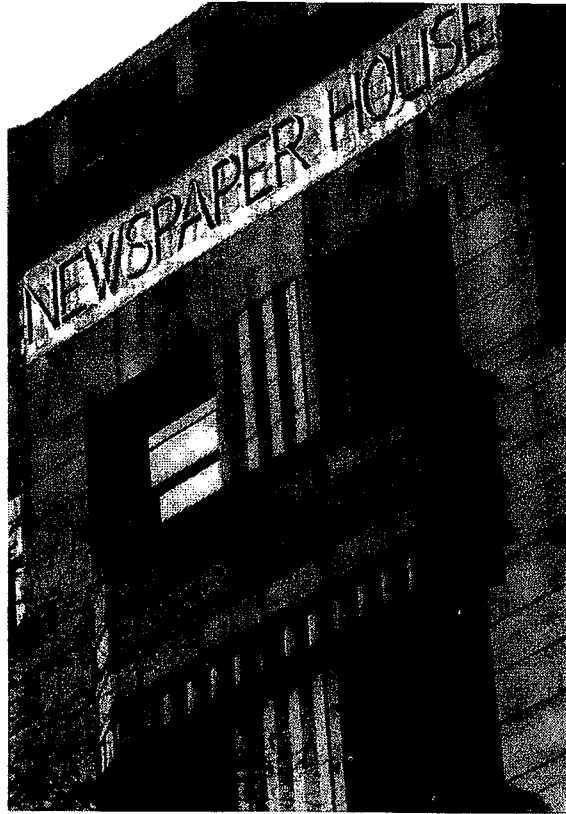


Figure 9 Newspaper House, Collins Street Melbourne. Constructed in 1933, the building incorporated neon signage on a base embedded in the facade. This is possibly the oldest surviving neon in Melbourne and is rare for its architectural integration into the design of the building. The sign no longer operates.

Illustrations of Buckley & Nunn's men's store on Bourke Street, Melbourne show that at the time of the completion of construction in 1934, neon signage had been incorporated as an architectural feature in the building's design. The words 'Buckley and Nunn Mens Store' were written in a neon art deco type face on an architecturally integrated sign directly over the entry way.<sup>35</sup> This has since been dismantled and the storefront has been altered with the construction of an entry canopy.

The outdoor signage industry did have its own journal, the *Outdoor Advertising News* through which it advanced the cause of advertising and in particular the neon sign. The journal also listed the industry companies operating throughout Australia. In 1949 the *News* listed sixteen companies involved in neon work Australia wide with four operating in Victoria<sup>36</sup>. The *News* featured neon signs developed in the United States as well as outstanding examples of 'spectaculars' developed in Australia.

Magazines such as *Decoration and Glass* and *The Modern Store* discussed the use and misuse of neon for advertising and shop front identification consistently in 1936.<sup>37</sup> This appears to be the start of the more popular use of neon signing for advertising and in some respects marks a move away from the brief architectural use of neon where neon was used for outlining architectural features.

35 Photograph of the entrance-way. (Source unknown).

36 *Outdoor Advertising News*, July 1949, p29.

37 In 1936 *The Modern Store*, a Victorian journal on shop design, ran a three part series on the use of Neon for advertising. *The Modern Store*, February 1936, p59; June 1936, pp34-35; July 1936, pp30-32, 50; and August-September 1936, pp24-25.

Trade journals such as *Pointers*, which was circulated by the motor industry, demonstrate that neon signs were readily adopted by that industry. Illustrations of buildings erected or converted for Preston Motors had a standard Preston Motors neon blade sign perpendicular to the building with standard Chevrolet & Buick signs attached on the facades. A number of these were known to be in place by 1948<sup>38</sup> and it would appear that the idea of neon as a new form of 'scientific' advertising was well suited to the idea of speed as portrayed by the modern streamlined motor vehicle. A surviving example of neon associated with a motor garage is the two-sided 'Douglas's Service Station' sign on Ballarat Road, Footscray. It is likely that this sign dates from the mid-1950s, when the adjacent Ampol service station was constructed.

Although progressively replaced by the acrylic sign after World War Two, the neon continued to have commercial status. Acrylics had been made possible by its mass production in the United States during the war. These signs were long lasting and many post-war moulded and cut acrylic signs can still be found in strip shopping areas, often associated with Milk Bars or Fish & Chipperys.

The use of neon, however, continued, primarily for picture theatres; it was, after all, linked to the notion of the 'light show', which the theatres promoted. Examples such as 'Mid City', 'Village', & 'Greater Union' in the central city were all erected at approximately the same time, fronting the new multi-cinema phenomenon which took hold through-out Australia in the mid-1960s to 1970s. Neon signs do continue to be made today, albeit in small numbers. Sign companies such as Sign Craft of Kensington continue to use neon in its contemporary signage hidden behind a translucent acrylic face. What was a vibrant signage industry has today all but disappeared. Signage today is required to have immediate impact and is required to be constantly updated with refresh rates as brief as monthly or quarterly. The backlit moulded acrylic sign has become the standard of today.

#### 2.2.4 Neon Companies in Victoria

In comparison to the United States, where anyone with a modest financial backing could set up a neon shop (and often did), Australia has never had the market for the manufacture of large amounts of neon signage. The largest signs were probably the extant PELACO, NYLEX, Slade, Skipping Girl, the Allens sign, AWA (in Sydney); in addition to a number which have since been disassembled, such as BBB Mattresses, Laconia and Ricksha Paints (South Melbourne), Good Year, Ethyl Petroleum, and the Tumbling Dice (St Kilda Junction). Of the companies established in Victoria, only two remain in business; both, however, have substantially reduced the size of their operation.

Claude Neon, the company which many associate most directly with Georges Claudes original patents, divided into a number of departments. They came to occupy large factory premises at 291 Mt Alexander Road Ascot Vale and their 1989 chart of operations indicates some sixty-six personnel under the then State Manager, Roger Harrowell. The Claude Neon office was divided into three work units: Finance and Administration; Plant Operations; and a miscellaneous group which involved sales staff, a permits manager, outdoor advertising manager, artists, maintenance managers and other consultants. The plant itself employed some thirty-three staff, which included an estimator, design engineer, draftsmen, stores, glass benders, sheet metal fabricators, painters and layout and assembly staff<sup>39</sup>.

38 *Pointers*, August 1948, p 124, 128, 130.

39 Layout diagram of staff placement for the Mt Alexander Rd plant dated 1989, held by Claude Neon.

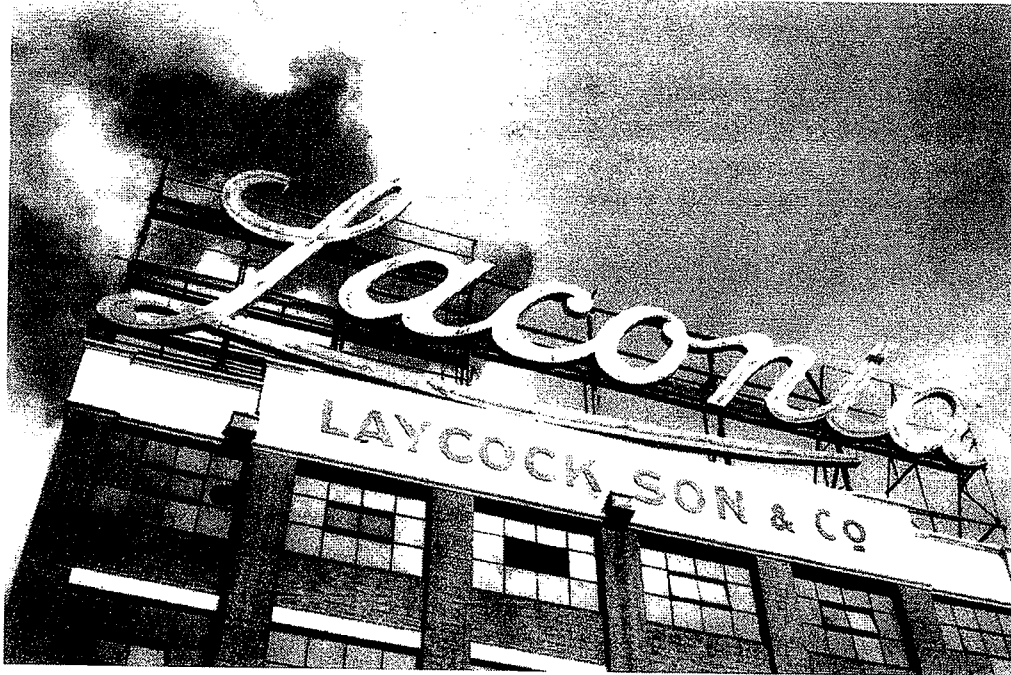


Figure 18: Laconia sign South Melbourne.  
(source: Claude Neon collection)

In 1990, Claude Neon began preparing for the closure of the Mt Alexander Road factory and the downsizing of their workforce. The company then subsequently took up smaller premises, firstly in South Melbourne and then in South Carlton where they are presently based. The company today exists mostly in name only.

The Mt Alexander Road plant had been capable of large-scale manufacture, such as the 1960s ESSO sign on City Road, South Melbourne which was 9m high and 33.5m long, with individual letters of 6.5m and 5m high (figure 10). The sign was lit with ninety-three electric lamps and 570m of neon tubes. City Road was a major thoroughfare into the city and at the time of its erection the area was already home to a number of other large scale electric signs including Repco, Coca Cola and Goodyear tyres (opposite ESSO).

### 2.3 The Decline of Neon Signage

A combination of events after World War Two started the decline in popularity of neon signage and many were disassembled after that date. This culminated in 1954, when the United States Supreme Court decided in favour of municipal controls over the aesthetics of the built environment;<sup>40</sup> signage control by-laws were then passed in many American communities. By the 1970s, campaigns to clean up suburban Main Street, corporatisation, franchising amalgamations and take-overs had led to the destruction of many individual, original and unusual neon signs. The introduction of acrylic sheet which, when illuminated from behind, produced a warm translucent glow sealed the demise of the neon industry. The new acrylic signage was easy to install, maintain, and was readily changed.

A similar situation was to be found in Great Britain. During World War Two, all neon signs in Britain had been turned off, both for air raids and also as an energy saving requirement. However, the occasional daytime relighting of major neon signs, such as those in Piccadilly, was used to boost public morale at that time.

