

REGENT CINEMA FACADE AND SURVIVING THEATRE FABRIC

101-107 Rundle Mall

Hoyts 'Regent' was described at its opening in June 1928 as 'Australia's most luxurious theatre . . . which will set a standard for all time'. This was indeed one of the grand cinemas of Australia and in the late 1920s it was the most modern in South Australia. The Regent reflected the optimism and glamour of the industry at the time and was built so that live theatre could be incorporated with cinema facilities.

The new picture theatre was constructed in 1927-28. Cedric H. Ballantyne (Melbourne) in association with English & Soward architects (Adelaide) designed the building. The contractor was J.R. Taylor and Sons of Melbourne, structural ironwork was by Perry Engineering Co. and the elaborate plasterwork by Hopkins Pty. Ltd. The design, abstracted from Renaissance forms and imagery, is bold and majestic. This and the lavish materials and elaborate fittings and furnishings guarantee this building a place in the history of cinema in Australia. Although the interior space has been reduced, the chandeliers and the arcaded wall panels in pierced fibroplaster remain to indicate the high level of ornamentation required to capture the imagination of the populace. The Regent reflects the state of the American movie industry at this time. Ornament was the tangible sign of grandeur and status, and the eclecticism seen in theatre design typified by the Regent was hedonistic and self indulgent. The object of the elaborate lobby and staircase, for example, was the satisfaction of the 'common man's vanity'.

The world's first public screening of 'motion pictures' was in Paris in December 1895. Only ten months later in October 1896 the first two 'motion pictures' were shown in Adelaide. One screening was at the Theatre Royal and the other in a picture theatre at the Beehive building.

A night at the 'flicks' in those formative days of cinema often included more than a mere film; there were juggling acts, song and dance routines, and musical items. As the 'talkies' were developed and became longer and more sophisticated, the vaudeville entertainment which frequently accompanied films ceased altogether.

The opening-night at Hoyts Regent was an extravaganza of live and motion picture entertainment. Hundreds of patrons were filmed as they crowded into the foyer where tapestries, statuary and reproduction antique furniture heightened their pleasure. Lights ' . . . gleamed through the Arabesque work of ceiling and walls'. Of the auditorium the *Advertiser* of 29 June 1928 admired the effect of over 3000 lights, ' . . . craftily hidden behind the cornices and grilles, and only their radiance remains to shed a glow of contentment and rest'.

Byron Bidwell, director of presentation for Hoyts Theatres Ltd., was brought from America to supervise the stage presentation. The orchestra pit could accommodate a full symphony orchestra and a huge Wurlitzer organ which was installed in 1930. (This is now at St Peter's College).

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In the grand style the theatre management also organised a corps of Regent cadets, 'boys of refinement and ambition' wearing smart uniforms and helping conduct patrons to their seats. Ted Winter worked at the cinema for forty-seven years. Starting as a pageboy and finally becoming manager from 1955 to 1975, he declared the Regent was his ideal of a movie palace, with its glamour and style. On opening night he well remembered William Cade's eighteen piece orchestra thundering out the *William Tell Overture* while the 'electrics man' madly changed coloured lights to match the moods of the music. The silent movie was *Flesh and the Devil* with Greta Garbo and John Gilbert. Some lucky patrons watched from special 'love seats', ' . . . thigh to thigh and sigh to sigh, without even a seat arm between them'.

Ross Thorne states that:

Like the other large, picture palace style theatres in the capital cities Adelaide's Regent presented variety acts periodically together with the film programme: there was an equipped fly tower stage and other necessary facilities. Adelaide was not a large city in 1928 and Hoyts under the guidance of F.W. Thring were possibly fortunate that the opposition company of Union Theatres were a little slower in building such magnificent cinemas and did not build any of this scale in either Adelaide or Brisbane.



(CD Ref 3974/16)

In March 1929 the Regent offered something big - sound, *The Red Dance* and a few sound shorts featuring King George V and Beatrice Lillie. It is also claimed that the Regent showed the first 'all-talkie' in Adelaide called *In Old Arizona* starring Warner Baxter.

The Regent theatre is all that survives of several equally popular cinemas in Adelaide. In 1939, £39 000 was spent on the cinema in renovations. The cinema went into decline during the 1960s when it was found that the 2298 seat cinema was simply too big to fill when it was having to compete with television. To cater for audiences of the 1970s and 1980s radical plans for the cinema were undertaken and on March 30 1967, a charity variety show was held to mark the closure of the theatre for extensive renovations and alterations. The foyer and stalls were lost to create a shopping arcade and two small cinemas were built into the old shell. Since then a further cinema has been incorporated into the complex.

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While these changes compromised the integrity of the original structure, sufficient remains of the interior and the street elevation to evoke the majestic picture palace of old.

ACA, BSO, index, 21 March 1927; *Advertiser*, 29, 30 June 1928, 18 June 1975, 2 February, 1976; *Builder*, 17 November 1926, 16 March 1927, 6 April 1927; MLSA, D6297 (misc.), Historical photographs (Town Acre 84), Jurs, V., *Picture theatre building in South Australia*, n.d., A928; *Regent Magazine*, 1928-35; *Register*, 30 June 1928; *South Australian Register*, 20 October 1896, Thorne, R., *Cinemas of Australia via U.S.A.*, 1981, p. 288.

