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The Capitol: its producer, director, auteurs and given circumstances: an epic of a "lucky" theatre

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The Capitol: Its Producer, Director, Auteurs

and Given Circumstances:

An epic of a "lucky" theatre.

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

MA (HONS)

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LYNNE DENT BA (HONS)

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Abstract

Sydney's Capitol theatre stands on the oldest site on which there has been theatrical activity. It is significant for its historic architecture, distinctive interior and place in popular entertainment. Using a theatre-based analogy, this study sought to explore the history of the site, building and theatres focussing on the involvement of the City Council, Chief Secretary's Department and its Lessees, from the height of its popularity to its loss of public favour and through changing circumstances.

Research was undertaken in the archives of Sydney City Council, Department of Local Government and Cooperatives and National Trust of Australia, as well as newspaper sources held by many libraries. Secondary sources included texts of authorities in the areas of architecture, theatre, cinema, related government legislation and publications of the Australian Theatre Historical Society (now the Australian Cinema and Theatre Society). In addition, a number of people involved in the modern restoration work and who worked in the building gave talks at seminars and openings, interviews to the author and wrote letters containing more invaluable information.

The intention was to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in a number of technical, theatrical, administrative and historic elements of this important theatre and, where possible, link it to the social life of the city's population within the arbitrary period from 1860s to 1983. The only information that remained constant and accessible was that related to the administrative bodies. Contrary to initial expectations, findings show administrative incompetence by its owner, State authorities' failure to enforce government regulations and serious manipulation by its longest lessee, while others bore the brunt of neglect. The Capitol was 'lucky' to have survived long enough to be restored and extended.
This HIPPODROME is being erected for MESSRS. WIRTH BROS. by the MUNICIPAL COUNCIL of SYDNEY. Contractors: MASTON & YATES, 3 Spring St.
CRS 51/3314: Demolition Photograph 18 Jan 1915. Corner Parker and Hay Streets.
Acknowledgments

Acknowledgment is due to all the people who willingly assisted in this research and to whom I am very grateful. The following is generally in chronological order:

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The students of Theatre Technology THEA 106 in 1993 for their research on the Capitol. A considerable amount of prime source information which they found, has not been duplicated elsewhere. The work of Rosanna Caltabiano, Gareth Gillham, Nerida Noon and Martin Vella deserve special mention.

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The former President, Kevin Cork,1 Archivist, Les Tod, Secretary, Mark Love, Patron, Professor Ross Thorne, Ian Hanson, Bob Harper and member Murray (whose last name I failed to record) of the Australian Theatre Historical Society (ATHS) for their constant encouragement, information and assistance,. The society has now changed its name to the 'Australian Cinema and Theatre Society, Inc', but has retained the title, Kino, for its journal.

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1 Sadly, gratitude must be expressed posthumously for his interest and encouragement. Kevin was President during this work. He resigned to complete his MA (Hons) Degree (by research) in Humanities at the University of Western Sydney (Nepean) and had completed the second draft of his PhD thesis at the time of his death in March this year (1998).
The Public Information Officer, Catharine Ambroz and Archivist, Gail Hesselman of the National Trust of Australia (NSW).

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Special thanks must go to the staff of the Sydney City Council Archives, Manager, Mark Stevens, Archivists, Angela McGing and Renato Perdon, and Souphaphone Sounthorn. Their interest and help can never be forgotten and was integral to this work. Of all the Council departments, the staff of this one deserves the highest respect for their own work in historical research, publications and exhibitions, and their willing encouragement to other researchers and historians.

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Fortunately, most of the people approached for this research, were willing to help. Some mistakenly doubted they would be of assistance, while others, whose initial doubts that I would find archive records dry and lack interest, had to be convinced otherwise.

There are many gaps in this study, brought about by the impossibility to uncover all sources of information in the time available; lack of specialised knowledge on my part, especially in areas like architecture, engineering, law and real estate; the absence of people, who could provide an oral history of the venue. Of the lessees, I thank Harry M. Miller for being willing to speak with me. Others could not be contacted and some others did not respond to my enquiries.
This research has been very interesting and by the nature of the prime sources studied in detail, it has possibly taken longer than would normally be expected. Investigative study has challenged many of the assumptions raised during the research. A few assumptions were realised, while others were debunked. It has also been an interesting exercise trying to trace the sources of rumours about the building and to attempt to find additional material about anecdotal reports of certain elements or events, reported to have taken place in relation to the theatre. Neither of these exercises was always successful.

It was necessary to overcome the confusion created by references to other Hippodromes in Sydney. The Hippodrome in the Haymarket that is mentioned by Margaret Williams and referred to by Eric Irvin, predates the building on the Capitol site and had no link to either the Hippodrome or the Capitol. Whereas, the Hippodrome File held by the New South Wales Archives was established in Goulburn Street. It was used to show the first explicit sex films in Sydney during the 1970s and never complied with the regulations of the Theatre and Public Halls Act of 1908 or was licensed.

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3 Archive staff did not know the address of this Hippodrome and said the only way to know was to view the file, which involved unnecessary travel, time and expense. New South Wales State Archives (Kingswood): 80/1538 Parts A and B, Shelf Location 17/3545: Hippodrome. Sydney; "Sex comes to the Citadel." *Sun* 3 Jul. 1974: [n.p.].
Table of Contents

Introduction 1

The Haymarket: A Social Hub 18

Belmore Markets: The Theatre's "Infancy" 32

Hippodrome: The "Juvenile" Aladdin's Palace 51

Hippodrome - An Unfulfilled Promise 73

A Time of Change: The "Engenue" Period 90

The Capitol: "Magnificent Shrine of the Silent Art" 112

A Period of Uncertainty: Reaching Maturity 134

Doldrums and Decay: Entering Middle Age 156

Unexpected Revival 179

A Change of Life: The "Matron" 201

The Struggle to Survive 231

From Demolition to a Glorious Heritage: Emergence of the Grand Old Lady 256

The Timeless "Grand Old Dame" 284

Appendices 287

Bibliography 376
Capitol before restoration: Photograph shows holes in ceiling and openings to room where console was placed that led to serious accident in 1972: Photographs from Australian Theatre Historical Society taken in 1980s.

Restored Capitol: Proscenium Arch has been made more square to accommodate modern technology; hole in ceiling is location of one of the retractable lighting bridges; new seats constructed by manufacturer of truck seats: ATHS photograph.
Heightened stage house and Capitol pediment cornice beneath.

Tympanum with pediment window.

Checker-board Diaper tiles.

Keystones.

Cornice. Frieze with swags. Architrave.

Spandrels with fruit bas-relief.

Capitals obscured. Pilasters.

Imposts beneath Springing.

Central triple arch-bays.

Base with plinth.

Capitol awning.

Medallions.

New stage house.

Capitol parapet.

Raised market building

Awning level.

Hippodrome brick ground level.

New bricks in fire exits.
Introduction

Few people today, who gaze at Capitol's twinkling simulated starscape of the southern celestial hemisphere above, or notice the English flagstone in the carpet beneath their feet,¹ will realise that this experience almost failed to eventuate. Like His Majesty's Theatre in Perth, Melbourne's Princess Theatre, the Bourla Theatre in Antwerp and the Drottningholm Court Theatre,² the Capitol has survived the threat of demolition and redevelopment. The restoration of the Capitol in the historic Haymarket region of Sydney, has ensured that an important example of cinema and theatre architecture has been retained. It is a theatre representative of a time, in which cinema and theatre were central elements of the nation's leisure and cultural activities.³

One of the three oldest theatres in New South Wales, the Hippodrome/Capitol is now the last of the atmospheric style cinema buildings still used as such, in Australia.⁴ Unlike some of its counterparts, it was not adapted for another use or divided for a variety of purposes. Moreover, its recent restoration guarantees the retention of one of Australia's few significantly large venues, capable of staging modern, highly technical musical productions, from the current international theatrical circuit.

From the early years of settlement, the Hippodrome/Capitol site was used for

⁴ Ross Thorne, 1, 8-12; Ross Thorne, Examiner's Report.
theatrical entertainments as part of Sydney's social and cultural activities, making it 'the oldest site in New South Wales on which there has been theatrical activity'. Part of a larger site, it housed the city's first "Paddy's Market", servicing the needs of the city's population, of whom large numbers of working and poorer levels of Sydney's society lived both within and to the south of this area. Many visitors with diverse national and cultural backgrounds were also drawn to these markets. Many were from ships anchored in the nearby harbour. Consequently, the market site, stretching from Castlereagh Street to George Street, was an important commercial and civic hub and attracted many circuses, sideshows and entertainments.

The Council of the City of Sydney acquired and administered the property for almost the entire period under consideration. Initially, Council intended to overcome irregularities and charges of corrupt practices prevailing within the market system. However, the added incentive of gaining profitable market fees led Council to establish a policy in which its pecuniary interests were paramount. This marked the beginning of Council's premise that the property was a valuable piece of real estate.

Despite the construction of two theatre buildings (the Adelphi, later Tivoli, and the Hippodrome, later Capitol) on the overall market site, Council did not form a


8 "Old Belmore Markets." SMH 3 Nov. 1906: 8.


10 Fitzgerald, Sydney, 62; CRS 50 H 2: Crown Land Grant 1846.

11 Fitzgerald, Sydney, 64.
consistent official cultural-management policy governing either building. Instead, it sought to remain detached from the lessees' aesthetic use of the property but made provision that the lessees did not use the building for any "offensive trade" and confined the entertainment to that already approved by Council. Furthermore, the Sydney City Council failed to establish a constant maintenance policy for the structure of the theatre and did not recognise the social significance of the theatre until the 1980s. It has only begun to appreciate the building's heritage value during the last decade leading up to its restoration.

The absence of an established management policy of the theatre, meant there were no guidelines for either the Council or its administrative departments to follow. It also meant that Council's negotiations with the Chief Secretary's Department were flawed, requiring them to be renegotiated at various times during the life of the theatre. Council's inconsistent agreements with the building's various lessees highlights this deficiency.

The elected Council's failure to develop a consistent cultural and management policy affected the "fabric" and "image" of the theatre (as defined below). In addition, the City Council's economic policy and the State Government regulations, have influenced the "ephemeral spirit" and "persona" of the theatre. Several times, this caused some lessees to alter programming policies. On very few occasions, has the

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reverse situation been true, with the lessees directly influencing Council.15

The "fabric of theatre" is the physical nature of a performance venue, represented in this research by the Hippodrome/Capitol building, while the "image" of the theatre building evolves from observations of the same building made by the general population. It is the element, which has attracted or discouraged audience attendance and the entrepreneurs' use of the theatre.

In comparison, the "ephemeral spirit of the theatre" lasts as long as each individual performance and entertainment. Its transient nature changes imperceptibly with variations of time, circumstance, performance and audience response. The related "persona of theatre" is the audience reception of each live theatre presentation and film entertainment. This element determines whether the experience of the event sends each person away happy and whether it remains in memories long after each program has ended.16

It is the object of this thesis to explore and detail this complex interrelationship between the lessees, and owner/regulators, the inconsistencies generated thereby and the limiting effects caused by the various conflicts of interest. The period, on which this paper concentrates, begins in the market era from the mid nineteenth century to the 1980s, after the theatre has effectively closed and the struggle to retain it has begun. An equally eventful period began at this latter time, but extends beyond the limits of this paper. Creative licence has been used to liken this element of the theatre's story to

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15 Examples of this are the submissions made to Council, by Greater Union Theatres Limited and Gladwyne Pty. Ltd., requesting it to make decisions regarding the theatre's leases. This was to enable the companies to complete arrangements for film and live theatre programs ahead of time. CRS 34: TC 3968/48: Capitol theatre: letter P. W. Dive to Town Clerk, 30 Nov. 1948; CRS 116: 32/05/0200: Capitol Theatre. Lease to Gladwyne Pty. Ltd. Letters E. A. Robinson to Town Clerk 5 Nov. 1981 and 22 Dec. 1981.

16 Barker, 7.
the life of a female actor and drawn from a number of newspaper analogies likening the Capitol to a "lady" and "grand old Dame".

I have referred to those parts of the social history of the building, which were evident in consulted sources. As a result, the social history is not extensively or comprehensively studied here. A comprehensive study of entertainment forms presented in the venue, has been beyond resources and time limitations. Instead, this partial history of the Capitol and its antecedents narrates the story from the City Council's perspective as owner and lessor; from that of the various lessees and potential lessees and of the Chief Secretary's Department. Some reference is made to related New South Wales (NSW) State Government legislation and policies.

In the parallel analogy, the Council of the City of Sydney is the "Producer", which is responsible for the conception of an idea and the realisation and management of the "production". The Chief Secretary's Department and its successors, the Department of Services and Department of Local Government, took the role of "Director", in which the "theatrical property/production" is shaped in a collaborative process with other departments until opening night, when "he/they" relinquish these responsibilities. In this analogy, the responsibilities of these departments concluded with the restored Capitol's opening night on 24th January 1995. Lessees/licensees of the theatre were more like "auteurs", a term encountered more in film than theatre. Auteurs take an established "work" created by another author and alter it to suit their own purposes and needs. Lessees of the Hippodrome and Capitol altered the property to suit their own purposes.

This study drew on the research on the Capitol already undertaken by Professor Ross Thorne; Les Tod, Kevin Cork and Ian Hanson of the Australian Theatre Historical
Society (ATHS); James Semple Kerr; Kate Blackmore, and Lawrence Nield and Partners and Travis Partners (which are detailed in the Bibliography). Other authorities specialising in theatre crafts, provided information on a different aspect of the venue. The latter included Mark St. Leon, who doubted if he could be of much help. However, he has since been the major source for many consulted articles on the Wirth family, found in a variety of publications. As a result, it also details relevant information for different groups interested in the building and its comparison to other venues.

Archive files of the Department of Local Governments and Cooperatives in conjunction with the printed media reports, provides information on the state of the theatre, as well as work required to ensure the building complied with the *Theatres and Public Halls Act of 1908* and its *Amendments*. The files before 1920 are no longer available. This department was only responsible for administering theatre regulations with regard to the Capitol, from 1982 until its restoration and extension work was completed.

The building was constructed under the authority of Colonial/Chief Secretary's Department, which was succeeded by the Department of Services. Three quick administration changes in the mid 1970s caused confusion. Therefore, the name of the 'Chief Secretary's Department' will generally be applied to the responsible State Government body until this time. Under Secretaries for these departments were also responsible for other departments, such as the Department of Public Works, which used the same staff and were often interchangeable with the relevant departments.

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It is important to note that a spelling error was not made in the title of the *Theatres and Public Halls License* under the Act. It uses the American spelling for the word "License" and is the only New South Wales (NSW) Government licence with this spelling but nobody could explain the reason during this research. Consequently, it has caused constant confusion, even with staff most responsible for typing these government documents.  

Beginning in 1920, the Chief Secretary's Department files record its involvement in the building's story from after the first world war and contain the tenants' viewpoints, personal opinions of inspectors, police and others involved with the supervision of the safety regulations. Information regarding productions in the theatre, which required the Chief Secretary's approval, was generally absent from these files, despite the fact that productions required the approval of this department.

In comparison, the Sydney City Council Archive files are mainly concerned with matters related to leasing negotiations and construction of the building as the New Belmore Market, Hippodrome and, to a lesser extent, the Capitol. These files contain personal correspondence, reports, observations and memos, which enable 'voices' of both the tenants and Council to be 'heard'. They also contain invaluable collections of photographs of the property. These files help provide some missing details of the Hippodrome era in relation to the Chief Secretary's Office. Unfortunately, the important Town Clerk's file covering the Hippodrome's redevelopment and the first

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18 Garry Pearce and other staff members of the Department of Local Government and Cooperatives, during my research at the Bankstown office of the Department.

19 Unfortunately, the early files containing the documents covering the alteration for the Hippodrome, have been missing for at least thirty years. CSD T4172: Capitol theatre file. Minute paper, 1963.
years of the Capitol under the management of Capitol Theatre (Sydney), was never received by the Archives. The Chief Secretary's files and newspaper reports have been used to partially compensate for this loss. The method of citation to these files in this paper, is that required by the Archives of the City of Sydney Council.

Regrettably, the files of the National Trust of Australia (NSW) begin after the Trust classified the Capitol and its interior. They do not include the minutes of the Board considering the initial submission for the building's heritage conservation and they contain limited information on the Trust's point of view. These files contained a large collection of Heritage Council documents, printed media clippings and feasibility studies leading to the restoration of the building.

Like the local and State Government archives, the most recent files of the National Trust's archives contained information related to Ipoh Garden Developments' redevelopment of the property, which were deemed to be 'sensitive'. The files of all three bodies accordingly came under the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act and access to them would entail supervision, "vetting" and substantial costs, which are generally beyond the resources of private researchers. Newspaper and Journal articles and interviews with Tim Tait of Ipoh Garden Developments and Graeme Macey of Lawrence Nield and Partners, countered this difficulty.

A less tangible element also significantly affected the fortunes of this theatre. I

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20 The Council File CRS 34: TC 2360/26, covering the transfer of tenancy, alterations and the period thereafter, have been missing for decades and may no longer exist. Sydney City Council Archivists Angela McGing and Renato Perdon.

21 Freedom of Information Officer (FOI), Tony Collis (Department of Local Government and Cooperatives), Acting FOI, Graeme Dunn (Sydney City Council) and Gail Hesselman, Records Officer of the National Trust.

22 Held by the Library of the University of Wollongong, the Denis Wolanski Library, the Mitchell and State libraries.
have arbitrarily used the collective term, 'unforeseen circumstances', to consolidate various unrelated events that have changed the future of both the Hippodrome and the Capitol. These events included major economic depressions and international wars; government legislation and Inquiries, and development proposals; local events and the changing and declining security of the lessees. (In the parallel analogy, they form elements in the background and history of the theatre and, in the study of play's story lines, are termed "given circumstances".) Secondary sources provided the information for this aspect of the history.23

For many decades, Imperial measurements and currency were the units of measure recorded in the prime sources. With the exception of the currency, the metric equivalent has been included in the text. Because the currency is affected by inflation, it was difficult to convert to a modern equivalent, taking inflationary factors into account. Therefore, to avoid error, the metric conversion is not included in this history. However, at the time of the currency conversion in 1966, one pound was converted to two dollars and a shilling was equal to ten cents.

With exceptions like the circus and "Jesus Christ Superstar", the management of both the Hippodrome and the Capitol generally changed the programs every week, attracting a broad cross section of the audience. Admission prices were frequently included in early advertisements and the Capitol's management introduced a continuous screening policy. The latter attracted complaints of overcrowding and fraudulent practices, which were subsequently investigated and disproved by the Police and Chief

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Like the many counterparts in Sydney since the late 1960s, modern building development almost caused the Capitol's demolition. It has been a struggle for survival that can be likened to a slow death of a theatre and struggle over 'the body' in the final years of occupancy. In addition, competing politics and bureaucracies seriously jeopardised this last atmospheric theatre.

As has already been stated, contemporary documentation concerning the recent work on the Capitol, is not readily accessible to the private researcher. However, future comparison between archive files already available and those currently being created, will reveal if the prevailing trend in history has been reversed during the 1990s. Until now, Council and Lessees have managed the premises as a commercial venture, often at the expense of the city's population. A future study might also establish whether theatre and entertainment industry and profession interests are recognised in the intervening years.

Decisions made during the life of the theatre building could have caused it to be demolished. Several Council decisions were short sighted and had a long term detrimental effect. The Chief Secretary's Department allowed compromises based on prevailing circumstances and tenants' difficulties, contributing to the building's
persistent deterioration. Greater Union Theatres, the theatre's longest tenant, sought to manipulate the owners and authorities. This was to avoid complying with maintenance regulations under the *Theatres and Public Halls Act of 1908*. However, despite media and political claims to the contrary, some entrepreneurs were genuinely interested in restoration and maintenance of the building and its social and cultural function.

It is imperative to recognise, that there are two sections of the Council of the City of Sydney. The first consists of the local politicians elected to local government. Committee members, who decided Council management policies and consequently the fortunes of the Capitol, were drawn from this body. Accordingly, Council policy regarding the Capitol changed with whichever political group held power in Council, or with the City Commissioners' decisions, made during their short administration. Applications and negotiations with Council were generally submitted to the Town Clerk and considered by this body. Therefore, the term 'Council' in this paper, will generally refer to this body and the Town Clerk.

The second body of Council is formed by the bureaucratic departments responsible for the administration of the theatre's lessees and tenders. Recommendations and submissions on the Capitol by the latter body, were sometimes

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disregarded or deferred by the former body. Consequently, the officers of these separate offices and departments, will often be identified, unless, they represent Council policy as a whole.

All theatres came under State Government building ordinances and regulations governing the safety of performers, theatrical employees and audiences. However, the Capitol theatre attracted added attention from government departments, which were not normally concerned with theatres. The New South Wales State Rail and the Department of Housing intended to resume the theatre in the 1940s, while in the 1980s, the Heritage Council, part of the Department of Planning and Environment, prevented its demolition.

The Heritage Council imposed Interim and Permanent Conservation Orders on the building, preventing its threatened demolition. Of these orders, the Permanent Conservation Order covered the curtilage of the theatre only, allowing its alteration to a lyric theatre to ensure the building remained a viable facility. Under the terms of the Permanent Conservation Order, the theatre's developer could have completely dismantled a significant portion of the building, if they so wished, provided the developers "archivally recorded" [sic] the original structure before disturbing any component. This work was to be supervised by a Conservation Architect.

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33 An example is the restaurant project of J. Giersch. CRS 34: TC 3296/75: Capitol Theatre: ... Offer to Lease, Edgley and Dawe Attractions Pty. Ltd. Minute Paper Properties Branch, 24 Apr. 1978.


36 Mary Knaggs, letter to author, 18 Nov. 1993.
developers could then reconstruct the theatre, using modern technology and materials.\textsuperscript{37} Such an approach would ensure the building complied with current amended regulations under the \textit{Theatres and Public Halls Act}.\textsuperscript{38}

Paradoxically, the Capitol has survived when other theatre buildings of the same era were demolished. This is because it was owned by the Council of the City of Sydney at that time. Culturally deficient entrepreneurs and building developers progressively demolished other theatres and cinemas from 1968, seeking to realise profits from valuable property assets. They ignored the cultural and entertainment value of these buildings.\textsuperscript{39} Yet, this was reversed in the 1980s, when City Council became interested in consolidating and developing the site from George Street to Pitt Street. Their plans included at least one large modern lyric theatre. Council may have included this theatre in the redevelopment to placate similar protests to those voiced, when the Regent Theatre and Theatre Royal were demolished.\textsuperscript{40}

State politicians, like the Premier Neville Wran, considered this pressure to save the Capitol made it a rival to the Opera House, the state's new cultural icon.\textsuperscript{41} At least one local politician believed the Capitol's restoration would place an unacceptable

\textsuperscript{37} Trevor Waters and Greame Macey, Council Tour of Capitol, 26 Oct. 1994.

\textsuperscript{38} The theatre fell under this Act and the authority of the Department of Local Government and Cooperatives until the completion of the restoration, because the work commenced before this Act was superseded and when the Capitol was 'built'. Advice from John Christopher and Gary Pearce of the Department of Local Government and Cooperatives during my research with the Building Branch.


\textsuperscript{40} National Trust: Capitol theatre file. Kevin Rice, letter, \textit{SMH} 10 Oct. 1986: [n.p.].

burden on the city's ratepayers for the benefit of people living elsewhere in the state. The latter viewpoint disregarded the safety of ratepayers and other theatre patrons, under existing regulations. It also completely ignored the well-being of theatre practitioners and staff working in the building. The recognition of the benefits of tourism and the income it generates is a modern phenomenon that was completely overlooked at the time.

The nearby Tivoli theatre site, on which the "Old Belmore Market" stood, provides an example of what may have happened to the Capitol. Like the Capitol site, it is Council property and was redeveloped after the theatre and adjacent hotel were demolished. City Council required a modern theatre be incorporated in that development but that part of the site set aside for the theatre remains untouched and only used to park cars.

Fortunately, in the mid to late 1980s, influential people were interested in retaining and restoring the Capitol. They were in positions to prevent its demolition. Hindsight shows that in the long term, sometimes it was good fortune rather than good management by either the lessor or the lessees, which saved the building from demolition.

The Capitol has always functioned as a commercial venture, without the usual government subsidies that are available to some performing arts venues and companies. This may change in future, as increasing costs and unpredictable success of theatrical

43 Patricia Morgan. "Those were the Days, but this Could be the Start of Something." Bulletin. 5 Sep. 1970: 44-6.
productions may dictate live theatre productions becoming more dependant on
government subsidies and may even include those produced in the Capitol.45

Over the past decade, the evolving system of film exhibition has made the 'first
release' city cinemas, like the Capitol, obsolete. Films are now released simultaneously
to smaller cinemas around the state, catering to widely dispersed audiences. Therefore,
the Capitol as a large cinema, is no longer economically viable for this form of
entertainment.46

Spectacular openings have been regular events in the repetitive history of the
Hippodrome cum Capitol, but were invariably followed by progressive deterioration.
The recent opening may mark the reversal of this pattern. Attracting both praise and
criticism from its audience, the theatre's restoration work was undertaken by private
companies under contract to Ipoh Garden Developments.47 On behalf of the city's
ratepayers and residents, City Council contributed fifteen million dollars towards the
venture and leased it to the developers for ninety-nine years. This lease establishes a
profit sharing arrangement between the City Council and Capitol theatre management,
acting for Ipoh Garden Developments.48

Council lacked theatrical expertise and judgement, leading to several lost
opportunities to lease the theatre. It is an example, which generally questions the
desirability of government bodies owning theatrical venues and managing them by

46 David Penfold, Managing Director of Greater Union during the "Going to the Pictures"
48 The Capitol Theatre (Sydney: Capitol Theatre Management Pty. Ltd., 1995) [2-5]; Rosy Mobbs,
"IPOH gets nod for new Capitol." Australian Financial Review, 10 Dec. 1991: 31; Interview,
committee, when there is an absence of specialist knowledge of the entertainment industry. It also highlights the problems caused by these bodies remaining detached from the responsibilities of the theatres' management. However, this cannot be fully explored without comparative detailed studies of other theatres.

While this new ninety-nine-year lease establishes the possibility that the Capitol will survive its second century, there is no guarantee that the struggle for its survival will not resurface well before its third century. Before the expiration of this lease, Council could appoint a person with extensive theatre industry knowledge and expertise, to oversee the management of the Capitol on its behalf. Already this is a possibility, since the responsibility for the safety regulations governing all theatres now lies with local government administration. Therefore, through its relevant departments, Council should remain informed of the condition of the theatre since the State Government shed this responsibility.\(^49\)

Both the Hippodrome and Capitol primarily catered for the entertainment of the city's population, especially for middle and lower income residents. They were venues for 'popular culture' forms, which included the circus, vaudeville, melodramatic theatre, pantomimes, film, popular music, wrestling and boxing. Several times, the limited number of venues, capable of presenting 'high culture' forms such as ballet, opera, symphony concerts and drama, led interested bodies to pressure the City Council to allow them to use the Capitol. They sought to reserve the Capitol for seasons devoted to these forms of entertainment. This interest was rumoured to have been revived with the restoration of the Capitol and it's extended and improved stage and technical

\(^{49}\) Theatres now come mainly under the regulations of the \textit{Local Government Act of 1993 and its Amendments}. John Christopher, Manager of Building Branch of department of Local Governments and Cooperatives, information given during research: 1992.
The first production in the restored Capitol revived the traditions of the early circus. It was followed by an example of 'high culture' in the ballet presented by The White Oak Dance Project. Since then, popular modern musicals have entertained audiences who could afford to pay the high admission prices. The Capitol is no longer a venue catering for people in the lower income levels, working class families or children's entertainment. It is unlikely that productions such as vaudeville and pantomimes, like those successfully produced in both the Hippodrome and early Capitol, will be presented in the Capitol for many years to come - if at all.

Taking these all elements into consideration, not only was the Capitol lucky to have survived but it was also fortunate that the Hippodrome was built in the first place, even though it meant the loss of the building as a market. This negates the rumour among some theatre practitioners that it is "an unlucky theatre".

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50 Personal experience of general conversations during the "Going to the Pictures" Conference, 26 to 29 Jun. 1995, with people interested in the theatre and musical productions. David Penfold (Greater Union) and Miss Frost of Cameron MacIntosh, each voiced their respective companies' acknowledgment of the Capitol's improved facilities for live theatre productions.

51 Opening on 24th January 1995, the Compagnie Philippe Decoufle from Paris, presented a program of acrobatics and dance as part of the Festival of Sydney. The production was praised by the theatre critics.
Detail from Plan "De La Ville de Sydney: Capitale des Colonies Anglaises", 1802, reproduced in *Atlas of New South Wales* (1987) shows the site's clay deposits (1788) and residences beside creek, Brickfield Hill and road, which became George Street.

CRS 51/2512: Demolition Photographs. Detail showing Pitt Street frontage of Belmore Produce Markets (the Old Belmore Markets).
Chapter 1

The Haymarket: A Social Hub

Saturday night - the time of hustlers and bustling throngs congregating in the Great "Brightway" of Sydney. The "brilliantly-lighted shops" in George Street (the "Great Bright Way")\(^1\) and Belmore Produce Markets' flaming gas lights attracted numerous working class citizens of Sydney. Among them were families of hardworking men, servant girls on their free evenings, young women from the nearby factories, slatterns from the alleys and lanes and many larrikins.\(^2\) The area was a hive of activity, due partly to the open markets and related entertainment and leisure activities operating there. On at least one evening, the area drew a condescending group of companions from a more prosperous level of Sydney Town's society, people bent on being spectators. One such experience in 1875, evoked John Laing's description of his visit to the "poor man's" markets at the bottom of Brickfield Hill.\(^3\)

These "poor man's markets" were fringe markets that were commonly named the "Paddy's Markets". It was a term drawn from Irish origins\(^4\) indicating the large ethnic proportion of the colony's poorer convicts, emancipists and residents.\(^5\) As Sydney's first

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1 George and King Streets were the first streets in Sydney to have street lighting installed, because they were deemed to be the city's two principle thoroughfares. Gas service pipes for the "lines of light" street lighting, were supplied in George Street from the Benevolent Asylum, where the country trains now terminate, to Argyle Street in the Rocks and the area bounded by George, Campbell, Pitt and Hunter Streets, was provided with gas mains because it was the most prosperous part of Sydney. Rosemary Bloomham, *First Light: 150 Years of Gas* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1987) 10.


3 Laing, 120-123.


Paddy's Markets, they gradually grew in popularity until the city's working population preferred them to the Sydney Markets in George Street to the north.⁶

Laing's vivid description may have applied to any Saturday evening in Paddy's Market from 1846 and possibly many years before. Governor Darling proclaimed part of this ground for use as a cattle market on the 19th June 1829⁷ and the social and commercial activity of the people's market continued after the Old and New Belmore Market buildings occupied the site.⁸ On Saturdays, both market buildings were open to the public from midday to well into the evening. This was after the normal wholesale market business of the week had been completed.⁹

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, people enjoyed rides on merry-go-rounds and swing boats, and they visited sideshows and circuses in tents pitched on the site, on which the Capitol now stands.¹⁰ Swirling throngs of boisterous and excitable sellers, buyers and onlookers regularly patronised the Saturday night activities. Adding to the ambient noise, vocal itinerant preachers and food vendors advertising their wares attracted the attentions of local ragged children, some to taunt and others drawn by

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⁷ The proclamation was declared on 19th June, 1829. "Old Belmore Markets", *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)* 3 Nov. 1906, 8.

⁸ *SMH* 3 Nov. 1906: 8.

⁹ Michael Christie and Shirley Fitzgerald studied prime sources which placed this on Saturday and Wednesday evenings. However, a letter from the Mayor to the Town Clerk in 1893, states the New Belmore Markets were to be open for business on "Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (the) same hours as (the) Old Markets". Michael Christie cited by Fitzgerald, 62; CRS 26/267: Letters Received: re Belmore Markets. The Mayor, letter to the Town Clerk, 18 Jul. 1893.

¹⁰ *SMH* 3 Nov. 1906: 8.
"Peas", "tatters" and "sav'loys" [sic], entertaining spiel of a freshly garbed food vendor caught the attention of a large circle of onlookers. Standing in the outer ring of the circle, a young mother, simply dressed in a blue print skirt and calico jacket, listened patiently to a young cajoling son. Not an easy victory, but once accomplished, Laing's young, ragged currency lad finally runs with penny in hand, to buy the coveted "sav'loy". Purchase in hand he returns to her and, there, shares the special treat with her and the infant sibling balanced on her hip. Families like this were regular patrons and participants of the market and they enjoyed its leisure activities.

In this setting of popular culture and entertainment, the "embryonic" period of the theatre's career was conceived. From it developed the "spirit of theatre" linked with the open market site for over a decade.

On the 25th November 1842, the Sydney Municipal Council was established by an Act of Parliament and in 1846, the new local government body was given authority to administer the markets of Sydney Town. Claims of corrupt practices and mismanagement within the market system, prompted Council to take control of the two commercial markets that had begun operation well before 1834. The oldest of these was the George Street Markets (Sydney Markets) established in 1811 and situated on what was known as Market Square (later the site of the Queen Victoria Markets). This early market building was lined by small shops and housed both the wholesale and

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1 Laing, 122-3.
3 Fitzgerald, 62; CRS 16/51: Royal Commission: Fruit Industry, 1.
retail fruit, vegetable, meat and poultry traders. Surrounded by the colony's main commercial hub, Council chose the adjacent site as the location for the city's Town Hall.

The second market was that "poor man's" market described by John Laing and is the focus for this study. Situated below Brickfield Hill, the eastern end of this extensive site was briefly used for the wholesale cattle market. Its western boundary fronted George Street and housed the Corn and Hay Market building, which was later adapted for the fruit and wholesale business. Paddy's Market operated on the overall site after the normal market business had concluded and, in it, producers sold their own goods, food vendors prospered and fairgrounds operated.  

Early in the settlement's history, it was the practice to drive the cattle through the city streets to the Sydney Markets prompting an increasing number of complaints about various strolling animals causing havoc. The perceived danger from these animals and the steep incline encountered by northbound travellers at Brickfield Hill, possibly influenced Governor Darling's Proclamation. Shortly thereafter, the open cattle market business was replaced with the expanded fruit and vegetable trade and in 1866, the Municipal Council built the Belmore Produce Markets. This building became commonly known as the "Old" Belmore Markets.

The Cattle and the Corn and Hay Markets site was low and swampy, laying

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15 CRS 170/22: Vade Mecum, 1905, 123; Fitzgerald, 26; Laing, 120-3; Map of the Town of Sydney 1836, drawn and engraved for Proprietor, W. G. Capon (Bathurst: Central Mapping Authority, reprinted 1979); "Belmore Markets." SMH 9 Aug. 1908: 10.


18 SMH 3 Nov. 1908: 8; Kerr, 4-5.
beside one of the area's creeks flowing into Cockle Bay. When the settlement was first established, this land was site for the early manufacture of bricks, tiles and pottery, and housed the associated workers' cottages. Prominent among these potteries was convict Jonathan Leake's Pottery, which gave its name to Leake Lane at the land's eastern boundary. Leake Lane was later renamed Market Lane, (possibly when the markets were established), which in turn was renamed Wexford Street. This road was resumed for the extension of the city's rail system.

During the excavations for the restoration of the Capitol theatre, archaeologists engaged by the developers found evidence of the brick kilns and cattle markets still in their original positions. Similar excavations on the adjacent Gas Light Company property, also uncovered evidence of the brick works and this is on permanent public display in the foyer of the new commercial and retail building on the Hay Street site opposite the Capitol and Manning Building property. These brickworks produced

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19 SMH 3 Nov. 1906: 8; "Plan De La Ville De Sydney, Capitale des Colonies Anglaises aux Terres Australes" Leve par Mr. Lesueur, Atlas of New South Wales (Bathurst: Central Mapping Authority, 1987) 11; Plan of the Town of Sydney in New South Wales, 1807 (Bathurst: Central Mapping Authority, reprinted 1978); Kerr, 2.


bricks for the colony's more important buildings.\textsuperscript{25}

This research did not uncover any information on the intervening period between the brickworks operation and the establishment of the markets. Private enterprise built a market building on the George Street boundary of the Haymarket property in 1833, and it is shown on the maps drawn in 1836 and 1854.\textsuperscript{26} A small brick building surmounted by a turret clock, it was a significant landmark on the road to the northern part of Sydney Town\textsuperscript{27} and was later referred to as 'Haymarket House'. It was demolished before 1876, when the Watkins Terrace was built on the site, and was not standing when Laing visited the Haymarket. Consequently, from his position in the Paddy's Market he could describe his unhindered view of the George Street, its shops and transport, and turn the opposite direction to appraise the lights and activities in the Belmore Produce Markets.

On 4th November 1846, Queen Victoria granted the land bounded by George, Campbell, Pitt and Hay Streets, to "promote the public convenience of Our loyal Subjects, the Inhabitants of the City of Sydney in Our Colony of New South Wales. The land was to house a "Hay and Corn Market" forever and, if demanded, return to the Crown and its successors an annual "Quit Rent" of one farthing. In the event that

\textsuperscript{25} The bricks first used in the New Belmore Markets, also came from these brick kilns. Trevor Waters, Tour of Capitol, 26 Oct. 1994. Trevor Waters engaged the help of Boral Brick Company to research and develop similar bricks for the new work on the building. Clay of a close colour match was found at Bringelly tip. The company rediscovered the problems that beset the original brick-makers. During firing, the initial bricks exploded. This material was reused in the mixture for the second bricks fired in the kilns, producing an identical texture and colour to that of the original bricks. The new bricks were used in the walls of the new fire exits. Trevor Waters, Tour of Capitol, 11 Dec. 1995.

\textsuperscript{26} CRS 16/51: Royal Commission: Fruit Industry, 1; Capon, \textit{Map of the Town of Sydney}, 1836; Woolcott and Clarke's \textit{Map of the Town of Sydney}, 1854, SCC Archives.

\textsuperscript{27} Samuel and Thomas Bannister, \textit{Australia Visited and Revisited} (London: 1853, reprinted Ure Smith, 1974 204-5, cited by James Semple Kerr) 4-5.
Corporation of the City of Sydney be dissolved, the Land Grant made provision for use of the land for the same purpose. Later, the land was dedicated to Council in "fee simple" under statutory authority.

A Commission replaced the Municipal Council of the City of Sydney in 1854, and undertook alterations and enlargement of the Haymarket House to allow the expansion of the fruit and vegetable sales within. When this administrative body was replaced a few years later, the new Council appointed a Committee to be responsible for the markets and this Committee continued to alter and enlarge the building. Meanwhile the open air markets, including the weekly Paddy's Markets, operated on the remaining vacant property until 1892, when Council built the New Belmore Markets.

Named after the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Somerset Richard Lowry-Corry, the Earl of Belmore, the first of the Belmore Markets was opened by the Mayor, Alderman Walter Renny, on the 14th May 1869. Bounded by Campbell, Pitt, Hay and Castlereagh Streets, it comprised three, long, shed-like buildings separated by two service roads, each of which were 18 feet, 6 inches (5.6 metres) wide and permitted carts and delivery vans to supply traders from both sides of the buildings. The timber and iron buildings were constructed under various contracts and measured

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28 In 1846, when the citizens of Sydney were given the Haymarket property, the city was experiencing a serious depression. CRS 50 No. H2: Land Grant dated 4 Nov. 1846.


30 CRS 16/51: Royal Commission; Fruit Industry, 1; SMH 3 Nov. 1906: 8.

31 The Earl of Belmore was Governor, Commander-In-Chief and Vice Admiral of New South Wales from 1868 to 1872. SCC Archives: "Appendix III: Brief History of the Capitol Theatre." Lawrence Nield and Partners Pty. Ltd. and Travis Partners Pty. Ltd., "Capitol Theatre Feasibility Study: Prepared for the Council of the City of Sydney." Balmain: 1986.

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approximately 391 feet (119.8 metres) long by an overall width of 170 feet (51.82 metres) wide. All three buildings were lit with gaslight, encouraging Paddy's Markets trading to extend into them.33

Centrally located to the region's expanding clothing and textile factories, saddleries and growing residential suburbs, these markets continued to be the heart of the Haymarket.34 In this environment, John Laing and his companion (or companions) joined the customary bustling throngs, the crowded omnibuses and attended an entertainment inside a large canvas tent.35 They bypassed the spruiker loudly announcing the entertainment within, a flautist and a drummer (who were playing to attract the passing crowds), paid their threepence admission price and entered. Once inside, Laing chose to remain apart from the audience seated on tiers of "rough narrow seats" at one end of the tent. The assembled public were entertained by an acrobatic, tumbling and contortion act; an escapologist; a fire eater and a comedy routine between the ringmaster and a clown.36

During the performance, Laing noted two problems encountered by this group, which were to recur in both the Hippodrome and Capitol theatres (ventilation and unauthorised entry are covered in more detail in following chapters). He was critical of the assembled audience and the associated "atmosphere", which was not as pure as his party would have preferred. He also observed that between the acts, the "juvenile" contortionist pounced on young boys, who were trying to gain free admission by

33 Laing, 120-3.
35 Laing, 120-3.
36 Laing, 123.
crawling under the canvas.37

Also named the Haymarket Reserve, this site was chosen by a number of international and Australian circuses. Undoubtedly, they were swayed by the available gas supplies,38 water and closeness of the docks. Among the notable international circus companies to play on the market reserve were Chiarini's Royal Italian Circus, Wilson's San Francisco Palace Circus and Cooper, Bailey and Company's International Circus Allied Shows.

Chiarini's Royal Italian Circus opened in inclement weather, at eight o'clock on 17th June 1873.39 Entertaining an audience of two thousand people, the company presented a program of many impressive equestrians performing on magnificent horses. Of the skilled human acts, Miss Bridges was a talented horsewoman and tightrope performer, J. Fallon, a weight lifter, juggled cannon balls, the three Carlo brothers presented humorous acrobatic and musical acts and Edward Rowlan was a most amusing clown. The circus tent was lit with a ring of gas lights around a central arena, which was decorated with strings of flags.40 Both the circus pavilion and performance were unprecedented in the colony.

In April 1876, shortly after Laing's visit, the Wilson's San Francisco Palace

37 Staleness in the air and body odour were determining factors in the need for improved ventilation in later years, and Wirths were troubled with unauthorised entry into the Hippodrome. Laing, 121-2; CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Town Clerk to Under Secretary, 22 Jun. 1920; CSD 4172: Copy of Letter, George Wirth to Town Clerk, 25 Aug. 1920; Air Test of Capitol, 26 Jun. 1931.

38 Gas was introduced by the Australian Gas light Company on 24th May 1841, as part of the festivities for Queen Victoria's Birthday celebrations. A beacon was lit on Church Hill in Grosvenor Street. The Haymarket region was one of the first areas to be serviced by a reticulated gas power supply. Bloomham, 9-10.


Circus played on the site for a fortnight. The company promised patrons that they would experience "all the comforts of a theatre" under "a huge and great canopy of canvas", when they visited the circus. Gas light illuminated the performance area, in which the company presented a program built around the company's "Artists" and "finest stud of educated horses in the world".41

Within the year, "The Cooper, Bailey and Company's Great International Circus" arrived and played for two seasons on the Haymarket Reserve/Paddy Market site. At that time, it was the largest circus in the world. Even before its arrival on the Mail Steamer, City of Sydney, it was advertising the lavish and unprecedented attraction of the largest touring menagerie seen in Australia.42 It contained diverse exotic animals from around the world: such as "lions and tigers from Bengal and Brazil, a hippopotamus from the River Nile, all species of elephants, sacred cattle from Burma, sea lions from Alaska, and hyenas, zebras, leopards, ant eaters, apes, monkeys, baboons, horned horses, Lilliputian ponies, a nyl gar, a tapir, an African eland" and many more novel creatures, all housed in a city of tents. Its circus was performed by exotic animals, talented horses and skilled human performers.43

Cooper, Bailey and Company's equipment included a unique, seven-octave steam piano that could be distinctly heard for a great distance. This steam piano was as

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43 Among the human performers were the animal trainer and performer, Professor G. W. Johnston; James Robinson, the World Champion bareback rider; a troupe of five clowns; acrobats; athletes; turners; tumblers; gymnasts; vaulters; horizontal bar performers; performers on the trapeze and others. "Advertisement." Town and Country Journal 2 Dec. 1876: 914; 16 Dec. 1876: 994; 31 Mar. 1877: 514; 14 Apr. 1877: 598.
significant an instrument in its time as the Wurlitzer organ, which was later installed in
the Capitol. Equally impressive were the circus company's golden chariots, the musical
car of "Unemasyne" and the glittering and richly ornate costumes, representing the
exotic Orient, ancient Greece and Rome and courtly Paris. Everything was shown to the
city's public in the customary Grand Parade, which heralded each season. The
procession travelled an extensive route from Redfern in the South to Circular Quay in
the north and eastwards to Woolloomooloo and Darlinghurst, before returning to its
base in the Haymarket Reserve.44

Similar to international circuses, equestrian acts and acts of human dexterity
formed the foundation of Australian companies like Ashtons and Wirths. Wirths
advertised its travelling show as a 'hippodrome' in country towns, like Grafton where
the Wirth brothers' troupe joined with Perry's Circus to present a Roman, Hippodrome
and Wild West Show.45 Wirths family Circus was one of the national companies that
played on the Paddy's market site.

In the beginning, family members were skilled circus and musical performers
and, when finances permitted, the family gradually acquired equestrian and other
animal acts. The four brothers (John, Harry, Philip and George) first played on the site
on New Year's Eve soon after their arrival in Sydney, which may have been in 1880, or
two to three years later.46 Initially, this performance at the Haymarket was an

45 "Wirths Double Circus Company - Grafton." *Clarence Richmond Examiner* 18 Apr. 1891:
[n.p.] in Mark St. Leon Research Collection ML MSS 2165/4.
46 George Wirth placed this in 1880, but Mark St. Leon states this does not coincide with other
sources. He places the date from 1882 to 1883. "The Wirths and Their Circus." *The Theatre* 1
May 1911, and "The Romance of a Great Circus: George Wirth in a Reminiscent Mood." *The
Theatre* 1 Apr. 1920, reprinted in Mark St. Leon(ed.). *Australian Circus Sources* (Ultimo: Mark
experiment and proved to be so successful that they stayed for six months before proceeding to Ballarat. At first the brothers presented a sideshow in a small forty foot (12.2 metres) tent, charging six pence for admission and realising a profit of forty-two pounds on the first day alone. The success of their venture attracted rival enterprises who set up around them. Whereupon, John would invite the passing crowds to pay one shilling and come inside where they could see what the family troupe could do, after seeing the rest for free.

The brothers performed every act in the "Wirths All Star Varieties" show and played in their own band. John played the cornet, Harry the bass, Philip was on trombone and George's versatility on the horn was incorporated into the acts. They sang comic songs, danced on stilts, worked on the horizontal bars and Roman rings, and juggled with hats and clubs. George was the contortionist and enacted his own unique "Polendric Ladder Act".

The Paddy's Market season was prosperous enough to enable their purchase of another tent, as well as buying and training their own performing horses. Before moving on to Ballarat, they were joined by the remaining Wirth family members, as well as a Japanese Troupe and former members of the Cooper, Bailey and Company's International Circus Company who had remained in Australia.

The fact that international acts joined the Wirths' family company reinforces the premise that the family presented a polished and high quality show. Within four years

47 Mark St. Leon questioned Philip Wirth's statement about the sideshow, as he could find no other reference to verify this. St. Leon, *Australian*, 226-7.


49 St. Leon, *Australian*, 124-5; Brisbane, 102.

50 St. Leon, *Australian*, 125.
of performing at the Haymarket, the family circus owned one hundred horses and twenty-four wagons. By 1888, the family company travelled Australia in specially outfitted trains and were also able to import international circus acts and wild west companies.

In Australia during this period, horses and expert riders formed an integral part of the rural economy and expertise in horsemanship could attract either praise or criticism from knowledgeable audiences. Thirty years later, George acknowledged the skill of these Australian riders and compared them favourably with those in other countries.

By 1887, circuses and hippodromes were prevented from performing on the markets' site by an edict passed by the Mayor of the City of Sydney. This edict was the result of petitions from the "nobs of Sydney" and was passed well before the construction of the New Belmore Markets.

The Municipal Council of Sydney was responsible for the fabric of the markets from the time Council was first established. It altered, built and managed the site's market buildings. However, Paddy's Market portrayed the spirit of the markets and spread from the open Haymarket Reserve into the Belmore Produce Market buildings. Later, it permeated into the New Belmore Market Building, when it was subsequently built on the Haymarket Reserve. Ergo, Council was Sydney's patron similar to the


52 "Circus Romance: Mr Philip Wirth's Career." *West Australian* 9 Sep. 1931: [n.p.] from Mark St. Leon Research Papers Collection 2165/6, Item 3.


54 St. Leon, *Spangles*, 88.
patrons of early fairs and festivals in medieval Britain and Europe who were also in a position of authority and responsibility.55

Similarly, Paddy's Markets, its operation, circuses, sideshows and entertainments were reminiscent of the early popular culture evident in the early fairs and festivals. Modern circus performers, musicians, actors and legitimate theatre evolved from the traditions established on the early market grounds. Early lantern shows and cinematographic exhibitions were also first shown in travelling tent shows of the late nineteenth century.56 The successive construction of the Hippodrome and Capitol theatres on this site continued the social and cultural use of the Paddy's Market property that was established during this earlier period of time.


the expansive days of the 1880s Thomas Sapsford designed this grand market building for Campbell Street. The simpler structure of George McRae's design forms part of the present Capitol Theatre.


Detail of etching by M. Smedley: "Saturday Night in George Street" 4th July 1886, showing the Sydney markets lit with gaslight and clock tower of Sydney Town Hall.
SYDNEY CITY COUNCIL

The Council as Architect & Builder

The Corporation Building, Hay Street, completed in 1893 (CRS 569: T1055)

CRS 51/3420: Demolition Photographs. Hay and Pitt Streets corner: Belmore Market building being dismantled in 1913; Shows central clock tower, original brick structure, steel supports of roof and lanterns, signal box, electric wires and rails of light rail that passed between the two market sites.

CRS 51/3423: Demolition Photographs. Interior of market building looking toward Hotel Sydney and showing cast iron columns, bowed steel and lattice rafters. Wirths performed in this tent-like space in Easter 1912 and 1913, prior to demolition.
Chapter 2

Belmore Markets: the Theatre's "Infancy"

Prosperity to Poverty - during the latter two decades of the nineteenth century, the economic pendulum swung from one extreme to another. Soon after the windfall created by the earlier gold rushes and subsequent mining development of other minerals, increasing numbers of migrants arrived from Europe and China. Industrial expansion evolved from the advances in modern technology and concomitant demographic social and cultural growth took place in Sydney. All were circumstances, which influenced the city's market system, especially that of the Haymarket and Belmore Markets.

The eastern colonies were experiencing a time of prosperity before the 1890s, although, several years of drought temporarily placed Sydney's expansion behind that of Melbourne.¹ During the 1880s, the Municipal Council of the City of Sydney undertook a policy that planned the construction of many impressive buildings. A market building for the Haymarket Reserve was among these proposals.

The neighbouring Belmore Produce Markets had become congested and the wholesale traders were disgruntled with the prevailing conditions. Aware of this dissension, in 1885 Council issued instructions for the preparation of plans for a fruit market building.² Consequently, Thomas Sapsford, the City Architect, designed an impressive three storey building. Each level was indicated on the external facade by continuous rows of arches and positioned atop the centre of each exterior wall was a

Sapsford's design differed radically from that of the Belmore Produce Markets but it was never realised. A year after he prepared the plans, Council reverted to an earlier proposal to build a market in Sussex Street. Once again the fruit growers and sellers were critical, this time of the new building's location in relation to the city's commercial centres, with the result that these markets were never used. In 1887, the Municipal Council reconsidered and adopted Sapsford's designs for the new Belmore Markets, two years after they were first prepared.

Business failures, together with liquidations of many financial institutions and land companies before 1889, gave the earliest indication of the imminent world wide depression. This influenced Council's building policy and construction of the new markets. Wages were generally reduced and unemployment increased rapidly as a consequence of this economic crisis. However, instead of reducing or stopping its building program, the Sydney Municipal Council "urgently pushed on with many desirable and profitable undertakings". In his report, the Town Clerk stated, that this

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4 CRS 16/51: Royal Commission: Fruit Industry, 1.


6 The Council's concern extended to the thousands of unemployed in the city. Unlike other public utility corporations, it did not reduce the wages or retrench employees for five years (until 1896) and gave the State Government free use of the Exhibition Building in Prince Alfred Park, adjacent to the city's original railway terminus. The building was used to house the many unemployed, while they were looking for work during the harsh winter months. Rosemary Bloomham, *First Light: 150 Years of Gas* Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1992) 118, SCC Archives: PC 1892, 6.
"assisted very substantially in brightening the immediate prospect for the city". Earlier, the State Government had passed the *Corporation Act of 1879*, to assist the early Council with its insolvency and established it as a corporation with a sound financial position. It enabled the local government body to undertake and complete its building proposals. One of the building projects to be undertaken, was the New Belmore Market Building.

In the climate created by the depression of the 1890s, Council discarded Thomas Sapsford's plans for the markets. Instead it appointed a committee to advise on a new site for the covered market, after further deputations had been made to Council from representatives of the fruit trade. Once more the Haymarket Reserve was chosen for the new market building and Sapsford's successor to the position of Architect and Building Surveyor, George McRae, designed a less elaborate, single storey building for the Paddy's Market site. At the same time, he designed a two-storey building for the Corporation Stores site on the southern side of Hay Street. This building was to house the administration offices for the new markets.

Preliminary plans for the Corporation Building included eight offices with a space to be used for either an exchange, or reading room to service the markets. Below the offices at street level, was a refreshment room (entered either from the street or the

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8. Fitzgerald, 118.
women's waiting room) and three more shops facing Hay Street. It also housed public
toilet facilities for both sexes. The resultant building is still in use and virtually
unchanged, more than a century after it opened.

McRae's assistant and draughtsman R. H. Broderick, prepared extensive
drawings and tracings for the new Belmore Market project and his work earned
McRae's praise. Council approved the plans and specifications on 28th July 1891;
four months later, it accepted the tender of 24,902 pounds, submitted by A. M. Allan.

Tensions developed between the contractor and the City Architect, because
work on the building was spasmodic. George McRae visited the site on the 29th
September 1892, after the original expiry date of the contract. He found the brick and
stone building was nearly complete but he did not believe it would be finished within
the next two months. Despite pressure from the Council Architect's office, George
McRae again found the site unmanned in November. All work had stopped and it only
resumed after this visit.

Council's initial plans were to open the new market building in time to take
advantage of the summer trade but the constant delays forced the postponement of the
opening date to February in 1893. When the Contractor had still not completed the

12 CRS 26/154; City Architect: Plans, New Belmore Markets. George McRae to Town Clerk,
19 Nov. 1891.
13 SCC Archives: PC 1891, Yearly report of the City Architect and Building Surveyor, cited
by Thorne, Capitol, 3.
14 Thorne, 3.
15 CRS 26/261: Letters received: Time expired for erection of Belmore Markets, George McRae to
the Town Clerk, 29 Sep. 1892; SCC Archives: PC 1892, 4-5.
16 CRS 26/262: Letters received: re progress of works, New Belmore Markets. George McRae to
Town Clerk, 11 Nov. 1892.
17 SCC Archives: PC 1892, Town Clerk's Report, 4-5, PC 1893, Town Clerk's Report, 3.
work by March, McRae complained that Allan was undertaking the work in a "dilatory and unsatisfactory manner", especially since he only found one zinc and four iron workers but no plumbers on site.

McRae believed Allen had chosen to ignore all the letters and verbal notices from the Council office. Finally, the Architect's office advised the contractor that the Contract gave Council the power to employ men to complete any outstanding work - at Allan's expense.¹⁸

Conforming to normal procedures, the contractor was still required to finance both the work and cost of materials during this depression, and was to be reimbursed by Council, which already had funds available to build these markets. By April 1893, an extra payment of five hundred pounds was needed to enable the work to be completed, deviating slightly from the terms of the contract.¹⁹ The final cost of the completion of the building was 30,079 pounds and was financed by a special loan that was raised by Council.²⁰

The New Belmore Market building was officially opened on 14th July 1893²¹ and on the 27th July, the contractor applied for a payment of 1800 pounds, the balance due under the contract. However, he failed to take into consideration the Penalty Clause 24 in the Contract, which established a fine of ten pounds per day, after the expiration date of the contract. Consequently, because he exceeded the time by 210

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¹⁸ CRS 26/264: Letters received: Continued delay contract for Belmore Markets, George McRae to Town Clerk, 21 Mar. 1893.


²⁰ SCC Archives: PC 1893, Town Clerk's Report, 3.

²¹ SCC Archives: PC 1893, Town Clerk's Report, 3.
days, he owed Council more money than Council owed him.\textsuperscript{22}

In 1892, even before the building was opened, Council proposed to extend the building over the sites of the "Old" Belmore Markets, St. Francis Church and its school property.\textsuperscript{23} Council initiated negotiations for the resumption of the latter sites.\textsuperscript{24} If the proposed extension had been built, it would have created an impressive market building "accessible from every road of importance in the locality" and would accommodate the expansion of the fruit and vegetable wholesale trade for many years to come.\textsuperscript{25} The building would have vied with any other existing market within the southern hemisphere for a long time. It is not clear why the proposed extensions did not proceed after the old wooden markets were demolished and the church property was acquired; if it had been realised, the theatre would not have been built.

Nevertheless, George McRae and his staff, designed and supervised the construction of a beautiful Italian Renaissance style, market building.\textsuperscript{26} The New Belmore Market (later referred to as the Sir William Manning Market) was an uncomplicated symmetrical structure, as well as a very practical building. George McRae retained the arched bays and (one) clock tower elements of Thomas Sapsford's original plan. Thirty-six arched entrances (fitted with ornamental wrought iron gates)

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\textsuperscript{22} CRS 26/267: Letters received: re Balance due on Contract, Belmore new Markets George McRae to Town Clerk, 27 Jul. 1893.
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\textsuperscript{23} The church property lay between Castlereagh and Elizabeth Streets.
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\textsuperscript{24} SCC Archives: PC 1892, 5.
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\textsuperscript{25} SCC Archives: PC 1892, 4-5t.
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\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{26} James Semple Kerr, \textit{The Haymarket and the Capitol: A conservation plan for the area bounded by George, Campbell, Pitt and Hay Streets Sydney}, 2nd ed. (Sydney: National Trust of New South Wales, 1992) 8-9.
\end{flushleft}
formed the dominant feature of the external walls of the building. The clock tower was centrally located above the building and was formed with three inch (7.6 cm) diameter steel tubes clad with ornamental zinc covering. It was also supported by the crossed diagonal rafters that formed two elliptical bows and spanned eighty-five feet (25.9 metres) (see Hippodrome demolition photograph).

Because of the proximity of the creek flowing into Darling Harbour and the brickworks' quarried-clay deposits, the land needed to be filled, levelled and a culvert (the first of two) built in Hay Street before work began on the New Belmore Market. Extensive footings were sunk to a depth of twenty-five feet (7.6 metres) and later, their strength and depth enabled them to be used for subsequent alterations to the building.

Australian stone was used for the foundations of the building and elements of the entablature encircling the building. Huge blocks of Bowral Trachyte formed the plinths at the base of the pilasters, which were main elements in the building's exterior walls. Pyrmont sandstone was shaped for use in the cornices, parapets and

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27 Eleven arches were built into the facades facing Campbell and Hay Streets and seven arches faced both Pitt and the newly widened Parker Streets. CRS 170/22: *Vade Mecum* 1905, 127; SCC Archives: PC 1893, 3.


31 Andrew Wilson, "Appendix 3." Kate Blackmore, "Capitol Theatre: Historical Report for the Council of the City of Sydney" (Arcadia: 1989) 2.

ornamentation of the pediments.\textsuperscript{33} Most of this stone remains in the restored building but, unfortunately, a number of the original stone blocks from the pilasters were destroyed in the devastating fires of January 1994. They had been taken to the Gosford quarries for work and storage, until they were to be replaced in the theatre building.\textsuperscript{34}

Red double-pressed bricks formed the walls of the market building and the pilasters between each arched bay. Double-pressed moulded bricks shaped the archivolts of the arched entrances,\textsuperscript{35} which are still part of the adapted building. Red terracotta ornamentation was set into the brickwork to adorn the exterior walls of the building and under the terms of the contract, a sum of 1,370 pounds was set aside for this terracotta ornamentation.

The terracotta elements were produced by Brisbane based company, James Campbell and Sons,\textsuperscript{36} according to designs of George McRae and his staff. They adapted Classical Greek designs to depict the Australian local produce and character.\textsuperscript{37} Small bunches of grapes were placed in the centre of the capitals adorning the main pilasters. Each of the spandrels above the triple arched bays of the external walls, contained relief designs depicting one of a number of fruits, such as pomegranates, figs, apples, oranges and lemons. Floral, leaf and fruit designs decorated the keystones above each arch, the swags in the friezes and in the corbels and capitals.

Terracotta circular medallions were set in the spandrels of the remaining arches
and terracotta was used to form the imposts of each arch, as well as the diaper tiles in each tympanum. The tympana were built above the centre of the four external walls and were set in checkerboard patterns, like the structure's decorative spandrels. Each tympanum contained its own unique design but in the modern restoration, only two tympana remain and their broken tiles have been replaced by those with a different design from the unused tympana. Only viewers' close inspection will disclose the difference.38

A semi-circular, stained glass pediment window was set within each tympanum and contained a fruit motif. When the building was adapted in 1927, these remaining windows were painted over to exclude light for the presentation of films. They have only been recently uncovered and have been lit softly from behind, creating an interesting architectural feature.39

The interior of the building was the largest unbroken space in Australia.40 It afforded carts and other forms of transport, ample access and unhindered passage through the building. Wholesale fruit and vegetable traders placed temporary stalls on marked spaces on the floor, where they subsequently conducted their business.41 The floor was laid under contract by the firm of Flowers and Lane, and consisted of a thick, ten inch (25 cm) concrete foundation covered with Val-de-Travers asphalt covering. This asphalt was prepared by a special process, which was successfully devised to

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38 Waters, Tour, 11 Dec. 1995
40 The building measured 237 feet (73.23 metres) by 176 feet (53.64 metres), creating an area of 41,712 square feet. CRS 170/22: Vade Mecum, 1905, 123.
41 CRS 170/22: Vade Mecum, 1905, 123.
Flowers and Lane were required to take up the existing "stone pitchers" [sic] that already formed the floor of the market. Before levelling and laying the cement, the subcontractors filled any deficiencies in the ground with the broken "pitcher" stones, additional gravel and other suitable material. The whole area was compacted by ramming. This floor later created some problems in the alterations for the Hippodrome.

Sixteen, decorated, heavy cast iron columns were set in the floor and were dispersed throughout the space to support the building's roof. The columns had been cast vertically at Morts Dock in Sydney (renowned for its shipyards) and were the largest columns in the colony to be cast in this manner.

Strong mild-steel, lattice-form trusses were supported by the columns and, in turn, braced the roof spans and roof lanterns [sic]. They formed the building's roof spans. The largest radiated to the east and west, while the two shorter spans extended at right angles from the centre. Roof lanterns were built above the ridges of the roof. They were covered with patent roof glazing and louvres were set into their sides.

The cost of the floor was 4,036 pounds 5s 6d. The Specifications named the Emu Gravel Company as the supplier of the coarse sand and the cement was to be of an approved brand.

It is not clear, what the floor "pitcher" was. The closest descriptions found were: (a) a "pitchstone", a glassy igneous rock, having a resinous lustre and resembling hardened pitch; (b) "pitch" as in the building trade, to dress, work, or place (masonry). *The Macquarie Everyday Dictionary* (Sydney: The Macquarie Library, 1990) 510.

The lanterns on the New Belmore Market building, imitated the slope of the metal roof and was covered with glass to provide natural light to the structure's interior. Metal louvres built in the side walls of the lantern allowed cross ventilation of the building. Usually, lanterns can be seen street level, outside the building.

The long spans were each 66 feet (20.11 metres) long, while the shorter spans measured 28 feet (8.53 metres).
providing the building with natural light and cross ventilation.⁴⁷

No reference was made in these early documents to any early artificial illumination of the building. Like the "Old" Belmore Markets, the New Belmore Markets could possibly have been lit by the available gas, or by an early electrical supply. Gas service lines were first laid along George Street and in Campbell Street (as far as Pitt Street), in 1841.⁴⁸ The Australian Gas Light Company continued to extend these lines and built its third gas substation on land immediately to the south of the market property.⁴⁹

Protracted negotiations between the Municipal Council and the Australian Gas Light Company were followed by Council installing the first city street lighting, in July 1846.⁵⁰ Council photographs of work on the New Belmore Market site show gas batwing-burner street lights standing on both the Parker Street corners.⁵¹ Subsequently, the Municipal Council installed electric street lights throughout the city in July 1914, after it opened the Central (Pyrmont) Power Station and five linked substations.⁵² A Council photograph (taken in 1915) shows an electric street light on the Pitt and Hay

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⁴⁷ The heat created by the roof glazing caused the fresh produce to spoil and discomfort for the traders, with resultant complaints. A deputation unsuccessfully petitioned Council to paint the troublesome glass. CRS 170/22: Vade Mecum, 1905, 128; CRS 26/276: Belmore Markets, Petition that the roof be painted to resist heat. Stallholders to the Lord Mayor, 5 Nov. 1894.

⁴⁸ Broomham, 9-10, 51-4.

⁴⁹ Broomham, 54.

⁵⁰ Broomham, 51-3, 55.

⁵¹ CRS 51/3271, CRS 51/3272: City Engineer's Demolition Photographs; Broomham, 36-7, 48.

Electricity illuminated buildings well before this time and it was already lighting the New Belmore Markets building in 1907. Council had previously installed Lilliput lamps and arc lights in the building (the latter was also used for street lighting as early as 1904). That year, the City Engineer recommended Council replace each of the latter lights with two 50 candle power Tantalum electric lamps. Moreover, electricity powered the city's light rail system from 1893 and the system's tram lines passed between the two Belmore Market buildings.