40 M J Auer, *The Preservation of Historic Signs*, p 6.



*Figure 10 The Esso sign South Melbourne erected by the Claude Neon Company  
(source: Claude Neon collection )*

Not every city, however, placed limits on the use of neon signage. For example, in the former French colony of Vietnam neon maintains a strong place in contemporary signage. Large animated neon spectaculars for motor vehicles, beer and electrical products are still found in the major cities of Hanoi, Hue and Saigon. Many of these were placed on large scaffold structures on the riverbank opposite the city centres or, alternatively, large individual letters outlined with neon continue to be used for official signage on civic buildings.

In Victoria, metropolitan planning schemes decreased the number of permitted neons and today the uniform signage requirements in planning schemes cause reapplication permits to be required to allow the continuation of signage. Under previous arrangements, permits once issued by municipal councils continued until the day the sign was removed.

Another factor in the loss of historic neon was the contractual arrangement between client and sign company. Many signs were erected after being fully purchased by the client with the possibility of an ongoing contract for maintenance with the sign company. Once the client moved on, the sign often remained. Two companies; Claude Neon and Neon Electric Signs sought key sites for more complicated lease arrangements. Once secured, the air rights over the site were leased to a client company for a term. The sign company then erected the signs required and leased the package of site and sign to the client company. If the client company discontinued the arrangement, the site was returned to the sign company and the original sign removed. Thus a number of historic signs disappeared from the sky-line.

### 3.0 TYPES OF NEON SIGNAGE

One of the earliest known texts on the subject, *Neon Signs* by Donald Fink & Samuel Miller (1935), listed eight different methods of installing neon advertising<sup>41</sup>. These were as follows:

- (a) The swing sign, a free swinging boxed sign on a horizontal supporting bar (figure 11). No known examples exist in Victoria. This may be due to the likelihood of damage by wind and vandalism to this form of sign.
- (b) The projection sign & upright sign rigidly fixed to the building with an emphasis either of the sign as a horizontal or vertical element projecting from the building (figure 12 & 13). Many have been known to exist in Victoria. Example: *Regent, The Astor*.
- (c) The wall sign, being a sign box fixed against and parallel to a wall (figure 16). Example: *Orlando Wines at The Village Belle, Borsari's Corner sign*.
- (d) The outline skeleton sign, being signage made up primarily of exposed tube and often used to outline a building's features. Example: *the stars on the Astor Theatre wall*.
- (e) The roof sign, being a sky-sign set on a superstructure erected above a building (figure 15). Example: *Nylex, Slade Knitwear*.
- (f) The pedestal sign, being a sign erected on a pole, ornamental or otherwise (figure 14). Example: *Douglas's Service Station*.
- (g) The vestibule sign, being set in the entryway to a building or business (figure 16).
- (h) The marquee, being a whole structure constructed to support neon and light bulb signs as well as providing illumination for cut out lettering for show advertising. An example is the *Comedy Theatre* awning shown in Appendix 3.



Figure 11 Swing sign



Figure 12 Projection sign

41 Fink & Samuel, *op cit*, pp 80-88.



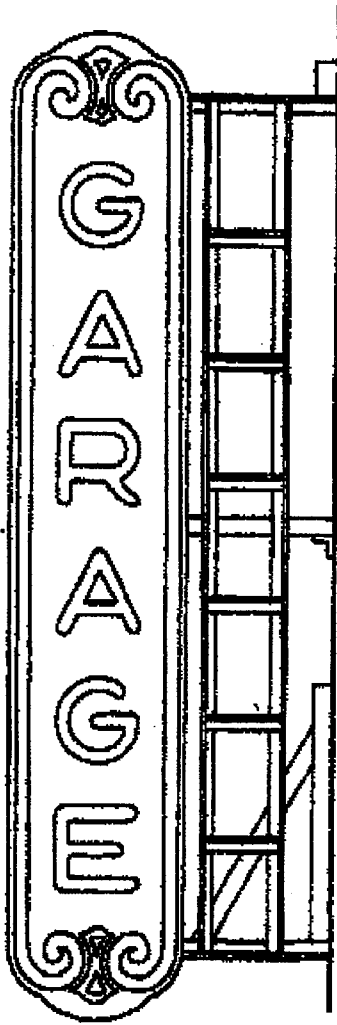


Figure 13 Upright sign

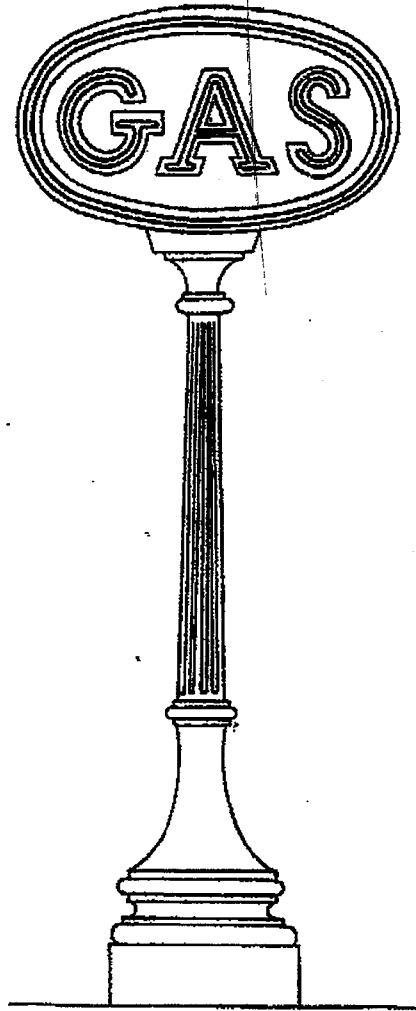


Figure 14 Pedestal Sign

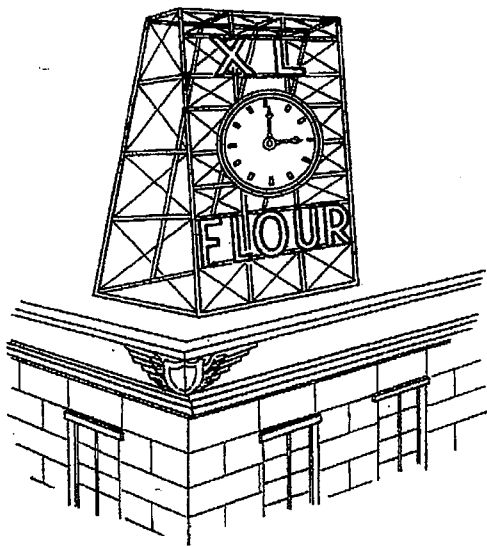


Figure 15 Sky-sign

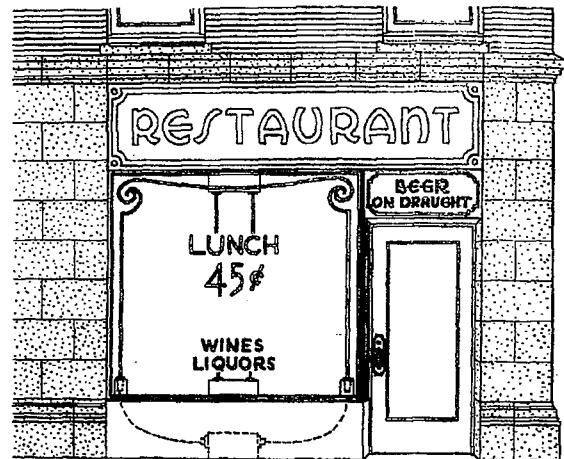


Figure 16 Wall sign, lobby sign over door and skeleton sign in window

Fink and Miller also outlined the different letter types which could be employed in sign construction (figure 17),<sup>42</sup> including:

- (a) The painted letter. Example: *Evans projection sign Elizabeth St Melbourne, The Skipping Girl Victoria St Richmond.*
- (b) The raised letter. Example: No known operating examples. The *Wines SEPPELT'S Wines* sign operating in the Adelaide Railway Station used what appears to have been raised marbled lettering as background to the neon tubes. The tubes have since been removed.
- (c) The shallow channel letter. Example: *Slade Knitwear Richmond.*
- (d) The deep channel letter. Example: *Astoria Taxis, Swanston Street, Carlton.*
- (e) The cut out letter box. Example: No known surviving examples available in Australia.

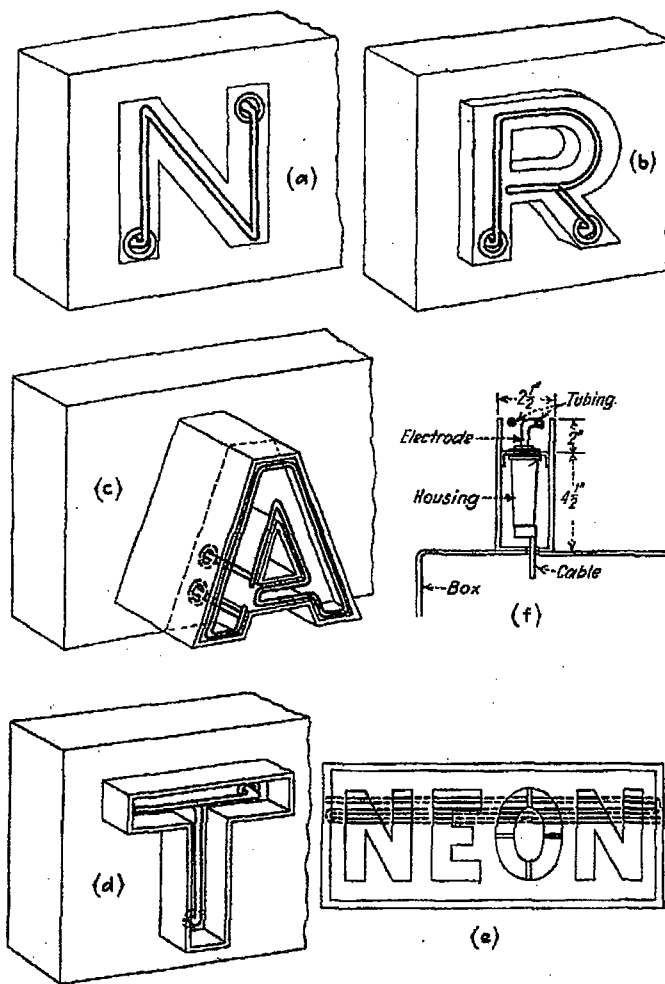


Figure 17 Letter types illustrated in Fink & Miller:

a) flat painted letter; (b) raised letter; (c) raised letter with shallow channel; (d) channel letter; (e) cut out letter (f) section through raised channel letter showing electrode housing.

