

GEELONG CITY 'C' CITATIONS

Site Name: Geelong Picture Theatre

Project File No: 1128

Address: 198-204 Ryrie Street Geelong 3220

Approx. Date: 1913

Integrity: Moderate-High

Significance Level: C (Local)

Photograph No: 04.08

Survey Date: March 2002



History

This site is located on parts of Allotments 3 and 4 of Section 25 of the 1909 Geelong Town Plan. Original proprietors of these allotments were the Wesleyan Church, (which appears to have established a denominational school on lot 3) and T. Butterworth (lot 4). By 1911, the sites were occupied respectively by the Church Missionary Association and Hargreaves and Armstrong, Coachsmiths.

On 9 August 1911, the Geelong Advertiser reported that the Geelong Theatre Company Pty Ltd had commissioned the building of the Geelong Theatre, with preparation of the 70 feet by 194 feet site to commence in six weeks. It was designed by the Geelong architects Tombs and Durran, and Melbourne-based Frank G. Richardson. They had designed a versatile theatre, to accommodate 1500 to 1750 people, at a cost of 15,000 pounds. Ventilation, acoustics and lighting were state of the art, and a unique feature was the theatre's sliding roof. The theatre opened on 26 May 1913, to a capacity audience. The façade of the building was constructed of unpainted cement-rendered brick. The interior contained two shops fronting Ryrie Street, in addition to the foyer and auditorium on the ground floor, and a public meeting room upstairs. Between June and December 1913, a verandah was added to the front façade. Between 1920 and 1930, a projection box was introduced in the archway above the main entrance, and an improved verandah

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replaced the earlier one. Otherwise the original building remained unchanged until 1973.

Sorfanos, Monsborough and Associates Pty. Ltd., Architects, were commissioned in 1971-72 to redesign the theatre as a twin cinema, the two cinemas being one above the other. This change involved additional toilet facilities, excavating the basement for Cinema One, and extending the former balcony seating to create Cinema Two. Externally, the façade above verandah level was covered in aluminium cladding, and ¼ brick facings were stuck on to the columns. The two shops at ground level were converted into an office and cafeteria, and the timber framed windows and entry doors were replaced with aluminium frames.

By 1989, there were plans to restore the original façade of the Geelong Theatre, utilising colours representative of the earlier era. In December 1995, these plans were realised, when, after 10 months of renovations by Construction Engineering (Aust) Pty. Ltd., Village Roadshow Pty. Ltd. opened its new Village Geelong 11. The 11-cinema complex was one of only two multiplex theatres in Australia at the time. The interior was characterised by Hollywood-style décor - carpet on walls and ceilings, gold decorative columns and cornices, a huge star mosaic on the foyer floor, escalators, lifts, wheelchair access and self-serve sweets and snack bar facilities upstairs. Altogether there was seating for 2126 patrons.

Description

The site at 198-204 Ryrie Street, Geelong, is dominated by the two storey Geelong Picture Theatre building, which forms a landmark in the commercial streetscape.

The two storey, rendered brick (with later overpainting), Federation Free styled Geelong Picture Theatre building is characterised by a symmetrical composition of three bays, emphasised by the large, altered central blind arch and flanking pavilions. The building has a gabled parapet with incised rectangular panels below which is a moulded, dentillated and corbelled cornice that follows the composition of the three bays below. The parapets of the pavilions also have smooth finished and rudimentary pilaster piers.

The central bay has a large early, arcuated title panel that reads "Geelong Theatre". The blind arch has been altered, although the rendered piers and iron balustrading is original, as are the roundel motifs flanking the arch. The original rendered voussoirs that define the arch have been further decorated with stylised patera motifs, while the appearance of window panes and the central projecting box have been introduced.

The end pavilions have a vertical emphasis created by the smoothly rusticated pilasters that rise to the underside of the moulded cornice below the parapet corbels. Between the corbels are decorative rectangular panels adorned with cartouches and festoons. Smaller festoons are located above the windows on the first floor in panels under simple window pilasters and drip moulds. These blind (altered) windows have recessed 8 paned steel framed casements and projecting stylised segmentally arched frames. Projecting moulded cornices between a plain wide band delineate the ground and first floors.

Apart from the blind highlights above the introduced cantilevered verandah, the ground floor has been greatly altered, although the three bayed composition with a central recessed porch and flanking shopfronts is partially extant. The overpainting and colours of the front facade have also been introduced, although the exposed red brick walls at the sides are original.

