



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.19 Marketing and retailing
- 3.21 Entertaining for profit

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 308 Commercial & service industries
- 405 Sport, recreation & entertainment

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) is a fine, relatively intact example of Inter-War Art Deco architecture combining strong horizontal and vertical streamlining with stylised decorative features. (Criterion 1.1)

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) is a landmark at a widely angled intersection and creates an attractive entry statement at a prominent intersection within the Geraldton city centre. (Criterion 1.3)

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) makes a positive contribution to the southern end of the Marine Terrace streetscape displaying a lively and appropriately scaled façade. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The Radio Theatre is an example of the many cinemas built in the inter-war period in Western Australia, when cinema entertainment was particularly popular; the Radio Motors showroom and service station was a response to the growing number of motor vehicles on West Australian roads at that time; and, the inclusion of flats reflected the popularity of bachelor apartments in the 1930s. (Criterion 2.1)

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) was a significant development in Geraldton in 1937, reflecting the general optimism of the time at the end of the Depression and for the Geraldton district in particular, and its construction maintained the site as a picture theatre. The site had housed such a function since at least 1921. (Criterion 2.2)

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) was designed by prominent architect Samuel Rosenthal, and is a good example of his theatre designs. (Criterion 2.3)

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) was purpose-built to house the theatre and motor vehicle business activities of Alfred G. Wheat, longstanding Geraldton businessman, whose family have been associated with the place from 1937 to 1976. (Criterion 2.3)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

The theatre was a significant social gathering place for several generations of residents in Geraldton and surrounding districts between 1937 and 1971; 1983 and 1988, and continues this role as a gathering place for religious purposes. (Criterion 4.1)

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) contributes to the Geraldton and surrounding community's sense of place as a significant two-storey building on Marine Terrace, and has provided an important continuity in use of the place for residents. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) is a rare example of a picture theatre constructed in the Art Deco style outside the Perth metropolitan area. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) is a fine example of the Inter-War Art Deco architecture which was a popular style for picture theatres of the 1930s. (Criterion 6.1)

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) is representative of the design work of architect, Samuel Rosenthal who was responsible for a number of similarly styled theatres many of which are no longer extant or have been converted for other uses. (Criterion 6.1)

Designed to house a number of disparate activities, *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)* is representative of a prevalent trend in Western Australia in the 1930s to accommodate a number of social and commercial developments. (Criterion 6.2)

The construction of *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)* is representative of development of Geraldton as a major settlement, and the popularity of cinema as a form of mass entertainment in the inter war years, in Western Australia. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) is generally in sound condition. The concrete hoods above the first floor windows are in poor condition. There are some high level cracks in the parapet walls across the two street elevations. A repainting program was in progress at the time of inspection.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) has moderate integrity. Although the picture theatre and residential functions have been adapted for compatible uses and are clearly evident in the fabric and form of the place, there is no longer any evidence of the service station function which has been replaced by a shopfront restaurant.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) has moderate authenticity. With the exception of the infill of the ground level service station, the place is highly representative of the original form and much of the Art Deco period styling is still apparent. The removal of the neon sign and associated theatre facilities such as ticket office and sweet shop, and replacement of the raked floor and seating detract from the authenticity of the place.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Katrina Chisholm, Architect for John Taylor Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) is a two-storey rendered brick building constructed in 1937 by West Australian Trustee Executor and Agency Company Limited for lessee Alfred Wheat. The place was designed by architect Samuel Rosenthal, and built by Richard Cardilini & Son and comprised a picture theatre, service station, motor showroom, two shops and four flats. The major part of the building was occupied by Radio Motors and the Radio Theatre. The Theatre operated continuously until 1971, and was revived for a few years between 1983 and 1988. Radio Motors vacated the site in 1976. The Radio Theatre and flats are currently occupied by the Potter's House Christian Group.