42 *Ibid*, pp 80-87.

## 4.0 EVALUATING NEON SIGNS

### 4.1 Criteria

Two American authors have laid out guidelines for determining whether historic signage should be retained. Phillips' argues for the retention of almost all historic neon, whilst Auer's criteria follows the lines set out by preservation authorities in determining the value of a historic place. Agencies such as the Australian Heritage Commission and the Heritage Council of Victoria have published evaluation criteria for determining the cultural importance of a place. If these criteria were followed, most historic neon signs would require preservation at a local level, whilst the criteria set by the Heritage Council can be used as a measure of whether the historic sign is of State importance.

The following guidelines have been proposed by Michael Auer, Preservation Assistance Division, U.S. Department of the Interior.

Retain historic signs whenever possible, particularly when they are:

- Associated with historic figures, events or places.
- Significant as evidence of the history of the product, business or service advertised.
- Significant as reflecting the history of the building or the development of the historic district. A sign may be the only indicator of a building's historic use.
- Characteristic of a specific historic period, such as gold leaf on glass, neon, or stainless steel lettering.
- Integral to the building's design or physical fabric, as when a sign is part of a storefront made of Carrara glass or enamel panels, or when the name of the historic firm or the date are rendered in stone, metal or tile. In such cases, removal can harm the integrity of a historic property's design, or cause significant damage to its materials.
- Outstanding examples of the signmaker's art, whether because of their excellent craftsmanship, use of materials, or design.
- Local landmarks, that is, signs recognised as popular focal points in a community.
- Elements important in defining the character of a district, such as marquees in a theatre district.

The following guidelines have been proposed by Peter Phillips; President, Society for Commercial Archaeology (USA).

Retain signs which demonstrate the following qualities:

- A rarity or distinction in the sign's materials or craftsmanship. This includes three dimensional stainless steel lettering, and virtually any porcelain-enamel or neon signs due to their age, scarcity, and extensive cost of replication.
- A large, well known sign that has become a popular landmark in the community by reason of its prominent location, long existence, large size, and /or unusual design.
- A sign that is integral to the design of a building and helps to identify the era or style of the building. For example, Carrara glass panel signs, or Art Modern pylons.
- Signs that advertise an obsolete product or defunct business, and which may give the only clue as to a buildings original use. Such signs are rarely architecturally

significant, but are always historically significant. These often become ghost signs, which appear after a rainstorm or when an adjacent building is torn down.

## 4.2 Issues of Preservation

The survey of historic neon has revealed that the passing of this technology has only recently begun to arouse interest as newspaper reports have made both the public and sign owners more aware of the declining number of historic signs. The issue of accountability and responsibility, and more specifically funding, for preservation, however, still needs to be resolved. The issues connected to preservation can be understood through a discussion of the PELACO sign in Richmond.

The PELACO sign is attached to a building no longer owned by the Pelaco company and the current building owner had therefore presumed ownership rights to the sign, which was no longer in operation although the sign structure was incorporated into the building.

The owner also presumed that the sign's existence meant that there were continuing rights for signage to be erected on the building. The manufacturing company, Claude Neon, subsequently claimed that they maintained ownership of the sign, as well as the rights to its repair and maintenance. This was complicated by the fact that the structure which supported the sign was clearly embedded within the building. There were no contracts on foot to support Claude Neon's claim and the building owner disputed their right to ownership.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, from c.1995 Claude Neon began to carry out repairs and the minimal relighting of the sign. The Pelaco company was still operating and it is presumed that they paid for the cost of minimal lighting.

The building owners had hoped to remove the PELACO sign and create substantial revenue for their company through the erection of new skyline advertising. However, the local authority decreed that signage rights for the building exist only for the PELACO sign and should the sign be permanently removed, the signage rights cease to exist. A similar situation was resolved harmoniously at the Elsternwick Hotel, where it was found that the repair and preservation of the Victoria Bitter sign was in the interest of the hotel owners and Carlton and United Breweries. There, preservation was the fortunate side-product of a legal process. In the case of the Skipping Girl sign, a Sydney based food manufacturer has funded its illumination. The sign is also an effective marketing tool for the building on which it sits and a new sponsor for the sign may be possible.

One possible solution to the problems created by preservation is to obtain funding from either the Heritage Council, the Public Heritage program (also funded through the offices of Heritage Victoria) or the Melbourne Heritage Restoration Programme *Seeding Fund*, which operates in Melbourne's inner suburbs. Such funding should be treated as a last resort and it should be noted that it fails to resolve the important issues of on-going maintenance and lighting costs. The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) has suggested that a trust fund should be established for each sign, into which the advertising company contributes. This proposal has not been tested in the market place. Alternately, existing businesses or building owners could be encouraged to participate in the retention of existing signage. Minimal additional development rights and a similarly minimal rate reduction could be offered as an incentive to facilitate this programme. Changes in the rate base however do not always flow to the sign owner.

The property rates question is however a difficult one. Signs such as Nylex need to be already rated as a separate 'Occupancy' in order to attract rate reductions. This does not always happen as the City Valuer has to identify that a separate occupancy exists, that appropriate permits have been given, and finally the Nett Annual Value (NAV) of the

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43 Personal communication with David Wixted, c.1995, by the solicitor acting for the building owner.

rateable property. The valuer will then also have to take into account that the sign is of historic importance and give an appropriate rating reduction as required by their valuation guidelines.

In the case of any sign construction, determining the NAV would mean identifying the value of the income from tenant (eg Nylex) to sign company (Whiteway Neon) and the disbursements in maintenance and electrical costs. For the NYLEX sign there may be a case for rate reduction as the determined rates base may be meaningful. This however may not be the case for smaller signs such as Skipping Girl where the rates would, if applied, be somewhat minimal, or for signs such as Slade which are on the company's premises.

The decline of the companies which carry out the maintenance on neon signage is now emerging as a significant issue in their preservation. Whiteway Neon has ceased trading in Victoria and has outsourced sign repairs to Major Media Melbourne operating in Fitzroy. In turn, Major Media subcontract any neon tube work to a declining number of artisans. Other companies, such as Claude Neon, now deal less in neon products and more in other signage forms and deal-making at their remaining high profile sites. The Australian Claude Neon company has now all but ceased trading in Victoria.

It is likely that the solution to the physical preservation of neon signage will take a number of paths and at the time of writing these have not been fully investigated. Public interest will probably promote a number of schemes but it is unlikely that there will prove to be one solution which is relevant for all neon signs. More likely is the prospect that each site will require constant negotiation and re-negotiation as the building, and therefore the neon sign and ensuing responsibility, changes ownership.

## 5.0 IMPORTANT ELECTRIC SIGNS

Of the signs surveyed in Victoria, four are large skysigns of importance in defining the industrial base of the former City of Richmond (now included in the City of Yarra). These are the Slade, Nylex, Skipping Girl and Pelaco signs.

Individually the signs all have historical importance with the Pelaco sign being technically important as one of the earliest and the largest sign in the Melbourne area.

Other signs of individual cultural importance are:

- Borsaris Corner sign  
A sign of social and historical importance at the state level
- Pelligrinis sign, Florentino sign (VHR), Herald Sun (VHR)  
Signs of social and historical importance
- Theatre signs: Her Majestys (VHR), The Comedy, The Regent (VHR),  
Signs of historical importance for their association with building use
- Astoria Taxis (now removed)  
Aesthetic importance

### 5.1 Recommendations for Statutory Protection

#### 5.1.1 Victorian Heritage Register Recommendations: New Inclusions

The following electric signs are recommended for inclusion on the Victorian Heritage Register or if the building is already included, a revised statement of significance should include the sign as an important element.

- Borsaris corner sign for reasons of social and historical importance
- Newspaper House for reasons of age (whole of building façade should be included). The mosaic by Napier Waller is already included on the Victorian Heritage Register.
- Princess Theatre light-bulb sign for reasons of age & technology. The theatre itself is already included, however the sign should be mentioned in the statement of significance for its rarity (the building is already included on VHR)
- Salvation Army vertical neon sign (the building is already included on VHR)
- Florentino's neon sign (the building is already included on VHR)

#### 5.1.2 Local Planning Scheme Recommendations

The following are recommended for inclusion in the Planning Scheme:

*City of Greater Geelong*

Sailor's Rest sign: *historic importance, age and rarity*

*City of Maribyrnong*

Apex Belting, Geelong Rd, Footscray, *rarity*

*City of Melbourne*

Astoria Taxis Swanston Street Carlton: *aesthetic* (demolished April 2002)

Lemon tree hotel Grattan St Carlton: *rarity & typical*

The Carlton Faraday St Carlton: *rarity*

Newspaper House *rarity*

Don Camillo Victoria St West Melbourne: *rarity*

Pelligrinis: *social, historic importance*

*City of Port Phillip*

Victoria Bitter (Elsternwick Hotel): *historic significance*

*City of Yarra*

Nylex, Punt Rd: *historic and social significance*

Slade Knitwear, Dover St: *historic, aesthetic significance*

Skipping Girl: *social & historic significance and rarity as a type*

## 6.0 SIGN MAINTENANCE & ONGOING FUNDING

### 6.1 Maintenance Issues

The purpose of planning scheme protection and protection under the various heritage acts is to cause the continued maintenance of that place or object; *To conserve and enhance heritage places of cultural significance.*<sup>44</sup> Permits are required to carry out works, alterations or demolition of these places. As a side benefit of this process is the public recognition of the history of a place. This process also allows available legislative tools and financial incentives to be used to fund the on-going maintenance of that place.

Historic electric signs such as neon are easily publicly recognizable but difficult to maintain although the technology of repair, while in decline, is reasonably available. Physical breakdown of materials includes rusting of sign metals and support scaffolds, breakage to glass tubes and bulbs, escape of gasses from neon tubes, breakdown of voltage regulators, timing switches and electrodes plus other issues such as aging of sign plastics and insulation. The craft skill of making and installing metal box lettering and neon tube is also disappearing with only a small number of artisans remaining in this field.

