

To look at the residential site now one would never guess what used to be there. But Bundaberg had a drive-in theatre situated near the corner of Maynard and Fitzgerald Streets from 1959-1989. The Skyway Drive-in was billed as a family friendly theatre and showed many well-known movies.

1959-1966: Bundaberg Drive-in Pty Ltd

On 30 July 1959 Council granted approval to Bundaberg Drive-in Pty Ltd to develop the site on the corner of Maynard and Fitzgerald Streets as a drive-in theatre¹. The Films Commission then had to grant a licence for the theatre which they did on 28 September 1959². However the Commission also stated that Council must licence the ground for use as a theatre before it could operate. Council decided they would issue the licence when the theatre was completed to their satisfaction³.

Construction began shortly after this initial approval was granted from both the Films Commission and the Council. The Council was contracted to do the clearing, excavation and drainage of the site, in addition to bitumenising the ramps. The building and electrical work was given to Bundaberg contractors².

Manager of Bundaberg Drive-in Pty Ltd, Mr Reg Hunt, visited Bundaberg at the end of October 1959 to check on progress and was fully satisfied with the work being carried out⁴.

Official opening: 26 Nov 1959

The official opening of the new Skyway Drive-in - 'the modern way to see movies'⁵ - was advertised for Thursday 19 November 1959. However, 'unclimatic weather'⁶ forced the postponement of the opening for one week and the Skyway Drive-in was officially opened on 26 November 1959.

- 300 vehicle capacity, later 500 vehicles
- Screen - 81ft wide x 37ft high (24.6x11.2m)
- Screen 18ft (5.4m) off ground, total 55ft (16.7m) in height
- 85 tons of concrete poured for the screen foundations
- 1 speaker post per every two vehicles - requiring 13 miles (20.9km) electrical wiring
- Modern plastic in-car speakers with adjustable volume for each car & switch for cafeteria service to car
- Cafeteria & children's playground
- Cost of drive-in construction - £75-80,000.^{4,7}

The first movies shown were *Magnificent Matador* starring Maureen O'Hara & Anthony Quinn, and *Mystery Lake* with George Fenneman & Gloria McGough⁸. Proceeds from the first night were shared among five charities⁹.

The Mayor, Ald. C.J. Nielsen officially opened the modern new entertainment venue in front of a capacity crowd. Excited about the new asset for the district's families he said...



...that probably the greatest need in the world today was the strengthening of family ties, a resurgence of the feeling of "one-ness" which used to bind families together in past years. Drive-in theatres will help to bring back that family spirit because the whole family can drive to the pictures and enjoy themselves⁹.

But it wasn't just about the movies. There was a Kiddyland playground for kids, Shetland pony rides, slippery dips, a free baby bottle warming service, and a dining experience where movie goers could have a snack or a full meal. The Skyway Drive-in encouraged people to come early and dine before the movie¹⁰.

1966-1985: Birch, Carroll & Coyle

Birch, Carroll & Coyle, the well-known movie theatre partnership, purchased the drive-in sometime in the mid-1960s, possibly in 1966¹¹, and the company sought an amendment to Council by-laws for Sunday night screening around 1 July 1966¹². They were seeking this amendment not only for the Skyway Drive-in, but also for the two other Bundaberg theatres they owned - the Olympia (now the Moncrieff Entertainment Centre), and the Wintergarden (now Blockbuster Video & gym)¹².



bun01381: Drive-in theatre, Maynard Street, Bundaberg, ca.1960

The existing by-law at the time allowed movies and other entertainments to be kept open only until 6pm on Sundays. Council elected to defer the decision for two weeks¹², and ultimately denied the request. Reasons for the denial included:

- Availability of television for Sunday night entertainment
- A survey of the street on a Sunday evening by one of the Councillors revealed fewer than 50 youths about
- Six nights of entertainment a week were enough
- Youth should be at home and not around the streets of a Sunday evening
- That the request came from the proprietors and not the public¹³.

Eventually though, Council did allow the theatre to operate on Sunday nights⁷.

Remodelling - Gala Charity Opening Night, 20 September 1967

Undeterred, Birch, Carroll & Coyle went on to remodel the Skyway Drive-in and opened the newly renovated facility on 20 September 1967. S.C. Lohse was the contractor for the renovations, and also for the original drive-in¹⁴, and the

architects for the remodeling were experienced theatre and drive-in architects Lewis, Williams & Associates of Brisbane. The aim was to "...create a colourful and casual air, coupled with a gay and relaxing atmosphere". The café area was altered to allow the public to see the food being prepared and 200 new speakers on custom made ramps were added¹⁴.



