

<b>Current name</b>	Northcote Bowl (AMF)
<b>Former name</b>	-
<b>Address</b>	166-174 Victoria Road NORTHCOTE
<b>Municipality</b>	City of Darebin



*Perspective drawing, 1963*



*Exterior view, 2007*

<b>Date on drawing</b>	February 1963	<b>Date of alterations</b>	1974
<b>Date of opening</b>	30 November 1963	<b>Date of closure</b>	-

<b>Architect</b>	Fisher & Jackson (Sydney) and Bernard Evans & Partners (Melbourne)
<b>Builder</b>	-
<b>Engineer</b>	Woolacott, Hale, Bond & Corlett (Sydney)

<b>Condition</b>	Excellent	<b>Intactness</b>	Fair (extended 1974)
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### History

Australia's first fully-automated bowling alley, which opened in the Sydney suburb of Hurstville in October 1960, was a triumph for a Sydney-based firm, Bowling Centre (Holdings) Pty Ltd. Over the next 12 months, the company went on to build other bowling centres at Sylvania, Enfield, Blacktown and Parramatta. It expanded into Victoria in early 1962 when it won the tender for a bowling alley to be incorporated in the new Southern Cross Hotel on Exhibition Street. Although numerous rival companies had already built bowling centres in Victoria by that time, Bowling Centre (Holdings) Pty Ltd nevertheless sought a piece of the local market by proposing two new bowling alleys in Victoria in early 1963. One was to be built in Humffray Street, Ballarat and the other in Victoria Road, Northcote. Drawings for both were prepared by Sydney architects Fisher & Jackson, who had designed the company's previous bowling alleys in New South Wales. The Melbourne firm of Bernard Evans & Associates was engaged to provide local supervision.

The suburb of Northcote seemed an odd choice for the new centre, as another company was already in the process of converting the former Plaza Theatre, at 401 High Street, into a 15-lane bowling alley. Plans for the rival 20-lane centre in Victoria Road were approved in March 1963, and construction commenced in May. At the time, it was estimated that construction would be completed within six months (ie by October of that year). The centre was officially opened on 30 November, only four months after its rival, known as the Plaza Lanes, had opened in High Street.

In 1974, the centre was taken over by the AMF chain, and a further ten bowling lanes were added.

### Description

The building, set back from the street beyond a carpark, presents a relatively stark face brick façade to Victoria Road, since overpainted in the dark blue hue that reflects the corporate image of AMF. The façade is enlivened by a row of parabolic concrete arches of various sizes (with board-marked concrete edges), with the main entrance set into the largest arch to the right side. The wall above incorporates pairs of terracotta pipe spouts, and, at the parapet level, a repeating motif of stepped header bricks. An illuminated box sign, surmounted by an overscaled bowling pin, stands on the street boundary.

Internally, the alley has been remodelled but retains its distinctive ceiling: a sawtooth portion above the lanes, with perforated acoustic tiles, and a flat portion above the concourse with exposed timber joists and proprietary boarding with a squiggle-like pattern. The thirty lanes have been divided into two areas (comprising ten and twenty lanes), and have modern computerised scoring systems and pindicators. The original bowlers' seating has been replaced by new plastic seating in an L-shaped configuration, with new handrails between the concourse and the lanes. The bowler's area retains square vinyl tiles, but elsewhere the floor is lined with non-original carpet. The reception counter, expressed as an island-like element in the centre of the concourse, is also of relatively recent origin.

### Significance

The Northcote Bowl is of considerable historical, architectural and aesthetic significance.

Historically, it is significant as a rare survivor of the tenpin bowling boom of the early 1960s. Since the closure, demolition or conversion of most of its early counterparts in the metropolitan area, it is now one of only four 1960s bowling centres that still operate in suburban Melbourne. With others at Chadstone, Mentone and Moorabbin, the Northcote example is of especial note as the only intact survivor in the outer northern and eastern areas. Purpose-built bowling alleys at Hawthorn, Camberwell, Heidelberg, Essendon, St Kilda and Box Hill have all been demolished, while others at Ringwood, Preston, Dandenong and Frankston have closed and been altered beyond recognition. Three other centres that were fitted out in disused theatres, at Northcote (High Street), Caulfield and Coburg, have also been converted to other uses, and now demonstrate little, if anything, of their former lives as bowling alleys.

The Northcote Bowl not only provides rare evidence of an ambitious foray into Victoria by the Sydney-based company that pioneered bowling alleys in Australia, but is also a rare local example of the work of the firm's architects, Fisher & Jackson. Together, they were responsible for three other Victorian alleys. The first, in the Southern Cross Hotel, was been razed; another at Ballarat has closed and been altered almost beyond recognition. The third alley, at Chadstone Shopping Centre, is still in operation but is not directly comparable, as it was buried in the bowels of the (now much-altered) complex, and was never expressed as a freestanding bowling centre, as at Ballarat and Northcote.

The Northcote Bowl is also of interest as one of Victoria's largest bowling alleys. The earliest local examples (eg Footscray and Brighton) had 18 or 20 lanes, while later ones tended to have a standard 24 (eg Chadstone, Preston, Geelong, Dandenong, Mentone and Box Hill). The Moorabbin centre, which opened in late 1962 with 28 lanes, remained the largest until the 20-lane Northcote Bowl was extended in 1974 with ten additional lanes. New bowling alleys erected since the late 1970s have tended to be similarly large-scaled, with 28 lanes (eg Frankston and Keon Park) or even 30 (Sunshine).

Aesthetically, the building is significant for its highly distinctive façade. Although starker than some of the lively Featurist-style bowling alleys built in Victoria, the use of parabolic arches of varied sizes is unusual. This is not just a unique expression amongst bowling alleys in Victoria, but is rarely seen in post-war architecture in general. It can only be compared to the multi-storey carpark of the former Old Melbourne Hotel in North Melbourne (1971), with its similar receding parabolic arches. The eye-catching illuminated signpost on the street, surmounted by an overscaled bowling pin, is not only a significant visual element in its own right, but also a rare surviving example of its type.

### References

"New bowl in Northcote", *Northcote Leader-Budget*, 8 May 1963, pp 1-2

"Northcote Bowl to open next Saturday", *Northcote Leader-Budget*, 27 November 1963, p 10