The first Geraldton town lots were offered for sale in June 1851, and the town developed as the official port for the regions pastoral and mining activities. Geraldton was proclaimed a town in 1871. The first State railway linked the mining district of Northampton with the Geraldton port in 1879. Geraldton was an important supply point for the Murchison goldfields in the 1890s, to which it was connected by the Northern Railway line. The Midland Railway line, connecting Geraldton with Perth, was completed in 1894. The town was also a popular holiday resort in the summer months for people from the goldfields.¹

As well as considerably reduced travelling times, the railway lines had the added benefit of providing a greater variety of entertainment as travelling troupes made the train journey to Geraldton and on to the goldfields. In the late 1890s, travelling companies such as Fitzgerald's Circus, the Olde English Fayre Company, Alfred Dampier's Theatre Company and Harry Rickard's

¹ Bain, Mary Albertus, *A Life of Its Own: A social and economic history of the City of Geraldton and the Shire of Greenough 1846-1988*, City of Geraldton, 1996, pp. 1-10; *The First Hundred Years: Geraldton Centenary 1850-1950*, Municipality of Geraldton, [1950], pp. 5-7.

Tivoli Company were among those taking advantage of the State's developing rail system.²

The first screening of moving pictures in Geraldton took place about 1913. They were run by Daniel Marsh, who owned the first electricity plant in the town. The shows were held at Queen's Pictures on Cathedral Ave, and Fox and Paramount films were shown.³ Alfred G. Wheat was the proprietor of a travelling picture show in the Great Southern district prior to World War One. Wheat was born in Bunbury in 1888. He married Winifred Burrows in Subiaco in 1920. His marriage was perhaps the impetus for him to settle in one place, as he arrived in Geraldton in 1921 to manage the Soldiers' Picture cinema.⁴ The cinema occupied a building in Fitzgerald Street on the rear of Geraldton Town Lot 1. The first title for Geraldton Town Lot 1 had been issued to George Kitching of Edah Station, in 1914. Following Kitching's death in 1918, the site was managed by the West Australian Trustee Executor and Agency Company Limited.⁵ Soldiers' Pictures were run by a syndicate of Geraldton businessmen and was so called because the profits were used to assist in the rehabilitation of returned servicemen.⁶

Alfred Wheat acquired the lease to Soldier's Pictures and changed the name to King's Pictures. He purchased Queen's Pictures from the Marsh family in order to acquire the local rights to Fox and Paramount films, and both cinemas continued to operate for a time until Queen's Pictures was eventually closed. In 1930, Wheat renamed King's Pictures, 'Radio Pictures' or 'Radio Theatre'. The first talking pictures were shown at the cinema that year and the name came from Wheat's belief that some day in the future radio would be used in the sound system of film. The old Radio Theatre presented both movie shows and vaudeville acts.⁷

The operation of the old Radio Theatre was carried on in conjunction with a garage business, known as the Radio Service Station, which also operated on Lot 1 from the late 1920s. The Radio Service Station, later known as Radio Motors, held the agency for Willys-Knight and Whippet cars. The business later expanded to include the sale of Racaphone radios and in 1934, a franchise for Oldsmobile, GMC, Vauxhall and Bedford vehicles was added.⁸

In the mid 1930s, the West Australian Trustee Company, with the concurrence of Mrs Kitching, decided to develop Geraldton Town Lot 1, a move that was hailed by the Mayor of Geraldton, R. Carson, as an important enterprise. The survey of the site in 1936, undertaken prior to the construction of *Radio Theatre Building*, shows the original brick and iron

² Webb, M. & A. *Golden Destiny: The Centenary History of Kalgoorlie-Boulder and the Eastern Goldfields of WA*, (2 vols), Hocking & Co and St George Books, Perth, 1995, pp. 569-571.

³ Wheat, Alwyn G., (son of Alfred Wheat), article on history of theatres and cinemas in Geraldton, *Geraldton Historical Society Quarterly Review*, No. 70, 1987, pp. 8-10.

⁴ Geraldton Regional Library, Local Studies Department, *Geraldton: 150 years, 150 Lives*, Geraldton Regional Library, 2001, p. 178; Wheat, Alwyn G., op cit.

