

The **Apollo** had a short life as an independent cinema when the **Glen** closed its doors in about 1933. The **Glen** was near the railway bridge along Glenferrie Road and Hoyts **Palace** was further north on the same side of the road. The **Apollo** around the corner in Burwood Road was only a proposition while the **Glen** remained shuttered.

The new theatre was an initiative of the Jesuit Order of the Immaculate Conception Church on the corner of Burwood and Glenferrie Roads. The **Apollo** was the church's re-badged Manresa Hall, built in 1924. Like many church halls in the inner city and fringe, it is a substantial building.



Manresa Hall was built for dances, socials, concerts and meetings. A kindergarten was opened in 1929. Big attendances at dances must have been anticipated. The Typhoon Ventilation System was put in well before the idea of seeking registration as a theatre. A more elaborate version of the Typhoon system had been installed in the New Malvern three years earlier.

The Church submitted specifications for a bio-box, motor room and re-wind room in 1934. This addition took over the external balcony that gave a view on to Burwood Road. The bio-box also protruded into the gallery, reducing the seating capacity of an already small space to about 150.

Windows were covered in with fibro cement sheets. A raked floor was built 'to prevent craning of the neck,' as the local paper explained. After inspecting the new floor The Department of Health wrote to the Father In Charge to express regret that the Department had not been told before the work started. Their expertise could have avoided the extra expense now necessary because the new steps and ramps into the hall contravened regulations.

On the question of aisle lights, the Fathers explained that the white ceiling reflected sufficient light from the screen (presumably in practice runs) for patrons to find their way out without additional illumination. The Department waived the need for aisle lights in the stalls, but insisted on them for the balcony.



The **Apollo** was opened by the Mayor of Hawthorn on Saturday 29 September 1934. The **Hawthorn Standard** was complimentary. 'The lighting, which has special dimming and colour devices, will be a feature never before seen in the district. The beautiful interior has lent itself admirably to lighting.' The paper emphasized the local and independent aspects of the venture. The lessee Mr. George Young was 'brother of (the singer) Florence Young and Mrs. Young is the manager.' The choice of opening feature, Paramount's **Cradle Song** in which an abandoned baby, raised by nuns, must later make the choice between the veil and the outside world, was possibly a diplomatic choice made in consultation with the Fathers.

The Apollo advertised first in the local Hawthorn paper. For the first year its tag line was **The All Australian Independent Theatre - Where Sound Sounds Best.**



Foyer of Manresa Hall.

The island ticket box has been removed.

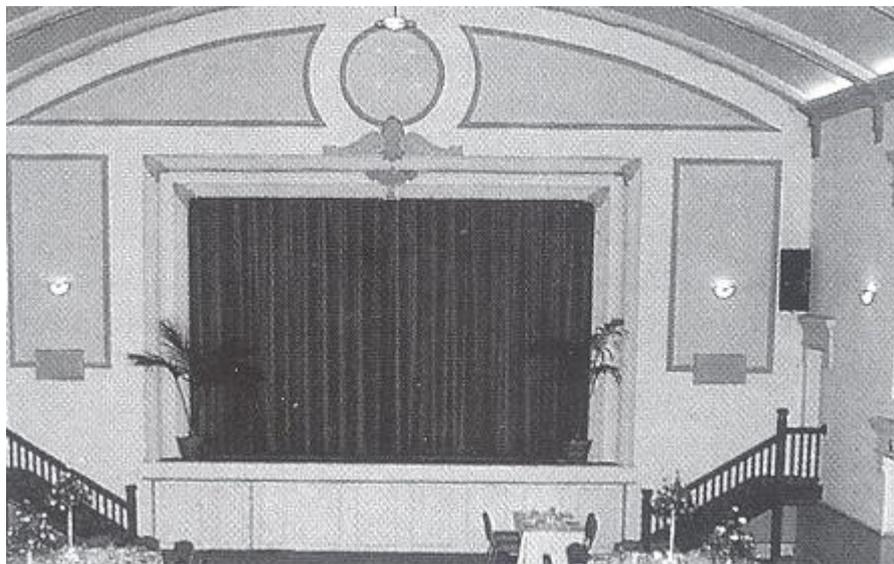
The venture seems to have been a middling success. The first shadow was the opening of the **Vogue** Hawthorn in 1936; a bus and tram ride west, but enough competition for the block ad. to now suggest **Make a habit of tuning to 3AW at 8.30 am and 7.15 .pm daily for our programs.** It did not help