Unlike the Belmore Produce Markets and contrary to conventional building practice, the New Belmore Markets contained no timber in its structure. Consequently, the Town Clerk deemed the building to be fire resistant, but the building's fire resistance was reduced with the introduction of timber during subsequent theatrical conversions.

When Lord Mayor, Alderman Sir William Manning (after whom the market building was later renamed) officially opened the New Belmore Markets on 14th July

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53 CRS 51/3352: City Engineer's Demolition Photographs.
54 The first electric light was lit on Observatory Hill for the Prince of Wales' wedding in 1893. SMH 20 Jun. 1863, cited by Broomham, 64; Broomham, 64; Frank Crowley, A Documentary History of Australia: Colonial Australia, 1875-1900, vol. 3 (Melbourne: Nelson, 1980) 63; SCC Archives: PC 1907, 144, 233.
55 Broomham, 64.
56 SCC Archives: PC 1907, 144, 233.
57 Broomham, 64.
59 In addition, the authorities considered the use of electricity in preference to gas, further dramatically reduced the risk of fire. Broomham, 88, SCC Archives, PC 1893, Town Clerk's Report, 3.
1893, many of the assembled guests voiced their approval of the building. Before it was completed, the Town Clerk described it as "fine stately and ornate" with terracotta ornamentation, which had a pleasing effect and compared favourably with "the terrible whiteness and sameness" of the surrounding contemporary, cement plastered architecture.

The market building continued to be linked with that of the early Sydney Markets. In 1890, the Sydney Municipal Council resolved to build a new market on the George Street property (also designed by George McRae). A few years later, work started on the impressive new building, the Queen Victoria Markets, and it was opened in 1898. Tenants of the two markets moved back and forth between the two facilities, until the closure of the New Belmore Markets. Even Ipoh Garden Developments, the company that has restored the Capitol, first restored the Queen Victoria Building and its office is in this building.

Regardless of the proposed extension of the New Belmore Market building and the soundness of its structure, it was only used for its original purpose for nineteen years. Some of the Paddy's Markets' activities moved into the building and continued to operate on Saturdays. Patronage of the building by a diverse and multicultural population, was never duplicated in later years.
Standing as it did, within the boundaries of Sydney's Chinatown, the Belmore Markets were as integral to the surrounding Chinese Community, as the Chinese people were to them. At a time, when it was not common practice to employ Asian people, the Sydney Municipal Council employed Chinese males to work in the markets.\textsuperscript{65} Their presence was often a topic for the newspaper media, which frequently referred to them as "John Chinaman" [sic].\textsuperscript{66} Within the markets, there were generally double the number of Chinese people to those of European origins and it was reported that they purchased double the quantity of good quality produce, when compared to anyone else.

Chinese market gardeners were credited with growing and selling the best quality fruit and vegetables in the markets. They introduced a broad variety of fruit and vegetables to the population of Sydney. Most of this produce was considered to be exotic and generally only available in the European Markets. Fruits sold included lemons, bananas, apples and grapes, while among the vegetables, there were all forms of leaf, root, legumes and melon crops.\textsuperscript{67} At a time when growers of vegetables were few and the price of vegetables unreasonably high, the Chinese growers and sellers were indispensable.

It was normal to see a Chinese seller among haggling bargain shoppers. Unflustered and undaunted by arguments in pigeon English, he refused to lower the asking price for goods and directed the unsatisfied customer to look elsewhere. At the same time, he would quickly strike a bargain with a more discerning buyer.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{65} Mark Stevens, Manager of the Sydney City Council Archives at an official Council function at the Sydney Town Hall, 27 Feb. 1996.

\textsuperscript{66} SMH 3 Nov. 1906: 8, SMH 10 Aug. 1908: 10.

\textsuperscript{67} Vegetables included cabbages, cauliflowers, pumpkins, marrows, carrots, turnips, parsnips, celery, asparagus, horseradish, peas, beans, artichokes, brussel sprouts, cucumbers and tomatoes. SMH 3 Nov. 1906: 8.
Elsewhere, wending his way between the stalls and crowd, a black coated Chinese clergyman bought some carrots here, a turnip there, and stopped intermittently to deliver a brief religious talk, whenever he encountered a willing ear.

Strangely garbed "Asiatics" and other nationalities drawn from ships berthed in the nearby harbour, added to the vibrant atmosphere as they strolled to and fro within the building. They continued to visit the markets over many years and were resplendent in vivid coloured caps and turbans, red and purple scarves and clothes of many tints, blacks and browns, enhancing the picturesque throng.

"All shapes and conditions of men (and women)" were attracted to the markets. Some buyers who were unable to pay the exorbitant prices charged in other parts of the city, were drawn by the drastically reduced prices of produce left unsold from the day's earlier wholesale trading. Little Sisters of the Poor gathering in volume for their convent community; housewives and mothers with families in tow, carrying purchases in baskets, prams or boxes on wheels; even "ladies of the night" mingled with the crowd, dividing their attention between business and their children's demands.

Apart from the produce sold in the New Belmore Markets, shooting galleries, entrepreneurs of daring and unusual attractions and dealers in second hand goods, jaded military clothing and fancy apparel, gave people a welcome distraction. Meanwhile, the ever-present food vendors, confectionary and soft drink sellers sought to tempt any passer-by. Just as sideshows previously performed on the vacant site, music and theatrical performances, side shows, early film exhibitions, circuses and novelty acts were conducted in the building in the intervening years. Entertainments such as a film

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*SMH* 10 Aug. 1908: 10.
show presented in 1907, by "Gibson"; "Mr Jamieson's Tog of War" [sic] in 191269 and Wirths Circus for the 1912 and 1913 Easter seasons.70

In January 1912, the Municipal Council approved a six-weeks lease at fifty pounds per week, for Wirths' Easter Season. Within two months, Council extended this lease to ten weeks for a total rental of 400 pounds. Again in 1913, Wirths occupied the building for a brief period of three or four weeks at a rental that remained at forty pounds per week.71

Following the elections for the Municipal Council in 1909, the newly elected Council demolished the Old Belmore Markets and was preparing to move the wholesale business from the New Belmore Markets (then officially known as the Sir William Manning Markets).72 The poor condition of the Old Belmore Markets had been criticised by John Laing in 1875, the Town Clerk in 190573 and by the newspapers and fruit trade rivals from 1907 (especially when the area was one of those affected by the plague).74 Ironically, criticism published in 1908, prompted Council's Comptroller of Assets and the President of the association representing the markets' tenants to spring to

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71 SCC Archives: PC 1912, 21, 68; SCC Archives: PC 1913, 9; "Amusements." SMH 11 Mar. 1912: 2; "Amusements." SMH 16 Mar. 1912: 2; "Amusements." SMH 15 Mar. 1913: 2; Thorne, 6. This last reference states "Council granted the firm the use of the markets for a period of ten weeks at 400 pounds per week." This is possibly an editing error.


its defence. Nevertheless, the subsequent development on the old market site contained one theatre and almost included a second. This gave the first indication of Council's future policy for the two market properties.

In May 1911, Lord Mayor Alderman Allan Taylor urged Council's Finance Committee to act quickly and invite tenders for the tenancy of the New Belmore Markets. He proposed, the leases should begin soon after the building was vacated, in the following October. The Committee procrastinated long after the building was empty, thereby losing valuable rental revenue for Council. Several motions were considered and these included the sale of the property to the Commonwealth Government for use as a Post Office, as well as converting the building to a Municipal Theatre that was comparable with theatres around the world. George Willoughby representing the lessees of the Adelphi theatre, which was built on Lot 2 of the Old Belmore Market property. He criticised Council's lack of support for his theatre, reminding it that these premises were to revert to Council at the end of its extensive lease), wrote to Council opposing the latter proposal and.

At the Council meeting on the 18th June 1912, Council refused to approve the

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77 SCC Archives: PC 1911, 419.

78 SCC Archives: PC 1911, 511; SCC Archives: PC 1912, 5.

79 SCC Archives: PC 1911, 120; SCC Archives: PC 1912, 168.

motion for a Municipal Theatre and, instead, approved a lease for the western section of the property be granted to Wirth Brothers for circus purposes. Initially, the Municipal Council approved an annual rental of 2,000 pounds and 5 per cent on any additional expenditure for the remodelling of the building but it was later revised. A second tender for the property was withdrawn before the tendering closing date and the remaining section was divided into smaller properties for lease to small traders.

Five weeks later, the Secretary of Brennan Fullers' Vaudeville Circuit (proprietors of Brennans Amphitheatres Ltd.) contacted the Town Clerk to ask for details of the contemplated alterations for a theatre and shops on the New Belmore Market site. Alerted by newspaper reports, he was expressing a similar interest to that proposed by Brennan Amphitheatres, which had submitted alternative plans for both sites on the former Old Belmore Market property. Strangely, the Town Clerk did not tell the company that Council had already decided to lease the property to Wirths. Instead, he stated the conditions of tender were being prepared and tenders would be invited in due course. Only Wirths tendered for the site and offered a higher rental and terms than that first considered by Council.

81 SCC Archives: PC 1912, 175.
82 A. S. Boulton submitted the second tender, which was withdrawn. SCC Archives: PC 1912, 175.
84 CRS 163: Plans 267/12 001-004, Lot 1 and Lot 2. Proposed Theatre Haymarket for Brennans Amphitheatres Ltd.
The Municipal Council of the City of Sydney made considerable investment in the property, especially when it was built during a severe depression. At that time, the population would have willingly accepted Council was not able to continue with its building plans. In addition, neither the Hippodrome nor the Capitol theatre would have evolved, had the anticipated extensions to the market building taken place.
CRS 51/3298: Demolition Photograph. Detail: Excavation of ground after removal of cement floor; added depth for water pit, hydraulics and circus ring.
CRS 51/3342: Demolition Photograph. Detail: Formwork for Family Gallery in Hippodrome; In background, the stained glass semi-circular pediment window.
Chapter 3

Hippodrome: the "Juvenile" Aladdin's Palace

Transformation - from the flapping canvases of the traditional circus to a towering and imposing structure; from market building to an amphitheatre of divertissement and, during a time of war and hardship, transformation from trauma and stress to escapism and glittering entertainment. Transformation too, in the sense of a theatrical device for change and illusion, which is fundamental to modern pantomime.

On opening night, one journalist likened the interior of the Hippodrome to a vast new "Aladdin's Palace". Reinforcing this image, the interior decor was painted in the official colours of Wirth's Bros. - traditional circus colours of pale blue, brown and gold, with white. Overhead, the shiny stamped steel and zinc ceiling of the building's auditorium reflected subtle lighting from half-concealed lamps, onto the heads of the spectators beneath. Looking down to the circus ring, they watched the diminutive performer on the prancing white steed, the blue and gold of the auditorium's decor echoed in her soft blue and gold costume and colours in her horse's bridle. A band of 'brilliants' swathed its neck.

Elegantly dressed Edwardian patrons came to the Hippodrome with spouses, their children and even with grandchildren. Some patrons would have been children of

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3. During a visit to the Faberge Exhibition (Powerhouse Museum from July to September 1996) I realised 'brilliants' are extremely sparkling diamonds. A 'brilliant' is the finest cut diamond with as many as 58 facets above and below the girdle. Funk and Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Inc., 1974) 77.
the Paddy's Market era and their offspring were forming their own special memories of
the live theatre experience. Wonderful memories were gleaned through watching the
performing elephants in the ring below, of other trained circus animals and the
bespangled performers both in the ring and on the stage.5

Many "juveniles" (young performers) at the Hippodrome were like the skilful
equestrienne May Wirth, whose family had earlier performed on the Paddy's Market
site. Other "juveniles" were like Mervyn King. He was an acrobat in the Hippodrome
at the age of twelve and a member of the St. Leon Troup when it was part of the cast of
the "Forty Thieves Pantomime" from December 1923. Now in his eighties and the
oldest circus performer in Australia, he clearly remembers the theatre and the show.6
This pantomime was produced by Harry Musgrove, by arrangement with J. C.
Williamson.7

Many adults remember that as young people they were taken by grandmothers,
aunts and cousins.8 One young lad regularly accompanied his uncle to the Hippodrome,
helping to carry his uncle's trombone and music. Once inside, he sat to one side of the
orchestra pit, from which he watched the performing elephants.9 The orchestra pit

5 Recollections of family and photographer Ron Israel. His memories were revived when he
recorded the recent restoration for Ipoh Gardens. Sydney Council Archives Exhibition "The


7 The "Forty Thieves Pantomime" opened Boxing Day 1923. The St. Leon Troup was linked
with the Wirth's family since their patriarch, John Jones, and Johannes Wirth first worked

8 Harry Musgrove had been the General Manager of Union Theatres Limited and Australasian
Films, before he resigned in 1920. John Tulloch, Legends on the Screen: The Australian
Narrative Cinema: 1919-1929 (Sydney: Currency Press; The Australian Film Institute, 1981)
106-7.

9 The oral history of the Smith and Lester families and Ron Israel, the photographer for the
restoration work.
nestled between the curve of the ring, the front of the stage and the two ramps.

The Municipal Council of Sydney altered part of the New Belmore Markets to construct the Hippodrome. This was according to the needs of the property’s first long term lessees and the result was an exact double of the London Hippodrome. Like its London model, the Hippodrome’s forty foot (12.19 metre) diameter circus ring was its prominent and central feature and beneath it was a deep pit measuring thirteen feet (3.96 metre). The pit was revealed when the ring’s floor was lowered to a maximum depth of twelve feet (3.65 metres) and it could be filled with water for aquatic spectacles and water-pantomimes. This feature was operated by hydraulic power.

Around the ring’s larger arc, three levels of raked seating recreated the fabric of the traditional amphitheatre and hippodrome. The proscenium stage, attached to the arena, imitated the modern hippodromes of eighteenth century England and was like some ancient Greek and Roman amphitheatres. Measuring 72 feet (21.94 metres) wide and 54 feet (16.45 metres) deep, the proscenium stage had a substantial fly tower and compared favourably with that of the modern Capitol theatre. The depth of the

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10 DT 4 Apr. 1916: 6; Lone Hand 1 May 1916: 353.


13 The unchanged height from the stage to the flies that was retained in the Capitol conversion, was 87 feet. However, the actual measurement of the flytower was not found in the available documents. CRS 170/22: Vade Mecum 1929: 175-6.

Hippodrome stage was approximately twice that in the early Capitol,\(^\text{15}\) which theatre architect, Henry E. White reduced in 1927, to increase the auditorium's seating capacity. Had the original Hippodrome stage been retained, many subsequent problems, caused by the limited stage depth and insufficient access to the stage during performances, would have never occurred.

The Hippodrome's adaptability for wet and dry entertainments revived the spirit and traditions of the ancient Greek and Roman amphitheatres, such as the Colosseum in Rome, itself a centre for popular culture. Like the Colosseum, the Hippodrome was the permanent venue for circus and hippodrome, in which equestrian acts and exhibitions of human dexterity, tumbling and acrobatics predominated.\(^\text{16}\) Cement was used in both structures for its strength, lightness and fire resistance, which was an added benefit to the theatrical venue.\(^\text{17}\)

Like the London and New York Hippodromes, this theatre imitated the amphitheatres of Philip Astley. Late in the sixteenth century, he partly enclosed the open performance space of his riding school at Halfpenny Hatch, on the South Bank of London. Then in his Royal Grove, built beside Westminster Bridge, he established the fabric of the permanent hippodrome building. He covered it with a dome-shaped roof and painted it to imitate tree branches, leaves and sky, similar to the ceilings of

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\(^{15}\) The alterations of the Hippodrome in 1927, included reducing the stage depth to 23 feet 8 inches (approximately 7.22 metres) and enlarging the Proscenium arch. CRS 170/22: *Vade Mecum* 1928: 179-83.


atmospheric theatres. Astley added a stage and built two tiers of seating around the ring, a pit and a gallery.\textsuperscript{18} From these buildings, he determined the smallest practical sized arena for good "horsemanship", was 42 feet (12.8 metres), slightly larger than the one in Sydney's Hippodrome.\textsuperscript{19}

After the Royal Grove was burnt down, Astley built the Amphitheatre of the Arts. Like its predecessor, it also burnt down and was in turn replaced by Astley's Royal Amphitheatre. Johannes Wirth and his brothers may have visited this latter building,\textsuperscript{20} when they stayed briefly in England, during their journey to Australia. When the international circus tour of the next generation of Wirth brothers took place many years later,\textsuperscript{21} this theatre had been replaced once more.\textsuperscript{22}

For their Sydney venue, George and Philip Wirth chose Astley's amphitheatre plan, which had been used for the Hippodrome in Leicester Square. Opened in 1900, the (London) Hippodrome also housed a large water tank under its performance ring but, by 1916,\textsuperscript{23} the ring and tank were covered with seating and the interior had been altered to create a music-hall.\textsuperscript{24}


\textsuperscript{20} Hartnoll, 39-40.


\textsuperscript{22} Astley's Royal Amphitheatre was replaced by the larger Sanger's Grand National Amphitheatre (which was declared unsafe in 1893, about the same time as the Wirths Brothers Circus was in England). Hartnoll, 40.

\textsuperscript{23} The year Wirth's amphitheatre opened in Sydney.

\textsuperscript{24} Hartnoll, 391.
George and Philip Wirths's earlier seasons in the vacant Belmore Markets in 1912 and 1913 influenced both their own interest in the building and Council's willingness to lease the property to them. Council was also prepared to alter the entire Sir Walter Manning Markets building according to the needs of its many new tenants and this included a hippodrome for Wirths Brothers. This decision was reached at the same June meeting that Council rejected the use of the building for a Municipal Theatre.

Paradoxically, despite Council's recent decision to lease the property to Wirths, the Town Clerk had failed to notify the Secretary of Brennan Fullers' Vaudeville Circuit of this possibility, when the latter approached Council for information on proposed alterations to the site. His company's interest was triggered by newspaper reports of Council's intentions regarding the property. By this time, this company was the proprietor of Brennan's Amphitheatres Ltd, which had opened the National Amphitheatre in Castlereagh Street and had previously submitted alternate plans for the Old Belmore Market site (this refers to previous mention in Chapter 2).

The Municipal Council divided the New Belmore Markets block into two. The

25 SCC Archives: PC 1912, 21, 68.
26 SCC Archives: 1913, 9.
28 SCC Archives: PC 1913, 310.
29 SCC Archives: PC 1912, 175.
30 Instead Jno. Houston was advised the preparations for tendering were not complete and tenders would be invited in due course. CRS 28: TC 3320/12: Sir William Manning Markets: particulars of proposed alterations. Letter Jno Houston to Town Clerk, 25 Jul. 1912, Letter Town Clerk to Secretary Brennan-Fullers' Vaudeville Circuit, c. 31 Jul. 1912.
eastern portion was subdivided into several properties, while the large western property was the site for the Hippodrome. It proposed to call for the submission of tenders for leases of twenty-one years, even though some Councillors were prepared to consider an even longer lease. Nevertheless, Council accepted Wirths Brothers' tender of an annual rental of 2,250 pounds for the nominated twenty-one-year lease and a further payment estimated at 6 per cent on any additional expenditure for work, which was required to equip the building for use as a theatre. Council accepted Wirth's tender, in September 1912.\textsuperscript{32}

Following the acceptance of their tender, Wirths made preparations to form its family business into a company for the purpose of this venture and it successfully sought Council's approval to register the theatre's lease in the new company name.\textsuperscript{33} Because Sydney Municipal Council had earlier decided to alter premises according to the needs of the building's tenants, Wirths engaged the architect E. L. Thompson, to prepare preliminary plans for the Hippodrome and to act on their behalf.\textsuperscript{34} Then, Council's architects prepared plans from this original submission and submitted them to the Chief Secretary's Office for approval according to the regulations of the \textit{Theatre and Public Halls Act of 1908}.\textsuperscript{35}

In March 1913, Under Secretary of the Chief Secretary's Office, J. A. Coghlan,

\textsuperscript{32} The first motion was to lease the property to Wirths for 2,000 pounds and 5 per cent in any additional expenditure. SCC Archives: PC 1912. 175, 316.


approved the plans subject to certain conditions. The Municipal Council, as builder, was to comply with four amendments to the proposal. These regulated the height and nature of the pit floor; limited the gradient of the ramps to the circus ring, to a maximum ratio of one in ten (Regulation 13); detailed the installation of an automatic ventilator over the stage (Regulation 16) and required the installation of a rigid steel, fire-resistant safety curtain for the prosenium arch, which was 45 feet (14 metres) wide by 30 feet (9.67 metres) high (Regulation 39). The Under Secretary suggested to Council, that compliance with these four amendments would likely result in the Minister giving approval for an "a" Grade license being issued for the amphitheatre.

By the following November, the list of requirements had lengthened to include stage galleries, an additional staircase and the grid over the stage, of which the latter was to have a load bearing capacity of 75 pounds per square foot (approximately 36 Kg per 30 square cm). These regulations required sufficient ventilation in the auditorium; "This Way Out" signs; candle lamps lit with vegetable oil, and the staircase access to the gallery to be increased to a total width of fifteen feet (4.5 metres). Seats and form seating were to be numbered and fixed according to an approved layout. Exit doors with panic bolts were required throughout the building.

At first, the most troublesome amendment to the original plans, was the requirement related to Regulation 8 of the Act, which required the highest point of the Pit Floor to remain within a maximum height of twelve inches (30.48 mm) above the

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37 At this time, the Chief Secretary's Office and the Minister for Public Works were linked. CRS 28: TC 4205/16: Under Secretary to the Town Clerk, 17 Nov. 1913.
footpath. It also limited the lowest point to no more than ten feet (3.04 metres) below ground level. In the original plans, the circus ring was at the existing ground level, with the rake of the seating rising from the cement floor. Both the Council representatives and Wirth's architect tried unsuccessfully to dissuade the Under Secretary from his ruling on this matter. At first, a water pit was not included in the initial set of plans but Wirths requested it after the Under Secretary ordered the removal of the cement floor.

Council prepared an application to the Governor for authority to borrow 35,000 pounds for the construction of the Capitol and it called Tenders for the construction of the building. Council received seven tenders and Council accepted the one from Maston and Yates for 32,500 pounds, which was based on the original plans and was lower than Council's original estimate of 34,500 pounds. Nevertheless, the total amount expended under the contract (exclusive of the City Treasurer's expenses) was 51,799 pounds 2s 4d. Part of the unexpected increase was due to the unforeseen

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40 SCC Archives: PC 1914, p. 53.


43 CRS 28: TC 4174/13: Hippodrome. Letter R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 24 Jul. 1917; Minute Paper 27 Jul. 1917; Minute Paper 26 Nov. 1913; Minute Paper 16 Dec 1913; See also Appendix on Hippodrome expenditure.
wartime inflation, some to the additional requirements of both the Chief Secretary's Department and Wirths, with the rest to the increased wages established by the newly introduced Federal Builders Award.

In February 1916, Council as Lessor, agreed to expend an additional 9,000 pounds on internal structural alterations and remodellings, in accordance with the Lease Agreement and as requested by the Lessee. These items included those already mentioned, as well as a ring curtain and appurtenances, stage dimmers, arc lamps and cluster lights, borders with tail blocks and lines, a cinematograph box, a paint frame and seats. (These items were later removed and disregarded by later lessees, see Chapters 5, 7 and 9.) For an estimated 2,500 pounds of this expenditure, Wirths agreed to pay a sum equal to 8 per cent per annum. It was necessary to add extra steelwork to the roof and stage to support the bridges for the spotlights and "stiffeners for possible suspended performers". For reasons of safety, the Chief Secretary's Department required the fly galleries to be widened and connected by a paint frame. These elements were to be made of reinforced concrete instead of the proposed timber.

Neither the circus company, nor Council had any expert stage staff in their

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45 CRS 34: TC 4205/16: Hippodrome, Claim by Maston and Yates for additional expenses. Letter, R. H. Broderick to the Town Clerk, 24 Nov. 1916.


47 Some of this steel structure has been retained in the theatre and is still place. CRS 34: TC 4992/12: Sir William Manning Markets. Letter, R. H. Broderick to the Town Clerk, 29 Sep. 1916; Trevor Waters, ATHS Tour of the Theatre, 11 Nov. 1995.


employ at that time. Consequently, Wirths asked Council through its architect, R. H. Broderick, to approach the theatre company, J. C. Williamsons, and request the services and advice of Rock Philips and James Turner. George Wirth stated these men were "high experts" in their technical field of fitting up the stage, the grid iron and rigging systems, fly galleries and other theatrical requirements. However, Williamsons replied that, regretfully, it could not comply with the request due to pressure of work. Eventually, John Povah was convinced to come out of "a well-deserved retirement" to design and supervise the installation of the stage lighting and electrical boards.

Within the year of Wirths and Sydney Municipal Council reaching the agreement on the Capitol lease, the outbreak of the first World War created difficulties for Wirth Brothers. It affected both the "fabric" of the theatre building and "spirit" of the live theatre. Wartime shortages caused a scarcity of building materials and relative prices escalated. The contractors complained that merchants had not kept the original stocks of iron and they were forced to pay the higher prices. They also criticised the plumber, to whom the work was contracted, as he began to "humbug the work" once the cost of iron rose and supplies were short; they claimed he held supplies of iron meant


for the building but was denying its existence. Compounding this, he was not keeping adequate records,\textsuperscript{55} which became a nuisance.

Films emerged as a popular entertainment form during the war years and soon after the Hippodrome opened, Wirths notified the Town Clerk that their company intended to play pictures for ten months of the year.\textsuperscript{56} At the time, city newspapers were advertising official war documentaries that were frequently shown in the Town Hall and similar venues.\textsuperscript{57} These films informed people of events in Europe and Africa. Meanwhile, there were mergers at various levels of the emerging Australian film industry and the American film studio production and distributors were gaining a commercial and cultural dominance in the Australian film industry and exhibition.\textsuperscript{58}

A year later, Council received an application from Walter Brown asking for permission to erect an electric sign in place of the Wirths' sign.\textsuperscript{59} Although permission was given, no further reference was found to show that it was erected. The war generated a number of programming difficulties for Wirths. It caused a growing shortage of good circus acts that was concomitant with the development of the film industry. Superior European circus performers were generally of German origins and political alliances prohibited them from entering Australia and those already in


\textsuperscript{57} "Amusements" SMH many issues during the war years, c. page 2.


Australia encountered antagonism. Consequently, cheaper and available animal acts became predominant in all Australian circus companies.  

Returning servicemen created further difficulties when they brought influenza back to Australia. Throughout the city, entertainments and public meetings were prohibited as a precaution to combat this serious epidemic. Even Wirths had to delay the Easter season of 1919, for five weeks.

Unlike the Hippodrome, tenders for the adjacent Manning Building leases were accepted well before the beginning of the war and they did not come under the same government regulations as Wirths Brothers. Requirements for their properties were less stringent and work began on the eastern part of the building in 1913. As a result, the amphitheatre's eastern wall was constructed before the rest of the building and at a lower cost. Meanwhile, the City Solicitor's report shows that Council was concerned about the Hippodrome lease. He advised Council that Wirths could be held to their agreement with Council, even though the lease was still not signed. Both parties signed the Agreement for Lease four months later and it came into effect when the company took possession of the theatre in 1916.

After George McRae left the Council, it appointed R. H. Broderick to the


61 St. Leon, Spangles, 155.

62 Two of the other leases were for Cropley Ltd [possibly a fruit and vegetable trader] and G. R. Martin, a mercer, hosier, clothier, tailor, hairdresser, tobacconist, watchmaker and fancy goods. SCC Archives: PC 1913, 414-5.

63 SCC Archives: PC 1914, 134.

position of City Architect and Building Surveyor. Assisted by George Merriman, he designed and supervised the Hippodrome project for the Municipal Council. The construction of the exterior of the Hippodrome building posed very few problems for either the Chief Secretary's Office, or the lessees. However, the exception was a problem with the recycled stonework from the former Pitt Street wall. It was reused in the Parker Street alterations but, when it was set in place, this stonework was found to have the wrong measurements because the structure's floor plan was not quite rectangular. Therefore, it was unsuitable and cost Council a further 950 pounds to remove the stonework and replace it with new masonry.

Specifications for the rebuilding of both the Manning Building and Hippodrome included instructions for the careful dismantling of the original New Belmore Market building, down to the lower stone foundations of the building's pilasters (approximately one metre above ground level) and directions for the preservation of its pressed bricks and terracotta elements. Similarly, the documents

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66 CRS 170/22: *Vade Mecum* 1905, 122-8; *Vade Mecum* 1917, 176-82.


69 CRS 51/3273 and CRS 51/3275 Demolition Photographs of Sir William Manning Markets for the Hippodrome.

70 CRS 51/3273 and CRS 51/3275 Demolition Photographs of Sir William Manning Markets for the Hippodrome.
detailed the subsequent reconstruction of these elements in the new building.\footnote{71} Except for the stage house walls, the builders used the original foundations in the building's reconstruction and they reassembled the exterior walls of the former building (where possible) above the awning line around the entire block.\footnote{72} These elements still form part of the building and this was the same method that was used for the extension and reconstruction of the Capitol stage house in the 1990s.

The structural design was altered slightly to reposition the ornamental northern and southern tympana over front and rear walls of the Hippodrome. A Council photograph shows that the decorative pediment cornices built above the parapet on either side of the northern tympanum, were faced with diaper tiles and displayed the year "1915".\footnote{73} These diaper tiles and date on the cornices, were removed during the alterations to the building undertaken in 1927. Other aspects of the building and its construction were to prove troublesome; they need another chapter to elucidate further and details are covered in Chapter 4.

While Council expected the Hippodrome to be completed in February 1916,\footnote{74} the requirements of the Chief Secretary's Department meant the building was not completed until well after its opening night. Ongoing requirements of both the Chief Secretary's Department and lessees caused the building's initial cost estimates to be
exceeded.\textsuperscript{75}

When the building was finally completed, it complied with all existing safety regulations and received ministerial approval. Its Grinnell Sprinkler System contained 281 sprinklers, which were dispersed over and under the stage and under the roof. The unprecedented, modern safety curtain and appurtenances fulfilled the relatively new government requirements.\textsuperscript{76} The Hippodrome officially seated 2440 people\textsuperscript{77} and should not be confused with the seating capacity in the later Capitol, which was in excess of 2900.

An official opening ceremony took place at the Hippodrome on the 29th March 1916. To mark its opening, Maston and Yates handed the keys to Lord Mayor, Alderman Meagher, together with a presentation gold-mounted letter knife. In turn, the Lord Mayor presented the keys to George and Philip Wirth, who remarked that the family had played on the site thirty-six years before and it was then that they founded their business in its present form.\textsuperscript{78}

Wirths were forced to postpone the planned opening night program to allow the

\textsuperscript{75} CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir Wm Manning Markets. Letter R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 4 Aug. 1916; Letter R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 29 Sep. 1916.


\textsuperscript{77} Newspaper reports on the opening night gave seating numbers at about 2000. Seats were counted \textit{in situ} by Police Officers responsible for inspecting the theatre and investigating any complaints or enquiries. On 9th July, Constable Davies counted 1307 Stalls seats, 412 in the Dress Circle, 458 in the Gallery, 36 in the Boxes and 227 on the stage, making the first official total, 2,440. In the subsequent report, dated 17th March 1924, police counted 2400 seats, of which 1050 in the Stalls, 510 were in the Dress Circle, 460 in the Gallery and 380 over the Ring Pit, and this information was recorded on all the theatre's licenses. \textit{SMH} 30 Mar. 1916: 10. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Police Reports, 9 Jul. 1921 and 17 Mar. 1924.

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{SMH} 30 Mar. 1916: 10; \textit{DT} 30 Mar. 1916: 3.
circus artists to arrive. Wild storms off the Great Australian Bight, hindered the arrival of the *R. M. S. Mooltan*. When it docked in Adelaide, the English and Japanese artists (travelling from Europe) left the ship and travelled across the country to reach Sydney in time for the new Opening Night. At the same time, the *Westralia* carrying the Wirth family acts, was caught on the Tasman Sea and the family had no other option but to wait out the storms. When Opening Night eventually took place on Monday, 3rd April 1916, Wirths presented its entire company to an appreciative audience and recorded the evening by photographing the assembled company after the performance ended.79

Patrons entering the Hippodrome were immediately impressed by its vestibule with its magnificent, white Sicilian marble staircases and then its auditorium. No matter where they sat, all patrons had comfortable seats and a clear view of the stage and circus ring. Over their heads, they were amazed to see a vast "coup de l'oeil" of the illuminated ceiling with "such sliding panels in the roof, which up until (then had) not been dreamed of" [sic].80 Similarly, the audience was captivated by the performances of the evening, especially those of May Martin Wirth, Captain Frank Huling's seals and the Riogoku family from Japan.81

The season was a financial success, unlike other entertainments that were presented throughout the following year. The war drama and spectacle, *Kultur*, which followed the circus into the Hippodrome, made use of the theatre's water pit to portray the siege and capture of Brussels, a factual wartime event. Wirths had engaged the

81 *Lone Hand* 1 May 1916: 353; *SMH* 4 Apr. 1916: 10; *DT* 4 Apr. 1916: 6.
drama's author, Leonard Durrell, to recreate and produce his London success at the Hippodrome.  

Subsequent programs in 1916 and early 1917, included two seasons of films presented by "Wirth's Hippodrome Pictures", Kemp's Buck Jumping Show and the circus's Easter Season, featuring King Neptune and the "Lovely Diving Mermaids". However, despite the circus family's efforts to make the theatre financially viable, it was idle for almost half of its first fifteen months of operation and this situation did not improve with time. Nevertheless, in eighteen months, Council raised the rental three times. It rose from 232 pounds 10s per month, to 336 pounds 1s 2d per month. Wirths successfully appealed against the extent of this rise but Council imposed the condition that the company first pay all the outstanding arrears and even this was a struggle for the lessees.

Endeavouring to reverse the theatre's fortunes, Wirths reached agreements with other enterprises for the use of the Hippodrome, one of which was William Anderson, the melodrama specialist. In October 1917, Wirths joined Anderson in a venture to

82 "In the Limelight." Lone Hand 1 Jun. 1916: 14.
85 Wirths protested at the increased rental, resulting the Chief Secretary's added cost increases of the construction and equipping of the theatre.
87 When in 1911, Council called for tenders for the leases of the Queen Victoria building, only one was received. William Anderson Theatrical Enterprises applied to lease the southern section of the building, from the ground floor to the roof (excluding the basement), for twenty-five years. He requested Council advance him 15,000 pounds to alter and remodel the property to a first class theatre, housing a maximum of 2,300 patrons. In turn, the company would pay a rental of 140 pounds per week and 4½ per cent on the money expended by Council. SCC Archives: PC 1911, 274-5.
produce several dramatic entertainments. They submitted plans for temporary alterations to the City Building Surveyor, the Chief Secretary and (in compliance with wartime regulations) the Federal Treasurer. Notable among the weekly plays produced during this venture, was the revival of the Australian play, "Robbery Under Arms", by Alfred Dampier and Garnet Walch. It opened on 6th October 1917 and was followed by the English play, "When London Sleeps" by Charles Darrell. Four more plays were produced over the subsequent six weeks.

Serious financial hardship resulting from the Hippodrome's lease, led Wirths and Harry Keesing of the Strand theatre to seek permission for boxing contests in the theatre in 1918. Keesing's plan was to hold mixed programs of vaudeville or film shows, with boxing contests and, under wartime regulations, this form of entertainment required the approval of the Chief Secretary, Council and the military authorities, who duly granted it. Captain Longfield Lloyd of the Victoria Barracks directed that at least half the program was to be either vaudeville or film, and the accompanying minor boxing matches were to be ten rounds of two minute duration. Also, the admission

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89 This play was adapted from Rolph Boldrewood's novel of the same name and was first performed in the Alextre Theatre in Melbourne, before touring and travelling to Sydney in the early 1890s. Richard Fotheringham (ed.), "Introduction", Alfred Dampier and Garnet Walch, Robbery Under Arms (Sydney: Currency Press, 1985) xxiv-xxv, xxxi-xxxvi; CRS 34: TC 3582/17: Hippodrome, For Approval to Temporary Alterations. Minute Paper Comptroller of Assets and Stores, 25 Sep. 1917.

90 The direction was by Wirth Brothers and Eddie Bond. Australian Scenic Studies were by J.J.Ricketts and Rege Robins. The plays was produced by special arrangements with Alfred Rolfe, Esq. (formerly of the Adelphi.) Mitchell Library: Theatres Programs: Hippodrome. William Anderson's Famous Dramatic Organisation. Robbery Under Arms.

91 Harry Keesing had been the General Manager and Manager of Stadiums Ltd. and in 1921, the Strand theatre was listed as one of the theatres in the Union Theatre circuit, which was later to be assigned the lease of the Hippodrome. CRS 34: TC 971/18: Hippodrome, Application from H. Keesing to Conduct Boxing Contests. Letter, Philip Wirth to the Town Clerk, 15 Mar. 1918; O'Brien, 38.
price was not to exceed two shillings and he asked management to send him copies or drafts of the proposed programs.92

Research for a Feasibility Study undertaken in 1986, uncovered information that Wirths had applied to Council to end its lease in 1919. Apparently Wirths had come to the conclusion that a circus was better located under a tent than in a building. Their request was rejected.93

In October 1919, when Wirths Brothers and Stadiums approached the Municipal Council and Chief Secretary's Department, World War I had ended and they no longer required the permission of the military authorities or Federal Treasurer. Wirths and Stadiums sought permission for Stadiums to manage the Hippodrome during the periods not used by Wirths. The subsequent boxing programs were so popular that the crush of waiting patrons could force the doors open and allow them to enter without paying, echoing the difficulties of the circus tent in 1875. Consequently, George Wirth applied for permission to install a narrow turnstile entrance in the eastern wall.94 This confined the queue to the private laneway and left the sidewalk free for other pedestrians.

Pantomimes were generally very popular and theatre companies traditionally produced them to earn sufficient revenue to cover the costs of the programs for the


93 This Feasibility Study Reference did not include reference details and this research did not find anything about this request, except that the company was experiencing difficulty at this time. Lawrence Nield and Partners Pty Ltd and Travis Partners Pty Ltd (prep.), "Capitol Theatre Feasibility Study: Prepared for the Council of the City of Sydney" (Balmain: Sep. 1986) 42.

following year. During the early years of the 1920s, Fullers Circuit produced vaudeville programs and a number of pantomimes in the Hippodrome, one of which was the revival of the popular Australian pantomime, *The Bunyip*. *The Babes in the Wood* was produced by P. W. Stevenson and Harry Musgrove presented *The Forty Thieves*.\(^9^5\) The latter pantomime proved to be an exception to the rule, as it was financially disastrous and led to Harry Musgrove's bankruptcy.\(^9^6\) During this season, complaints were made of overcrowding, of people blocking the aisles and tickets being sold, when there were no vacant seats.\(^9^7\)

Despite all attempts, Wirths could not overcome the mounting costs of the theatre, which were mainly caused by external influences. Finally, George Wirth wrote to the Town Clerk requesting Council's approval for the circus company to convert the Hippodrome to a picture theatre and the company engaged Henry E. White, a prominent theatre architect, to act for them.\(^9^8\) Broderick advised him to ascertain the Chief Secretary's current requirements under *Theatres and Public Halls Act*, before commencing any work on the plans or the building.\(^9^9\) White's first plans submitted to

\(^9^5\) Elsie (Lizette) Parks was the Spirit of Mischief (the Principal Boy); South African Comedian, Bert Harrow was the Dame; Jack Cannot was Ali Baba and the second comic; Joe (Dutchy) Morris was Quicksilver, Ali's donkey; Dan Niblo and Millie Doris, an American Black Face couple played, Hassarac (Lieutenant of the Forty) and Lizzie Ann (Maid to Morgiana) respectively; Ali's servants, Silence and Shadow, were played by the Hanlon Brothers from England and completing the cast list, four rows of Ballet girls. Theatre Programs A: Hippodrome (Sydney). Mitchell Library Special Collections.

\(^9^6\) Parsons, 380.


\(^9^8\) CRS 34: TC 1105/27: Hippodrome, Approval to alterations and additions to the building. Letter, George Wirth to the Town Clerk, 8 Feb. 1927.

Council on Wirths' behalf, was for a conventional "hard top" theatre.

Within a short time, an agreement was signed by Wirths, the Municipal Council of Sydney and Capitol Theatre (Sydney), a division of Union Theatres. It assigned the remaining term of the lease to the film exhibitor and, at the same time, the lease was reassigned to Wirths as the Mortgagee. This situation remained until 1931.

Wirths and Sydney Municipal Council had high expectations, when they created the Hippodrome. Unfortunately, it became a burden for the lessees and the lessor ceased to be closely involved with the building after it was completed. Sydney Municipal Council's policy was that the property was a valuable asset returning an income and with little expenditure, as this was passed to the lessees. Under the direction of the Chief Secretary's Department, a magnificent, multipurpose amphitheatre had been created. One that complied with all the current safety regulations and was capable of presenting hippodrome, circus, theatre, opera, vaudeville, concerts and "photo-plays". As the Hippodrome, the "fabric" of the theatre was more versatile than the building would ever be again and in terms of popular culture, its "spirit" similarly encompassed more diverse entertainments than would be presented in its successor, the Capitol.

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102 CRS 170/22: Vade Mecum 1917, 176-82.
CRS 299/1070: Hippodrome Drawings - no. 6. Cross Section showing Proscenium Arch, Lantern, sliding roof panels and stage house.
CRS 299/1077: Hippodrome Drawings. Detail of original Stalls and Stage Floorplan. Elements not mentioned elsewhere, such as Stage trapdoors and Artistes and Artists Entrances, are shown.
Chapter 4

Hippodrome - An Unfulfilled Promise

A promise for a prosperous future - a promise broken. It is unlikely that members of the Wirths circus company, the representatives of the Sydney Municipal Council, or the staff of the Chief Secretary's Office, foresaw the difficulties for the Hippodrome, which were to come. Their first aspiring collaboration involving these alterations to the building, were to become protracted and costly, especially during the years of World War I.

The Hippodrome promised Wirths a permanent home for its Sydney seasons and a profitable asset for the remainder of the year. For Council, it promised a valuable rental and the finest theatre building in Australia but, to the Chief Secretary's Department, it represented the newest innovations in theatre technology and safety, justifying regulations still being formulated and amended under the Theatres and Public Halls Act of 1908.

Tensions gradually developed between the parties involved as difficulties arose. A significant proportion of these evolved from the Chief Secretary's Department growing list of requirements, which continued even after completion of the building¹ (mentioned in Chapter 3). These amended regulations created problems for the lessees and jeopardised the future of the Hippodrome. However, changes to the building that Wirths requested during its construction also increased the costs of the undertaking.²

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² In 1917, the estimate of costs on work required by Wirths was 8,866 pounds 16s 11d; on work for the Chief Secretary's requirements, 3,667 pounds 15s 9d; cost of internal furnishings and fittings to equip the theatre for use increased from 9,000 pounds to 12,527 pounds 16s 10d, of which 3,501 pounds was for the inflated cost of connecting the electrical supply. CRS 28: TC 4174: Hippodrome: Sir William Manning Markets Tenders. Minute Paper Comptroller of Assets, 27 Jul. 1917.
After the lease was signed, an additional burden was created when Council transferred all responsibilities for repairs and additions associated more with the fabric of the building than the theatre, to the lessees. Safety and structural improvements were required by State Government legislation before the department could issue a licence under the *Theatres and Public Halls Act*. Consequently, the lessees were entangled by the collective demands of conditions in both documents.

As has been stated, Council Specifications for the Hippodrome contained not only directions insisting upon the use of recycled materials of the former building but also specified any new materials to be used in the building. As an example, 'Orb' brand, galvanised iron was specified for the building's roof.

Like the former market building, a lantern was built above the ridge of the roof but, set into the sloping planes of the roof on either side of the lantern, were large sliding movable roof panels. They were covered with galvanised iron, curved on the lower sides to resist weather penetration. These panels were similar to those in Melbourne's Princess Theatre, built for J. C. Williamson, George Musgrove and Arthur Garner.

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3 Council passed the motion to transfer responsibility for the installation of building's additional mechanical ventilation that was required by the Chief Secretary's Department, onto the lessees Wirths. SCC Archives: PC 1920, 500.


6 The first theatre to have a Sliding Roof and Ceiling in the world was the Princess Theatre in Spring Street, Melbourne built in 1886, during Melbourne's expansive building boom years. Audiences at performances on warm evenings enjoyed fresh air when the panels were rolled back to provide ample ventilation and expose the sky above. Michael Cannon, *The Land Boomers: The Complete Illustrated History* (Melbourne: Lloyd O'Neil, 1986) 10.
In a bid to economise, Council intended to reuse the former market building's lanterns and louvres but they had deteriorated and were the wrong size, rendering them useless for alteration. New louvres and gutters meant the area of roof designated for the sliding panels could be enlarged. Although these elements were intended to aid movement of air in the auditorium, additional ventilation was provided by weatherproof cowls strategically set into the roof. These cowls extended nine feet (24.7 metres) above the roof and opened with bell shaped mouths approximately three feet (0.9 metre) beneath the ceiling of the auditorium, or into the ceiling above the gallery.

Reinforced cement formed many other structural elements, such as the floors, dress circle, boxes, gallery, stage walling and stairwells. In accordance with the Under Secretary's directions, staircases that were built on either side of the building leading to the gallery floor, were widened to a total width of fifteen feet (4.57 metres). In other areas, reinforced cement replaced brickwork, which was the first proposed building material. Also, cement render was used to cover many internal faces in the building and was used on the inside surface of the external parapets. Specifications required these cement surfaces to be painted twice with alum solution, then covered with two coats of white paint.

The stamped steel auditorium ceiling was the only internal surface not covered in this manner; domes formed within the ceiling's steel were provided for ventilation.
Decorative plaster ornamentation covered interior surfaces, such as the proscenium wall, the arch and the adjacent boxes, the balcony faces at the Dress Circle and Family Gallery. According to the Specifications for Work, the Council Architect was to choose patterns for this ornamental work. Elsewhere, the building's exposed (internal and external) brickwork faces were painted with 'Petrifyel'.

Unlike other city theatres, which were still using gas lighting, the Hippodrome was fully powered by electricity (except for its emergency lights). Semi-concealed electric lights in the ceiling domes complied with the government's safety regulations and lit the theatre's auditorium and, according to the *Theatres and Public Halls Regulations*, the theatre's emergency "Exit" lights were fully exposed to public view and were carriage lamps fuelled by vegetable oil (instead of the originally nominated candles). These lights were fixed in sockets secured to the walls, where they burned throughout the public's presence in the building.

Timber was introduced into the building during these alterations; Northern Hardwood was the primary material throughout. In addition, under the "Specifications for Work", Oregon was used for the roof over the stage; Rimu floor boards were laid;

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10 CRS 130/20: Specifications for Work: Hippodrome, 66; CRS 170/22 *Vade Mecum* 126, 239.

11 An amount of 1,200 pounds was allowed for this work. CRS 130/20: Specifications of Work: Hippodrome, 63.


Fir used for the mock beams of the coved steel ceiling of the auditorium. A timber grid (also termed a rigging loft) was installed after the construction of the flytower was completed and half of this was found still in place in the Capitol flytower, during the restoration of the building in the 1990s. Unfortunately, this grid was one of the few remaining original elements that could not be retained by the building's redevelopers. Among the original timber elements that do remain, are the doors to the vestibule and foyer handrails.

The Hippodrome's main entrance attracted praise from patrons. White Sicilian marble staircases rising on either side of the vestibule led to the Dress Circle foyer above. Decorative tiles paved the vestibule's floor and formed the brown dados on the side walls of the staircases. (These floor tiles remain in their original positions in the foyer and scattered here and there are tiles depicting various historic symbols.) Meanwhile, stairwells elsewhere in the building were paved with either the specified "Ironite Kylite", or a similar product chosen by the Council Architect, R. H. Broderick.

Negotiations between Council, Chief Secretary's Office and Lessees about the interior elements of the building, were continuing after the demolition and reconstruction of the building had begun. Architects, Broderick and E. L. Thompson (acting for Wirths) tried unsuccessfully to convince the Chief Secretary's Office to relax

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its requirements in relation to the existing cement floor.\textsuperscript{20} The Under Secretary had informed Council that the floor of the auditorium had to be lowered 5 feet 3 inches (1.6 metres) but Broderick and Thomson argued that the "pit" floor in a circus building is actually used for the circus ring. It was only used for seating, when a stage performance was being presented.

Convinced the existing arrangement provided ample safety for the public, as well as providing a good working arrangement, Broderick tried to overcome the problem by dividing the floor into two distinct sections. One was designated as the "Pit" and the other as the "Circle" but his attempt was futile.\textsuperscript{21} Council was forced to comply with the Chief Secretary's requirement to dig up the building's extensive cement floor and underpin the walls; the cost to Council was an additional 1350 pounds.\textsuperscript{22} Without its layer of asphalt, the original cement floor would have contributed to the necessary fire resistance of the theatre.

Once it was established that the cement floor in the auditorium was to be removed, Wirths submitted amended plans for three major elements in the Hippodrome. George Wirth negotiated with Broderick to lower the floor of the understage area, to increase the size of the stage and backstage and to build a water pit under the circus ring. The Hippodrome's original plans showed a single level circus ring, a water safety curtain, a smaller stage and lower understage height. Therefore, Wirths were also


\textsuperscript{21} CRS 28: TC 1326/13: Plans and Specifications of Remodellings for W. P. Manning Markets - Wirths. Letter, Under Secretary to Town Clerk, 17 Nov. 1913; Draft Letter prepared by R. H. Broderick, Town Clerk to Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Office, 27 Nov. 1913.

responsible for many of the Hippodrome's increased costs but the result was a most versatile and significant theatre building.

During each circus season, Wirths' alterations allowed caged animals, elephants and horses to be temporarily housed beneath the stage and provided ample access for their movement to the two performance areas. (At least some performing animals may have been kept at the nearby parks between shows as is currently the practice in many towns.) The increased stage area improved the management of stage equipment, set properties and the performance area, while the adaptable circus ring and water pit were like those in similar amphitheatres round the world.

After further consideration, Wirths decided that they wanted the floor's movement to be stopped at various levels and locked into place, instead of only at the top and bottom levels. Consequently, the ramps had to be redesigned and the contractors had to install hydraulic rams to move the floor, hold it at various heights and allow it to lock into place.

Because Broderick and his department did not have comparable technology for the construction of the circus ring, they had formed a consultative group with Council's Building Surveyor and a consulting engineer. This group concluded the safest structure for the ring should incorporate girders and decking, which could be moved

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24 According to George Wirth, similar theatre buildings were in "London, New York and elsewhere." CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir Wm. Manning Markets: Lease to Wirths. Letter, R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 30 Nov. 1914.

hydraulically. The Government Inspector did not agree with their belief in the safety of the apparatus. These reservations led the Under Secretary to tentatively approve their plans and lay the responsibility for the water pit's safety entirely with Council.\textsuperscript{26} However, the project's major engineering problem was the construction of the entrances and above-mentioned ramps accommodating the different floor levels and linking the ring to Parker Street and the private laneway.

Council instigated consultations with the Sydney and Suburban Hydraulic Power Company about extending the company's water main and to provide the hydraulic connection and related machinery to the Hippodrome. Responding to Council's enquiries, this company offered to pay half the total cost but its representatives were later perplexed to find Council would not reciprocate in a like manner, when Council required it to reinstate the section of the public road disturbed for the work. Council claimed that, because it had born half the cost of the work, it was the company's responsibility to complete all the work, including restoration of the road.\textsuperscript{27}

In the building's latest restoration, this box water main used for pumping water under pressure, was found alongside the older water culvert. The latter would have been used to remove water pumped out of the building.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{26} CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir Wm. Manning Markets: Lease to Wirths. Memo of J. Neale Bredan, the Comptroller of Assets on base of Letter, R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 30 Nov. 1914; Letter, G. H. S. King, Under Secretary to Town Clerk, 20 Apr. 1915.

\textsuperscript{27} The company installed 1½ hydraulic connection, complete with stop valve and key for the Council. The total cost of this was 50 pounds exclusive of any roadworks and the company offered to subsidise the cost the extent of 25 pounds. Council subsequently charged the company for 9 pounds 19s 7d for the replacement of the council owned road. CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir Wm. Manning Markets: Lease to Wirths. Letter, A. Mayne Heron to Town Clerk, 23 Mar. 1915; Letter, Am Heron to Town Clerk, 5 Jan. 1916; Letter, Town Clerk to Manager, Sydney and Suburban Hydraulic Power Company Ltd., 13 Jan. 1916.

Wirths' original specifications, prepared by E. L. Thompson, denoted 250 pounds for a water pit to be built\textsuperscript{29} but the actual costs spiralled alarmingly. Later in 1914, the Municipal Council and the contractors' agreement increased the amount for this work to 500 pounds.\textsuperscript{30} Finally, the completed work on the hydraulic ring cost slightly more than 6,065 pounds (see Appendix F)\textsuperscript{31} and, according to the City Solicitor, were to be regarded as an extra expense to that of the original contract.\textsuperscript{32} Part of this added expense was generated by the necessity to reposition a large proportion of construction equipment and increase in builders labourers' wages.\textsuperscript{33}

Maston and Yates, the contractors experienced considerable trouble with work for the enlarged ring. One gantry needed to be underpinned, others removed, reconstructed and repositioned to deposit bricks, mix concrete needed to build the larger pit. Difficulties during the excavation work were exacerbated by excessive wet weather. Rain soaked earth constantly subsided during excavations and, because the site was below the region's tidal level, more water seeped into the well. Consequently, the installation of permanent pumps was required to constantly remove large volumes

\textsuperscript{29} The Specifications were submitted to Council after the first set of plans. CRS 130/20: Specifications for Work: Hippodrome. 53.

\textsuperscript{30} The Contract with Maston and Yates was signed in December 1913 and the order to commence work was given on 11 May 1914. CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir Wm. Manning Markets: Lease to Wirths. Letter, R. H. Broderick to Comptroller of Assets, 30 Nov. 1914; CRS 34: TC 4205/16: Hippodrome: Contract Claim. Letter, Maston and Yates to Town Hall, 20 Oct. 1916; Letter R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 24 Nov. 1914; Letter R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 8 Jan. 1917.


\textsuperscript{33} On 16th December 1913, Mr. Justice Higgins increased labourers' wages under the Federal Award, further increasing costs associated with the Hippodrome. CRS 34: TC 4205/16: Hippodrome Contract Claim. Minute Paper, Clerk of Works, 10 Jan. 1917; Report, R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 8 Aug. 1917.
of troublesome water during excavations\textsuperscript{34} as well as during the life of the building (as indicated in Chapter 11).\textsuperscript{35}

To undertake the complex construction involved in altering sections of the theatre structure for Wirths and the Chief Secretary's Department, builders were forced to erect two extra cranes on timber towers. Equipment that was placed to start work on the original proposals had to be dismantled, moved and augmented to enlarge the stage and backstage area (as requested by Wirths), because it could no longer reach the increased span of the stage tower roof.\textsuperscript{36} Both the stage and backstage area behind the proscenium wall were widened\textsuperscript{37} and brick and stone side wings were erected to support the roof's increased span. Beneath the stage, headroom was increased from an average of 4 feet 6 inches (1.37 metres), to 12 feet (3.65 metres) and an additional ramp to the rear of the stage was built, as well as an opening giving access to the ring.\textsuperscript{38}

There is a rumour that Wirths brought animals to the Hippodrome by way of an

\textsuperscript{34} CRS 34: TC 4205/16: Hippodrome Contract Claim. Report, R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 8 Aug. 1917; CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir William Manning Markets: Lease to Wirths. Letter, Broderick to Town Clerk, 4 Aug. 1916.

\textsuperscript{35} CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir Wm. Manning Markets: Lease to Wirths. Letter, R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 22 Jul. 1916.

\textsuperscript{36} CRS 34: TC 4205/16: Hippodrome: Contract Claim. Letter, Maston and Yates to Town Clerk, 20 Oct. 1916; Letter, R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 24 Nov. 1916; Letter, R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 8 Aug. 1917.

\textsuperscript{37} "Messrs Wirth Bros. original plans (were) inadequate for the necessary combination of efficient visual opening and scenery moving space behind the proscenium." CRS 28: TC 4205/16: Hippodrome Contract Claim. Report, R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 8 Aug. 1917.

underground rail line. At first, this seemed plausible because the rail line for the Eastern Suburbs Railway later passed directly under the building instead of joining the other city rail lines, which took a different route. However, the rumour is incorrect as State Rail Archives do not have a record of such a line, nor do Council plans or correspondence show any likelihood that such access ever existed. Instead, these files indicate the opposite. The closest reference to any rail link was a protest about a rail siding voiced by the Belmore Markets Growers and Agents Association in a letter to the Town Clerk, in 1900. However, this protest referred to the Bathurst Street Markets, where a number of traders moved after vacating the Campbell Street property. Animals transported to the Capitol would have been brought from either the rail terminus at Central, or from the Darling Harbour goods-yard.

These changes to original plans caused considerable unplanned expense for Council and were subsequently included in calculations for an increased rental. Expenses required by the Chief Secretary's Department were unavoidable but they guaranteed the building complied with stringent safety standards. The Chief Secretary's Department administered the building and safety regulations for the city's theatres, under the *Theatres and Public Halls Act of 1908*, which was the product of a long history of theatres being destroyed by fire both in Britain and in Australia. In 1882, a

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40 Victor Poljanski, Manager Archives, State Rail Authority of New South Wales, to author, 20 May 1994.

41 The Chief Secretary's files could not be used to cross check this as those before 1920 have been lost.

42 CRS 26/2850: Letters Received. Belmore Market Growers and Agents Association: Protest against Railway Siding.
Royal Commission inquiring into the Construction of Theatres and other places used for public assembly and entertainment and leisure was set up by the New South Wales Government and its report (released in 1887) led to the establishment of early guidelines for safety within theatres. These were in turn followed by legislation of the *Theatres and Public Halls Act of 1908*, its Amendments and Regulations.

During the construction of the Hippodrome, this latter legislation and regulations were being amended constantly and led to ever lengthening requirements for the amphitheatre. To the first four amendments to the theatre's plans, this department added further requirements such as the installation of the stage sprinkler system and mechanical ventilation. Accordingly, Council arranged installation of the "Grinell Sprinkler System" on the stage but the mechanical ventilation posed considerable problems, because the Chief Secretary's Office decided mechanical ventilation was needed after the building was completed, and it was never installed in the Hippodrome auditorium.

Broderick sought to overcome the Chief Secretary's objections regarding the Hippodrome's ventilation by trebling the building's ventilators, installing open fanlights over the theatre's doors and inserting louvred windows in stairwells leading to gallery. At first, the Under Secretary approved these alternative proposals on condition that

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45 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Under Secretary to Town Clerk, 31 Aug. 1920.
mechanical ventilation be installed if it should prove necessary. Without checking further to determine if Council's additional ventilators remedied the situation, the Chief Secretary's Department continued to demand mechanical ventilation be installed.

An example of this is the Under Secretary's letter to George Wirth in March 1925, in which he advised the lessee that tests of the ventilation revealed air quality in the Dress Circle and Gallery did not comply with regulations. He stated that the air movement was insufficient and directed Wirths to install four large electric fans in positions indicated by the department. Departmental officers anticipated that these fans combined with the building's roof openings would remedy the problem.46

Changes to the original requirements for the proscenium safety curtain and wall also added to costs. Extra fire doors were ordered for openings below stage47 and Wirths' original specifications included installation of a water safety curtain like those installed in the Theatre Royal, Palace and Criterion Theatres. A sum of 150 pounds was set aside in the initial estimations for this item48 but the Chief Secretary required a rigid metal curtain and equipment be installed in the theatre. His reply to the Town Clerk contained details of the latest, precise technical data on the equipment.49 Eventually, the cost for the six ton steel curtain and its installation was 1,100 pounds.50

46 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Under Secretary to George Wirth, 27 May 1925.
Both the Hippodrome's large rigid safety curtain and performance ring were the largest and first of their kind in Australia at the time of the building's construction\(^\text{51}\) and this claim was still on Wirth's letterhead in 1922.\(^\text{52}\)

Wirths agreed that the automatic sprinkler system required by the Chief Secretary's Department would be worthwhile\(^\text{53}\) and both parties dropped any mention of a drencher after the installation of these sprinklers.\(^\text{54}\) However, the matter of a drencher was revived in 1928 and again in 1977 but it was not incorporated into the building until the modern restoration by Ipoh Garden Developments.\(^\text{55}\)

During the theatre's early years, police acted on behalf of the Chief Secretary's Department, investigating conditions in the building and acting on any complaints. Their duties included reporting on the progress of work and alterations being undertaken, counting the theatre's seats for inclusion on the license and regularly visiting the theatre while public were present to ensure the company complied with safety regulations. Complaints varied from blocked exits\(^\text{56}\) to overcrowding. A constant problem during the life of the Hippodrome and Capitol, was cars parked in the


\(^{53}\) This cost 714 pounds to install. CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir Wm. Manning Markets: Lease to Wirths. Letter, R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 29 Sep. 1916.

\(^{54}\) A 'Drencher' is a fine water spray curtain, which cools the metal fire curtain in an emergency. The sprinkler system was confined to the area behind the proscenium wall. Seventy-four sprinklers were placed under the roof, 79 under the grid, 27 under the "fly galleries" and 111 under the stage. CRS 28: TC 4992/16: Hippodrome. Letter, R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 6 Jul. 1915; Letter, G. H. S. King, Under Secretary to Town Clerk, 28 Jun. 1916; Letter, E. B. Harkness, Under Secretary to Town Clerk, 23 Jun. 1916.


private laneway, blocking the building's exits. However, a modern foyer that services the restored Capitol has since removed that problem.

Sometimes officers interpreted regulations differently and one example involved theatre seats stacked against an exit. During one inspection an officer found them to one side of the stage but judged dimensions of other exits still allowed the theatre to give ample escape for audience and performers and comply with safety regulations. Whereas, his supervisor disagreed and directed management to remove the obstruction.\(^57\)

Police were called to investigate another complaint, when a Mr. Broad said the theatre was overcrowded. He informed police that he had taken his family to the Hippodrome to see "The Forty Thieves" pantomime; when they entered, the theatre was already overcrowded and they could not see the stage from the few available seats. Consequently, the manager refused to refund his money.\(^58\) A Constable accompanied Broad back to the theatre and advised Producer (and Manager), Harry Musgrove, and his assistant of the complaint. Musgrove replied that Broad was not entitled to a refund, because seats were available when he first purchased his tickets,\(^59\) and he had "jumped" the seats of other patrons. He then had to be removed.\(^60\)

When Inspector Walker subsequently visited the theatre about the same matter,

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he saw women and children sitting on steps, blocking the two central aisles in the stalls and the aisles in the Upper Gallery. This time, Musgrove told him that a fireman with the Fire Brigade had given permission for people to be placed in some aisles but ushers placed them incorrectly. However, because the Pantomime was closing on the following Saturday, no official action on the matter.

Soon after this incident, an officer of the Chief Secretary's Department recommended it stop issuing temporary licences for the Hippodrome and instead issue a full provisional licence but, again, made it dependant on the installation of mechanical ventilation. The department also asked for the theatre's actual seating capacity to be counted and recorded on the theatre's license. Accordingly, it then asked the Fire Brigade's Chief Officer if he agreed to the matter.

Like the Police, the Board of Fire Commissioners and the Fire Brigade reported to the Chief Secretary's Department. Because their responsibility covered all safety elements in the theatre, the Fire Brigade inspected the building and its fire equipment. In his report the officer described the condition of the theatre as being clean and well kept. Except for Peter Cheung Chi Kong's brief tenancy in 1977, this statement was never repeated about the theatre again. The first full provisional license was issued two

61 At first, Musgrove told the Constable that it was Mr. Jackson of the Fire Brigade, but later admitted to Inspector Walker that he made a mistake about the identity of the fireman. Chief Jackson was the Head of the Fire Brigade when the Hippodrome was altered some years later.


63 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Report, Supervising Architect, Chas. E. Fairfax, 5 Mar. 1924; Letter, Under Secretary to Town Clerk, 11 Mar. 1924; Memo, W. R. Mandelson, 1 Apr. 1924.


days after the report.

Fire Brigade Reports and correspondence from the Board of Fire Commissioners and Police give accurate descriptions of the existing conditions in the theatre. Fire Officer Skelton's report states the Hippodrome was brick, with an iron roof and gallery; the exit doors were fitted with panic bolts; the exit lamps were in full working order and the whole building was lit with electricity. The stairs and handrails were all in good order and all scenery was dressed with fire retardant. As well as the metal drop (fire) curtain, the theatre was adequately equipped with twelve wheel fire hydrants with hose branches and swinging brackets, the sprinkler system and ten hand fire extinguishers correctly located throughout the building. He recommended six hand extinguishers be placed in the theatre's backstage dressing rooms. Years later, Greater Union Organisation claimed ownership of all the fire equipment in the theatre and did not acknowledge that any such equipment was in the theatre before its predecessor gutted the building.

Wirths Brothers' long and costly association with the Hippodrome property, virtually ended when they vacated the premises in 1927, driven out by escalating costs, expensive improvements to safety and ventilation, and changing audience expectations. After their former circus venue reopened as the Capitol, Wirths resumed their Sydney Easter Season in their city of circus tents pitched on land on the corner of Wentworth Avenue and Goulburn Street. The "juvenile" period of the theatre's history was over; circus entertainments generally and Wirths Brothers in particular lost the public's high esteem.

66 "Tempting Theatrical Fare Offered for the Holiday." DT 7 Apr. 1928: 5; Advertisement. DT 7 Apr. 1928: 15.
FULLER'S

BIG FAIRY
PANTOMIME

THE
BUNYIP

TWICE DAILY
2-30@
CRS 294/75: Remodelling of Hippodrome for Capitol. Detail from section showing part of the Capitol Proscenium Arch (1928).
Chapter 5

A Time of Change: The "Engenue" Period

Possibly nothing is more symbolic of the changing nature and expectations of the post war population, than the "flapper".¹ Like the young film industry, she grew and developed during the years of the first World War and embraced a freedom that was hitherto unknown before it began. Many young women of all socio-economic levels of Sydney society were proud to be identified as "Flappers". They delighted in forms of popular entertainment that most influenced the fabric and content of the theatre industry during the 1920s: cinema, unchaperoned dances and the freedom offered by the modern motor car.