Costs are also associated with upgrading some skysigns to meet Occupational Health and Safety standards. These standards require the construction of ladders, walkways, safety rails and the like around larger and higher signs so as to allow easy access to maintenance personnel. Previously these signs were maintained by workers using simple ladders lashed to the sign. Today, the standards require permanently fixed walkways and ladders, making the renewal or repair of signs such as the NYLEX, PELACO and Slade signs an expensive exercise.

Also of concern is the cost of maintenance or renewal of large elements such as the box metal letters which may have rusted and are in a state of collapse. The tendency with this form of repair is that the whole box letter will be rebuilt in a different material such as powder coat aluminium. The electrical system will also most likely require repair all the way from the electricity company meter to fuse box and onto the sign. While there may exist maintenance contracts with sign companies, it was to be expected that signs would have had a defined life period with little expectation that there would be public pressure to maintain them beyond the life of the company that originally commissioned it.

In the case of the Slade Knitwear sign, the costs of renewal of some elements of the sign are related to crane hire, removal of individual letters, tube regassing, rewiring, insulator renewal, repair of scaffold, patching of the sheet metal work or complete letter replacement, rust conversion, repainting and re-erection. As well as this there is an expectation that the renewed scaffold will contain walkways and ladders as required by Occupational Health and Safety standards.

Added to this is the insurance and relighting costs by a company which no longer has the public profile or operations it once had. Slade's owners have indicated to David Caan of Major Media Melbourne that the increased lease costs of a renewed Slade sign are not within their budget. In this circumstance they prefer to leave the sign unlit<sup>45</sup>. Caan indicates that the repair costs are in the order of greater than \$50,000 and the likely monthly lease costs to the Slades' would rise tenfold in order to cover the repair and rebuilding costs by Whiteway.

<sup>44</sup> Section 43.01-1, City of Yarra Planning Scheme

<sup>45</sup> Pers. communication by David Caan, 27 March 2002.



## 6.2 Ownership and Ongoing Management

### 6.2.1 Site ownership

As mentioned in section 4 above, some signs exist on sites which are under a lease contract arrangement set up by the original sign erection company. Two important signs fit this situation. They are the PELACO sign and the Nylex sign.

#### *The PELACO sign*

The PELACO sign is erected atop a building once owned by the PELACO shirt Company. In the late 1980s the building was sold to Mr Mark Munzer trading as Moniton Pty Ltd. The building was bought for its commercial value. Mr Munzer also saw the possibility of the removal of the PELACO sign and sale of the air space for other forms of advertising.

Claude Neon however made a claim over the sign and the air rights. While this claim was a matter between Munzer and Claude it is understood that Claude were claiming that the sign was erected on a lease basis to PELACO and they maintained ownership of the sign and an ability to access the air rights. The opposing point of view ie adverse possession of the sign by Munzer also had some credibility as the Claude Neon company had no ongoing arrangement with the new site owner once Pelaco left the site.

This argument occurred at a time when the Heritage Council of Victoria was investigating the inclusion of the sign on the Victorian Heritage Register. The then Minister for Planning and Local Government (the Hon. Robert Macillellan) indicated to the site owner he was not willing to allow the City of Yarra consideration of the site for future large signs thereby blocking any further useful development of the air rights. The sign is presently minimally lit.

#### *The NYLEX sign*

The NYLEX sign is however in a vastly different situation. The original erection was undertaken by Neon Electric Signs (now Whiteway Neon) with an air rights lease over the malster towers originally purchased by Neon Electric in order to allow placement of a 'spectacular'. Upon the erection of the Nylex sign by Neon Electric the 99 year lease was transferred to the Nylex company and this will cease in approximately 2060<sup>46</sup>. The Nylex company (through its various guises such as BTR Nylex and now Nylex Industrial Products), provide a substantial monetary outlay to Whiteway for the lease and maintenance of the sign. Whiteway distributes a portion of this money to the site owners. Nylex has recently sought to substantially increase the sign's size and change its format. This change is in line with Nylex's diverse activities in the marketplace as its operations are no longer solely based around industrial plastics. Should Nylex terminate its arrangement with Whiteway then it would be open to another company to purchase the remaining time portion of the lease for a new and no doubt substantial sign. Such a development would require a permit from the City of Yarra.

Nylex has already applied for a planning permit for a modified and larger sign at the site. The permit requirement is generated by the provisions of the Yarra planning scheme. A permit has not been issued by the City for for the proposal.

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46 Pers. Comm by David Caan, 28 March 2002.

Arrangements at other sites include ownership by a client company with a repair contract arrangement with the signage company. The following fit this category.

### ***The Slade Knitwear sign***

Slade Knitweares' sign was erected in 1970 by Whiteway Neon. The Slade company purchased the sign and entered into a lighting and repair contract with Whiteway Neon and this has continued until recently.

Presently the contractual arrangement between Slade and Whiteway has lapsed and it is unlikely that the agreement will be renewed.

### ***The Skipping Girl sign***

The Skipping Girl sign was re-erected as a smaller sign on top of the Crusader Plate Company factory in Victoria St Abbotsford in 1970. Crusader Plate ceased trading in the late 1980s.

The building was sold in the 1990s as a single entity to Hooker Cockram builders and then developed as studio offices. The sign was retained in the body corporate property. More recently the site has become studio apartments and offices. The sign continued to be maintained by Whiteway Neon for Mastercraft Foods, and only recently has the new owners (Goodman Fielder<sup>47</sup> of Sydney), determined not to continue the maintenance contract with Whiteway. The Skipping Girl sign is fortunately of such size and iconic value that it lends identity to the building and the strata dwellings and offices on which it stands. There is a commercially identifiable value in the body corporate maintaining the sign. The Body Corporate has an opportunity to purchase the sign for its residual value and relight it, thereby continuing to identify its premises. A pessimistic view of this situation is that there may not be any desire for the strata owners to want to fund or repair the structure and that it is seen as a liability financially and because of insurance implications. Sponsorship of the sign by the developers on the other side of Victoria St could be the method by which it survives lit. The sign is presently utilised in the developers advertising.

### ***Victoria Bitter sign at Elsternwick Hotel***

The Victoria Bitter sign, also maintained by Whiteway Neon was originally maintained under contract to the hotel owners. More recently the sign has been purchased by Carlton & United Breweries. The sign was partially disassembled in the mid 1990s to allow repairs to be carried out. It was a concern of the owners that taking down the sign completely for repair work would involve a) the need for a demolition permit from the local authority, b) a planning permit to re-erect the sign with possibly renewal periods as a condition of the permit, c) further occupational health and safety works to allow access to the sign. In these circumstances a regime of ongoing repair until the whole structure was renewed was seen as the most strategic option from a cost and permitting point of view.

## **6.3 Summary of Management Issues**

The following summary outlines problems and opportunities in managing and continuing the presence of historic signs:

### **6.3.1 Problems:**

The following are problems associated with historic signs:

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<sup>47</sup> Personal communication with Malcolm Parks, Property Consultant to David Wixted 6 September 2002.

- Ongoing (albeit marginal) lighting costs
- Ongoing air rights leases and maintenance contracts owned by a signage company which may be of substantial monetary value particularly between client company and the head leasee of the air rights.
- Costs of maintenance particularly if the sign is in poor repair or Occupational Health and Safety requirements are yet to be met
- The original client company is no longer in existence and the sign has no intrinsic value to the owner of the property which supports it
- The insurance concerns for a site owner who may have a derelict sign on their property in a location which has an impact on public safety (eg many projection and upright signs are supported over public footpaths)
- Statutory requirements such as planning permits for continued signage operation particularly if signs which were once in industrial areas are now surrounded by residential development.

### **6.3.2 Opportunities**

Positive opportunities include:

- Land-marking of an existing property using an important historic electric sign
- Sponsoring of historic signage by an outside company or corporation
- Ongoing signage maintenance by an existing company associated with the advertised product.
- Relighting of an existing sign by an existing building owner or tenant to highlight an existing business which may have had no original connection to the sign.

## **6.4 Brokering a Solution to Preservation**

Preservation does not lie in statutory protection alone. Preservation of historic signs must involve their repair and relighting and in a number of cases an understanding of the contractual arrangements between the sign company, client company and the leasee of the air rights is essential. In the case of small wholly owned signs such as Sailor's Rest, Pelligrini's and the like, statutory protection and small incentives via the municipal planning scheme may be all that is required. Larger signs such as Slade Knitwear may be the subject of a more detailed study into costs and cost recovery through outside means. Large commercial signs such as Nylex require substantial financial input to broker a solution.

### **6.4.1 Tools**

The following preservation tools have been used in addressing preservation of heritage places.

#### *Preservation easement*

A preservation easement would be used to create a separate title over the historic sign and the access to the sign. This allows parties other than the owner to access the sign for investigation and repair purposes. This tool is in use in the United States and can be used to create property vested in the care of an outside organization. The insurance cover for such an easement arrangement would have to be investigated. An alternative would be to have the sign included in common property under the control of a Body

Corporate. Such an arrangement would allow a separate Occupancy to be created for the purposes of rate assessment.

#### *Rate Rebates*

Rebates are used for preservation works after agreement with the rating authority. Rebates related to historic signage are useful for small works and continued lighting costs. Rate rebates are possible through the Heritage Act to encourage an interaction at municipal level between the property owner and the rating authority. Money 'saved' in rate rebates must be expended on agreed preservation works to the rated item. The rebate can be set down for a limited time period eg often one to three years. Nevertheless municipal authorities are reluctant to be involved in this process, as it requires a drop in their income stream and opens the door to other property owners seeking rebates. Minimal rebates for actions such as continued lighting may however be possible. A separate occupancy for the sign would have to be created through a body corporate or preservation easement to allow the City Valuer to set a meaningful rates base for the sign. In some ways this is a *Catch-22*, as some historic signs attract no rates at present and therefore do not have this as an added annual outgoing.

#### *Public Preservation Trusts*

Preservation trusts do operate in Victoria with the prime example being the Melbourne City Council's Heritage Restoration Fund and the offshoot the Heritage Seeding Fund. Traditionally the funds have been low interest loans made available within the municipal boundaries of the City of Melbourne. In recent years the fund's trustees have sought joint ventures with the surrounding municipalities and encouraged them to forward proposals for restoration works on key privately owned properties. These ventures have been offered through the MHRF's *Seeding Fund Programme*, a subsidiary arrangement of the main programme. The Trustees have also allowed funding through grants of monies where low interest loans were unlikely to be taken up due to the higher setting up costs. Historic illuminated signs would be prime candidates for such funding due to their profile across large sections of the metropolitan area. In particular the PELACO, Slade and Skipping Girl signs could benefit from such an arrangement.