⁵ DOLA survey Diagrams, 10116, 11 February 1936 & 16094, 13 February 1951; Certificate of Title, Vol. 584 Fol. 33, 24 March 1914.

⁶ Wheat, Alwyn G., op cit; *Geraldton Guardian*, Liftout, 1 December 1999, [p. 28].

⁷ Geraldton Regional Library, Local Studies Department, op cit; Wheat, Alwyn G., op cit; *Geraldton Guardian*, 'Last screening for Geraldton Radio Theatre?' 28 October 1971. Note: Newspaper articles referenced without page numbers were provided by Geraldton Regional Library Local Studies Dept.

⁸ *Geraldton Guardian*, 'That 'Radio Corner' era has come to an end', 26 August 1976, including photograph of the site in 1929.

theatre across the rear of the site, a stone building on the Fitzgerald Street frontage and another on the Marine Terrace frontage.⁹ The building on Marine Terrace was a two-storey structure that appears to have been occupied as part of Radio Motors operation and may originally have been a residence.¹⁰ It was removed to make way for *Radio Theatre Building* which was described as:

...a substantial block of buildings, including a theatre, business premises and flats, with Mr. A. G. Wheat as lessee. Plans were prepared by Mr. S. Rosenthal, F.R.I.A., Warwick House, Perth, and the contract let to Messrs. R. F. Cardilini and Son, Geraldton, the enterprise involving the outlay of £12,500.¹¹

The final screening at the old Radio Theatre on Fitzgerald Street was 'a special four-hour entertainment', after which the projection equipment was moved to *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)*.¹² The new Radio Theatre in *Radio Theatre Building* was opened on 9 April 1937, by the Mayor of Geraldton, R. Carson, in front of 'a very large attendance'. The Mayor congratulated all connected with the enterprise, which, he said, indicated they had confidence in the future of Geraldton. He hoped it would prove to be an incentive to other enterprising citizens. Present also was O. Wilson, manager of Warner Bros First National Pictures Ltd, and G. Caffery of Fox's Twentieth Century Pictures. A 'select programme' for the opening included the screening of *China Seas* starring Clark Gable and Jean Harlow.¹³ A description of the new building was included in the newspaper report of the opening:

The new block of buildings with its two storied frontage, finished in plaster, presents an attractive appearance. It comprises the theatre, a service station, motor show rooms, and two shops, whilst on the upper storey there are four modern flats, to which access is afforded by entrances in Marine Terrace and Fitzgerald Street. Entrance to the theatre is gained by means of handsome vestibule, leading off Marine Terrace. The vestibule is wide and is fitted with swing doors as a protection from the weather. Within the vestibule is the glass enclosed ticket office, and flanking the vestibule there is the office on one side, and on the other a ladies rest room and room for parking perambulators, a convenience which will be greatly appreciated by mothers.

The circle is reached by a wide staircase, and at the top on either side there are lounges, comfortably furnished with chairs and couches, whilst there is also a retiring room for ladies. The interior of the theatre... will provide accommodation for nine hundred people. At the present time seats have been provided for about eight hundred patrons, but there is ample room available for the provision of another hundred seats. The seats are all of the tip up variety nicely upholstered in leather. A facility that will be much appreciated will be the marked slope, both of the auditorium and the circle, which will enable everyone to obtain a good view, which was not always possible in the old building. In addition much greater space has been provided between the rows of seats... whilst the seats are also wider...

⁹ DOLA survey Diagrams, 10116, 11 February 1936 & 16094, 13 February 1951.

¹⁰ *Geraldton Guardian*, 'That 'Radio Corner' era has come to an end', 26 August 1976, including photograph of the site in 1929.

¹¹ *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 'New Radio Theatre. Important enterprise. The opening ceremony', 10 April 1937, p. 3.

¹² *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 'Radio Theatre. The closing night. Grand gala performance', 1 April, 1937.