Advances in modern technology in many fields, above and beyond the moving picture industry, liberated the flappers² and increased their employment opportunities.³ However, the same advances influenced the gradual decline of live theatre and circus, as evident in the Hippodrome.⁴

A legacy of the war was the freedom for young women to break away from traditionally acceptable occupations of domestic service and teaching. They worked in offices, factories, retail shops, telephone exchanges, entertainment and hospitality

¹ Barbara Cameron, "The Flappers and Feminists." Margaret Bevege, Margaret James, Carmel Shute (ed.). Worth Her Salt: Women at Work in Australia (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1982) 260.
industries without any fear of the former stigma or rebuke and they also took advantage of opportunities created by the popular film industry. Women often accompanied silent films on the organ and piano.

Although the opportunities for young women increased dramatically within a limited time span, they like the female wage did not equal those of male counterparts. Consequently, while flappers may have wished to go to live theatre productions (like those at the Hippodrome), they could only afford to attend the less costly cinema. It was a democratic entertainment that could be afforded by the lowest wage earners and their families, while the accompanying live component masked the decline of live theatre. It was not until the introduction of 'talking' motion pictures in 1928 that the dramatic decline of the live theatre component of the program became more obvious.

As early as 1921, cinema attracted more people than any other form of entertainment, which caused many theatres to be altered to picture houses. Wirths found this emerging competition compounded the financial drain of the Hippodrome's

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7 Vamplew, 155-7, 161.


ventilation requirements (mentioned in Chapter 4) and, like their contemporaries, they were forced to close the theatre in order to alter it to a dedicated picture house. They engaged the theatre architect Henry E. White to prepare plans for submission to Council and advised the Chief Secretary's Department that the theatre would be renamed the "Capitol". Precedence for the circus family had been established a decade before, when their Olympia Theatre in Melbourne was altered to a picture theatre.

The Municipal Council's response to this proposal was one of relief, as the matter of mechanical ventilation was like a nemesis that still had to be faced. If the lessees could not be forced to install it, Council officers feared the Chief Secretary might transfer responsibility back to the lessor. Council anticipated efficient mechanical ventilation would be included in the complete modification of the building's interior to a modern picture theatre and would finally satisfy the continuing demands of the Chief Secretary's Department.

White's first set of plans for the remodelled Hippodrome were submitted on Wirths Brothers' behalf to the Chief Secretary's Department and they were approved.

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11 Waterhouse, 133.
12 CRS 34: TC 1105/27: Hippodrome, Approval to alterations and additions to the building. Letter, George Wirth to Town Clerk, 8 Feb. 1927; CSD 4172: Under Secretary to Henry E. White, 16 Mar. 1927.
subject to the fulfilment of fourteen requirements. These plans showed a traditional 'hard top' cinema but White later submitted revised drawings prepared for Union Theatres. These new plans and drawings were for 'an atmospheric' theatre in the style pioneered by American architect, John Eberson. They contradicted many of the established design mores of the traditional picture houses.

Agreeing to this alteration of its property, the Municipal Council directed the circular pit be filled, or treated in such a manner as to prevent access by rats or the accumulation of rubbish. This work was to be done in such a way that the tank could be restored to its former condition when the original lease expired in 1937.

It must be acknowledged that the files of the Council and Chief Secretary's Department do not link Union Theatres to the Hippodrome during the initial proposal to alter the building. The lease was still held by Wirths and no application had been made at that time to transfer the lease. However, Edwin Geach of Union Theatres talked with and wrote to the Lord Mayor urging him to support Union Theatre's application for a demolition-order on the Hippodrome when the Finance Committee met the following

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17 In 1926, many of the 'hard top' cinemas in the United States of America were designed in tasteful classical style, such as Roman, Renaissance and English Adam. Prominent theatre architects of this style of theatre were Thomas W. Lamb and C. W. and George Rapp. Tulloch, Australian Cinema, 20; Ross Thorne, Cinemas of Australia Via USA (Sydney: Architecture Department: University of Sydney, 1981) 2-4, 14.


It was not until the 20th July 1927 that Sydney Municipal Council, Wirths and Capitol Theatre (Sydney) signed the assignment and reassignment of the lease and mortgage. Just as Wirths established its family business as a company for the Hippodrome project, Union Theatres formed Capitol Theatre (Sydney) to manage the Capitol.

Council Architect, R. H. Broderick, met with Henry White to discuss these proposed alterations to the building with which Broderick had been involved since its inception and which he redesigned to become the Hippodrome. Broderick's reports written after these discussions suggest a change of attitude to the theatre and the proposed alterations. He resigned from his position the following year but there are no indications that this matter influenced his decision.

The Capitol was the first of the five atmospheric theatres built in Australia. Their curved plaster ceilings rising from behind the auditorium's pseudo-exterior decoration create an illusion of being outside. Most of the Capitol's decorative and lighting elements were constructed in the United States and shipped to Australia on the

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21 See Chapter 3.


24 Ross Thorne originally stated there were four atmospheric theatres built in Australia, but in later talks at the meetings of the Australian Theatre Historical Society, increased the number to five. Ross Thorne, Capitol Theatre: A Case for Retention (Sydney: Department of Architecture, University of Sydney, and Australian Theatre Historical Society, 1985) 1.
Aorangi in 1927, making it an example of the building industry's emerging prefabrication technology.

Early in 1927, before the lease of the property was assigned to Union Theatres, Henry White accompanied Stuart Doyle to America to study the latest building trends in theatre architecture, particularly the work of John Eberson, whose atmospheric theatres were in Omaha and the Chicago Theatre in Illinois. Just as the Hippodrome was built on the plan of the Hippodrome in London, the Capitol was modelled on the Chicago Theatre.

Similarly, A. E. Emmelhainz, the company's technical director, travelled to the United States to study the best methods for creating special effects used in the Capitol. He returned before the Aorangi, which was carrying the equipment he had purchased, including the Brenkert Brenograph Junior, and prepared to supervise its installation in the theatre. At least four similar special effects projectors were placed in the theatre during the 1990s restoration, but they have not been used because contemporary...
entrepreneurs fear they will distract the audience from the following live musicals.\textsuperscript{32} While this attitude prevails, modern audiences will not see the full effect of the Capitol's interior as it was seen when first opened.

The beginning of work on building modifications was marked with a dedication ceremony held on 12th August 1927. "Engenue" Edith Roberts, the lead in "The Adorable Outcast",\textsuperscript{33} broke a bottle of champagne on an improvised stage and stated it would be the "finest (theatre) in Australia and among the most noted in the world." Stuart Doyle of Union Theatres, the parent company of the new Lessee, then dedicated the building to the "greatest of all art forms - the art of the motion picture, the art of comparative youth," which he claimed that "in the twenty-five years of its existence it has developed to such an extent that today it is the only art that is self supporting."\textsuperscript{34}

Included among the dignitaries present at this ceremony were representatives of the film industry, Stanley S. Crick of Fox Films (who was to become a Sydney Council Alderman and Lord Mayor), John C. Jones of First National Pictures, John Hicks of Paramount Pictures, C. McIntyre of Universal Pictures, Ralph Doyle of United Artists and N. B. Freeman from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.\textsuperscript{35} Nevertheless, the number and origins of dignitaries at the ceremony on opening night (eight months later)\textsuperscript{36} was far more impressive. They represented both levels of Council administration, State


\textsuperscript{33} This film was being made by Australasian Films Ltd. at the time. \textit{SMH} 13 Aug. 1927: 16.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{SMH} 13 Aug. 1927: 16.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{SMH}, 13 Aug. 1927: 16.

Government departments, the entertainment industry, neighbouring lessees and a foreign ambassador.37

White's first plans for the remodelled Hippodrome were submitted to the Chief Secretary's Department on the 9th March 192738 and the Under Secretary's reply acknowledged the building's proposed name-change.39 On 7th April 1927, the theatre's first licensee, Wirth Brothers, only applied for a three-month license instead of the usual annual license,40 allowing time for the building's lease to be transferred to its new tenants, Union Theatres.

White's plans prepared for Union Theatres, retained the exterior of the building but raised its parapets and removed cornices containing the date. Builders altered the roof to accommodate the raised auditorium ceiling and altered flytower but alterations to the building's interior were far more dramatic. Apart from raising six roof trusses and ceiling, the depth of the stage and flytower was halved, the Hippodrome's two upper levels were replaced with only one Dress Circle. Seating was redesigned with the intention of seating 2,999 patrons but dimensions laid down in the regulations of the Theatres and Public Halls Act of 1908, meant this number was never realised. When the officers counted the seats in situ for inclusion on the licence, there were 2973

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In April 1928, Stuart Doyle applied to the Under Secretary for permission to accommodate 245 standing persons within the Capitol. He advised the Chief Secretary's Department that many seats at the back of the stalls were removed to accommodate these patrons and, because this complied with guidelines determining the area required for each person, the department duly granted permission for this number of people. Following unproven complaints of overcrowding generated by the theatre's continuous screening policy, this number of standing patrons was reduced to 200 persons. Patrons entered this area at the back stalls via a beautiful 'courtyard', which was a replica of that at the Pitti Palace in Florence Italy.

Inside, the auditorium design imitated an Italian outdoor terraced garden. One terrace housed the orchestra's stringed instruments, a second terrace held the wind instruments and the stage and screen were each on separate terraces. Terraces around the walls held statues, small trees and shrubs. Just as property owners blend diverse and often unrelated elements in a garden, the decoration in the theatre encompassed a broad cross section of decorative patterns and styles. The building in turn, became analogous with the diverse nature of the film industry and variety theatre productions.

Despite regulations requiring all plans, construction and use of the theatre to be

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42 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Stuart Doyle of Union Theatres to Under Secretary, Harkness Esq. 10 Apr. 1928; Letter, Stuart Doyle to Under Secretary, 29 Apr. 1929; Floor plan, Arrangement of Aisles at Back Stalls: Capitol Theatre, Drawing No. 3A, 1 Jul. 1929.


44 *SMH* 13 Aug. 1927: 16.
approved by the Chief Secretary's Department, department officers and the Board of
Fire Commissioners were concerned about finding two unapproved rooms when they
inspected the building on the day before the theatre's opening. One room was built
above the roof-line and the second was built in the small space situated beneath the
upper floor that held the biograph box and seats of the gallery and above the ceiling of
the mezzanine foyer. The roof-top room was built out of undressed Oregon timber and
covered by few sheets of asbestos, which officers deemed to be "highly inflammable
and easily ignited". They found several boys working in this room and an accumulation
of papers scattered all over the floor. Officer Jackson of the Board of Fire
Commissioners judged the construction of this room to be "a most dangerous practice
and if allowed to continue would form a very grave precedent".45

Decades later, Robert Francis toured the theatre with former Capitol
projectionist, Ian Hanson, and Ian Tranter; they found remains of a gymnasium still in
the roof and an old table tennis table remained bolted to the floor.46 Apparently this
room had never been removed.

This matter highlights one difficulty in researching archive documents. When a
matter is first recorded and not mentioned again in subsequent documents, it can
usually be assumed that it was remedied according to the government regulations but,
as in this example, it can also indicate a matter has been overlooked and forgotten with

Department, 11 Jul. 1928; Report, from F. Jackson of the Board of Fire Commissioners, to
Under Secretary, 21 Sep. 1928.

46 CRS 837/69: Robert Francis (prep and writ.) "An Acre of Seats in a Garden of Dreams: A
Celebration of Sydney's Capitol Theatre. Treatment and research for a quality documentary
about the history and restoration of Australia's last remaining Atmospheric Picture Palace,
for Anthony Buckley Films Pty. Ltd." 12 Jul. 1989: 30; James Sabine (ed.). A Century of
Australian Cinema (Melbourne: Australian Film Institute, 1995) 89.
time.

The second space was formed when the two levels of the former Hippodrome were replaced by one. Its use was considered to be against public safety, especially when inspectors constantly complained of accumulated 'rubbish' creating a fire hazard throughout the history of the building. These officers stated the situation could not be allowed to continue.47 When Ipoh Garden Developments recently restored the theatre, this room was rebuilt with department and City Council's approval and made into a staff room.48

The Hippodrome had been classified as an "a" grade theatre, containing a metal fire curtain and all necessary safety requirements needed for live theatre. However, Union Theatres removed this curtain and equipment during the alterations to the building and sought to avoid this "a" grade classification and associated regulations. This is indicated in March 1927, by architect White informing the Chief Secretary's Department that Union Theatres intended to only screen pictures in the Capitol.49 Contrary to this advice, during the inspection mentioned above, department officers learned the theatre was to be used for "a" grade entertainments. Officers found: the company had made preparations for live presentations; sixteen drop cloths and draperies were hanging from the grid; scenery and equipment was in place; theatrical


48 Capitol Theatre Reconstruction and Extension, Campbell Street, The Haymarket Sydney: Tender Design. Ipoh Garden Developments (Aust) Pty. Limited; Peddle Thorp Architects. Section 2, Auditorium West; Section 1, Auditorium East, on display in the Manning Building, courtesy of Fletcher Construction Pty Ltd, 1994-1995.

49 Cinemas only presenting films only were given a "b" grade classification and did not require the installation of a fire curtain. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Report, W. R. Mandelson, Architect, 11 Mar. 1927.
lighting had been installed for an orchestra, ballet girls and chorus; an approved sprinkler system was in place over the stage but it had still not been extended; installation of approved emergency lighting was required. Consequently, "in the interest of public safety", the Under Secretary under the *Theatres and Public Halls Act* required the licensee to install a new metal safety curtain and install these other safety elements in the building. However, acting on advice from Chief Officer Jackson of the Board of Fire Commissioners, the Under Secretary rejected the initial plans for this fire curtain. These plans were for an all-metal curtain filled with asbestos but, according to Chief Jackson, reports of asbestos curtains failing all safety tests meant they were considered unsafe.

Jackson blamed the probable variable expansion of the metal in the curtain and said that prevailing opinion was "it is now definitely understood that the only reliable fire curtain is that which is made on the principle of a fire door." This was a laminated wood door covered with sheet metal (double lapped), which could be made in sections built in a light iron frame. After further discussions, Jackson was prepared to approve the curtain proposals that were originally submitted, provided the curtain be controlled mechanically instead of manually and a drencher be installed over the

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51 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Report, Chief Officer F. Jackson, Board of Fire Commissioners, 26 Oct. 1928; Letter, Under Secretary to Henry E. White, 9 Nov. 1928.


curtain. This drencher needed to operate automatically in case of a fire.55

Chief Officer Jackson died during these negotiations56 and the matter was left in abeyance until his successor, Chief Officer Nance, could become acquainted with the matter.57 Nance later approved the original curtain design and appurtenances subject to three conditions,58 which did not mention a drencher. After 1972, the installation of a drencher became another long term problem for the building's lessees.

A coal strike in 1928 delayed work on the fire curtain.59 It hampered both the collection of materials for the manufacture of steel and the construction of the curtain itself. After it was placed in position during the last months of 1929, the balanced safety curtain was the largest in Australia.60 Government regulations required Capitol Theatre (Sydney) to lower the curtain during each interval and notify the audience in playbills and programs that this was taking place.61

Silent films were only shown for a brief time in the Capitol. Sound motion pictures were introduced late in 1928 and temporarily boosted theatre audiences

55 This revives the matter of the water curtain mentioned in Chapter 4. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, G. M. Kenworthy, Managing Architect, to Under Secretary, 21 Dec. 1928; Report, W. R. Mandelson, Government Architect to Under Secretary, 10 Jan. 1929.


57 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Chief Officer Thomas Nance to Secretary, Board of Fire Commissioners, 2 Apr. 1929.

58 These related to the mechanical operation of the curtain, the position of its appurtenances and in order to prevent the generation of fumes, the curtain to be painted with varnish or aluminium paint. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Under Secretary to Henry E. White, 11 Apr. 1929.


throughout the city. However, sound films meant managements of all city theatres like the Capitol, Regent and State, no longer needed to continue employing musicians to accompany films, or engage guest artists, chorus girls or other live performers. The spread of this trend also had an influence on live theatres.

As the concomitant depression worsened, large theatres became expensive to maintain and theatre managements sought to counter this by attracting more patronage by various means, including catering to the popular fad of mini golf. Capitol management was no exception but it had not obtained permission from the Chief Secretary's Department. A newspaper advertisement alerted the Under Secretary to its existence in the Capitol and, in turn, he requested an investigation be undertaken. The inspector found that its position on the mezzanine foyer did not pose a safety threat and considered it better than the previous arrangement.

On 3rd June 1930, Sydney Municipal Council and Capitol Theatre (Sydney) signed an indenture transferring the remaining term of the original twenty-one year lease to the new lessee and this agreement finally released Wirths from all association with the building. When the *Rents Reduction Act of 1931* was passed in October

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62 Nancye Bridges, *Curtain Call*, Frank Cook (Ed.) (Sydney: Cassell Australia Limited, 1980) 52-7; Tulloch, 48-9; Waterhouse, 133; Brisbane, 212-3.
63 O'Brien, 64.
1931, the Capitol's rental was reduced to 2,954 pounds 17s. per annum,\(^67\) which was less than the maximum comprehensive rental paid by Wirths. This legislation was the result of the Depression and reduced the rental of all city theatres.

Earlier that same year, Council had given its consent for Capitol Theatre (Sydney) to sublease the Capitol to Greater Union (Extension) and the three parties signed the agreement on 22nd January 1932.\(^68\) Subsequently, in 1933, the head lease was assigned to Greater Union Theatres, when Union Theatres and its subsidiary, Capitol Theatre (Sydney), were facing liquidation.\(^69\) Meanwhile, the Deputy Town Clerk was impressed by the new lessee's control of most of the cinemas in the city, which included the picture houses of Greater Union (Extension). He recommended the best interests of Council would be served if it approved the transfer.

Stuart Doyle was forced to wind up Union Theatre's affairs and, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* states, he established Greater Union Theatres by organising a new overdraft.\(^70\) Greater Union Theatres was then able to buy the assets of the liquidated company for approximately 400,000 pounds, the value of Union Theatre's


\(^{68}\) This document highlights the legal argument that Capitol Theatre (Sydney) Limited, a subsidiary of Union Theatres and the lessee of the theatre, and Greater Union (Extension) Limited were separate companies. It is unlikely that the Council would agree to a company sub-leasing a Council owned property to itself. CRS 50 DP 316: Deed Packet. The Municipal Council - 1st Part, Capitol Theatre (Sydney) Limited - 2nd Part and Greater Union (Extension) Limited - 3rd Part: Consent of the Municipal Council of Sydney to Sublease, 22 Jan. 1932.

\(^{69}\) CRS 34: TC 3072/33: Capitol theatre, Manning Square. Consent to transfer of lease Capitol Theatre (Sydney) Ltd to Greater Union Theatres Ltd. Minute Paper, Properties Branch, 2 Aug. 1933.

Some references blame the Depression for the temporary closure of the Capitol from 25th November 1932. While it may have had some influence on the theatre's closure, other factors were also involved, including demands from American distributors. The current Sydney Manager of Greater Union Theatres, A. G. Gillespie, notified the Under Secretary that the theatre was closing but was unable to state when it would reopen. He assured department officers that no work was being undertaken while the theatre was closed. However, the company placed placards outside the theatre, incorrectly advising its public that the Capitol was "closed for alterations to the cooling and sound producing plant". It also promised the theatre would reopen during Christmas week but failed to keep this undertaking.

Over the decade from 1927, the production and exhibition areas of the Australian film industry was under pressure from the Commonwealth Royal Commission into the Motion Picture Industry, a N.S.W. Government Inquiry, introduction of a Quota System and Entertainment tax and a film war, as well as leverage from American film interests. Consequently, the English, Scottish and Australian Bank pressured the two rival theatre chains, Greater Union Theatres and Hoyts, their associated film productions and distribution companies to combine,

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forming a partnership known as the General Theatres Corporation.74

The same company personnel continued to manage the theatre as before and the Capitol reopened under this partnership on 7th April 1933.75 Two Australian comedies were screened, George Wallace's "Harmony Row" and Pat Hanna's "Diggers in Blighty". On that first night, Pat Hanna gave a speech to the assembled audience.76 (Both of these films were made at Effeet Studios in Melbourne, which had been founded by Frank Thring. Stuart Doyle considered Thring to be part of his film production competition.)

General Theatres Corporation remained the Capitol theatre's licensee until December 1937.77 While the name on the theatre's long term lease remained unchanged, the annual Theatre and Public Halls Licenses reflected these changes in the theatre's management structure.

The earliest indication that the Capitol's lessee had not fulfilled its safety and maintenance obligations arose during the Chief Secretary's Department annual inspection in November 1930. Government Architect, W. R. Mandelson, found the theatre's bio-box ceiling was damaged and, on closer inspection, he discovered that the room had not been constructed with fireproof materials, as was originally stated.78 Consequently, because the bio-box was/is the most fire-prone area of a cinema in terms

74 In Australia, this group was commonly referred to as "the Combine". Bertrand, 23-39, 45-7, 57-8; Tulloch, Australian Cinema, 52, 65.
76 SMH 8 Apr. 1933: 14.
77 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Copy of Letters, Secretary, Greater Union Theatres Pty. Limited to Under Secretary, 24 and 29 Dec. 1937.
78 Report, Government Architect to Under Secretary, 11 Nov. 1930, CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file.
of industry related hazards, the department required the room to be made fireproof, smokeproof and over-sheeted with iron, and it advised the company to install an approved fan. Then later in 1933, the Municipal Council received its first complaint about the theatre's dilapidated appearance from one of its own Aldermen.

Alderman Arthur McElhone asked: if any covenants were in the Capitol lease regarding the painting of the premises, when the premises were last painted and when it was due to be painted again. The Properties Department advised Council that there were no covenants specifically related to the painting of the building but lessees were required to keep the building in good tenantable repair (a situation of which McElhone was highly critical). When Council officers subsequently inspected the building, they found a considerable amount of maintenance had not been undertaken. There was peeling and stained paint, dirty walls, corroded metal, accumulated rubbish, blocked gutters and broken or missing glass panes. Accordingly, Council advised the company of the work that was outstanding but the Lessees questioned its liability under the lease and, except for two exterior items, the company chose to leave the remainder

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79 Early film was particularly inflammable and other electrical and lighting elements in the bio-box, including the projector, also posed a danger of fire. In comparison, the stage house and theatre lighting and equipment of live theatres were the danger areas.

80 CRS 34: TC 4949/33: Capitol Theatre, Enquiry re comments in lease relating to painting. Memo, Alderman Arthur McElhone to Town Clerk, 13 Nov. 1933.


82 This is one of the rare documents detailing a Council inspection. CRS 34: TC 4949/33: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper City Engineering and Building Surveyor's Department, 19 Dec. 1933.

83 CRS 50 D.P. 316: Deed Packet. Letter, Town Clerk to Secretary, Greater Union Theatres Ltd. 11 Sep. 1934; CRS 34: TC 4949/33: Capitol. Letter, Town Clerk to Secretary, Greater Union Theatres Ltd. 23 Mar. 1934.
(including the painting) in abeyance until the end of its lease. This time, Council was advised it was unable to enforce compliance of the maintenance order on the Capitol. However, when the new lease was formulated in 1937, conditions remedied this situation and also contained safeguards against the liquidation of another lessee, as well as transferring payment of rates and taxes from Council to the lessee.

With the Capitol's original lease finally expiring in 1937, Council decided to offer the lease for public tender. After some delay, a five-year lease was granted to General Theatres Corporation but, as has been mentioned above, it remained in the name of Greater Union Theatres. During the previous year, company management and a State bank forced Doyle from his position in the company and replaced him with Norman Rydge. Rydge's background was in law and accountancy and he rejected the idea that Australians would support their own films.

Stuart Doyle's departure from the company, was the end of the foremost period of the theatre's story. Greater Union Theatre's interest in the Council owned building

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89 ADB, 337-8; Tulloch, Australian Cinema, 52.
90 Documentary, Celluloid Heroes shown on ABC television in 1996 and repeated February 1998.
obviously waned and it was slow to instigate maintenance and repairs. Company limited its publicity to the first class feature programs in the State and other company cinemas and only advertised its "b" grade films in the Capitol towards the end of the week, exacerbating the building's decline.

Without one crucial Council file, it is not possible to uncover many details about Council's involvement with the premises from 1927. One exception is its decision to accept all Stalls and some Dress Circle seats\(^\text{91}\) in place of the technical equipment that Council had installed in the building in 1916 (Chapter 3) and which Union Theatres had removed, replacing them with items more suited to cinema. At the time, the matter of ownership and reimbursement was raised but remained in abeyance until a new lease was signed in 1937. This Council decision was ill advised, contrary to the original agreement between itself and the lessee\(^\text{92}\) and had ongoing ramifications, as mentioned in Chapters 7 and 9. While Council acknowledged that the equipment had deteriorated between 1916 and 1927, it completely overlooked the comparable depreciation of the replacement chairs over the subsequent decade.

As indicated by Alderman McElhone's complaint, Council did not act on conditions in the lease to ensure the lessee kept the building in good repair and regularly painted. Meanwhile, *Proceedings of Council* minutes show the nature and reduced number of references to the Capitol lessened during this time, indicating Council had distanced itself from the management of the premises, especially after R.

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H. Broderick retired.

In comparison, the Chief Secretary's Department files provide information of the department's interest in the theatre from 1920. It was that department's practice to return plans to the licensees. Consequently, plans of the Safety Curtain and other equipment were not available for study. The department's role in relation to the Capitol, was to approve all proposed building developments, administer matters of public safety and regularly inspect premises to ensure all government regulations were being observed. Accordingly, it granted relevant licences to lessees of the building once they complied with these constantly revised regulations.

While the 'flapper' provides an analogy to the emerging popular entertainment of 'cinematographic exhibitions' with a live theatre component as presented in cinemas, their mothers and grandmothers can be likened to traditional theatre and circus. The older women fought the influence of the American dominated industry on attitudes and morals of the Australian youth. These women banded together and their collective voice was joined with some from the Australian film industry and a number of politicians, prompting the above mentioned Royal Commission into the industry in 1927. Stuart Doyle on behalf of Union Theatres, gave evidence at this hearing and surreptitiously supported the American influence on the Australian industry. Like the live theatre, these women's resistance was overcome.

The period from the end of the Depression to the beginning of World War II

93 Kingston, 112, 133-5; Tulloch, 14-5, 85, 100.
94 Bertrand, 22-30.
marked the end of the carefree youthful image of the flapper that Union Theatres appropriated to portray Capitol's programs and policies, which are covered more fully the next chapter. Meanwhile, the Depression was also a time of hardship for Sydney's population, businesses and the film industry. People less able to pay for their entertainment tended to remain home listening to new wireless' entertainments, leaving many cinemas almost empty.

At the same time, the construction and opening of the city's underground railway transferred the city's business centre northwards, placing Union Theatre's latest and more luxuriant State theatre at an advantage over the Capitol.

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96 Wireless was also an innovation in sound technology parallel with sound films in the late 1920s. Bertrand, 154; Tulloch, 66-7.

This bevy of beauty make ready to rehearse their part for the big ball.

FUN . . . FROLIC . . . GIRLS . . . GAIETY
LAUGHTER . . . BOY! — WHAT A NIGHT!
MEET TED HENKEL, FREDDIE SCHOLL, THE
CAPITOL BALLET AND ALL THE FAVOURITES
OF FILMLAND

Tickets 12/6 each on sale at the Capitol, Lyceum, Lyric, Crystal, Palace, Empress Theatres.

Table reservations, A. G. Gilbey, Hon. Treas., 3rd Floor, Film House, 251a Pitt St., Sydney.

and have the time of your life—seven hours of joy let loose at

THE CAPITOL BALL
in support of Ted Henkel’s candidature in the Popular Dancers’ Contest in aid of United Charities at the WENTWORTH
from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. on MONDAY, 3rd SEPTEMBER. There will be host of novelties — prizes for the best ziff —
Young men in the Attache Service, c. 1932: Sam Hood Collection, Mitchell Library, reprinted by Playbill for Capitol Theatre, Sydney
Chapter 6

The Capitol: "Magnificent Shrine of the Silent Art"

From 1896, the year moving pictures were invented, strong competition prevailed between Australia's film exhibitors. By the 1920s, Union Theatres and Hoyts Theatres dominated the industry and, to counter the enticement of its rival company, Union Theatres introduced a policy that welcomed Capitol's patrons as guests and friends rather than anonymous customers.

"Always at your service fair lady." - a familiar friend?

"Haven't we met before?" - a welcome stranger.

With this spirit of neighbourliness and camaraderie, patrons left the theatre with films and variety programs echoing in their memories and with mementos of each week's entertainment, such as: recipes like "Pink Sugar for kiddies" and individual cherry puddings, a cure for drunkenness, directions for all purpose liniment, or soap jelly shampoo. These tips were found in the pages of Union Theatres' official magazine, the *Capitol News*, which was published weekly and was free to patrons. Through it, audiences became familiar with the theatre's musicians, performers, backstage staff and management; they learned about background decision meetings and of coming films and their casts.\(^2\)

Capitol Theatre (Sydney) was officially recorded as the theatre's lessee and its management emulated its parent company's employment and programming policies. In turn, Union Theatres emulated the American model, which interspersed "flesh and


blood" variety acts with featured silent moving pictures in equal proportions.³

Despite social changes that followed the first world war, under Stuart Doyle's direction, the company placed young female and male employees in very different, gender based roles and this was highlighted in its publicity. Although its selection criteria for the employment of both sexes was very similar, it singled out hostesses and ballet girls to become well-known personalities, even encouraging the city's young women to vie for the prestigious role of the 'Miss Personality Hostess'.⁴ However, males in the theatre's attache service remained an anonymous group but faced a more secure future with the company than their female counterparts.⁵

Capitol management introduced the first "Capitol Personality Girl", Kay Kennedy, to the audience on the opening night. She was described as being the ideal girl for such a position, because she possessed "intellectual beauty combined with poise and dignity"⁶ and had been chosen through a well-publicised competition that the company conducted before the Capitol alterations were complete. Competitors were judged on their personality, beauty, talent and brains. This American concept established one young woman as a theatre's "house identity" and the Australian girl was to invest the Capitol with a spirit of intimacy.⁷ Photographs of aspiring entrants in the


⁴ Among a collection of items given to the Sydney City Council Archives by Rhonda Weed of the Capitol Theatre, was a collection of Capitol News, newspaper articles and advertisements. SCC Archives: Capitol theatre - information folder: Advertisement, "This Week's Page of Personalities." *Sunday News* 11 Mar. 1928: [n.p.].

⁵ The Capitol Theatre management in the early years of its occupancy of the theatre, always referred to their personnel as hostesses, attendants and attaches, not usherettes or ushers.


⁷ *Sydney Mail* 11 Apr. 1928: 32.
"Personality Girl" contest appeared each week in the *Sunday News*.  

Similarly, the *Capitol News* repeatedly publicised the young women in the Capitol Ballet and guest artists over a much longer period of time. Chorus members were shown actively involved in diverse activities outside the theatre and their likes, dislikes and rehearsals noted. Management arranged balls and dances that created additional public exposure for their ballet girls, the Capitol stage band and orchestra. It even invited audience members to support the theatre's musical director and orchestra leader, Ted Henkel, in his candidature in a Popular Dancers' Contest, which was organised by the *Sun* and *Telegraph Pictorial* Newspapers to aid the United Charities Fund.  

In comparison, company policy directed that young male employees were to be made apprentices of Union Theatres, receiving instruction in all aspects of the exhibition side of the motion picture industry. Management proposed they progress to higher executive positions but, as individuals, they remained anonymous to the public. Their publicity related to duties and responsibilities as part of the whole "Attache Service". Nevertheless, thousands of young men applied for these positions and

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8 Olive Lavington, Vera Chapman, Phyllis Sherborne, Lois Reynolds, Eileen Boyd, Queenie Stanley and Eimee Mellyh were the finalists for the second week in March. SCC Archives: Capitol theatre information file. "This Week's page of Personalities." *Sunday News* 11 Mar. 1928: [n.p.].


10 Ted Henkel worked with Rose Day of the United Charities fund and with his partner Miss La Marr, was representing the theatre at the Capitol Ball at the Wentworth Hotel on Monday 3rd, September. Patrons were invited to meet the Capitol Ballet, Fred Scholl and "all the favourites of Filmland". CRS 840 B/13/19: Capitol theatre Artifacts: Agency Trevor Waters: Access No. A95/11. *Capitol News* No. 18, 4 Aug. 1928: 13, 17; *Capitol News* 28 Jul. 1928: 17.

successful applicants were chosen for their courtesy, thoughtfulness and smartness. Dressed in the company's stylish uniforms, they represented the theatre's management to patrons and were instructed to pay special attention to elderly persons, ladies and children.

Attaches undertaking the duties of car attendants were forbidden to take gratuities from patrons and this was included in advertisements in the *Capitol News* and the *Daily Guardian*. According to the company, all were well paid for this work.\(^{12}\) Attaches provided security for customers' vehicles within the company's own parking area, which accommodated a thousand cars and was situated diagonally opposite on Campbell Street within a hundred yards of the theatre's entrance.\(^{13}\)

Parking provision was only one aspect of Union Theatres' attempt to place the Capitol at an advantage over other city cinemas, facing problematic parking restrictions.\(^{14}\) Audiences travelling by public transport could arrive at the Capitol from all directions, because all forms of public transport were directed towards the centre of town, close to the theatre; a bus terminus was nearby and Central Railway was only a short walk away.\(^{15}\)

Meanwhile, Union Theatres engaged renowned international musicians, like Americans Ted Henkel and Fred Scholl and Englishman, Horace Sheldon. Through the

\(^{12}\) During the first few months after the theatre opened, advertisements for the Capitol in the *Daily Guardian* contained this information and map of its location.


Capitol News, they answered patrons’ questions and were given similar publicity to company’s female employees, also becoming special drawcards for the theatre. Each week Henkell composed music scores for the Capitol’s silent films and live presentations, and conducted the Capitol Orchestra and Capitol Unit Showband. Before his appointment at the Capitol he had been Musical Director at the Forum in Los Angeles.

In 1928, there were a number of orchestras in Australia, including the (Hoyts) Regent orchestra and (Union Theatres) State orchestra. However, Capitol management announced its theatre had the first stage band in the country. Initially, the company thought musicians familiar with this popular form of music would have to be brought from America, but Henkel worked with the Australian musicians, training them to play the new jazz style music. As a result he complimented the standards of musicianship that he found in Sydney, even of unemployed musicians he heard playing in the city streets.

Fred Scholl came from the prestigious Graumann’s Chinese and Egyptian Theatres in Hollywood and was engaged to play the Capitol’s Wurlitzer organ. Like Henkell, Scholl also had to devise a new musical program for the organ each week and invited audience members to request musical favourites. Patrons learned that he favoured Classical music, but did not often play it in his organ solos since patrons preferred Jazz. He said that Classics were generally unpopular and, after he played a

number of such compositions, the resultant long term loss of popularity was difficult to counter. Therefore, for any Classical piece to receive resounding applause in the theatre, it had to be accompanied by lighting effects, singers, and more; even then it was a gamble. Scholl found it necessary to assume the role of novelty organist, in the same class as a vaudeville artist, and play comic songs like "Is She My Girlfriend".19

Both Henkell and Scholl became representative of the city's popular culture through the pages of the Capitol News. Not only were audiences informed about Henkell's above-mentioned candidature in the popular Dancer's Contest but also about his opinions on sport. He believed golf played to music improved a person's golfing skills by 100 per cent.20 (After the introduction of sound films, he went on to lead popular dance orchestras in New Zealand in 1929 and at the Palais Royal in Melbourne around 1932.)21 Photographs in the Capitol News showed Scholl jumping rope at the theatre picnic and articles revealed he collected visual art forms, enjoyed painting, drawing and making caricatures of people around him.22

In September 1929, management announced the position of Director of Music was to be taken by Horace Sheldon,23 who had been at the London Palladium before coming to the Capitol24 and, like Henkell, supported the Jazz style. He saw it as in

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21 The *Capitol News*, no. 22, 1 Sep. 1928.

keeping with modern developments. Similarly, Manny Aarons, who had been the Musical Director for Sydney's Tivoli and Lyceum theatres, was to follow Fred Scholl as the Capitol's organist, playing the theatre's magnificent Wurlitzer organ, which is described later in this chapter.

Unfortunately, this policy of neighbourliness and courtesy initially evident in the *Capitol News*, was not emulated in later years.

The growing influence of "moving film exhibitions" in the popular entertainment industry caused Union Theatres and Hoyts Theatres to compete for the same public by building dedicated picture theatres. Exploiting the popular dance fad attracting the young flappers and their "beaus", the two major film exhibitors incorporated ballrooms into some cinemas, like the State and Cremorne's Orpheum. Because the Capitol was restricted by boundaries established more than a decade before, management countered this competition by arranging those dances and balls that are described above. This competition was heightened by the American based film distributors who sponsored movie balls and related entertainments, associating the film industry with this element of popular culture and the youthful population.

Hoyts was building the lavish Regent picture theatre, when work commenced on the Capitol and it became identified as the Capitol's competitor. It was a "hard topped"

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29 Barbara Cameron, "The Flappers and Feminists." Margaret Bevege, Margaret James, Carmel Shute (ed.) *Worth Her Salt: Women at Work in Australia* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1982) 260.
theatre built in Renaissance style and Hoyts meant to create an impression of "culture" within its walls. The lighting on the auditorium's domed ceiling gave the impression of sunrise and night skies (a similar illusion to that used in the atmospheric theatres like the Capitol) and its circle foyer accommodated hundreds of dancers. The Regent opened only a few weeks before the Capitol and, in December 1928, it and the Lyceum theatre premiered the first full length, "talkie" film, The Jazz Singer.

Unwilling to allow its rival to dominate the industry, Union Theatres undertook its own building program. Within a comparatively short construction time, the Capitol opened on Easter Saturday (7th April 1928) and was followed within the year by the opening of its commercial "Skyscraper Gothic" tower housing a modern shopping block and Gothic style State theatre. Due to management preferences and publicity, the State was to have a greater impact on the fortunes of the Capitol than the Regent.

Union Theatres described the Capitol as the "magnificent shrine of the silent art" and identified the ceiling as the "most striking feature of the Capitol." Its dusky blue sky contained a thousand frosty stars with passing veils of mist reinforcing this

30 Tulloch, 20.
31 Collins, 112-3.
32 "Tempting Theatrical Fare Offered for the Holiday." Daily Telegraph Pictorial (DT) 7 Apr. 1928: 5.
34 Collins, 121-2.
36 This colour may have been made with Reckitts Blue and egg white CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Harry M. Miller to Under Secretary, 20 Apr. 1972.
outdoor illusion. Contemporary authorities have stated that it is not clear if the 'stars' formed any specific pattern, but Capitol News stated it was the Mediterranean sky over the Italian theatre set below. In today's building, it is an accurate replica of the southern celestial hemisphere.

Audiences experienced the illusion of sitting in a Italian courtyard garden surrounded by balconies and terraces. Creepers were intertwined in the internal architecture and other forms of live vegetation were interspersed with replicas of priceless works of art and tapestries around the auditorium walls. Atmospheric lighting subtly softened to a sunset afterglow as the audience for each session settled into their seats and it continued changing to a starlit night sky. The lighting equipment, which created this illusion of a changing sky and other special effects, had been shipped to Australia with the theatre's statuary. Announcing its arrival, the Sydney Morning Herald listed four cloud making machines, 500 star twinkling machines and 120 spotlights in the inventory. One of these spotlights was a naval spotlight.

Arriving at the Capitol, patrons bought tickets from the central ornate ticket box in the elaborate atmospheric main foyer and proceeded into the theatre. As they did so, they passed gilded, wrought iron gates set into the "outer walls" of a Florentine

39 SCC Archives: Capitol theatre information folder. Capitol News [n.d.] "A Florentine Garden Under a Moonlit Sky: This Treasure House is a Veritable Palace of Dreams Come True".
courtyard. These gates were exact reproductions of the gates at the Pitti Palace in Florence and appeared to show the way to marble fountains spraying jets of crystal water, which caught the sparkle of moonlight. Once inside the auditorium, patrons walked on the Capitol's rich velvety carpets. Woven in England, these carpets were patterned to represent lichen touched flagstones; tiny red flowers crept from the cracks between the warm pinks, yellows and fawns of shaped sandstone. Velvet covered seats complimented the carpet colour. They were designed to be as comfortable as lounge chairs and staff could remove the covers for cleaning.

Lounge chairs in the Dress Circle were replicas of those on the magnificent Roxy theatre in New York. These 1,550 lounge chair seats cost four times more than seats in any other theatre in Sydney; the company claimed even the less expensive and elaborate seats in the stalls were superior to seats elsewhere in the city. All seats within the stalls had a clear view of the stage, because steel girders made the Dress Circle self supporting and relieved the stalls of any obstructive posts. Some of these steel girders weighed over forty tons.

Decorative architecture along the auditorium's eastern wall leading to the proscenium wall recreated the medieval garden wall in the manner chosen by the Medieval Italian noble family, the Guelfs. Their distinctive structures contrasted from

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44 *DT* 9 Apr. 1928: 5. In the 1990s restoration, an original piece of carpet was analysed by computers and the original design and colours recreated in the new carpet. An estimated forty-eight colours were used. Trevor Waters, *Tours of Capitol*.


46 SCC Archives: Capitol theatre information file. *Capitol News* [n.d.]: 4-5.
those of their rivals, the Ghibellines, whose Venetian palace facade was echoed on the western wall of the theatre's auditorium.

Colours used in the theatre's auditorium and foyers and recreated both the vivid and gentle colours of nature that were popular in Italy during this era. Elaborate, twisted, carved columns were painted in strong reds, greens and gold, joined by raw ochres, rich yellows and old ivory round the walls, and terra cotta red in the tiled and gabled roof of a Florentine villa (over the proscenium arch). All colours challenged the traditional harmonious colours used in the city's other theatres.

They were not the colours darkened with time that became analogous with the Capitol decades later but pale luminescent paints that derived clarity from their natural bases. Egg whites and laundry blue were used in the paint for the ceilings, while beer based and milk based paints covered the walls and other strong coloured, decorative elements. The artificial snow white doves caught colours of twilight lighting and green vegetation provided a contrast for the ivory statues.

Replica artworks for the Capitol had been shipped to Australia from John Eberson's company in the United States of America and the Sydney Morning Herald heralded their arrival by listing these 'treasures': Ajax, Venus Melos, Diana robing, Apollo and The Wolf of the Capitol (as mentioned above) with Romulus and Remus, Minerva, Venus of Capua, Julius Caesar, Amazonian Venus, bas reliefs, medallions and

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47 Rival Medieval Italian families, the "Guelphs" and the "Ghibellines" were politically opposed and supported either the pope or the Emperor. Reader's Digest Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary vol. 1, (Sydney: Reader's Digest Association Pty. Ltd., 164) 367, 387; CRS 840 B/13/19: Capitol theatre Artefacts: Capitol News 9 Jun. 1928: 9.


urns of different shapes and sizes.\textsuperscript{50} Even Union Theatres' management published its first issue of its publication, \textit{Capitol News} before the opening night to stimulate interest in the theatre building, its plaster statues and where the original models could be found.\textsuperscript{51}

Two examples of these statues still standing in their original positions on the western wall of the auditorium are the "Capitoline She Wolf" and "Appollo Belvedere".\textsuperscript{52} The \textit{Capitol News} advised patrons that their marble originals could be found at the Palazzo dei Conservatori and the Vatican, respectively. Other statues represented in the Capitol's plaster collection, could be discovered in the collections of the Museum of Santa Maria del Fiore, the Louvre, the Vienna and Berlin Art Galleries, representative of the world's famous galleries.\textsuperscript{53}

Subtitled "Eight pages of interesting details concerning the Capitol theatre that is to be your new movie home",\textsuperscript{54} this first issue of the \textit{Capitol News} added:

Magnificent objects of art in beaten silver and gold and rich tapestries (which) find a place on the gorgeous decorative scheme. White pigeons flutter to a


\textsuperscript{52} "Know Your Own Theatre." \textit{Capitol News} 1 Sep. 1928: 6: M.L. 791.4305/5.


\textsuperscript{54} SCC Archives: Capitol theatre information folder. \textit{Capitol News} [n.d.] "A Florentine Garden Under a Moonlit Sky: This Treasure House is a Veritable Palace of Dreams Come True"
resting place with love birds in the foliage of cypress trees. Peacocks proudly (display) their brilliant plumage to the idler.\textsuperscript{55}

In addition, the magazine invited each potential patron to:

Imagine yourself seated in a beautiful old world Florentine garden. Above, the blue Mediterranean sky. Stars twinkle. Clouds float by as if in silent admiration of the beauty encased in those creeper-clad palace walls below. ... For a dream palace that came true is embodied in the opening of Australia's greatest theatre.\textsuperscript{56}

Standing at the south-east corner of the auditorium was a small round temple housing the statue of Bacchus with a young satyr.\textsuperscript{57} Henry White's plans for this temple and Proscenium Arch indicate these elements may have been built in Australia. These plans bore the name and lion symbol of John Eberson's company and associated it with Henry White's company in this Capitol theatre project.\textsuperscript{58} They were the only plans to link these two companies.

Combined with the theatre's visual elements, the atmosphere was enhanced by gentle zephyrs of air moving inside the auditorium. This atmosphere originated with a gigantic volume of forced air moving through progressively reduced air-ducts until the perfumed air entered the auditorium through very fine, imperceptible outlets.\textsuperscript{59} This air was humidified and cooled by two separate plenum fans with an air-conditioning plant that was situated on the building's roof, while exhaust fans situated in the basement and

\textsuperscript{55} SCC Archives: Capitol theatre information folder. \textit{Capitol News} [n.d.]: 1.

\textsuperscript{56} SCC Archives: Capitol theatre information folder. \textit{Capitol News} [n.d.]: 1.

\textsuperscript{57} D.2 in Annexure B, included in the Deed of Lease in 1975. CRS 50 DP 316: Deed Packet. Council of the City of Sydney - one part, and Hoyts Theatres - other part: Deed of Lease, 2 Oct. 1975.


under the theatre's seats removed stale air. Management likened the movement of the Capitol's air to a typhoon that was broken down, explaining that 220,000 cubic feet of air per minute moved through what it described as a "state of the art" ventilation system.60

One of the plenum fans was linked to an ioniser and essential oil plant, which filtered perfumed air into the rear of the auditorium through vines interwoven in the pergola. This was intended to add to the audiences' comfort and contentment, especially in summer months.61 Despite this latest technology, the Chief Secretary's Department would not issue a full licence until a full test of the ventilation was undertaken to see whether it conformed to the Act.62

Shipped separately to Australia from the statuary and lighting, was the largest Wurlitzer Organ outside the United States. Originally commissioned by Rudolf Wurlitzer, this instrument utilised the inventions of Englishman, Robert Hope-Jones, who was accredited with every major advances in tone and sound production in the previous twenty years.63 The white organ had three manuals and fifteen racks of pipes and cost the company 21,000 pounds. When it was installed in the Capitol, its main pipework was located behind the Venetian Palace on the western wall, its solo pipework was built into the Florentine temple opposite and the massive diaphone


pipes were put into the space above the ceiling, where they resonated throughout the auditorium. Deep, base-tone resonances and stereo effect were complimented by the organ's sweet sounds, which were produced by the organ's Vox Humana and the Tibia Clausa.

This Wurlitzer could produce 173 different orchestral effects and was capable of imitating all sounds made by animals and birds, as well as recreating the screaming human voice. Under the expert playing of Fred Scholl, the organ could represent cavalry by the sounds of the horses' hoofbeats in a mad gallop, a clash of arms and the rattle of soldiers and horses' accoutrements; crowd scenes began with a subdued murmur, growing in volume until it reached a deafening roar. Sounds of nature, like the rush of surf on a tropical beach or the reverberation of crashing thunder in a violent storm, were all within the scope of the organ. Once Scholl reproduced the sound of the human voice to settle a domestic argument of two theatre patrons, by playing "Thanks for the Buggy Ride".

Entering the theatre on opening night, the first audience reacted to the theatre by applauding. Their plaudits were soon transferred to the proceedings of the evening, beginning with the opening speeches followed by live entertainment and films. Chief Commissioner, E. P. Fleming praised the venture undertaken by Australians; acknowledged the pleasure that people were to experience in the theatre; expressed pride for Council’s link to the theatre; then commended the financial commitment of

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64 These measured 32 foot (9.74 metres). It's Capitol, 11.
65 The first Wurlitzer organ had been developed in 1914 for use with silent films and the arrival of any of these theatre organs in Australia was a source for considerable media and public interest. CRS 840 B/13/19: Capitol theatre Artifacts: Accession Number A95/11: Box 4: Capitol News, 28 Jul. 1928: 15; Collins, 95-8.
the 150,000 pounds spent on the building by Stuart Doyle and his company. (Fleming had recently been appointed in place of the Municipal Council.)

Fleming was followed by American Ted Henkel and the musicians of the Capitol Orchestra and Showband, Fred Scholl on the magnificent organ and the Capitol Ballet presented the musical and variety items. Two short documentary films were screened in the first half of the program and the feature film, His Lady, followed the interval. (This is covered in more detail in Appendix G.)

After the Capitol was opened to the public, management and staff conducted public tours of the building each morning at 10.30 a.m. to enable patrons to view its art "treasures". Management made it known that these pieces had cost the company more than 50,000 pounds to create and acquire.

Subsequently, Capitol Theatre (Sydney) ran four continuous sessions from Monday to Saturday. Officially, the early morning shoppers' session commenced at 11.00 a.m. and shoppers were offered "a delightful rest after milady's busy bargaining." Like the afternoon's five-o'clock Intermediate Session, this session limited entertainment to films with musical accompaniment on the Wurlitzer organ, provided by either Fred Scholl or Les Waldron in 1928. The afternoon session catered for patrons, who had remained in the city after work, and out-of-town residents, who

68 DT 9 Apr. 1928: 5.
70 The Capitol News 22, 1 Sep. 1928.
needed to consider transport logistics.

In comparison, the (earlier) Afternoon de Luxe Session\(^22\) and the Evening de Luxe Session presented the full Capitol Entertainment Unit in a complete live variety program. It consisted of the theatre's thirty man orchestra and a stage band of twenty musicians, both led by Ted Henkel; the Capitol Ballet; various guest stars and Fred Scholl on the Wurlitzer organ.\(^73\) Like the organ console, the theatre's orchestra made a "grand entry" being raised by hydraulic lifts.\(^74\)

The policy of continuous screening often caused queuing, as patrons entered and departed at any time during the day. Individuals often remained to see and hear items they had missed, or differing entertainment and support features in subsequent sessions. Meanwhile, problems linked to continuous screening were caused by patrons delaying their departure until after the beginning of the next session while people waited for their seats. The latter stood at the back of the auditorium, then, guided by staff they moved down side aisles and waited against the walls for seats to be vacated.\(^75\) Consequently, complaints of overcrowding were made to the Licensing Police and Chief Secretary's Department who were forced to investigate. The situation of blocked aisles also led to amendments to theatre regulations, which all theatre managements were to observe.\(^76\)

In September 1929, Capitol management forewarned audiences of its intention

\(^{72}\) Commencing at 2.15 p.m.


\(^{74}\) CRS 170/22: *Vade Mecum* 1929, 175-6.

\(^{75}\) CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Memo, Under Secretary to Metropolitan Police, 22 Oct. 1928; Two Reports, Licensing Police, 26 Oct. 1928.

\(^{76}\) CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Under Secretary to Secretary, Union Theatres, 12 Nov. 1928.
to introduce Cinesound, the latest sound-film technology, together with its companion projection equipment, Cinegrand. Management said this technology was exclusive to Union Theatres and it projected film onto the screen measuring 40 feet wide by 20 feet (12 metres by 6 metres) high. Its lifelike pictures were filmed with a specially built camera using 56 mm film, which required specially constructed heads, capable of housing this larger film, to be attached to existing projectors. Management also announced that this innovation was to be followed by another, Magnascope.77

Although Capitol News reported the proposed introduction of innovative sound equipment would compensate for the loss of captions used in silent films, it disadvantaged deaf patrons. As a result, Doyle proposed the installation of headphones and specially designed acoustic equipment for use by deaf patrons. Similar equipment had been successfully tested in Canada and the United States of America78 and Capitol News reassured these patrons that other deaf people had already tried and used the apparatus, finding it very helpful. By September 1928, except for local advertising, the regular cooking, fashion and local content articles in the Capitol News were replaced with anecdotes about the American stars of current and coming films, as well as information about promised attractions.79 This emphasises American influence on the theatre's management at that time.

Within a short time of the Capitol opening, an impressive number of international film distributors signed exclusive contracts with Union Theatres and the


79 Various issues of the Capitol News in the Sydney City Council Archives and Mitchell Library collections.
Capitol management announced it would be presenting the best and most recent films from important producers. They named First National Pictures, Paramount Pictures, DeMille, Master Pictures, United Artists Attractions, Universal Super-Jewels and P.D.C. Pictures. Both Greater Union Theatres and Hoyts were experiencing pressure from the local industry, politicians and legal commissions to show British and Australian films, which were also seeking to influence government to introduce a quota system.

Except for the Australian Cinesound Newsreels, the production company with which Stuart Doyle was associated, Australian films were not even considered for the Capitol until On Our Selection premiered in 1931. It was shown for an unprecedented three weeks, breaking with the Capitol management's policy of only screening films for one week. Later in 1932, when Greater Union Theatres and Hoyts Theatres formed their partnership, General Theatres Corporation, many more Australian and British films were introduced to Capitol audiences. Unfortunately, even this newly formed company sought to monopolise Australian film exhibition by emulating American business practices.

Doyle's diverse interests led him to lose control of Greater Union Theatres, the company he founded. In addition to his involvement with Union Theatres and Greater Union Theatres, he was Managing Director of Australasian Films and director of eight

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82 The two original companies remained intact as branches of this company, with the management of each being retained to manage each branch. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Company correspondence during these years.
84 Bertrand, 58.
related companies; he became Managing Director of Cinesound Productions and, with Sir Benjamin and John Fuller, founded the Australasian Broadcasting Company (which later became the Australian Broadcasting Commission under the Federal Government). This partnership then established the Commonwealth Broadcasting Corporation, of which station 2UW was a part. Doyle's business interests expanded internationally, particularly in Britain.85

In relation to the Capitol audiences, agreeable experiences of the Capitol are the fabric of most people's elusive memories and oral history; they contrast with the complaints and infringements that remain recorded in department archives. One such complaint was made by the Secretary of Harmony Lodge No. 48, a branch of the International Order of Good Templars and investigated by the Chief Secretary's Department.86

On the Friday preceding Christmas in 1931, Mrs. Rolfe visited the Capitol to enjoy an evening's entertainment. Before the evening session began, she saw the Capitol management and the proprietors of McWilliams wines present patrons "young and old" with small bottles of McWilliams Port as they departed from the theatre. As an office bearer of the local temperance branch she was alarmed at the prospect of any harm coming to the patrons and, at the insistence of her Lodge, she wrote to the Chief Secretary's Department about the matter.87

The incident had been part of a publicity campaign, where seven to eight

86 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Mrs. M. Rolfe, Secretary of Harmony Lodge No. 48, to Chief Secretary, 23 Dec. 1931.
87 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Mrs. M. Rolfe, Secretary of Harmony Lodge No. 48, to Chief Secretary, 23 Dec. 1931.
thousand bottles were presented to adults as they left the theatre after specified sessions. According to the subsequent report, patrons received the offending bottles as they left the vestibule but before they stepped onto the footpath. Because of this technicality, the investigating Sergeant believed that no Act or Regulation had been broken. However, after some discussions between a number of senior police, the matter was left to the Under Secretary for determination. Acting on Regulation 107 (a), which stated that "no person shall take spirituous or other alcoholic liquors or beverages into any licensed theatre or public hall while open to the public", he found that a breach had occurred.

Earlier in the year a more serious infringement occurred at the theatre. Trespassers had entered the building by way of the private laneway and a grating on the passageway roof. Once inside they opened the doors to the exits to allow their companions to enter. Consequently, theatre staff secured the two affected exits with chains and padlocks, which was against regulations. As with many theatres, unlawful entry and efforts to prevent it became a constant problem.

During these early years, the variety of programs presented in the Capitol echoed the way its interior combined different architectural decorative styles. Based on an American design concept, these styles included Marocain adornment blended with Classical Greek statues arrayed on Florentine and Venetian facades. In the same way, Capitol programs linked fantasy and documentary films with live music and dance

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entertainments and pantomime.

Opening night speakers praised the theatre building, its management and ownership as being a total Australian venture. However, while the company and theatre were Australian, the influence from America is evident in its architecture, the company's employment policies and program format and content, even to the dominance of American film over the Australian product. The "Jazz Age" and "flapper" were drawn from American films including those shown in the Capitol. Fashions were modelled on those paraded in American moving pictures; Capitol dances and balls gave young men and women the chance to practise 'Jazz Age' dance steps that were in vogue and drawn from the same pictures. People from all social and income levels were fascinated with the Capitol, "Australia's Greatest Theatre".

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91 Tulloch, 19-20, 22.


93 Tulloch, 14-5, 25, 61.

94 Cameron, 260.

95 This became the company motto for the Capitol and it was used on signs, in advertising and on the cover of the *Capitol News*. 
Young soldier flogging war bonds during war years: Sam Hood Collection, Mitchell Library, reprinted by Playbill for Capitol Theatre, Sydney
Parker and Hay Street Corner of Capitol, display cases containing posters (c. 1940s), Stage Door. Shows original stone plinths from market building, which remain in place in restored building. Sam Hood Collection, Mitchell Library.
Chapter 7

A Period of Uncertainty: Reaching Maturity

Uncertainty and disruption — the turbulent war years created uncertainty not only for the nation but also for the security of the Capitol theatre. Political rivalries active within the elected body of the Municipal Council of Sydney, challenged the theatre lessees' security of tenure and representatives of the lessee were content to use this tenuous situation to avoid maintaining the building according to the company's obligations under their lease agreements. Lease conditions were constantly revised with each new lease and the regulations governing the theatre's licence were regularly amended. Paradoxically, in years to come, the Chief Secretary's Department failed to assert its authority under the relevant Act, or to ensure the lessee's compliance with certain safety regulations.

At a national level, the Federal Government passed legislation to regulate property matters and the film industry. The National Security Act No. 15 of 1939 had a long term affect on the Capitol theatre well after the end of the war. It hampered Council's administration of the building and, after its responsibilities were transferred to State Governments, it became more commonly known as the Landlord and Tenants Act.

Changes were brought about in the cinema industry during the Second World War. Allied servicemen (many of whom were stationed in the Pacific) visited Australia on leave. When compared with their Australian counterparts, they had more disposable money and anecdotal reports have stated that tensions often erupted between the two groups. Cinemas were among the many businesses to take advantage of the influx of

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these visitors and began to operate on Sundays. These early years of the 1940s brought a prosperous revival for many cinemas that was unequalled since the introduction of sound.

However, frequent wartime blackouts left audiences in darkened theatres waiting for interrupted film programs to continue and wartime film content encompassed the extremes of escapism and documentary reality. The escapism catered for audiences who preferred to avoid harsh reality, while documentaries provided the latest film footage from the distant "theatres of war". Despite their propaganda content, these documentaries gave people some idea of conditions and events experienced by the Australian Armed Forces stationed overseas.

As in the First World War, Australian authorities favoured propaganda films and newsreels as a means of documenting the situation, which prompted the formation of the National Film Council. This body advised the Federal Labor Government on many aspects of the Australian film industry and exhibition. Nevertheless, American films still dominated programs in Australian cinemas, especially in those picture theatres owned or managed by the two large exhibitor chains, Greater Union Theatres and Hoyts Theatres. Newspaper advertisements for the Capitol theatre programs highlight this.

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2 O'Brien, 86-7.
3 While the Capitol's receipts increased, no comparable repair work was undertaken on the building or its equipment. Ian Hanson, "Sydney Capitol: From Market, Circus and Theatre. Part 5." Kino No. 27, Mar. 1989: 19-21.
5 O'Brien, 88.
6 O'Brien, 86.
7 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Sun 22 Mar. 1944: [n.p.].
Under the wartime regulations, the Federal Treasurer, Ben Chifley, was required to give permission for the sale or changing the lease of any property. This directly affected proposals for the Capitol and, in 1944, resulted in a bitter debate about its future. When, in 1942, Greater Union Theatres applied to renew its lease for a further two years, it did not encounter any difficulty. However, in October of the following year, when the company applied to renew its lease well before the current one expired, its own attitude was bombastic and it encountered opposition from Council.

Stanley S. Crick, formerly the Managing Director of Hoyts theatres and also associated with management of Fox Films, was the Lord Mayor of Sydney in 1942 when there was no question about renewing the theatre's lease. In the period between 1942 and 1944 there were changes to the franchise and voting regulations leading to a change in the Sydney Municipal Council, Crick was no longer Lord Mayor and was now opposed to Greater Union Theatres retaining the theatre's lease.

Percy Dive, the Secretary of the company, assertively and incorrectly claimed in his application for the new lease that his company had been the Capitol's tenant for seventeen years. He wanted an early reply to enable his company to program ahead

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12 The City Solicitor advised the Building Surveyor that a search of documents had revealed that Capitol Theatre (Sydney) and Greater Union Theatres were separate and distinct companies. CRS 34: TC 2510A/43: Capitol theatre: National Security (Economic Organisation) Regulations. Minute Paper City Architect and Building Surveyor, 26 Jun. 1944.
and, on its behalf, stated "we would also point out that it has been our policy to maintain the theatre in the highest preservation and the matter receives our constant care". However, the condition of the theatre was challenged in Council.

Even the Chief Secretary's Department had received a complaint about the condition of the theatre in 1941. A medical student and a friend were bitten a number of times by bed bugs, which he identified as "Cimex Lectularius". This complaint and another made to the theatre's management, caused the company to take action two days before the department's inspection. The latter took place eleven days after the complaint and revealed ample evidence of the vermin. Meanwhile, theatre management arranged an improved cleaning routine and commenced eradication procedures.

Hoping to obtain a greater monetary return from its theatre building, Alderman Crick's challenge led Council to engage the services of Real Estate Agents and Valuers, Richardson and Wrench, and R. V. Dimond and Chartered Accountants and Actuary, E. S. Wolfenden. These consultants as a body, were to submit a report and valuation on the Capitol, which Council intended to use in a reassessment of the future management of the property. At the same time, Alderman O'Dea argued that Council should ascertain its legal position before undertaking any debate on the matter and

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15 The company increased its cleaning staff from 3 to 15, and the theatre cleaning hours were now from 11.00pm to 8.00am. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Report, Inspector, Office of the Director of Public Health, Mar. 1941.
16 SCC Archives: PC 1943, 259-60.
concerns expressed in the meetings prompted Sydney Municipal Council to seek legal advice before the Finance Committee made its final recommendations.  

It is obvious that rivalries from the film exhibition industry intruded into Council's decisions during these fiery debates, which were reported in most of the city's newspapers. Alderman Crick was influenced by his previous involvement with Hoyts Theatres; Alderman Armstrong abstained from voting on the issue of the Capitol lease because he was an Alternate Director of the parent company, Greater Union Theatres, and had investments in Melbourne. He feared these would be seen as a conflict of interest and, indeed, one newspaper later questioned his interests in relation to matters concerning the Capitol.

Stanley Crick criticised Greater Union Theatres' monopoly of the Capitol and that the theatre's rental had not increased from "125 pounds per week". This was rental set in 1937, when the new five-year lease was granted. Further, Crick believed that, by placing the theatre's lease on the current open commercial market, Council would

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21 Armstrong was the Alternate Director of Greater Union Theatres, in place of Melbourne based H. Sherlock, and held a large number of shares in Amalgamated Pictures. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. "Growing Interest in Theatre Lease." Truth 19 Mar. 1944: [n.p.].


23 While it was reported that the rental for the theatre was 125 pounds, according to the lease agreement signed on 16th June 1937, Greater Union Theatres paid an annual rental of 6,760 pounds at 130 pounds per week, paid in advance. When the lease was renewed in September 1942, the rental and conditions remained the same, but for only a two year term. CRS 50 DP 316: Deed Packet. The Municipal Council of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Limited, Lease of Capitol theatre, 16 Jun 1937; The Municipal Council of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Ltd, Lease of Capitol theatre, 24 Sep. 1942.
likely attract a rental up to 300 pounds. He pressed his colleagues to call for immediate
tenders for the Capitol's lease.24

Alternately, he proposed that Council invite tenders for longer leases of five, ten
or fifteen years duration25 and, in the meantime, demand a rental of at least 150 pounds
per week from Greater Union Theatres for a shorter lease. This short tenancy would
allow Council to explore other options for the building during this tenancy.

Crick's opinions and another similar motion tabled by the Civic Reform
Aldermen, attracted bitter criticism from the Labor Aldermen, who considered it unfair
to the present lessees to throw them out after they had built up the business. Finally, the
decision was split according to Political Party numbers.26

In November 1943, the Civic Reform moved to gain a realistic valuation of the
Capitol's lease27 and the consultants' report (mentioned above) was tabled. Alderman
Crick challenged the report's estimated valuation of the Capitol's refurbishment.28
Valuations placed the cost of refurbishing the Capitol at 80,000 pounds,29 which
Alderman Crick contrasted with work done on a recently refurbished Victorian (Hoyts)
cinema. (The latter had cost only two-thirds of the amount quoted for the Capitol.)

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24 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. DM 23 Feb 1944: [n.p.].
25 SCC Archives: PC 1944, 46, 171.
27 SCC Archives: PC 1943: 259-60.
28 Crick based his objections on his years with the Hoyts chain of cinemas.
Subsequent Council meetings continued in agitated debate as motions were passed and promptly rescinded. Uproar peaked when three Civic Reform Aldermen voted with their Labor opposition to defeat these motions, enabling Greater Union Theatres to remain in the theatre. During the Council debate it was disclosed that Warner Bros. [sic], the American film distributor, had written to the City Council to inquire about the theatre's lease. It was well known that this company was seeking to establish a venue for its films in Sydney.

Council also received other enquiries about the theatre's lease, prompted by newspaper reports about the theatre's tenancy, but these were not included in Proceedings of Council or reported in newspapers. These "Expressions of Interest" came from H. S. Lean of Fuller Theatres, Ronn Shafto of Newtown Majestic, Garnett H. Carroll of Melbourne's Princess Theatre, Harry Wren of the Theatre Royal in Adelaide, H. R. Kitching of Newcastle's Trocadero, Euston M. Greene Concert Management and from serviceman S. Platt of the Stationary Unit of the New Guinea Forces.