To the west of the main Picture Theatre is a semi-detached two storey modern Renaissance styled building that forms part of the theatre complex. It also has a

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three-bayed composition, accentuated by a central steel framed window and balconette (having a steel balustrade) on the first floor. Flanking the central bay are two pavilions with stylised Doric pilasters flanking narrow steel framed windows. Above the first floor is a panelled entablature below a bracketed projecting cornice. The parapet is rudimentary, having a shallowed gabled central bay and incised rectangular panels. This building is linked to the main Picture Theatre by a single bayed addition having a blocked up timber framed double hung window. The ground floor of the building has been altered and forms part of the overall composition of tiled piers and aluminium framed windows of the picture theatre complex.

Comparative

By 1908, moving picture theatres were popular throughout the U.S.A., and soon after in Australia. Initially, they accommodated 100 people or less, but by 1908 some theatres were able to seat 400-800 persons. The design of the facades became more decorative in an attempt to entice visitors within. Decorative plastering was widely used and these buildings became known as "palaces". Lubin Palace, U.S.A., built in 1908, is possibly one of the earliest examples of a palatial picture theatre. Swanson's Moving Picture Theatre built in Chicago in 1909 was a less elaborate example, but the form of this building was distinctive, with its dominant central arch, flanking pavilions and decoration.

Other local picture palace examples of similar composition followed in Australia. The Melba Theatre (1911), Britannia Theatre (1912) and the Majestic Chelsea Theatre (1912), all situated in Melbourne, were slight variations on the arcuated picture palace theme.

Statement of Cultural Significance

The Geelong Picture Theatre building, 198-204 Ryrie Street, Geelong, has significance as a reasonably externally intact example of the Federation Free style and arcuated picture palace composition popular in the U.S.A. and Australia in the first decades of the 20th century. An unusual style for a building in Geelong (although not unique), the Geelong Theatre was completed in 1913 to a design by the Geelong architects, Tombs and Durran, in association with the Melbourne architect, Frank. G. Richardson. Although there have been changes to the original facade, the general form, composition and detailing is extant and in good condition.

The Geelong Picture Theatre building, 198-204 Ryrie Street, is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level. Although altered, it demonstrates original design qualities of a Federation Free style. These qualities include the symmetrical composition of three bays, emphasised by the large, central blind arch and flanking pavilions. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the gabled parapet with incised rectangular panels, moulded, dentillated and corbelled cornice, arcuated title panel that reads "Geelong Theatre", rendered piers and cast iron balustrading to the central blind arch, roundel motifs flanking the arch, rendered voussoirs, smoothly rusticated pilasters of the flanking pavilions, moulded cornice below the parapet corbels, decorative rectangular panels adorned with cartouches and festoons, smaller festoons above the first floor windows, simple window pilasters and drip moulds, 8 paned steel framed casement windows and projecting stylised segmentally arched frames, projecting moulded cornices between a plain wide band delineating the ground and first floors, highlight windows above the verandah, ground floor composition (but not finish or detailing), and the exposed red brick walls at the sides. The Theatre is representative of a number of similarly designed and composed moving picture palaces constructed in Australia in the early 20th century.

The neighbouring building to the west also contributes to the architectural significance of the place. It demonstrates original design qualities of an interwar modern Renaissance style. These qualities include the three-bayed composition, accentuated by a central steel

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framed window and balconette. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the two pavilions with stylised Doric pilasters flanking narrow steel framed windows, panelled entablature below a bracketed projecting cornice, and the shallowed gabled parapet with incised rectangular panels.

The Geelong Picture Theatre building, 198-204 Ryrie Street, is historically significant at a LOCAL level. It is associated with the development of moving pictures in Geelong from 1913, with the establishment of the Geelong Theatre Company Pty Ltd, who had commissioned the construction of the building in 1911. The Theatre has further associations with the Geelong architects, Tombs and Durran, and Melbourne-based architect, Frank G. Richardson.

The Geelong Picture Theatre building, 198-204 Ryrie Street, is socially significant at a LOCAL level. It is recognised and valued by the Geelong community has an important place for recreation and entertainment.

Overall, the Geelong Picture Theatre building, 198-204 Ryrie Street, is of LOCAL significance.

References

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