In the case of the Slade sign, such a grant arranged through the City of Yarra could mean that a high on-going lease cost would be avoided. The sign itself would have to be sold outright to the property owner for a minimal residual value eg a peppercorn price, then vested in an easement arrangement with the benefactor being both the City of Yarra and a new owner should the present owner vacate the site. While the owner continues to occupy, the sign should be maintained illuminated through a minimal maintenance and lighting arrangement with a sign company. The capital costs of the repair works would be borne by the preservation trust as a loan with an ongoing return to cover either the capital only or capital plus interest at the lowest possible rate of return available to the trustees. The alternative is for the MHRF to provide an outright grant.

#### *Philanthropic Preservation Trusts*

Few of these are known to exist and those that do often have their resources allocated to humanitarian causes. A philanthropic trust in this instance may work if it is industry based ie if it is set up through the advertising and signage industry. In the case of the City of Yarra such an industry body may be interested in providing funds through some *quid pro quo* flexibility in permitting of certain sign types and locations within the municipality. A *quid pro quo* arrangement may be the acceptance of permit applications for larger than normal or animated signage on a high visibility site. One option could include leasing of Council owned sites to signage companies with a low level income returned to the Council for ongoing maintenance of the site. The majority of the lease monies would be directed to signage restoration activities via the MHRF *Seeding Fund*. This could be sold by the

Council to rate payers as an arrangement in the public interest and at the same time divorce the Council staff from the arduous activity of accounting for the monies generated and method of disbursement. It also allows opportunity for excess monies to be put into other heritage activities in the municipality thus providing a benefit beyond just the repair of the historic signs.

Such an arrangements would have to be publicly transparent and capable of auditing. An ongoing maintenance contract for the historic sign would have to be provided in return. The sign itself would have to be sold to the building owner for a minimal residual value (so that a sign or media company would not be the beneficiary of funding) and a preservation easement created for the purposes of access for ongoing maintenance and repair. This would allow ongoing access and prevent development around or in front of the sign. The signage industry may be prepared to sponsor an historic sign such as the Pelaco sign provided there was a return in terms of publicity and onsite advertising.

#### *Sponsorship*

An existing historic sign, if privately owned, may be relit through sponsorship deals brokered in part by the municipal authority.

Sponsorship may be in the form of cash payments for repair and lighting in return for a small illuminated small sign attached in proximity to the main sign. For example; *Lit by Origin Energy* as a subsidiary illuminated sign in proximity to the main sign. Such a deal would be for a minimum time period such as 10 years. The maintenance and illumination costs would be met by the sponsor. The sign would be used freely in the sponsors advertising provided there are no trade, copyright or patent rights held over the sign by other parties.

#### *Renegotiation of Permits for Existing Signs*

The present standardised municipal planning provisions require on-going permit applications to allow the continuation of signage. A method for reducing the impact of this provision for historic signs is to develop a standardised 'Incorporated Plan' for the site which allows for historic signs not to be subjected to ongoing permit applications, nor repair applications. Building permits may be required to allow assessment of work safety issues and electrical and engineering certification.

#### **6.4.2 Funding Sources**

Funds are required to undertake the following actions

- Legal fees in relation to the sale of the sign and the creation of preservation easements.
- Legal fees in relation to sponsorship deals for relighting and maintenance and free use of the sign image.
- Maintenance (gantry structure, metal boxing, electrical components)
- Relighting (electrical supply costs)
- Create return to building owner where there is an existing commercial return for the air space

Funds may be available through levies on the industry or through individual sign sponsorship such as for Pelaco or Skipping Girl.

Funds may also be available through *Client –Owners*.

Client-owners are building owners with a historic sign advertising their own business. In this case Client-owners are normally required to carry out works at their own expense or through funding sources they may be able to avail themselves of.

It is a recommendation that apart from individual sponsorships, any funds obtained or garnered through the advertising industry be gifted into the Melbourne Restoration Fund for distribution via the funds advisory committee. In the case of capital repair works, the MHRF would be requested to make a grant on the basis that a preservation easement be provided (if necessary). Prior to providing funds, the sign would have to be sold for its residual or peppercorn value to the client- owner. The client-owner would be required to insure the sign as part of the building.

Maintenance of the sign and ongoing electrical costs would be paid by the client-owner (as in the case of Slade). Access to a special rate reduction for occasional larger than usual maintenance costs (not otherwise covered by insurance such as hail damage) may not be welcomed by municipal authorities.

#### *Non client-owners*

Non client owners are building owners with historic signs on their buildings unrelated to their business and for which no royalties are received. These signs often are transferred to the building owner through adverse possession. The original sign company or sign owner may have long departed the site, transferring all the property and its liabilities to the new site owner.

#### *Royalty Signs*

Signs which generate an income for building owners may continue to be owned and maintained by a signage company such as Whiteway. The obvious signs in this category have been Skipping Girl and NYLEX. Of these, Skipping Girl now may be passed to the building owners for its residual value. The Nylex sign is by far the most problematic. Nylex continues to pay for use of the air rights and the royalty payment is substantial. Nylex has the ability to continue a tenancy and maintenance contract. It may be possible to have Nylex retain the existing sign on the proviso that they be allowed to have further signage on the site that is connected to the original Nylex sign and their animation is connected eg the original sign becomes animated over a period of time then is extinguished while the newer sign illuminates for a shorter time.

#### **Summary of funding options**

It is unlikely that the signage industry would partake in a contribution scheme – the industry is no longer as cohesive as it once was, and where there was a definable group of industry leaders such as Claude Neon and Neon Electric there are now a number of part players which are really deal makers, seeking opportunities to acquire leases over prospective signage sites, finding tenants and contracting the work to signage erector companies. It is also unlikely that smaller players operating on the fringes of the Metropolitan area could be enticed into such a scheme.

The most likely source of funding is through the larger agencies such as electricity service providers and advertising agencies sponsoring individual signs where their brand can be marketed in conjunction with the sponsored sign.

Funds garnered through *quid pro quo* arrangements should be directed to an existing Trust fund such as the Melbourne Heritage Restoration *Seeding Fund* which is set up to gather funding for heritage works and has the infrastructure to appropriately disburse the monies.

## 6.5 Recommendations on Management

It is recommended that the following actions be undertaken in relation to the following signs by the City of Yarra within the next six months:

- **Statutory protection:** pursue statutory protection within the Planning Scheme of the following signs: *Nylex Plastics*, *Skipping Girl*
- **Ownership:** Broker Negotiation of transfer of ownership from Whiteway Neon to building or client owner for residual or peppercorn value of sign. There is an advantage in negotiating a peppercorn transfer of say \$1 or even \$100:

Slade Knitwear sign transfer to Slade building owners  
 Skipping Girl Sign transfer to the body corporate of Skipping Girl Place,  
 &  
 Nylex sign to remain in the existing arrangement

- **Funding:** pursue the making of repair applications to the City of Melbourne MHRF (Seeding Fund) by Slade family and body corporate of Skipping Girl Place Encourage owners of PELACO, and Slade signs to seek sponsorship with City of Yarra endorsement for continued lighting and maintenance of signs for a minimum 10 year period through agencies such as Citipower, Origin Energy or AGL with small sponsor logos attached near main sign.

**Table of Ownership and Opinion of Repair costs**

Sign	Ownership	Repairs Required	Lighting
Nylex	Whiteway Neon sign. Head lease held by Whiteway, air-space tenanted by Nylex, sign and maintenance contract in possession of Whiteway.	Total Repair \$750,000 est.*	\$5-10,000*
Pelaco	Claude Neon sign. In possession of building owner. (Adverse possession). Claude Neon contract could be said to have expired through non performance or non-payment.	Major overhaul required (cost unknown possible budget \$150000 to \$200,000^)	
Skipping Girl	Whiteway Neon sign  Buchan Foods (Sydney) last held a contract with Whiteway to light and maintain. Sign owned by Whiteway who have lease over air rights. Sign in possession of building owner.	Repairs & repainting required.  \$50-75,000*	\$3000*
Slade	Whiteway Neon sign.  Sign is in possession of building owner. No contract currently in existence for maintenance between Slade Bros and Whiteway.	Major repair works  Possible cost >\$50000*	\$3000*

\* Estimate by Whiteway Neon    ^ Estimate by D Wixted

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## 8.0 APPENDICES

## **Appendix 1: Brief**

### **Heritage Study of Illuminated Signs**

#### *Background*

In the context of issues surrounding the Slade Knitwear sign 105-155 Dover Street Richmond the Minister for Planning the Hon John Thwaites MP suggested that Heritage Victoria should carry out a study of all extant signs. To this end Heritage Victoria has had preliminary discussions with David Wixted of Heritage Alliance, a recognised authority in the area.

The City of Yarra in which some of the more significant signs are located has expressed an interest in such a study. Understandably, Yarra is more concerned about the management issues involved with the signs rather than the identification, comparison and assessment of significance that is important to Heritage Victoria. Nonetheless, Heritage Victoria recognises that recommendations for future management of signs which are found to be significant is a worthwhile focus for the study.

#### **Brief Details**

##### *Purpose*

The study is intended to identify illuminated signs in Victoria, to assess their levels of cultural heritage significance, to recommend statutory listing at the State and local level as appropriate, and to suggest management strategies for their future. In doing so it will be necessary to understand their contextual history and to make a comparative analysis.

##### *Structure*

The report should contain:

- An essay on the history and iconography of illuminated signs with particular emphasis on neon signs
- A survey of extant examples which records their age and condition
- A comparative analysis of types and examples
- An assessment of cultural heritage significance for each of the identified signs based on the criteria published by the Heritage Council.
- Recommendations for protection either under the Heritage Act or by means of the Heritage Overlay to the local planning scheme where appropriate
- Statements of cultural heritage significance for those signs recommended for listing
- A discussion of maintenance issues generally and by individual sign
- The development of an appropriate model for a management structure. Ideally this should be a suitable structure applicable to other Councils to adapt who may have internally illuminated signs in their municipality. The model should provide a comparative analysis of a selected number of trusts or other management structures (at least 5) and should address:

##### The management structure

- who should be involved and what their position should be
- attitudes of owners
- Possibilities of a management fund or agreement vesting management or ownership

- The legal limitations and the legal nature of the 'Body of Management'
- Who should oversee the funds

Funding issues:

- Costs associated with maintaining signs
- The sources of the funds including possibilities of financial or in kind contributions

The model should incorporate a comparative analysis of different management trusts and have a clear direction for a suggested model, if one exists.