Alderman O'Dea, who had earlier proposed the theatre should become a Civic Theatre, announced he would seek clarification from the Treasurer regarding the
provisions established under the *National Security Act*\(^\text{35}\) and, accordingly, enquiries were initiated but the outcome was not recorded in available documents.\(^\text{36}\)

This Act pegged property rents to that paid in 1939 and prevented them from being forcibly increased. It also determined whether or not properties could be sold.\(^\text{37}\)

Nevertheless, Aldermen raised an alternative proposal a fortnight later - the possible sale of the Capitol's freehold.\(^\text{38}\) An architect with Sydney Municipal Council, A. Smillie, immediately met with the Chief Secretary's Architect, W. Mandelson, to discuss the matter. They raised concerns about the advisability of subdividing of the Manning Square block,\(^\text{39}\) particularly with regard to the private lane between the site's two buildings.

Because the boundary of the Capitol site encompassed two corners of a city block, Mandelson found that need for a courtyard was reduced but new exits leading directly to Campbell and Hay Streets would be needed. Smillie told him that the enquiry was an unofficial one and work was not expected to take place before the end of the war. As a result, neither government body took further action on the matter.

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36 CRS 34: TC 788/44: *National Security (Economic Organization) Regulation Amendments*. Transfer and extension of lease of property; Effect on transactions to which Council is a party. Regulation 6; Letter, M. W. McIntyre, City Solicitor to Town Clerk, 8 May 1944.


38 SCC Archives: PC 1944, 46.

Under this proposal, the Capitol site posed a number of other difficulties. Regardless of the ramifications of the federal wartime legislation, the physical boundaries under State Government legislation prevented any sale of the property. Complications arose concerning the common eastern wall of the theatre that was shared with the adjacent Manning Building, as well as the theatre's eastern lavatories and private laneway into which a number of exits led. The latter elements were situated on the Manning Building property and outside the boundary of the area proposed to be sold. Consequently, any potential purchaser would not be able to comply with any *Theatres and Public Halls Regulations* related to toilet facilities and emergency exits.\(^{40}\)

In addition, cinematic and theatrical equipment in the Capitol was the property of the lessees and could not be included in the sale. Therefore, this further reduced the theatre's ability to be a functioning and efficient theatre and the venue's value for future lessees or purchasers. In the unlikely event that sale of the theatre was approved by the Federal Treasurer, an eventual owner would find the costs of necessary extensive refurbishment of the Capitol to be excessive. Furthermore, they would exceed limits set by Federal Government and not be approved under the same federal legislation, the *National Security Act No. 15 of 1939*.\(^{41}\)

The Department of War Organisation of Industry was responsible for administering the wartime regulations and its aim was to support the nation's overseas

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war effort, by the strict control of resources and manpower in Australia. It rarely consented to any extensive work and expenditure like that being proposed for the Capitol. Consequently, due to these wartime regulations, arguments in Council were redundant and neither increased rental nor proposed sale ever took place. Although the legislation was later relaxed, the situation remained constant during the remaining years that Greater Union Theatres occupied the building.

Influences from the State and Commonwealth legislation on the future of the Capitol are particularly evident in November 1943, following the company's application to renew the lease (mentioned above). The City Solicitor advised the City Council that the regulations of the "National Security (Landlord and Tenant's) Act" did not apply to the Capitol and that the City Council was free under the Act's provisions to call for tenders, to extend the term of the lease and to increase the rental. This opinion was confirmed after the Act was amended in March 1944. However, on the 9th June 1944, State Government again amended their legislation and revoked those conditions that favoured Council. Revised regulations pegged rentals to that being paid in 1939 and this fell within the term of the theatre's second lease. Consequently, these amended

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42 The department was created in June 1941 and was abolished in July 1945. During the war years, the department worked closely with the Manpower Directorate and its powers stemmed from the Control of Essential Materials (Goods) and the Control of Essential Materials (Production). *The Australian Encyclopaedia* vol. IX, 504.

43 CRS 34: TC 2510/43: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper City Solicitor, M. D. McIntyre, 19 Nov. 1943.

44 The National Security (Economic Organisation) Regulation Amendments were published in the *Commonwealth Gazette* on the 21st March 1944. Whereupon, the City Solicitor confirmed his opinion that the theatre's lease fell under Regulation 6, Sub-regulation 2, Paragraph (a) of the regulations. CRS 34: TC 2510/43: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper City Solicitor, 8 Jun. 1944.
conditions obstructed the City Council's freedom to act in relation to the theatre.\textsuperscript{45}

Greater Union Theatres' existing lease expired on the 13th June 1944 (four days after the crucial amendments) and, as a result of these changes, the company was able to retain its lease with the same terms and conditions as before. Nevertheless, it allowed Council to reduce the term of the lease to eighteen months.

Possibly fearing the company would not be granted a new lease in 1944, Greater Union Theatres prepared to completely strip the theatre should it be required to vacate the building and it claimed virtually everything except 2,070 chairs. Only entitled to remove the removable fittings and furnishings that it had brought into the theatre, the company claimed many fixtures. This claim included the hydraulic mechanism of the orchestra pit, the fireproof curtain and its electrical operating gear, six tons of balance weights, stage curtains and scenery, the sprinkler systems, the entire ventilation plant, all fire hydrants and hoses, the battery systems for the emergency lighting and the ejector pump for the pit, as well as all the statues and moveable pedestals.\textsuperscript{46} Many of these items replaced those that Union Theatres had removed from the Hippodrome during the initial alterations (refer to Chapter 4).

The City Solicitor and City Building Surveyor advised Council that the company was only entitled to remove those furnishings and fittings that Greater Union Theatres had brought onto the premises since its occupation of the building. According to Council records, this company's lease and tenancy officially commenced on the 1st

\textsuperscript{45} Regulation 5 of the updated amendments most affected the security of the Capitol. CRS 34: TC 2510/43: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper City Solicitor, M. W. D. McIntyre, 20 Jun. 1944.

\textsuperscript{46} CRS 34: TC 2510/43: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper City Building Surveyor, 15 Dec. 1943.
September 1933⁴⁷ and, they said, this excluded anything introduced by Wirths "should anything remain on the premises". However, there had been no interruption in the occupancy of the theatre, when the lease was transferred from Capitol Theatre (Sydney) to the new lessee, Greater Union Theatres, making it harder to identify the company's property.⁴⁸

Similarly, the City Solicitor and the City Building Surveyor had difficulty in clearly defining what was a fixture and what was a fitting. The City Solicitor defined this according to whether these items were fixed to the structure in such a way that some degree of damage would occur should they be removed.⁴⁹ Under the building's lease, when it expired, the lessee was required to leave the building in good tenantable repair. Moreover, the City Building Surveyor considered carpets, statues and furniture were fixtures in the building and had been brought to the premises by a prior lessee. Therefore, Greater Union Theatres had no right of ownership over them.⁵⁰ Once the lessee retained the occupancy of the theatre, the matter was left in abeyance until the company finally vacated the theatre in 1972.

Despite retaining its tenancy of the Capitol, Greater Union Theatres did remove all the superficial decorations, such as banners, tapestries and artificial foliage that were first introduced to the theatre in 1927. Workmen cut the wiring to all lighting effects equipment, which could no longer operate because the company had allowed it to fall


⁴⁹ CRS 34: TC 2510/43: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper City Solicitor, 31 May 1944.

into a state of disrepair. Lack of maintenance caused the theatre to be closed briefly early in 1945 to allow repairs. Afterwards, the company re-opened the Capitol as a "first release" film house for a short time but the theatre no longer presented the "image" of a superior film house.

In July 1945, Greater Union Theatres installed a new non-flammable Cinematograph Screen. It replaced the theatre's Mason and Hart screen, which had only been positioned in the building in February 1940. However, a report of a theatre inspection undertaken in 1950, stated the new Brakelite Cinematograph Screen was installed in February 1946. As no other screen was installed in the meantime, this may have been the date of the department's first inspection of the screen.

A proposal was made to the City Council, during March 1944, to use the theatre for short periods of "flesh and blood" shows. These entertainments were to include grand opera, music concerts and drama. Although Council did not act on the suggestion, this proposal resurfaced several times over the years.

A bogus writer was the next applicant to take up this theme. Edward Coak [sic] purported to be the Honorary Secretary of the Australian National Theatre

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51 Hanson, Part 5, 19-21.
52 Hanson, Part 5, 19-21.
53 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre File. Letter, S. L. Anderson, Under Secretary to Secretary of Greater Union Theatres, 2 Jul. 1945; Certification of Curtain, J. T. Clevers, Manager of the Capitol, 10 Jul. 1945; Report from the Board of Fire Commissioners, 18 Jul. 1945.
54 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Memo, Chief Secretary's Department, 2 May 1940.
57 This signature was unclear and appeared to be "Coak" rather than "Cook".
Movement in correspondence directed to the Town Clerk. "He" said that because the Capitol was owned by Council it should "be given to the great need of a Civic or Australian Theatre". In a subsequent open letter that "he" intended for general distribution, "he" stated Australian talent could develop to world standards with the availability of such a venue and "his" organisation intended to bring the matter to the citizens of Sydney. "He" hoped to awake an appreciation of an Australian theatrical culture. Meanwhile, "he" was seeking to encourage Council to lead them in this undertaking. The copy of the second letter from "Cook" [sic] was received in May, expressing strong political statements.

Soon after (in June), William Dove wrote to Council, denouncing the Australian National Movement and Cook as bogus. He said, she was a woman, who had "founded the racket (and she was) known at the Town Hall, the City markets and all over Sydney", by another alias to that used in the letters. Council heard nothing more from either correspondent. Meanwhile, a genuine National Theatre Movement of Australia was based in Melbourne.

When the war ended, the Chief Secretary's Department began to re-evaluate the state's regulations and existing conditions in the state's theatres. This had been postponed during the war years and inspections of city theatres recommenced in 1946. Listed among these were the Capitol, Civic, Haymarket and State theatres. One of the main concerns at the time was for mechanical ventilation in theatre buildings, as some

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59 CRS 34: TC 2510/43: Capitol theatre. Open letter, E. Cook to "Fellow Australian", received on 16 May 1944.

theatre managements had not operated their mechanical ventilation systems while the public was present. Under new regulations, mechanical ventilation in theatres was to be capable of changing the air at least eight times per hour. It can be assumed that the Capitol's early struggle with this problem had been resolved and the building complied with these latest standards, because no further mention of this matter was found in either the department's or Council's files.

Changes within administration of the Chief Secretary's Department placed all elements of theatre buildings under the control of Theatres and Public Halls branch and the Department of Health was to judge the suitability of ventilation in all new and remodelled theatres. While the Capitol's ventilation complied with regulations, other items did not. New safety regulations were drawn up in 1948 and that year's annual inspection showed work was needed on the Capitol's fire safety curtain.

Outstanding maintenance work and extensive additional work was needed to allow the curtain to comply with these new safety requirements. The curtain's winch and related appurtenances required immediate repair, including the addition of an approved centrifugal brake or governor, designed to regulate the speed of the curtain's descent and prevent it rebounding from the stage floor. Also, the turnbuckle and shackle attachments on the curtain's ropes were too small and needed to be completely replaced.

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63 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre File. Letter, Chas. J. Bellemore, Under Secretary of Department of Labour and Industry and Social Welfare to Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 22 Jan. 1948; Report, Department of Labour and Industry and Social Welfare, 22 Jan. 1948; Report, S. L. Anderson, Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 2 Feb. 1948.
The Chief Secretary's Department undertook extensive correspondence with Greater Union Theatres on the matter but the company failed to comply. Instead, they complained that the insecurity of its tenure prevented it acting on the department's requirements. More grounds for their argument were provided in December 1947, when newspapers announced that the State Railway Department intended to demolish the Capitol, which was used as another excuse to avoid obligations. Company Secretary, P. Dive, stated expense involved with the required maintenance work on the building was both "unwarranted and unjustifiable".

To add further weight to their excuse to by-pass the regulations regarding the safety curtain, Greater Union Theatres' representative declared the company's present and future entertainment policy eliminated "flesh and blood entertainment of any kind whatsoever and (was) limited in the entirety to the presentation of films possessing limited audience appeal." This policy was to be pursued until the company's occupancy ceased.

On 21st July 1948, department officers relented and permitted the company to immobilise the curtain. Seven days later, they directed the curtain be fixed in its top position; its equipment secured to make it inoperable; the electric supply permanently

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64 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre File. Letter, P. W. Dive, Secretary of Greater Union to Chief Secretary's Department, 11 Jun. 1948.
66 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Board of Fire Commissioners to Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 13 Aug. 1948.
68 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Greater Union Theatres Pty. Ltd. to Town Clerk, 11 Jun. 1948; Letter, Secretary of the Board of Fire Commissioners of New South Wales to Under Secretary of Chief Secretary's Department, 25 Jan. 1951. A note dated 16 Feb. 1951 on this last letter, recognises that the regulations for "b" grade theatres were being amended.
disconnected from the winch. In addition, the company was to remove the handle to the manual winding gear and the release cords attached to the winch.\textsuperscript{69} Although the Department informed Greater Union Theatres of its decision, it took a further five years before any action was taken.

When a number of fires occurred in the building early in the following decade, representatives of the Board of Fire Commissioners and Police Department reported Greater Union Theatres still had not complied with any department directive involving the fire safety curtain given in the late 1940s.\textsuperscript{70} The company was finally forced to act on the matter and requested a consultant inspect the curtain in May 1951.

During later years of the 1940s Company Secretary, P. W. Dive, was only applying for short term extensions of the company's lease (in 1946\textsuperscript{71} and 1948).\textsuperscript{72} Documents do not show a reason for the company seeking short extensions to the lease when it wanted an early reply from Council in order to allow its management to arrange the company's future long term programming. Contrasting this situation, in 1949 the

\textsuperscript{69} The immobilisation of the fire curtain was in accordance with Regulation 32 of the \textit{Theatres and Public Halls Act}. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre File. Letter, Chas. J. Bellemore, Under Secretary to Department of Labour and Industry to Chief Secretary's Department, 5 Jul 1948; Report of Stage Fire Curtain, Department of Public Works, Jun. 1951.

\textsuperscript{70} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Report, Board of Fire Commissioners to Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 24 Jan. 1951; Letter, Secretary of Board of Fire Commissioners to the Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 25 Jan. 1951.

\textsuperscript{71} The City Council dropped the clause in the lease, regarding possible war damage and the requirement for the lessee to contribute to War Damage Insurance. CRS 34: TC 3589/46: Capitol Theatre, Campbell Street: For Renewal of Lease: Greater Union Theatres. Letter P. W. Dive to Town Clerk, 15 Oct. 1946; Minute Paper City Solicitor's Department, 21 Jan. 1947.

\textsuperscript{72} CRS 34: TC 3968/48: Capitol theatre, Campbell Street: (1) Expiry of Lease - Greater Union Theatres. (2) Lease to Greater Union Theatres. Letter, P. W. Dive to Town Clerk, 30 Nov. 1948.
company applied for a longer lease, even though it was aware of the more tenuous nature of its tenancy due to the State Railway Department's interest in the property.

Indeed, the Railway Department first gave notice to Council in November 1947, advising that it intended to acquire and demolish the theatre for the extension of the Eastern Suburbs Railway. Secretary for the Railways, S. Nicholas, advised the Town Clerk that department engineers considered the nature of the ground in the area of the theatre was unreliable and would need to use the traditional construction method of "cut and cover", which was undertaken from the roof down and then covered with earth. These tunnels were to come within sixteen feet of the theatre's floor.

Therefore, he said, the Capitol site would have to be cleared to enable the ground to be excavated; the department may even be forced to acquire the whole theatre block and the lease should not extend beyond 1948 as the department anticipated it would be able to commence work in January 1949. Nicholas asked the terms and conditions Council wanted to make the building available to the department. However, at the same meeting that the department's first letter was

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74 CRS 34: TC 2141/48: Capitol theatre, Campbell Street: Proposed acquisition by Commissioner of Railways. Letter, S. Nicholas, Secretary for Railways, to Town Clerk, 28 Nov. 1947.
77 CRS 34: TC 2141/48: Capitol theatre, Campbell Street: Proposed acquisition by Commissioner of Railways. Letter, S. Nicholas, Secretary for Railways, to Town Clerk, 28 Nov. 1947; Letter, S. Nicholas, Secretary of Railways, to Town Clerk, 17 Jun. 1948.
tabled, Council decided to offer Greater Union Theatres, a lease of the premises for a further year.\(^7\)

In continuing negotiations, Council sought to convince the department to alter the route enough to prevent the resumption and demolition from happening and arranged a conference to discuss alternative routes for the rail lines. Town Clerk, Roy Hendy and Lord Mayor, R. J. Bartley, met with Major General A. C. Fewtrell, Colonel K. A. Fraser and Mr. Cook of the Department of Railways on the 15th July 1948.\(^7\) Although engineers had already considered all alternatives, Major General Fewtrell agreed to undertake further tests and obtain further data. They then adjourned the conference until full requirements of his department were known.

Fewtrell admitted State Rail was aware of Council's concerns. His department had rejected Council's proposal to construct a shaft entrance in Belmore Park "for various engineering reasons (and it) could not be seriously considered." Engineering problems associated with the Capitol site, involved the necessary underpinning work on buildings adjoining the theatre site.\(^8\)

In August, S. Nicholas notified the Town Clerk that the department was undertaking further investigations into the construction of track facilities and tunnel construction between Chalmers Street and Town Hall stations, with the intention of minimising any interference to any Council property.\(^9\) Two months later, the


\(^9\) CRS 34: TC 2141/48: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper Town Clerk, 15 Jul. 1948. As well as an annual rental of 6,760 pounds, the Council was receiving 625 pounds 7s. for the Municipal Rates on the building.

\(^1\) CRS 34: TC 2141/48: Capitol theatre. Letter, S. Nicholas to Town Clerk, 31 Aug. 1948.
The theatre would need to be vacated to allow railway engineers to underpin the building for stability.\(^\text{82}\)

This concession was still unacceptable for Council because the Railways Department required vacant possession of the theatre while it undertook this construction.\(^\text{83}\) Work on the underground rail system ceased and remained in abeyance for many years. When it did resume, advances in technology enabled the theatre to remain undisturbed.

Apart from negotiations between the theatre's owner and lessee, in the mid 1940s, a strong external pressure began to build aimed at changing the form of entertainment in the Capitol. Charles Moses, the General Manager of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (A.B.C.) and the Conservatorium of Music, together with renowned conductor, Eugene Goosens, led a body of people who were still seeking a permanent home for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.\(^\text{84}\) They chose the Capitol because its auditorium was acoustically superior to the Town Hall, or any other theatre in the city,\(^\text{85}\) and because it was owned by the citizens of Sydney.

These men fostered public and media support for the theatre to be made

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\(^{84}\) This pressure was reported in most of the city's newspapers as early as 1944, but was very pronounced in 1947 after Sir Eugene Goosens expressed his interest in the theatre. "A.B.C. Plan for Sydney Musical Centre." SMH 13 Nov. 1947: 8; "Goosen's Heart Set on Capitol Theatre." SMH 14 Nov. 1947: 4; CSD 4172: Capitol theatre File. "Grand Opera Plan for the Capitol." DM 22 Mar. 1944: [n.p.].

available for "high culture" of opera, orchestral concerts and ballet instead of its present "popular entertainment". Like the period before the Hippodrome was built, Council was asked to turn the building into a Musical Centre or Civic Theatre\textsuperscript{86} but the idea was again rejected. Instead, Council decided it would grant the lease to its present tenant, Greater Union Theatres.\textsuperscript{87}

Further threats to the fabric of the building emerged in 1947, when the Minister for Housing was alerted by newspaper articles reporting the renewal of the Capitol's lease.\textsuperscript{88} In November, the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} reported that the State Minister for Housing, Mr. Evatt, intended to resume and demolish the theatre as part of his slum-clearance plans\textsuperscript{89} but, within a month, newspapers were reporting the above-mentioned State Railways Department possible demolition of the Capitol to build tunnels for the Eastern Suburbs Railway.\textsuperscript{90} Unlike the Railway's proposal, nothing more came of the State Government's slum-clearance plans in relation to the theatre.

By the beginning of the 1950s, the situation for the Capitol was still confusing. The company had not undertaken repairs on any element of the building or its safety equipment; neither Council nor the Under Secretary enforced conditions of the lease or regulations under the relevant legislation. Moreover, at the end of the decade the matter of demolition for railway extensions was still pending. Past its prime, the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[86] During this time, there was an unrelated movement for a National Theatre, which finally culminated in the establishment of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust.
\item[87] CRS 34: TC 2141/47: Capitol theatre Letter, Town Clerk to the Secretary of Railways, 4 Dec. 1947.
\item[88] CRS 34: TC 2141/48: Capitol theatre, Campbell Street: Proposed Acquisition by the Commissioner of Railways. Letter, S. Nicholas, Secretary for Railways, to Town Clerk, 28 Nov. 1947.
\item[89] "Future Role of Capitol Still in Doubt." \textit{SMH} 18 Nov. 1947.
\item[90] "Theatre May Come Down in Year: Railway Warning on Use of Capitol." \textit{SMH} 2 Dec. 1947: 3.
\end{footnotes}
Capitol was gradually slipping into a state of mediocrity and obscurity of middle age. No longer a rival - during these years, it was not even considered in relation to any other theatre.

Diagrams from *The story of the Eastern Suburbs Railway*, pp. 13, 15. First diagram: Lowest point of the line is Hay Street, 13 m. below sea level. Second diagram showing both inner city lines.

Next page: associated foyer alterations for Rudas. The boundary of the inner foyer was moved forward, replacing seven rows of seats; floor and aisles altered to accommodate new stairwells.
Chapter 8

Doldrums and Decay: Entering Middle Age

No longer the haunt of young flappers, servicemen, city shoppers or families, the Capitol had ceased to be in vogue and relinquished its claim of being "Australia's Greatest Theatre". The Capitol building aged badly as the decade merged into the 1950s and its fortunes declined to a point where it no longer represented those of the city or the nation. Its image was uninviting and its fabric severely neglected. No longer was Sydney's population drawn by any remnant of theatre and cinema appeal linked to the Capitol and it was now drawn to the busier and more exciting central business district to the north.

Many lavish picture houses with glittering chandeliers and elaborate interiors were located in this new popular region and they became the population's favoured cinemas. Numbered among them were the State, Embassy, Mayfair, St. James and the Prince Edward. In these newer cinemas patrons enjoyed unaccustomed comfort and often escaped into refreshing air-conditioned auditoriums from oppressive summer temperatures outside. Here, they were enthralled by vivid colour and musical scores of the best quality first release films, qualities rarely reproduced by equipment in suburban theatres, which screened films some considerable time after first release.

During the remaining twenty-two years that Greater Union Theatre remained in the Capitol, the theatre was incapable of competing with these rivals. Management continued to show lower budget "B" grade films and, if they waited, cinema patrons

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1 Ross Thorne, Cinemas of Australia Via USA (Sydney: Architecture Department, University of Sydney, 1981) 70.

2 Personal experience of family, friends and self.

3 This continued the company policy prevalent in 1932. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Secretary of Board of Fire Commissioners to Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 25 Jan. 1951; Diane Collins, Hollywood Down Under: Australians at the Movies:
could see these films in less expensive suburban cinemas without any loss of film quality.

At the beginning of the 1950s the Capitol was still threatened with resumption and demolition for the rail extension and coveted for use as the city's opera house. This latter proposition ceased after the lease was renewed in 1952, when "Fort Macquarie" tram depot was being identified as the most suitable site for this a "high culture" venue. Eventually, ongoing newspaper reports of the growing support for opera seasons in the Capitol led Greater Union Theatres to make a transient offer as part of its application to extend its lease in 1951. They proffered the theatre for four weeks each year to present opera seasons.

These newspaper articles also attracted a submission from H. [Harry] O. Wren, Managing Director of Celebrity Theatres, and, subsequently, the attention of Council's Finance Committee. Wren told Council that his company had access to theatre managements of J. C Williamson and the Tivoli Circuits and, as a result, he was in the position to ensure the Capitol did not close between the Opera seasons. His submission contained two alternatives, the first was to enter a profitable management partnership with Council and the other was for his company to lease the Capitol at an increased rental. As well as providing for seasons of opera, similar arrangements could be made for ballet, musical comedy, musical revue, variety and concerts by local and

1896 to the Present Day (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1987) 164-6.


international artists.  

Meanwhile, the Lord Mayor received correspondence from Mrs C. T. Lorenz, Deputy President and founder of the New South Wales National Opera. She had been perplexed to read a newspaper article stating that Sydney's Lord Mayor was alleged to have said "there is no charity in the City Council" in relation to the Opera. She too, offered a rental more than that paid by Greater Union Theatres for regular short leases and contrasted the City Council's treatment given to her society with that afforded it in other cities.  

Neither Council nor the Lord Mayor acted upon either proposal. Instead, Council decided to offer the Capitol's tenancy to its current lessee on a monthly basis until tenders for longer-term leases could be invited and accepted. Meanwhile, the City Solicitor advised Council about the complex situation involving removal of furnishings, fittings and equipment, should Greater Union Theatres vacate the building; in addition, he outlined the legal aspects of the lease under the *Landlord and Tenant Amendment Act, 1948.*

When advertisements for tenders were published, Council only received two tenders and both were seeking a three-year lease. One from Greater Union Theatres, reminded Council of its rights under the lease, that the rental was "pegged" and it could

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not be raised. Secretary, P. W. Dive, reiterated Greater Union Theatres' contention that it had rebuilt the theatre at no cost to Council and that it subsidiary's management maintained the building in a first-class condition. The second was a lower tender from Hoyts Theatres and, in the end, City Council continued leasing the building to Greater Union Theatres through the 1950s and 1960s.

Although the Railways Department had completed a number of the Eastern Suburbs Railway project's less troublesome tunnel sections by the early years of the 1950s, nothing more eventuated involving the theatre site. In 1952, work on the underground rail-link was postponed. Forced by recession and pre-existing financial commitments, State Government eventually abandoned the project because it could not justify its expense. Work had recommenced on the Town Hall to Wynyard rail-link that had been interrupted during the war, but it was proceeding more slowly than expected.

Furthermore, the section of tunnel to be built under the Capitol posed major problems for State Railways Department engineers. Located thirteen metres below

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15 The Circular Quay link was commenced in 1936 and was postponed during the war years, 1939 to 1940. The loop was opened for regular service in January 1956.
sea level, it was to be (and still is) the lowest section of the railway line. The department's chief engineer, Major-General Fewtrell, divulged that the department's original plan was for a double line to pass beneath the Capitol site but its engineers reconsidered the project. Consequently, the double line tunnel was replaced by two separate single line tunnels, each measuring fifteen feet (4.57 metres) wide.18

Plans to build the inner city's rail system were triggered shortly after the turn of the century and, in 1913, Dr. J. J. Bradfield presented the first proposal for a rail link to the eastern suburbs of Sydney; this route did not encroach on the Capitol site. Instead, it separated from the central underground link by way of two portals situated between St. James and Circular Quay stations.19 Flyovers in the plan were to facilitate crossings of all lines and additional platforms were planned for Town Hall, St. James and Museum stations. They were to cater for this line and one to Millers Point and Sydney's western suburbs. Two additional platforms were built at both Town Hall and St. James stations but they remained unused for decades until the route for the Eastern Suburbs Railway was revised. This new plan incorporated the Capitol site and used those Town Hall platforms that were meant for the western suburbs extension.20

Release from imminent threat of demolition did not safeguard the well-being of the Capitol. The continued lack of maintenance became evident in the 1950s when the first of a number of fires broke out in the building. Although relatively small, it was more by luck than good management that they did not cause serious damage or injuries.

This fire occurred during the afternoon session on Thursday, 30th November 1950\textsuperscript{21} when one of the reels of film broke and caught alight, after its sprocket holes stripped on the projector's feed mechanism during screening. The theatre's Office Manager assured the Chief Secretary's Department that the only damage was to the Biograph Projection head and neither the bio-box nor building had been damaged. Also, it had been quelled by the theatre's fire extinguishers and there had been no need for any fire brigade to attend the building.\textsuperscript{22} Of all these fires that occurred over a thirteen year period, this would have been the only one to catch the audience's attention.

About 2.00 a.m. on the 24th January 1951, a fusion fire started in one of the building's electrical switches. Once again, the company was quick to point out to the Chief Secretary's Department that no fire brigade was required and the company did not intend to make a claim on its insurance.\textsuperscript{23} However, the third and fourth fires were potentially more serious.

On the evening of the 29th August that year, a fire started in soot accumulated inside the exhaust flue of the theatre's Deutz two-stroke, crankcase-scavenge type engine. This engine was used for the theatre's emergency generating plant. Sparks from this fire escaped the open flue pipe\textsuperscript{24} and burned the timber emergency "catwalk"

\textsuperscript{21} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, C. W. Judd, Office Manager, Greater union Theatres to the Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 11 Dec. 1950.

\textsuperscript{22} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, C. W. Judd, Office Manager of Greater Union Theatres, to Chief Secretary's Department, 1 Dec. 1950.

\textsuperscript{23} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, C. W. Judd, Office Manager of Greater Union Theatres, to Chief Secretary's Department, 24 Jan. 1951.

\textsuperscript{24} At this time the uncovered pipe terminated at roof level. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Secretary of Board of Fire Commissioners to Under Secretary, 11 Sep. 1951.
escape on the roof.\textsuperscript{25}

Investigators reported that under normal circumstances, engines of this Deutz model were renowned for being prone to smouldering-type fires in the carbon build-up, which frequently accumulated in the bends of their exhaust pipes. They were also known for fires generated by large pieces of incandescent carbon being ejected from the pipes and falling onto flammable material.\textsuperscript{26} Nevertheless, this particular Deutz engine was made more dangerous by the makeshift pipe that had been substituted for the engine's original exhaust.

This replacement piece was galvanised iron pipe and was longer and wider than the original exhaust pipe. It had been soldered at its joins and did not have a spark arrester fitted to the exterior end. After the pipe was attached to the engine and installed in the building, its solder joints had melted and had been replaced with putty. Furthermore, it passed immediately beneath the timber ceiling along the exit corridor leading to the roof.\textsuperscript{27} One inspection report noted that the pipe had been lengthened a further thirteen feet (3.96 metres) above the parapet of the building.\textsuperscript{28}

The burned timber catwalk was no longer safe for its intended use and inspectors considered that this particular fire could have spread further.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{25} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Secretary of the Board of Fire Commissioners to the Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 11 Sep. 1951.

\textsuperscript{26} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Capitol Theatre Haymarket - Investigation of Reported Fire (on) August 29th 1951, Department of Public Works. 9 Oct. 1951.

\textsuperscript{27} This was a 5 inch diameter, light galvanised pipe measuring approximately 100 feet long. The original specifically made, shorter pipe was only 4 inches in diameter. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Report, Capitol theatre Haymarket - Investigation of Reported Fire (on) August 29th 1951, 9 Oct. 1951, Department of Public Works.

Compounding the danger to the building, they found spare fuel oil stored in rubbish bins, which were housed nearby in unsatisfactory makeshift facilities. In their findings, they recommended the timber adjacent to the offending pipe be trimmed back and two electric lights closely positioned to this pipe along its path to the exit, needed to be moved away and modified in such a way to give adequate clearance between the two elements. In addition, the licensee was to provide proper storage facilities for fuel and provide lagging to any future bore-casting that would replace the existing horizontal pipe.

Although an audience was present when this fire broke out, it was not warned by staff or evacuated from the theatre as a precaution. Nevertheless, the company was forced to comply with existing regulations whereby all fires were to be reported to the Chief Secretary's Department and Union Theatres' Office Manager, C. W. Judd, notified the Under Secretary of the fire. He stated, an unknown witness had seen and reported it; no damage was done and there had been no need for a fire brigade. Fortunately, fire brigades from Headquarters, George Street West, the Rocks and Darlinghurst stations had responded to the call and these fire officers extinguished the fire.

Capitol Theatre (Sydney) disregarded the department's directives and did not

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29 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Secretary of the Board of Fire Commissioners to the Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 11 Sep. 1951.


32 Letter, C. W. Judd, Office Manager of Greater Union Theatres to Under Secretary, 31 Aug. 1951. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file.

33 Letter, Secretary of Board of Fire Commissioners to Under Secretary, 11 Sep. 1951. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file.

34 This was a subsidiary of Greater Union Theatres and managed the Capitol for the lessee/parent company.
undertake any repairs or alterations to the building. Seven months later, another fire burned the last remnant of the sisal and asbestos lagging around the exhaust pipe. Like the previous fire, this ignited while an unsuspecting audience was in attendance and inspectors again found that company management still had not complied with any of their previous directions. However, first indications that the company had begun to comply with department letters were related to the Chief Secretary's Department in the following August. The Capitol's Manager told a Fire Brigade officer that the company was cleaning the exhaust pipe every week, had installed a new spark arrester and anticipated no more problems.

A potentially disastrous fire started during the early morning hours of 25th March 1963. This time a cigarette butt had been pushed through a hole in the stalls floor and ignited disused seating and large collection of rubbish gathered near the orchestra pit. Fire Officers extinguished it with a fire hose and two fire extinguishers and, luckily, the structure of the Capitol was not damaged. Disturbingly, Sydney City Council was never informed or aware of any of these fires in its property.

It is a paradox that, at the same time as these early incidents were occurring, the

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35 The fire occurred during the evening screening on 20th March 1952. Some discrepancies regarding the time of the fire are evident in the report from the company and the report of the Board of Fire Commissioners. Letter, C. W. Judd to Chief secretary's Department, 21 Mar. 1952; Report, Secretary of Board of Fire Commissioners to Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 3 Apr. 1952. CSD 4271: Capitol theatre file.


37 Letter, Secretary of the Board of Fire Commissioners, 8 Aug. 1952. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file.

38 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, C. W. Judd, Capitol Theatre (Sydney) to Chief Secretary's Department, 25 Mar. 1963; Report, Secretary of the Board of Fire Commissioners to the Under Secretary, 8 Apr. 1963.
company and Chief Secretary's Department were still debating the unsafe proscenium safety curtain and other longstanding matters. This included work on the sprinkler system, which would allow automatic disconnection of the ventilating fans in case of a fire; improved lighting over exits; parked cars frequently blocking exits to the eastern laneway and storage of the Tivoli's stage scenery in the Capitol's backstage and understage areas.\(^{39}\)

In an attempt to avoid the work and expense involved in repairing the proscenium curtain, Greater Union Theatres sought advice of theatre consultant, G. R. Brakell of Brakell Products. He inspected the fire safety curtain in May 1951 and stated it could be "deaded" to the steel roof girders, using three flexible steel cables of 2 inch (5 cm) circumference, and "tommed" to the floor of the stage with lengths of "4 by 4 inch" (10 cm width and breadth) hardwood timber.\(^{40}\) Although the Public Works Department did not agree that the consultant's solution was safe,\(^{41}\) his proposal was not automatically rejected due to uncertainty about the theatre's future.\(^{42}\)

Brakell's proposal led the Public Works Department to inspect the building again and report that it doubted his proposal. The department requested a copy of the consultant's plans for "tomming" of the curtain. Then, guided by a report from the Lifts and Scaffolding Branch of the Department of Labour and Industry, department

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representatives found Capitol's existing rigging was not safe for this purpose and believed it would be difficult to equalise the 4½ ton metal curtain on each of its three supporting cables. In comparison, they felt the department's comparative cost recommendations on its alternate proposal would not be significantly more than Brakell's solution to the problem.\(^{43}\)

Responding to this uncertainty, the Chief Secretary's Department first consulted the Department of Labour and Industry and Board of Fire Commissioners before eventually approving Greater Union's proposal in August 1953, on the understanding that the Capitol would not be used for anything other than films.\(^{44}\) During one inspection, the Manager of the Capitol incorrectly convinced a Fire Brigade Officer that the curtain was working properly but, as his company was only showing films, it wanted to secure the curtain. Management promised it would inform the Chief Secretary's Department if the company decided to present stage shows in the future.\(^{45}\) It was an empty promise.

In December, the Under Secretary was alarmed to read a daily newspaper advertisement that stated two pantomimes were being shown each day at the Capitol. He immediately ordered another inspection of the theatre, its stage section and fire curtain. As in the previous year, department inspectors were accompanied by Officers


\(^{45}\) CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Secretary of Board of Fire Commissioners to Under Secretary, 1 Apr. 1953.
from the Child Welfare Department. During this visit, they were told that the curtain was being raised and lowered according to regulations. However, they found the pins (which had secured the curtain in place) had been removed before the pantomime season commenced but the curtain would not operate and was "jammed above the counterweights". The company rectified the problem before the next inspection.

Another pantomime in 1959 posed some different problems for the Chief Secretary's Department and sub-lessee, Celebrity Circuit. Neither Greater Union Theatres nor the pantomime's producer had notified the department of a presentation of live theatre in the Capitol and again this knowledge was drawn from the morning newspaper. "Robin Hood on Ice" (starring Jenny Howard and George Wallace Jnr.) required the theatre's stage to be extended out over the orchestra pit and a large ice tray to be placed on stage. A motor had been added to the fly gallery to raise and lower the proscenium safety curtain and was adjusting the fall of the curtain to stop it at the top of the ice tray. At the time of inspection, the Government Architect noted that "hazards to performers" remained unchanged from those listed in the department report from the previous year.

Negotiations between the department and Harry Wren of Celebrity Circuits, revolved around the location of the refrigeration plant, which had been placed on stage.

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46 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Urgent Memo, Under Secretary of Chief Secretary's Department to Secretary, Department of Public Works, 29 Dec. 1953.
47 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Government Architect and Secretary, Department of Public Works Department, to Under Secretary, 6 Jan. 1954.
in full view of the audience. For safety reasons (Regulation 45), the department required the plant to be placed outside the walls of the building (in Parker Street). Inspectors considered its presence in view of the audience was undesirable; the perceived principle danger was "the escape of fumes, which although non-toxic, could, because of their weight, have a seriously suffocating effect upon audiences or other persons in low levels of the theatre or create panic as a result of explosion or the appearance of smoke in the event of some breakdown or defect in the motor."50

Understandably, Celebrity Circuits did not want the unit to be placed in this insecure position and successfully convinced department officers that it was not a heating element as outlined in the legislation. The department provisionally allowed the company to place this equipment in the understage area, where the proscenium wall and safety curtain could shield the auditorium and audience "if any unforeseen occurrence took place." During these negotiations, Celebrity Circuits claimed a similar unit operated in the Empire and Palladium theatres, with the knowledge of department officers. When department officers investigated this claim, they found that neither its own officers nor the Fire Brigade had any knowledge of the matter.51

Following these negotiations and conclusion of the production, the department contacted Greater Union Theatres to ask for an explanation of the matter. The licensee replied that its agreement with Celebrity Circuits permitted the sub-lessee to use the building for an extended period, subject to Celebrity Circuits complying with all relevant "statutes of the State of New South Wales". It is doubtful that Celebrity


Circuits was aware that some of the department's outstanding requirements were evident in 1951, two examples being the catwalk and safety curtain.\textsuperscript{52}

Capitol Theatre (Sydney) undertook some work on the theatre in 1954, when the electrical supply was changed to Alternating Current by the Sydney County Council. Wormald Brothers began work on the ventilation plant and sprinkler system, although the latter was still not enough to comply with theatre regulations five years later.\textsuperscript{53} The company arranged for stage draperies and black masking to be made fire resistant and a new panoramic, silver coloured, metallised "sound screen" to be installed.\textsuperscript{54}

Widescreen technology had been developed in the United States during the 1950s, to counter competition from television.\textsuperscript{55} Soon after being introduced overseas, Australian audiences saw wide-screen films in Cinemascope, Vistavision and Todd-ao, with Technicolor and stereophonic sound.\textsuperscript{56} The "Brakelite" Wydascope Cinematograph Screen installed in the Capitol was also manufactured by Brakell, who used a tubular steel frame for support.\textsuperscript{57}

Very little changed in the theatre during following years. Management continued presenting programs of the same standard and staff only cleaned areas within

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\textsuperscript{54} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, W. Osborne, Secretary of Board of Fire Commissioners to Under Secretary, 2 Mar. 1954; Report of General Inspection, Government Architect, 8 Jun. 1954.


\textsuperscript{56} A quip heard at the "Going to the Pictures Conference" in June 1995 and at a meeting of the ATHS, was that "Australia got the 'cure' (for television) before it got the 'disease'.

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the theatre that were exposed to the public. No repairs were undertaken and the list of maintenance items continued to grow. Along with the safety curtain and timber catwalk, the company was directed to install sprinklers in the dressing rooms and a smoke escape hatch over the stage.58

In 1961, Greater Union Theatres subleased the Capitol to Rudas Theatrical Organisation. This company planned to present the English production of the "Crazy Gang"59 and was prepared to undertake a considerable amount of work in the theatre. The agreement between the two companies transferred responsibility for the building's repairs to the new sublessee.

Rudas Theatrical Organisation brought the first gas into the building, when it installed four gas heaters.60 The Chief Secretary's Department approved their installation on condition that ventilation of the units prevented a build-up of carbon dioxide.61 In 1972, when Council and lessee were disputing what items could be removed from the theatre, these "100,000 B.T.U." units were in the inventory of items that Greater Union Theatres claimed to have installed in the theatre.62

Design Productions on behalf of the Rudas company, prepared and undertook most work in the theatre, while the sublessee was in occupation. This company

59 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, C. F. Chaplin, Rudas Theatrical Organisation to Under Secretary, 8 May 1951.
received the department’s approval to remove seven back rows of the back stalls, remove the existing barriers from between pillars, erect new fire resistant barriers behind the altered seating, insert step wells and alter the floor at the rear of the stalls. This latter work entailed cutting and raising the floor to enlarge the inner foyer and the floor of this created space was covered with decorative linoleum. It opened out into the main vestibule, where Design Productions removed the ornamental ticket box and replaced it with a decorative fountain. The department gave permission for this theatrical contractor to cut away sections of false plaster walls at either end of this new inner foyer in order to provide large display areas.

To the front of the auditorium, alterations were required to enable the orchestra elevator to be used as the forestage for the "Crazy Gang" season. This was to compensate for the lack of stage space behind the proscenium arch and allow scenery to be moved, giving the theatre company additional flexibility. Work on the theatre was undertaken during weekend hours, when the theatre was normally closed.

The Chief Secretary’s Department informed Design Productions of outstanding

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63 This reduced the seating capacity of the theatre from the recorded 2,973, to 2,501. However, this number was never adjusted on the theatre’s licence. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Application for Theatre and Public Hall License, 15 May 1963.

64 This company was engaged to undertake repairs and alterations for Rudas Theatrical Organisation. Department negotiations with this company were cited in 1970. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letters, G. F. Hilder, Design Productions, to Under Secretary, 9 May 1961 and 7 Jun. 1961; Plans, Capitol Theatre - Sydney: Foyer Alteration, first draft, 6 May 1961.


items to be repaired. As well as items already mentioned above, panic lighting was
required on stage and in the dressing rooms.\textsuperscript{68} Documents state work on the catwalk
was completed that year,\textsuperscript{69} but it was still in a dangerous condition in 1969.\textsuperscript{70} However,
acting on its own initiative, the lessee removed it completely by the following year.\textsuperscript{71}

When the "Crazy Gang Show" opened, Rudas Theatrical Organisation invited
patrons to come to the "New Capitol".\textsuperscript{72} Unfortunately, the season of the "Crazy Gang"
did not run as long as first anticipated and it closed a month later on 12th August. Soon
after, Greater Union Theatres applied to the department for permission to leave
outstanding work in abeyance.\textsuperscript{73}

Inspection of the theatre in 1964, showed how little maintenance had been done
to the building. Greater Union Theatres had "allowed (the building) to deteriorate" and
inspectors were told that Greater Union Theatres "only intended to carry out temporary
repairs of an urgent nature".\textsuperscript{74} Accumulated rubbish was located in many areas
throughout the building, including the space beneath the biograph box and in an old

\textsuperscript{68} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Chief Secretary's Department to G. F. Hilder, 5 Jul.
1961.

\textsuperscript{69} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Under Secretary to Secretary, Greater Union Theatres,
14 Feb. 1961; Report, Board of Fire Commissioners, 10 May 1961.

\textsuperscript{70} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Report, Annual Inspection, E. Smith, Government Architect,
Department of Public Works, 17 Mar. 1969; Letter, W. E. Tinkler, Theatre Controller, Greater
Union Organisation, Theatre Department, 22 Apr. 1969.

\textsuperscript{71} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Report, Annual Inspection, E. Smith, Government Architect,

\textsuperscript{72} Crazy Gang Program, Theatre Programs File A: Capitol theatre (Sydney). Mitchell Library,
Special Collections.

\textsuperscript{73} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Herbert G. Hayward, Greater Union Theatres, to

\textsuperscript{74} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Report, A. F. McFarlane, Government Architect, 27 Nov.
1964.
dressing room on the roof, possibly the unauthorised rooms mentioned in reports in 1927. Water had entered the roof, causing ceiling sheets to be loosened and holes to form in both the auditorium ceiling and roof. When the lino on the inner foyer was removed, inspectors found sections of the floor had been affected by white ants.\textsuperscript{75} Annual Inspections in 1966 and 1968 continued to show growing deterioration of the Capitol and surrounding environment,\textsuperscript{76} which worsened until the company vacated the theatre in 1972.

One unexpected find made by inspectors in 1970, was a number of old and unused stage draperies hanging behind the screen.\textsuperscript{77} When the department directed the company to remove these drapes, W. E. Tinkler of Greater Union Organisation replied that they eliminated echoes and reverberations associated with sound films and that their removal would have "unfortunate acoustic consequences".\textsuperscript{78} Consequently, they were allowed to remain provided they were treated with the fire retardant, "Albert-T" in accordance with Regulation 75A of the existing legislation.\textsuperscript{79}

The relationship between Sydney City Council and Greater Union during these twenty or more years, was equivocal. Except for the building's rental and lease, Council was not very concerned about the Capitol after the threat from the Railways


\textsuperscript{76} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Annual Inspection(s), Government Architect, Department of Public Works, 8 Dec. 1966 and 5 Apr. 1968.


\textsuperscript{78} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, W. E. Tinkler, Theatre Controller for Australia, Greater Union Organization, to Chief Secretary's Department, 11 May 1970.

\textsuperscript{79} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, A. J. McFarlane, Government Architect, Department of Public Works, to Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 20 May 1970.
Department was suspended in 1952. Several times Council invited tenders, with limited or no success. Unlike the Chief Secretary's Department and the citizens of Sydney, it remained either unconcerned or unaware of the deteriorating condition of the building and even the few inspections by its officers failed to change anything.

While Council appeared to remain unconcerned about the building itself, the matter of its low rental was raised again in 1959. Alderman Thom, Leader of the D.L.P. (and formerly a solicitor) complained that rental for the Capitol was far below the current rental market. He recommended tenders be called for the lease, which was due to expire, and he said that Council had received approaches from solicitors acting for an interested party. This party was seeking information about the theatre's lease but had not received a reply. The unnamed party was prepared to pay a greatly increased rental for the theatre, as well as spending 75,000 pounds on repairs to the building. Alternately, this company was prepared to buy the theatre, should Council offer it for sale.

According to Lord Mayor, Alderman H. F. Jensen, under the Landlord and Tenant Act, the City Council could neither accept a higher tender, nor evict Greater Union Theatres. He said this was because the lessee observed the conditions of tenancy, continued to pay the rental of 6,760 pounds and paid premiums for the lease.

This Act had come into full effect after the federal National Security Act expired in 1948. The latter had been extended twice during its term and, on its expiry, its remaining powers were transferred to the State Governments. However, rentals were

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still pegged at the pre-war levels.  

Council resolved "inter alia" to invite tenders for either five or ten year leases of the Capitol and, early in 1959, placed advertisements the same in the newspapers. Not even the alleged interested party responded but, instead, Greater Union Theatres submitted an offer to lease the building for two years on the existing terms and conditions.

Concomitant with its submission to the City Council, Greater Union Theatres applied to the "Fair Rents Board" for a determination. It claimed that a "fair rent" had never been determined under the *Landlord and Tenant (Amendment) Act, 1948 and Amendments*; it argued that while its subsidiary used the building to show films and leased it with furniture, Council did not supply services as part of that rental. At first, the court hearing was set for the following July but it was adjourned several times.

When the matter was adjourned to November, the company's agents sought to have the matter settled "out of court" and requested a conference between the two litigants. The company itself then wrote to Council, offering to withdraw its
application provided Council accepted their tender. Acting on advice of its agents, Council agreed to the company's demands. Council's agents did not believe Council would receive any benefits from a court hearing and pointed out that Council had not received any premium payments since the lease expired. Accordingly, the lessee's application to the Court was formally withdrawn on 3rd December.

The court challenge was unnecessary and made the company look foolish, especially as its tenancy was not threatened in any way. Greater Union Theatres was seeking to exert control over Council and, although the challenge was an inconvenience, it was in Council's interest to maintain the existing arrangement.

This new lease for two years (back-dated to 5th March 1959) was signed on 26th January 1960. The company continued to pay the same rental and was still responsible for all rates, taxes, insurances and licences, as well as the premium paid in consideration for being granted the lease. This premium was to compensate for not paying the higher rental proposed by Council but the lessee ceased paying it after the next lease became due.

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91 CRS 34: TC 3487/59: Capitol theatre, Regarding Greater Union's application to the Fair Rents Board. Notification from Rent Control Office, Form No. CB/44, File No. T10117/59.


93 This premium of 2,000 dollars, to be paid in annual instalments began in 1955. CRS 34: TC 4817/54: Capitol theatre: Application for Renewal of Lease. Minute Paper Town Clerk, 24 Feb. 1955; Letter, K. Moremon, Secretary, Greater Union Theatres, to Town Clerk, 14 Mar. 1955.

Council's Deed Packet does not contain any further leases signed by Greater Union Theatres after 1960. This last agreement, like previous leases, required the company to undertake all repairs and paint both interior and exterior surfaces before the lease expired, but this did not happen. When this lease fell due for renewal, the Town Clerk offered the company a two-year lease on the same terms and conditions but more than two months passed without any reply from the company to Council's correspondence.95

Finally, Keith Moreman, the Company Secretary, wrote to the Town Clerk and merely advised him that the Company Directors were considering the matter. They would notify the Town Clerk, when they made their decision96 but, each year until 1970,97 the company continued to notify Council that it was unable to change the existing arrangements.

Neither City Council files, nor Chief Secretary's files give any indication that the company even attempted to maintain the building according to conditions in both lease and licence. During its tenancy of twenty years, Greater Union Theatres used a number of excuses to avoid its responsibilities and employed a threatened resumption of the building for its argument to immobilise the curtain. The anticipated alteration to the power system by the Sydney County Council provided another excuse to delay work on the emergency sprinkler system,98 although, some work on the sprinklers finally took

place in 1954. The company did promise to remove the stored Tivoli's scenery when the neighbouring theatre's current season ended.

In 1961, the company claimed "difficulties experienced by the motion picture industry" and the advent of television as reasons to avoid signing the theatre's subsequent lease. Instead it sought to retain its tenancy of the building on a weekly basis, which indefinitely deferred the payment of the lease premium. At first, the company proposed that this should be to the end of the year but deferment continued for the remainder of its tenancy.

Council officer, Ron Dunphry photographed the building's interior in 1972, after Greater Union Theatres vacated the building, and they show the building's neglected state. It was unpainted, water stained and had holes in the roof and ceilings. Greater Union Theatres' neglect and disinterest in Council's property, ensured audience interest declined along with the building's condition.

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99 Over a number of years, the city's power was changed from Direct Current to Alternating Current. Before the Sydney County Council was made a separate body, it was originally one of the Sydney City Council departments. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, R. A. Johnson, Secretary of Public Works to Under Secretary, 15 Feb. 1954.

100 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Report, Government Architect and Secretary of Public Works Department for Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 19 Jan. 1952.

101 This was introduced to Australian audiences in 1956.


CRS 356/1-112: Photographs of Capitol, Ron Dunphry, 1972. Detail: shows the original curve of the proscenium arch that was altered in 1990s.
Chapter 9

Unexpected Revival

As the 1970s began, the Haymarket region was not the most pleasant area in Sydney. It was severely run down\(^1\) and loitering men constantly frequented the area. At that time Sydney was used for "Rest and Recreation Leave" (R and R) for armed forces of several nations, who were fighting in Vietnam, and their presence attracted profiteers into many places like Kings Cross. Consequently a quest for profit also forcibly removed many well-established permanent residents as speculators sought to demolish large tracts of historic houses. Meanwhile, a strong drug culture established in the King Cross area spread its endemic prostitution to other parts of the city. The Haymarket, with the Capitol block in particular,\(^2\) was a receptor for both prostitution and displaced, loitering men.

Youthful and middle-aged women, busy shopping or travelling through this area of the city, found it almost impossible to pass through Haymarket without being solicited for sexual favours, money or drunken attentions.\(^3\) The overall nature of Sydney city changed generating conflicting attitudes amid the population, and dissension was especially evident in the area surrounding the Capitol.

Greater Union Organisation\(^4\) continued its policy of using the theatre for its lower budget horror-fantasy and western cult films. Sydney City Council had not yet

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1 Patricia Morgan, "Those were the days but this could be the start of something." *Bulletin* 5 Sep. 1970: 44-6.


3 Personal knowledge and experience from years of living close to the city.

formulated plans for the theatre, its neighbouring properties or the surrounding area; audiences were deterred by the aged and neglected image of the Capitol's deteriorating structure and the uninviting "spirit" of theatre presented, discouraged more.

Although Harry M. Miller and his company have been blamed for a number of changes at the theatre, the lessee and other interested parties began initial attempts to change the Capitol from a dedicated cinema to a live theatre venue, almost two years before Harry M. Miller Attractions acquired the theatre's lease, and they disturbed the status quo considerably. Council granted Greater Union Organisation an extension of lease early in 1970 but changing circumstances prompted both the Capitol's lessees and lessor to re-evaluate their position.

Despite its obligations under the lease, Greater Union Organisation had still not painted or maintained the Capitol. Alternately, Council did not receive sufficient rental for the building to make large scale work economically feasible for it to undertake, or be at ratepayers' expense. Council officers did not enter the building for anything other than routine inspections, which do not appear to be as frequent or as thorough as those undertaken by the Chief Secretary's Department.

In September 1970, Council's mounting dissatisfaction with prevailing lease arrangements led it to reconsider Greater Union Organisation's lease of the building once more. This was well before the current lease's expiration date and was the result of a declining number of city's cinemas and theatres.

During the previous decade and early years of the 1970s, a number of theatre

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5 There were no references in the documents consulted that showed Council representatives conducted routine inspections.

properties were sold. These included the St. James and Prince Edward cinemas, as well as the Tivoli and Palace theatres; all were closed and demolished. Like the Capitol, the St. James was once a live theatre that had been adapted to exhibit films. The demolition of these theatres established a trend, which continued well into the decade.

Threat of demolition hung over the State, Theatre Royal and Regent theatres and Her Majesty's was razed by fire early in the 1970s. In addition, the Stadium at Rushcutters Bay, often used for concerts as well as the regular fare of boxing and wrestling matches, was demolished to make way for construction of the Eastern Suburbs railway and Sydney Opera House was not yet completed. Therefore, the Capitol was the city's sole venue capable of presenting live theatre to large audiences and its potential rental value became inflated, even though its stage area would impose severe limitations on live productions.

The State Government recognised this loss of theatres and, in 1971, it passed new Building Code regulations. Clauses of that code granted bonuses for developers if they incorporated new theatres in their development plans.

The first indication of the Capitol's value as a live venue occurred in July 1970. Greater Union Organisation's Controller of Theatres for Australia, W. E. (Bill) Tinkler, approached the Chief Secretary's Department on behalf of McColl Enterprises. He sought permission to present American comedian, Bill Cosby, on stage at the Capitol

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8 Her Majesty's Theatre was gutted early on Friday, 31st July 1970.
9 Ian McGrath, personal experience working in the Capitol. Performers frequently exited on one side of the theatre, ran round to the other side via Hay Street.
but Tinkler was uncertain if the entertainer was to be accompanied by a guitarist, or whether a support vocalist would be included on the program. Cosby's show was to be staged on the extended floor over the orchestra pit - in front of the fire curtain.\textsuperscript{11}

Tinkler stated that because the show entailed such a small company, his own company would not need to move either the film sound screen or its backstage sound system for the concert. Consequently, neither the neglected stage nor backstage facilities would be required, including the inoperative safety curtain. His assurance was persuasive and neither the Chief Secretary's Department nor the Department of Public Works made any objection to the concert.\textsuperscript{12}

Ironically, the first of three performance dates for Bill Cosby's concerts\textsuperscript{13} immediately preceded the fire at Her Majesty's Theatre on the 31st July 1970. Within a few days, Greater Union's Supervisor of Hard Top Theatres, Keith McLellan, wrote to the Under Secretary requesting permission for the company to make the Capitol available to the Opera Company of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT), which had been appearing at Her Majesty's Theatre. This would allow the Opera Company to use the theatre for an "Opera Concert Series" from 5th to 13th August, and compensate for its interrupted Opera season of \textit{Otello}. The only other venue capable of staging opera was the Elizabethan Theatre at Newtown, but it was not available for use and was soon to be altered and repaired by its owners - the Australian Elizabethan


\textsuperscript{13} The concerts were to be from 30th July to 1st August. CSD 4172: Capitol. Letter, W. E. Tinkler, 15 Jul. 1970.
Initially, the Opera Company believed all its sets and costumes had been destroyed in the fire, prompting all sixty singers of the Otello cast to wear evening dress for the concerts. Like the Bill Cosby show, they sang "front of curtain" and were accompanied by an orchestra of forty-five musicians playing in the orchestra pit created earlier by Rudas Theatrical Organisation. Both musicians and singers entered and left the theatre through the auditorium and, to overcome the problem involving denied access to backstage dressing facilities, they used 'front of house' toilet facilities normally reserved for the audience.

Just as critics and audiences praised the acoustics of the early Hippodrome, the acoustics of the Capitol were similarly lauded by audiences attending the concerts. This was not a new revelation but it was one that had been overlooked or forgotten since the earlier proposal to use the theatre for opera. As well as inherited structural qualities of the Hippodrome amphitheatre, the surfaces of the Capitol's plaster statues and substance of the interior decoration of its auditorium contributed to the acoustic environment, which allowed the audience to clearly hear every sound element of each performance.

Opera presented without its visual elements further reinforced the listeners' appreciation of the quality of the theatre's acoustics, especially those who had been

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15 John West, Theatre in Australia (Sydney: Cassell Australia, 1978) 250.
17 McGrath, Class discussions, Theatre Technology THEA 106, 1993.
deterred by the theatre's deteriorating image and its reputation as a popular culture venue. Many were entering the Capitol for the first time; Eva Wagner, a reporter for the *Australian*, was one such person and was astounded and pleasantly surprised by her experience.\(^18\)

Bill Tinkler and Keith McLellan visited the Chief Secretary's Department to consult with Government Architect, A. J. McFarlane, on the last day of the opera company's occupancy of the theatre (13th August). They were seeking information about work the department required to be undertaken in the Capitol in order for it to reach the necessary minimum standard for presentation of live and full scale musical productions. McFarlane advised them of all the details laid out in a letter, sent to Mr Hilder of Design Productions in 1961. A copy had also been sent to Greater Union Organisation at the time.\(^19\) Therefore, the two men were informed of matters of which they should have been already aware.

Since 1961, the absence of any maintenance work meant that not only had these items deteriorated further (or as in the case of the emergency catwalk, been completely removed) but others had also been added. Additional items included the galvanised roof and box gutters, which needed repairs and painting, and the caneite ceiling in the auditorium, which had been damaged by water leaking from above. There were defective sections and holes in the ceiling well before the two men's visit to the Government Architect\(^20\) and painting was still a constant problem.


Tinkler thanked McFarlane for his assistance and promised his company would keep the matter under consideration. It would also keep the government department informed of any further developments. However, department officers heard no more on the matter and in March of the following year, the annual inspection revealed that nothing had been rectified in the intervening period, not even those items pointed out to the two men.

Three days before this visit to the Government Architect, Keith Moremon, Managing Director of Greater Union Organisation, rang the Town Clerk to review the company's occupation of the Capitol and in his letter confirming their discussions he maintained his predecessor's claim that his "Group of Companies" built the theatre and had held a number of the building's leases. He also said that, earlier in the year, the Company had proposed to Council that it purchase the premises. This can be questioned as a search of the relevant Council file, Proceedings of Council and Index of Letters Received did not show any approach was made by the company at any time since the beginning of the year and there had been no earlier inquiry to the Chief Secretary's Department.

The company's latest proposal was for Council to grant a three-year lease of the property, with the same rental and under the same terms and conditions. In return the

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23 The rental was set at 130 pounds in 1937. The conditions of the lease stated the company was responsible for all rates, taxes, insurance and rates, and was required to maintain the theatre in good habitable repair, as well as painting it within the duration of each two year lease. CRS 50 DP 316: The Municipal Council of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Limited. Lease of Premises situated in Campbell, Parker and Hay Streets, City of Sydney, Known as the Capitol theatre, 16 Jun. 1937.
company would undertake to spend more than 100,000 dollars to replace its roof and ceiling, to modernise 'front of house', auditorium and dressing rooms. He advised Council that the company planned to bring the building to a standard sufficient to present live entertainments and films. At the same time, he directed his company to take steps in all its theatres to combat the introduction of coloured television.

Expecting Council's approval, the company had already met with representatives of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, N. L. T. Productions and a number of other interested parties but Council was slow to respond. When it did, it offered the company a two-year lease with an option for a further year. Moremon was dissatisfied with Council's response and replied that after the company's consultation with the Chief Secretary's Department, it had re-evaluated the situation and could no longer consider a lease less than five years, sufficient time to justify the expenditure it had proposed, as well as new additional requirements. This period was necessary because the company could not claim expenditure on repairs for taxation purposes but they offered to give priority to live entertainment if Council complied with their original request.

On 14th August 1970, the day after Tinkler and McLellan's meeting with the Government Architect, the Senior Clerk of Greater Union Organisation urgently phoned the Under Secretary on another matter. An industrial dispute at the Sydney Town Hall

25 O'Brien, 140.
induced the company to seek permission to transfer that evening's performance of the "ABC Youth Concert" to the Capitol. Prompted by this phone call, McFarlane contacted McLellan to discuss the matter in question and McLellan confirmed arrangements for this concert would be the same as those established for previous concerts. The Under Secretary duly granted permission.  

Greater Union Organisation again contacted the department because of this continuing industrial dispute. The company asked for permission to stage the "Yehudi Menuhin Concert" and "ABC Symphony Concert" on the 18th and 24th August respectively. In between these concerts it was still showing a season of horror movies and the film, *African Safari*. Despite its initial panic, the company became so confident in negotiations with the Chief Secretary's Department that there is no reference in the department's files to other live presentations, like the "TV Make it Australian Concert", "Bath Festival Orchestra", or to concerts held during the following year (other than the "Liberace" concert).

This omission is highlighted by the annual inspection of the theatre in June 1971. Inspectors E. Smith (Government Architect of the Public Works Department) and District Officer Atkinson (Fire Brigade Headquarters) were surprised to find Exhibition Wrestling was being presented on Sunday nights in the theatre, as neither man had been informed of this. No correspondence or records of negotiations were in the Chief Secretary's Department files; nevertheless, it had granted permission for

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31 Patricia Morgan, "Those were the days but this could be the start of something." *Bulletin* 5 Sep. 1970: 44-6.
wrestling in the previous month.\textsuperscript{32}

Tinkler's confidence with the Chief Secretary's Department is evident in his application made in October 1971, to move the existing cinema screen and its equipment, four feet (1.2 metres) further upstage for the proposed "Liberace Concert".\textsuperscript{33} This attitude was well founded, as J. B. Halliday, the Under Secretary, had no objections to the proposal,\textsuperscript{34} even though the company had not undertaken any of the safety or maintenance requirements under the relevant Act in the fourteen months since the company made its first application to present live performances.

It is also a paradox how Sydney City Council considered the company had fulfilled the terms of its lease for such a long time. Nevertheless, either the company had grown complacent and took it for granted that it would continue to automatically retain the Capitol's lease, or it did not particularly care whether it retained the theatre or not. As the current lease's expiration date approached, the company did not indicate to Council that it intended to extend its current lease or apply for a new one. Subsequent leases required three months notice of intention to vacate or remain.

Following the loss of Her Majesty's Theatre, City Council began to re-evaluate the Capitol's use and how Council could assist J. C. Williamson during reconstruction of their theatre. At the first meeting after the fire, Alderman David Griffin requested leasing of the Capitol be placed on the agenda for consideration by Council's Finance


\textsuperscript{34} Approval was granted on the 18th October 1971.
Committee and this was reported by daily newspapers.

Their reports attracted letters from A. G. MacPherson, the Chairman of Directors of J. C. Williamson and Harry O. Wren from Celebrity Theatre Circuit. Ian McPherson from the Sydney Film Festival had already approached Council to request a brief use of the theatre during each annual Sydney Festival and newspapers were responsible for rousing his interest in the Capitol. Company representatives had not, however, been allowed to inspect the building.

According to its resolution (passed at the above mentioned meeting), on 7th October, Council held a meeting with representatives of invited companies who had vested interests in the city's entertainment industry. After the Lord Mayor's introduction, Keith Moremon explained his company's position and proposal for the theatre. Others presented their positions - Mr. Alcorso of the Australian Opera Company needed the matter to be resolved within the week; B. Scott of J. C. Williamson, only needed the theatre for periodic leasing and John Neary of N. L. T. Productions was content to cooperate with Greater Union Organisation's proposals. It is not clear why Celebrity Theatre Circuit was not invited as a result of its expressed...
interest in the Capitol lease.

In the end, nothing was changed and Council resolved to lease the theatre to its current lessee for a further two years with the same rental and conditions.\(^{40}\) However, this was backdated to the beginning of 1970, at which time, the last extension to the lease expired.

