

State Theatre (Village 4 Cinemas)

Inventory Number: 53; Property ID: 21331; TRIM Reference: 21331#002#0003

Draft Report by Chris Cochran & Michael Kelly 3 August 2007; Audit 9 December 2009, updated July 2012 (Cochran & Murray);

Final Report: November 2012

Hastings CBD Heritage Inventory Project



STATE THEATRE

OTHER NAMES: Village 4 Cinemas



Photo: R. Murray, 2012

LOCATION:

Street and Number: 134-142 Heretaunga Street East (Business), 140 Heretaunga Street East (Council)

City / Town: Hastings

Region: Hawke's Bay

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

Legal Description: Lot 1 DP 6 DP 1893 Lot 1 DP 2956 PT Lot 2 DDP 29

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Certificates of Title (includes Registry): HBA4/1492, HB A4/1493 and HB A4/1494, Hawke's Bay Registry

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Architectural Value:

The architectural value of the building as a whole is slight, and is dependent largely on the first floor façade which, although it is well-mannered, is rather sparsely decorated and quite ordinary. The building's architectural values are largely undermined by the over-scale addition on top.

Historic Value:

Although this is a picture theatre of long-standing, the loss of much of the building's heritage fabric and its conversion into a multiplex has diminished its historic value to an extent. Nevertheless, the building has kept its main purpose for its entire existence, a continuity of use that is of some significance. The lost theatre interior was an example of the work of two notable New Zealand architects (Edmund Anscombe and Vernon Brown), and it has a modest academic interest for that.

Aesthetic Value:

The building has modest aesthetic value, mainly resident in its first floor façade and the contribution this makes to the streetscape quality of this part of Heretaunga Street East. However, the major addition of 1994 diminishes this value, since it is quite out of scale with the original building (more or less doubling its height), and its overbearing proportions and heavy decorative features dominate the old to an inappropriate degree.

Social Value:

Cinemas have been significant places in the social life of New Zealand's communities. This particular building has operated nearly continuously as a cinema since its opening in 1934. This gives it considerable local social significance, as generations of Hastings' citizens have used the building. However, the building is presently closed.

HISTORY:

This building was constructed in 1934 for Dennis Donovan, a successful Hastings businessman, in conjunction with Amalgamated Theatres, one of New Zealand's most successful theatre chains during the 20th century.

Donovan owned property - shops and a billiard room - on Heretaunga Street and the theatre was intended to be built behind his existing buildings, with a new façade constructed over the front of the old buildings.¹ To link the theatre with the street, a narrow entrance was to be built on the street, replacing one of the existing shops, and a passage constructed back to the theatre. In the absence of original plans for those existing buildings, it is not possible to know the extent to which this was undertaken, if at all, although several existing commercial concerns, including Donovan's billiard saloon, continued in business during the completion of the theatre,² strongly suggesting the intent of the development was carried through.

¹ *Hawke's Bay Tribune*, 25/9/1933

² *Wises Street Directory*, 1934

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The existing building was designed by architect J T Watson and a permit issued in late July 1931. This had four shops on the ground floor and a substantial billiards room on the top floor. It is the façade of this building that survives today.

The theatre building (and modifications to the then existing commercial building) was designed by the noted Wellington architect Edmund Anscombe, a specialist in Art Deco and Moderne design, and Auckland student Vernon Brown, in one of the unusual collaborations that regularly occurred as a result of the surfeit of work in Hastings and Napier after the Napier earthquake. Brown was later noted as one of the significant early practitioners of modernism in New Zealand. The building cost £6,950.³

An undated and unattributed permit drawing, probably of 1940s vintage, shows the curved verandah as a modification to the building. Notes on the drawing illustrate some of the building's then uses (or at least intended uses), including billiards salon, "State Salon", "State Milk Bar" and a business labelled "Bunkers."⁴

The theatre was intended to be managed as a theatre showing 'first-class programmes' only.⁵ Amalgamated Theatres, the theatre's lessees, was established by the Moodabe brothers, Joseph and Michael, the sons of Lebanese immigrants, in Auckland in 1928. By 1938 they managed 63 theatres in New Zealand, their financial position bolstered by convincing 20th Century Fox to take up a half-stake in the company two years earlier. Fox bought the other half in 1960, but the Moodabe brothers remained in charge.⁶ Amalgamated Theatres was later taken over by Chase Corporation and, after the 1987 crash, its assets were picked up by Australian chain Hoyts Cinemas.