*Format*

The report is to be compiled in Microsoft Word for Windows 97 with all photographs to be scanned at a resolution of at least 150 dpi and be embedded within the document. The report should be provided in disk form and this may be a CD ROM.

*Timing*

As per attached contract details.

**Contract Details**

The client for this report is Heritage Victoria

*Services*

The client shall supply/provide the following services:

- A heritage study of illuminated signs in Victoria in accordance with the attached brief.

*Appointment*

The appointment of the consultant shall be upon the recommendation of the Steering Committee. On appointment, the consultant shall provide the Steering Committee with an outline of the proposed method and approach to the study. The outline shall include a schedule of tasks and completion times, persons responsible and proposed reporting times.

*Supervision*

The consultant will report to a Steering Committee comprising:

- Patrick Miller – Heritage Victoria
- Nicola Stephens – Heritage Victoria
- Alison Blacket – City of Yarra

General administration of the study will be by Patrick Miller on behalf of the steering committee.

*Budget*

The total budget for the Conservation and Management Plan is \$10,400 inclusive of GST.

*Payment*

- 10% on commencement of contract;
- 60% on submission of first draft acceptable to the Steering Committee;
- 30% on submission of final report acceptable to the Steering Committee.

### *Timing*

The study is to start no later than 17 September 2001, with the first draft being completed by December 30 2001. The steering committee will comment on the brief within two weeks of receiving it. The final report is to be completed by 12 November 2001. Any change to this timetable is to be agreed to by the Steering Committee.

### *Meetings*

The consultant shall meet with the Steering Committee on three occasions as follows:

- First meeting, following appointment and prior to commencing examination;
- Second meeting two weeks after presentation of the first draft at which the committee will provide its comments;
- Third meeting on presentation of final report.

Further meetings may be scheduled with the agreement of both Steering Committee and consultant.

### *Copies*

On the agreed date of completion of the study, three copies of the report shall be submitted to the client. In addition a copy of the study shall be supplied on a computer disk which may be a CD ROM.

### *Ownership and copyright*

Ownership and copyright of the study including all maps, plans, photographs and the like supplied to the Steering Committee by way of progress, draft, or final report or publication, (including the original of the final report) be vested jointly in Heritage Victoria and the consultant.

### *Acknowledgment*

Acknowledgment of any persons or bodies assisting in the production of the report is required. Additionally the commissioning and funding of the study by Heritage Victoria must be acknowledged.

### *Archival storage*

The responsibility for effecting archival storage in accordance with Article 28 of the Burra Charter is held by the client.

### *Dismissal*

Should progress of the work be considered unsatisfactory, the Steering Committee may recommend the dismissal of the consultant and the appointment of a further consultant to complete the work. The grounds for dismissal shall only be:

- Failure to meet agreed submission dates (or as reasonably extended) provided that such failure not be the fault of the Steering Committee; and/or
- Failure to undertake the work (or portions of it) as agreed to on appointment, or during the progress of the brief.

### *Changes to brief*

Where it becomes clear that some aspect of the task will require more investigation or more expertise than has been allowed within the budget or the terms of the agreement, the practitioner shall advise the client immediately.

### *Insurance*

The consultant shall be fully responsible for obtaining all necessary insurances.

## **Appendix 2: Explanation of Companies**

### **Sole Trader**

A sole trader carries on business in his/her own right, as the only proprietor either in his/her own name e.g. James Smith, or under a business name 'JB Autos'. Under the Business Names legislation, the name of the business is required to be registered with Consumer and Business Affairs Victoria. In the above example, James Smith would not be required to register his own name (although he may) while the name 'JB Autos' must be registered.

A Sole Trader is liable to taxation in his/her own right as an individual and will be required to declare the income from the business in his/her own personal tax return, and to pay income tax at personal tax rates. A Sole Trader may also be liable to pay provisional tax. The Sole Trader owns the assets and is responsible for the liabilities of the business. Liability is unlimited and will extend to the total personal assets including his/her share of those assets jointly owned with another person.

### **Partnership**

A partnership is formed when two or more people go into business with a view to making profit. The business may be carried out under the partners' personal names or a registered business name. Partnerships are regulated by the Partnership Act and the agreement between the partners. This agreement should be in writing and prepared on the advice of a solicitor.

#### **The Agreement will cover many matters but should include:**

- nature of business
- roles and authority of partners
- proportion of ownership
- liability to contribute funds
- manner of dissolution
- distribution of assets on dissolution
- manner of resolution of disputes

An important aspect of a partnership is the unlimited liability of each and every partner for all the financial obligations of the business. This even applies to debts incurred by a partner without the knowledge or consent of other partners. Therefore, a partnership should only be considered where there is a high degree of loyalty, competence and complete understanding between the partners.

A Partnership is required to lodge an income tax return. However, the profits of the partnership are distributed to the partners in the proportions designated by the Partnership Deed or as agreed from time to time. The partners are thus liable individually for personal income tax on their shares of the profit and they must include their shares of the profit in their individual tax returns along with their income from other sources. They may individually be subject to provisional tax. Children who derive unearned income from a share of a partnership are subject to a special rate of taxation.

A Partnership may be dissolved in accordance with the Partnership Agreement, but the Partnership Act requires certain public notices to be placed. It is automatically dissolved on the death of one of the partners. For further information on the dissolution of partnerships see DSRD's information sheet on this subject. Telephone **13 22 15** for a copy.

## **Company**

A Business may be conducted by a Company as an entity in its own right. Companies are registered under Companies legislation which also regulates the running of the company and sets out the duties of its officers. It is normal for a solicitor to prepare documents and apply for incorporation. A Company has a constitution containing rules which govern its operations. A Company has shareholders who are its owners and directors. The shareholders may also be directors and employees, which is often the case in a small family business.

The Company is subject to taxation in its own right payable in quarterly instalments. Shareholders receive a credit towards the tax on dividends equal to the relevant amount of tax paid by the Company.

The liability of the shareholders is limited to the unpaid calls (if any) on their shares in the company and therefore a company structure may be advantageous in a high risk business. But often major creditors will call upon directors to personally guarantee the Company's liabilities. Personal liability of directors and employees may also arise out of an offence under the Corporations Law or negligence in the performance of their duties. For further details consult DSRD's information sheet on companies.

## **Trading Trust**

In recent years Trading Trusts have been commonly used as the structure for carrying on a business with their main objective of tax minimisation. A Trust requires a Trustee to act on behalf of a Trust and it has been preferable to have a company newly incorporated to act as the Trustee as it is believed that this limits the liability of the Trust to the paid-up capital of the Trustee Company.

A Trust is formed by a gift or settlement being made to the Trustee on behalf of the, as yet unformed, Trust. A Solicitor draws up a Trust Deed setting out the powers and formalising the administration of the Trust. The Trust has beneficiaries rather than shareholders as in a company, who are entitled to distributions of capital and/or income and these distributions are controlled by the Trustee. The distribution made to beneficiaries are subject to income tax as part of their personal income and are liable for provisional tax on these distributions. A Trust can be wound up and the assets distributed but only where there is consent of the beneficiaries. However, it may be very difficult to obtain the consent where the beneficiaries are children or specified as a class (which is usual). Therefore, this type of structure needs to be given careful consideration particularly from the relevance of the tax saving and winding up.

## **Co-operatives**

A co-operative is similar to a company in that it is a legal entity in its own right and has members, directors and staff to manage its day to day business.

A co-operative differs from a company in that its members are businesses themselves (sole traders, partnerships and companies) and its primary purpose is to provide services to its members. These are services that are better provided through a larger or specialised organisation or are services that an individual member could not afford. Such services typically include marketing, manufacturing, transport and sourcing supplies.

A co-operative is somewhat like a franchise except members own and control the 'franchise'. Traditionally in Australia, co-operatives were formed by primary producers but co-operatives have application in manufacturing, retailing and service industries. Decisions are made in a democratic manner - one member one vote. All members may participate equally regardless of shareholding, size or position in the organisation. No member may hold more than 20% of the shares. These principles avoid the dominance of the co-operative by one or more people; they also reduce the possibility of a takeover.


Membership of the co-operative is open. However, directors have the opportunity to approve or reject applications for membership, to ensure that only those people with a genuine interest are involved.

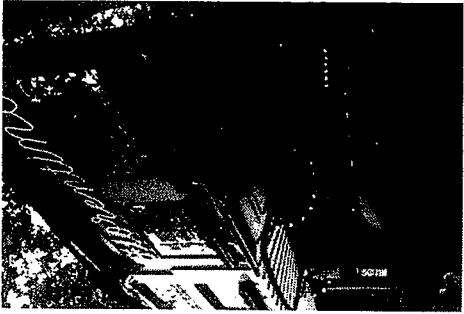

Co-operatives are not required to distribute surplus to shareholders - initially it can be put back into the business. Companies must distribute 20% or incur tax penalties. Co-operatives are registered in Victoria under the *Co-operatives Act 1996* at Consumer and Business Affairs Victoria.