During its last meeting before Christmas 1971, Council resolved to direct the lessee to vacate the premises on or before 29th February 1972\(^{41}\) and, next day, Council notified the Greater Union Organisation of its decision.\(^{42}\) Whereupon, E(ric) J. Sanders of the company replied with an air of injured sensitivity and shock at being told to vacate the theatre. He felt that after the many years his company and Council had been associated, Council should have advised the company that it thought the rental was overdue for adjustment and Council should not have allowed the matter be made public before it notified the company.\(^{43}\) In addition, he accused Council of not considering the company's planning for its future public entertainment and he asked for an extension of five weeks to allow programs to be presented and the company to remove its fixtures and fittings.\(^{44}\)

As already stated, following its customary practice, the company had not


\(^{43}\) CRS 34: TC 397/61: Capitol theatre. Letter, E. J. Saunders, Secretary, Greater Union Organisation, to Town Clerk, 7 Jan. 1972.

\(^{44}\) CRS 34: TC 397/61: Capitol theatre. Letter, E. J. Saunders, Secretary, Greater Union Organisation, to Town Clerk, 7 Jan. 1972.
contacted Council to confirm its intention to take up its option on the theatre. Instead, Council received its first tentative approach from Harry M. Miller, inquiring about the Capitol's lease and a letter outlining results of that meeting soon followed.45

Miller's company planned to open its production of "Jesus Christ Superstar" at the end of March in the following year and the pantomime "Winnie the Pooh" during the first school holidays.46 Miller offered a weekly rental of 2,000 dollars and to spend more than 100,000 dollars on repairs and improvements to the theatre.47 Provision would also be made to install "a revolving stage, full stereophonic sound, stage lighting equipment, additional dressing rooms, orchestra pit alterations" and facilities to improve patrons' comfort. By this time, the state of the theatre could not be ignored.48

On 19th December, David J. Whitford, General Manager of The Jesus People syndicate, wrote an unusual letter to the Deputy Lord Mayor after learning that Greater Union Organisation was to no longer control the Capitol. His company had already booked the Capitol through the lessee in order to present its rock musical, "Jesus Christ Revolution" and Whitford expressed his "shock" at the change of events.49 He divulged the names of people involved in his syndicate in confidence and stated that churches of all denominations gave their blessing to the company's efforts to expose the Australian

47 SCC Archives: PC 1971, 699.
48 CRS 51: Council Photographs taken in 1972 (before Harry M. Miller Attractions gained occupancy of the theatre; CSD 4172: Capitol theatre, file. Many documents including the annual inspection reports and correspondence to the lessee and lessor.
Youth to Christianity. Meanwhile, Melbourne's *Age* stated Harry Wren was the musical's entrepreneur\(^50\) and Harry M. Miller sent a legal affidavit to the Deputy Town Clerk (due to the absence of the Town Clerk and Lord Mayor) advising Council that "The Jesus People" was only a registered business name. Miller said the company was owned by Harry Wren Pty. Ltd.; its capital consisted of a hundred dollars, of which one share was owned by the company's Secretary/Accountant and the remaining ninety-nine shares were owned by Mrs Irene Wren.\(^51\)

Two days earlier, (four days before Council notified Greater Union Organisation of its final decision) Whitford wrote to the Town Clerk on behalf of the Jesus People syndicate, to submit a proposal for the theatre's lease.\(^52\) This syndicate wanted to lease the Capitol for two years with an option for another two years, offering a weekly rental higher than that offered by Harry M. Miller Attractions and proposed to undertake improvements at its own expense. It intended to use the theatre for its Sydney season of the "Jesus Christ Revolution", which it was producing by arrangement with Williamson-Edgley Theatres. (Meanwhile, its production was attracting criticism from that city's media.)\(^53\) The syndicate also planned to use the Capitol to present a number of live performances by international artists like Harry Belafonte and Sammy Davis

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52 He had read an article in a Melbourne newspaper on Tuesday 14th December, stating the Capitol was available for leasing.

Although Council later considered this proposition seriously, it lost the Town Clerk's support after Whitford postponed and then failed to keep his appointment. Well after the due time for this appointment, Whitford's secretary telephoned the Town Clerk and followed by sending a telegram, to tell him that Whitford was still in Melbourne and asking for another appointment. Accordingly, the Town Clerk cancelled negotiations.

Whitford did not like the Town Clerk's rejection. He sought to pressure the Town Clerk to reverse his refusal to meet him and wrote a number of letters protesting to the Town Clerk, Lord Mayor and State Premier, R. W. Askin, as well as notifying Andrew Benison of the Daily Telegraph about the situation. This protest eventually led Council to open the lease to public tender, which closed at 3.00 pm on 27th January 1972.

When Council first received Miller's and Whitford's initial submissions, it resolved to authorise the Town Clerk to negotiate with any interested parties. Soon,
John E. Neary, OBE, approached the Town Clerk and the Deputy Lord Mayor on behalf of his new company (John Neary Pty. Ltd.), Aztec Services and Williamson-Edgley. This syndicate of companies was interested in turning the Capitol into an "Australian Entertainment Centre". In his personal letter to Alderman Shehadie, Neary stated that he believed his long term interest in the Capitol entitled him to special consideration and he would match any realistic offer that Council might receive. He offered to pay 2,000 dollars per week during seasons of live productions but half that amount for film programs. In addition, he planned to present live shows, when the public could not see any live shows elsewhere in the city, and show Australian films. Finally, he asked the Town Clerk to put the matter to Council for consideration and allow him time to speak to the other members in his syndicate.

Council notified Greater Union Organisation that it had advertised for public tenders and requested to be advised when the company would allow prospective tenderers access to inspect the building. It also advised that it could not grant an extension of time to the company. Part of the responsibility for this decision lay with Keith Moremon himself.

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60 He visited the Town Clerk on 23rd December. In his subsequent letter he stated he approached Council before the demise of Her Majesty's Theatre and the Stadium; with Bobby Limb, he visited Ald Shehadie in August 1970. They represented a syndicate comprised of Dennis Wong, Michael Edgley, Aztec Services and himself; he next visited the Lord Mayor with Keith Moremon to discuss the proposal that he take over Greater Union's lease to turn the theatre into the Australian Entertainment Centre. CRS 34: TC 397/61: Capitol theatre. Letter, John E. Neary, OBE, to J. Luscombe, Town Clerk

61 CRS 34: TC 397/61: Capitol theatre. Letter, John E. Neary, OBE, to J. Luscombe, Town Clerk


When Miller rang Moremon before Christmas to request a prior inspection of the theatre, he replied, "My board is absolutely furious about what you have done and any request for access prior to our lease terminating will be denied." Miller's company needed to take measurements and ascertain the available technical facilities in order for the company to have a number of elements built and imported from overseas before its tenancy commenced. On the previous Monday, the Lord Mayor had telephoned Miller to request an extra six to eight weeks outside the time limit to allow Greater Union to complete its planned program and remove its equipment (as mentioned above). However, Greater Union Organisation's refusal to give Miller's company access until after it vacated the building, meant Harry M. Miller Attractions did not have any lee-way to allow the former lessee to delay its departure, while making preparations for its own tenancy. Consequently, Miller's company could not comply with Council's request for it, particularly "in view of Greater Union's attitude."

The subsequent tendering procedure did delay Harry M. Miller Attractions' occupancy of the theatre. When Council's tender box was opened, it only contained the submission from Miller's company, which did not comply with all Council's terms of tender. It was incomplete because the company's representatives could not inspect the building and the theatre's inventory had not been made available. However, Harry M. Miller Attractions offered an annual rental of 104,000 dollars, while neither of the other
companies submitted a tender nor contacted Council again, leading to conjecture that they sought to delay Miller's company entering the building.

Greater Union Organisation's departure from the theatre was not without incident. This company claimed virtually everything that was built into the theatre since 1927, including equipment installed by its predecessor Union Theatres, heating equipment installed by Rudas Theatrical Organisation and some Council owned equipment. It also claimed 695 theatre seats, which it had ear-marked for one of its Queensland theatres, light-fittings, statuary, curtains, carpets, air exhaust systems and other fittings. The company did not make any allowance for equipment installed by Council that was replaced during the Capitol alterations. Instead, it claimed the latter as its own.

Tinkler offered to sell certain items to Council but specifically excluded projection and stage equipment and the organ. He concluded his letter with the statement that the company's offer was made to Council on the "basis of the goodwill and understanding and that it had completely satisfied and fulfilled all the terms and conditions of 'our' tenancy under the lease and as weekly tenants."

The Wurlitzer organ was subsequently boxed and stored in various locations for a number of years, before it was installed in the Orion theatre at Campsie. Early in

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the 1960s, when the instrument had fallen into disuse after decades of intermittent use, Greater Union Theatres allowed the Theatre Organ Society of Australia (TOSA) to repair the instrument and install additional musical elements. Volunteers worked outside screening hours to restore and "releather" the organ and extend its capacity from fifteen to seventeen ranks, with sixty-one notes in each rank. In return, the company gave the society first option to purchase the instrument at some future time. With the assistance of the Canterbury Municipal Council it was permanently installed in the Orion centre. Sydney City Council unsuccessfully approached Canterbury Council to permit the organ to be replaced in the Capitol as part of the recent restoration and development but, instead, recording tapes of the organ were made available for use in the theatre.

Council officers and its legal representatives found it difficult to arrange a conference with the company to discuss the termination of the company's current lease and the matter of the theatre's fittings. The Managing Director (Moremon) and General Manager would not be contacted by phone and Company Secretary, Eric Saunders, replied that Council could not prevent the company removing its property. At the same time on 17th February, the Deputy Town Clerk was advised the company was removing seats, light fittings, statuary, curtains, carpets, heating, air exhaust fans and other

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74 "Phantom of the Opera" (general news items) Torch, 1993 [n.p.]

fittings from the theatre. He immediately went to the theatre to personally prevent any removals until a conference could be arranged. Next, he instructed the Council Solicitor to advise the Tenant's Solicitor that unless a conference be arranged immediately as a matter of urgency, Council would seek the advice of Senior Council "on injunction proceedings to restrain the removal of fixtures, which were considered to be part of the internal decor and the architecture of the building." Council would also arrange for "Professional Quantity Surveyors to be in attendance at the theatre during the following morning." Council arranged for a comprehensive photographic record to be made of the state of the theatre at this time, which showed the neglected condition of the building.

At 5.00 p.m., Moremon finally agreed to have a meeting with the Deputy Town Clerk at 8.30 next morning, in the company of other officers of the company and Council. He agreed to halt removal of fittings, pending discussion between the parties involved. The company's Superintendent provided the requested list and related valuations totalling 32,430 dollars. However, this was reduced to 20,000 dollars because of deliberate damage to Council's property and equipment in the building.

Backstage rigging comprising pulleys, counterweights, wires, flies, ropes, wirestock and other items were deliberately cut and severely damaged. The remnants were left in a tangled heap on the stage and Council alluded to this and similar action

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77 CRS 51: Council Photographs.
by Greater Union Organisation as malicious damage.  

The company offered to sell this tangled heap to Council for 5,000 dollars but, unlike other items, refused to restore it in the flytower. Furthermore, in the 1990s, representatives of Peddle Thorpe Architects and Fletcher Constructions found that the grid system and equipment in the Capitol flytower had been originally placed in position for Wirths. Therefore, this equipment already belonged to Council and was part of the items it had provided in 1916.

Greater Union Organisation's final act was to inform the Under Secretary of the Chief Secretary's Department that it had ceased to be the lessee of the Capitol and requested the licences be transferred to the City Council. Saunders regretted that the original licence had been lost over the years and could not be returned to the department for amendment.

As the long-term Lessee of the Capitol, Greater Union Theatres in its various forms, left an unfavourable impression of the company and ultimately the building with public perception. It did not maintain the building in accordance with conditions of the Council lease or the Theatres and Public Halls License. While it was natural for the company to favour its own theatres, it neglected the Council-owned property. It seemed

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83 The items referred to in this agreement, the company was obliged to return to Council in good working order or replacement equipment in lieu, at the end of the lease. CRS 50 DP 316: Deed Packet. Agreement, Municipal Council of Sydney with Wirth Brothers Ltd. 9 Mar. 1916.
that not only was the company not interested in the Capitol but it also did not want anyone else to gain occupancy of the building. This was especially evident with its attitude to Harry M. Miller, a comparative new-comer to the Sydney entertainment industry.

Moremon's claim (which has been repeated by others) that his company built the theatre could be disputed. In the true sense of legal terminology, Union Theatres altered the Hippodrome and went into liquidation; therefore, it was not the same company as Greater Union Organisation, which Keith Moremon now represented. Not even Council's agreement to allow Capitol theatre (Sydney) Limited to sublease the Capitol to Greater Union (Extension) Limited,\(^8^5\) alters that fact. In spirit, the companies may have considered themselves to be the same, because Stuart Doyle was the Director of both companies and so were the initial company officers.

Only a week before the last lease expired, the Deputy Town Clerk made the first City Council acknowledgment that the company had not maintained the building, when he recommended the "Professional Quantity Surveyors (be) in attendance at the theatre ... to assess the value of the fittings and the extent of unperformed maintenance under the lease for the purpose of instituting legal proceedings against the Lessee for the recovery of the sum of money involved."

\(^8^6\) In comparison, the Chief Secretary's Office was a conscientious authority, when it came to inspecting the building, but it tended to avoid any exercise of its authority to ensure all safety regulations were fulfilled.


Photograph from program of 1972 season of "Jesus Christ Superstar" shows set with lower section of dodecahedron on the left
Chapter 10

A Change of Life: The "Matron"

"Jesus Christ Superstar" and the Capitol - For many people aged over twenty-five years, the two are synonymous. This rock opera left an indelible mark on many memories, especially if this was their first visit to theatre. Younger patrons acquaint the "matronly brown" Capitol with the many Rock Concerts that were staged there some time later but all tend to remember gloomy premises strongly contrasting with their experience of live theatre.

Influenced partly by people's response to American Evangelist, Billy Graham's crusades, Christian plays were popular early in the 1970s and Rock Operas challenged conventional musical theatre. Apart from "Jesus Christ Superstar", other plays on this theme included "The Jesus Christ Revolution", (which was named "Man of Sorrows" in Sydney) "Godspell" and "Man-child". Locally, two Christian groups raised Harry M. Miller's ire, when they planned to present versions of "Jesus Christ Superstar". Both of these musicals contained music from Andrew Lloyd Weber and Tim Rice's original rock opera, leading to legal action over performance and copyright ownership.

Miller threatened both amateur groups with injunctions to prevent their productions proceeding. Newnes Youth group had already presented five performances

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2 Written by Enzo Toppano, Peggy Mortimer and Lorrae Desmond. When it played as "Man of Sorrows" in Sydney, Colin Croft played Herod. Personal memory of own and children's attendance. In Melbourne, entrepreneur Harry Wren claimed the musical was only conceived three weeks before. Wendy Milson "Magic was killed in onslaught of sound." *AGE* 10 Jan. 1972.

3 Produced by Aztec Services under Ken Brodziak, with whom Harry Miller produced "Hair" in 1969.

4 Lyrics and Music by Chris Neal and recorded in Melbourne.
of its production before bringing it to Sydney but, for its sixth show, the group changed its production's name to "The Jesus Revolution" and it did not attract any more objections. This performance was presented at Sydney's Town Hall under Reverend Alan Walker's sponsorship (of the Central Methodist Mission).  

In comparison, the Loreto Convent and St. Aloysius College initially believed Leeds Music Corporation of London had given them permission to present their version of the musical as a Passion Play. Their students continued to rehearse and prepare for their schools' annual concert, even though Miller was instigating legal action against them. He claimed that he had exclusive performance rights for the musical and was joined by Tim Rice, Andrew Lloyd Weber and the Robert Stigwood Group of London. Nevertheless, Mr. Justice Helsham was critical of all parties involved in the case and refused to issue any injunction because none of the parties had clearly established which company had authority to grant the play's performance rights. However, the plaintiffs gained a hollow victory when the convent postponed its production a few hours before the first performance was due to begin.

Miller's own production of "Jesus Christ Superstar" finally opened on 4th May 1972, but the performance was delayed by a technical fault in the video link between the conductor and orchestra's string section, positioned in a space under the stalls floor. While patrons waited, protesters and demonstrators assembled on footpaths outside.

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6 "'Superstar' hearing to resume on Tuesday." SMH 18 Sep. 1971: 3; "Nun had doubt on permission for 'Superstar'." SMH 23 Sep. 1971: 3.
7 "No 'Superstar' bar, but Convent postpones show." SMH 24 Sep. 1971: 1.
8 "Superstar off to a late start." SMH 5 May 1972; "Taking it Seriously: TV hitch holds up Superstar." Daily Telegraph (DT) 5 May 1971; Jim Oram, "Harry M's Supersweat: Superstar first night shemozzle." [n.p.], 5 May 1971, [n.p.] Denis Wolanski Library: Capitol theatre,
Reverend Walker was with the play's supporters and a large group from Sutherland's Presbyterian Reformed Church led opposition to the play.  

This church group had approached Council for permission to distribute pamphlets outside the Capitol on the opening night but Council did not consider their proposal until four days 'after' the opening. It formally gave the church group permission to hold a demonstration provided participants conducted themselves in an orderly manner; did not force pamphlets on people; gave assurance that any resultant litter was cleaned up; members were not to enter the theatre or obstruct any lines of movement or traffic and it was required to gain Police approval. This group applied to repeat the demonstration for ten days from 7th June but, this time, Council rejected their application two days 'before' it was due to take place.

Miller initially planned to present his production of "Jesus Christ Superstar" in March 1972 but he did not approach Council about leasing the Capitol until three months after the above-mentioned legal proceedings. It was April (immediately before "Jesus Christ Superstar" opened) before he approached Minister Willis for the Chief Secretary's Department, to ask for this department's assistance.

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9 SMH 5 May 1972.
10 SCC Archives: PC 1972, 186.
13 At this time, the Chief Secretary's Department and the Department of Public Works were linked. The same officers used both the letterheads as if they were interchangeable. Correspondence from the Capitol's lessees was directed to the former.
Meanwhile, Council received two approaches for the theatre's lease (mentioned in the previous chapter) but, when its tender box was opened on 27th January, it contained only Miller's informal submission. This leads to conjecture that rival companies intended to delay the opening of "Jesus Christ Superstar" and obstruct Council arranging better terms for the building's lease. Both rivals had earlier been involved in business dealings with the former lessee (who had voiced a sense of injustice at being asked to vacate the premises).

Council granted Harry M. Miller Attractions a two-year lease and an option for two renewals of one further year each. The "Agreement to Lease" made between the City Council and Harry M. Miller Attractions was finally signed on 4th May, which coincided with the company's opening night. In earlier discussions between Miller and the Deputy Town Clerk about the lease, Miller's company requested a one-year lease and options of further yearly extensions until such time as Council decided to demolish the building or sell its property.

Miller's company promised that, after its initial lease expired, it would pay additional rental to cover any increases in rates, taxes and levies above the 1972 level. As a condition of each lease extension, it would also pay an advance sum that was to be equal to three months rental; it would carry the costs and responsibility for all repairs; improvements on the theatre would benefit Council because "all of (the improvements

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17 CRS 50 DP 316: Deed Packet. Indenture of Lease between Council of the City of Sydney - One Part, Harry M. Miller Attractions - Other Part, 4 May 1972.
18 Discussions held on 20th February 1972.
would) become and remain the property of the Council". Outstanding work continued to include painting the building; making the outside lighting and the fire curtain operative; renovating various areas within the building needed for live theatre and for its performers; installing a back-stage hot water system, refreshment bars and carpeting. In return the company reserved the right to temporarily install equipment for stereophonic sound, theatre lighting, special effects and any other requirements for its productions. Meanwhile, Council was to restore theatre fittings and backstage rigging 'removed' by Greater Union Organisation but Harry M. Miller Attractions' solicitors proposed that instead of actually restoring the damaged rigging, Council could contribute up to 12,000 dollars for the work to be carried out and the company would make all arrangements.

Accordingly, the Production Division of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT) was engaged to repair the grid and counterweight system (at a cost of 14,250 dollars); to return the safety curtain to its original operating condition, which involved repairs and re-alignment of the safety curtain; repairing the curtain's winch drive, motor/transmission, wires and ropes and, where necessary, fitting new parts, limit switches and head control-gear. The Production Division also repaired and extended all the theatre's electrical wiring; rectified rotten stage flooring and undertook many

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other sundry repairs throughout the theatre. Apart from these repairs, the AETT built and maintained the production's dodecahedron and props. When "Jesus Christ Superstar" ended, AETT dismantled the dodecahedron; sold its individual useful parts separately and the remainder for scrap.

Many other companies were engaged to undertake various repairs throughout the building and one, or more, of these businesses was again engaged to undertake work on the building in the early 1990s. One example is the tradesman who repaired tiles and marble and whose son later found the family business still had some tiles originally used in the building.

Under Greater Union Organisation, the theatre's seriously deteriorated paint work was listed among the items for immediate repair by the Chief Secretary's Department. When Miller's company acquired the lease and made preparations to repair the building, he was advised that Taubmans made paint of the required quality.

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26 Trevor Waters, ATHS Tour of Capitol. 11 Dec. 1995. 1.00 pm.

Consequently, he used "Superstar Brown" coloured paint on the building and informed the Under Secretary that the auditorium ceiling was to be repainted with a mixture of Reckitts Blue and egg whites.28 (A modern version of this natural paint colour with its natural sheen, thick covering ability and easy flow quality, was made for the modern restoration by "Matisse" paints and its name identified with the Capitol.)29

In the above-mentioned negotiations the company's solicitors suggested Council, its officers and workmen be given access to the building at any time to view its state of the repair or to serve notice in writing about repairs or their payment but these visits were not to disturb the Lessee's business. They also pointed out that Harry M. Miller Attractions was not obliged to carry out any structural repairs, other than of a minor nature, but would make the roof waterproof and continue to maintain it in that state.30

Negotiations remained amicable and both parties agreed that Council would be technically responsible for repairs to the Capitol to the value of 116,000 dollars and, of this amount, the company would advance 104,000 dollars to Council as an interest free loan;31 Council was to establish a "Suspense Account" to hold the advanced payment from which payments for costs of repairs would be drawn as they fell due.32 Instead of repaying the company, Council was to reduce this amount by 1,000 dollars per week

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28 Information given to author during research was that this was traditionally used "paint". In another conversation, Tony Youlden said some of the stored tins of this mixture exploded. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Harry M. Miller to Under Secretary, 20 Apr. 1972; Tony Youlden conversation with author, NIDA, Jan. 1994.

29 Trevor Waters, ATHS Tour of Capitol. 11 Dec. 1995. 1.00 pm.


31 This sum for the repairs and restoration of the theatre was based on 52,000 per annum for the two years of the lease.

and credited to Harry M. Miller Attractions' weekly rental payments. Apart from this money, Miller offered Council a rental of 2,000 dollars per week, inclusive of all rates, taxes and insurances. This agreement allowed the full rental to be claimed on taxation upon invoices presented to Council for payment.\(^{33}\) (However, this amount is not the full expenditure outlaid by Harry M. Miller Attractions.)\(^{34}\)

Interpretation of these documents indicates the participants' initial understanding was that Harry M. Miller Attractions would lodge all this money with Council before any work was undertaken and the maximum amount to be held by Council was 104,000 dollars.\(^{35}\) Within six months, the company made its first approach to Council to alter its lease agreement,\(^{36}\) when its Financial Director applied to have his company’s advance payments negate the Bank Guarantee requested by Council.\(^{37}\) (Council required Capitol lessees to lodge this with Council to ensure ten weeks' rent was available to Council if they defaulted in their rental payments.) Consequently, the company's officers came to believe that this advance was not to exceed 30,000 dollars at any one time. Yet again, this revised company policy was changed and Harry M. Miller Attractions began to advance the money to Council as

\(^{33}\) This was at 2,000 dollars per week payable in advance and initially the company was to lodge a Bank Guarantee for surety, equal to ten weeks rental paid in advance.

\(^{34}\) This amount was exceeded when cost of ceiling was added and possibly cost more. Ian Hanson, "Sydney Capitol: From Market, Circus to Theatre." *Kino* no. 28, Jun. 1989, 16.


payment of invoices was due.\textsuperscript{38} 

In the first month of its tenancy, Miller's company paid Council three cheques totalling 32,250 dollars but later payments became spasmodic as company finances became stretched.\textsuperscript{39} It resulted in some confusion among officers of both the company and Council,\textsuperscript{40} who were uncertain which of the parties was owed money.\textsuperscript{41}

Extensive repairs had already been completed before Miller's telephone conversation with Minister Willis, mentioned above. The Minister, in turn, asked Government Architect, Aden J. McFarlane, for every assistance be given to the applicant. Unfortunately, Miller failed to contact McFarlane until four days after the agreed day, which provoked some disapproval.\textsuperscript{42} Both men made their first visit to the Capitol on 18th April to reveal what needed to be done on the building to enable it to be opened to the public.\textsuperscript{43} Accordingly, Miller was informed of the department's requirements,\textsuperscript{44} almost all of which were met by his company. These included


\textsuperscript{39} Miller requested the advance payments be substituted for the required Bank Guarantee for 30,000 dollars, (equal to ten weeks advance rental) as it needed the money for expenditure on the Capitol. CRS 34: TC 397/61: Capitol theatre. Letter, Harry M. Miller to Town Clerk, 17 Nov. 1972, Letter, Bank of NSW to Frederick Gibson, Executive Director, Harry M. Miller Attractions, 15 Nov. 1972.

\textsuperscript{40} Like the company's representatives, Council's Treasury Officers and Properties Officer also differed about the clauses covering the money advanced for the building's repairs, the methods of transferring the payment between the Lessor and Lessee, and the amount the Council was to hold at any one time.


extending the wet-pipe sprinkler system backstage and through the dressing rooms; installing approved safety lighting and other fire precautions.45

During this inspection, McFarlane saw the dodecahedron erected in position on the stage revolve and observed that its opened petals blocked the fire curtain path of descent and prevented a smoke seal forming between the curtain and stage floor.46 Both men differed about whether there was ample room on the stage for the set to operate safely; Miller stated the operator's position enabled him to close this offending machinery if the curtain needed to be lowered but, by August, an uneasy tolerance still existed between the parties.47

Frederick J. Gibson, Harry M. Miller Attractions' Managing Director, applied to Council for permission to alter the theatre's foyers. His company planned to install bars to sell alcoholic beverages to theatre patrons; these sales were to be in evening hours between Monday and Thursday and for a slightly longer period on Friday and Saturday.48 This was unprecedented, as alcohol had not been served in city theatres before this time. The Chief Secretary's Department imposed stringent conditions regarding times when alcoholic beverages could be sold,49 for only one hour before and

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48 Nominated trading hours from Monday to Thursday were 7.00pm to 11.30pm, and beginning at 5.00pm on Fridays and Saturdays. CRS 34: TC 2329/1972: Capitol theatre: F. J. Gibson, Development Application. Local Government Act 1919 as Amended, City of Sydney Planning Scheme, 16 Aug. 1972, re: Building Application, F. J. Gibson, 20 Apr. 1972.
after evening performances and during interval.\textsuperscript{50} Ignorance of these restrictions caused patrons to be critical of the theatre's closed bars, when the first performance was delayed by the above-mentioned technical failure.

This new start for the Capitol was not always a harmonious one. Suspicion that the electrical fault on opening night was sabotage grew after an unknown person threw a bomb into one of the building's eastern stairwells in the following May.\textsuperscript{51} It was quickly extinguished by resident fireman before any damage occurred.\textsuperscript{52} Three months later, a second petrol bomb broke windows in the theatre's western wall, when it exploded in Parker Street one Saturday evening. The resultant inspection showed how a fire could have been caused in the dressing room when these windows were smashed and inspectors recommended that (Police) action be expedited.\textsuperscript{53} No further mention was made in documents of what action followed.

Later in November (1972), a horrific accident occurred involving the proscenium safety curtain, a circuit breaker and lighting console\textsuperscript{54} and is covered in more detail in Appendix H. Four cast members were injured, when the free-falling fire curtain struck them during an afternoon matinee; it struck a dodecahedron petal, forcing

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{51} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre. Report, District Fire Officer, H. Atkinson, 26 Sep. 1972; "Bomb at Jesus Theatre." \textit{Australian} 13 May 1972: [n.p.].
\bibitem{54} See Appendix H, "A Night at the Theatre: Fifteen Seconds of Free-fall."
\end{thebibliography}
it down and pinning one young male to the floor. In 'front of house', the senior electrical technician was partially blinded by a flash from a circuit breaker. In turn, a fire extinguisher's smoke-like powder hung in the air, alarming the audience, who evacuated the building. Assembled on outside footpaths, they were met by arriving fire brigades, ambulances and the wail of sirens.

In accordance with regulations, John Young, the company's Production Manager, notified the Under Secretary of the accident but the Department had already been alerted by the city's morning newspapers. Department and Fire Brigade inspectors undertook an investigation of relevant equipment; they found a safely enclosed circuit breaker had broken down under load, emitting sparks and a small amount of smoke, but they doubted it would have caused a fire. Powder from one of the fire extinguishers had spread to the stage and had an appearance of smoke. The inspectors recommended no further action was considered necessary. After this accident,

55 John Young pointed out to the Under Secretary that the petal of the dodecahedron prevented more serious injuries and possible deaths. After this accident, the requirement of alarms warning of the descent of the safety curtains, was introduced into the amendments of the Theatres and Public Halls Act. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, John Young, Harry M. Miller Attractions, to Under Secretary, 24 Nov. 1972.


57 Witness account told by Janet Binns to author. Apr. 1997. at University of Wollongong.


legislation was introduced requiring an alarm to warn people of the descending curtain.

Unlike the Chief Secretary's Department, Council was not alerted to the accident by the city newspapers. The Town Clerk and Property Department first became aware of the incident barely a year later, when Council was approached by solicitors acting for the injured actor. They requested information about the theatre's licensee, whether Council had conducted an enquiry and whether Council had taken any action on the matter. The Town Clerk notified them that Council was not aware of the incident and advised they contact the Chief Secretary's Department for details they required. They had already done this earlier in the year.

Council was forced to conduct an investigation after these solicitors took legal action against Harry M. Miller Attractions, which in turn brought a cross-claim against the City Council, making it a "cross defendant". Consequently, late in 1976, Council Building Inspector, N. Keshan, conducted a thorough investigation, uncovering a lot of information and interviewing many relevant people. He could not interview a few significant people and one person denied any link to the company, preventing him from identifying which person made the fateful call to lower the curtain. Meanwhile, a

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64 CRS 34: TC 3910/73 and TC 3910A/73: Capitol theatre. Enquiry re Accident to Mr. G. V. Gilmour, Allegedly caused by fire, 10 Nov. 1972.
disgruntled former employee made allegations of disunity and drug-taking in the company but no proof of this in relation to the accident was found and the Building Inspector decided these claims were irrelevant. 65

This investigation highlighted a tension between officers of Council and the Chief Secretary's Department (Department of Services). 66 Before the Building Inspector's approach to the Department of Services, the City Solicitor wrote to the Under Secretary advising him of the impending legal action involving the accident. He explained that Council had just learned it was 'joined in' the action and needed to gather information urgently. 67 In his reply, the Under Secretary stated Department policy prevented it making its papers available in the circumstances outlined in the solicitor's letter 68 (a similar reply to that first given to the injured actor's solicitors). Later, a solicitor from the City Solicitor's office rang him to ask under what circumstances the Department could make the papers available to her but his answer remained the same. 69

When Council's Building Inspector approached the Officer-in-Charge of the Theatre and Public Halls Technical Section of the Department, asking to "peruse the file dealing with the Capitol theatre", he was asked if it was in relation to the legal proceedings outlined in the City Solicitor's letter. Aden McFarlane telephoned the Under Secretary before advising Keshan that he could only give information of a

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66 At the time of the accident, the Chief Secretary's Department was responsible for the theatre regulations.


general nature regarding regulations under the relevant act. Interpreting this response as being uncooperative, the Inspector replied that McFarlane's cooperation would have saved time and trouble for both Council and the Department, should Council be forced to take out a subpoena to obtain the required information. Whereupon, McFarlane replied that the best he could offer was for Council or the City Solicitor to send a written list of questions to the Department, which it could answer after careful study by its own Legal Department. Nevertheless, he did answer many pertinent questions.

The Council officer's opinion of the Department and McFarlane's perceived lack of cooperation was supported by a recommendation from Senior Counsel. He recommended Council join the renamed Department of Services as its Co-cross-defendant but Council's above-mentioned solicitor advised the Town Clerk that Council needed the department's cooperation instead of making its officers into "hostile witnesses". She said that it was also in Council's best interests not to pursue this course of action. Both legal cases (the injured actor against Harry M. Miller Attractions and Harry M. Miller Attractions joining the Council as co-defendant) were settled 'out-of-court', the latter after Council's solicitor advised the case would likely favour the lessor but such action would be long and too costly to justify.

Ironically, Miller's association with the Capitol through "Jesus Christ Superstar"
coincided with legal action he had taken against others but this situation was reversed after his company became the tenant of the building. As well as the proceedings surrounding the above-mentioned accident, a separate complaint was made to the Chief Secretary's Department regarding a breach of safety regulations, prompting the Department to issue a summons against Harry M. Miller Attractions.

After a matinee of "Swan Lake" (the first film screened in the Capitol by the Company), exiting patrons found most of the theatre's exits locked and one leaf each of the double-doors leading to the Main Foyer had been bolted closed. The reason for this situation was a crush of people in the foyer waiting to enter for the next session. Department Inspectors subsequently visited the Capitol and talked with Manager, Chris Frost, and a theatre administrative officer, Mrs Blogg. During this conversation, one of the department's architects entered the auditorium and saw that the complaint was well founded. When he returned to the main foyer, he saw Mrs. Blogg speaking to an employee, who subsequently walked into the theatre's inner foyer and was disappearing down a passage after he re-entered the theatre. This time, he found the previously wired doors had been released; chains and locks from other doors were found on the floor nearby; offending bolts on one leaf of the double doors had been unbolted. This breach would have had serious ramifications in the event of an emergency and it


74 Chris Frost again managed the theatre for a subsequent lessee and wrote one of the letters supporting the retention and restoration of the theatre, following the invitation for submissions in 1981 (see Chapters 11 and 12).

75 Mrs Blogg was the theatre's Assistant Manager who quelled the audience panic at the time of the accident (see Appendix H), experience of an audience member on the night, Janet Binns, anecdote; CRS 34: TC 3910/73: Capitol Theatre. Interview 14, 7 Sep. 1976.

resulted in the Department issuing a summons against the Licensee/Lessee.

Miller's Chief of Staff, J. Barnett, visited the department next day to explain problems the theatre was experiencing with unlawful entry and the action he had taken to prevent this situation from being repeated. Next, Company Director, Richard Harper, approached the Department to request it withdraw the summons and he also explained that his company was forced to secure doors to circumvent incidents of unauthorised "penetration" into the building. When Miller phoned the Department, he was told of management's infringement of safety regulations and withdrew his request regarding the summons. He said his company would plead guilty at the hearing.

During this research, reference and criticism were made in conversations to the replacement of the auditorium ceiling by Harry M. Miller Attractions, which proved to be not quite accurate. The company first asked Council for permission to renew the auditorium ceiling in May 1973, and sought to have the work completed before its 1974 season of the "National Ballet of Senegal". Instead, Council decided that this was its own responsibility and as the expiry date of the theatre lease approached, it called for tenders to undertake the work to a maximum sum of 18,000 dollars. It also approached the Under Secretary on the matter. The department sent technical information and a brochure on the appropriate improved material and it duly gave permission for Council to replace the existing Cane-ite ceiling with a suitable fire

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79 SCC Archives: PC 1973, 267, 735.
resistant substitute. Nevertheless, Council sought further advice from the firm of acoustics specialists, Peter Knowland and Associates before acting.

After testing a sample of the Cane-ite, this company found PVA paint produced a better result than oil-based paint and recommended that absorbent fibreglass tiles be installed on 15 to 20 per cent of the ceiling after the ceiling material was installed. Nevertheless, the company proposed to test the existing ceiling's reverberation before alterations commenced.

This new Cane-ite product was half an inch thick, (fire tested) lightly compressed, medium density soft-board containing radiata pine fibres, with waterproofing agents and binders (complying with AS.0116-1968) and was ivory grade coated on both sides. Once in place, it was to be painted with two finishing coats of PVA paint; apertures for the ceiling's blinking lights were to be inserted in the material and were to be positioned to match the existing placement of lights.

By February 1974, Miller's company was getting desperate and wrote to the Deputy Town Clerk to ask the waiting contractor to begin work immediately. Miller outlined times when the company could allow workmen access to the building that still


81 This company was currently engaged to work on the Town Hall's acoustics. SCC Archives: PC 1973, 735-6.

82 Measurement comparisons of existing and proposed ceiling material was acceptable except for the frequency for 1000 Hz absorption (existing 0.21: proposed 0.39). CRS 34: TC 3910A/73: Capitol theatre. Letter, Peter Knowland and Associates, 18, Jan. 1974 cited in Copy, Minute Paper City Planning and Building Department (from CRS 34: TC 1563/73), 3 Apr. 1974.

allowed the ballet season to take place. The Deputy Town Clerk considered Miller's letter was unacceptable and advised Richard Harper that he required another letter that used different phraseology. The company obeyed and enclosed payment of two hundred dollars to cover half of the additional moneys the contractor required to begin on the 19th February, earlier than planned. Some of this difficulty arose because City Council was in recess over the summer season.

When the time came to renew its lease, Harry M. Miller Attractions was unable to take up its option and Miller suggested to Council that the company remain in the building in a caretaker capacity, until a new lessee could be found. Council appreciated and accepted the lessee's offer. The company also offered to sell its equipment to Council, but based prices for the items on replacement value in the current market, making no allowance for depreciation. Miller estimated that it would cost Council 175,000 dollars to refit the theatre if his company removed all this film and theatre equipment. His company was not unique among the Capitol's lessees in

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86 This letter and enclosure was acceptable and the Deputy Town Clerk directed Mr. Boyce Smith of Building Installation Services be advised to start work. CRS 34: TC 3910A/73: Capitol theatre. Letter, Harry M. Miller to Leon Carter, Deputy Town Clerk, 15 Feb. 1974.
87 CRS 34: TC 3910A/73: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper City Planning and Building Department, c. 23 Mar. 1974.
this respect. When roles of seller and purchaser were reversed, lessees depreciated the value of Council's property, while Council often resisted paying the full cost, using various justifications when it was required to pay for services and/or material items.

Tension between Council officers and company representatives was obvious at the end of Miller's first lease. Items of contention included outstanding gas and electricity bills, damaged grill and fretwork, stained carpet and seats (the latter also in need of repair) and missing items including four statuary pieces,\(^92\) three of which were found in the room off the Dress Circle, broken beyond repair.\(^93\) It was estimated that it would cost one hundred dollars to replace the hand from the remaining broken statue. Later, when Ipoh Garden Developments' officers inspected the theatre for the restoration work, fifteen items were missing. Some were replaced by similar statues from former State theatre in Melbourne, while fibre-glass replicas were substituted for the remainder.\(^94\)

Council officers and Hoyts Theatres' representatives inspected the Capitol prior to Hoyts becoming its new Lessee. They were critical of the fabric stage curtain, which Miller's company left for the new lessee to hang; they thought it was only in a fair condition and estimated it to be over thirty years old.\(^95\) This curtain replaced the original multi-coloured curtain that Greater Union Organisation had earlier dumped at

\(^92\) From the Dress Circle Foyer, an 18 in. high vase (O 21) and 6 foot high plaster statue of nude male with both arms raised (P 46); a 3 foot high lamp in shape of Grecian Urn (O 36) from east side of Stage; hand broken from 7 foot high plaster statue of Amazon on eastern wall. CRS 34: TC 397/61: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper Properties Branch, 3 Sep. 1974; Minute Paper Properties Branch, 13 Sep. 1974; Minute Paper Properties Branch, 30 Oct. 1974.

\(^93\) Photograph of Supplicant Youth taken in 1966 appears to be the smashed statue from the Dress Circle/Lounge Foyer. Hanson, 15.

\(^94\) Waters, 1994.

Popular culture entertainment in the Capitol, took a brief innovative turn under the management of Harry M. Miller Attractions. "Jesus Christ Superstar" had been preceded elsewhere in the city by the successful production of "Hair" and it was to be followed in the Capitol by another equally spectacular musical, "Gone with the Wind" opening in May 1973. Because a "certain amount of this production" was to take place in front of the existing proscenium arch and fire curtain, as well as the element of fire being integral to the play, Production Coordinator, John Young, began early consultations with the Chief Secretary's Department. In addition to discussing construction of the set, management was concerned that existing theatre regulations would lead to complications in relation to fires. It wanted to be exempt from the need for emergency sirens and alarms, lest they panic the audience during the normal course of production. However, in April, the company's Production Coordinator notified the Under Secretary that this production had been postponed indefinitely.

In place of the play, Harry M. Miller Attractions began preparations to begin screening "Swan Lake" from 28th May. It arranged for Brakell Products to install a

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96 Hanson, 16.
97 Jesus Christ Superstar program; Katharine Brisbane, Entertaining Australia: an illustrated history (Sydney: Currency Press, 1991) 310.
new Sound Screen - Harkness Flameproof, Serial 22, the Bio-box was altered; additional electrical wiring was installed; it engaged the company, Carl Zeiss, to install a new Projector and film equipment. This equipment was listed in the extensive inventory that company officers offered to sell to Council in 1974 and was again included in the inventory offered for sale after Hoyts Theatres' lease expired two years later.

In 1974, when Sydney City Council once more advertised for formal tenders from potential lessees, it only received a formal tender from Hoyts Theatres and an informal reply from Miller. Hoyts Theatres revealed that it intended to dispose of many of its other traditional cinemas (it was already building a theatre complex containing seven cinemas on the site of the former Trocadero ballroom).

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102 This equipment used the first platter film transport system in New South Wales and second in Australia. Hanson, 16.

103 Ernemann VIII (35 mm. film) Projector complete with Zennon Lamp House, fully automatic, non-rewind system; operation through Ernemat remote controlling of sound curtain operation and projector and Altec-Lansing speaker systems. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, John Young to Under Secretary, J. B. Halliday, 21 May 1973.

104 CRS 34 TC 397/61: Letter and inventory, Harry M. Miller to Town Clerk, 8 May 1974; Minute Paper Properties Branch, 14 Jun. 1974; Inventory List, 1 Jul. 1974; SCC Archives: PC 1974, 441.


106 CRS 34: TC 663/74: Capitol theatre. Memo, Town Clerk to Deputy Town Clerk, 23 Apr. 1974; Letter, Harry M. Miller to Town Clerk, 14 May 1974; Formal Tender, Hoyts Theatres, 6 May 1974; SCC Archives. PC 1974, 249, 437-8.

107 Hoyts expected to remain in the (leased) Regent until October 1975, and hoped to negotiate with the City Council for an extension of its lease of the Paris theatre until the opening of the complex at the end of 1976. It expected to lose the Century before then, when its owners began to redevelop the site. CRS 34: TC 663/74: Capitol theatre. Invitation of Tenders for Lease. Formal tender and letter, Dave Turnbull, Hoyts Theatres, 6 May 1974.

Theatres offered to pay 2,200 dollars per week rental; it intended to screen films in the Capitol and, with Council's permission, it planned to sublet the premises for live concerts and productions. This policy opened the theatre's facilities to a variety of entrepreneurs, interested in producing live concerts.

Council's Finance Committee moved that Hoyts Theatres pay the rates, taxes and insurances on the building and, accordingly, Council granted the company a two-year lease with an option for a further two years. However, the lease agreement was delayed until ownership of the theatre's equipment was established.

One entrepreneur to use the Capitol during this period was Edgley and Dawe, who presented productions like the seasons of "Nureyev and the London Festival Ballet", the "Russian Folk Company" and "Siberian Cossacks". This company intended to present the American Ballet Company in November 1976, which coincided with the American bi-centenary. Consequently, Andrew Guild, a Director of the sublessee, approached the Town Clerk to confirm that the theatre would be available for the season before it finalised travel and accommodation details for the touring company. However, Council kept delaying its reply in order to ascertain if Hoyts Theatres was

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113 CRS 34: TC 3296/75: Capitol theatre, Hay St., Campbell St. and Parker St.: Offer to lease, Edgley and Dawe Attractions Pty Ltd. 22/10. Letter, Andrew Guild, Director for Edgley Dawe Attractions Pty Ltd and Associated Companies, to Town Clerk, 22 Oct. 1975; Letter, Andrew Guild to Comptroller of Properties, 23 Jan. 1976.
taking up its option. Eventually, after five months the company notified the Town Clerk that the tour would not eventuate.

While it was using the Capitol, Edgley and Dawe arranged for contractors to make alterations for the London Festival Ballet. The stage was extended over the existing orchestra pit; an extensive new orchestra pit was built below floor level in front of the auditorium; existing air-conditioning ducts, electrical wiring and lighting (that was installed by Harry M. Miller Attractions) were replaced. These alterations were designed to be reversed, when necessary, but were able to be used for the American Ballet Company and similar productions.

Although the sub-lessee applied directly to Council for permission to carry out these alterations, Council considered it should not involve itself with third parties during the current lease but should only negotiate direct with the lessee. This distanced Council from any knowledge of what was happening in its property and highlights Council's management policy in relation to the Capitol.

Hoyts Theatres' tenancy of the theatre did not generate as much correspondence as previous lessees. Repairs and alterations to the building, undertaken by Miller's company, relieved it of a considerable burden and obligation under both the lease and licence. The only serious matter brought to the department's attention in June 1975,

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114 CRS 34: TC 3296/75: Capitol theatre, Hay St., Campbell St. and Parker St.: Offer to lease, Edgley and Dawe Attractions Pty Ltd. 22/10. Minute Paper Properties Branch, 29 Jan. 1976.
116 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre. Letter, Gareth James, Edgley and Dawe Attractions, to Under Secretary, 13 Jun. 1975; Letter, Trowell and Balcombe to Town Clerk, 6 May 1975.
was the dangerous state of the building's awning.\textsuperscript{118} An anonymous caller complained of this and a problem with the new orchestra pit; they were investigated by the District Fire Officer.

The rusting-metal awning surrounded the entire block. The section attached to the theatre was supported by building props that were tied onto the awning to hold them in place; many of the props had been dislodged from their positions by reversing vehicles.\textsuperscript{119} This is the first reference to the awning since construction of the Hippodrome and, because it was part of the building's structure, it was part of Council's responsibility.\textsuperscript{120} It was in such bad condition that Council was forced to call for tenders to replace all of it.\textsuperscript{121} Work began the following April\textsuperscript{122} and was almost completed by November at the total cost of 60,418 dollars.\textsuperscript{123}

In 1976, Hoyts notified Council that it intended to vacate the theatre on the 15th September\textsuperscript{124} and supported Harry M. Miller Attractions' request for a short lease of twenty weeks, to enabled the current season of a restaged production of "Jesus Christ
Superstar" to finish. This time the musical was praised by the media and did not attract any opposition or demonstrations.

Early in the year, Council received an application to use the theatre from Jim McDonald of Delicado Productions, who wanted to use the Capitol for up to six days in October. Discussions with Council increased this period to two or three weeks and the company offered to pay 4,000 dollars per week. Council replied four months after McDonald contacted Council's Property Department and outlined seven rigid conditions, fixed the rental at 5,000 dollars per week and required a reply within seven days. Even though the company was prepared to abide by the conditions (some involved extra expenditure), it was unable to consider the high rental and they let the matter lapse. Council then invited Delicado Productions to make a fresh offer incorporating further details and the licence fee it was prepared to pay to Council but Delicado Productions officially withdrew its offer. "Jesus Christ Superstar" opened on

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125 McDonald was interested in using the Capitol for either five days from 4th October or six days from 11th October and initially asked Council to indicate the required rental. CRS 34: TC 1930/76: Capitol theatre. Purchase of equipment from Hoyts Theatres Ltd. Letter, Jim McDonald, Delicado Productions, to Property Department, 17 Feb. 1976.


129 Harry M. Miller Attractions notified Council on this day that this company wished to negotiate for a twenty-week lease after Hoyts Theatres vacated the premises and was offering to pay 4,250 dollars per week. CRS 34: TC 1930/76: Capitol theatre. Purchase of equipment from Hoyts Theatres Ltd. Minute Paper Property Sub Committee, 17 Jun. 1976.
3rd June and continued to play until 16th October.130

Another unique set was designed for this restaged production of "Jesus Christ Superstar" based on two large, raked platforms that extended out into the auditorium. Steel-panel extension sections were added to the bottom of the safety curtain to allow for these ramps and because there was no precedent for this alteration, permission was required from the Department of Services (Chief Secretary's Department).131 Adjustment needed to be made to the curtain's counter-balance for safety.132

Two days before the commencement of "Jesus Christ Superstar", the Department of Works revived the need for a drencher to be installed over the safety curtain, a requirement which had been dropped in 1927. Department officers considered it was necessary to compensate for deficiencies created where the steel extensions on the bottom of the fire curtain fitted between and around the protruding ramps of the stage set.133 Jack Barnett of the Scenery Centre (and formerly of AETT), which had been engaged to erect the sets for Harry M. Miller Attractions, gained quotes from Wormald International for the work but costs quoted at 11,000 dollars were prohibitive.134 A drencher has since been installed as part of the new restoration

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130 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, J. B. Holliday, Under Secretary to Minister of Department of Services, 1 Jun. 1976.


During his short second lease of the Capitol, Miller's company paid 4,000 dollars per week in advance and agreed to pay 30,000 dollars on demand. In return, Council exempted it from undertaking maintenance work or paying rates and taxes on the premises. When the Miller's company vacated the building this time, Council briefly considered taking legal action against it, because of another missing statuette, but failed to do so.  

In 1974, when Harry M. Miller Attractions' first lease expired, Miller had offered to sell furnishings, fittings and sundry items this company had brought into the building. Council's Properties Department had then been in favour of purchasing their cinema and live theatre equipment but reversed this position two years later when the second lease lapsed. The first recommendation had been made on grounds that the building would be easier to lease if it contained this equipment after the next lessee, Hoyts Theatres, vacated the premises. Council's Executive Officer instigated the second and opposing recommendation to the purchase of the same cinema equipment, because he believed it would place an additional financial obligation on Council to replace this equipment for any future lessee. He also pointed out that the Capitol's lack of air conditioning, carpet, modern seating and available parking, placed it at a disadvantage to a number of modern theatres that were being constructed in the city.

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and recommended any prospective entrepreneur needed a longer lease to recoup any expenses incurred updating the theatre's facilities.

After Harry M. Miller Attractions vacated it, the Under Secretary would not permit the public to enter the building until Council undertook certain repairs. Because of this directive and lack of projection equipment, Council could not grant a three-week lease to the International Children's Film Festival (part of the Sydney Film Festival) in the following January. Peter Cheung Chi Kong needed to hire projection equipment when he used the Capitol to present his ill-fated season of the Chinese Documentary film, "Acrobatic Knights" in 1977.

Disregarding the clash of personalities and tensions between parties involved, Harry M. Miller Attractions presence in the theatre revived the image of the theatre, restored a significant proportion of the structure and rekindled the fortunes of surrounding businesses. Although this revival was temporary, it drew enough attention and interest in the theatre to inspire its survival. It may have led to the classification by the National Trust, one important element leading to the modern restoration of the building and neighbouring properties.

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142 He had applied to temporarily use either of the Council-owned theatres, the Capitol or Paris, and Council delays made the season open a month late on the 23rd April. It was not a financial success and instead of the proposed six weeks, the film was only shown on six days. CRS 34: TC 631/77: Capitol theatre. Letter, Peter Cheung Chi Kong, 12 Mar. 1977; Application by Peter Cheung Chi Kong for use for period 25 Mar. - 8 May 1977, Minute Paper Treasury Department, 20 Dec. 1977.
These leases were profitable for the Sydney City Council. Repairs undertaken by Miller's company relieved the lessor of a future burden. However, Council chose to remain uninformed of the condition of its structure and might have been found to be responsible if the awning had injured people. Meanwhile, the Chief Secretary's Department and its successor, the Department of Services/Department of Public Works, continued to be more aware of the theatre's condition than its owner.
CRS 294/68: Detail of Architect Brian S. J. Woolstone's impression of alterations to Capitol for Joseph Giersh. Shows proposed cabaret entertainment, dining tables on stalls terraces and theatre seating in Dress Circle.
Chapter 11

The Struggle to Survive

Despite the short respite provided by "Jesus Christ Superstar", the fortunes of the Capitol resumed their downward spiral. Slowly at first - but, with growing momentum, the fabric of its structure deteriorated to a dangerous state, despite efforts of a prospective tenant (Joseph Giersh) and the last lessees (Vlado Shopov and Gladwyne). They tried unsuccessfully to persuade City Council to grant them leases, which would allow the theatre to be repaired and restored; their efforts to resurrect the Capitol's image were intended to attract audiences and entrepreneurs back to the theatre, making it a viable venue. Unfortunately, most proposals submitted expected City Council to pay all costs for repairs and alterations in return for reducible rentals set at, or below, the rental paid in 1972.

After Harry M. Miller Attractions' short lease of the Capitol expired on 16th October 1976,¹ it was vacant for almost two years² even though Council tried unsuccessfully to attract tenders for five or ten years.³ Council was eventually forced to apply to the Department of Services to ask it to transfer the Capitol's Theatres and Public Halls License (T4172) to Council until such time that a new lessee was found.

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² Council approved that Vlado Shopov be granted the lease of the Capitol, at its meeting on 13th August. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, L. P. Carter, Town Clerk, to the Under Secretary, Department of Services, 29 Aug. 1979.

³ Advertisements were inserted in newspapers of all the Australian Capitol cities. CRS 34: TC 3296/75: Capitol theatre. Offer to Lease: Edgley and Dawe Attractions. Conditions and Terms of Tender for the Capitol theatre, 3, 5 or 10 [sic] years. Minute Paper Properties Branch, 7 Jan. 1977.
for the theatre. Council then lost this licence in its files and the Town Clerk had to request a replacement licence be granted to Vlado Shopov, when he was lessee. In his reply, the Under Secretary asked to be informed of Council's plans for the Capitol. In the meantime, except for continuing to pump out seepage in the theatre's basement each fortnight, Council did very little regular maintenance during these two years.

As he had done nearly every time Council called for expressions of interest since 1974 through to the mid 1980s, Harry M. Miller again proposed an arrangement with Council, whereby the two form a type of partnership to manage the Capitol. He planned to turn it into the biggest live venue in Australia and proposed a form of partnership, whereby Miller's company would manage the theatre for Council; be responsible for the employment of all required staff; hire all necessary equipment and book productions and performers and over a minimum period of ten years. Council

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4 This licence currently can be found in CRS 34: TC 1637/76: Capitol theatre. Lease to Harry M. Miller Attractions.


7 In April 1978, Ald. S. McGoldrick asked about flooding in the basement of the Capitol and was told Council's employees regularly pumped out the water at fortnightly intervals. Inspection of the building found that this long established maintenance procedure had prevented any damage to the building from this continual seepage. Council officer, L. W. Lambert, mistook the adjacent water source as "the tank stream". CRS 34: TC 1032/78: Capitol theatre. Alleged flooding of the basement: Question Without Notice - Ald. S McGoldrick, 10 Apr. 1978; Minute Paper Properties Branch, 16 May 1978.

8 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Inspection, Department of Public Works, 10 Sep. 1979; Inspection, Department of Public Works, 15 Oct. 1979; Annual Inspection, Department of Services, 11 Mar. 1980.

would share the profits but was expected to spend up to 500,000 dollars restoring the building.\textsuperscript{10} Although Council's Executive Officer recommended this proposal be investigated and considered,\textsuperscript{11} it was not accepted.

Another offer, received earlier, was also being considered. Film and television producer, Stafford Films, was seeking a theatre in which to show its own films and in October 1976, its Director submitted an offer to Council. He had read newspaper reports that the theatre was soon to be vacated and offered to lease the Capitol for five years and one month, with an option for a further five years.\textsuperscript{12} Beginning on 1st November, the first month would be rent-free to allow Stafford Films to repair and restore the theatre at its own expense but, from then, it would pay 1,500 dollars per week rental in the first year and a weekly rental of 2,000 dollars for the remaining four years.\textsuperscript{13} To defray costs, the company proposed to provide live theatre and cinema performances; to film, videotape and record stage performances and occasionally broadcast and televise performances, as well as use it for seminars. The company hoped to take advantage of the summer season, when leisure activity peaked.

Nine months later, Council's Property Officer returned the Director's telephone call but, by then, Stafford Films was occupying the Elizabethan Theatre at Newtown and was no longer financially able to proceed with its proposal. Although still

\textsuperscript{10} CRS 116: 32/05/0103: Capitol theatre: Question of Lease to Mr. Shopov: Question without Notice by Ald. T. Reeves. Informal Offer, Harry M. Miller Attractions to Town Clerk, 14 Feb. 1977; Minutes of Meeting held in Function Room at 3.30 p.m., 25 Jul. 1977.


interested in the Capitol, its management said it would have to postpone this offer until its situation could be reviewed.\textsuperscript{14}

Although it is unclear who was holding it, a cocktail party and film night was planned for April 1977 and Council was forced to undertake urgent repairs on the building in preparation for it.\textsuperscript{15} This was because the Department of Services refused to allow any public meetings or public entertainments to take place in the building until this work was done.\textsuperscript{16}

In the following May, Peter Cheung Chi Kong's shortened season of Chinese documentary films took place during the time when Council was considering Miller's and Stafford's submissions.\textsuperscript{17} Then, Council allowed Garron International (Distribution) to use the building from July to August 1977.\textsuperscript{18} Peter Cheung Chi Kong thoroughly cleaned the premises before vacating the premises and, except for Wirths, was the only lessee specifically recorded to leave it in a clean condition. Consequently, Council's Property Department approved the return of his cleaning deposit and the small sum remaining he voluntarily left with Council.\textsuperscript{19} Afterwards, the Capitol fell

\textsuperscript{14} CRS 34: TC 3296/75: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper Properties Branch - Administration, [c. 25 Jul. 1977].


\textsuperscript{16} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, Under Secretary to Town Clerk, 19 Nov. 1976.

\textsuperscript{17} Instead of the anticipated six weeks, with an option for a further six weeks, the Chinese documentary film season only ran for six days. The lessee was to pay in advance to Council almost 118 dollars per day of screening, either 10 percent of the gross takings or one third of the net takings (whichever was greater) and a refundable cleaning deposit. Gross ticket sales for each day ranged from 128 dollars to 276 dollars 50 cents and was a financial loss. CRS 50 DP 316: Deed Packet. The Council of the City of Sydney, one part, and Peter Cheung Chi Kong, Other part: Deed. 22 Apr. 1977; CRS 34: TC 631/11: Capitol theatre. Application by Peter Cheung Chi Kong for use for Period, 25/3 - 8/ 5/77. Minute Paper Treasury Department, 20 Dec. 1977; SCC Archives: PC 1977, 112-3.

\textsuperscript{18} SCC Archives: PC 1977, 341.

into a serious state of disrepair.

Council did not receive any appropriate responses to its advertisements.\(^{20}\) As a result, it decided to modernise and renovate the building and contacted the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) to ask for a list of specialist architects, who could undertake a feasibility study and working brief of the Capitol on its behalf.\(^{21}\) The RAIA sent a list of six companies,\(^{22}\) whom Council contacted along with a further six more architects or companies.\(^{23}\) Nine architects indicated they were/would be in a position to undertake the work and were interested in the project. Although they were only asked to indicate if they were prepared to undertake the study and to set a fee for their work, at least two of these architects expressed doubts in the wisdom of retaining the building and advised Council to redevelop the site instead. Two others commented that optimum requirements for the theatre would be a workable stage with wings, improved sightlines, seating for at least 8,000 patrons, as well as a multiple use venue that could house theatre and cinema exhibitions, galleries, a community centre, youth centre, arena type entertainments, promenades, conventions, music of all forms, restaurants, specialty shopping and marketing.\(^{24}\) Lord Mayor Ald. Nelson Meers and

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\(^{20}\) SCC Archives: PC 1978, 341.


\(^{22}\) CRS 34: TC 3296/75: Capitol theatre. Letter, A. C. Reynolds, Secretary, RAIA, to J. Boyd, Property Officer, 15 Nov. 1977.

\(^{23}\) CRS 34: TC 3296/75: Capitol theatre file. Letters, Town Clerk to Keith E. Cottier; Peter Parkinson; Peter Hall; Tom Brown and Associates; Hassell and Partners, 11 Nov. 1977; to Ancher Mortlock and Woolley; Michael Davies and Andrew Metcalf; Minnett, Cullis-Hill, Peterson and Powell; Harry Seidler and Associates; Rudder, Littlemore and Rudder, 16 Dec. 1977; to McConnel Smith and Johnson, 26 Jan. 1978; to Vivian Fraser, Jan. 1978

Town Clerk, Leon Carter, came to prefer the redevelopment option.25

Even though a Council spokesman assured the Department of Services' inspectors that Council did not intend "to let the theatre until such time as the repairs and alterations recommended by architects to improve the general appearance (could) be made",26 Council abandoned its feasibility study plans after solicitors acting for restaurateur, Joseph Giersh (of the Manzil Curry House/Night Club), approached it about leasing the Capitol.27 Giersh offered a gross rental of one million dollars (including rates, taxes and insurances) for a ten-year lease and planned restoration work to the value of 750,000 dollars on the Capitol's interior, exterior and in preserving its structure.28 Giersh interpreted from the "tenor of Council's advertisements that Council (required) work to be carried out by him/tenderer at the cost of the Council".29 Accordingly, he would supervise work worth up to 877,000 dollars, which included alterations required for a theatre-restaurant.30

He planned performances of local and overseas entertainers, Cabaret, Rock Concerts, Big Bands, Vaudeville and light musicals and, hoping everything would go to
plan, he intended to be operating before the following Christmas. Geirsh engaged architect Brian S. J. Woolstone to prepare preliminary plans and sketches for the restoration.

Woolstone visited the Department of Services to learn the full extent of all outstanding work to be undertaken under the *Theatres and Public Halls Regulations* and followed this with an investigation of the premises in order to prepare a comprehensive list of work to be completed in the restoration. Woolstone's proposed plan accommodated 1,400 people around tables set on terraces, a configuration that could easily be returned to conventional auditorium seating; the main kitchen on the first floor of the adjacent Manning Building, would supply servery kitchens in the stalls and a dance floor was to be located in front of the stage. Elements of this plan allowed for temporary adjustments, which could be reversed at a future date. Before considering this proposal, Council again invited tenders for the theatre, this time for terms of three, five and ten years but the only response was a second letter from Joseph

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32 A drencher was to be installed, the rate of free-fall of the safety curtain was to be readjusted and other fire precautions were required. CRS 34: TC 3296/75: Capitol theatre. Letter, Weiss and Co. to Town Clerk, 25 May 1978; CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Department of Public Works/Department of Services, Record of Interview, Brian Woolstone, District Officer R. Roberts, A. J. McFarlane, 28 Jun. 1978.

Giersh's solicitors.34

Then, with the full cooperation of Giersh, Council conducted a thorough investigation of the restaurateur's financial position.35 It also authorised a draft lease be drawn up36 and arranged for its Architect's Section to prepare plans from Woolstone's preliminary sketch plans and under his guidance. During this work, Giersh introduced a number of significant new variations, leading Council's Supervising Architect, William J. Atkinson, to recommend three alternatives to Council to ensure that this project and Council's work were completed. The first was for the limited number of Council architects to concentrate exclusively on this work; the second was to temporarily employ two experienced architects to work under the Supervising Council Architect and the third was to engage outside architectural consultants.37 Atkinson recommended the latter option be accepted.

Curiously, while Council architects and city solicitor were preparing for Giersh's tenancy of the Capitol, its Treasury Department claimed payment from Giersh and other tenants, for outstanding debts owed by two separate property owners.38 All tenants including Giersh complied with the request but Council deferred its decision on the

34 CRS 34: TC 3296/75: Capitol theatre. The Council of the City of Sydney: Schedule of Tenders, c. 30 May 1978.


Capitol until a future unspecified date, with the result that no further action was taken on the matter. Finally, in July and again in August 1979, seventeen months after their first approach to Council, Giersh's solicitors asked it to return their client's deposit.

On 11th January 1979, the 'new' Lord Mayor, Alderman Nelson Meers, revealed that Council considered the theatre-restaurant proposal was uneconomical for Council and it could not afford to leave the Capitol and Paris theatres idle, "no matter how historically important". Also, it was seeking alternate uses for both sites; Meers believed they should be rezoned for residential buildings. Two days earlier, the Daily Mirror reported that Sydney City Council proposed to turn both the Paris and Capitol theatres into housing sites, which attracted strong opposition from both the public and Minister for Housing, Paul Landa. In contrast, on the same day, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that the 'current' Lord Mayor, Alderman Jeremy Bingham, was seeking someone with 750,000 dollars available to tender for the Capitol.

Later in the year, Council resolved to lease the theatre to Vlado (Bill) Shopov,

42 Within two days of the first announcement, Lord Mayor Jeremy Bingham was succeeded by Alderman Nelson Meers; In June 1979, Lord Mayor Alderman Nelson Meers proposed a twenty million dollar residential/office and theatre complex, with the ability to provide better theatrical facilities able to cater for large-scale opera, ballet and musicals. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. "Discussions will decide theatre's fate." SMH 11 Jan. 1979: [n.p.]; "$750,000 for a facelift." Daily Mirror 9 Jan. 1979: [n.p.]; CRS 116: 32/05/0336: Capitol theatre. "Feasibility Report on the Capitol theatre ... for Gladwyne, Blair Zemski and Assoc. Windsor Vic: [1981]
on the same day that Giersh's solicitor Weiss wrote his last letter. The Department of Services was notified that, in April, Council had received a new application to lease the Capitol but it did not consider Shopov's application until 28th June. Council did not allow enough time for his financial position to be investigated before it resolved to grant him the Capitol lease. Prophetically, Alderman Tony Reeves raised concerns about the businessman's financial record, especially his outstanding debts with Council. Nevertheless, it granted him a two-year lease.

Because it was common knowledge that Lord Mayor Alderman Nelson Meers was more interested in redeveloping the site, newspapers expressed surprise that Council had granted this lease. The Capitol was now in a very bad condition and required urgent repairs and cleaning. While the theatre was empty, vandals further exacerbated this situation and repairs were again required to just bring it up to a

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47 Council used the extensive repair schedule prepared for Giersh as the guideline for negotiations with Shopov. As well as repairing existing items, it also included air conditioning. CRS 116: 32/05/0103: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper Properties Branch, 2 Jul. 1979; CRS 34: TC 3295/75: Capitol theatre. Schedule of Repairs - Capitol theatre, Minute Paper Town Clerk, 22 Jun. 1978.