No, Miss Address, 007 or not, you cannot eat the tablecloth at the **ELITE CAFE**

However, you may wish to join the hundreds in the Bundaberg District who enjoy the Superlative Cuisine of the **ELITE CAFE** from Top Suppliers Cooked to Perfection

Mine Host
THEO LATHOURAS

JIM QUAITE, who recently completed installations of Electrical Appliances and lighting circuits at the **NEW SKYWAY DRIVE-IN**

SAYS
 "THEY'RE SITTING PRETTY NOW — AS PRETTY AS THAT GIRL UP THERE FROM **"CASINO ROYALE"** THAT'S SHOWING TONIGHT at the **BIG GALA CHARITY PREMIERE**

It pays to have good connections! If yours are bad see **JIM QUAITE**
 ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR 6 DUNKIRK ST. PHONE 2951
 "EVEN OUR PRICES WON'T SHOCK YOU."

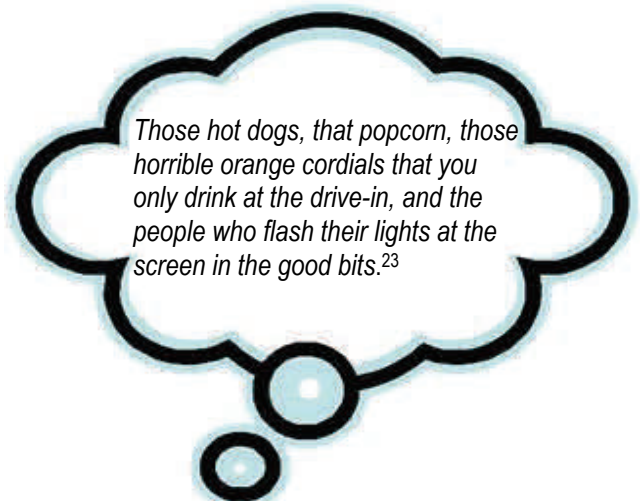
The opening was organised as a gala charity event with proceeds going to the pensioner homes scheme, as chosen by the Mayor, Alderman Nielsen¹⁵. The theme of the event, and the movie shown, was James Bond's *Casino Royale*. All the advertising in the *Bundaberg*

News Mail mentioning the night, was themed the same, with some interesting results!

Miss Casino Royale

The Skyway Drive-in and the people of Bundaberg really got into the theme and a competition to find Bundy's own Miss Casino Royale was held. Eight girls were whittled down to 3 finalists - Jan Kennedy, Sandra Torrisi and Sandra Knott.

All three girls appeared on the night in replica leotards (paisley in orange and blue tones) from the film and were judged by Ms D. Cottell, Ms H. Schuh, and Miss Joan Douglass¹⁶. 17-year-old Jan Kennedy was



declared Bundaberg's Miss Casino Royale with Ald. C.J. Nielsen performing the honours. Jan won a holiday in Surfers Paradise, a watch, a hairstyle, and a portrait by renowned local photographer Ray Peek. Of her win Jan said: "It was rather a shock, but it was all *beaut fun*"^{17,18}.

Bundaberg's biggest ever cake

Lushus Cakes, with the help of other Bundaberg businesses, made a 6ft-wide (1.8m), 120lb (54kg) cake shaped like a roulette wheel for the event. It was apparently Bundaberg's biggest ever cake. Special cake tins had to be made, and the cake had to be baked in four sections as it could not fit whole into the baking oven. Mr Col Dryden had the challenging task of ensuring it was a success. Over 20 hours went into the baking, while 15 hours was spent on decorating. It required 80lbs (36kg) of cake mix and 20lbs (9kg) of marzipan icing.



Photo: *Bundaberg News Mail*, 20 Sep 1967, p19.

In the centre of the cake was an actual roulette wheel which could revolve due to the motor hidden in the cake stand's base. The cake was officially cut by Miss Casino Royale, Jan Kennedy, and Mr S.A. Morley, General Manager of Birch, Carroll & Coyle. The lucky patrons of the drive-in on opening night got to taste-test the results^{16,19}.

Theft

The successful charity opening night for the remodeled Skyway Drive-in was very nearly derailed before the night was even over as thieves stole the safe containing the night's takings of \$900. The proceeds, less the cost of the film, were due to be donated to the Bundaberg pensioner homes scheme. The heavy steel safe measuring 3ft x 2ft x 2ft (91cm x 61cm x 61cm) was in the manager's office and the thieves forced 2 doors open to get to it sometime between 12.30am and 5.00am the morning of the 21st September²⁰.

The safe was found soon after in bushland near the Catholic Cemetery on Fitzgerald Street. While giving the public the impression they had no leads, police officers lay in wait for 30 hours until the three thieves returned for the safe. One man was arrested at the scene and later jailed for 12 months, while two others escaped. One of the men who escaped was apprehended in Melbourne two years later^{21,22}.