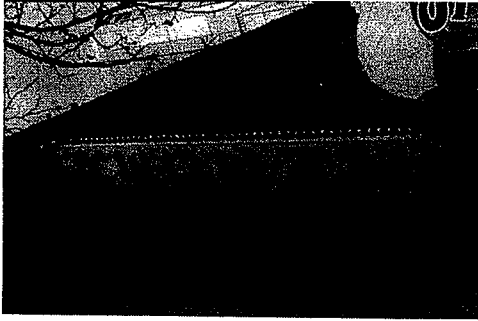



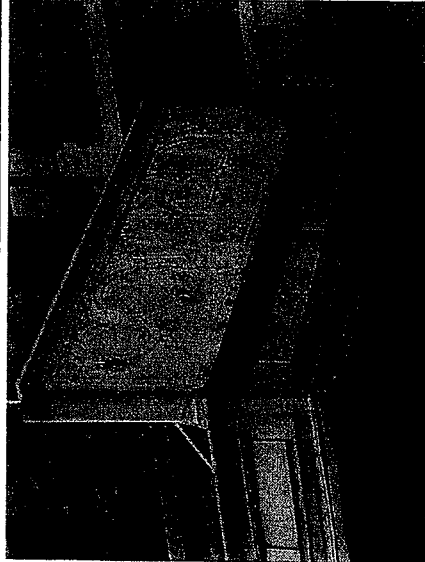


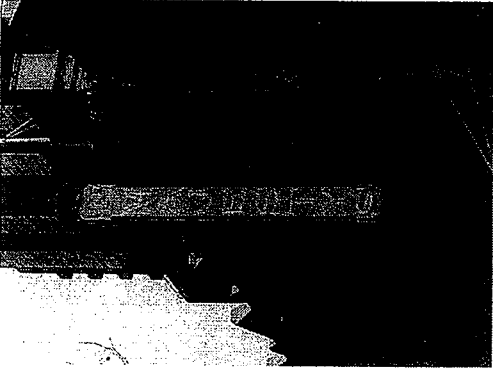

Appendix 3 Survey of Surviving Historic Neon Signage in Melbourne and Surrounding Districts

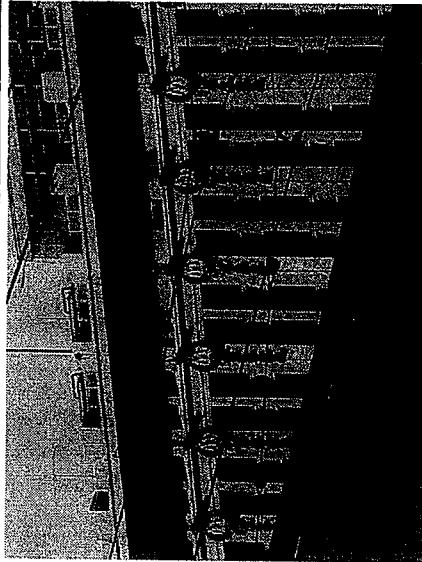

SIGNAGE	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
CITY OF MELBOURNE		
SALVATION ARMY	Bourke Street, Melbourne	Vertical building sign metal box construction with exposed neon, flat painted letters Approx 8m tall.
		




FLORENTINO'S	Grossi Fiorentino, 80 Bourke Street, Melbourne	Horizontal cursive sign approx 10m long	
PELLIGRINI'S	Pelligrini's Espresso, 66 Bourke Street, Melbourne	Horizontal cursive sign approx 10m long	
THE SOCIETY	Bourke Street, Melbourne	Removed	
ELIZA TINSLEY	Bourke Street, Melbourne	Vertical building sign metal box construction, metal lettering back lit by neon approximately 5m long, circa 1950s. Sign no longer functioning. Business no longer functioning. Statutory Protection	

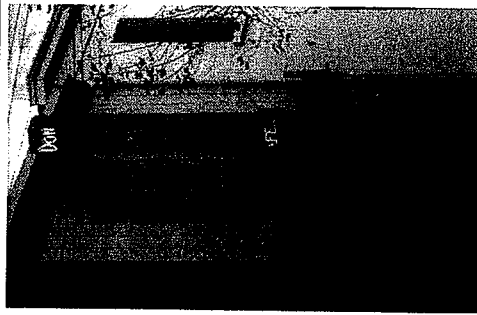

<p>REGENT PLAZA</p>	<p>Regent Theatre, 191 Collins Street, Melbourne</p>	<p>Two vertical theatre signs <i>Regent and Plaza</i>. Metal box construction &gt;5m long. Neon and light bulb festoon edging. Sign not functioning. Statutory Protection.</p>	
<p>THE LIGHTHOUSE</p>	<p>Paton's Building, 115 Elizabeth St, Melbourne</p>	<p>Vertical building sign approximately 5m high. Probably circa 1940s. Similar to Her Majesty's sign. Business no longer operating. Sign no longer functional and decayed.</p>	

<p>EVANS</p>	<p>Former Evan Evans premises, Elizabeth St, Melbourne</p>	<p>Vertical building sign approximately 5m high. Painted background with neon letters. Sign functioning. Business functioning (but no longer at this address).</p>	
<p>THE COMEDY</p>	<p>Comedy Theatre, Exhibition St, Melbourne</p>	<p>Horizontal marquee theatre sign circa late 1930s-1940s. Approximately 3m wide x 1m high. Business operating. Sign functioning.</p>	


HER MAJESTY'S	Her Majesty's Theatre, 219 Exhibition Street, Melbourne	Vertical neon sign approximately 5m tall circa 1940s. Business operating. Sign functioning.	
HERALD SUN	Flinders Street, Melbourne	A long sky sign crowning the top of the former Herald-Sun building with individual metal box letters some 2m high with four exposed neon tubes on each box letter. This is the longest neon sky sign existing. Sign functioning. Business still functioning, but no longer at this address. The sign may have been erected between 1933 and 1940 as it shows in a photograph circa 1920s-40 (State Library of Victoria). Of historic importance.	

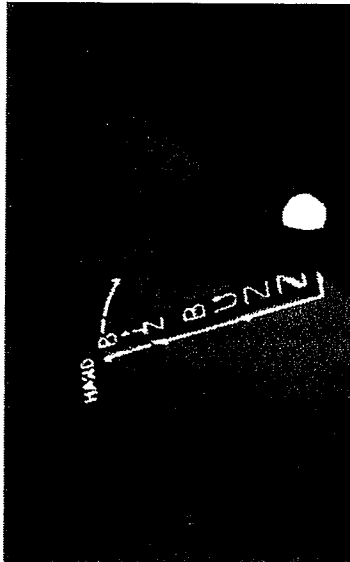

<p>MYER</p>	<p>295 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne</p>	<p>Light bulb sign. Integrated into northern Lonsdale street facade circa 1926. (now MYER previously MYERS) approx 7m long. Business operating, Sign not operating</p>	
<p>PRINCESS THEATRE</p>	<p>163 Spring Street, Melbourne</p>	<p>Light bulb sign. Erected over the gable pediment front of the Theatre. Unknown date. Of historic importance for association with building, rarity and age.</p>	

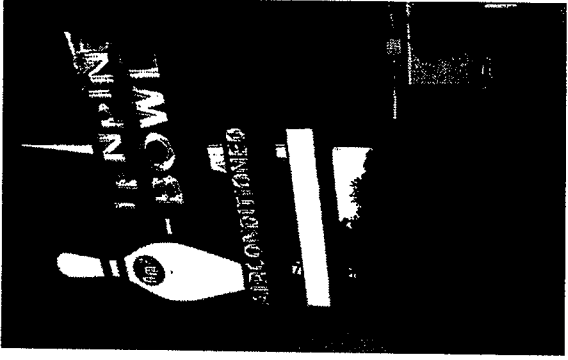
<p>JOIN THE DRUIDS</p>	<p>Druids House, 407 Swanston Street, Melbourne</p>	<p>Two signs with the <i>Join the component</i> separated from the main sign <i>Druids</i> which is in neon. Druids sign is a 5m high building sign dating to the 1930s period. Neon is formed in trough letters. Business operating. Sign not operating but appears to be in good condition.</p>	
<p>CAPITOL</p>	<p>Capitol Theatre, 109 Swanston Street, Melbourne</p>	<p>Horizontal theatre sign. Metal box construction 3-4m long. Neon and festoon edge light bulbs with metal trough lettering. Sign not functioning. Business operating. Statutory protection.  Important for rarity, historical association and age.</p>	
<p>ROPERs</p>	<p>Swanston St, Melbourne</p>	<p>Vertical building sign; metal box construction. Neon lettering in metal trough letters. Approximately 6m high, circa 1930s-1940s. Sign not functioning. Business no longer operating. No Statutory Protection.</p>	

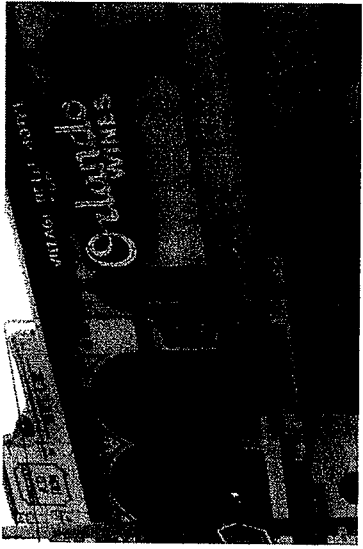
<p>DON CAMILLO CAFFE</p>	<p>215 Victoria Street, West Melbourne</p>	<p>Vertical building sign, metal box construction. Neon letters approximately 4m high, c.mid-1950s. Sign functioning. Business still operating. No Statutory Protection.</p>	
<p>THE CARLTON</p>	<p>Carlton Movie House, Faraday St, Carlton</p>	<p>Vertical building sign 4-5m high. Exposed neon letters. Sign is similar in age and height to University Café. Business no longer operating, but sign still operative. No statutory protection.</p>	

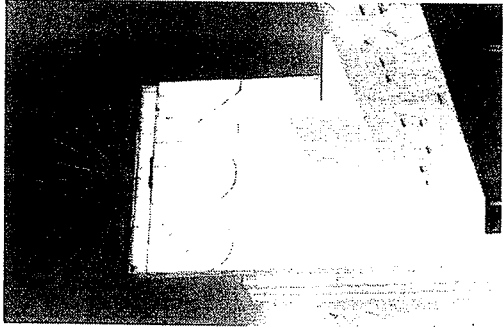



<p>BORSARI CYCLES</p>	<p>Borsari Ristorante, 201 Lygon Street, Carlton</p>	<p>Business sign recently revived after the demise of the original business in 1992-93. Sign is approximately 2m high x 1m wide. Sign functioning. Business still operating although the sign is no longer clearly related to the cycle shop. Important for aesthetics and historical association.</p>	
<p>SIRENA TONNO- SIRENA TUNA</p>	<p>King &amp; Godfree shop, Lygon St, Carlton</p>	<p>Advertising sign for canned tuna approximately 1.5m<sup>2</sup> with a contemporary overlay. The original Sirena Tonno sign is in the shape of the round fish can. This sign no longer functions. The Siren Tuna overlay is more recent (and in English). The advertising is associated with shop below. No statutory protection.</p>	