48 Two liquidated companies with which Shopov had been associated, owed Council a total of 2,366 dollars. CRS 116: 32/05/0103: Capitol theatre. Question of lease to Mr. V. Shopov: Question without notice by Ald. Tony Reeves, 10 Jul. 1979; Minute Paper Properties Branch, 2 Jul. 1979; Letter, V. Shopov to Town Clerk, 21 Aug. 1979.

49 Rental commenced on the day of the first performance in the Capitol, on the 21st September 1979. The lessee was required to carry out all work specified by the Department of Services. CRS 50 DP 316: Deed Packet. Between the Council of the City of Sydney, Lessor, and Vlado Shopov, Lessee, Deed of Lease. 16 Jan. 1980.

minimum safety standard before anyone could be allowed to enter the premises. One repetitive particular of this decay, which increased after the theatre was vacated in 1976, was the deteriorating and dangerous state of its proscenium safety curtain.

Before the end of the restaged production of "Jesus Christ Superstar", the theatre's annual inspection found the safety curtain with its steel extension sections, took from five to eleven seconds to descend to the stage in "free-fall". The inspectors considered this speed to be excessive and were also critical that it did not form a satisfactory smoke seal with the stage floor and protruding ramps. Consequently, a drencher was considered necessary and remained on the Department of Services' list of requirements until the building was restored in the 1990s.

Approximately two years later, before Council's officers could take Shopov to inspect the theatre, its employees needed to clean the building and undertake obvious repairs. They extensively and repeatedly cleaned the exterior walls with high pressure hoses and cleaning agents to remove faeces and rubbish smeared on them; rubbish and excreta also had to be removed from inside the building before they could wash

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52 CRS 34: TC 1637/76: Capitol theatre. Letter and Annexure, Under Secretary of Department of Services (formerly Chief Secretary's Department), to Mr. Louis Van Eyssen, Harry M. Miller Attractions, 15 Oct. 1976.

53 CRS 34: TC 1105/27: Hippodrome, approval to alterations and additions to the building. Minute Paper City Health Officer, 20 May 1927.

54 A similar situation existed in 1927, when "undesirables" used the theatre's lowest exit door in the private lane as a public convenience. This exit was below street level and was covered by an iron gate (the latter was originally part of the New Belmore Market building). CRS 34: TC 1105/27: Hippodrome, approval to alterations and additions to the building. Minute Paper City Health Officer, 20 May 1927.
walls and floors. Other outstanding work included the replacement of broken glass, securing decorative lanterns, restoration of hardware fittings, sagging ceiling sections cut out and replaced, leaking roof made waterproof with Bitumastic Compound, rewiring the building and more. The cost of repairs to more than forty outstanding maintenance items, came to 38,844 dollars.\textsuperscript{55}

Shopov was not happy with the lease agreement with Council, because his tender was substantially below the rental set by Council. He was to pay 2,000 dollars per week plus rates, taxes and insurances (similar to the Hoyts Theatres' lease) and was required to pay six weeks in advance. He requested a delay of up to eight weeks before he pay anything and explained that he wanted to get the theatre in order first.\textsuperscript{56} Council's Properties Committee was willing to agree to this request\textsuperscript{57} but the Committee reversed its decision when he reopened the theatre to the public only a month after this request. Therefore, Council calculated his rental payments from the date of this opening,\textsuperscript{58} which automatically made him two weeks in arrears.

The prematurity of this opening was highlighted within the first twenty-one weeks of Shopov's lease, because the theatre was closed for sixteen weeks of that time to allow work to take place.\textsuperscript{59} Fortunately for the company, Council had arranged to

\textsuperscript{55} CRS 116: 32/05/0103: Capitol theatre. Letter with Addendum, V. Shopov to Town Clerk, 4 Oct. 1979.

\textsuperscript{56} CRS 116: 32/05/0103: Capitol theatre. Letter, V. Shopov to Town Clerk, 21 Aug. 1979.

\textsuperscript{57} CRS 116: 32/05/0103: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper Controller of Administration, 23 Aug. 1979.


refund up to six months of the first year's rental, to cover expenses of essential work. Shopov claimed a another substantial amount that exceeded the approved repayments and Council warned him that it would have to ratify all future expenditure. Council's policy of refunding rental for costs of repairs proved to be an unsatisfactory arrangement, as it led to uneasy negotiations about whom was owed the money and whether the last lessees, Shopov and Gladwyne, were in arrears with their rental payments.

When the new lease was granted, Council continued to make the new lessee responsible for complying with all Department of Service's regulations, which involved outstanding work. Initially, Councillors sought to include outstanding structural and safety elements, such as the emergency catwalk leading to the roof, maintaining fire equipment and the metal safety curtain.

Meanwhile, the City Solicitor, D. G. Barr, recommended that "in view of the unfortunate history of this theatre", Council request the Sydney County Council and the Department of Services to notify it forthwith of any defects in the building, or if the lessee was deficient about complying with their regulations. By December, the Department notified Barr that Shopov had failed to finish work it required on the Capitol, including fire curtain repairs. Stressing the extreme urgency of the matter, the solicitor stated that Council would have difficulty defending its position if another accident should happen like that in 1972; this was made more urgent by Shopov's

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61 CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Letter, L. P. Carter, Town Clerk, to the Chief Secretary, Department of Services, 27 Sep. 1979.

failure to sign and return the theatre's lease.\textsuperscript{63}

The restaurateur announced to the newspapers\textsuperscript{64} that he would spend 50,000 dollars on the renovations and that he intended to use the theatre to present rock concerts.\textsuperscript{65} In addition, he planned to use Australian bands but expected them to "play the game" by accepting the payments that he was prepared to pay. However, he reversed this belief, saying "rock shows are not for the Capitol", when in March at a "wild" concert, alleged fans of "The Angels" extensively damaged the theatre and smashed an arm and head off the "Venus Genetrix" statue.\textsuperscript{66} Shopov said he was upset by the damage and had earlier opposed this concert. However, he was powerless to act because the theatre had been sub-let (even though Lou Gibbons, his Manager, was in charge of the theatre at the time).\textsuperscript{67}


\textsuperscript{64} Department of Works, Government Architect, A McFarlane ordered an inspection of the building be made immediately to ensure the premises was suitable for the public, when he read this newspaper article. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Roger Collier, "A rock beat belts new life into the Capitol", Sydney Morning Herald (SMH), 7 Sep. 1979, 7; Memo, A McFarlane, 7 Sep. 1979, written on the bottom of the page containing the paper article.

\textsuperscript{65} Expenses related to these repairs were credited to a rental account, calculated to an equivalent of 2,000 dollars per week. CRS 116: 32/05/0103: Capitol theatre: Question of Lease to Mr. Shopov: Question without Notice by Ald. T. Reeves. Minute Paper Properties Branch, 15 May 1980.

\textsuperscript{66} On Saturday, 29th March, audience members ripped up and smashed seats; pulled the main entrance and toilet doors off their hinges; smashed a panel out an exit door and kicked holes in the walls; broke and pulled lights and railings off walls; at the front entrance; broke the phone; Pulled up a section of the floor in front of the stage, tore the covering off speaker stands; smashed 32 louvre windows and damaged their fly screens. The statue was damaged by either a fan or one of the performers. CRS 116: 32/05/0145: Capitol theatre. Minute Paper Properties Branch - Administration, 31 Mar. 1980; Les Tod and Kevin Cork, The Dream Palaces. Part One: The Atmospherics (Sydney: Australian Theatre Historical Society, 1988) 11.

In January, the Under Secretary received a letter from a firm of Sydney solicitors inquiring about the full details of the current licence and licensee of the Capitol. This was on behalf of a company of Melbourne solicitors, who, in turn, were acting for an unnamed party that intended to take over the theatre's lease.  

On the same day, Chris Frost (formerly manager of the Capitol theatre for Harry M. Miller Attractions and later of Michael Edgley International) was appointed the theatre's manager by the "new company". Nevertheless, an agreement had already been reached by Shopov and three Directors of Gladwyne on 24th December.

By February 1980, Shopov applied to sub-lease the theatre to Gladwyne, under its Directors, Eric Robinson, Michael Coppel and Zev Eizik. Eric Robinson, "the intending lessee", joined the Department of Services' annual inspection of the theatre.

In September, Council approved the termination of Shopov's lease and granted


Gladwyne a new lease of two years.\textsuperscript{74}

Under the sub-lease agreement, Shopov had the lease and all theatre, cinema and liquor licences for the Capitol and Gladwyne agreed to pay Shopov 47,000 dollars rent, which was split into three instalments. They were paid on certain dates: 12,000 dollars on the day of the agreement, 20,000 dollars on 1st September and 15,000 on 21st September 1981, subject to certain conditions and apportioning the money on a daily basis but reducible if Gladwyne could not remain in the theatre. In addition, during the term of the sub-lease and beginning when the repairs and renovations were completed to Council's satisfaction, Gladwyne agreed to pay Shopov advance monthly payments of 8,667 dollars each. Shopov with Council's agreement, gave them the option of being assigned the Head Lease and indemnified Gladwyne and its directors from any claim, suit or action by him, or for him. They signed an Agreement to transfer the lease from Vlado Shopov (Assignor) to Zev Eizik, Michael Coppel and Eric Robinson of Gladwyne (Assignees) on 23rd October 1980.\textsuperscript{75}

Shopov had undertaken repairs in the building but so had the sub-lessee and, for many items, it is not clear which company undertook which work.\textsuperscript{76} His company went into liquidation and for a while, not even his solicitors knew where he was, with the

\textsuperscript{74} Gladwyne was a company that was specifically formed for the purpose of operating the Capitol. CRS 116: 31/05/0145: Capitol theatre. Letter, Bowen and Gerathy, Solicitors, to Town Clerk, 14 May 1980; Memo (on base of letter) Controller of Administration, 1 Oct. 1980 (reference made to file 32/05/0103); CRS 116: 32/05/0336: Capitol theatre. Letter, E. A. Robinson to Town Clerk, 10 Jul. 1981.

\textsuperscript{75} CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Copy: Agreement made on 23rd October 1980, between Vlado Shopov ... (Assignor), and Zev Eizik ... Michael Coppin ... and Eric Robinson ... (Assignees) and Gladwyne (the Company), 24 Dec. 1979; CRS 116: 32/05/0145: Capitol theatre. Copy, Heads of Agreement, [n.d.].

result that he was unaware that Council was seeking to recover legal costs and reimbursements of 532 dollars associated with the termination of his lease. He rectified this situation once he was aware of it and arranged to pay instalments until the debt was paid.77

Gladwyne arranged for its associated company, Jands, to organise necessary repairs on the fire curtain, its winch, brake and motor, which had been left unfinished by Shopov.78 Department of Services required this equipment to be operating safely before Gladwyne could use the theatre under its sub-lease and Council required further work to be completed before it would grant the company a two-year lease.79 Years of deterioration led the Department of Services to require the new lessee to replace six sets of worn, defective and damaged double exit doors with hardware and panic bolts, as well as hardware on three other exits.80 These doors and associated equipment were imported from the United Kingdom.81

Like Shopov, Gladwyne made the Capitol available to many promoters to


80 CRS 116: 32/05/0200: Capitol theatre. Letter with plans and elevations, Under Secretary to Director of Gladwyne, 30 Nov. 1981.

present live performances.\textsuperscript{82} Between March and August of its first year of tenancy, Gladwyne successfully presented more than fifty concerts ranging from ballet, variety shows, to rock concerts and had booked local and international performers through to the following year.\textsuperscript{83} Early in 1981, Gladwyne received a letter from entrepreneur, Paul Dainty inquiring about the availability of the Capitol. Dainty and Cameron Mackintosh had inspected the Capitol and were "adamant that the Capitol (was) the only theatre in Sydney in which it is possible to mount (the) musical" 'Cats'.\textsuperscript{84} Dainty needed urgent confirmation that the theatre would be available between March and December in 1983, for the proposed season.

Gladwyne was also approached by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT) seeking to use the Capitol for its production of the Chinese Opera Company and also by the Department of Education, who wished to produce two annual series of "Plays for Schools".\textsuperscript{85} With these three firm offers in hand, Gladwyne's Directors applied to Council to extend its lease to December 1983, in order to confirm these bookings.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{82} Companies negotiating to use the theatre included Michael Edgley International (Sesame Street Live and Tommy Steele) and the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (Peking Opera).
\textsuperscript{84} CRS 116: 32/05/0200: Capitol theatre. Letter, Michael Coppel and Eric Robinson, Gladwyne, to Lord Mayor D. Sutherland, 22 Dec. 1981.
Curiously, City Council ignored the substance of Gladwyne's request and agreed to extend the lease for only fifteen weeks (till the 31st of December 1982). The unprecedented reason given by the Town Clerk for not extending Gladwyne's lease was that "it would constitute a breach of the provision of the Local Government Act, which requires the consent of the Minister of Local Government prior to the commencement of any lease in excess of two years". At the time, Council was waiting to acquire three small properties facing George Street in order to consolidate and develop the whole site, and Council's Director of Administration advised that it was not advisable for any lease to extend beyond the end of the following year.

Angered by the Town Clerk's reply, Gladwyne's Directors arranged a meeting with the Lord Mayor and expressly excluded the Town Clerk. Subsequently, Council's Properties Branch re-evaluated the starting date for the anticipated redevelopment and expressed their opinion that the building would not be needed before the end of 1983 (the date requested by the lessee).

During the period when Council was expecting to acquire the few George Street properties that were still privately owned, Council found that one of these properties had unknowingly been leased for a further two years, therefore, delaying the planned redevelopment. The Town Clerk said this error justified Council removing the

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six-months possession clause in the Capitol lease and asking a higher rental for the
building. Consequently, it reversed its decision regarding the brief extension of the
lease but Gladwyne had lost the three potential bookings in the intervening period.
Granting the extra year extension and acting on the Town Clerk's advice that the
extended tenancy made the theatre's lease more valuable, Council raised the theatre's
weekly rental by 750 dollars.

In December 1982 Gladwyne first proposed to undertake work that would
completely restore the theatre. Robinson stated the company needed a twenty-year
lease for it to be able to recoup the expenditure resulting from this work, estimated at
710,000 dollars, and his company was prepared to progressively increase the rental
payments over that time. It had already spent more than 150,000 dollars on repairs by
1981, and exit doors cost another 5,000 dollars. Still the theatre did not meet to the full
safety standard. He further stated that, should Council not agree to this proposal, it
would accept a two-year lease with both the company and Council carrying out urgent
repairs, which would cost the company an estimated 217,500 dollars. Although City
Aldermen on the "ad hoc" Committee tended to favour the latter, this proposal would
not resolve the theatre's long term problems of disintegration.

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93 Accordingly, the lease was due to expire in 1984. CRS 116: 32/05/0381 and 32/05/0336:
95 CRS 116: 32/05/0336: Capitol theatre. Letter, Eric Robinson to Town Clerk, 1 Dec. 1982;
on the Capitol Theatre for Gladwyne.
96 CRS 116: 32/05/0336: Capitol theatre. Report of meeting between Property Committee and
Gladwyne, 10 Jan. 1983; (Gladwyne) Proposal for Long Term Lease of the Capitol, [c. 17
May 1982]; (Gladwyne) Proposal for Short Term Lease of the Capitol, [c. 17 May 1982].
Lord Mayor, Alderman Nelson Meers, in his reply to Robinson's first letter of December 1982, informed the company that it "would not pay Council to undertake this work", nor enter any arrangements to extend the tenancy.\(^{97}\) Despite this statement, City Council granted Gladwyne the extension to December 1983 (as mentioned above).\(^{98}\) Then in June 1983, Council approved an extension to the lease until the 31st December 1984 and made the company responsible for the building's structural repairs to a minimum of 75,000 dollars, to the satisfaction of the Town Clerk.\(^{99}\)

Some problems attracting complaints to the Department of Services (and successor) to be addressed by the lessee were the exit doors' split timbers and inoperative "door furniture" preventing them to open;\(^{100}\) falling sections of foyer ceiling, caused by careless roof repairs and a deliberately blocked downpipe;\(^{101}\) patrons smoking in the inner foyer during Kraftwerks, Mike Oldfield and Australian Crawl rock concerts and standing in the aisles. Damaged exit doors permitted unlawful entry and constant vandalism; undergoing repairs to the foyer's ceiling was misconstrued as a worse problem and smokers fouling the air led to conflicting interpretations of existing regulations.\(^{102}\)

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\(^{102}\) In 1928, "Standing Room" was 735 square feet at the back of the stalls for waiting patrons. It was enlarged to an inner foyer in 1961, by removing seven rows of seats. In 1972, the area was service by bars to serve alcoholic beverages and was still separated from the seating area by fire resistant barriers. After complaints about Patrons smoking in the inner foyer during performances and removing the fire-proof barriers, one interpretation was that this area was part
Department officers also visited the theatre to inspect stage sets for the Osmond Concert and Elvis Stage Show. The Osmond Concert was accompanied by a laser light show using relatively new technology, which required an inspection by the Scientific Officer of the Health Commission's Radiation Branch, who approved this equipment. A false stage was built for the Elvis Stage Show, which required adjustments to the safety curtain by staging consultants, Scenery Workshop. When the latter was tested, for the first time since 1972, "the stage 'safety' curtain descended in 'free-fall' at a reasonable rate and without any excessive 'impact' on the false stage."

Department of Services and/or Department of Local Government officers continually outlined the extent of urgently needed work and warned Gladwyne that its Theatre and Public Halls License was in jeopardy, if it did not undertake the work immediately. A limited lease prevented the extent of the work from being economically feasible and Gladwyne was deterred from taking any advance bookings of the theatre's entry foyer, where legislation permits smoking. Another recognised it as part of the auditorium.


From June 1982, the responsibility for the Theatres and Public Halls Act was transferred from the Minister of the Department of Services to the Department of Local Government. Correspondence in the files reflect this change, even though the personnel remained the same.

Shopov never received License No. T4584, because he had not paid the fees and, when Gladwyne paid the two outstanding licence fees, the whereabouts of the original was unknown. Replacement Licence No. T4699 was made out to Gladwyne and transferred to Council. CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. Memo on base of Letter, Under Secretary to Director, 25 Sep. 1981; Report, W. Liddle, 8 Jun. 1982; Receipt 14 Jul. 1984.
The state of the theatre reached crisis point and, over a three month period, Eric Robinson desperately sought responses to letters he had written to Council about the need for the company to undertake urgent repairs to the building. He warned that Gladwyne was no longer able to absorb the costs of repairs; detailed the serious and hazardous problems within the theatre; the latter not only jeopardised public safety but also threatened the theatre's licence and public liability insurance. He warned the Town Clerk that his company would be forced to terminate its tenancy of the building if it did not receive a prompt and adequate response; even that was ignored until the company withheld rent to provoke a reaction. While some departments were dilatory, the Treasury Department was quick to respond but not in the way the company planned.

Finally, Gladwyne ended its struggle with Council over the theatre's repairs and restoration; it vacated the Capitol on 16th December 1983, after the Victor Borge concert. While the lessee owed Council over 17,428 dollars in rental, it had not been compensated for the purchase and repairs of the theatre's exit doors and hardware, or

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108 By 1981, Gladwyne had already spent more than 150,000 dollars on repairs, the exit doors cost another 5,000 dollars and still the theatre did not meet to the full safety standard. CRS 116: 32/05/0336: Capitol theatre. Letter, Eric Robinson to Town Clerk, 1 Dec. 1982; Letter, E. A. Robinson to Right Honourable D. G. Sutherland, [n.d.] (written and received between 1 Dec. and 17 Dec. 1982).


for replacing the foyer carpet and approximately three hundred seats. Despite frequent requests, Gladwyne never received the inventory identifying Council's property. Nevertheless, Council argued it should have been aware that any replacement and repairs of (three hundred) seats and theatre carpets came under the company's responsibilities. However, Council reluctantly agreed to pay most of the expenses involved in importing and erecting the new exit doors and it subsequently deducted ten thousand dollars from the outstanding rental and, at Coppel's suggestion, the balance was deducted from money Council owed to Jands for work it undertook in the Town Hall.

From that time, the Capitol was used only intermittently, which contravened the conditions outlined in the correspondence from the Department of Services/Chief Secretary's Department. Council received a number of enquiries, which did not eventuate to anything.

In February 1984, "a concerned citizen" wrote to the Lord Mayor, Alderman Doug Sutherland, to express her concerns over the closure of the Capitol and uncertainty about the State and Regent theatres. Replying on his behalf, Town Clerk, Leon Carter, assured her that the "Council has no plans to close the Capitol and will do everything to keep the theatre operative."

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The struggle for the Capitol could not be resolved under the existing situation. Gladwyne was hamstrung, caught between the pressing demands of the Chief Secretary's Department in its various guises and the uncooperative demands of Council. The situation was not going to change without a drastic change in Council's management policy regarding the theatre building.

While the period under investigation concludes with the Capitol's closure at this point of time, the story of the struggle to retain the theatre building continued along a parallel line. This struggle, outlined in Chapter 12, went in favour of the Capitol so that now it continues a new and exciting era of service to the public.
Two of the original statues that had hands and drapery replaced during the 1990s restoration, “Venus Genetrix” and “Appollo Belvedere. In backgrounds are (left) small temple housing Bacchus and young satyr, and (right) “Capitoline She Wolf” with Romulus and Remus.
Decoration over foyer doors to auditorium painted in original colours.

Showcases on Campbell Street wall with publicity posters and photographs of "Miss Saigon".
Chapter 12

From Demolition to a Glorious Heritage: Emergence of

The Grand Old Lady¹

'Demolition by neglect² - in less than three years, the once magnificent atmospheric theatre slipped to a state of crumbling decay, a gloomy atmosphere thick with dust, and with the distinctive stench of resident cats. Rain and pigeons had entered by way of the damaged roof and guttering, seeping into broken statues and grimy carpets, or scattering droppings and feathers through once-ornate foyers. White mould covered aged leather seats like decaying velvet, while overhead, the faded midnight-blue ceiling was tattered and fell in pieces; so too, did the surrounding plaster walls. Although empty, the Capitol was not lifeless. Fleas and bird lice permeated the building, which vandals had sprayed with contents from the remaining fire extinguishers. Constantly flushing urinals in the upstairs 'lavatories' still echoed after thirteen years.

Victim of the unnecessary conservation struggle pitting it against the Regent theatre, the Capitol was left vulnerable. Only an odd visitor or curious entrepreneur aware of its condition and, by 1989, not even Lord Mayor, Alderman Jeremy Bingham was aware of the extent of damage in this Council property following years under its sole control.

Moves to preserve the Capitol were first evident in 1976, when the National

¹ Phillip Koch, "Grand old lady is staging a recovery: but for now she's all mess and mud." Sunday Telegraph 27 Feb. 1994: 17.
Trust of Australia (New South Wales) classified the theatre building,\(^3\) the Australian Heritage Commission entered the Capitol on the Register of the National Estate in 1978.\(^4\) Also in 1978, the Heritage Council of the Department of Planning and Environment officer, R. Noble, contacted the Town Clerk to ask what Council planned for the "restoration and future use" of the Capitol.\(^5\) He advised Council that if it did not reply by the end of September, the Heritage Council would proceed on the understanding that it had no objection to the Heritage Council's recommendation for a Conservation Order being placed on this property according to the *Heritage Act of 1977.*\(^6\) Consequently, on 7th November 1978, the Heritage Council recommended to the Minister that he place a Conservation Order on the Capitol and this was duly approved on 22nd January 1979.\(^7\)

Despite these safeguards, in October 1978, a newspaper editorial highlighted concomitant pressure to redevelop the Haymarket site, when it reported that the theatre may be demolished. This editorial prompted a variety of letters to be written to Council. They ranged from a letter from the Campbelltown Theatre Group to ask if it

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\(^3\) Classification was proposed by W. L. Chapman and approved on 31st May 1976 and the "owner" was advised on 6th August. National Trust of Australia (New South Wales), Classification Listing Register.


could purchase two hundred seats,\(^8\) to the one from Michael Edgley International, expressing its management's desire to see the theatre renovated and updated. This company had used the theatre in the past and its management was anxious to continue using the venue for many future productions.\(^9\)

When the first Interim Conservation Order expired on the 16th March 1981, the protection of the building lapsed. Once again in 1985, the Heritage Council advised the current Minister for Planning and Environment to place another Interim Conservation order on the building, at a time when it was obvious that the Capitol was threatened by two factions. (One group sought to retain the Regent at the expense of the Capitol and the other comprised of the Town Clerk and some Aldermen, denied the Capitol had any architectural significance, described later). The Minister, R. J. (Bob) Carr, requested a study be commissioned by the department and accordingly, Price Waterhouse Management Consultants and Entertainment Brokers McKellar were engaged to undertake the work.\(^10\) He subsequently placed an Interim Conservation Order on the building\(^11\) and followed this in 1987 with a Permanent Conservation Order,\(^12\) which only covered the property's curtilage. The Heritage Council required all work to be supervised by a conservation architect and recorded before being disturbed or

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\(^12\) Permanent Conservation Order (PCO No. 955) was placed on 29th May 1987. Letter, M. Knaggs, Department of Planning, to author, 11 Nov. 1993.
When restoration work on the Capitol finally took place in the early 1990s, Trevor Waters of Peddle Thorp Architects was appointed the conservation architect. Beside his architecture expertise, he had specialist knowledge in archaeology and history, during the work on the site, he not only supervised and recorded the project but, also, liaised with different tradesmen and sweated beside willing labourers. Many "treasures" were uncovered, one of which he found among his fellow labourers. This man had been a restorer of statuary at the Hermitage in Leningrad and was later given the task of recreating missing drapes, arms and hands on the Capitol's statues.

After the Heritage Council's initial approach to Council in 1978, Lord Mayor, Alderman Nelson Meers spurned pressures to retain the building. In 1979, he made public the City Council's tentative plans for the Capitol's future and proposed it be used for opera and ballet. This was prompted by the May release of the Opera House Trust's Annual Report, prepared by its General Manager, Peter Hemming. To support his own assertion that Sydney needed a new lyric theatre capable of seating 3,000 people, Meers used Hemming's claim that Sydney was being overshadowed by rival theatres in Melbourne and Brisbane and said that, if the Capitol was developed to contain this proposed seating capacity, the building would generate a proper income for Council.


Mary Knaggs from the Heritage Council, Tim Tait of Ipoh Garden Developments and Graeme Macey of Lawrence Nield and Partners (who were acting for the council as their consultants and agents), all referred to him as the authority on the restoration work at the theatre. Mark Stevens, Manager of the Sydney City Council Archives highlighted Waters' interest in the history of the theatre and actions to preserve items found during the work. Trevor Waters during ATHS tours of the building and in conversation with author at opening of Council Archives exhibition on the Capitol.

Trevor Waters, ATHS Tour of Capitol. 11 Dec. 1995. 1.00 p.m.
Council's ownership of the entire property from George Street to Castlereagh Street aided this proposal and the property's proximity to Council's Goulbourn Street Parking Station and to Central Railway Station magnified this advantage. Meers believed this proposed new theatre would compete favourably with the smaller seating capacity in the Opera Hall at the Sydney Opera House. This latter venue depended on subsidies from the Federal Government to operate, which he could not see continuing indefinitely. Meanwhile, Premier, Neville Wran, dismissed the Lord Mayor's suggestion by saying that he "wouldn't hold his breath waiting for the (new theatre's) first performance."

The Lord Mayor's proposal released Council from any part of the expected 15 million or 25 to 50 million dollar construction costs for a new theatre building. Instead, he proposed Council would provide the site and establish a trust fund for finance it perceived would be provided by the Commonwealth Government and public contributions. Meers also presented his alternate but least preferred plan whereby Council could decide to develop the property as part of the whole uptown area regeneration. Even this option would produce more assets, with a corresponding increase in revenue for Council administration.

Paradoxically, even though the City Council was proposing to demolish the


theatre, it still approved a lease be granted first to Vlado Shopov and then to Gladwyne,\textsuperscript{21} while it waited for the interim conservation order to expire (as outlined in Chapter 11).\textsuperscript{22} At the same time, it included the Capitol on the City Council's Register of Important Buildings in the 1983 City of Sydney Plan.\textsuperscript{23} Had Council accepted Gladwyne's (1982) proposal to extend the theatre's lease for twenty years and reduce its rental, Gladwyne would have been able to undertake the needed comprehensive restoration work on the building to a maximum value of one million dollars and have sufficient time to recoup the costs.\textsuperscript{24} This would have increased the Capitol's value, allowed the theatre to comply with all the current safety regulations and negated building's subsequent deterioration and uncertainty about its future.

Under Lord Mayor, Alderman Doug Sutherland, Sydney City Council and the Heritage Council held discussions about Sydney's buildings of heritage significance at the Town Hall on 23rd July 1981. The Lord Mayor headed Council's representation of thirteen Aldermen and ten Council officers, while a deputation of fifteen representatives for the Heritage Council was led by Mr. Justice Hope.\textsuperscript{25} Because the Capitol was included in this list, the Heritage Council tabled a summary of public


\textsuperscript{22} National Trust: Capitol theatre file. Heritage Council, Branch Manager's Report 263/84, Aug. 1984; also in Heritage Council File H.C. 32985.


\textsuperscript{24} National Trust: Capitol theatre file. Bruce Newton, "Theatre Bid to Carry Out $1m Facelift." \textit{Australian} 2 Dec. 1982: 5; CRS 116: 32/05/0336: Capitol theatre. Letter, Eric Robinson to Town Clerk, 1 Dec. 1982.

\textsuperscript{25} Mr. Justice R. M. Hope was also the Chancellor of Wollongong University at the time. CRS 116: 32/03/0070: Capitol theatre, Proposed Extension of Stage Area. Notes of Meeting held with Heritage Council of NSW in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Sydney at 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 23rd July 1981; Minute Paper Town Clerk, 30 Jul. 1981.
submissions on the future of the theatre that it had received and both groups agreed that Council's City Engineer be requested to prepare and submit a report to Council on the possibility of narrowing Hay Street and closing Parker Street. They foresaw this proposal would permit the Capitol stage to be extended.

Secretary of the Heritage Council, George Gaweda, later told Eric Robinson of Gladwyne that the Heritage Council found the Capitol was worthy of preservation and had already informed Council of this. He did not believe the present City Council would not threaten the building's continued existence and mistakenly saw no need for the Heritage Council to impose interim or permanent conservation orders on the building.26

A second meeting between officers of Council and representatives of the Heritage Council was held in 1982. They discussed the desirability of extending the Capitol stage into Hay Street and/or into Parker Street without substantial modification and expenditure, as well as considering the logistics of traffic management and relocating the many underground public utility services located round the building.27 Hay Street formed part of the area's traffic corridor between Central/Surrey Hills area and Darling Harbour and, taking account of the cost of moving the building's structural columns along Hay Street and relocating traffic and utilities, they reached the conclusion that an extension on Hay Street could not be pursued and the Parker Street

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extension was of doubtful value.28

These reservations were overcome a decade later, when Fletcher Constructions extended the stage house into Hay Street to provide an adequate stage of a size comparable to that in the Hippodrome, and provision of improved and more pleasant backstage facilities and dressing rooms. Parker Street has also been incorporated into the development but it has not been used for the additional theatre foyer space and covered mall as originally planned. Instead the towering 'glass'-covered pedestrian thoroughfare29 is flanked on the lower level by eating establishments and provides an exhibition space on the upper level, leading to office space on the first floor of the George Street property. Although it does not provide the proposed direct access to the theatre, this structure houses lights that illuminate the restored western wall of the Capitol building. The reunited site recreates the early Corn and Haymarket block between Pitt and George Streets.

During his term in office, Lord Mayor, Alderman Douglas Sutherland fluctuated between his predecessor's preference to redevelop the site (in February 1981);30 to promising to preserve the theatre (May 1981);31 then supporting the retention of the


29 It is an assumption that glass is the material used in this construction, and was not verified for this paper. A superficial impression of this covering is that it has the appearance and properties of glass.


Regent at the expense of the Capitol (February 1984), and finally back to supporting restoration work after the feasibility report by Travis Partners, and Lawrence Nield and Partners was distributed to the city aldermen in October 1986. Soon after he came to office, another newspaper reported that, despite the (first) Interim Conservation Order imposed on the building, the Lord Mayor was waiting for it to expire to enable Council to act on the constant proposal to redevelop the site. He was joined by former Lord Mayor, Alderman Meers, who was still pressing for a new theatre to be built. Nevertheless, the City Council and the Heritage Council advertised for submissions relating to the heritage significance and these replies were discussed in the meetings mentioned above.

By 1984, not even the Department of Local Government knew what Council was planning for the Capitol. As the theatre's licence was due for renewal in June, the Department sought to undertake its annual inspection of the building but it encountered difficulties arranging this. Indeed, during June, a Council representative advised the department's officer over the telephone that it was Council's intention to close the

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theatre, making any inspection unnecessary. Regardless, in July, Council resolved to retain and restore the Capitol in conjunction with development in Council's surrounding properties. The Town Clerk notified the department of this decision and promised to notify it of any developments.

Without first inspecting the Capitol, the department issued a replacement licence (No 4952) to Council, because the Licence (No. 4699) issued for Shopov and Gladwyne was not available. Department architect, Serge Fijac, had previously sought to have the theatre's seats counted, clarify the situation regarding the inner foyer and the condition of other elements during the desired inspection of the building but without this inspection, the seating capacity recorded on the theatre's licence remained unchanged and incorrect. Department inspectors were not given access to inspect the building until the month after the licence was issued, at which time the condition of the theatre led the inspector to report that the premises was unsuitable for public entertainment and the licence should be suspended. Further inspections showed no improvement in the state of the building and, in July 1985, a recommendation to suspend the licence was made; it was suspended for two years from the end of that
Meanwhile in 1983, the Heritage Council commissioned Professor Ross Thorne to prepare a study on the state's cinemas and theatres. The second stage of the work was completed in 1984, and in May 1985, Minister Bob Carr requested the report again be updated. This study was one of the instrumental factors in saving the Capitol and Thorne's report was of such a standard that the Heritage Council decided to publish it as a limited edition.

Perceptively, in March 1985, Ross Thorne notified the National Trust of his suspicions that Sydney City Council were secretly determined not to keep the Capitol theatre. Even the Branch Manager of the Heritage Council was aware of this and placed it in his report written the day before Thorne's news. Like many "secrets", news of these rumours was printed in the newspaper less than a fortnight later and three days after that, on Friday 12th April, Bob Carr placed the Heritage Council's second Interim Conservation Order on the building. This Order prevented the Capitol's demolition for two years, gave time for discussions and a considered study of the

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building to be undertaken, as well as allowing public debate.48

These fears stemmed from preliminary reports prepared on behalf of City Council. In 1984, while Council still did not have a policy on the future disposition of the former market site, it recommended the Deputy Lord Mayor head a special sub-committee comprising prominent people in the theatrical field. This committee was to advise Council whether the Capitol could be a viable proposition for a lyric theatre in its existing state. Alternately, it was to consider if the theatre should be refurbished or replaced by a modern complex. Suggested people were Michael Edgley, Hayes Gordon, Noel Ferrier, Lloyd Martin and Andrew Brigger.49

Within the month, the Town Clerk complained to the Heritage Council that Hayes Gordon had not replied to the invitation to submit a list of suitable people to form this sub-committee50 but it was an ill-timed statement, because Council still had not sent the invitation.51 Afterwards, Mr Gordon accompanied architect, Alan Williams (of Alan Williams and Associates), Patrick Vietch (Australian Opera Company) and


officers of the Department of Local Government and Council to inspect the theatre.  

Initially, Williams had been contacted by Alderman Ashmore-Smith, who sought to engage him to submit preliminary proposals on the Capitol. Williams rang and then wrote to Department of Local Government's Aden McFarlane to arrange a joint inspection of the Capitol and, later, managed to submit three concepts within the three months before he died (in January 1985). He recommended the Capitol's demolition but the Councillors never saw them. Soon after, newspapers reported the struggle that developed in Council among the thirteen Labour aldermen, who were pressing to redevelop the site, and Opposition of nine Independents and six Liberal aldermen.

Meanwhile, arguments beyond politics of local government pitted the Regent and Capitol's conservation against each other. The National Trust supported the retention of both theatres and was of the point of view that the Capitol was not only "a vital building individually" but a key and essential building in the low rise human scale corridor, linking the Central Station and Belmore Park with Darling Harbour and the Haymarket area. This significance was also identified by the Department of Planning.


and Environment in its "Belmore Park Civic Design Study".\(^56\)

In 1987, stalemate in Council led to its replacement by three City Commissioners and the Capitol was threatened once more. Two City Commissioners, Sir Eric Neal and Norm Oakes, saw little value in restoring the building.\(^57\) Sir Eric voiced on public radio\(^58\) that, although the Capitol was third on his list of priorities in relation to other entertainment venues, he was inviting the latest public opinion on its future\(^59\) and part of this initiative was to open the Capitol to the public on one Sunday. Thousands of people came and gave their support to the retention of the building.\(^60\)

Condemnation of the Capitol by city officials and pressures to pit the Capitol and Regent theatres against each other again attracted strong public support for the theatre. The publicity raised by the City Commissioner's proposal attracted many submissions, two of which even preferred retaining the Capitol instead of building the monorail.\(^61\) Two groups fighting to retain both the Capitol and Regent theatres were

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\(^{58}\) This was on 2BL's morning program, on 9th July 1987.


\(^{61}\) As well as support from the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. National Trust: Capitol theatre file. Minutes, Environment Board Meeting, RAIA, 22 May 1986.
Save Our Stages (S.O.S.) under David Nettheim and Greg Khouri of Actor's Equity, and the Australian Theatre Historical Society (ATHS).

Representations from members of the ATHS were being made to the Minister of Environment and Planning in 1981, to the Properties Committee of the City Council and to the National Trust in 1983, which led to the publication of *Capitol: A Case for Retention*. This proved to be another very influential document in the fight for the theatre.

When Commissioner Neal spoke on 2BL about the Capitol, he disregarded both the Conservation Order and the design competition sponsored by the Sydney City Council and Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA), two years before. Consequently, the RAIA wrote to him and outlined the history behind support for the theatre's restoration and the cost effectiveness of the proposal. They argued that it was more economic to restore the theatre, when compared to the more expensive option of demolishing and redeveloping the site. This was a constant argument over many years.


64 This publication was referred to in the archival collections of all bodies, and was available for study in most. Ross Thorne, *Capitol Theatre: A Case for Retention.* (Sydney: Department of Architecture, U Sydney; Australian Theatre Historical Society, 1985).


66 National Trust: Capitol theatre file. Letter, R. S. Sheaves, Executive Director, RAIA, to Sir Eric Neal, [post 10 Jul. 1987].
and only abated when the restoration and extension work was finally completed.

In 1985, the RAIA, (NSW Chapter) with the former City Council had run an ideas competition for the future redevelopment of the site within the boundaries of George, Campbell, Castlereagh and Hay Streets. Its emphasis was to retain the existing Capitol's structure but alterations aimed at overcoming its shortcomings were allowed to be incorporated in these designs. Perceived improvements included additional foyer space providing for movement and service for theatre patrons; improved and enlarged backstage facilities with a larger stage to enable the theatre to function efficiently.

This competition was launched at the RAIA's June meeting (which was held in the offices of Lawrence Nield and Partners), and the deadline was set at 12th July. During initial planning discussions on the project, members raised the need to consult a theatre expert and suggested Tom Brown. He was theatre consultant for the State Theatre of the Victorian Arts Centre and the Queensland Cultural Centre Lyric Theatre and, as such, he was able to evaluate the economics of the submitted entries.

Brown was joined by representatives of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust when he viewed the five finalists chosen from seventy entries. He made comments and

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69 One hundred and fifty six entries originally registered for the competition. Some were from architects and others were from students, with a number of people submitted several entries. Competition entries came from New South Wales and Queensland. Sheaves, 9; Tod and Cork, 11.
suggestions, particularly regarding compatibility of the design proposals with other national theatres. The design by Michael Harrison and Aladin Niazmand established a model for some of the subsequent commercial designs. Judges for the competition were Minister for Environment and Planning, Bob Carr; the Assistant Government Architect of the Special Projects Division of the Department of Public Works, Andrew Anderson; the Vice President of the NSW Chapter of the RAIA, Lawrence Nield and Associate Professor Ross Thorne of the Department of Architecture at the University of Sydney. (All these men were among the influential people, who saved the theatre.)

As he presented the five winning entries, Bob Carr stipulated that, although the Capitol was owned by Sydney City Council, restoration of the theatre must not impose any financial burden on the city's ratepayers. Also, finance for the final project would have to be generated by redevelopment of the remaining sections of the property. He revealed that, although, it was only three months since he placed the Interim Conservation order on the building, it was this competition that "tilted" him towards saving the Capitol.

The judges deemed each of the five winning entries to be equally the best,

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70 Sheaves, 8; Thorne, "Capitol, Sydney", 4.
73 Sheaves, 7.
because each concept contained a valid idea. In each design, the integrity of the theatre was retained; the surrounding buildings and environment were credible and imaginative; the facilities for the public and backstage requirements were more than adequate and the economics of the project were taken into account. They were then placed on display for public comment, and the winning entries were presented to Premier, Neville Wran, as well as to a special meeting of Council.

Shortly after the design competition, Sydney City Council commissioned Lawrence Nield and Partners and Travis Partners to prepare a Feasibility Study on the Capitol theatre, and Aladin Niazmand represented this company in consultations with Department of Local Government officers. Among the sub-consultants engaged for the study were Tom Brown and Associates, and Peter Knowland and Associates. This 233-page work was updated in 1989 and used by Chesterton International as part of the preparation for the second competition. More than a year later, the City Commissioners engaged Rice Daubney Architects to prepare a tender brief for the


76 Sheaves, 7-9.

77 Sheaves, 7.


theatre. Ross Gardner, Daubney's architect, attended a meeting of the Capitol Theatre Advisory Sub-Committee of the Heritage Council on the 26th November and divulged that he had been working on the project for two weeks and would need one extra week before he could make a submission to the Heritage Council. He used Lawrence Nield and Partners, and Travis Partners' feasibility study and Interim Conservation Order No. 465, as the basis for this report.

Members of the RAIA were concerned that the Heritage Council only considered the Rice Daubney report. At their December meeting, they supported a motion that the Heritage Council should have the advantage of studying both this report and the extensive report prepared by Lawrence Nield and Partners with Travis Partners in 1986. They passed the resolution to send a letter to the Minister, drawing his attention to the earlier report and suggesting that consideration of both studies was needed for the best decision regarding the future of the Capitol.

The National Trust was also concerned about this situation and successfully applied to have the earlier report made available to the Heritage Council and the

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82 The brief was to be completed in a month. Reference to meeting on 26th November of Capitol Theatre Advisory Sub-Committee. National Trust: Capitol theatre file. Heritage Council, Item No. 3 (b)(VI), Director's Report, 3 Dec. 1987; Heritage Council, Item No. 87/126. Director's Report No. 594/87.

Public.\textsuperscript{84} Early in January 1988, a meeting was held between Ken Cripps, acting for the Minister, Frank Walker, and Chris Patten of the National Trust to discuss the matter.\textsuperscript{85} These men noted that the better researched report by Lawrence Nield and Partners and Travis Partners had not yet been released and was more favourable from conservation and urban design viewpoints than the Rice Daubney Brief. In addition, its economic analysis prepared by James Lang Wooton, was "well-founded".\textsuperscript{86}

The 'new' Sydney City Council engaged consultants, Chesterton International (NSW) to prepare a brief for the developers' competition and to act as its agent.\textsuperscript{87} This time, fifty companies initially indicated an interest in the competition.\textsuperscript{88} Although Council was effectively conducting the competition through its agent, it reserved the right not to be bound to any winning proposal and it could accept any independent proposal.\textsuperscript{89} Like the earlier design competition, it attracted considerable media attention, of which most Sydney reports were generally favourable. However, the \textit{Architect} (the journal for the Victorian Chapter of the RAIA) was critical that "not one

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{86} National Trust: Capitol theatre file. File on Meeting between Ken Cripps and Chris Patten, 12 Jan. 1988.
  \item \textsuperscript{89} SCC Archives and National Trust: Capitol theatre file. Chesterton International (NSW), "Capitalizing on Sydney's Capitol": Introduction and Summary.
\end{itemize}
of Melbourne's (and Australia's) outstanding architects" were included among the four winning developers for the Capitol site. It stated only two of the chosen companies were known to it and strongly inferred Melbourne architects would not be given fair consideration for any project in Sydney.  

Four final proposals were Bond Properties, Essington Developments, Capital Land Corporation, Ipoh Garden Developments (Aust.). Bond Properties and Essington Developments both incorporated very high towers on the western boundaries; Capitol Land Corporation and Ipoh Garden Development Designs each maintained a height that was more compatible with the buildings in the immediate area.

In hindsight, subsequent to unrelated events that involved Alan Bond and his companies, it was fortunate that the Bond Corporation's proposal and plans were not chosen as the winning developer, otherwise work on the Capitol may never have been realised.

Political and entrepreneurial interest in the Capitol emerged before this competition. By November 1988, the Liberal Party had been elected to government and it became evident that the policies of the Minister for Planning and Environment (and the Heritage Council) and the Minster for the Arts regarding the Capitol, contradicted

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91 The architects were Lawrence Nield and Partners and Travis Partners.
92 Architects were Jones Brewster Regan Architects.
93 Architects were Hely and Horne, Stuart and Perry Architects.
94 Architects were Peddle Thorp Architects, for whom Trevor Waters was the theatre's Conservation Architect.
95 File contains the submissions, plans and drawings of the four final development proposals. CRS 680: Capitol theatre Development proposals, 1989.
each other. Peter Collins, Minister for the Arts, gave the impression to city newspapers and delegates at a conference of stage designers and theatre architects that the Capitol was to be one of the "monuments to his tenure of the portfolio."  

Even though the theatre did not belong to the State Government, Peter Collins arranged a number of meetings to discuss the future of the Capitol. He was host to a breakfast meeting, where he and Premier Greiner met with people involved in various areas of the entertainment industry, journalist Leo Schofield and City Commissioner Norman Oakes; then five months later, he had further meetings with many of these people. Just three days before elections for a 'new' City Council, he met with Commissioner Norman Oakes and both men decided "to call for expressions of interest in the retention and restoration of the building". Ironically, any decision reached by these two men could have been immediately vetoed by the incoming Council.

The Minister and Mike Walsh also made a well-publicised visit to the theatre, ostensibly to get the redevelopment restarted and implying future State Government

96 National Trust: Capitol theatre file. Letter, P. C. James, Executive Director, National Trust, to the Hon. Peter Collins M. P., Minister for the Arts, 16 May 1988.


98 Plans prepared by Lawrence Nield and Partners and Travis Partners were studied and discussed. Oakes reject plans on economic grounds. National Trust: Capitol theatre file. "Leo at Large", SMH 2 Jul. 1988.

99 This included entrepreneurs, Mike Walsh, Michael Edgley and Wilton Morley and the general manager of the Opera House, Lloyd Martin; with the (about to be demolished) Regent's entertainment brokers, "developer" Leon Fink and general manager, Clive McKellar, who was accompanied by his wife (actor and dancer) Robina Beard; Director of the Sydney Festival, Stephen Hall, and journalist and public relations agent Leo Schofield, all of whom indicated financial, management and/or development interests in the venue. National Trust: Capitol theatre file. SMH 10 Dec. 1988: [The Arts] 85.

involvement. Mike Walsh's company, Hayden Theatres, hoped to operate the Capitol as a live theatre once the work was completed (unlike his company's picture theatre at Cremorne).

These meetings and visits failed to aid any restoration or redevelopment of the theatre but, because they concentrated public attention on the building, they established a practice whereby the Capitol was a useful political tool. In the end, the State Government did not contribute any money or assistance to the project, except for the normal monitoring of the building work through the Department of Local Government (formerly the Department of Services). Jeremy Bingham and Frank Sartor, candidates in Council's elections, questioned Minister Peter Collin's actions and timing.

Over time, both aldermen were elected to the position of Lord Mayor and used the Capitol in their publicity. During research for this paper, men from different companies involved with the site's subsequent redevelopment generally credited Lord Mayor, Alderman Frank Sartor, for carrying out policies that resulted in the Capitol's restoration and extension. However, he was not always happy with the Ipoh Garden Developments involvement with the theatre.

In September 1989, Council (under Lord Mayor, Alderman Jeremy Bingham) accepted the ambitious tender submitted by Ipoh Garden Developments. It granted Ipoh

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102 Tod and Cork, 11; "Capitol Theatre to be reborn for $40m." SMH 13 May 1988: 7.


the rights to redevelop the Capitol and adjacent site in return for a ninety-nine-year lease of the theatre\textsuperscript{105} and allowed it to transfer the site's Floor Space Ratio (of 54,118 square metres of unused floor space) to other city buildings being developed by the company.\textsuperscript{106} At that time, Alderman Sartor criticised the length of the lease, stating that it effectively alienated Council from any control or say in the theatre.\textsuperscript{107} Almost a year later, when negotiations reached a stalemate and no documents had been signed, he was prepared to withdraw from negotiations with the developer\textsuperscript{108} and, in 1991, (after the developer withdrew from negotiations with Council)\textsuperscript{109} he even justified Lord Mayor Bingham's efforts to support another potential developer's proposal, provided Venue Associates could find financial backing.\textsuperscript{110}

Negotiations between Council and Ipoh Garden Developments were prolonged and strained.\textsuperscript{111} Council expected a greater financial return than the company could


\textsuperscript{106} This floor space was worth 77 million dollars, and was transferred the World Square and Masonic Temple sites. \textit{SMH} 5 Sep. 89: 1; Andrea Dixon, "World Square raises Capitol concern." \textit{SMH} 7 Aug. 1990: 35; Denis Wolanski Library: Capitol theatre, Sydney. Robert Weatherdon, "Ipoh cuts plans for Capitol site." \textit{Financial Review} 3 Jan. 1991: 11.

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{SMH} 5 Sep. 89: 1.


justify and, as a result, these talks failed. Tim Tait, the developer's architect-in-charge, explained that restoration costs are always substantially more than people originally estimate and it is not always evident if there will be a profit until the end of the project.

Ipoh Garden Developments depended on the property market, which declined in 1990, a year after gaining Council approval for the Capitol project. (This was concomitant with an expensive industrial dispute that erupted on the company's World Square site.) Consequently, the developer unsuccessfully asked Council to grant it the freehold of the George Street commercial properties, which it planned to refurbish and sell to provide finance for the work. Later, in October 1996, when the company reduced its plan, these properties and the Parker Street foyer were no longer included in the overall project.

After Lord Mayor Frank Sartor came to office in 1991, the theatre restoration/redevelopment was put out to tender again and Ipoh's modified tender, a third plan, was accepted. This time, City Council indicated that it would be prepared to contribute some finance for the project. Ipoh Garden Developments' proposal was for a "bare bones" theatre venue (like the Royal and Her Majesty's Theatres) but it contained compromises approved by Council. However, Council's tender document comprehensively outlined their requirements for a production house with "all the bells and whistles". This was similar to the performing arts centres in other Capitol cities, which have their own resident companies and require permanently installed

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Ipoh Garden Developments expected long-running live productions would use their own technology specifically designed for each production, while visiting touring companies would be self-sufficient, or arrange to hire any required equipment. Because the developer was unfamiliar with managing entertainment venues, it entered a partnership with Arena Management under entrepreneur Kevin Jacobsen.\(^\text{116}\)

Although the state's *Local Government Act, 1993* and *Local Government (Approvals) Regulation, 1993* transferred the responsibility for theatres, cinemas and public halls and their construction to local councils, approval for the restoration and extension of the Capitol had been given before the relevant dates of the Acts; under the "savings clauses" of these Acts, the Capitol came under the regulations of the earlier *Local Government Act, 1919*.\(^\text{117}\) Some compromises needed to be negotiated between the department's architects and officers with the developers and their architects (Peddle Thorp Architects), because the theatre no longer conformed to changing regulations, but needed to retain certain heritage elements unique to the building. Where it did not pose a safety problem, some conditions of the Act's current regulations were relaxed.\(^\text{118}\)

Council eventually contributed fifteen million dollars (in addition to the


\(^{118}\) Waters, Graeme Macey (Lawrence Nield and Partners) and Government Architect, Serge Fijac, Department of Local Government, in conversations with the author.
property) of the overall 45 million dollars for the theatre project. After a number of delays, the theatre was finally opened on 24th January 1995, at which time, an audience had its first opportunity to see the "grand old lady" of Sydney theatre in all its glory, view its modern new foyer built over the former troublesome private lane and voice opinions on artist, Laurens Tan's modern wall sculpture that was specially commissioned for the project.

Its interior restoration was as faithful to the original fabric of the Capitol as was possible. Unfortunately, entrepreneurs using the theatre did not feel the same as its supporters and, although, projectors able to reproduce the early atmospheric effects on the ceiling were installed in the theatre for its opening in 1995, they may never be used. Moreover, Cameron MacKintosh arranged for three boxes to be erected on each side of the Dress Circle, detracting from the accurate detail of the original Capitol auditorium. His rationale for these boxes was that they create a domino effect when performers take their bows. Usually, audiences in the stalls leap to their feet, patrons in the boxes follow their example and this influences those people sitting in the Dress Circle.

The heritage significance of the Capitol is highlighted by the National Trust's

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121 Laurens Tan was formerly a lecturer with the Creative Arts Department at Wollongong University. "Renaissance of the Capitol theatre." Craft Arts International No. 34, 1995: 108-10; Megan Howe, "Capitol idea for leading Wollongong Artist." Illawarra Mercury 24 Jan. 1995: 5.


123 ATHS Tour of Capitol. 11 Dec. 1995. 1.00 pm.
letter to the Town Clerk. Environment Director C. H. Patten advised him that the Capitol, Manning Building and other classified buildings and items "of heritage significance" were "places, which are components of the natural or the cultural environment of Australia, that have aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance or other special value for future generations, as well as for the present community."  

The "grand old lady" has recovered and lives on.

---

PODROME
ULLERS'
Fairy Pantomime
MOTHER GOOSE
South-east corner of Capitol auditorium showing round temple, restored statues, Marocain mesh screen that once concealed organ pipes and built above original Hippodrome ramp that descended to ring from shared laneway. ATHS photograph.

Mezzanine level of new foyer built above private laneway where parked cars often blocked exits. Laurens Tan's sculpture modern sculpture on left wall. Design used will bridge the architectural styles of the Capitol and future hotel on Manning Building site. ATHS photograph.
Chapter 13

The Timeless "Grand Old Dame"\textsuperscript{1}

If the Capitol was a woman (as described by newspapers), she would be admired as a tough survivor. Born in the poorest part of Sydney Town, her infancy occurred in the cultural hub of the Haymarket, with its market buildings, circuses and popular entertainments. As a "juvenile", she had a bright and exciting childhood as the Hippodrome, presenting the human face and physical dexterity, as well as the glitter and novelty of the most exciting commercial forms of popular entertainment and culture.

The fledgling film industry found an enticing partnership with her as a young woman and she experienced the inevitable name change to the Capitol when she was married to a different cultural format. As an "engenue", like the young "flapper", she was beautiful and enticing, with an air of fantasy and independence, enhanced by a enviable clarity of vocal and music production. Chastened during the difficult times of the depression, she emerged again with a new spirit during the war years.

In her maturity, men fought over her and a few for her, then most neglected her shamefully. Threatened repeatedly, she struggled on and was ever the willing hostess. Within this lady's\textsuperscript{2} walls young performers were given their start, and older entertainers exhibited their talents in their declining years. Audiences were always welcomed through her doors.

As a "matron", she rose above the damage to her reputation as being an unlucky theatre. Misadventure within her walls can be laid at the feet of men's neglect and error

\textsuperscript{1} Matt Condon and Susan Borham, "Grand Old Dame to Reign again." \textit{Sun Herald} 5 Apr. 1992: 19.

Taking the analogy further, Council can be identified as her "producer". It owned the property, raised finance for construction and was responsible for her creation and existence, from inception to completion and engaged the (initial) production and technical team. As "director(s)", the Chief Secretary's Department and its successors oversaw all elements of this property, directed safety regulations and gave her licence. They relinquished this role when the final project was realised and the building was officially handed to Council.

Just as "auteurs" take a completed work and change it to suit their own purposes, the Capitol's lessees altered 'her' for similar reasons. Wirths required a multipurpose venue for predominantly traditional live performances; Union Theatres' recreation featured modern film exhibitions; Greater Union Theatres (under its several titles) monopolised the property and basically raided its/her assets; Harry M. Miller Attractions, Vlado Shopov and Gladwyne each proposed improvements that they could not complete; Hoyts' interest was temporary, lasting only until its George Street complex was completed.

"Given circumstances" of the Capitol's story were drawn from selectively retained records of these departments and involve elements of time, place, background details and lost opportunities. She is the protagonist for whom the surrounding "characters" give support or opposition. In this storyline, many divers actions are introduced, some remain unresolved while others retain the element of mystery. The Capitol, herself, sets the "mise en scene" for a enduring triumphant epic, with an option for a sequel.
This "old stager"\textsuperscript{3} is a tough survivor, "a Grand Old Dame",\textsuperscript{4} at the beginning of another new start. Transformed like the "Dame" of Pantomime, in the manner of Sir Robert Helpman and Sir Frederick Ashton, she has seen the best and the worst of theatre and cinema. With an elegant bow, she shares many happy memories. She is indeed - a lucky theatre!


\textsuperscript{4} Matt Condon and Susan Borham, "Grand Old Dame to reign again." \textit{Sun-Herald} 5 Apr. 1992: 19.
The Capitol: Its Producer, Director, Auteurs

and Given Circumstances:

An epic of a "lucky" theatre. Vol. 2

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the

requirements for the award of the degree

MA (HONS)

from

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by

LYNNE DENT BA (HONS)

FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS

1998
## Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Incomplete List of Programs</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatres and Public Halls Licenses</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental and Leases</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wirths: A Skeleton History</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Opening Night at the Hippodrome</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hippodrome: Equipment, Fittings and Costs</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening Night at the Capitol</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Night at the Theatre: Fifteen Seconds of Free-fall</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projection, Sound and Other Equipment</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparisons: Hippodrome, Capitol (1928) and Capitol (1995)</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Land Grants</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inaccessible Council Files</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WAIT FOR THE BIG SHOW
HAYMARKET RESERVE
TWO WEEKS ONLY.
COMMENCING SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 14.
THE GREATEST EXHIBITION OF ANY AGE OR COUNTRY
COOPER, BAILEY & CO.
GREAT INTERNATIONAL ALLIED SHOWS

CIRCUS AND MENAGERIE

A SCENE OF AMERICAN AND BACCHUS CAMEL.
A SCENE OF AFRICAN, ASIATIC, AND AMERICAN LIONS,
FROGS, SNAKES, LIZARDS, BIRDS, REPTILES.

BRAZIL AND BRAZILIAN TIGERS.
A SCENE OF BRAZILIAN TIGERS.
A SCENE OF ALLIGATORS IN THE FRESHWATER.

UN AMEABLE ZEBRAS.
A SCENE OF ZEBRAS.
A SCENE OF AFRICAN ELEPHANTS.

A MEDITATION OF MONKIES.
A SCENE OF MONKEYS.
A SCENE OF LIVING NIPPERIN FORKS.

A SCENE OF ALASKA BEAR.
A SCENE OF GIANT GIRAFFE.
A SCENE OF MEERSCHAUM FORKS.

A SCENE OF BENGAL TIGERS.
A SCENE OF BENGAL TIGERS.
A SCENE OF ALASKA BEAR.

CIRCUS DEPARTMENT

Two Performances Daily—Afternoon and Night.

FIVE FUNNY CLOWNS
JAMES ROBINSON,
THE CHAMPION BARE-BACK RIDER OF THE WORLD.
Who will flatly appeal to each exhibition, has rendered his name famous in connection with animal history.

The Performance given by this remarkable Company in the Greatest circus of the world.

New Acts Never Seen Before.

BATTOUTE LEAPERS
Double Somersault.

Six Elephants
Unrivalled in Swift Riders.

FEATS IN MID-AIR
SPORTS OF THE ZEBRAS.

Professor G. W. Johnston
The Great Indian, Lion, and Horseman of the world will give Executions of his remarkable power.

Two Performances Daily—Afternoon and Night.

CIRCUS—Advertisement:—Town and Country, 31 Mar. 1876:—p514
Pantomimes were frequently presented in the Hippodrome but mainly during some of the Christmas holiday seasons. *The Forty Thieves* Pantomime (1923) was mentioned more than any other in the archive files and oral history for this research.
Appendix A

An Incomplete list of Programs

When used as Hay and Corn Market; the open air Paddy's Markets and Belmore Markets and Haymarket Reserve:

Mid to late nineteenth century, until 1890: Saturday afternoon and nights, sideshows, music, theatre, film shows. Some of the circuses were:

1873:
17th June. Chiarini's Royal Italian Circus.

1876:
22nd April. Wilson's San Francisco Palace Circus (Haymarket Reserve.)

18th December. Cooper, Bailey, and Company's Great International Allied Shows and Menagerie.

1877:
14th April. Cooper, Bailey, and Company's Great International Allied Shows and Menagerie.

1882-3:
31st December 1882. Wirth's All Star Varieties.

As the New Belmore Markets, also known as the Sir William Manning Markets:

1907:
[n.d.] Film Show by Gibson.

1912:
16th March. Wirth Brothers' Greatest Show on Earth.

June. Mr Jamieson's "Tog O'War" [sic].

1913:
15th March. Wirth Brothers' Greatest Show on Earth.

As the Hippodrome.

Wirth's Brothers Circus performed every Easter during its tenancy of the building.

1916:
3rd April. Wirths Circus. (six weeks)

31st May. Kultur, Leonard F. Durrell's gigantic military aqua drama based on actual war-time events. (four weeks)
27th June. Idle for five weeks.


7th August. Wirth's Hippodrome Pictures: Picturecraft's *The Unwritten Law*, featuring the World's greatest Prima Donna, Beatrix Michelena. Support features included English official war films and some screamingly funny comedies.

12th August. The last night showing *The Closed Door* featuring Rouse Peters and Barbara Tennant. A play with a purpose that all should see.

13 August. Idle for five weeks.

23rd September. Kemp's Buck Jumping Show, with a yard full of wild horses, Australian rough riders, Miss Kemp and Professor Kemp, and mystery horse, Chester, the Marvel of the Age. (six weeks)

6 November. Idle five weeks.


1917:

29th January. Idle eight weeks.

24th March. Wirth's Greatest Show on Earth, with "King Neptune and the Lovely Diving Mermaids, the Riogoku Japanese Troupe, Bailey Brothers' Posing Horses and Dogs, Captain Huling's Seals, Captain Lindos' Lions, Maximo the Drunk on the Wire, Daredevil Sampt, Rowland's Society Circus, Cyclonic Romanoff, Wirth's Performing Elephants, Lions, Tigers, Bears, Leopards, Horses and Ponies, and numerous other attractions." (eight weeks)

Within the first fourteen months, the Hippodrome was idle for 27 weeks. (CRS 34: TC 1195/16: Hippodrome: Insurance.)

June. Walter Brown of Brown's Pictures, applied to the City Council to erect electric signs for Brown's Pictures, on the Hippodrome, replacing the Wirth's electric signs. Although this was approved, the work does not appear to have taken place, and no evidence was found during the research, to show that the company showed films in the theatre.

29th September. Under the Direction of Wirth Brothers Ltd and Eddie Bond, William Anderson's Famous Dramatic Organisation presented a season of dramas. The first was a revival of Alfred Dampier and Garnet Walch's *Robbery Under Arms*, made possible by special arrangements with Alfred Rolfe, Esq.

20th October. The Charming Romantic Drama taken from the poem by Henry W. Longfellow, *The Village Blacksmith*.

27th October. Frank Harvey's Emotional and Domestic Play, *The World Against Her*. It was advertised as a drama for the ladies and dealt with "the great social question, is Marriage a failure?"


1918:

The Chief Secretary's Department and military authorities gave permission for Harry Keesing of the Strand Theatre, by arrangement with Wirths, to present Boxing Contests at the Hippodrome. Strict guidelines were established for the matches, the price of admission and at least half the program to be comprised of a vaudeville entertainment. (CRS 34: TC 971/18: Hippodrome; SCC Archives: PC 1918, p145.

1919:

Later in October, the Council and the Chief Secretary's Department approved an agreement between Wirths and Stadium's Ltd. to produce boxing and vaudeville during the part of the year, when the building was not used by Wirth's Brothers Circus. Military authorities and the Federal Treasurer were no longer required to grant permission for these entertainments. (CRS 34: TC 3741/19: Hippodrome; SCC Archives: PC 1919, 433.

1920:

Some of the Boxing Contests in 1920 were:

19th July. The International Featherweight Contest between Raymond Toomey of the Philippines and Australian, Charlie Cole. The support contest was between Sid Rider and Jimmy Ryan.

23rd July. The Novice Boxing Tourney, comprising fourteen contests of six rounds each.

26th July. The Featherweight Contest between Jimmy Hill and Bert Secombe, and a ten round contest between Jack Sharkey and Joe Green. This program drew a crowd, who forced open the doors, flowed into the building and saw the contest for nothing. Wirths applied to build an entry turnstile door to combat the problem.
1922:
9th September. Fullers Circuit presented *Arrivals of 1922*. Within this format, the program changed every week.

Christmas. Fuller Christmas Pantomime.

1923:
23rd December. Harry Musgrove in association with J. C. Williamsons, presented *The Forty Thieves* pantomime. An application was granted giving the company permission to build temporary dressing facilities for this program. Some complaint arose from people standing and sitting in the aisles.

1924:
Christmas. Revised and rewritten pantomime, *The Bunyip*. (This Australian pantomime was first presented at the Grand Opera House, for the 1916-7 Christmas season.)

Fullers also presented the *Mother Goose* pantomime at the Hippodrome, but the date was not listed in the primary source. Robert Frances also listed *Stiffy and Mo*, and *Everest's Monkey Hippodrome*.

1925:
19th December. Frank Rigo Opera Company presented *The Barber of Seville*.

1926:
Every Sunday Night at 8 pm. A Vocal and Instrumental Concert, silver coin admission price.

27th December. P. W. Stevenson presented Dan Thomas's pantomime, *Babes in the Wood* and *Harlequinade*.

