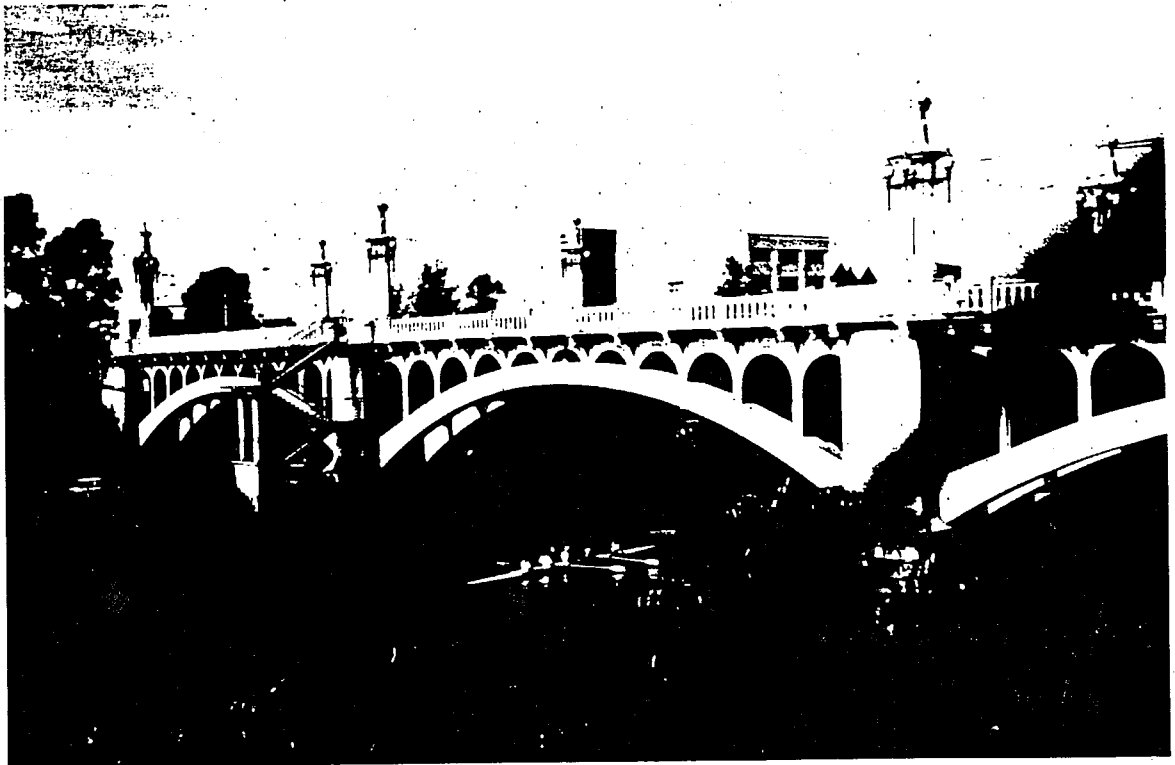

Church Street Bridge, Church Street, South Yarra



History and Description

This concrete bridge, constructed in 1924 from the designs of the architects H. Desbrowe Annear and T. R. Ashworth replaced an earlier 1857 metal bridge.²⁴ Desbrowe-Annear was a successful architect and early Modernist of the inter-war years who had a strong background in engineering.²⁵ He designed many houses for wealthy clients in Toorak and South Yarra.

Both the earlier and later bridge were designed to link Chapel Street, Prahran, with Church Street, Richmond. These developed as major commercial shopping centres. The first Church Street bridge was purchased from the British Government at the end of the Crimean War. It provided an important link but eventually required replacing because of its age and the increasing volume of traffic.²⁶

The new 1920s bridge was constructed as the result of a joint agreement between three municipal councils - Prahran, Richmond and Melbourne, the Metropolitan Tramways Board and the State Government. It was seen as opening up Prahran's gateway to the north.²⁷ At the same time, electric trams were to run across the new bridge. At the opening in July 1924, the Governor travelled on the first tram to cross the river.²⁸

24. *RVIAJ*, November, 1924. Illustration of bridge under construction and completed bridge.

25. Desbrowe-Annear, *For Every Man his Home*, Melbourne, 1922.

26. Sally Wilde, *The History of Prahran*, p.22.

27. Wilde, pp.22-23.

28. Wilde, p.22; J. B. Cooper, *The History of Prahran*, pp. 162-178.

The construction of the bridge in 1923-24 was by the Reinforced Concrete and Monier Pipe Construction Company. This company was founded by John (later Sir John) Monash who, after working as an engineer on the Outer Circle Railway and for the Melbourne Harbour Trust, began private consulting. In 1900, Monash's company introduced reinforced concrete construction to Victoria, using the Monier trellis method of reinforcement. In subsequent years, the company constructed a variety of bridges, tanks, dams, drains and buildings in Australia.²⁹

The new arched bridge was built with three spans bridged by seven open spandrel arched ribs equally spaced across the width of the bridge. These were joined at the crown, each springing from cast steel hinges to allow for expansion or movement. The carriageway was used for the electric tramway soon after construction. Ornamental pylons provide support for overhead wires, as well as decorative lighting fixtures.

Significance

This 1924 reinforced concrete bridge has state significance as an example of the important role of bridges in the development of Prahran. From the beginning, bridges contributed to the evolution of a transport system which connected Prahran with metropolitan Melbourne and nearby suburbs. The bridge provided an important link between the major shopping centres of Chapel Street, Prahran, and Church Street, Richmond. It has state-wide design significance representing an important technological achievement and demonstrating the innovative work of the Monash firm, Reinforced Concrete and Monier Pipe Construction Co. and the designing architects, H. Desbrowe Annear and T. R. Ashworth. The structure also has aesthetic value in its contribution to the Yarra environs.

Sources

City of Prahran, *Annual Reports* 1920-21, 1922-23.

Cooper, J. B., *The History of Prahran*, 1924.

Desbrowe-Annear, H. (Ed.), *For Every Man his Home*, Melbourne, 1922.

Lewis, Miles, *200 Years of Concrete in Australia*, 1988.

Reinforced Concrete and Monier Pipe Construction Company records, Melb. Univ. Archives.

Wilde, Sally, *The History of Prahran 1925-1990*, 1993.

Analysis & Recommendations

It is recommended that this property be retained at A1 level.

29. Reinforced Concrete and Monier Pipe Construction Co. P/L records, Melb. Univ. Archives.