

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (Former Opera Theatre)

54-58 Grote Street

Historically this building is significant as a venue for live entertainment in Adelaide. It was erected as the Princess Theatre for Edwin Daw in 1912-13 (who changed its name to the Tivoli Theatre) and was first leased by Harry Rickards who after a vaudeville career in Britain and America became a leading variety entrepreneur in Australia. The building continued to provide live entertainment, reflecting changes and developments up to and including its rehabilitation as the Opera Theatre.

Selections from operas were performed as part of live entertainment from the earliest days of settlement. The first complete opera, *Rob Roy*, was performed in December 1839 in a makeshift theatre on the site of the former Fowler Factory on North Terrace.

In 1861 Adelaide saw its first Italian opera when a company led by Signor and Signora Bianchi gave an ambitious sixteen-week opera season. By the late 1890s in the early days of cinema, theatrical activity was booming so that several new venues such as this theatre were built even at a distance from the established commercial areas of the city. This theatre was officially opened as a home for vaudeville on 5 September 1913. It was built on an open paddock with a stream running through it, a place where market gardeners and stallholders parked their carts and fed their horses.

An earlier Tivoli Theatre in King William Street, was referred to as the old Tivoli once the new Tivoli was opened. The new Tivoli Theatre was designed by the architects Williams & Good with Messrs W. Essery and J. Henning as the contractors. The new Tivoli, 'sumptuously equipped', was opened by the mayor, Lavington Bonython, in the presence of a large number of representative citizens'. The building was described as 'appealingly chaste' in its white and gold decor, and its appointments were thought be 'lavish'. The *Critic*, 10 September 1913 described this as '. . . unquestionably the most up to date building of the kind in the Commonwealth'.

However, the new Tivoli Theatre never succeeded in becoming the principal theatre in Adelaide, perhaps because it was too far out of the way or too big for the Adelaide of 1913. For the first few years it was a 'live' theatre in every sense of the word. Performers appearing at the old Tivoli were retained to perform at the opening night of the new Tivoli. One of them was the vivacious Lillie Langtry, that 'electric spark' who 'had quite taken Adelaide by storm'. Applauded for her dancing, singing and 'frocking', Langtry was equally famous for her public love-life.

The new Tivoli housed long seasons of plays, vaudeville, and a quaint feature 'Tango Teas', which combined fashion parades, entertainment and light refreshments. The Tango Teas came to Adelaide for a short time in 1914. They were ' . . . the absolute rage of every city in America and England' and were early examples of audience participation in a performance.

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The theatre was erected for Edwin Daw, who called it the Princess Theatre, but Hugh D. McIntosh, governing director of Harry Rickards Tivoli Theatre Limited, took over the lease when it was first completed and changed its name to the Tivoli Theatre. The *Green Room*, 1 September 1913, had reported that as soon as McIntosh had inspected the new theatre he asked 'How much?'

Harry Rickards first appeared in music halls in London. His career 'took off' when he sang T. MacLangan's song 'Captain Jinks of the House Marines' which captivated London and lifted his salary from £5 to £20 a week, an enormous salary for a variety artist. He was promoted to performing at London's leading variety theatre, The Shaftsbury Theatre, which opened up opportunities for him to visit Australia in 1872. He returned several times, staying for 'some years' and creating a vaudeville circuit which took him regularly on tour around Australia. The Tivoli Theatre in Grote Street was but one of the many leased theatres in his circuit.

The theatre was extensively altered in 1962 and renamed Her Majesty's Theatre following the closure and demolition of the Theatre Royal in Hindley Street. In addition to new foyer arrangements the original dress circle and gallery, (the gods) were removed and replaced by a single upper circle. The building was altered again in 1978-9 by improving backstage and foyer facilities and raising the scene tower. It was renamed The Opera Theatre, the home of the State Opera Company of South Australia. The company, which was brought about by the State Opera of South Australia Act of 1976, had developed out of Adelaide's first professional company formed in 1973, the New Opera South Australia. This had developed from the Intimate Opera Group formed in 1957 although there had been earlier unsuccessful attempts in 1924 and in 1933 to create a professional opera company. In 1989 the State Opera moved to the Festival Theatre.

The Grote Street facade of this building is of some note architecturally because of its exuberant applied ornament and curiously contrived proportion which is reminiscent of a classical stage proscenium. Unfortunately the facade now appears to float over the ground floor due to alterations to the entrance and new wall cladding at ground floor level. The external integrity of the building above ground floor level is high, even though the interior has been totally remodelled. The building is an important feature of the northern side of Grote Street and complements the Metropolitan Hotel on the eastern corner.