1927:
Easter. Wirth's Brothers Circus.

**Capitol**
*Under the management of Capitol Theatre (Sydney) Limited, a branch of Union Theatres Limited.*

1928:
7th April. *His Lady* (in the United States, was called *When a Man Loves*), starring John Barrymore and Dolores Costello, directed by Crosland Alan [1927]. The music Score, as with all other silent films during his term at the theatre, was composed and provided by Ted Henkel and his orchestra. After twelve months, his place was taken by Bert Howell.

14th April. Paramount's *Beau Sabreur*. This was Paramount's answer to *Beau Geste* and was thought to have been lost. However, in 1995, it was one of fifty films held by the Australian Archives that were sent to Hollywood for restoration and
preservation.
The supporting film was Two Flaming Youths with Chester Conklin and W. C. Fields.

21 April. Gentlemen prefer Blonds. Slightly Used, starring May McAvoy.

28th April. Brigadier Gerard, starring Rod La Rocque.


12th May. The Missing Link, with Syd Chaplin and Akka, the most human monkey. Also showing, The Opening Night, starring Claire Windsor.


4th August. Paramount Picture: The Fifty Fifty Girl with Bebe Daniels. Also, Lures of Love, starring Mary Philbin, Lionel Barrymore and Don Alvarado.


18th August. The comedy farce, Easy Come, Easy Go, with Richard Dix. Also, the Paramount Picture, Red Hair, starring Clara Bow.

25th August. A Hero for the Night, a comedy starring Glen Tryon.

1st September. If I were Single, A Master Picture, starring May McAvoy and Conrad Nagel. A Paramount Picture, The Last Command [1928] starring Emil Jannings and Evelyn Brent, directed by Joseph von Sternberg. Emil Jannings won the Oscar for Best Actor, for his role as the White Russian General in this film.


6th October. *Hot News* with Bebe Daniels and Neil Hamilton.


Coming to the Capitol within a short time, were:
- *Sunrise*, with Janet Gaynor, George O'Brien and Margaret Livingston; *The Heart of Maryland*, with Dolores Costello; *Foreign Legion*, starring Lewis Stone, Norman Kerry, Mary Nolan and June Marlow; *Home James* starring Laura La Plante.

16th December. *Showgirl*, starring Alice White and *Freedom of the Press* with Lewis Stone.

Also, this week, Rin Tin Tin in *Rinty of the Desert* and the Revue: Billy Dave in *Love at Midnight* (*Love on the High Seas*).

22nd December. *Cinderella Pantomime* with over 100 people in the cast.

1929:

5th January. *Forgotten Faces*.

19th January. *His Private Life*.


9th February. *Take Me Home*.

16th February. *Moran of the Marines*.

23rd February. *The Fleet's In*, plus the cartoons, *Krazy Kat* and *Inkwell Imps*.

29th June. Universal: *The Cohens and the Kellys* [1926] starring George Sidney and Charles Murray. (This was the first of a successful series of Jewish and Irish comedy films.) Supporting film, Richard Dix in *Red Skin*.

6th July. *Abie's Irish Rose*, a talking, singing and sound film, starring Charles (Buddy) Rogers and Nancy Carroll. Showing this week with *While the City Sleeps*
starring Lon Chaney. On the same program, Ted Henkel's Stage Band with the Capitol Ballet presented "On the Air", Fred Scholl rendered "Ten Little Miles from Town" on the Wurlitzer Organ and the Capitol's Unit Orchestra played the overture from "La Boheme".

13th July. The second week of Abie's Irish Rose with two all talking comedies, Lucky in Love and Hollywood Bound.


1930:
15th February. Horace Sheldon (from London Palladium) was conducting the Capitol Unit Orchestra and Showband and Manny Aarons, "the Wizard of the Wurlitzer" (previously the Musical Director of Sydney's Tivoli theatre, under Harry Rickards) was playing the organ. "All talkie" features could be presented in the theatre, which also had earphones fitted to twelve of the seats in the Dress Circle for use by deaf patrons.

5th December. Paramount: Santa Fe Trail with Richard Arlen, Rosita Moreno, Mitzi Green and Eugene Pallette. Also, Sweethearts on Parade starring Alice White, Lloyd Hughes, Marie Provost and Kenneth Thomson.

6th December. 10.00am show, Children's Matinee: The Rink starring Charlie Chaplin and live on stage, Houdini the boy.
Management installed a three hole mini-golf course on the Dress Circle Foyer. (Advertisement in the Daily Guardian 5 Dec. 1930, prompted an inspection by the Chief Secretary's Department, CSD 4172, report dated 5 dec. 1930.)

Christmas. Pantomime Jack and the Beanstalk.

1931:
23rd March. Present Arms and skating marvels with Bert Howell's Orchestra.

12th August. The premiere of the successful Australian film, On Our Selection. It ran for an unprecedented three weeks.

Mr A. G. Gillespie wrote the Under Secretary on 4th January under the letterhead of General Theatres Corporation of Australia Limited. The licensee was duly changed in accordance with the letter, and the theatre was operated under the umbrella of this company until 4th January 1938, at which time the license was transferred to Greater Union Theatres Pty Ltd.
Under Greater Union Theatres Ltd:

1932:
January. *The Squaw Man* starring Warner Baxter. (Warner Bros. [sic] made an earlier film of the same name in 1914 and starred Dustin Farnum. It was remade in 1916 by Lasky/de Mille Productions.) Shown with *One Good Turn* starring Laurel and Hardy.

15th January. M.G.M.: *The Sin of Madelon Claudet*, starring Helen Hayes, who was awarded the Academy Award in 1932, for this film.


9th March. *Sidewalks of New York* with Buster Keaton.

20th March. *Mata Hari*.

6th April. *Street Scene* with Silvia Sydney.

22nd April. M.G.M.: *The Champ* [1931] starring Wallace Beery and Jackie Cooper. The film won the 1931-2 Oscar awards for the Best Actor and the Best story or screenplay. This Gala was also the 4th Birthday Celebrations.

8th May. *Strangers May Kiss* with Norma Shearer.


10th June. *Sentimental Bloke* (Australian) starring George Wallace. George Wallace also appeared on stage.

24th June. *The Easiest Way* with Charley Chase.


27th September. *Huddle* starring Norman Navarro and Una Merkel.

6th October. *As You Desire Me* with Greta Garbo.

The Capitol Closed for four months. Mr. A. G. Gillespie wrote to the Under Secretary, advising him that the theatre would close after the final performance on 24th November 1932 and that the company would notify the Chief Secretary's Department when the reopening date was determined. This was the first letter in these files that was written
under the letterhead of Greater Union Theatres Limited. (CSD 4172: Capitol theatre. Letter, A. G. Gillespie, Sydney Manager of Greater Union Theatres Ltd. to the Under Secretary, 24 Nov. 1932.)

The Chief Secretary's department was duly notified that the theatre would reopen on 7th April 1933. (CSD 4172: Capitol theatre. Letter, A. G. Gillespie of General Theatres Corporation of Australia Ltd. to the Under Secretary, 5 Apr. 1933.)

1933:

28th October. *The Silver Chord* with Irene Dunn and Joel McRae. Also showing, *Doctor Bull* starring Will Rogers, Marion Dixon, Louise Dresser and Andy Devine.


Showing in the mid 1930s: Universal's B Grade Horror Films
- *Dracula* [1931] starring Bela Lugosi.
- *The Invisible Man* [1933] with Claude Rains.
- *The Black Cat* [1934] with Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff.

1936:

From December 1937, Under Greater Union Theatres Pty. Ltd.:

In December, the Chief Secretary's Department received a letter from the company, requesting the licenses of the Capitol and a number of other cinemas, be transferred from General Theatres Corporation of Australasia Limited to Greater Union Theatres Pty. Ltd. (CSD 4172: Letter from company to Under Secretary, 24 Dec. 1937.)

1938:
15th July. *Let George Do It* (Australian), Director Ken G. Hall and starring George Wallace.

1939:
22nd September. *Gone to the Dogs* (Australian), Director Ken G. Hall, starring George Wallace.
30th September. *Come Up Smiling (Ants in His Pants)* (Australian) with Will Mahoney, Shirley Ann Richards, Jean Hutton and Evie Hayes.

1940:

5th September. *Wagons Westward* and second film, *One Hour to Live*. Also on stage, a stage show of juveniles in *Healthy Kid Trade*.

12th September. *Ghost Comes Home* and *Framed*.


3rd October. *Two Girls on Broadway* and *Last Alarm* showing Joan Blondell, Lana Turner and George Murphy.

10th October. *Dark Command* and *I Can't Give You Anything but Love Baby*. Also a stage Act.

17th October. *Girl from God's Country* and *Outside the Three Mile Limit*.

24th October. *Hot Steel* and *Convicted Woman*.

31st October. *When the Daltons Rode*. (Photographs of publicity promotions are in the Sam Hood Collection, held in the Mitchell Library.) Support Film, *Sing, Dance, Plenty Hot*.

14th November. *Doomed to Die* with Boris Karloff. *Captain is a Lady*.

21st November. *Twenty Mile Team* and *Ski Patrol* starring Wallace Beery.

28th November. *Queen of the Yukon* and *Texas Stampede*.

5th December. *Women in War* and *Carolina Moon*.

12th December. *Sky Murder* and *Love, Honour and Oh Baby*.

19th December. *Wyoming* and *South to Karanga* with Wallace Beery.

26th December. *Drums of the Desert* and *Fugitive from Prison Camp*. 
1941:

2nd January. *So You Won't Talk*, plus *Black Diamonds*. On stage, "Good Stage Show".

9th January. *Argentine Nights*, plus *Military Academy*.

16th January. *The Ape* with Boris Karloff. *I'm Nobody's Sweetheart Now*.

23rd January. *Captain Calamity* and *Melody in the Moonlight*.

30th January. *Sporting Blood* with *Ol' Swimming Hole*.

6th February. *Mummy's Hand* and *We Who are Young*.

13th February. *Angels over Broadway* and *Margie*.

20th February. *Rangers of Fortune* and *Barnyard Follies*.

27th February. *Gallant Sons* and *Rio Grande*.

3rd April. Universal: *Bank Dick* starring W. C. Fields; *Behind the News* and on stage, "The Rawdaws".

10th April. *Hit Parade of 1941* and *Ellery Queen, Master Detective*.

17th April. *Trail of the Vigilantes* and *You're Out of Luck*.

21st April. *Maisie was a Lady* and *Arkansas Judge*.

1st May. *Give Us Wings* and *Ride Tenderfoot Ride*.

8th May. *Invisible Woman* and *Great Plane Robbery*.

15th May. *You're the One* and *Doomed Caravan*.

22nd May. *Man Betrayed* and *Blonde Inspiration*.

29th May. *Before I Hang* and *Wild Man from Borneo*.

5th June. *Roundup* and *Devil's Pipeline*.

19th June. *Escape to Glory* plus *Glamour for Sale*.

26th June. Universal: *Black Cat* [1934]

3rd July. *Man Made Monster* and *Horror Island*.

10th July. *Penalty* and *Nobody's Children*.
17th July. *Meet Boston Blackie* and *Dark Streets of Cairo*.

24th July. *Reaching for the Sun* and *In Old Colorado*.

31st July. *Sign of the Wolf* and *Meet the Chump*.

7th August. *Bad Man* and *Roar of the Press*.

14th August. *Back in the Saddle* and *San Francisco Docks*.

21st August. *Las Vegas Nights* and *Pirates on Horseback*.


In March 1945, Greater Union announced to the local newspapers, its new program policy. The company proposed to present "outstanding films" at the Capitol, which would run for several weeks, instead of the prevailing system of weekly program changes. Accordingly films from Paramount, Universal, Colombia, British Empire Films and Metro Goldwyn Mayer, would be shown. Not included were films distributed by Warner Bros. [sic], RKO and Fox Films.

1944-5:

Universal: *Can't Help Singing*, Deanna Durbin's first and only Technicolor film.

1946:


1947:

14th January. *Twilight on the Rio Grande* starring Gene Audrey. Also *Little Miss Broadway* with Jean Porter.

26th November. *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (Australian) starring Bert Bailey, Fred McDonald and Shirley Ann Richards. *Dark Command*, with John Wayne and Walter Pidgeon.


1948:

23rd August. *The Perfect Specimen* with Errol Flynn and Joan Blondell, plus *Invitation to a Murder*. 
1950:
6th January. *Into the Straight* (Australian) with Charles Tingwall and Muriel Steinbeck.

1951:
3rd February. Rafael Sabatini's *The Sea Hawk* with Brenda Marshall and Claude Rains. *Passage from Hong Kong.*

16th February. Abbott and Costello, *The Noose Hangs High* and *Trapped.*


1st September. Alan Ladd, Brian Donlevy, Barry Fitzgerald and William Bendix in *Two Years Before the Mast* and *Death of a Champion* with Donald O'Connor.

15th September. Gregory Peck, Robert Preston, Joan Bennett in *The Macomber Affair* and *Texans Never Cry.*

22nd September. John Garfield, Edward G. Robinson and Ida Lupino in *The Sea Wolf.* Also showing, *God is My Co-Pilot* with Dennis Morgan.


1952:

19th January. *Cattle Drive* (Technicolor) with Joel McRae and Dean Stockwell. *Illegal Entry* starring Howard Duff and Marta Toren.


December in 1952 and 1953, Christmas Pantimimes.

Early 1950s:
Universal: *Man Without a Star* [1955] Director King Vidor and starring Kirk
Douglas.
Paramount: *The Bridges at Toko Ri* with William Holden, Frederick March and Mickey Rooney. This film won an Oscar for Special Effects.

1954:
[n.d.] Paramount: Irving Berlin's *Holiday Inn*, filmed in Vistavision. This film was a remake of a successful 1942 film, which had won an Academy Award for its music. The company chose the Capitol, because its acoustics would demonstrate the top sound quality of the film and the film's colour on the new big screen.


1955:
Universal: *To Hell and Back* [1955].

December 1959 to January 1960. Live productions: Celebrity Circuits under Harry Wren presented the Children's Pantomime, *Robin Hood on Ice* directed by Enzo Toppiano and Peggy Mortimer. This was followed on 15th January by *Ice Capers*.

1960:

12th August. *Dust in the Sun* (Australian) Director Lee Robinson and starring Chips Rafferty.

1961:
June. Rudas Theatrical Organisation presented the live production of the *Crazy Gang*. Various extensions and alterations to the theatre were undertaken for this production. (CSD 4172: Capitol.)


Christmas. The Children's pantomime, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*.

1963:
June. Saturday Morning Organ Concerts.

1970:
30th July to 1st August. McColl Enterprises presented live production, *Bill Cosby*. It was presented in front of the fire curtain and was accompanied by a singer and guitarist.
31st July. Her Majesty's Theatre burned down in the early hours of the morning. At that time it was being used for the Opera season.

6th to 13th August. Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust presents *Otello: Opera Concert Series*, transferred in part from Her Majesty's Theatre. (CSD 4172: Capitol.)

Industrial Dispute at the Town Hall, caused programs to be transferred to the Capitol.

August. *Bath Festival Orchestra.*
*Sydney Symphony Orchestra.*

14th August. *A.B.C. Youth Orchestra* (possibly Verdi's *Force of Destiny.*)

18th August. *Yehudi Menuhin Concert Series.*


In August, at the same time as these live performances were being presented, the film programs were also being presented and included films such as:

*African Safari,*
*Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter,*
*Billy the Kid versus Dracula,*
*Curse of the Scarlet Altar.*

13th October. (There is some confusion if this concert was in 1970 or 1971, but communication within the files is dated, 13 Oct. 1970) *Liberace* with 28 piece orchestra.

7th November. *TV Make It Australian Concert.*

1971:
March. Regular Sunday night wrestling exhibitions, *World Championship Wrestling* and *Mud Wrestling.*

September. *History of Jazz,* concert with Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Dizzie Gillespie and Sonny Stitt.

November. *Glen Miller and His Orchestra* Concert.

December 1971.
A number of interested parties approached the City Council, seeking to lease the Capitol at an increased rental, when the current lease expired. Greater Union protested at this time but not later.

1972:
5th February. Theatre Organ Society of Australia stages the *Last Organ Recital.* Ten
organists played the Wurlitzer Organ before it was removed from the theatre.

10th February. *Count Yorga, Vampire.* The last film screened by Greater Union Theatres.

21st to 26th February. *Marty Feldman,* the last live concert presented during Greater Union Theatre's lease of the Capitol.

License T231 for the Capitol theatre, had been lost during Greater Union Theatre's tenancy of the theatre and was replaced by License T4172, issued to Harry M. Miller Attractions.

Under Harry M. Miller Attractions Limited:

April. *Jesus Christ Superstar* starring Trevor White, John English, Michelle Fawdon and Robin Ramsey.

14 December 1972, Film (title not recorded in documents) 16 mm non flammable film from Fumeo Xenon 450/900.

The planned live production of *Gone With the Wind* was postponed indefinitely on 2nd April 1973, for lack of financial backing.

30th May 1973. New Screen, Harkness Plastic Flameproof No. 22 with masking and automatic curtain equipment (installed by Brakell Products) replacing the Brakelite Wydascope Screen that was installed in 1954. Also, 1 Ernemann VIIIIB Projector complete with Zennon Lamp House, Fully Automatic non-rewind system, Ernemat Theatre Automat remote controlling of sound curtain operation and projector, and Altec-Lansing Speaker Systems installed by Carl Zeiss Pty. Ltd.). Alterations to the Bio-box was undertaken by Hamilton and Baker.

c. 16th June 1973. Film, *Swan Lake*.

25th March 1974 *National Ballet of Senegal.*

Theatre was idle from 12th May to 15th May 1974.

Under Hoyts:

1974:
4th May. *Slansk, Polish Dancers.*

1975:

9th to 21st June. Edgley and Dawe Attractions Pty. Ltd. *The London Ballet Festival*, featuring Rudolph Nureyev. From the 9th to 14th: *Sleeping Beauty* and from 15th to 21st: the *Prodigal Son*.

6th May. *11 Day Rock Film Festival*.

24th to 26th June. *Kim Bonython Production*.

29th June to 5th July. *Korean Art Troupe, the Mansudae Art Troupe*.

8th, 18th and 21st August. *The Great Guitarists*.

22nd August. *Sergeant Pepper*.


1976:

21st February. *Victoria Ballet*.

c. 23rd May. *Petrouchka Ballet* with Galina and Valery Panov.

3rd June. Restaged, *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Harry M. Miller Attractions had a sub-lease of the building until Hoyts head lease expired, at which time Harry M. Miller Attractions leased the building until later in the year.

1977:

The theatre was idle, except for a brief period when Peter Cheung leased the theatre for a brief season of Chinese documentaries, *Acrobatic Knights*.

Late 1970s:

*Wrestling*.

*Cossack Dancers*.

Under Vlado Shopov.

1: 79:
License T4172 was replaced by License T4584 on 2nd January 1979, when the former was lost in the City Council files.

December. *Spoonful of Blues 2*, with Bo Diddley, Dutch Tilders and Kevin Borich Express.

1980:

*Juliet Prowse.*

c. 24th July. *The Osmond Concert.*

*Victor Borge.*
*Paul Williams.*
*Roy Orbison.*
*Rita Coolidge.*


November. *The Alexander Brothers Show.*

1981:

7th March. *'Elvis' Stage Show.*

22nd October. *Ice House, Simple Minds* and *Divynals*, presented by Dirty Pool.

10th November. *Echo and the Bunneymen*, with *Sunny Boys.*

26th November. *Cher.*


[n.d.] A Rock Concert *New Order* with support band *Pel Mel.*

1982:
2nd March. Lindsay Kemp: "Flowers" and "The Dream".

15th March. *Cleo Lane.*

March. *Elton John; George Benson.*

17th March. *Shakin Stevens.*

19th March. *Peter, Paul and Mary.*
22nd to 23rd March. *The Pretenders.*

c. 26th March. Concert.

29th to 30th March. *Joan Armatrading.*

*Australian Film institute Awards.*

c. 20th May. *Mike Oldfield.*

5th August. *Australian Crawl Concert.*


6th and 7th October. *Simple Minds.*

14th and 15th October. *Madness.*

1st and 2nd November. *Joe Crocker.*

[n.d.] Various Rock Concerts.

*Janis Ian.*

*Black Sabbath.*

*Randy Newman.*

1983:

7th February. *Toots and the Maytals - Reggae.*


May. *Louden Wainwright and Margaret Roadnight.*

22nd August. *San's Idea and Dave Ades Quintet.*

*Yehudi Menuhin.*

*Tommy Steele.*

8th December. *Victor Borge* the last production/presentation before the Capitol theatre was permanently closed. However, the Council source states the last time the theatre was used at this time, was for a Rock Concert in early 1984.

The Capitol was closed except for incidental purposes.

1995:

The restored and extended Capitol reopened on 24th January with *Compagnie Philippe Decouflé,* part of the Festival of Sydney. It was followed within the week, on 1st
February. by *The White Oak Dance Project* with Mikhail Baryshnikov.
A season of *West Side Story* commenced on 25th February and the long-awaited *Miss Saigon* opened in July.

**References**


CSD 4172: Capitol theatre.

*Daily Guardian*, various issues.

Denis Wolanski Library at the Sydney Opera House.


Mitchell Library, Theatre Program Files for the Hippodrome and Capitol theatres.

SCC Archive Files.


*Sydney Morning Herald*, various issues.

*Town and Country Journal*, various issues.

IN PURSUANCE of the provisions of the Theatres and Public Halls Act, 1908,

FRANK AUGUSTUS CHAPLEY,
Colonial Secretary for the time being of the State of New South Wales, do hereby grant unto

**General Theatres Corporation of Asia Ltd.**, a License for the

**Capitol Theatre, Sydney**, for

**GENERAL ENTERTAINMENT PURPOSES,**

subject to the provisions of the said Act and the Regulations now or hereafter to be made thereunder:

AND I DECLARE AND DIRECT that this License continue in force for the period of twelve calendar months from the 7th April, 1906, unless the same shall be sooner cancelled in pursuance of Section 16 of the Theatres and Public Halls Act, 1908, by the Colonial Secretary for the time being of the said State.

<table>
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<td>1037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of persons who may be admitted thereto... 2737

GIVEN under my Hand, at the Colonial Secretary's Office, Sydney, this 6th April, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and thirty-six.

E. B. HARKNESS

Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, being the person appointed in that behalf by the Colonial Secretary.

Mr. A.G. Gillespie,
Manager General Theatres Corporation of Asia Ltd.,
49 Market Street, Sydney.
LICENSE
UNDER THE
THEATRES AND PUBLIC HALLS ACT, 1908
IN RESPECT OF A
THEATRE OR PUBLIC HALL

IN PURSUANCE of the provisions of the Theatres and Public Halls Act, 1908,
I,
KEVIN JAMES STEWART
MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT
unto
COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SYDNEY
of
TOWN HALL HOUSE, SYDNEY SQUARE, SYDNEY
a license under that Act, in respect of the theatre or public hall situated
at
CAMPBELL STREET, PARKER STREET AND HAY STREET, HAYMARKET SYDNEY
and known as
CAPITOL THEATRE

The license is granted subject to that act and the Regulations thereunder and to any
conditions as may from time to time be determined in respect thereof pursuant to Section 12A of
that Act and shall, subject to any suspension thereof, continue in force until cancelled pursuant to
that Act.

1736 Stalls
1037 Gallery
200 Standing
2973 persons

Licensed capacity .....

Issued this TWENTY-THIRD day of OCTOBER 1984

DENISE NOLAN
FOR MINISTER

Conditions:

CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file: Office copy of the last License in the file. Contrary to reality, the recorded seating capacity remains unchanged; the City Council is the Licensee.
Appendix B

Theatres and Public Halls Licenses

Despite being the owner of the building, the Sydney City Council chose not to be listed as the licensee until forced to do so. This was when the theatre building was vacant and its condition threatened its license. The licenses for the theatre recorded the seating numbers for the theatre. The Hippodrome seated 2,400 people and the Capitol held 2,973 people at the most. At various times throughout its history, standing numbers and seating numbers were altered until the theatre's accommodation was less than that recorded on the license. (The newly restored Capitol seats approximately 2,072 patrons in January 1995.)

The Hippodrome opened with Wirth Brothers Circus as lessee in 1916 and operated under a number of temporary licenses, pending the satisfactory installation of a mechanical ventilating system or an alternative. In 1924, the Under Secretary of the Chief Secretary's Department granted Wirth Bros. Ltd. the first full licence.

Temporary Licence numbers were infrequently listed in the files consulted. While the temporary licenses were generally for one year's duration, some were for shorter periods, especially when there was an anticipated change of Licensee/Lessor. Annual licences were given a different number each year, until 1950, when licences were given one constant number. The Capitol's first licence was granted to Union Theatres Limited in 1927 and in 1931, the licensee's name was changed to Greater Union Theatres Limited. Greater Union Theatres closed the theatre temporarily on 24th September 1932 and the Capitol reopened on Friday, 7th April 1933, at which time an

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1 The Theatres and Public Halls Act of 1908 and Amendments uses the American spelling for the word "license" and is the only New South Wales Government licence to be spelt in this manner. Unless otherwise stated all of the following references related to the Theatres and Public Halls Licenses, will come from the Chief Secretary Department's Capitol theatre file: 4172, under the authority of the Department of local Governments and Cooperatives.
application was made to change the licensee's name to General Theatres Corporation of Australia Limited (Union Division).

On 4th January 1938, the name on the license was again changed. This time it was to Greater Union Theatres Proprietary Ltd. Despite the name changes, the men responsible for the Capitol and other theatres in the Greater Union chain, remained constant.

In 1950, the department began to issue annual and bi-annual licences with one constant number. Consequently, the *Theatres and Public Halls License* T231 was issued for the Capitol theatre. When the lease and tenancy of the building was transferred to Harry M. Miller Attractions in 1972, Greater Union Theatres found the licence had been lost during the company's long occupancy of the building. This license was superseded by License T4172, granted to Harry M. Miller Attractions Pty. Ltd. on 20th October. It is from this license that the file for the Capitol, held by the New South Wales Archives, held on behalf of the Department of Local Government and Cooperatives, derives its number.²

On 23rd May 1975, the Department of Services (Theatres Section) transferred the licence to Hoyts Theatres Ltd. and, in turn, the Department of Services, Theatres and Public Halls Technical Section,³ back to Harry M. Miller Attractions Pty. Ltd. on 20th October 1976. The company only had a brief tenancy of the theatre and the license was transferred to the Council of the City of Sydney on 4th February 1977. The

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² Chief Secretary Department's Capitol theatre, file number: 4172; Government Records Repository Shelf Location: 17/3545.

³ In the intervening period, the Chief Secretary's Department, Theatres and Public Halls Technical Section, administered the requirement and regulations of the *Theatres and Public Halls Act* from the 23rd January to 14th May 1976.
licence was lost once more and during this research was located in file CRS 34: TC 1637/76. Vlado Shopov was granted the lease of the theatre but a replacement licence (License T4584) was approved in lieu.

Shopov never received License T4584, because the fees for 1979 and 1980 were not paid. When this licence was not returned to the department after Shopov's tenancy ceased, replacement License T 4699 was issued to Gladwyne on 10th June 1981.

In 1982, the responsibilities of this act was administered by the Department of Local Government. It transferred the licence to Council. However, another replacement licence needed to be issued (T4952) on the 23rd October 1984. The following year it was suspended for two years, as the theatre was unsafe.

The more recent files of the Department of Local Government and Cooperatives are identified by the numbers, FF 901271 and FF 9012771A. Within the early files, some documents have been given numbers with progressive numbers, which changed each year, but these files have been compiled under the one number and are easy to find. Unfortunately, as many of the letters in the files are copies, some do not appear to have any readily available date recorded on them and can only by placed in time by their location between other documents.

The papers before 1920 have been missing from these files for decades and the only letters from the department, still extant from this period, can be found in the Sydney City Council Archive's numerous files of the Hippodrome and the Capitol.

It must be noted that the Chief Secretary Department's, Prosecution files: Hippodrome: 80/1538 Parts A and B (Shelf Location: 17/3672) do not relate to this

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building or this period. They relate to the former Salvation Army Citadel Hall at 33 Goulburn Street (Sydney), which was renamed the Hippodrome and in which the first "R" rated sexually explicit films were shown. The proprietors never complied with government regulations and a licence was never approved. This file holds an interesting article from the *Sun* newspaper, which mentions that the new Hippodrome retains its water tank, which was used for immersing converts.⁵

Written in dialogue form, they document conversations between the licensing police and various other people involved in the business (excluding one proprietor who was at the time, in prison) and make interesting reading.

**Chief Secretary**

The office of the Colonial Secretary was established with the foundation of the Colony of New South Wales in 1788. From 1788 to 1820, the Secretary to the Governor acted as the Secretary to the Colony.⁶ In May 1824, the Office of the Secretary to the Governor and the Office of the Secretary to the colony were officially separated.

With the beginning of Responsible Government in 1856, the Colonial Secretary was also known as the Principal Secretary or the Chief Secretary and frequently acted as the Premier or the Prime Minister until 1907, at which time the Premier's Department was established. In 1856, the functions and duties of the Colonial/Chief

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⁵ "Sex Comes to the Citadel." *Sun* 3 Jul. 1974: [n.p.]

⁶ Governor King, "Secretary's Responsibilities" (1804), *Historical Records of Australia* 1.4.538 cited in *The Concise Guide to the State Archives of New South Wales* 2nd ed. Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references come from this Guide.
Secretary were published in the *New South Wales Gazette*.7

The term "Chief Secretary" was used by the Governor on 4th October 1859 and gradually became the commonly used title. The Colonial or Chief Secretary to the Government became an official ministerial title on 1st April, 1959, when the *Ministers of the Crown Act* was passed. Under the position's administration, its official responsibilities included the Police Department and the Fire Brigades Board, which were both involved with the issue of theatrical licenses.

With time, the responsibilities of the office expanded to such an extent that they were divided. In the 1930s, the Under Secretary, E. B. Harkness advised the Colonial/Chief Secretary, the Minister for Health and the Minister for Social Services. Accordingly in the files related to the Capitol, letters from the same person are frequently under the letterheads of these departments, as well as the Department of Public Works, which later was linked to the same office. Until 1969, the Chief Secretary was responsible for the licensing and regulation of theatres and for the control of plays and films.

The Chief Secretary's Department was renamed the Department of Services from 3rd January 1975 to 23rd January 1976; then the Chief Secretary's Department until 14th May 1976 and the Department of Services until it was abolished in May 1982. All its functions and responsibilities, including the Theatres and Public Halls Branch, were transferred to the Department of Local Governments and Lands. Later, this department was combined with another to become the Department of Local Governments and Cooperatives.8 In 1993, under the *Local Government Act*

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7 *New South Wales Gazette*, No. 155, 9 Oct. 1856, cited as above.
responsibility for theatres and public halls has been transferred to the regional and local
government levels.

Within a relatively short space of time, successive elected governments have
divested the department of many of its extensive portfolios, until it held only two at the
time of this research. However, because the restoration, alterations and extension of the
Capitol commenced before this final legislation, the responsible minister was advised
that the administration of the building remained under the *Theatres and Public Halls
Act of 1908 and Amendments* until the building was completed and the keys officially
handed to the building's owners and/or lessees. At that time, the administration of the
safety regulations and the Capitol would be transferred to the relative departments of
the Sydney City Council.

**The Board of Fire Commissioners**

The Board of Fire Commissioners conducted the annual inspections of the
theatre until 1983, when the theatre was closed. In the early years, the regional, then
the Licensing Police also conducted inspections of the theatre.

The Board of Fire Commissioner was constituted under the *Fire Brigades Act of
1909*, under which all the Fire Brigade boards within the state were dissolved and their
responsibilities were transferred to the Board. In November 1989, the Board was
dismissed under the Grey Report and the *Fire Brigades Act* was passed on the 19th
December 1989.
CRS 51/3461: Demolition Photographs. Manning Building and Market property showing remnant of original market building at ground level at right, where Hippodrome was to be built; the reconstructed market building above the awning level of the Manning Building; Hotel Sydney on the Pitt Street boundary of the former "Old" Belmore Markets Property site, c. 1914.
CSD 4172: Capitol theatre file. 1929 floor plan of "Standing Room" alterations in inner foyer behind the columns of the former Hippodrome prepared for Union Theatres.
Appendix C

Rental and Leases


The agreement to lease the part of the building at 2,250 pounds per annum and 6 per cent on additional expenditure of approximately 9,000 pounds needed to equip the theatre. Lessee was also responsible for the insurance on the building and was obliged to keep the inside and outside of the building in good tenantable repair. The term of this first lease was for twenty-one years from 1st April 1916, the intended opening night.

One clause within the lease absolved the Council from the responsibility for any damage caused by water overflowing from the surrounding streets, drains or any of the adjacent Council properties.

The signatories were George and Philip Wirth for Wirths Bros. Ltd. and Thomas Huggins Nesbitt, the Town Clerk.


Wirths paid an additional rental at a sum equivalent of 8 per cent on the amount expended. These items included chairs, the ring curtain and appurtenances, proscenium curtain and appurtenances, stage dimmers, borders with tail blocks and lines, arc lamps and cluster lamps for the stage and roof, paint frame and cinematograph box, at an estimated cost of 2,500 pounds. (Additional rental: 200 pounds per annum).

The price of admission at the Hippodrome in 1916 was:
for Wirth's Circus: 5s in the Dress Circle and Arena Stalls, 4s for Stalls, 3s for Back Stalls and 2s in the Family Circle.
for Wirth's Hippodrome Pictures: 6d and 1s.

1st April 1916. Commencement of the twenty-one year lease. Rental for Hippodrome was 3,812 pounds 14 s per annum payable monthly at 317 pounds 14 shillings (s) 6 pence (d).

The original cost of the building in 1916 was 51,799 pounds.

1st August 1917. Rental was increased to 3,008 pounds 19 s per annum, to cover the cost of additional alterations.

14th September 1917. Rental was again increased to 3,812 pounds 14s per annum.

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Related File: CRS 34: 2360/27 - Note: This file was never received by the Council Archives.

Four of the seven signatories were the Town Clerk, William Grazebrook Layton, George and Philip Wirth and Stuart Doyle for Capitol Theatre (Sydney).

The lease was assigned to Capitol Theatres (Sydney) Ltd and mortgaged to Wirth Bros. Ltd. Capitol Theatres (Sydney) Ltd (a division of Union Theatres Ltd) covenanted to expend 50,000 pounds on the alterations to the building. However, the actual amount spent was closer to 173,121 pounds.2

The price of admission to the Capitol in 1927 was:

The Week-Day Price special, except Saturdays and holidays, which were more expensive:
- 10.30 a.m. to noon: Adults 1s and 2s; children 9d and 1s.
- Noon to 5.30 p.m.: Adults 1s 6d and 2s; children 1s and 1s 6d.
- From 5.30 p.m.: Adult 2s, 3s and 4s in Reserved Section; children, 1s and 2s, except in the Reserved Section. The prices listed did not include Tax.


Related File: CRS 34: TC 2360/27 (As above).

October 1931. As a result of provisions in the Rental Reduction Act of 1931, the rental was reduced to 2,954 pounds 17s per annum (246 pounds 4s 9d per month).3


Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 5318/31. [Not available]

Town Clerk, Roy Hendy signed for the Council and two directors signed on behalf of each of the companies. Of them, Edwin Geach signed as a director for both Capitol Theatre (Sydney) and Greater Union (Extension).

1st September 1933. Lease transferred to Greater Union Theatres and the rental remained the same.

Related Files: CRS 34: TC 3072/33.

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Capitol Theatre (Sydney) Limited was in liquidation. Robert Hill signed the lease agreement as the Liquidator and for Capitol Theatre (Sydney). Stuart Doyle was one of the two directors who signed on behalf of Greater Union Theatres Limited.

1st April 1937. The Municipal Council of Sydney (the Council) agree to let and Greater Union Theatres Limited (the Company) agree to take the land and premises described in the indenture of the lease dated 3rd June 1930, made between Council and Capitol Theatres. Signatories included Town Clerk Roy Hendy and directors, Robert Hill and Stuart Doyle for Greater Union Theatres Limited.
Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 135/37.
Under this agreement, the weekly tenancy of the building was to start on the following day and could be terminated on a week's notice by either party. The rental remained at 73 pounds 2s 7d per week.

16th June 1937. The Municipal Council of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Limited: Lease of premises situated in Campbell, Parker and Hay Streets, City of Sydney, known as the Capitol theatre.
Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 135/37.
This new lease was for five years from the 14th June, 1937, at a rental of 6,760 pounds per annum. The lease was on the basis of a weekly tenancy and could be terminated at a week's notice. Additional conditions in this lease made the lessee responsible for the payment of rates, taxes and charges due on the property. The lessee was not permitted to carry out any offensive trade, nor could permit or conduct any entertainment on a Sunday, Christmas or Good Friday during the term of the lease. The lessee was required to paint and paper the building during the second and fifth years of the tenancy and precautions were to be taken against the harbourage of rats, reviving concerns expressed in relation to the hydraulic ring. Precautions were included to guard against another company liquidation.
In Annexure B related to the furnishings and fittings place in the building for Wirths in 1916. Under an agreement between the Council and the new lessee, 1736 stalls seats, originally cost one pound each and 334 Dress Circle seats originally valued at three pounds each, were accepted in lieu of the 2,738 pounds originally expended in 1916. While it was accepted the original equipment had decreased in value during the decade between the opening of the Hippodrome and the transfer of the lease to Capitol Theatres (Sydney), no similar acknowledgment was made of the deterioration of the theatre's chairs in the decade from 1927 to the signing of the building's second lease.
The lease was signed by the Town Clerk, Roy Hendy and Edwin Geach, J. W. Dive and one other company representative (whose signature is unclear).

24th September 1942. The Municipal Council of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Ltd: Lease of premises situated in Campbell, Parker and Hay Streets, City of Sydney, known as the Capitol theatre.
Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 4083/41.

The term of the lease was for two years and the rental remained the same as the previous agreement and continued until Greater Union Theatres vacated the theatre in 1972. Reference was made to possible war damage and damage by fire, lighting, flood, tempest and strikes.

Signatories to the lease were Roy Hendy, John Goulston and the same person, whose signature was not clear on the last lease.

13th November 1944. The Municipal Council of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Pty. Ltd: Lease of ... Capitol theatre.
Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 2510/43.

Lease for eighteen months, and although the Council sought to increase the rental of the property, the *National Security* (War Damage to Property) *Regulations* pegged the rental to the pre-war level. Roy Hendy was the Town Clerk and Robert Hill and John Goulston acted for Greater Union Theatres.

14th November 1945. The Municipal Council of Sydney and Greater Union Theatres Pty Ltd: Lease of ... Capitol theatre.
Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 2295/45.

Lease was for one year and signatories were Town Clerk Roy Hendy and acting for the lessee, were John Goulston and Norman Barnett.

24th January 1947. The Municipal Council of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Ltd: Lease of premises situated in Campbell, Parker and Hay Streets, City of Sydney, known as the Capitol theatre.
Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 3589/46.

The term of this lease was for one year. Except for the removal of any reference to war and war damage, the terms and conditions were substantially the same as those dating from 1937.

Company Directors, John Goulston and Norman Barnett, and company secretary J. W. Dive were the signatories for the company and Roy Hendy, the Town Clerk continued to sign all leases on behalf of the Council until 1957.

18th February 1948. The Municipal Council of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Ltd: Lease of premises situated in Campbell, Parker and Hay Streets, City of Sydney, known as the Capitol theatre.
Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 3999/47 [not available]

One Years lease dating from 14 December 1947, and signed for the company by the Directors J Evans and the man whose signature was mentioned above, and by Company Secretary J. W. Dive.

2nd June 1949. The Council of the City of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Pty. Ltd: Lease of Capitol Theatre, Sydney.

This was originally a one year lease, but pencil alterations altered the term of the lease to two years dating from 14th December 1948 altered to 1949. The signatories were virtually the same as the previous lease, plus that of the Deputy Town Clerk, E. W. Adams.

11th November 1949. The Council of the City of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Pty. Ltd: Lease of Capitol Theatre.
Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 4291/49.

This lease was for two years from 14th December 1949. The signatories for the company were John Goulston, J. Evans and J. W. Dive.

18th April 1952. The Council of the City of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Pty. Ltd: Lease of Capitol Theatre.
Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 4899/51.

This lease was for three years dating from 5th March 1952. Conditions of the lease were substantially the same as for previous leases, except for the addition of a clause which permitted the lessee to remain in the premises on a weekly tenancy after the lease expired.

Lord Mayor, E. C. O'Dea and Roy Hendy signed for the Council and the Acting Secretary signed for the Lessee.

1st June 1955. The Council of the City of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Pty. Ltd.: Lease.
Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 4817/54.

The lease was from two years dating from 5th March 1955. An addition to the rental in this agreement, the lessee agreed to pay a premium by way of two yearly instalments of 1,000 pounds. The lessee agreed to pay this instalment in consideration for the lease being granted, rather than paying an increase in rental, which the company opposed.

18th April 1957. The Council of the City of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Pty. Ltd.: Lease.
Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 261/57.

The term of the lease was for two years and substantially the same as the last lease. Condition 7 required the Lessee to undertake repairs to the building. However, if the company failed to do this, the Lessor was empowered to undertake the repairs at the expense of the Lessor.

Town Clerk, E. W. Adams and the Lord Mayor H. F. Jensen signed on behalf of the Council and except for J Evans, the other signatories for the company are not clear.
5th March 1959. Although there is no new lease document in the Deed packet, the lease was renewed for a further two years from this date.4

26th January 1960. The Council of the City of Sydney to Greater Union Theatres Pty. Ltd.: Lease.  
Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 5425/58.  
This lease and the signatories were substantially the same as the previous lease. No further leases of the Capitol granted to this Lessee, were in the Deed Packet. Neither this lease or the previous lease recorded the option for the renewal of the lease.

Related Papers: CRS 34: TC 397/61.  
Also dated 4th May 1972, an Indenture of Lease signed by the same two parties.  
Harry M. Miller Attractions Pty Ltd. was granted a two year lease (dating from 4th May 1972), with an option of a further two years. The Lessee was to notify the Council three months before the expiry date of its intention to take up this option. Including the amount expended on the work required in the building, the annual rental was 156,000 dollars. One thousand dollars per week was specifically generated by this work. An amount equal to ten weeks rental in advance was also to be lodged with Council was required, but negotiations led to a compromise whereby a guarantee from the Bank of New South Wales, was lodged in lieu of this payment.

In the company's tender, the Lessee covenanted to spend 116,000 dollars on repairs and refitting the theatre. This amount was apart from any additional expenditure required by the company for its own productions, such as the installation of theatre sound and lighting equipment. Due to the destruction of the grid system by the previous Lessee, the Council agreed to be responsible for the first 12,000 dollars of this amount. In addition, the Council would pay the remaining cost of the work, but this amount would then be paid to Council by the Lessee, by way of the additional rental mentioned above. However, because the Lessor did not have the money, the company offered to advance this sum without interest, to Council and the weekly payment be deducted from this amount.

These extensive agreements highlight the lack of maintenance undertaken by Greater Union Theatres Pty Ltd and the amount of work needed to bring the theatre back to the required standard.

Signatories to these agreements were the Town Clerk L. P. Carter, Lord Mayor Emmett McDermott, Minister for Local Government Charles Benjamin Cutler, Harry M. Miller and M. Enchelmaier for Harry M. Miller Attractions.

2nd October 1972. The Council of the City of Sydney and Hoyts Theatres Limited: Deed of Lease.

4 In the Deed packet, reference is made to a note in CRS 34: TC 397/61 and Town Clerk's Minute Paper in CRS 34: TC 5425/58.
This lease was for two years with two further option of one year each and dated from 16th September 1974. The delay in signing this lease stemmed from the Lessee's reluctance to be responsible for the licenses required for the building and Council's refusal to be responsible for the same.

It is interesting to note that Condition 5, reintroduced reference to possible damage by war damage and added fusion explosion, damage by aircraft (or articles dropped therefrom) motor vehicles, house breakers, burglaries and malicious damage.

Town Clerk L. P. Carter and Lord Mayor Tom Pat signed for Council and J Mostyn was one of the two Hoyts Directors who signed the agreement.

22nd April 1977. The Council of the City of Sydney and Peter Cheung Chi Kong: Deed.  
Related Papers: 631/77.  
This was a limited lease for the period from the 20th to 31st May 1977. Prior to occupation of the theatre, the Lessee was to pay the Council 205 dollars for the cost of cleaning, and in respect of each day the company screened films, 117 dollars 58 cents (c) to be paid in advance. In addition, the Lessee was to pay to Council 10 per cent of gross takings or one third of net profits, whichever is the greater. The company was to keep a complete and accurate copy of the ticket register and books of accounts, which were to be made available to the Council officers up to six months after the company vacated the premises. The same records were to be audited and the report submitted to Council. Further, the company was to pay the cost of the electricity and for the time of the Council officers (at 9 dollars 75c per hour) during the inspection of these records.

Condition 23 of this agreement required the Lessee to insure all employees in the event of an accident, no doubt in response to the accident in the theatre in 1972.

Related File: CRS 116: 32/05/0103.  
The two-year lease dates from the 21st September and could be terminated by writing, three months in advance. The yearly rental of 104,000 dollars was paid in monthly advance instalments and Council was to hold an advance rental payment of six weeks.

Shopov was required to carry out all necessary work, whether of a structural nature or not, to enable the theatre to be used for live theatre and fulfil all requirements of the Department of Services and Council. This work included complete rewiring of the building. In return, Council agreed to rebate rental to a maximum of 52,000 dollars to reimburse Shopov for these repairs.

24th December 1979. Vlado (Bill) Shopov and the three Directors of Gladwyne reached an agreement for Gladwyne to sub-lease the Capitol, which was subsequently approved by Council. (refer to Chapter 11.)

Related File: CRS 116: 32/05/0200.

Two-year lease granted beginning on 15th September, 1980 at a yearly rental of 104,000 dollars, to be paid weekly in advance. As the previous lease, the lessee was to pay six weeks rental in advance.


Lease for two-year period dating from 21 September 1979 and by resolution of the Lessor on 15th September 1980, Lessor agrees to termination of lease by the Lessee as at 14th September 1980.

This is the last document in the Deed Packet.

22nd December 1981. Gladwyne applied to extend lease to December 1983 but is only granted an extension to the end of December 1982, a period of fifteen weeks.

Council later agreed to extend the lease to the end of December 1983, then to December 1984. However, Gladwyne gave Council notice and vacated the theatre after 16th December 1983.
Astley's Riding Riding Academy, Royal Grove and Hippodrome
A jubilant Damien Oliver had his pay packet cut to the tune of $1000 by the stewards after his Melbourne Cup victory. He could be in for a cut of another kind from the Freedman clan.

The winning jockey of the Melbourne Cup is still presented with the Wirth's gold-topped whip, as well a monetary prize. *Illawarra Mercury* 8 Nov. 1995: p. 61.
Appendix D

Wirths: A Skeleton History

Wirths Brothers Circus followed the path of a number of other early Australian Circuses, such as St. Leon's Royal Victorian Circus, Fitzgerald's and Ashton's circuses. It was founded by brothers, John, Harry, Philip and George Wirth. However, this family tradition had begun with their father Johannes James (J.J.) Wirth and his brothers. The older Wirth brothers, Joachim (Jacob), Johannes and Peter, had departed from Bavaria in 1848, fleeing revolutions in a number of European countries.1 Travelling first to England, they arrived in Australia in 1855 on the ship Merlin.2 They joined John Jones's National Circus3 as circus musicians in 1858 but, later, left the company to perform around the northern districts of New South Wales and in Queensland.4

After their arrival in Queensland and before Johannes settled with his own family in Dalby (Queensland), the brothers played music in the goldfields, in streets and public houses in Sydney and Melbourne. They also played in dance-halls, at country race meetings, for agricultural shows and colonial circuses.5

At Dalby, Johannes and Peter built a barn-like dance hall, using slab bark that

3 John Jones's sons founded the St. Leon's Royal Victorian Circus. Brisbane, 80.
4 Brisbane, 53.
5 "Circus Romance: Mr. Philip Wirth's Career." The Western Australian 9 Sep. 1931 [n.p.], from Mark St. Leon's Research papers Collection ML MSS 2165/6 Item 3; Brisbane, 53.
Johannes had cut, and, there, they gave music lessons. Johannes and his English-born wife Sarah, taught dancing, chiefly fashionable gallops and polkas. Sarah Phillips had been a milliner when she married Johannes at St. Andrews Church in Sydney in 1856. They later raised seven children.

Many years later, Philip remembered his parents giving waltz exhibitions while the family was at Dalby and that he was a capable 'Master of Ceremonies' at the age of eight. During the three years that the family lived in Dalby, some of the children began their musical career in their father's dance band and Mary Elizabeth Victoria Wirth was born (in 1868). Mary was commonly known as Marizles and became as skilled a circus performer as her brothers.

Dalby's population declined when the rail line was extended to Roma by 1870, and, when Ashton's circus travelled through the town, Johannes (J.J.) was convinced to join it as bandmaster. He later returned to collect his oldest sons to join him in the circus. In 1878, the remaining members of his family moved to Sydney by way of Tenterfield and Tamworth. Because George was one of the youngest children, he had to remain with his mother and sisters but took every advantage to train and prepare for a future life in the circus. This, he said, was very much against the approval of his oldest sister, Minna.

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7 Mark St. Leon (coll and ed.), *Australian Circus Sources*, Lim. ed. 21 (Ultimo, NSW: Mark St. Leon, 1987) 225.
8 Brisbane, 53, *ADB*, 544-5; *West Australian*.
9 Ramsland, 28.
10 *ADB*, 544.
11 Ramsland, 29.
In an interview for *The Theatre* in 1920, George explained, how his father assumed the name 'John' and was often billed as J. J. Wirth. During his early years in the colonies, Johannes travelled simply with a wagon and four horses and, lacking a tent, improvised by cutting down branches and arranging them in a circle to create a circus enclosure. George said the four sons joined him when they were old enough and, under his tutelage, commenced their circus training. At various times, Johannes entered into a number of partnerships, one of which was with Mr Jones [sic] in Queensland.\(^\text{12}\) (An advertisement for this circus, printed in 1858, was reproduced in Mark St. Leon's work *Spangles and Sawdust* and showed the name of "Werth" [sic] among the company's artists.)\(^\text{13}\)

George was apprenticed as a bookbinder\(^\text{14}\) but the family's earlier travels with Ashton's circus, when he was a boy, made a strong impression on him.\(^\text{15}\) He was only ten years old when he first joined his father, three older brothers and Cooma Kitchie, a Japanese trapeze artist and tumbler.\(^\text{16}\) At that time, the family troupe possessed neither performing horses nor animal acts but entertained audiences with acrobatics, songs, dances and farces. Before performing in each town, they attached a sign to a suitable log, advising that the "Wirhs All Stars Varieties are coming" and draped decorations to

\(^{12}\) According to Philip Wirth, this was in 1864, but in *Entertaining Australia* and in the *ADB*, it is stated that "Werth's Band" was included in the advertisements for John Jones's National Circus in 1858-9 and that they left this circus in the 1860s. *Western Australian* 9 Sep. 1931; *ADB* 544-5.


\(^{14}\) Ramsland, 30.

\(^{15}\) Ramsland 14.

\(^{16}\) "The Romance of Great Circus: George Wirth in a Reminiscent Mood." *The Theatre* 1 Apr. 1920, reprinted in Mark St. Leon (coll and ed.), *Australian Circus Sources*, Lim. ed. 21 (Ultimo, NSW: Mark St. Leon, 1987) 123.
adorn the performance space. These wallpaper streamers had been coloured with Reckitts Blue.\footnote{St. Leon, \emph{Australian}, 124.}

However, Philip, who was three years older than George, stated the name of the family troupe was "The Star Troupe of Varieties". According to him, the four brothers decided to form their own circus in 1878 after John Ridge, another circus proprietor, was unable to pay them their overdue wages.\footnote{Western \emph{Australian}.} About 1891, the brothers were playing at Kempsey when they met and briefly rejoined the Ashton's circus. It was Ashtons and their intention to perform in Sydney but an altercation between the two companies erupted during their stay in Goulburn in 1882 and they parted company. Consequently, this intention was not realised.\footnote{St. Leon, \emph{Australian}, 124, 226; Brisbane, 53; \emph{ADB} 545; Ramsland, 29.}

Johannes (John J.) was deceased by 1882 and, until that time, "The Star Troupe of Varieties" was a country touring company comprising the four brothers, two Japanese and a German, whom Philip considered had "limited talent". One of the Japanese was the cook and the other was Cooma Kitchie. Possessing only a light wagonette and a couple of horses, the family company opened during the height of the goldmining period at Gulgong in New South Wales\footnote{West \emph{Australian}.} and performed at country halls along the way.\footnote{Ramsland, 20.} At the time of their arrival in the district, there were thirty thousand gold miners; those attending the troupe's performances at Gulgong gave gold nuggets
for the price of admission and lit their pipes with one pound notes.\textsuperscript{22}

All the brothers continued playing in the band that had begun under their father's leadership. In addition, they entertained audiences by performing on horizontal bars, on both single and double trapeze, and on the Roman Rings. They were adept at tumbling, contortion, club-swinging, balancing and walking on stilts; they were accomplished clowns, presented acrobatics and sang comic songs.\textsuperscript{23} To stretch a performance, George and Philip would enter the ring and play their cornets; George's expertise was evident when he could triple tongue 'High F' for eight bars.\textsuperscript{24} Harry, on the other hand, was the best black-faced comedian that George ever knew and could perform such a convincing drunk act that sometimes led to his arrest by police officers who were not convinced this was part of the act.\textsuperscript{25} Their circus experience enabled them to present an accomplished acrobatic and musical show.

The family troupe had prospered and grew from 1882. From Gulgong, the brothers travelled to Kempsey, Windsor and Sydney where they joined Sarah and their three sisters.\textsuperscript{26} The brothers decided to perform in Paddy's Market, as a experiment.

The market reserve site in the Haymarket Brightway had traditionally been used by circuses and sideshows for many years and later housed the Hippodrome.\textsuperscript{27} Their

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item[22] \textit{West Australian}.
\item[23] St. Leon, \textit{Australian}, 124; The Wirths and their Circus." \textit{The Theatre} 1 May 1911: 3-7, reprinted in Mark St. Leon (coll and ed.), \textit{Australian Circus Sources}, Lim. ed. 21 (Ultimo, NSW: Mark St. Leon, 1987) 106.
\item[24] \textit{West Australian}.
\item[25] St. Leon, \textit{Australian}, 124.
\item[26] Mark St. Leon states Johannes died in 1880, at the age of 46 and after twenty-five years in the colony. \textit{Australian Circus Sources}, 124, 225. However, in \textit{Spangles and Sawdust}, he places the year about 1875. \textit{Spangles and Sawdust}, 86, Brisbane, 102, \textit{West Australian}.
\item[27] \textit{West Australian}.
\end{thebibliography}
performance was so successful that they stayed on the site for six months (according to George) or twelve months (according to Philip) and this success attracted rival groups, who would perform around them for free. Consequently, passing people would be invited to come inside and see the best once they had seen the rest.  

While the family were in Sydney, they obtained a forty-foot tent (like the one they used at Paddy's market) and 'broke in' a number of horses, before moving to Ballarat for their winter 'stop over'. Besides these horses, their first performing animal was 'Beverly', a very versatile goat. She came from Beverly in Western Australia and had proven herself to be an apt student, learning to jump over banners, complete various feats on horseback and doing 'headers' into burning balloons. By 1920, the company had included a large and impressive animal collection as part of their circus and menagerie.

During the family's stay in Ballarat, they purchased more horses and hired trainers. By 1888, they had fourteen wagons and sixty horses when they toured New Caledonia. Within a short time, the family company possessed more than one hundred horses, twenty-five wagons and had more grooms than performers. For every six horses, there was one groom.

When Wirths made their first journey by rail, which was undertaken to enable

28 St. Leon, *Australian*.
31 Ramsland, 31.
32 *West Australian*. 
new wagons to be built, the circus owned forty wagons, 125 horses and employed seventy hands, as well as a large number and variety of performing animals.33 On their return to Melbourne, the family found the service horses were in fine condition but misbehaved so badly that both horses and wagons were sold. Thereafter, the circus travelled by train and ship,34 emulating the practice of visiting international circuses and was among the first Australian circuses to travel this way.35

Wirth Bros. [sic] came to an arrangement with Mr McLaughlin of the New South Wales State Rail over their train travel. Rail charges for the first ten years were ten shillings per mile on the forward journey and five shillings per mile on the return journey; by 1931, during the years of the Great Depression, the price had risen to fifteen shillings per mile. By that time, Philip Wirth told the reporter from the *West Australian*, the high cost of railway bills in Australia were almost killing the company. To illustrate this, he gave as an example, the costs of the journey from Port Augusta in South Australia to Kalgoorlie in Western Australia.36

This was not the first financial depression to affect Wirths circus company. In 1893, the same year that the New Belmore Markets opened, world banks failed and difficult circumstances in Australia created a depression to rival that of the 1930s. Before this occurred, Wirths had brought the 'Wild West Show' from the United States of America to join it during the company's 1890 tour of New Zealand and Australia.37

33 Ramsland, 31; St. Leon, *Australian*, 127.
34 St. Leon, *Australian*, 128.
35 Brisbane, 133.
36 This trip alone cost the circus 716 pounds. *West Australian* 9 Sep. 1931, Brisbane, 116.
37 Brisbane, 116; *West Australian*. 
Despite the success of this tour the company failed to benefit from Western Australia's goldrush during the second visit and it faced several predicaments. This prompted Wirths to try their luck overseas and the circus sailed from Adelaide for South Africa in 1893.\textsuperscript{38} It was the first country visited in a seven-year world tour which included South America, England, India and South-East Asia.

Meanwhile, Harry Wirth organised his own tour for 'Wirth's Pacific Circus' in 1895. Tragically, both John and Harry died while on their respective circus tours. John died in South Africa in 1894 and, in 1895, Harry died of sunstroke while on board ship.\textsuperscript{39} Following their deaths, Marizles joined the management of the family business.

Although their seven-year tour was generally successful, it proved to be a precarious venture. The novel Australian animals and birds in the circus menagerie had been a popular drawcard in South Africa, with the Boers travelling hundreds of miles to view them and this part of the tour was very profitable.

Next, the circus sailed for Montevideo where their fortunes were reversed. Strong anti-British feeling in the city led to the deliberate incineration of the theatre in which they were to appear. Unfortunately, they were not insured and lost everything except their horses. An English woman lent them fifty pounds, enabling them to continue their tour of the South American countries before proceeding to England, then back to South Africa.\textsuperscript{40}

They returned to South Africa just before the outbreak of the Boer War and,
during this season, they were asked to lend their theatre to both the Boers and British. However, wishing to remain neutral, the brothers refused both requests. As a consequence of this decision, the Boers allowed the circus to pass unmolested through their lines some months later and they were on the last train to cross the Modder River before the Boers blew up the bridge.41

With the looming outbreak of the Boer War, Wirths circus sailed for Colombo, South-East Asia and Australia. After this, Philip Wirth was never interested in touring overseas again, believing that no other country could equal Australia for climate or resources.42

George Wirth had been seriously injured in 1893 and was forced to retire from performing circus acts and, in 1889, he became the circus's business manager.43 Following an international trip in 1922, George compared Australian circuses and performers with those he saw overseas. He believed that if an Australian circus, similar to the early Wirth's company, set out on a world tour in the 1920s, it would prove to be a very successful enterprise.44 However, Wirths would not undertake such a tour as George and Philip were at an age when such an undertaking would be physically taxing.

Wirth Bros. Circus [sic] established a routine after they returned to Australia whereby they would perform in Sydney over Easter, coinciding with the Royal Easter Show, and be in Melbourne for the racing season, which culminated with the

41 St. Leon, Spangles, 88.
42 St. Leon, Spangles, 88.
43 ADB, 545.
44 "The Circuses of the World: Seen and compared by George Wirth." The Theatre 1 Apr. 1922, reprinted in Mark St. Leon (coll and ed.), Australian Circus Sources, Lim. ed. 21 ( Ultimo, NSW: Mark St. Leon, 1987) 135.
Melbourne Cup. Here they presented the jockey on the winning horse of the Melbourne Cup, with a gold topped whip. This tradition had been started by their former competitors, Fitzgerald Circus, which they bought after the founders' deaths and is still being enacted today. In Sydney, Wirths established a tradition of distributing 'hot cross buns' and ginger beer to the city's children on Good Friday. Although the circus is no longer operating, the last member of the Wirth family line was still honouring this Easter tradition in 1994.

Under George and Philip Wirth, the company established the Olympia in Melbourne and Hippodrome in Sydney as permanent venues for the circus and planned to continue touring during the intervening period. In 1905, Wirths leased the Olympia to a cinematographer and, in 1907, moved into a new Olympia built on the site of the original amphitheatre. Approximately a decade later, it was altered to show films. Other business ventures in Melbourne were Wirth's Park Pleasure Grounds, Wirth's Skating Rink, Wirth's Palais de Dance and Wirth's Hippodrome (Melbourne).

Before Wirths leased the Hippodrome from the Municipal Council of Sydney,

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45 George was a member of the Australian Jockey and The Victorian Racing Clubs. Brisbane, St. Leon, Spangles, 109; Mark St. Leon,"Chapter Six. Australia", ms.; ADB, 413.


48 Letter, Mervyn and Emily King to author, Nov. 1994.

49 This early use for film was less than ten years after the cinematograph was introduced to Australia. Brisbane, 144, 153.

50 Ross Thorne, Theatre Buildings in Australia to 1905 (Sydney: Architectural Research Foundation, University of Sydney, 1971) 218; Danial Catrice, "Cinemas in Melbourne to 1940." 'Going to the Pictures' Conference, University of Sydney, 26 Jun. 1995.

the circus performed in the New Belmore Markets for the Easter Seasons in 1912 and 1913. Council granted them a long term lease of the building late in 1912, and it was to be altered according to their needs (as described in Chapters 3 and 4). In its advertisements for the Hippodrome, the circus company praised it as "Sydney's newest Playhouse, the only one of its kind in Australia, (containing a hydraulic ring)". As a result of this venture, the family formed Wirths Bros. Ltd [sic] to be the official lessee for the new theatre building.

Wirths Brothers Circus was the only circus permitted to tour New South Wales from 1914 to 1918, the years of the first World War. There had been a number of Germans in the circus company when the war began but their presence caused considerable trouble, forcing the company to dismiss them. After the war, they were not allowed into the country and Wirths were not happy with the readily available English performers.

During their tenancy of the building, Wirths sub-leased the premises to a number of other entertainment enterprises to keep the venue occupied and viable while the circus was touring. Their efforts were unsuccessful and the venue proved costly, especially during and after the war. Eventually, George and Philip Wirth relinquished their lease after they applied to alter the building to a picture theatre. On the opening night of the renamed theatre in 1928, Wirths Brothers Circus and Menagerie was presenting its Sydney Easter Season "in a vast city of waterproof tents" pitched on the corner of Wentworth Avenue and Goulburn Street in the city.

52 Wirths' letterhead included in a number of City Council Archive files related to the Hippodrome.

George retired from the administration of the circus in 1930. In 1936, he became the Director of the National Studios at Pagewood in New South Wales, where a number of Australian films were produced. He died in 1941 and was survived by his wife.

Philip Wirth remained active in the performing and training aspect of the circus, training many horses by using only a command and a handkerchief. He also contributed to the ongoing training of a number of somersault equestrians. Included among these were his nieces, Stella and May, who were to gain international recognition. Philip died at his home in Coogee in 1937 and, like George, had published his own autobiography before his death. Philip was survived by six daughters and two sons, who took over the management of the family business.

Unfortunately, television added to the circus's difficulties and, like other forms of entertainment, the circus was forced to close in 1963 as a result of declining business.

Marizles (Mary [or Margaret] Elizabeth Wirth) was younger than her brothers and was an accomplished equestrienne. She married another circus musician, John Augustin Martin in 1891. They had a daughter, Stella, and adopted May, the daughter of French gymnast, John Edward Zinga and his wife Dezeppo Marie. Within sixteen years of marriage, Marizles was widowed but she and her daughters continued to perform and tour the world with the family circus. They also performed for companies like Barnum and Bailey's Circus and Ringling Brothers.

May Wirth was an exceptional performer and had been trained by her natural father, Marizles, Philip Wirth and the ringmaster, John Cooke. May was the star performer on the opening night of the Hippodrome. Unfortunately, she did not receive
the same level of acknowledgment in Australia that she was given in the international
circus and vaudeville circuit.

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"Wirth's New Playhouse: Spectacular Opening of the Hippodrome." *Daily Telegraph*

Various advertisements for Wirth Bros. Ltd. Circus and Menagerie, in the *SMH* during
the week of the opening.

Wirths' Souvenir - "Mr Philip Wirth trained these brumbies with a word of command
and a handkerchief." Item 7, Box 1/3. "The Edward Irham Collection." ML
5497, Mitchell Library of the State Library of New South Wales, cited by
Detail of a photograph similar to the one taken on the Hippodrome's opening night, as described in the *Sydney Morning Herald* 4 April 1916. Reproduced in Ian Hanson, "Sydney Capitol From Market, Circus and Theatre" Part 2. *Kino* September 1987. Photograph shows company with about ten elephants on stage, sixteen mounted horses and ten smaller horses in the arena and the orchestra in the orchestra pit.
BUNS, BUNS, HOT-CROSS BUNS!—Hundreds of kiddies will cherish memories of Good Friday because of the buns they received at Wirths' Circus.


Wirths' performers Similar to Riogoku family Risley contortion and acrobatic act and clown act on opening night, reprinted in Bulletin 5 September 1970: p.44.
Appendix E

The Opening Night at the Hippodrome

Although the building itself had been officially opened on the 29th March 1916, the "Grand Opening Night" of the theatrical venue was postponed to Monday 3rd April. Rough seas had delayed the arrival of the international stars and members of the Wirth family sailing to Australia from Europe and New Zealand and the management of Wirths had delayed the opening "to be fair to the first night patrons".

The program opened with a grand parade of horses, riders and "gorgeously caparisoned [sic] elephants, whereupon, the stage curtain rose on the assembled staff, artists, stage assistant and Philip Wirth. This is how the audience was first introduced to the "Colossal Aggregation of Star Attractions". Wirths used this description to advertise the circus company in the city's newspapers and stated it had arrived in Sydney from the Million Dollar Pavilion in Atlantic City.