¹³ *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 'Radio Theatre. The new building', 3 April 1937, p. 3 & 'New Radio Theatre. Important enterprise. The opening ceremony', 10 April 1937, p. 3.

The stage, which has a depth of sixteen feet, and a proscenium opening of twenty-seven feet, has been designed so that it can be made full use of for entertainment. The apparatus in connection with the showing of the pictures is portable... Further, at the side of the stage are artistess (sic) dressing rooms... Handsome heavy curtains have been provided for the proscenium...

The projecting room is at the rear of the circle... Since the final screening in the old building workmen of Harringtons Ltd., Perth, under the direction of Mr. N. F. Oliver, Raycophone (sic) engineer, have been engaged in fitting up what is known as the Raycophone extended frequency range and electric equipment. The equipment, which was installed in the old theatre only eighteen months ago, and which was one of the first to be provided in a provincial town, has been transferred to the new building...

The building is not yet complete, and workmen will be engaged for a month or so in adding the finishing touches. The footpaths have to be laid out to synchronise with the layout of the building, which with its heavy awning, shading the shops, service station, the entrance, etc., and with its Neon light flashing at the Marine Terrace end will be a great architectural improvement to this portion of the main street...

Two [of the flats] consist of a lounge, bedroom, kitchen and bath room, gas stoves and bath-heaters being provided. The other two flats have an additional bedroom.¹⁴

An earlier newspaper article stated that the interior of the Radio Theatre 'is finished in white and cream with flood lighting effects... whilst the entrance is in white and cream with a brown floor and black border'.¹⁵

Perth firms featured in the provision of furnishings and services for *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)*. B. M. Holt was consulting engineer, Benporath & Son Ltd undertook the electrical installation, H. P. Brady & Co installed the ceilings and the seating was provided by C. G. Norton. Curtains were supplied by Aherns and furnishings by Foy & Gibson.¹⁶

Architect Samuel Rosenthal was born in Hastings, England in 1888 and migrated to South Australia with his parents three years later. He was educated in Adelaide and articulated to architects Garlick and Jackman. Harold Boas invited him to Perth in 1914 to take over his Perth practice when he enlisted for military service in World War One. By January 1915, Rosenthal had also enlisted, joining the 11th Battalion, which fought at Gallipoli. He was invalided to London and stayed to work on the War Graves Commission. After his discharge, he continued to work in London until 1923, when he returned to Perth to work with Harold Boas, before establishing his own practice. His work has been described as demonstrating a 'refreshing simplicity of unadorned form allied to classical principles of composition, dignified but relaxed'.¹⁷

The popular architectural styles of the later 1920s and 1930s were Art Deco and Moderne. Art Deco 'represented all that was new and modern at the time, and was seen to express the hopes and aspirations of a new generation,

¹⁴ *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 'New Radio Theatre. Important enterprise. The opening ceremony', 10 April 1937, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 'Radio Theatre. The new building', 3 April 1937, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 'New Radio Theatre. Important enterprise. The opening ceremony', 10 April 1937, p. 3.

¹⁷ Geneve, Vyonne, 'Samuel Rosenthal (1888-1967) Pioneer modernist architect', *Art Deco Society, Newsletter*, March 1992, pp. 8-9.

changed forever by the Great Depression and the First World War'.¹⁸ The style was named after the Paris Exhibition of 1925, and was 'influenced by European modern functionalism and American versions of art deco and streamline moderne'.¹⁹

The most popular representation of these styles was the picture theatres. Rosenthal was responsible for a number of picture theatres and picture gardens during this period, most of them since demolished, including the Gaiety Theatre, South Perth (1926), Broadway Theatre, Victoria Park and Theatre Royal, Collie (1927), Premier Theatre, East Perth (1928), Richmond Theatre, North Fremantle (c.1929), Hurlingham Theatre and Gardens (1930), which was the first theatre built in Western Australia without a stage, and Mayfair Theatre, Bunbury (1939), his last theatre design. Those of his theatres that are still extant include the Regent Theatre, Guildford (1926), Rosemount Theatre, North Perth (1929), Beacon Theatre, South Fremantle and *Radio Theatre Building* (1937).²⁰

The provision of single and two-bedroom flats on the upper floor was a response to the popularity of bachelor apartments in the late 1930s, a direct result of the development of gas stoves. The flats may have been occupied by families leasing the two shops in *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)*, but their compact design was primarily aimed at the single person or young couple market rather than a family.