The text in this Information Sheet was copied from the **Heritage of the City of Adelaide: An Illustrated Guide**, (1996). The photographs contained in this Information Sheet are a selection of those held by Heritage Services, in digital format.

The property described in this Information Sheet is included in the Register of State Heritage places. A heritage listing does not mean or imply right of access by the public to such properties.

The heritage related Principles of Development Control as well as the Precinct specific objectives and Principles of Development Control are contained in the Adelaide (City) Development Plan. These should be referred to in whole when contemplating any development.

Further information on the Heritage Incentives Scheme, an initiative of Council to sponsor timely and appropriate conservation action is available upon request of the Customer Service Centre.



CITY OF ADELAIDE HERITAGE STUDY

The City Heritage Register-Definition of Items

Prepared by the Dept. of Planning and Development

Item	REGENT CINEMA FACADE AND SURVIVING THEATRE FACADE	Building No 3/2217
Address	101-107 Rundle Mall	CT 3179/95

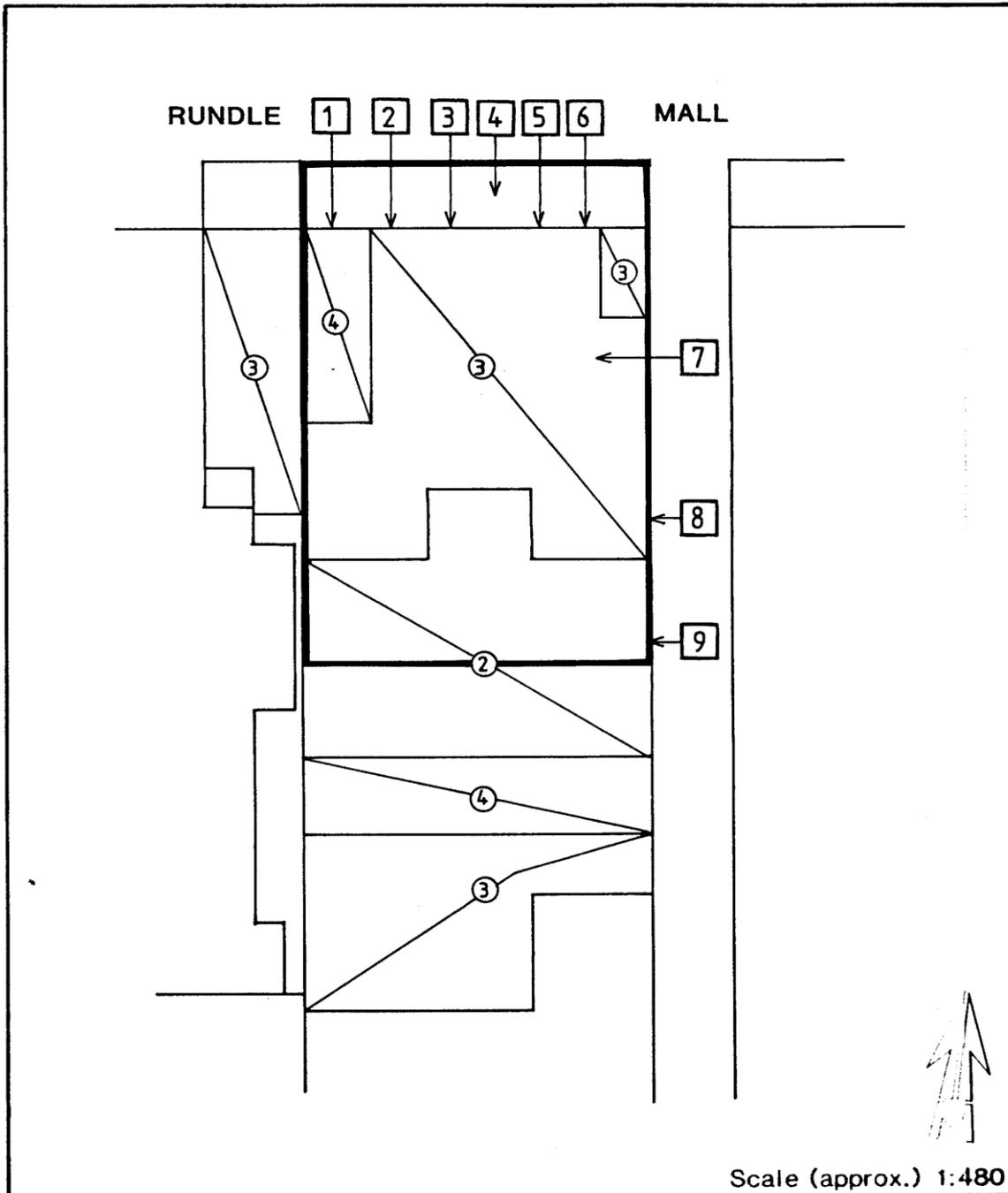


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NOTES:

1. Modified shop front at ground floor level.
2. Lined rendered facade.
3. Note Multi-paned arched windows with balustrading across window openings.
4. Awning included.
5. Note Decorative entablature.
6. Facade of original theatre.
7. Note Include staircase and surviving internal fabric of foyer and theatre finishes.
8. Side elevation of little interest (brick construction).
9. Thick line indicates limit of old theatre.