THINK PINK FOR EASTER '77
 WITH THE PINKEST OF THE GREAT PINK MOVIES OF OUR TIME.

AND NOW SEE....
PETER SELLERS in
BLAKE EDWARDS
"THE PINK PANTHER STRIKES AGAIN" (NRC)

with **HERBERT LOM**
 with **OLEN BLANEY** - **LEONARD ROSSITER** - **LEALEY ANNE BOWEN**
 Music by **HENRY MANCINI**
 Written by **FRANK WULLONAN** and **BLAKE EDWARDS**
 Produced and Directed by **BLAKE EDWARDS**

Head of **PANORAMA** COLOR by **DeLuxe** **United Artists**
 A Paramount Company

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE WITH...
"The Sound of Pink Music"

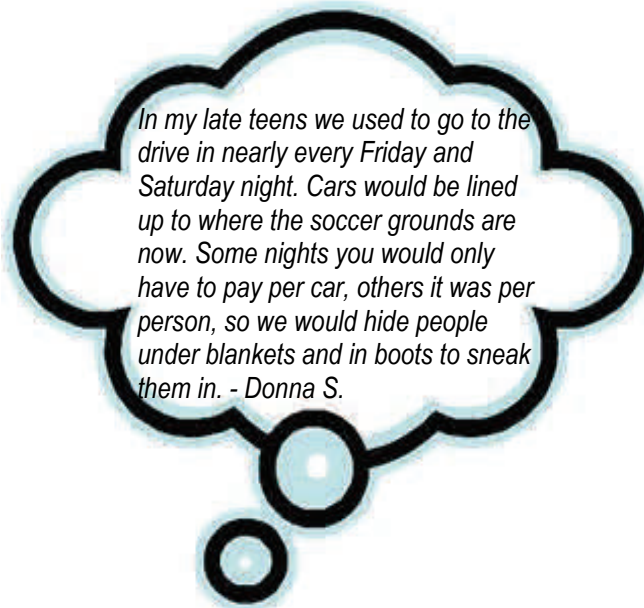
SEE **PINKIE AND RHETT!**
"GONE WITH THE PINK"

SCREENS WITH
 Cornel Wilde and Yaphet Kotto
"SHARK'S TREASURE"
 (M). Colour

HORROR FANS
 Don't forget this **SUNDAY MID-NIGHT**.
 "Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde"
 (M). "Scars of Dracula" (NRC)

NOW TONIGHT 7.15
 (Till Tues. Exc. Fri. & Sun).
 Gates/Dine 6.45

DRIVE IN Skyway



In my late teens we used to go to the drive in nearly every Friday and Saturday night. Cars would be lined up to where the soccer grounds are now. Some nights you would only have to pay per car, others it was per person, so we would hide people under blankets and in boots to sneak them in. - Donna S.

1985-1989: local consortium

A local consortium of businessmen comprising of Peter Sawyer, Paul Neville, Ron Hancock, Neville Loxton and Steve Brennan, purchased the Skyway Drive-in from Birch, Carroll & Coyle in August 1985²³. Paul Neville was experienced in the theatre industry, having managed the Olympia/Crest and Wintergarden theatres, and been Wide Bay Manager for Birch, Carroll & Coyle^{16,24}.

Birch, Carroll & Coyle got out of the venture in 1985 seemingly because of low profits. Speaking in 1989, the then theatre controller of Birch, Carroll & Coyle, Mr Bill Palmer, indicated that the company sold

the drive-in because "...it was not profitable for a big company to keep it operating'. He further went on to say that "it might have been possible for a family operation"²³.

The same reason of low profits would also see the local consortium decide to close up business in 1989 after trying to tough it out for the 18 months leading up to the decision. According to Peter Sawyer the drive-in was closing...

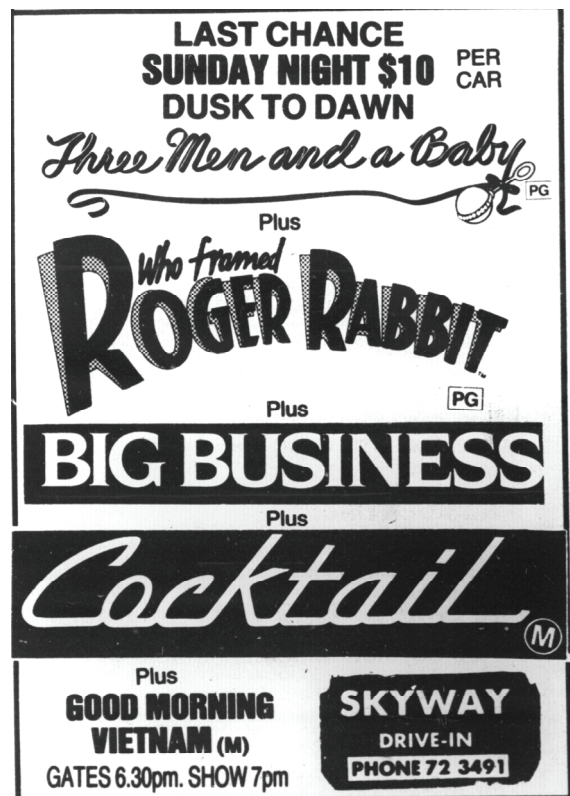
"...simply because it was not as profitable as it had been. People's tastes for movie viewing have obviously moved toward theatres and particularly, videos in the past few years in Bundaberg"²³