The old Radio Theatre building on Fitzgerald Street was stripped internally and used as a motor vehicle workshop for Radio Motors. Radio Motors operated the new service station, and the motor vehicle showroom on the ground floor of *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)*.

The flashing red neon sign on the roof of *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)*, which spelled out the word RADIO, was at first considered a possible hazard to shipping, but local fishermen valued it, as the sign could be seen for miles out to sea and was used by them as a navigation beacon.²¹

During World War Two, the *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)* experienced a boom period and screened films every night, mainly due to the number of servicemen stationed in the area.²² The Theatre Sweet Shop became the Comfort Fund Shop during the war years, where knitted items were collected for distribution to servicemen at the front.²³

In 1951, Geraldton Town Lot 1 was subdivided, creating Lot 19 (lot 21 in 2003), the site of the Radio Motors workshop (the original theatre), and Lot 20, the site of *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)*.²⁴ The place was purchased by Goldfield Pictures while the Wheat family retained Radio Motors, which they continued to operate on Lot 19 (lot 21 in 2003) and on rented portions of Lot 20, specifically, the service station and showroom on the ground floor of the

18 Geneve, Yvonne, 'Art Deco in Beaufort Street', *Waltzing Moderne*, Vol. 7 No. 2 March/April 1994, pp. 6-7.

19 Geneve, Yvonne, 'Versions of Modernism in Western Australian Cinema Design 1930-1940', UWA Master of Arts thesis, 1991, p. 144.

20 Geneve, Yvonne, 'Samuel Rosenthal', op cit.

21 *Geraldton Guardian*, 31 December 1999, p. 36.

22 *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 4 February 1947, p. 3; *Geraldton Guardian*, 'Movie-going a popular pastime', 31 December 1999, p. 36.

23 Information from HCWA Place file 01060.

24 DOLA Survey Diagram 16094, approved by the Town Planning Board on 13 February 1951.

Radio Theatre Building.²⁵ The Radio Motors' Vauxhall-Bedford franchise was replaced with a franchise for Standard, Vanguard and Ferguson tractors and equipment. Alfred Wheat died in 1956 and his son Alwyn continued to run Radio Motors. In 1957, he sold the radio and electrical division of the business and opened a Ford dealership.²⁶ In 1965, the landholding of *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)* was reduced when Radio Motors purchased a portion of Lot 20 and it was then designated as Lot 22 on Diagram 24908, fronting Fitzgerald Street.²⁷

In the 1960s, the Radio Theatre in the *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)* faced considerable competition from the three drive-ins, which operated in Geraldton, the first opening in 1957, and picture screening ceased at the Radio Theatre on Friday 29 October 1971.²⁸ In 1973, *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)* was purchased by Robert and Marion Elliott and Norman and Eunice Barndon of Geraldton.²⁹ In 1974, Alwyn Wheat ran a Campers Pride store from the corner of Marine Terrace and Fitzgerald Street, while continuing to operate a Toyota and Mercedes vehicle franchise at Radio Motors. It is not known when the service station function ceased and the petrol bowsers were removed from the corner. In 1976, Alwyn Wheat moved his business operations to another venue in Geraldton, ending the Wheat family association with the site and with *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)*.³⁰