Philip Wirth delivered a brief introductory speech, thanking a number of people involved in the construction of the Hippodrome, many of whom were present in the audience. Among these were Lord Mayor, Alderman Barlow; Architect and Building Surveyor, R. H. Broderick; his assistant Architect and Chief Draftsman, James H. (George) Merriman; contractors, Maston and Yates; theatre technician, John Povah.

The performance commenced. May Martin Wirth, "the electrifying girl equestrienne" danced, balanced upside down and somersaulted onto and from the back of her white charger, "Joe", as he galloped around the ring; his neck was arched and wreathed in diamond "brilliants". As her act progressed, she successfully discarded his bridle and trappings.

Likened to a blue butterfly in flight, she was a small and dainty person who could execute quick and agile movements. She was a brilliant rider, performing skills
that very few experienced male riders could accomplish. The palest blue of her costume, which was comprised of a blue evening bodice decorated with touches of gold, the "shortest possible" blue tulle shirt over long silken tights and blue satin slippers, was complimented by the colours of the surrounding decor of the auditorium. One journalist commented that her feet were high above her head as much as they were on the back of her horse, or even on the sawdust covered ring below.

Although Mr Welby Cook was the circus ringmaster, during May's act, Marizles Martin Wirth was the ring-mistress. Twenty-year old May, her mother and Martin Wirth family had just returned from a five-year world tour prior to this opening night. One of many highlights of this tour was their performance before King George and Queen Mary at the Olympia in London. It had been a triumphal success and, afterward, the family assumed the name of the Royal Martin Wirth Family.

The Riogoku Family from Japan were the next to perform. A troupe of seven Risley Contortion and Acrobatic performers, they wore beautiful costumes and used what was described as "a gorgeous Oriental stage setting", which was made with richly embroidered silk; both their costumes and the set were advertised as costing 6,000 pounds. Instead of performing on a conventional single stool, one acrobat who was the troupe's principal support and anchor, lay balanced on four stacked stools which raised him as high as the flies over the Hippodrome stage. From his feet and this precarious position, another acrobat did a back somersault while, at critical moments, the stools were kicked away one by one. It was a daring and accomplished act, culminating in a picturesque and graceful close.

Captain Frank Huling's Famous Performing Seals and sea lions were the next on the bill. This act introduced a novelty to the Australian experience that resulted in an
overwhelming response from the assembled spectators. Exceptionally well trained, these animals formed an orchestra, accomplished balancing feats and were adept at throwing and catching the ball. Mounted on a smart little pony, one seal juggled balls, batons and sundry circus items as the pair circled the ring and, then, the same seal walked on a tight rope with a parlour lamp balanced on the tip of his nose. Meanwhile, the remaining seals were perched on stools that circled the ring and encouraged audience response by clapping their fins in simulated handclapping motions. Unfortunately, Captain Huling's troupe of five seals were to die from excessive heat while the company was performing in Adelaide.

Described as "tit bits", various acts by the circus company's performing animals were interspersed throughout the program and audience response was equal to that given to Captain Huling's act. These included Captain Lindo's five performing lions who leapt over hurdles and through hoops while Bruin, the huge brown bear, portrayed humorous stupidity and ineptness. Bruin concluded his part of the act by displaying a fondness for a honey "bottle", emptying its contents down his throat as he circled the ring.

The ever-popular, gigantic and gaily adorned elephants performed another "tit bit", continuing to amuse the spectators. As well as Wirth's lion act, their performing horses, ponies, monkeys and dogs were all featured in acts of their own.

Next, a comedy item presented by the Wirth Family. One journalist described it as a "smart piece of work" and was a big feature of the show, reinforcing their deserved reputation as a splendid ensemble. An aerial trapeze act by a troupe of "human aeroplanes", the "Esthonians and Novikoffs" followed, led by Ernestoriva N. Novikoff. This troupe had appeared in Sydney previously and continued drawing an appreciative
response from their audiences. Also, the *Daily Telegraph* review stated their "excellence of the turn (act) was to found in its speed."

Next came Philip Wirth and his handsome little pony, Earl Dudley, both well-liked by this audience. The little pony performed on the back of a moving lorry and apparently achieved more tasks and skills than most other performing horses could do on a solid sawdust-covered ring. They were succeeded by successful and entertaining human acts, including Dan Yelding, an English jockey, who gave a humorous rendition of an American Indian Scout act; inimitable clowns, Joe, Alex and George; the graceful Loretta Twins, advertised as being the world's only female bar performers; Alex Christie, an accomplished young horseman from Sydney; Louvain, an innovative high wire act; Mussa Maiev, a Russian Cossack; Stella Martaine, a singing equestrienne; Fidein, a Charlie Chaplin Clown.

Many of the two thousand patrons showered congratulations for the venue and performance on George Wirth and the company's stage manager, Mr. J. Cooke; the the traditional presentation of flowers was followed by the conclusion of the evening, a flashlight photograph of the assembled circus company.

Thereafter, Hippodrome performances were held every evening, excluding Sundays, which was not permitted by law for some decades. There were matinees on Wednesdays, Saturdays and public holidays. Admission for adults to the circus was Dress Circle: 5 shillings, Arena Stalls: 4 shillings, Stalls: 3 shillings and the Family Circle in the uppermost gallery, cost 2 shillings per seat.
CRS 51/3382: Demolition Photographs. Photograph during Hippodrome construction showing water pit and girders of ring floor; cement formwork of two upper levels and wire grid of amphitheatre stalls floor; Existing shared eastern wall.

CRS 51/4709: Miscellaneous. Campbell and Parker Streets corner of Hippodrome: Date, 1915, shown on original pediment cornice and original parapet; both gas and electric street lights on corner; posters of boxing events indicate Stadiums management period. Photograph taken 19th August 1919 by Milton Kent.
CRS 51/338/1 Demolition Photograph. Detail: Formwork for stage, ramp and ring. These photographs were used in research by Trevor Waters
Appendix F

Hippodrome: Equipment, Fittings and Costs

Safety Curtain: 1915.

At the time of construction and fitting the Hippodrome, Council officers thought the fire curtain and gear were the largest of its kind in Australia.¹ Thorough consideration had to be given to the smooth operation of a rigid curtain, which weighed over six tons, and the Council Architect kept his counterpart in the Chief Secretary's Department apprised of plans for the curtain and relevant details during this planning stage.

He sent the plans of safety curtain along with those for the Fly Galleries (amended) grid floor and roof over the stage to the Chief Secretary's Department in August 1921.² (Unfortunately, it was Department policy not to keep copies of the same unless requested.) These plans were accordingly approved after some alterations to its appurtenances.³ Five areas of the Department's concern were identified and these were:

- A more efficient means was required to check the passage of smoke around the sides and bottom of the curtain, when closed;
- The prevention of heat being conducted through the curtain with insulated vertically distance "H" irons;
- The proposed woven asbestos (possibly in the curtain) was to be replaced with asbestos millboard of a suitable thickness;

¹ CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir William Manning Markets, Lease to Wirths. Letter, Town Clerk to Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 7 Dec. 1915.
The Balance weights were to be arranged in such a way that when the curtain was raised to its full height above the stage, the weights would be under the stage and were to be provided with shock absorbers.

The Cable from the winch operating the curtain was to be enclosed with a suitable tube and provision was to be made to lower the curtain from both sides of the proscenium opening and from both fly galleries.

The subsequent plans were for the curtain to operate with the least amount of friction and be operated by either hand or electric power. Theatre experts had advised the Town Clerk at the time of planning that it was still best to operate the curtain by hand. Overload sheaves were to be mounted on rolled steel joists of very large diameters, ball bearings were needed and ropes were to be made of extra pliable plough steel. Steel runners (1½ inch diameter) of the type used for elevators were used to guide the balance weights and four concussion tubes of the oil buffer type, were mounted on the top of the balance weights.

The counterweight runners were enclosed in sheet steel from top to bottom and the hoisting gear was located on the fly gallery. This was consisted of cylindro-conical drum connected by machine cut spur gearing, to a shaft, which was provided with hand cranks. The drum was to be provided with a brake; the latter was to be able to act automatically, as well as released from either the machine, or from each side of the proscenium by handropes.

A hoisting machine with a speed governor was used to prevent excessive speed in the descent of the curtain and it had the added advantage of slowing the fall of the curtain.

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4 CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir William Manning Markets. Letter, Town Clerk to Under Secretary, Chief Secretary's Department, 7 Dec. 1915.
curtain as it approached the stage. This was achieved by the hoisting ropes winding
onto the smaller diameter, winding-drum of the governor. Thereby, it also reduced the
work of the concussion tubes.

The Under Secretary was advised that, if it was desired, an electric motor could
be connected to the drum through a clutch. The clutch could be opened simultaneously
with freeing the brake from the machine or proscenium positions.

The Government Minister approved the final plans of these items on 14th
December 1915, and the Under Secretary of the Chief Secretary's Department made
note that every essential detail was shown. In addition, the department was aware that
provision had been made for optional and alternative methods of operation. In this
instance, the Under Secretary requested a copy of the plans be lodged with the
department for future reference.

Sprinkler System: 1915.

New and amended regulations of the *Theatres and Public Halls Act of 1908*,
passed in 1914, required automatic sprinklers to be installed in the theatre. When these
regulations were passed, the R. H. Broderick consulted with the Superintendent of the
Fire Brigade, who advised him that sprinklers were not only advisable, but necessary.
Accordingly, the Town Clerk notified the lessees Wirth Bros. Ltd. [sic] of this
requirement George Wirth replied and agreed to comply with the regulations but
questioned whether this cost should be Council's financial obligation instead of the

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5 CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir William Manning Markets. Letter, G. H. S. King, Under Secretary,
Chief Secretary's Department, to the Town Clerk, 14 Dec. 1915.

6 CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir William Manning Markets. Letter, Town Clerk to Wirth Brothers, 14
Jun. 1915.
lessees'. Whereupon, Broderick recommended to the Town Clerk that because the sprinklers were proven to be necessary, the Lessees could agree to pay interest on the additional costs, as they had done with their other financial agreements, otherwise the matter be put to the Council and its Finance Committee. These bodies could decide the entire cost of the same be born completely by Wirths.

A Grinnell Sprinkler System was installed in the theatre and it consisted of 281 sprinklers. Distribution of the sprinklers were as follows: 111 in the understage area, 27 under the fly galleries; 69 under the grid and 74 under the roof. Because of the extensive sprinkler system in the stage area, Broderick requested the Government Architect of the Chief Secretary's Department, release Council from the obligation of painting the timber work of the stage, roofs, gridiron and more items in the stage area with fire resisting solution.

Like the plans for the safety curtain and equipment, the Under Secretary also requested a copy of these plans be lodged with the department for future reference. This theatre building was built, when the regulations were being established and revised. Requests for lodgement of plans were not repeated in later years, when a number of other theatres had been built.

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Circus Ring, Pit and Ramps:

Permission was given for Roller Shutters at top of ramps opening into Parker Street and the private laneway on the Opposite Prompt (OP) side of the building. The shutters were to be fitted with bolts, which were required to be locked in the open position, when the public was in the theatre building. These plans were sent to the Under Secretary along with plans for the proposed ventilation under the stage and for the Gallery, Dress Circle and Stalls.\(^{12}\)

In April 1915, the Chief Secretary provisionally approved the plans for the water pit, which was proposed to be built beneath the circus ring. Because of safety concerns and that it was the first hydraulically operated movable circus ring floor in Australia, the Minister laid all the responsibility for its safety with the Council\(^{13}\)

Theatre Equipment: 1916.

Council "covenanted" in the Agreement for Lease (dated 13th July 1914) "to expend a sum estimated at approximately 9,000 pounds in carrying out such internal structural alterations and remodelling of the premises" that were set out in writing by the lessees, who would pay additional rental calculated at 6 per cent of the expenditure.\(^{14}\) Solicitors (Stephen, Jacques and Stephen) acting for Wirths accordingly requested Council to equip the Hippodrome with:

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1. Chairs
2. Carpets and curtains
3. Sign: Wirth's Hippodrome
4. Ring Mat
5. Ring curtain and appurtenances
6. Paint frame
7. Proscenium curtain (cloth) and appurtenances
8. Stage dimmers and borders with tail blocks and lines
9. Cinematograph Box
10. Set of stock scenery for theatre use
11. Arc lamps and cluster lamps for stage and roof.\(^{15}\)

The Comptroller of Assets and Stores recommended Council authorise items 1, 5, 7, 8, 11; items 6 (paint frame) and 9 (Cinematograph Box) were additions necessary for completing the building but adjuncts, which Council needed to consider independently of other items; the remaining items, 2, 3, 4 and 10, were legitimately tenants' fittings. The Finance Committee decided according to the Comptroller's recommendations but increase the additional rental to 8 per cent of the expenditure.\(^{16}\)

The cost of these items were as follows:\(^{17}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chairs</td>
<td>£1,118/13/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ring Curtain and appurtenances</td>
<td>118/7/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint Frame</td>
<td>100/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proscenium curtain and appurtenances</td>
<td>87/14/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Dimmers</td>
<td>387/19/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borders</td>
<td>300/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tail Blocks and Lines</td>
<td>100/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Arcs and gelatine</td>
<td>350/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster lamps \textit{et cetera}</td>
<td>70/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinematograph bases</td>
<td>103/19/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£2,736/12/10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{15}\) CRS 34: TC 303/16: Hippodrome - Re Equipment. Letter, Stephen, Jacques and Stephen to Town Clerk, 7 Jan. 1916.


\(^{17}\) CRS 34: TC 303/16: Hippodrome - Re Equipment. Report, R. H. Broderick to Town Clerk, 15 Jun. 1917.
These items were removed in 1928 and as part of its 1937 lease agreement, Council agreed to accept in lieu 1,736 Stalls and 334 Dress Circle seats.

The Cinematograph Box and Paint Frame were included in two lists of items that were not part of the original structural alterations and remodelling of the Hippodrome. These are as follows:

List 1

1. Solid concrete "ceilings" over Roadways from Campbell and Hay Street
   £200/ 0/ 0
2. Lowering the whole of the auditorium at the request of the Chief Secretary (CSD)
   1,350/ 0/ 0 (or £854/9/11)
3. Hydraulic ring pit complete
   6,065/0/11
4. Increasing height under stage
   1,022/19/4
5. Widening fly galleries
   137/18/10
6. Reinforced concrete paint
   82/1/5
7. Gridiron and alterations to roof over stage to suit same
   470/5/11
8. Rigid fire curtain as required by Chief Secretary's Department (CSD)
   1,115/4/10
9. Ramp from stage to under-stage floor
   75/2/9
10. Drying Room
    55/8/0
11. Mechanical ventilation under stage (CSD)
    329/17/7
    Cement Fly Galleries (CSD)
    202/7/9
    Sprinklers (CSD)
    749/13/0
    Sliding Roof
    386/19/8
    Gates (CSD)
    29/3/0

(Items 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 were carried out under the instructions of both Wirths and Chief Secretary's Department.) The Sprinklers and ramp for Wirths are included in an earlier Schedule of costs born by the Contractors, as listed by R. H. Broderick on 4th August 1916.

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List 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special (metal) fire curtain</td>
<td>£1,100/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowering of under-stage</td>
<td>1,016/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ring Pit</td>
<td>3,260/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fly galleries</td>
<td>348/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sliding Roof and louvred main roof</td>
<td>540/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timber barrier at back of stalls</td>
<td>50/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke vents over stage</td>
<td>560/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra fire doors in proscenium wall</td>
<td>160/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Exit doors</td>
<td>70/0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pump</td>
<td>140/0/0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In September 1916, he applied for authority for additional expenditure of 4,936 pounds to cover costs for: List 3:

- Installation of (above mentioned) automatic sprinklers over the stage, in addition to the following items:
  - Electricity supply and materials (introduced with work for the circus ring, pit and hydraulic rams £800/0/0 and extension of main service feeder from Campbell to Parker Street 162/2/10
  - Additional cost of stonework for Hay, Campbell and Parker Street frontages 950/0/0
  - Additional cost of brick and stonework to northern and southern features of the building, as well as alterations to gables and stonework as a result of widening the stage 500/0/0
  - Ramp from rear of stage to Basement below and awning extending full length of the stage 354/0/0
  - Extra cost of brass and galvanised railing as required by the Chief Secretary owing to widening of staircases to Gallery and Dress Circle 375/16/0
  - New Office 68/16/2
  - Special store rooms over private boxes 98/15/4
  - Enclosures to water meters, fan and pump rooms 30/2/8
  - Ramp from rear of the stage specially desired by Wirths 128/4/4
  - Additional Cinematograph Box 50/10/0
  - Additional steelwork to main roof owing to increased span and preparing for

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gangways for spotlights and stiffeners for possible suspended performers\textsuperscript{21} 350/ 0/ 0

These costs determined the full rental of the Hippodrome as follows:

Minute Paper Comptroller of Assets and Stores Office.\textsuperscript{22} 27th July 1917.
Subject: Hippodrome:
Full Contract Payment.  £51,799/ 2/ 4
Estimated cost of original building  24,000/ 0/ 0
  27,799/ 2/ 4

Cost of Additional Works:
A. Required by Wirths  £8,866/16/11
B. Required by Chief Secretary  3,667/15/ 9
  12,534/12/ 8
Cost equipment under special agreement  2,736/12/10
Cost of internal structural alterations originally estimated at 9,000 pounds  12,527/16/10
  27,799/ 2/ 4

The original estimate 9,000 pounds was exceeded mainly due to the additional cost of electricity which cost 3,501 pounds. The original estimate by Wirths' architect allowed 750 pounds for the electricity, a difference of 2,751 pounds. When this amount is deducted from £12,527/16/10, the result of 9,776 pounds comes closer to the original cost estimate submitted by Wirths architect.

The final rental adjustment can now be made -
- Flat rental under lease  £2,250/ 0/ 0
- Cost of Equipment £2,736/12/10 at 8% per annum  218/18/ 8
- Cost of additional work required £12,534/12/ 8 at 6% per annum  752/ 1/ 6
- Cost of Internal Structural Alterations £12,527/16/10 at 6% per annum  751/13/ 5
  Gross rental per annum  3,972/13/ 7

\textsuperscript{21} Trevor Waters said these trapeze anchors and rigs were found still in place, when the latest restoration work was undertaken and they have been left untouched.

equals approximately £76/ 8/ 0 per week

Memo on side of page.

Should Council agree to pay extra cost incurred by Contractor in respect to his altered arrangements to gantries etc. (claim 1000 pounds), this sum must be added to the amount of 12,534 pounds, making 13,534 pounds on which 6% is charged, increasing the rental by an additional 60 pounds per annum.

\[
\begin{align*}
£3,972/13/ 7 \\
60/ 0/ 0 \\
\hline
Total per annum 4,032/13/ 7 \quad \text{at} \quad £77/10/ 0 \quad \text{per week}.
\end{align*}
\]

Council notified Wirths that the rental would be increased as a result of these costs. Initially, the estimate was for £250/14/11 per month but figures supplied by Council indicated the rental would be increased to £336/ 1/ 2 per week. Consequently, Philip Wirths challenged several items, seeking to avoid costly arbitration on the matter. Philip Wirth considered it unreasonable that £3,667 for works required by the Chief Secretary's department and £1,000 payment paid to the contractors for delays in starting work and making "minor" alterations, should be included in the rental estimation. In addition, smaller amounts were queried and he sought to have the company's insurance obligation reduced.\(^23\) Council agreed to exempt payment for the Chief Secretary's Department provided the company immediately pay the rental in arrears, which included this item in its estimation.\(^24\)

The company could not pay this amount in a lump sum and arranged to pay it by instalments that were added to the weekly rent.

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Appendix G

Opening Night at the Capitol

Gathering for the Easter Saturday evening performance, the Capitol's opening night audience was transported to distant Italy, to a Venetian courtyard beneath palace walls and under a Florentine twilight sky. Twinkling stars, English flagstones, Classical Greek statues, doves and creeping vines, the auditorium was like a film set in which spectators became members of a gigantic cast. They were the first of many people to be enthralled with the new Capitol theatre.

On that evening, the dress circle was reserved for invited dignitaries, Directors of Union Theatres, guests and spouses. Dignitaries included the City Commissioners, the Chief Secretary, A. Bruntnell, the Under Secretary, E. A. Harkness, the State Premier and a large number of State politicians, as well as the Consul-General for Japan. Besides the Union Theatres Directors and senior personnel, the entertainment industry was represented by live theatre identities including the Taits, Fullers, J. Musgrove, D. Carroll, Captain F. Hurley [sic]; film industry moguls, Stanley Crick and J. Hicks Jnr; prominent people within the music industry. Also amid the guests were lessees of the neighbouring properties, such as W. F. Cropley and his wife.

First, the theatre's interior attracted audience applause, then, they gave it to the opening ceremony. The elevation of the variegated red and green curtain heralded the opening speech by the Chief Civic Commissioner, E. P. Fleming. Representing the Council body, he praised the directors of Union Theatres for work on the Capitol and

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1 Captain F. Hurley and Captain Frank Huling may have been the same person. This/these name(s) were associated with Wirths opening night, exploring the Antarctic and politics.

2 The City Council had been sacked in December 1927 and from 1st January 1928 to 30th June 1930, Sydney Council was administered by three City Commissioners. Hilary Golder, Sydney's Electoral History: A Short Electoral History of Sydney City Council, 1842-1992 (Sydney: Sydney City Council, 1995) 42, 79.
revealed refurbishment cost the company 180,000 pounds. Next, relating to coming entertainment, he remembered attending a screening of the first motion picture in Sydney and thought film progress since that time was remarkable.

Stuart F. Doyle, Managing Director of Union Theatres, announced this was wholly an Australian venture with work being undertaken by Australian workmen and technical experts. Because of their loyalty and efficiency, the opening date had not altered by as much as one day, even though the date was established six months earlier. He gave credit to architects John Eberson of New York and Henry White from Sydney and to the company's technical director, A. E. Emmellhainz [sic], as well as to various contracting firms. Congratulatory telegrams from large American production companies and many film celebrities were read as the conclusion of the official ceremony. These came from May Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin and others.

As the Capitol Orchestra and the Wurlitzer console rose from the depths of the Capitol the audience applauded once again. Emerging into a darkened auditorium, thirty musicians under Ted Henkel's direction and Fred Scholl on the theatre's Wurlitzer Organ played "The Dance of the Hours" by Ponchielli. This was followed by "Capitol News and Views of the World", described as a Screen Newspaper Pictorial.

Next, Fred Scholl played Verdi's "Quartette from Rigoletto", demonstrating the quality and impressive tone of the magnificent Wurlitzer Organ. Novel and unusual

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3 Fleming stated the amount spent by Union Theatres was 180,000 pounds, but Stuart Doyle stated it was only 155,000 pounds. The difference between the two sums, is close to the value put on the building structure itself. "The Capitol: Richly Ormamented Theatre: Opening Ceremony." Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) 9 Apr. 1928: 4; "A Florentine Night in the Haymarket: Wonders of Capitol Theatre: Brilliant Opening." Daily Telegraph (DT) 9 Apr. 1928: 5.
characteristics of the instrument were shown to advantage in the humorous jazz novelty composition, "Ain't that a Grand and Glorious Feeling". His third choice was the softly sentimental, "Indian Love Call" from the popular musical "Rose Marie".

Two short films were screened. "Feathers", an American bird film, contained more than half its content of Australian birds, and "Toddlers", a novelty film by Paramount, that attracted scarce comment from opening night critics.

Before the live theatre component of the program began, the Capitol's Miss Personality Girl, Kay Kennedy, was introduced and, in turn, she introduced Ted Henkell. Miss Kendell's talents and poise were highly praised by the Sydney Mail.

Henkel presented the theatre's "All Australian Band". A large imitation lyre on centre stage set the stage for "Chopinata" played by the band and freely based on Chopin's melodies, as well as echoing fragments of the "Military" Polonaise and "Liebestraum" by Liszt. The brightly-costumed Capitol Corps de Ballet joined them to present Spanish-style novelty piece, "The Dancing Tamborine", the Capitol Male Quartette sang "Just a Memory" and the whole ensemble concluded the bracket with "Fifty Million Frenchmen can't be wrong", which established an appropriate musical setting for the evening's main film.

During interval, patrons were entertained by Fred Scholl playing "Mignon" (Thomas) in the first of his weekly Operatic Interval Interludes. When the evening's program resumed, the evening's feature film "His Lady", a Master Picture production, was based on the story and opera "Manon Lescaut". This silent film was set to musical

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4 A Prizma Color [sic] Study.

5 In the United States of America, this film was shown under the title "When a Man Loves", "His Lady" was indicated as the film's subtitle.
score composed by Ted Henkel and was set in the French courts of the Pompadour period, according to Hollywood's paradigm. Henkell's musical composition skills overcame difficulties for the company related to J. C. Williamsons controlling the Australian performance rights of popular musicals and operas.\(^6\)

Starring John Barrymore and Dolores Costello, the film attracted praise from one critic, failed to impress another and did not get any mention by a third journalist. The *Daily Telegraph* said the film was a success, echoing the audience's appreciation of its theme of love and intrigue set in the glittering French courts.

In contrast, *Sydney Morning Herald* criticised it as being modern life in fancy dress, even though it was set during the reign of Louis XV, but praised the photography, brilliant costumes and acting. However, it said the film was superficial, had little sincerity, tending to be tiresome. Accordingly, "some of the love scenes (were) gross; and as far as the episodes at the end, anyone with any sensitiveness will turn his head away from the sight of the frightful bestial creatures on the convict ship." Consequently, this was not thought to be the best film that could have been chosen for the opening of such a lavish theatre.

Unlike opening night in the Hippodrome, the Capitol did not have to contend with the dramatic news on an international front. Whereas war news dominated the newspapers in 1916, just over a decade later the opening of the Capitol attracted considerable media attention and excitement.

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References


Detail: Inner foyer during restoration construction. Columns from Hippodrome on left, also formed first inner foyer boundary of Capitol (1928). This foyer was first enlarged by Rudas Theatrical Organisation (1961) and retained by Harry M. Miller Attractions (1972). Stalls floor (right) has been re-raked. Photograph print no. C840-4, Ron Israel (photograph courtesy of Sydney City Council Archives).
Appendix H

A Night at the Theatre: Fifteen Seconds of Free-fall

The matinee commenced. Settled in the dark auditorium, the audience were enjoying a performance of the controversial musical and neither they nor the actor-singers took any notice of occasional flickering lights. To the audience, this was part of the show and, for the performers, it had happened several times before. During the first half of the program there had been imperceptible problems but nothing to prevent the show proceeding normally.

Interval came, the safety curtain was lowered (as required) and raised, in time for the audience to return to their seats. Slowly, the house lights dimmed, the performers took their places on stage and the backstage crew and console operators commenced their duties. Those men not needed for the moment moved down to the staff room below stairs for a coffee break and the on-duty fireman began his regular patrol of the building. The orchestra commenced to play.

About 7.30 p.m., 'Jesus' was standing on stage, framed by the proscenium arch and centre of attention. Surrounded at various levels by 'soldiers' and 'reporters', 'Jesus' was preoccupied with action of the moment. Opposite him 'Judas' stood on the forestage at that moment, no longer singing but still part of the action. Extending out from the stage were large open petals of the flower-like dodecahedron, the most striking piece of the stage set.

At the appropriate moment, stage lights dimmed and flashing bulbs became the dominant light source for the 'Reporters' Scene'. As the song progressed, spotlights began to go out, followed by all the stage lights, leaving the exit lights and flashing camera bulbs to light the darkened auditorium. Music from the orchestra pit continued and the show did not miss a beat.
A little forward of the proscenium arch on the prompt side, the switchboard room housed two lighting consoles and had a view of the stage through screened slit-openings. From here the Dimmer-control console operator and his trainee assistant controlled the stage lights for the show but not the backstage lights. These lights were monitored by a young casual electrician seated at stage level behind the proscenium wall. He was unfamiliar with the theatre. As well as the switch panel for the backstage working lights, he monitored the close circuit television and standing behind him, but disregarding his presence, was the Assistant Stage Manager.

Sitting on the stage opposite side to him (Opposite Prompt) was the Stage Manager, calling the show's second half for his first time and under guidance of the Stage Director. On a scaffold platform above sat the Dodecahedron Operator.

During the evening, the assistant console-operator had been experiencing trouble with lights linked to his console. When too many lights failed he called across the intercom to the Stage Manager, requesting the help of the company's Head Electrician and this message was promptly relayed.

Leaving a game of cards and the staff room, the Electrician climbed to the switch room, where his investigation showed one light in each set of three controlled by one console, would not work. He diagnosed a problem with one of Console's three phases but, finding no problem with the fuses, he proceeded to undo the screws to the circuit breaker box. As he lifted the metal panel, he was instantly blinded by grit and a flash explosion that started a small insulation fire. Startled, 'Judas' looked up, seeing the flash and silhouetted figure hurled with arms in the air.

"Joe's been hurt! The switchboard's on fire." The Senior Console operator alerted the Stage Manager.
Urgently, the Electrician blindly grabbed what he thought was a bundle of rags. With the young console operator using an extinguisher by his side, he smothered the flames before making his way down stairs to turn off the mains' power to the stage. Confident that trouble was averted and the show could continue, he left for the Eye Hospital to have his partially blinded eyes treated.

Whether by malfunction or by inexperience, the dry powder extinguisher used by the younger man failed to work properly and the resultant conversation was overhead by the Assistant Stage Manager. From his position behind the casual electrician, he could also see the flashes reflected on the opposite wall. Removing his headset, he picked up the nearby extinguisher and ran to the switchroom to give assistance. Simultaneously, men in the staff room were warned of this fire. Aware of the earlier departure of the Head Electrician, the Head Mechanist (who was also Chief of Staff) and a 'flyman' ran to help, taking the only route possible. They dashed upstairs to the prompt side rear exit, out into Hay Street and round to the Parker Street emergency exit that led directly to the Switchroom. Here they separated to allow the 'flyman' to collect yet another extinguisher from stage level and the Head Mechanist to proceed to the switchroom. He found the fire was out and the air dense with powder. As he turned, he was horrified by what he saw on the stage below.

* * *

Outside the vents leading to the auditorium, powder hung in the air like smoke. The musicians played and the actors continued to perform in darkness.

"Drop the curtain!"

The voice over the headphones struck an urgent note.

"What?" asked the young electrician, now alone at his post.
"Drop the curtain!", came the reply, panic registering in the voice.

The Dodecahedron operator, called out over his microphone, "You can't. What about the people on stage?"

"F... the people on stage! Drop the fire curtain!" Yelled the voice.

Instantly obeying both the voice and the vague sign before him, the young electrician leant forward and put the ring on the suspended wire onto a wall-mounted peg, setting in motion the uncontrolled descent of the six-ton metal curtain. He had seen the curtain tested every day but had never seen it free fall before. Not knowing there was a similar mechanism on the other side of the stage, he believed the voice was directing him to act — it had already replied to his question.

The fall took fifteen seconds!

Realising the curtain was descending, the dodecahedron operator leant forward, grasped the wire to shake the ring from the pin, trying to stop the downward movement of the guillotine-like curtain. This wire was loose; this pin was free; he could do nothing to stop it! The curtain was still falling. Abandoning his post, like the 'flyman', he rushed forward in desperation trying to prevent the inevitable. As he did so, he saw the Stage Director remove his headset, throw it onto the Stage Manager's bench and disappear down the steps to the basement.

* * *

When the lights dimmed for the "Reporters' Scene", the cast on stage was aware that the stage spotlights had begun to malfunction. This had happened before and the orchestra was still playing, so they continued to sing and act.

All the stage lights went out.

Unwittingly, the orchestra played and the performance continued. Almost
imperceptibly, a shadow descended silently obliterating the indistinct view of the audience in the darkened auditorium.

A young 'soldier' at the rear of the stage was struck on the head by a heavy object. He knew that metal spear props falling from above had previously injured people but he had the sensation that everything was falling. As he fled out into the street he heard the screaming — the screaming that would not stop.

Some actors were like 'Jesus', taking a moment to realise the curtain was descending immediately before them. Actors positioned high on the stage platforms were shaken. The curtain struck the petal of the Dodecahedron, forcing it down to the floor. A few actors were completely unaware of the curtain's descent. One 'reporter' was struck a glancing blow along her spine, three others were struck to the floor and lay in its path and a fourth was pinned by the sharp petal corner.

This young actor had been kneeling in position beneath the petal. It concealed everything above from his view and backstage lights were hidden by cloths. Given no warning, he could not escape! He was trapped! He was helpless.

The silent curtain stopped, suspended three feet above the surface of the stage, obstructed by the protruding petal. The petal had stopped the curtain from crushing the three performers lying in its path. Desperately, people united their human strength to try to raise the monstrous panel. 'Judas' on the forestage, Jesus' on stage and other actors were joined by the Dodecahedron operator, the flyman, other available stage crew and the company manager. (The latter, running from his Front-of-House office to the 'fire' in the switchroom, had witnessed the curtain's descent and had continued to where he was needed.) Together, they managed to raise the curtain enough to wedge a table under it, enabling aid to be given to the injured actors. Then — slowly the curtain
began to rise under its own mechanical power.

Oblivious to events on stage, the orchestra continued to play until the surrounding consternation became apparent. The same could not be said for the audience. In relative darkness they were fully aware of danger. Responding to the presence of the billowing smoke-like powder and to the accident on stage, people were triggered to panic. Urged on by the agonised screams, echoing through the building and the copious blood visible on stage, they rushed towards the emergency exits. As they fled, house lights blazed into life.

"Stop!"

Resounding through the auditorium, the very strong, deep voice of the theatre's Assistant Manager. Standing forward of the balcony and towering above fleeing patrons in the stalls, she calmly directed people to be still and not push, no one was in danger and to proceed in a orderly manner to the exits. Her presence was such, that it quelled the panic and patrons quietly left the theatre. The show was cancelled.

A doctor was called to attend to the injured. Ambulances ferried four of the injured to Sydney Hospital. Within a short time, two were released and a young pregnant actress was transferred to another Hospital but the fourth had sustained extensive injuries. At the age of twenty-five, he had become a paraplegic.

* * *

Once the situation calmed, the Company Manager found it difficult to convince staff and members of the company to resume their normal schedule and present the planned evening program. For him, excluding the very few experienced technicians, this was evidence of the company's lack of professionalism and experience, which opened the possibilities for accidents and broke faith with paying customers. He had
been engaged, after the season had already commenced, to counter a deteriorating professional attitude and trouble within the company, as well as claims of previous drug abuse.

Next day, the Production Coordinator, acting for the Executive Producer of the entertainment production company, conducted the first enquiry into the accident. According to government regulations the Executive Producer duly notified the Chief Secretary's Department and, some time later, the officers of this Department, the Department of Labour and Industry, and the Fire Service conducted an investigation of the theatre and its equipment. They found no fault with the Fire Curtain or its appurtenances.

The third enquiry was conducted almost four years later when City Council was threatened with legal action. Solicitors acting for the paralysed actor, sued Harry M. Miller Attractions, the musical drama's production company. The company in turn issued a cross claim on the theatre's owner, Sydney City Council. Alarmed by this action, City Council appointed its Building Inspector to investigate the accident. Despite the incident being reported on the front page of city newspapers, Council had been ignorant of this early incident.

The Council Inspector's investigation took place in 1976 when the musical, "Jesus Christ Superstar", was being restaged. A completely new stage set had been designed and built and incorporated two large ramps, which extended out into the auditorium. These required heavy profile sections to be attached to the lower edge of the metal fire safety curtain, the first innovation of this type in Australia. As part of his investigation, City Council's Building Inspector tested and inspected the theatre's curtain and its appurtenances. He found the heavy chain, intended to slow the
momentum of the curtain, had been removed before the new production commenced and was lying beneath the stage. In its place, a much lighter chain was attached, a chain, which allowed the momentum of the curtain to increase as the curtain fell. When he directed the new Stage Director and new Head Mechanist to release the curtain in free-fall, so that he could watch and time the descent, it crashed onto the stage, buckling the profiles. To the inspector, the company representatives appeared to be unconcerned, assuring him that the sections could easily be replaced.

This time — the curtain fell to the floor within seven seconds!

Reference

Binns, Janet. Witness account as told to author. Apr. 1997. at University of Wollongong.

CRS 34: TC 3910/73 and Attachment: Capitol Theatre, Hay Street. Enquiry re Accident ... Allegedly Caused By Fire.

CSD 4172: Capitol Theatre.


Detail of Sub-stage floor plan of restored Capitol, drawn by Peddle Thorp Architects for Ipoh Garden Developments' Tender Brief, showing new purpose for former circus ring, path of underground railway tunnels and enlarged forestage and orchestra pit.
Appendix I

Projection, Sound and other Equipment

Some equipment purchased by Harry M. Miller and Hoyts Theatres' equipment list (4th August 1976).¹

- *35 mm Ernemann VIIIIB Projector with optional sound reproduction - Serial 2464.
- *Zeiss Ikon Xenosol V C500W Xenonlamphouse and Phillips Xenonbulb.
- Cold principal mirror for Xenosol V.
- Ernemat Theatre Automat complete.
- Lens turret/aperture changer (automatic).
- Remote focussing control.
- Key Switch for automat.
- Amplifiers, 50 W output.
- Transformer, 15/380/220
- Special Xenon-Rectifier Dr. Jovy 175 amps with transistorised current stabiliser.
- 4 film reels.
- 1 splice, 35 mm.
- 3 lenses (including 1 Anamorphot).
- Non-rewind-System, plates carrying 20,000 feet of film and make up table and control cabinet.
- 1 Control box projection room.
- 2 Altic lensing speaker systems.
- Tubular steel, two bar, flown screen frame, size 42 feet x 19 feet.
- 1.4/1.5 gain pearl lace in projection screen, size 40 feet x 17 feet 6 inches.
- Set motorised movable black velour side maskings complete with tracks, motorised by means of 1/8 h.p. single phase motor.
- Reversing contractor.
- Remote control push button station and limit switches.
- Top and bottom fixed masking.
- Automatic fire protection device over projection ports, including ali fittings.
- Supply and installation of all electrical wiring, mains boxes to bio-box switchboard and stage curtain control.
- Motorisation of house curtain, remote push-button control and limit switches, general installation.

Other equipment in the inventory included:

Sundry equipment:

- 6 Mirrors.
- Hot water service to candy bar. This originally cost 1,500 dollars and was no

¹ CRS 34: TC 1930/76: Capitol theatre. Purchase of equipment from Hoyts Theatres Ltd. Letter, B. J. Rochester, Secretary of Hoyts Theatres to Town Clerk, 4 Aug. 1976.
longer needed by Hoyts Theatres.

The company offered to sell the above listed items to Council for 15,000 dollars.

Items which Hoyts Theatre would remove when vacating the property:

- Three washing machines for glasses.
- Stainless steel glass trays.
- Various glasses, spirit measures and sundry bar equipment.
- One automatic still-drink dispenser (coin operated).
- One automatic coffee dispenser (coin operated).
- Two drink-dispensing machines, property of suppliers.
- Refrigerated ice-cream equipment, property of Streets Ice Cream.

Council owned:

- Two stalls liquor bars.
- Two stalls (portable) candy bars.
- One liquor bar on Mezzanine Floor.
- One (portable) candy bar on Mezzanine Floor.

Work proposed by Harry M. Miller in April 1972, in lists of proposed work to be undertaken in the theatre.²

1. Lay 42 oz. rubber backed all-wool broadloom carpet to be laid in vestibule, stalls foyer, aisles and area in front of stalls.

2. Complete repainting of exterior theatre with specified top-quality Taubmans Paints.

3. Renew galvanised iron roofing to the auditorium.

4. Alter entrance of men's toilets in circle level foyer.

5. Erect sound box at rear of auditorium to house sound-mixing equipment and operator. Box to be constructed with 4 in. x 2 in. framing with ½ in. plywood sheathing.

6. Convert void on prompt side of auditorium at circle level to house lighting equipment; area to be sheeted with Fyrcheck in accordance with regulations.

7. Install three liquor bars.

8. Convert gentleman's rest area to manager's office.

9. Erect temporary stage floor.

10. Provide orchestra change rooms below stage. Rooms and ceilings constructed with Fyrcheck.

11. Overhauling fire equipment, in addition to sixteen new fire extinguishers supplied by Council.

12. Theatre was completely rewired according to Sydney County Council requirements.


14. Store rooms erected on either side of bio-box.

15. Ceiling painted with Reckitts Blue and egg whites.

16. Repaint dressing rooms.

17. Complete renovation of plumbing services; renew supply from main; providing nine hand basins, two "water closets", two 60 gallon Rheem hot water units, provide four showers for cast.

18. Renew box offices.

19. Check, service and adjust fire exit doors and panic bolts.

20. Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust engaged to restore fire curtain, winch, and counterweight gear at a cost of 12,000 pounds.


22. Isolate lamp room from staircase in dressing room block using Fyrcheck.

23. Signs involving the rings for the release of the fire curtain mounted on walls.

24. Fitting asbestos seal to bottom of fire curtain.

25. In relation to the refurbished fire curtain, redesigning the dodecahedron to ensure it folds to ensure free movement of curtain.

26. Sealed off lamp room.
27. Discussions held over the need for a stage smoke hatch when stage set was not of a conventional nature.

28. Disagreement over the need to restore the cat-walk fire escape and provision of what was considered adequate fire escape for the forty-one cast members from backstage dressing rooms.

29. Negotiations over the installation of a sprinkler system in dressing room blocks.

30. Construction of external fire stairs investigated.

31. Installation of cinema equipment mentioned above.\(^3\)

---

Restored Capitol: Long section of building and new extended stage plan. Courtesy of Graeme Macey
Restored Capitol: Lighting Bridges Plan and Section through stage. Courtesy of Graeme Macey
Restored Capitol: Dress Circle and Stalls seating plan, indicating one box each side. 
Courtesy of Graeme Macey
Appendix J

Comparisons

Hippodrome, Capitol (1928) and Capitol (1995)

External dimensions of Hippodrome/ Capitol Building as shown on Council's plans and documentation:

- Northern and Southern frontages, 34.13 metres;
- Eastern and Western frontages, 52.42 metres;
- Eastern and Southern boundaries were extended in the Restoration and Extension work of the early 1990s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hippodrome</th>
<th>Capitol, 1928</th>
<th>Capitol, 1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>2440</td>
<td>2973</td>
<td>2072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage width</td>
<td>21.94 metres</td>
<td>21.94 metres</td>
<td>19.4 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage depth</td>
<td>16.45 metres</td>
<td>7.22 metres</td>
<td>15.7 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proscenium width²</td>
<td>14 metres</td>
<td>15.24 metres</td>
<td>15.2 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proscenium height</td>
<td>9.67 metres</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.6 metres at centre, 7.3 metres at spring of curved corners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circus Ring/Aquatic Ring width</td>
<td>12.9 metres</td>
<td>covered</td>
<td>orchestra rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquatic ring depth</td>
<td>3.65 metres to floor surface, 3.96 metres to base of pit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height of Flies</td>
<td>26.51 metres</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.0 metres to underside of grid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understage height</td>
<td>3.81 metres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Surface</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No rake; demountable semi-sprung timber floor/hardboard overlay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Technical Information Capitol Theatre, courtesy of Graeme Macey

2 Before alterations for Wirths and Chief Secretary's Department.
## Comparison of Sydney Theatres' Safety Curtain in Free-fall

(1976)³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAFETY CURTAIN</th>
<th>S/Y</th>
<th>S/B</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>H/M</th>
<th>T/R</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>C3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curtain installed</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freefalls when ring on pin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raises Manually</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowers electrically</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raises electrically</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of free-fall in Seconds.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freefall control P side</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freefall control O/P</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Electric control P side</td>
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<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Control O/P</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signs P side</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signs O/P</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warning alarm when operating</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke Hatch</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
S/Y = Seymour Centre - York Theatre; [seating - 788]
S/E = Seymour Centre - Everest Theatre; [seating - 605].
NA = New Art theatre; [seating - 697].
HM = Her Majesty's; [seating - 1488].
TR = Theatre Royal; [seating - 1503].
B = Bijou; [seating - 987].

M = Minerva; [seating - 1006].
R = Regent; [seating - 2169].
C1 = Capitol, 6 Dec. 1976; [seating - 2269].
C3 = Capitol, 10 Nov. 1972; [seating - 2269].

O/P = Opposite Prompt (Stage Right/ eastern side of stage)
P = Prompt (Stage Left/ western side of stage)
- = Not Applicable
y = yes
n = no

(Note. Capitol capacity in 1928 was 2,973 - counted "in situ" by the Police. Stuart Doyle removed some seating to expand the auditorium Standing Room for 200 persons. Rows of seats were removed in 1961 and again [for technical equipment] from 1972 onwards.)
### Comparison Stage Areas: Prepared by Tom Brown and Associates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian Theatres</th>
<th>Working depth, Stage to Proscenium</th>
<th>Width of Stage</th>
<th>Width of Side Stage</th>
<th>Rear Stage Depth</th>
<th>Width of Proscenium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitol theatre (with extension) into Hay Street (9.5m max.)</td>
<td>17.2 metres</td>
<td>26 metres</td>
<td>14.5 metres</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>14.5 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide Festival Theatre</td>
<td>16.7 metres</td>
<td>28.5 metres</td>
<td>6.5 metres</td>
<td>6.5 metres</td>
<td>17 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victorian Arts Centre/ Lyric Theatre</td>
<td>17.1 metres</td>
<td>22 metres</td>
<td>two side stages, each 12.5 metres</td>
<td>15.5 metres</td>
<td>15 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland Cultural Centre/ Lyric Theatre</td>
<td>17.5 metres</td>
<td>27 metres</td>
<td>15 metres</td>
<td>12 metres</td>
<td>15 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Opera House/ Opera Hall</td>
<td>15.7 metres</td>
<td>18 metres average</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>7.6 metres</td>
<td>13.5 metres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

4 National Trust Capitol theatre file: Lawrence Nield and Partners Pty. Ltd. "Capitol Theatre Feasibility Study Prepared for the Council of the City of Sydney". (Balmain: Lawrence Nield and Partners Pty. Ltd. and Travis Partners Pty. Ltd.)
Percy Dove Map (c.1880): Detail map showing Old Belmore Markets, the Hay and Corn Market land (which Archivist Angela McGing advised the master plan names this the Haymarket Reserve) and the Watkins Terraces.
CRS 294/02: Street plan showing Hippodrome, surrounding properties and streets [n.d.]
Appendix K

Early Land Grants

From 1788 to 1809, the Governors and administrators approved a number of land grants on properties described as being:

A. "between the Church land and the ground used as a brickfield, without the town of Sydney"

B. "between the land used as a brickfield, without the town of Sydney, and the east end of the land allotted for the maintenance of a schoolmaster."

Because of the time when these two descriptions were used, it is possible that they refer to the brickfields on which the Capitol now stands. In addition, Church Lane's location in Surry Hills to the east of Brickfield Hill, may assist this premise. Nevertheless, research into the origins of other brickfields that extended southwards from present day St. Peters was not undertaken.

Two similar descriptions leave little doubt that the brickfields are those mentioned in this paper.

C. "on the west side of the brick field road bounded on the east by the public road and on the west by the water line of Cockle Bay".

D. "in the township of Sydney on the east side of the road leading to the brickfields".

---

2 Ryan, 164, 218-9, 225, 229.
3 Ryan, 18.
5 No 93, 1800/1801 Book 3C, cited by Ryan, 236.
6 Ryan, 239.
## Town Allotments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Governor</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1792/1A</td>
<td>Phillip</td>
<td>David Collins</td>
<td>8/12/1792</td>
<td>A. - Leased 2 acres; Rent 2s. 6d. p.a. for 14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>John White</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>William Balmain</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>Dennis Considen</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>George Johnston</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1793/1794/1A</td>
<td>Francis Grose</td>
<td>Lieutenant Thomas Rowley</td>
<td>4/5/1793</td>
<td>as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>1796/1A</td>
<td>Hunter</td>
<td>John Harris</td>
<td>22/7/1796</td>
<td>A. - Leased 8 acres, rent and term as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>1796/2B</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>1796/2B</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>Reverend Richard Johnson</td>
<td>15/9/1796</td>
<td>Leased 2 acres to the west of the brickfield; rent and term as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>1799/2B</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>Charles Robinson</td>
<td>24/10/1799</td>
<td>Leased half an acre at the brick fields in the township of Sydney; Rent 5s. p.a. for 14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>1800/1801/3C</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>Captain Johnathon Thomas Prentice</td>
<td>24/9/1800</td>
<td>C. - Leased &quot;7½ acres; Rent 2s. 6d. p.a. for 14 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>1803/3C</td>
<td>King</td>
<td>James Wiltshire</td>
<td>8/6/1803</td>
<td>D. - 3/4 acre and 26 square rods; Rent 10s. p.a. for 14 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Book</td>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>195</td>
<td>1806/3C</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>Edward Luttrell</td>
<td>1/1/1806</td>
<td>Leased 81 square rods in the township of Sydney on the Brickfield Hill; Rent 10s. p.a. for 14 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>199</td>
<td>1806/3C</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>Richard Palmer</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>Leased 2 roods and 21½ square rods on the south side of Brickfield Hill; Rent 10s. p.a. for 14 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>211</td>
<td>1806/3C</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>John Tucker</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>Leased 47 square rods on the east side of Brickfield Hill; Rent 10s. p.a. for 14 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>375</td>
<td>1809/4D</td>
<td>William Patterson</td>
<td>J and G Blaxland</td>
<td>23/12/1809</td>
<td>Leased 4 acres near the brick fields in the township of Sydney; Rent £2 p.a. for 21 years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rural Acreages (many in the Sydney Town Area)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Governor</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>1794/1A</td>
<td>Francis Grose</td>
<td>William Roberts</td>
<td>8/1/1794</td>
<td>B. - Grant 30 acres; Rent 1s. p.a. commencing after 10 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>972</td>
<td>1800/3C</td>
<td>King; 1806, King also approve extension of lease.</td>
<td>John Harris, Esq.</td>
<td>26/3/1800</td>
<td>A. - Leased 24 acres, 36 roods; lease extended to present lessee on 1/8/1806; Rent 5s. p.a. for 14 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1150</td>
<td>1803/1804/3C</td>
<td>as above</td>
<td>John Harris</td>
<td>31/12/1803</td>
<td>A. - Grant 34 acres; Rent 2s. 6d. p.a. after 5 years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A combination of time: Corporation Building (1893) and Capitol Sign, 1928: Mitchell Library Photograph Collection, reprinted by Playbill for Capitol Theatre, Sydney.
Appendix L

Inaccessible Council Files

A number of City Council Files are no longer available for various reasons and a few files were missed.

Files in question. They were either not consulted or uncertain whether they are available or not:

CRS 34: 2177/26: Hippodrome, Theatres and Public Halls Act, License.
CF 366/72: Capitol theatre. Properties Department files.
CF 66/72: Capitol theatre. Properties Department files.
CF 72/73: Capitol theatre. Properties Department files.
DF 66/72: Capitol theatre. Quotations regarding re-rigging backstage equipment.
CF 99/76: Capitol theatre.

Not Available:

CRS 34: TC 1897/14: Hippodrome, Additional hydrants.
CRS 34: TC 4406/14: Hippodrome, Subletting Plumbing and Joinery.
CRS 34: TC 829/14: Hippodrome, Sale of Debentures to Cover Costs
CRS 34: TC 2360/27: Capitol theatre. Furniture and fitting - lease.
CRS 34: TC 8594/28: Capitol theatre. Discharge from sprinklers.
CRS 34: TC 5318/31: Capitol theatre.
CRS 34: TC 4083/41: Capitol theatre. Lease to Greater Union.
CRS 34: TC 2295/45: Capitol theatre. Renewal of lease to Greater Union Pty. Ltd.
CRS 34: TC 3999/47: Capitol theatre. Lease.
CRS 34: TC 2938/49: Capitol theatre. Repairs to drainage.
CRS 34: TC 3324/57: Capitol theatre. Question of dimensions.
CRS 34: TC 1494/64: Capitol theatre. Offer to Purchase, Olympic Knitting Mills.
CRS 34: TC 2166/65: Question of remodelling the southern part of the city.
CRS 34: TC 4075/70: Capitol theatre. Application by K. B. Chambers for lease for remodelling.
CRS 34: TC 3267/71: Capitol theatre: complaint regarding condition of premises.
CRS 34: TC 1373/72: Capitol theatre: Protest from the Presbyterian Reformed Church against "Jesus Christ Superstar".
CRS 34: TC 2071/72: Capitol theatre. Maintenance and servicing to fire extinguishers and hose.
CRS 34: TC 649/72: Capitol theatre.
CRS 34: TC 1406/73: Capitol theatre. Valuer General Correspondence - Statistical information.


CRS 34: TC 2551/73: Refund of portion of license fee for illuminated sign - Claude Neon Ltd.


CRS 34: TC 1032/74: Capitol theatre. Dilapidated condition of awning.

CRS 34: TC 2355/74: Capitol theatre. Inspection of fire fighting equipment.

CRS 34: TC 3021/74: Capitol theatre. Correspondence regarding License under Theatre and Public Halls Act - Hoyts Pty. Ltd.

CRS 34: TC 542/74: Capitol theatre. Inspection of fire equipment - leased to Harry M. Miller Attractions Pty. Ltd.

CRS 34: TC 1252/75: Capitol theatre. Alleged flooding.

CRS 34: TC 1422/75: Capitol theatre. Hoyts Ltd., alterations to permit operation liquor bars.

CRS 34: TC 1782/75: Capitol theatre. Inspection of fire fighting equipment by Department of Services.


CRS 34: TC 1298/76: Capitol theatre.

CRS 34: TC 1688/76: Capitol theatre. Request for use by Ashfield Ice Skating.

CRS 34: TC 2025/76: Capitol theatre. Application by Stafford Films Pty. Ltd. to lease.

CRS 34: TC 2612/76: Capitol theatre. Suggested reinstallation of Wurlitzer Organ.

CRS 34: TC 2956/76: Capitol theatre. Use for Twisties Super Kids Film Festival/Festival of Sydney.

CRS 34: TC 885/76: Capitol theatre. Harry M. Miller - License.
CRS 116: 06/02/0028: Capitol theatre.

CRS 34: TC 1554/77: Capitol theatre. Repairs to Fire Curtain.

CRS 34: TC 1571/77: Capitol theatre. Enquiry re availability for use; TVW Channel 7, Perth.

CRS 34: TC 1838/77: Capitol theatre. Board of Fire Commissioners, disconnect fire alarm.


CRS 34: TC 399/77: Capitol theatre. Enquiry re availability for musical; N. Smith.


CRS 34: TC 836/77: Capitol theatre. Reinstate water supply to premises rear fire hydrants.

CRS 116: 06/02/0028: Capitol theatre.

CRS 116: 32/18/0185: Capitol theatre.

CRS 116: 32/18/0189: Capitol theatre.
Left: The recreated English Flagstone carpet containing forty-eight colours and row plaques from Capitol's originals; track technology used to make comfortable seats.

Below: Restored inner foyer that was first enlarged Rudas and modernised by Harry M. Miller;.
Left: Entrance to auditorium from mezzanine foyer, showing the intricate patterns and colours of the columns painted in milk-based paints. Beer based paint was used on the original walls and the restoration sought to use a similar medium.

Below: After the opening of "Miss Saigon", the restored area above the awning showing the altered New Belmore Markets/ Hippodrome exterior and Capitol parapets
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---. 5 May 1972, [n.p.].
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---. 1 Apr. 1992, p.33.

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---. 31 Dec. 1971, [n.p.]
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---. 11 Nov. 1972, [n.p.]
---. 3 Mar. 1975, p.3.
---. 8 Jun. 1975, p.64.
---. 30 Aug. 1976, [n.p.]
---. 15 Jun. 1978, [n.p.]
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---. 13 Aug. 1982, [n.p.]
---. 21 Jul. 1984, [n.p.]
---. 13 Apr. 1985, p.5.
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**Maps**


*Percy Dove Key Map.* [c.1880]: SCC Archives.

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*Map of the Town of Sydney, 1831.* copied Jan. 1919 from plan marked original engraving. SCC Archives.


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Visual Sources

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CRS 116: Demolition Photographs. SCC Archives.


"Sam Hood Photograph Collection." [c.1940s]. Mitchell Library.

Smedley, W. F. "Saturday Night in George Street." 4 Jul. 1886. [engraving].

**Electronic Media**

*ABC News*. ABC Regional Television. 24 Jan. 1995, 7.00 pm.


*Channel 9 News*. WIN 4. 26 May 1995, 6.30 pm.


**Conference**


**Tours**


Australian Theatre Historical Society (ATHS) Tour of Capitol 9th Nov. 1994. 3.30 pm.

ATHS Tour of Capitol. 11 Dec. 1995. 1.00 pm.

"Going to The Pictures" Conference Tour of the Royal Theatre: Greater Union Theatre, Pitt Street and State Theatre. 8.00 am.

**Interview**

Letters


Macey, Graeme. Letter to author. 15 Nov. 1993.


The Archives of the Council of the City of Sydney

When using the Sydney City Council Archives, a researcher agrees to use the method of citation of source material according to that already established by the Council policy. In some instances, the full title of certain files have been extensive and included more than the full address. Therefore, the first citation of each file has been made in full each chapter, after the title of the file has been cited in full, then shortened to omit repetitive, minor details, while retaining the essential details.

The Council uses the code CRS, which stands for the "Council Record Series", PC for the "Proceedings of Council", TC meaning the "Town Clerk's file number" and DP for the "Deed Packet". The following records are generally listed in chronological order.

SCC Archives: Capitol Theatre - information folder.


SCC Archives: PC 1893, pp. Town Clerk's Report, 1, 3.


SCC Archives: PC 1909, pp. 15, 17, 39, 49, 64, 236, 244, 289, 363, 652, 658.


SCC Archives: PC 1911, pp. 120, 274-5,
SCC Archives: PC 1912, pp. 21, 68, 158, 168, 175, 191, 202, 217, 225, 236, 263, 316, 407, 552.

SCC Archives: PC 1913, pp. 310, 461.

SCC Archives: PC 1914, pp. 53, 134, 190, 419.

SCC Archives: PC 1915, pp. 6, 512.


SCC Archives: PC 1918, 9, 145.

SCC Archives: PC 1919, 433.

SCC Archives: PC 1920, 500.

SCC Archives: PC 1922, 508.

SCC Archives: PC 1927, 343, 526.


SCC Archives: PC 1930, 94.

SCC Archives: PC 1937, 48, 135.

SCC Archives: PC 1942, 13.

SCC Archives: PC 1943, 259-60.

SCC Archives: PC 1944, 11, 40, 46, 65, 75, 125, 134, 146, 171, 181.

SCC Archives: PC 1945, 212.

SCC Archives: PC 1946, 303.

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SCC Archives: PC 1948, 283, 324.

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SCC Archives: PC 1962, 22.
SCC Archives: PC 1963, 15.
SCC Archives: PC 1965, 184.
SCC Archives: PC 1971, 699.
SCC Archives: PC 1973, 159, 267, 691, 735.
SCC Archives: PC 1974, 142, 249, 437, 441.
SCC Archives: PC 1975, 618.
SCC Archives: PC 1976, 132, 221-2, 284, 308, 361.

[The records for later years were being indexed at the time of this research and were not yet available. Where there are no references mentioned for intervening years, the subject of the Capitol and its site, were not mentioned.]

CRS 170/22: *Vade Mecum* various volumes.

CRS 50 H2 Crown Land Grant 4 Nov. 1846, for Hay and Corn Market.

CRS 50 DP 316: Deed Packet: Containing Leases for Hippodrome and Capitol theatre.

CRS 65/2094: Tenders - Floor Belmore Markets: Flowers and Lane, 5 Dec. 1892.

CRS 65/2123: Tenders - Supplying 12 Trucks, Belmore Markets, 6 Jul. 1893.
CRS 26/2850: Letters received: Belmore Markets Growers and Agents Association: Protest against Railway Siding.

CRS 28/1675: Town Clerk - re: Conduct of Business and Lighting at Belmore Markets. (1908)

CRS 28/1656: Town Clerk - re: Belmore Market Growers Association and Belmore Market Employees Association. (1909)

CRS 28/1026: Chief Secretary's Department - Instruction Theatre and Public Halls Act. (1911)

CRS 28: TC 3926/11: Chief Secretary: Proposed theatre, Pitt and Campbell Streets.

CRS 28: TC 4074/11: Belmore Market site - Proposed Coffee House; and letter received, Town Clerk.


CRS 28: TC 3320/12: Application by Brennan Amphitheatres Ltd. for Sir William Manning Markets particulars of proposed alterations.

CRS 28: TC 4992/12: Sir William Manning Markets, lease to Wirths.

CRS 170: City Engineers Demolition Photographs/Books on Microfilm.

Spec. 130/20: Specifications of Work for the Hippodrome.

Spec. 130/21: Specifications of Work for the Manning Building.


CRS 299: Plans of the Hippodrome on Microfilm.

CRS 6/397: Town Clerk's Department Correspondence, 1914-1977, Microfilm Index: CRS 34.


CRS 34: TC 1195/16: Hippodrome.

CRS 34: TC 1193/16: Hippodrome, Use of Theatre.

CRS 34: TC 1296/16: Hippodrome, Increased Ventilation.
CRS 34: TC 303/16: Hippodrome, equipment of. (1916)

CRS 34: TC 4205/16: Hippodrome, Claim by Maston and Yates for additional expenses.

CRS 34: TC 2276/17: Hippodrome, Electric Sign.

CRS 34: TC 3582/17: Hippodrome, Approved temporary alterations.

CRS 34: TC 971/18: Hippodrome, Use for Boxing matches.

CRS 34: TC 3741/19: Hippodrome, Use by Stadiums Ltd.

CRS 51/4709: Miscellaneous Photograph Collection: Photograph of the Hippodrome. (1919)


CRS 294: Plans: Alteration of Hippodrome to Capitol theatre on microfilm. (1926/7)


CRS 34: TC 1105/27: Hippodrome, alterations for conversion to cinema.

CRS 34: TC 1745/28: Capitol theatre, Establish movable Confectionary stall.


CRS 840 B/13/19: Capitol theatre Artefacts: Accession Number A95/11. (1928-9)

CRS 34: TC 5623/32: Capitol theatre, Insurance.

CRS 34: TC 3072/33: Capitol theatre, Transfer of Lease.

CRS 34: TC 4949/33: Capitol theatre.

CRS 34: TC 1472/36: Capitol theatre.

CRS 34: TC 135/37: Capitol theatre, Invitation of Tenders.
CRS 16/51: Miscellaneous: Royal Commission, Fruit Industry New South Wales -
Evidence of Roy Hendy (Town Clerk).

CRS 34: TC 2510/43: Capitol theatre, Lease of Premises, or lease or sale of Freehold.

CRS 34: TC 2510A/43: Capitol theatre, Leasing of Property.

CRS 34: TC 788/44: National Security (Economic Organization Regulations)

CRS 34: TC 3589/46: Capitol theatre, Renewal of Lease.


CRS 34: TC 3968/48: Capitol theatre, Greater Union offered lease.

CRS 34: TC 4291/49: Capitol theatre, Lease granted to Greater union.

CRS 34: TC 4899/51: Capitol theatre, Tenders for lease.

CRS 34: TC 4817/54: Capitol theatre, Renewal of lease.

CRS 34: TC 5425/58: Capitol theatre, Invitation of tenders for lease.

CRS 34: TC 3487/59: Capitol theatre, Regarding Greater Union's application to the
Fair Rents Board.

CRS 34: TC 397/61: Capitol theatre, Renewal of Lease.

CRS 356/1-112: Photographs of Capitol, Ron Dunphry. (Master negatives CRS 409)
(1972)

BA 463/72: Capitol theatre, Jesus Christ Superstar. (1972)


CRS 34: 3228/73: Capitol theatre, Extension of Fire Insurance to include Sprinkler
damage.

CRS 34: 3910/73: Capitol theatre, Enquiry into fire and accident, 10 Nov. 1972.

CRS 34: TC 3910A/73: Attachment File: Capitol theatre, Enquiry into fire and accident.

Spec. 3148: Ceiling - Complete renewal of the auditorium ceiling in the Capitol.

CRS 34: TC 1031/74: Capitol theatre, Authorised expenditure, replacement of awning.

CRS 34: TC 663/74: Capitol theatre, Tender for lease - Hoyts Pty. Ltd.
CRS 34: TC 1068/75: Capitol theatre, Application by Trowell and Balcombe on behalf of Edgley and Dawe Attractions Ltd. to install an orchestra pit.

BA 410/75: Capitol theatre, alterations for ballet.

Plans 410/75: Capitol theatre, alterations for ballet, microfilm.

CRS 34: TC 3296/75: Capitol theatre, Offer to Lease: Edgley and Dawe Attractions Pty. Ltd. Conditions and Terms of Tender for the Capitol theatre.

CRS 34: TC 1637/76: Capitol theatre, Lease to Harry M. Miller Attractions Pty. Limited.

CRS 34: TC 1930/76: Capitol theatre, Purchase of equipment from Hoyts Theatres Ltd.


CRS 34: TC 1032/78: Capitol theatre, Alleged flooding of basement. Question without notice.

CRS 34: TC 3672/78: Capitol theatre, Board of Fire Commissioners, Installation of electric fire alarm.

CRS 34: TC 3932/78: Capitol theatre, Offer to purchase seats/ Campbelltown Theatre Group.

CRS 116: 32/05/0103: Capitol theatre, Lease to V. Shopov.


CRS 116: 32/05/0200: Capitol theatre, Lease to Gladwyne Pty. Ltd.

CRS 116: 32/05/0336: Capitol theatre, Renewal of Lease to Gladwyne Pty. Ltd.

CRS 116: 32/04/0295: Capitol theatre, Rentals: Gladwyne Pty. Ltd.


CRS 116: Y05-01362: Capitol theatre, Proposed extension of the stage area.


3322 - 3388: Construction on site, 1915.
3420 - 3465: Alterations and Additions, Sir Wm. Manning Markets (eastern end), 1913-1914.

Exhibition Handout: Sydney City Council, "The Council as Architect and Builder: An exhibition of architectural drawings from the archives of Sydney City Council, held at Town Hall House, August - September 1994 to mark City Week - 28 August to 3 September 1994."

Exhibition