

HISTORY : Designed by Bohringer, Taylor & Johnson, architects of the State, Flinders Street (opened February 1929), Western (West Brunswick) and Mentone Theatres in Melbourne and for Combined Victorian Theatres Ltd, theatres at Sale, Hamilton, Lakes Entrance, Wangaratta and Bairnsdale.¹ The Burnley was built by F.L. Walton Pty. Ltd. of Brighton for £30,000,² and opened on 21 May 1928.³ The vestibule ceilings was supported on columns said to be replicas of those at St. Peter's, Rome.⁴ The internal decoration, described as being in the Adam style, was by A.A. Seargent of Geelong, with fibrous plaster by S. Millsom & Sons Pty. Ltd of North Fitzroy.⁵

It was operated for Burnley Theatre Pty. Ltd.⁶ by Union Theatres Limited (who also operated The State), predecessor of the present Greater Union Organisation Pty. Ltd.

The theatre was altered for sound in August 1929, only six months after the first sound film in Melbourne. In October 1931, Union Theatres were liquidated⁷ and Burnley Theatre Pty. Ltd. operated the theatre itself. In May 1939, mechanical ventilation and heating were installed.⁹ The Theatre closed on July 9, 1958¹⁰ and in 1959 converted to its present ownership and use.¹¹

VISUAL DESCRIPTION : Over the cantilevered verandah, the first storey facade has rather squat Tuscan half-round pilasters on pedestals in pairs between five windows, with fan decorated heads in the Adam Revival manner of the interiors. The deep abstracted frieze and cornice has a very abstracted pediment embossed with the name of the building. The vestibule has a decorative dished fibrous plaster ceiling, also supported on half-columns. Ticket boxes were in mahogany veneer, the floor in black, yellow, orange and blue terazzo. The Circle Foyer also had mahogany veneer, with a buffet counter. The auditorium has a decorative fibrous plaster dished dome ceiling, painted in amber, gold and ivory. The proscenium has gold filigree plasterwork in a fan shape, with concealed lighting. The wall decoration is stencilled paintwork.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS : One of very few surviving Melbourne suburban picture palaces. Of these, only the Palais St. Kilda is a better surviving example, albeit much larger.¹² There are no comparable buildings in Richmond, stylistically. The Old Greek (former National) Theatre, Bridge Road is not as significant or intact.

SIGNIFICANCE : Of State architectural and historical Significance as the most intact surviving example of a suburban picture palace in Melbourne, other than the (much larger) Palais Theatre, St. Kilda. Of particular significance is the surviving fibrous plaster interior decoration and paint colour scheme. Also historically significant for its association with the architects Bohringer, Taylor and Johnson who designed several picture theatres in Victoria and as evidence of the early years of the present Greater Union Organisation Pty. Ltd. Finally, of local social significance as a community entertainment and meeting place for Richmond families for thirty years from 1928 to 1958.

INTACTNESS : The first storey facade and cantilevered verandah are intact. The original wall and ceiling interior decoration of plasterwork, paint finishes and colours is highly intact. The Dress Circle false ceiling was installed and there are offices in the Gents Toilet, Vestibule and Auditorium. Light fittings have been removed, the floor partly a concrete slab, and Fly Gallery stage machinery removed. Metal stairs and ramps have been constructed from the Stage to Auditorium and Circle and some walls are penetrated by storage fittings. The shops at the corners have been demolished and incorporated.