In 1977, title to *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)* was transferred to Brian and Ethel Keeble.³¹ Circa 1983, the theatre was re-opened by a syndicate headed by Dan Cunningham. Patrons used the upper circle where seating remained intact and pictures were screened every night, but the venture struggled to survive and eventually closed in 1988.³² Ownership of *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)* changed hands in 1986, when the place was purchased by current owners, Elio Gaetano Reale and Maria Reale.³³ After the closure of the picture theatre for the second time the theatre was used as a teenage nightclub, necessitating the removal of the raked floor and seating in the auditorium. This venture appears to have been short-lived, as by December 1989, the Potter's House Christian group was occupying the Radio Theatre and part of the theatre entrance and the proscenium had been bricked up. None of these alterations was apparent in June 1988. The shop on the east side fronting Marine Terrace was occupied by Anita's Pizza 'N' Pasta Bar for a number of years.³⁴

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) was classified by the National Trust in 1989 and, in 1998, the place was listed on the City of Geraldton Municipal Heritage

25 Certificate of Title, Vol. 1165 Fol. 176, 12 November 1953; *Geraldton Guardian*, 'That 'Radio Corner' era has come to an end', 26 August 1976.

26 Wheat, Alwyn G., op cit; *Geraldton Guardian*, 'That 'Radio Corner' era has come to an end', 26 August 1976.

27 Certificate of Title Vol. 1165 Fol. 176 & DOLA Survey Diagram 24908.

28 *Geraldton Guardian*, 'Last screening for Geraldton Radio Theatre?' 28 October 1971.

29 Certificates of Title, Vol. 1307 Fol. 9, 12 June 1973 & 29 December 1977.

30 *Geraldton Guardian*, 'That 'Radio Corner' era has come to an end', 26 August 1976.

31 Certificate of Title, Vol. 1307 Fol. 9, 12 June 1973 & 29 December 1977.

32 Wheat, Alwyn G., op cit.

33 Certificate of Title, Vol. 1745 Fol. 088 & Register number 20/D16094.

34 *Geraldton Guardian*, 'Radio Cinema building may be classified by National Trust', 16 June 1988 & 'Historic building classified', 22 December 1989; *Geraldton Guardian*, 'Historic building classified', 22 December 1989 & 31 December 1999, p. 36; Geneve, Vyonne, *Significant Buildings of the 1930s in Western Australia*, National Trust, Perth, 1994, Vol. 1, entry for Radio Theatre.

Inventory with a Category 2 management rating.³⁵ In the late 1990s, there has been a renewed interest in cinema going, resulting in a number of new cinema complexes being opened in various metropolitan areas in Western Australia. A new four-screen cinema complex, the Geraldton 4 Cinema, opened on 2 December 1999, on the corner site opposite *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)*.³⁶

In 2003, the theatre continues to be occupied by the Potter's House Christian group, who also occupy the flats as administration offices and Sunday School rooms. A Thai restaurant occupies the former service station area on the ground floor. Though not part of this assessment, the old Radio Theatre building is extant on Lot 19 (lot 21 in 2003).

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) is a two-storey rendered brick and asbestos fibre-cement roofed building constructed in 1937 and is representative of the Inter-War Art Deco style. The place incorporates a former picture theatre together with restaurant facilities at ground floor and former residential spaces above. The former entertainment and residential functions have been adapted for use by a Christian group who use the theatre as a place of congregation and the flats as Sunday School facilities and offices.

The place is located on the south side of Marine Terrace at the intersection with Fitzgerald Street. The junction of the two streets forms an obtuse angle and the building layout follows this same geometry with the restaurant and former residential spaces wrapping around a wide, truncated corner. The wing extending along Fitzgerald Street is lower in height and separates from the larger form of the theatre which extends back, perpendicular to Marine Terrace towards the site of the earlier Radio Theatre building on Lot 19.

The stylised rendered facades of *Radio Theatre B Building (fmr) uilding* are characteristic of the Inter-War Art Deco period with the Marine Terrace elevation being the most elaborate.³⁷ A suspended canopy over the footpath is continuous around the two street elevations separating the upper and lower levels. The Art Deco style characteristics are concentrated principally at the upper level as modifications to the ground floor shopfronts have diminished the authenticity of the lower level. Each elevation is divided into bays by pilasters and exhibits both horizontal and vertical streamlining in the render detailing and window treatment. The central bay of the Marine Terrace elevation forms a dominant entry statement, achieving a sense of verticality through the higher parapet and elongated wheat sheafs expressed in relief in the side pilasters. With the exception of the truncated corner, the remaining bays are identical with a rectangular window opening located centrally in each bay. A horizontal concrete canopy cantilevers over each window opening and further horizontal emphasis is expressed in the striped detailing to the window sides.