that access to MGM or Paramount films was fourth week out from the city. At other times the **Apollo** took first suburban release of 'throwaways' such as Columbia (British) product.

There was also personal discord. In May 1936 the ads told the public *that Gladys Young (sister-in-law of the late Florence Young, Australia's noted singer) is the sole lessee of the Apollo theatre.* Within a fortnight the text had changed to Under New Management.

The new lessee Mr. David Laidlaw brought **The Apollo** into the Independent Theatres column. Zarf Rivers and His Orchestra played on Saturday nights from 7.30 to 8.00 pm. By this time **The Apollo** was the only theatre in the suburbs to claim an orchestra as an added attraction.

A
simple
stage
setting.



Aspects of the **Apollo** were capable of impressing experts. After casting around for a heating system for the **Camegie Theatre**, Hoyts chief engineer Trevor Hedberg told the Health Department that the choice would probably be similar to the installation at the **Apollo**.

The **Glen** re-opened in 1939. A bare-bones structure had been transformed into a modern cinema. The **Apollo** slogged on for another two weeks before conceding.

If there are church files, photos and memorabilia of the **Apollo** years they have not come to light. Some questions beg for an answer. Although the theatre was conducted on an owner-tenant basis, to what extent was congregation loyalty a factor in audience numbers? Was the theatre's ability to field an orchestra based on talent found within the congregation, a case of parishioners happy to perform more for love than money? Or was it an orchestra of professionals who did two engagements per night; first at the theatre then around the corner at the Ziegfeld Palais (or some other dance venue)?



The bio-box was in the centre of the balcony wall.

The space is now as it was before the theatre fit out.

In 1940 the Church renewed the seats in the stalls and reduced their number from 650 to 530. This upgrade suggested that the Fathers were optimistic about attracting a new lessee. They may have seen the theatre as a 'last-chance' house for the suburb, something akin to the **Victory** Malvern. Nothing came of it.

Manresa Hall reverted to dances, may have been fitted out with a banked-track roller rink, opened as a Drop In Centre and had a stint as the Manresa Function Centre (their brochure was the source of the photos). Now it is the Billy Lids Indoor Play Centre. The bio box is long gone, replaced by copies of the original lead-light doors that open on to the balcony above the street. I stood in the centre of a cheerfully painted hall, jostled by children exploring indoor adventure equipment. Speaking above the din, the staff member who kindly let me look around said that she was not surprised by my visit, "This place has had an interesting life." It's still having one.

The Immaculate
Conception
Church
(Jesuit Order)

Y. W. Vanheins
243 Collins St,
Melb.

29 September,
1934
'Cradle Song'
Dorothea Wieck
'Thundering Herd'
Randolph Scott

Gladys Young
Warne St,
Heidelberg
1934 - 36
David Laidlaw
Paxton St, E.

James C. Brockie
Social functions
from 1925

Malvern
1936 - 39

C & W

Adaptation of RCA
system by Fred
Bevans

Stalls: 650
Balcony: 150

2nd June, 1939
'One Night of Love'
Grace Moore
'Sunset in Vienna'
Lilli Palmer

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References: Public Records Office/ Melbourn Archives Centre. File no. 7884P/254/1293 Alf Lawrence Remembers in CinemaRecord 39, p. 27 Hawthorn Free Press.