ACA, *Annual report 1912*, Assessments, BSO records; Abbie, M., 'Professional theatre in Adelaide', BA Hons. thesis, University of Adelaide, 1970, pp. 64, 126; *Advertiser*, 5 September 1913, 8 September 1913, 27 August 1921, 3 August 1924; Anders, D., Verbal information, 18 January 1988; Brokensha, P., & Tonks, A., *Culture and community - economics and expectations of the arts of South Australia*, 1986, p. 100; *Critic*, 3 September 1913, 10 September 1913; Fischer, G., 'The professional theatre in Adelaide 1838-1922' in *Australian Letters*, Vol. 2, March 1960, pp. 90-7; *Green Room*, 1 September 1913; Horner, J., 'A short history of music in South Australia' in *Australian Letters*, Vol. 2, March 1960, p. 58; *Observer*, 6 June 1896; *South Australian*, 4 December 1839; *South Australian Register*, 7 December 1839, 6 September 1913; State Opera of South Australia program for *Die Fledermaus*, 1979.

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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	OPERA THEATRE	Building No	10/0310
Address	54-58 Grote Street 23-39 Pitt Street	CT	1617/45

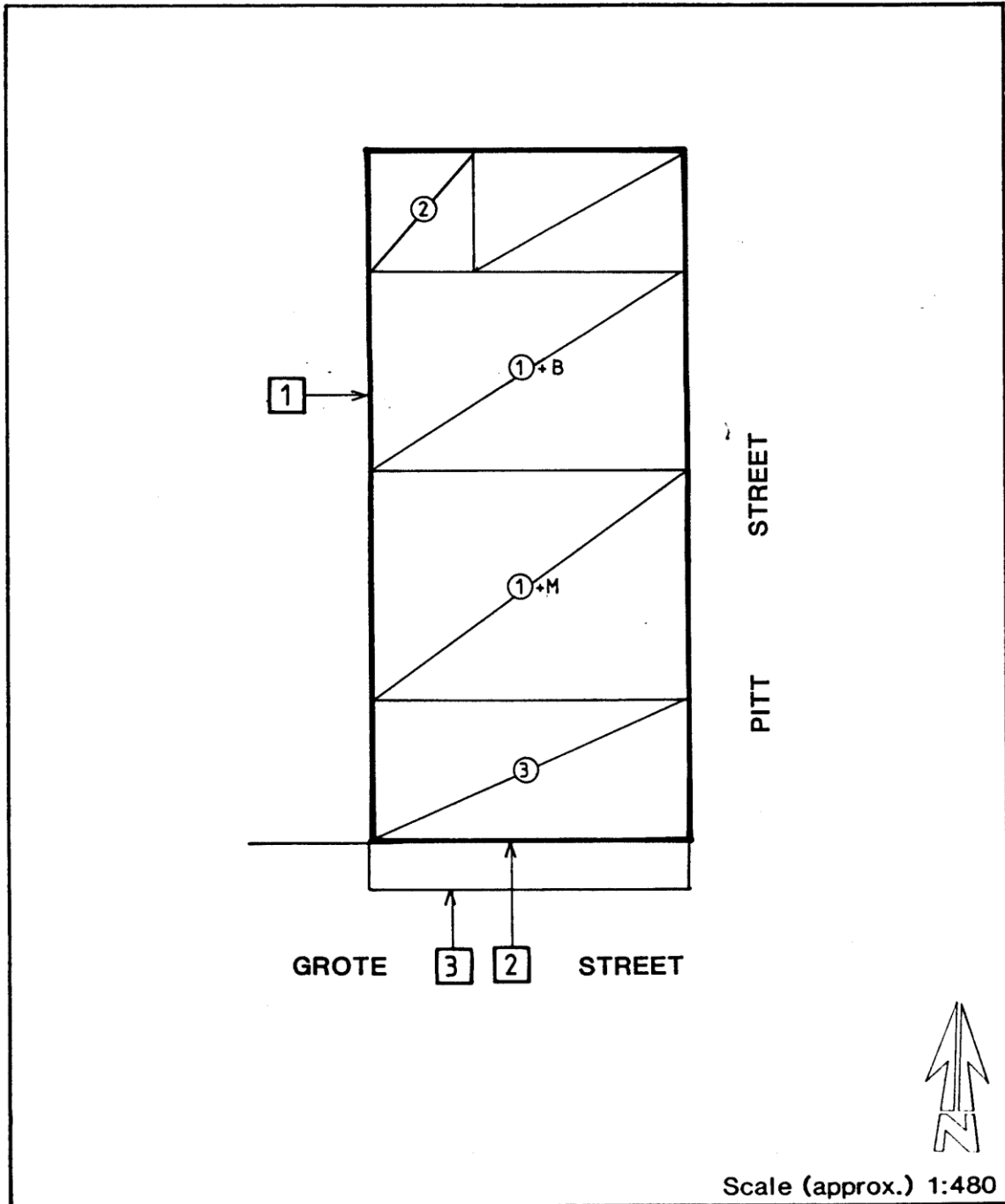


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NOTES:

1. Mansard roof over of recent date.
2. Ground floor altered.
3. Canopy not included.