The rear elevations are less elaborate featuring face or painted stretcher bond brickwork. The large rectangular form of the theatre auditorium is visible from Fitzgerald Street, beyond the shop and residential wing, with the

³⁵ Suba, T., Callow, B. & Grundy, G., *City of Geraldton Municipal Heritage Inventory*, 1996-97, Place no. 301.

³⁶ *Geraldton Guardian*, 31 December 1999, p. 36.

³⁷ Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989, pp. 188-191.

undeveloped land between the theatre and angled street used only for carparking. The walls and gabled, asbestos fibre-cement roof of the theatre rise well above the fence line at the back of the carpark, extending to the back of the site towards the old Radio Theatre building. The brick piers dividing the elevation are stepped and accentuated with cement rendered coping. Bands of cement render have also been applied to the head of the window opening in each bay, and beneath the eaves. The double-height window openings have been boarded over although glazing is still evident in the smaller, aluminium framed sashes at the back of the auditorium. A timber framed staircase is located alongside the external wall providing egress from the theatre balcony.

Much of the roof is obscured from street level behind parapets around the principal elevations. The parapets step down along the side elevations following the low, single pitched roof behind. Only the roof over the theatre auditorium is clearly evident from street level. The gabled roof has a curved section over the ridge and a lower, lean-to roof over the stage area at the rear of the building.

The entrance to the theatre foyer located in the central bay along Marine Terrace has been modified with an unsympathetic infill treatment consisting of clinker brickwork panels and double leaf timber doors with diagonal boarding. The foyer inside is an open space at the back of which are the entrances to the auditorium and sanitary facilities located to each side of the wide timber staircase leading to the upper floor. The steps immediately inside the auditorium entrances would have been installed when the raked floor and seating were removed in the 1980s. The floor is now level and carpeted, and furnished with moveable seating arranged as required by the church group. The auditorium interior displays some elaborate plasterwork of the Art Deco period. The side walls have a patterned dado of horizontal lines while the chamfered walls near the raised stage incorporate some vertical motifs, possibly inspired by skyscraper silhouettes, in the panels above the dado. Further vertical emphasis is apparent in the temple-like surround to the stage in the stylised columns and capitals. The ceiling has a stepped profile with a curvilinear patterned grille, which is likely to have assisted ventilation throughout the auditorium, in the vertical face of each step. A geometric designed ceiling cornice is apparent over the balcony end of the auditorium.

This balcony level is accessed by the main staircase from the foyer. The timber staircase has a landing at an intermediate level and then divides into two narrower flights rising in the opposite direction. A lounge is located at the top of each flight on both sides of the theatre with sanitary facilities accessed from the northern lounge. Double leaf doors open directly into the balcony from the lounges. The balcony floor has initial, gently rising passages on each side, before developing into wide curved tiers stepping down to maintain sight lines. Some fixed leather upholstered seating is still extant along the forward tiers but most of the original furnishing has been removed. The location of the former projection room is discernible in the wall at the back of the balcony although the projection equipment and small glazed boxes have been removed. A pivoting window at the back of the projection room, indicative of the ventilation requirements of the former function, is still operable.

An external covered balcony is located between the upper level of the theatre and two former flats along Marine Terrace. The balcony is fenced along the south-west side with a gate opening onto a timber staircase which descends

to the concrete paved service areas at ground level. The balcony also allows access to the back of the flats which are now used as Sunday School facilities by the church group.