UNIVERSITY CAFÉ	257 Lygon Street, Carlton	Vertical building sign 5-6m long animated to say <i>University</i> then <i>Café</i> . Circa 1950s. Neon lettering sign functioning over painted letters. Business functioning. No Statutory Protection.	
LEMON TREE HOTEL	Grattan Street, Carlton	Vertical Sign up to 5m tall, non animated with words <i>Lemon Tree Hotel</i> Functional, well maintained, business no longer operating No Statutory Protection	
<b>CITY OF MOONEE VALLEY</b>			
BIZZ BUZZ HARDWARE	445 Keilor Road, Niddrie	Vertical sign in the shape of a carpenter's hammer 4-5m long with neon outline and lettering. Sign functional, business operating. No Statutory Protection.	
MOROCCO HAMBURGERS	Mount Alexander Rd, Moonee Ponds Junction	Horizontal sign approx 3m long with painted background, double faced Circa 1950s Not operating, removed circa 2000	

TENPIN BOWL	Essendon Bowl, 70 Fletcher Street, Essendon	Horizontal sign approx 2M wide with acrylic illuminated skittle & words TENPIN BOWL. Sign operational, business operational. Also words Café in neon on south wall of bowling alley building.	
CITY OF YARRA			
SLADE	Former Slade Knitwear factory, 105-155 Dover Street, Richmond	Erected in 1970.  Important for aesthetics.	
SKIPPING GIRL	Skipping Girl Apartments, 651 Victoria Street, Abbotsford	Erected 1936; reconstructed 1970. Business no longer operating Important for aesthetics and historical associations.	
NYLEX	Barrett Burston Maltings, 2 Gough Street, Richmond	Erected 1967. Business and sign operating. Important as landmark.	
PELACO	Former Pelaco	Erected 1939. Large double sided sky sign	

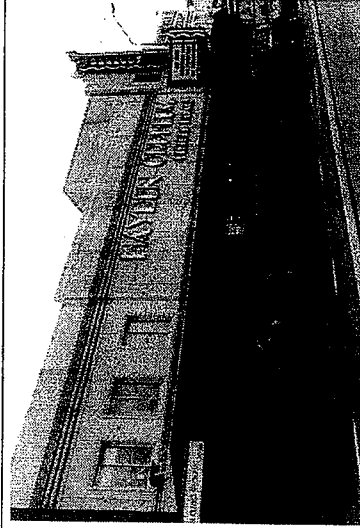
	factory, 23 Goodwood Street, Richmond	individual metal box letters with neon letters. Sign not functioning. Business not functioning. Statutory Protection.	
<b>CITY OF PORT PHILLIP</b>			
<b>ASTOR</b>	Astor Theatre, 1 Chapel Street, St Kilda	Vertical theatre sign. Metal box construction 7-8m long. Neon stars attached to building façade. Neon lettering with painted background originally constructed circa 1936. Refurbished in 1986. Sign and business operating. Local Statutory Protection.	
<b>VILLAGE BELLE HOTEL for ORLANDO WINES</b>	Village Belle Hotel, 202 Barkly Street, St Kilda	Two flat wall signs approx 5m long x 0.5 & 1m. Box wall signs with painted lettering. Not operating although hotel still operates. Appearance is of 1950s signage. Signage obviously erected in two phases. (ie Orlando Wines then Village Belle Hotel	


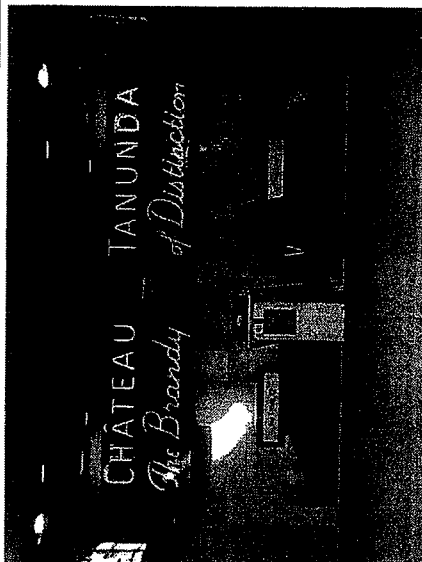
<b>CITY OF MARIBYRNONG</b>	
<b>SUN THEATRE</b>	<p>Sun Theatre, 8 Ballarat Street, Yarraville</p> <p>Cinema sign approximately 1m x 1m high in reasonable condition. Painted background with neon outline. Sign functioning. Business operating. Statutory Protection.</p> 
<b>DOUGLAS SERVICE STATION</b>	<p>145 Ballarat Road, Footscray</p> <p>Linear box sign associated with the adjacent service station. Business operating, sign operable but not often illuminated. Style is more 1930s than a 1950s sign.</p>
<b>CITY OF GREATER BENDIGO</b>	
<b>OVAL MOTEL</b>	<p>Oval Motel, 194 Barnard Street, Bendigo</p> <p>Pole sign approx 4m high. Operating buisness sign in 1960s style although probably erected 1970s</p> 

<b>CITY OF GREATER GEELONG</b>		
<b>SAILORS REST</b>	Foreshore, Geelong	Light bulb sign dated to 1926.
<b>RURAL CITY OF HORSHAM</b>		
<b>RACV BOLTONS GARAGE</b>	Horsham	Vertical Blade sign above entry way reads RACV Bolton's Garage Likely to be 1930s sign (exposed lettering), approx 5m high.

Appendix 4: Important Interstate Historic Electric Signs

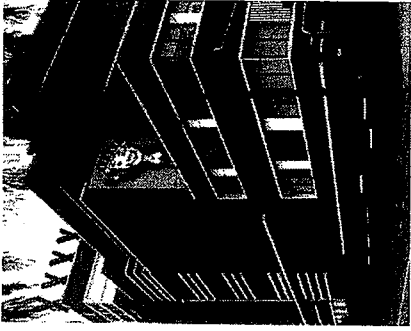


SIGNAGE	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
<b>NEW SOUTH WALES</b>		
AWA	AWA Building, 47 York Street, Sydney	1938. Large circular logo on AWA building. Business operating but not from this address. Building taken over by TAFE, sign operating. Sign is approx 6-8m in diameter. Significance: architectural & historical
Hayden Orpheum	Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace, 380 Military Road, Cremorne	1930s Picture theatre with an extravaganza of Art Deco styled neon signs and outline neon much of which has been restored or more recently introduced. Business operating, neon operating. Significance: architectural/aesthetic historical



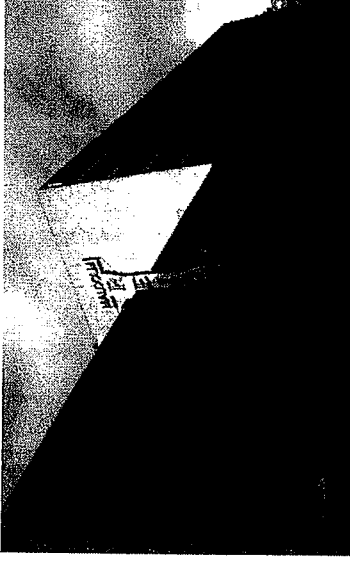

<p>Sharpies Golf House</p>	<p>Nevada Bob's Golf Shop, 220 Elizabeth Street, Central</p>	<p>Large animated sign approx 13m long. Sign functional. Business still operating (albeit under another name). Significance: aesthetical &amp; historical</p>	
<p>Chateau Tanunda</p>	<p>St James Railway Station Entrance Elizabeth St Sydney</p>	<p>Box sign approx 6m long x 1m high in two colours (Chateau Tanunda in blue neon, The Brandy of Distinction in Yellow) with central analogue clock Significance: Historical</p>	

**QUEENSLAND**



<p>XXXX &amp; xxxx drinking man icon</p>	<p>XXXX Brewery, 185 Milton Road, Milton</p>	<p>Large sky-sign of XXXX letters on top of brewery tower with drinking man icon on lower eastern wall of brewery. Erected after construction of the building circa 1951. Both signs have had renewals at dates unknown. The XXXX drinking man icon originally appeared in 1928 (with hat in hand) and the present hatted version appeared date unknown although its style appears to be post World War Two. Business &amp; signs operational. Significance: historical</p>	
<p>XXXX the popular Beer</p>	<p>Breakfast Creek Hotel, 2 Kingsford Smith Drive, Breakfast Creek</p>	<p>Skysign atop hotel's mansard roof is a prominent landmark in Brisbane. Date of erection unknown. Signs operational, business still functioning. Significance: historical</p>	
<p>Princess</p>	<p>Princess Theatre, 8 Annerley Road, Woolloongabba</p>	<p>Vertical Wall sign on front of nineteenth century vaudevillian Princess Theatre. Date unknown. Significance: historical</p>	

**SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

<p><i>Haihs Chocolates</i></p>	<p>Beehive Corner, 2 Rundle Mall, Adelaide</p>	<p>Premises occupied by Haigh's since 1915.</p>	
<p><i>Reids Furniture</i></p>	<p>Rundle St (East end), Adelaide</p>	<p>Malcolm Reid Furniture sign. Vertical box construction with trough lettering approx 6m high. Business no longer operating. Sign not operating. Significance: historical</p>	
<p><i>Elliotts Cycles</i></p>	<p>200 Rundle Street, Adelaide</p>	<p>Horizontal box sign exposed neon approx 3m long. Style is Art Moderne. Business operating, sign partially operating. Significance: aesthetic</p>	
<p><i>Motel Signs</i></p>	<p>Hindley Street (West End), Adelaide</p>	<p>Vertical box signs approx 5m high, exposed neon. Possibly 1950s. Business still operating. Signs operable. Significance: historical</p>	
<p><i>Regent Theatre</i></p>	<p>Regent Theatre, Rundle Mall, Adelaide</p>	<p>Vertical box neon and bulb signs. Approx 5m high, business and sign</p>	

Laucke skysign	Laucke grain mill, Greenock Millhouse, Greenock	operating. Signs appear to be recently restored. Significance: historical	
		Skysign approx 3m long. Sign not functional, business operating. Significance: historical	

**TASMANIA**

*Outline Neon*

Former Hydro Electric  
Commission of  
Tasmania, Hobart

1949 use of neon to outline the  
Commission's new building in Hobart.  
Possibly the largest use of neon for such a  
purpose in Australia. Fully maintained.  
Significance: architectural, aesthetic,  
technical & historical