Recently Paul Neville said that the drive-in survived black and white, and then colour TV, but couldn't survive the introduction of videos⁷.

There were rumours at the time that the land would be sub-divided but the theatre owners had no plans for the site, other than its sale with all fixtures in place. It remained to be seen whether it was purchased by someone interested in keeping the drive-in operating or not^{23,25}.

End of an era- Sunday 26 March 1989

The Skyway Drive-in had its final farewell in a dusk to dawn movie marathon on Sunday 26 March 1989. Patrons who attended on the last night were treated to 5 big-name movies - *Three Men and a Baby*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, *Big Business*, *Cocktail*, and *Good Morning Vietnam*²⁵, and thus had plenty of time to say a fond farewell to a Bundaberg institution of nearly 30 years.



LAST CHANCE
SUNDAY NIGHT \$10 PER CAR
DUSK TO DAWN

Three Men and a Baby PG

Plus

Who Framed
ROGER RABBIT PG

Plus

BIG BUSINESS

Plus

Cocktail M

Plus

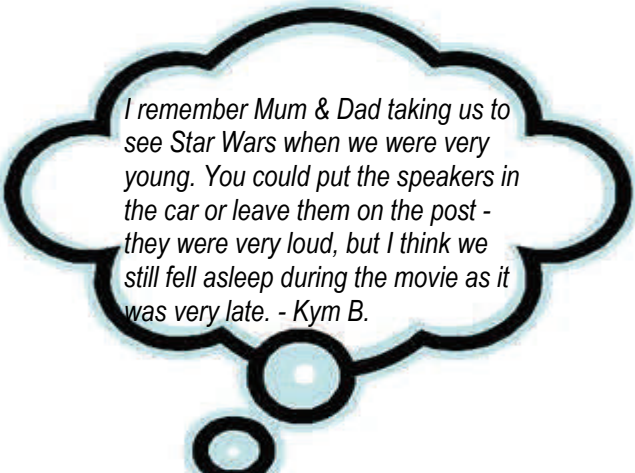
GOOD MORNING VIETNAM (M)

SKYWAY DRIVE-IN
PHONE 72 3491

GATES 6.30pm. SHOW 7pm

References:

1. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 31 July 1959, p3.
2. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 1 October 1959, p4.
3. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 9 October 1959, p4.
4. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 28 October 1959, p4.
5. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 14 November 1959, p8.
6. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 18 November 1959, p12.
7. *Bundaberg News Mail* online, 'Outdoor Cinema Plan', 3 August 2012 [accessed 6 May 2013: <http://www.news-mail.com.au/news/outdoor-cinema-plan/1490919/>].
8. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 26 November 1959, p16.
9. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 27 November 1959, p4.
10. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 24 November 1959, p10.
11. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 7 July 1966, p28.
12. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 15 July 1966, p3.
13. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 29 July 1966, p3.
14. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 20 September 1967, p19.
15. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 20 September 1967, p17.
16. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 23 September 1967, p8.
17. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 19 September 1967, p20.
18. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 21 September 1967, p1.
19. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 20 September 1967, p20.
20. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 22 September 1967, p1.
21. Godwin, S. & Cavander, L. (eds). 2009. *Bundaberg in Print: 110 Years of News*. Bundaberg Newspaper Company, Bundaberg, p138.
22. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 25 September 1967, p3.
23. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 7 March 1989, p1.
24. Moncrieff Entertainment Centre: About Us [accessed 26 June 2013: <http://moncrieff-bundaberg.com.au/about-us>].
25. *Bundaberg News Mail*, 25 March 1989, p5.



I remember Mum & Dad taking us to see *Star Wars* when we were very young. You could put the speakers in the car or leave them on the post - they were very loud, but I think we still fell asleep during the movie as it was very late. - Kym B.

Peta Browne, Bundaberg Regional Libraries

Photo: *Bundaberg News Mail*, 20 Sep 1967, p17.