More formal access to the flats is provided by a staircase and entrance from Marine Terrace. A further entrance around the corner is shared by the two former flats along Fitzgerald Street. The four flats which are similar but not identical were planned with living and bedroom spaces along the street elevations, having some views towards the ocean, with kitchen and bathroom service areas behind. The central flat contains irregular shaped rooms where the corner is truncated, and a dividing wall has been removed from the northernmost flat to create one large activity space. Although there have been some modifications, the planning and fabric are still representative of the original period of construction. The structure consists of timber floors and masonry dividing walls and features detailing and ornamentation from the Art Deco period. Walls typically have been plastered and painted, or papered, and feature a high level picture rail with contrasting treatment in the wall surface above. Some geometric styled cornices and ceiling decorations are still evident and dark timber joinery has been utilised for skirtings, fireplace surrounds, panelled doors, and architraves. The casement timber window frames which exhibit strong horizontal streamlining in the glazing bars, and the proportions of the door panelling, with a longer lower panel and obscure glazing in the panel above, are all consistent with original fabric.

Some of the fabric at *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)* is in a deteriorated condition. The cantilevering concrete hoods over the windows are the most severely affected with reports of pieces falling to the street below. Horizontal cracking in the parapets of the street elevations is relatively extensive. There is also evidence of water penetration from the roof over the auditorium. Elsewhere, deterioration is primarily superficial with flaking plaster and paint finishes. A repainting program was being carried out by the main tenants at the time of inspection.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) is one of four remaining theatres designed by Samuel Rosenthal in the Art Deco style in Western Australia. It is not known exactly how many theatres Rosenthal designed that are no longer extant.

The others are: *Regent Theatre*, James St, Guildford (1926), now occupied as the Slovenian Hall, (HCWA Place 03614, classified by the National Trust and entered on the Guildford Municipal Heritage Inventory); *Rosemount Theatre* (formerly the Regent), Fitzgerald St, North Perth (1927), closed in 1967, the upstairs gallery converted to a bowling alley and the lower floor used as a hall by the Police and Citizens' Club (recommended for entry on the Town of Vincent Municipal Heritage Inventory during the 2000-2001 review); *Beacon Theatre*, cnr Wray Ave & Hampton Rd, Beaconsfield, occupied by Stammers Supermarket, (HCWA Place 03615, classified by the National Trust); and *Old Regent Theatre*, Kellerberrin, occupied by the Police Boys' Club in the early 1990s, (HCWA Place 11886, entered on the Shire of Kellerberrin Municipal Heritage Inventory).

Two other of Samuel Rosenthal's buildings, namely the *Old Cable Station*, Curtin Ave, Cottesloe (HCWA Place 4586) and the *Cottesloe Civic Centre* (HCWA Place 0593), to which he contributed, are entered on the State Register of Heritage Places.

Cinemas and theatres were a common subject for Art Deco architecture. Other Art Deco cinemas constructed in the late 1930s include the William Leighton designed *Piccadilly Theatre and Arcade*, Perth (HCWA Place 2065, entered on the State Register); *Windsor Theatre*, Nedlands (HCWA Place 1831, assessed as below threshold for the State Register, classified by the National Trust, and entered on the City of Nedlands MHI), and the *Cygnets Theatre*, Como (formerly the Como), (HCWA Place 2404, entered on the State Register). Several earlier theatres were refurbished by Leighton in the Art Deco style including the *Astor Theatre*, Mt Lawley (HCWA Place 2425, entered on the State Register) and the *Princess Theatre*, Fremantle (HCWA Place 0953, entered on the Register of the National Estate, Classified by the National Trust, entered on the City of Fremantle MHI and part of the West End conservation area).

These cinema structures were sometimes part of retail developments which included shops, and some also included a residential function, but none, apart from *Radio Theatre Building (fmr)*, is known to have combined a cinema with a service station and motor showroom.

Radio Theatre Building (fmr) is a rare example of a picture theatre constructed in the Art Deco style outside of the Perth metropolitan area, a relatively uncommon example of Sam Rosenthal's architecture, and an uncommon combination of functions in a single complex.

13.4 KEY REFERENCES

No key references.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH
