

HISTORY : The Richmond open baths were built on land ceded from the grounds of Richmond Central School to the Council in 1897. In return, pupils have been admitted free for swimming lessons.¹ They were opened as part of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations and cost £2,000. At 150 by 80 feet (46 x 18m) they were the largest in Victoria. They soon were heated and provided a hot bathroom service.² The Council built the Baths out of concern at the number of drownings, especially of children, in the Yarra, both whilst swimming, but also through lack of any other washing facilities. The Baths' water was emptied and changed, once a week. Admission was not free, but charged at a penny.³ They were renovated to Olympic dimensions, chlorinated and a new entrance facade erected in 1933-34 and the water changed daily. This was part of the project that refaced the Town Hall and cost £30,000.⁴

VISUAL DESCRIPTION : A wide-span arched steel structure, with tiered seating also supported on a steel frame, with sloping ends. It is clad with corrugated steel and red brickwork. The entrance building has an asymmetrical facade in a restrained Greco-Modernist manner. It has three bays, with a lower fourth bay at left as entry, returning at sides. There are render dressings and block-capping with slightly recessed panels and discs, over metopes and a wavescroll-pattern. Openings have broad architraves with angle rebates, keystones and cill-moulds. Over the entry is a ceramic disc of the Municipal arms.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS : Other enclosed swimming baths include the City Baths (1903-04) and the State Swimming Centre (1930s?). It is stylistically comparable to the Town Hall additions of the same date and to the Richmond Club Hotel, 102 Swan Street, 1930s(?).

SIGNIFICANCE : An early heated swimming baths (1897), with a rare early enclosure on a steel frame and a Greco-Modernist facade (1933-34). Of local historical, architectural and social significance.

INTACTNESS : The interior was not inspected, due to building works in progress.

CONDITION & THREATS : Good.

REFERENCES : 1. L.J. Blake (General Editor), Vision and Realisation. A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria. Melbourne 1973. Volume 3, p.71.
2. Janet McCalman, Struggletown. Public and Private Life in Richmond. 1900-1965, (MUP) Melbourne 1984, p.13.
3. City of Richmond. Carringbush Regional Library. Copping it Sweet. Shared Memories of Richmond, Richmond 1988, p.231.
4. Ibid. pp.168, 173 & 174.