Dennis Donovan remained the owner of the property until his death in 1940.⁷ His son, Dennis Lumley Donovan inherited the property and ran a hairdresser's from one of the shops (possibly his father's own shop). He finally sold the property to Forrester Holdings in 1968.⁸

State Theatre remained a single auditorium theatre until 1994. That year, Forrester Holdings, Hawke's Bay Cinemas and Village Force Cinemas demolished the theatre space and converted the building into a four theatre complex, extending the building by another storey on its Heretaunga Street elevation.⁹ After this development, the theatre was known as Village Four. It appears that the remaining old shop fronts were also removed at this time. In 2000 the building was purchased by Stephen and Kartini Martin¹⁰, and the current owner is Hastings Cinema Limited. The last lessee was the Reading Cinemas chain; the building currently stands vacant

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Architect:

Original building: J T Watson.

John Thomas Watson (d. 1960) was born in Hull, England and came to New Zealand in 1905. He began a practice in Napier in 1932 after working in Greymouth, Masterton and Wellington (for Edwards Construction Co.). He worked as city architect in Napier, and

³ This figure is on file, although no primary source for this amount has been located. A figure of £10,000 was estimated while the theatre was being planned. (See *Hawke's Bay Tribune*, 25/9/1933.)

⁴ Hastings District Council files

⁵ *Hawke's Bay Tribune*, 25/9/1933

⁶ Moodabe, Michael. 'Moodabe, Joseph Patrick 1899 - 1985; Moodabe, Michael Joseph 1895 - 1975'. Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, updated 16 December 2003 - <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>

⁷ CTs HB 10/245, 10/246 and 10/247, LINZ, Napier

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See plans etc. for Building Consent 94/0200, Hastings District Council

¹⁰ CTs HB A4/1492, A4/1493 and A4/1494, LINZ, Napier

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while in both private and public practice he designed a number of structures along Marine Parade, including the Sound Shell. He also designed the Colonnade, the Municipal Theatre and the airport buildings.¹¹

Theatre building and associated alterations: Edmund Anscombe and Associates and Vernon Brown, Associated Architects

Changes of 1994: Neville Norwell and Associates.

Builder: 1931 building – unknown.
1934 State Theatre - N Cole

Date of construction: 1931 (original building), 1934 State Theatre

Construction details: Reinforced concrete construction

Description: The former State Theatre, now Village 4 Cinemas, stands rather dominantly in the middle of its block on Heretaunga Street. The surrounding buildings are a mixture of one- and two-storey buildings, largely of 1920s and 1930s vintage.

The building started life as a plain two storey commercial structure containing shops and a billiards hall. Not long into its life, it was added to and altered to include a large picture theatre at the rear. The building was subsequently greatly enlarged and extensively altered with the 1994 addition to contain 4 cinemas.

It is only the first floor façade to Heretaunga Street that remains visible of J T Watson's original building of 1931. Little other fabric of any age can be seen. This façade has a symmetrical composition divided into three bays, with four windows in the central section flanked by a group of three windows on either side; all the windows are now blanked off inside. The central section has a flat parapet with a shallow recessed panel; the flanking ends have shallow gabled parapets with some unusual decoration in the form of 3 groups of downward-pointing arrows. The stayed verandah has an arched central section, giving a strong and elegant emphasis to the main cinema entrance.

The five original ground floor concrete columns remain exposed, along with the haunchings to the main beams, and the original division of the four shop bays can still be understood from the façade. However, the spaces between the columns have been infilled with modern joinery and walling. Above the 1931 façade, the modern addition of 1994 picks up and exaggerates some of the features of the original design, in particular the arrow motif, while there is a stepped cornice and other bold geometric features that attempt to tie the addition back to the original. However, the addition is quite over-scale and it is very dominant in the street, rising to the height of a four storey building in what is a predominantly one and two storey environment.

The interior of the cinema pre-1994 was largely unaltered from Anscombe's original design and was recorded as having very interesting period features. All this is now lost, with no identifiable trace of Anscombe's work left; the interior is almost entirely modern work apart from some of the structure of the original building that still remains. There are ticketing, toilets and two theatres on the ground floor, and two theatres upstairs (at the front of the building) in the 1994 addition.

¹¹ 'Obituary, John Thomas Watson', *Hawke's Bay Herald Tribune*, 13 December 1960, n.p. (found in New Zealand Biographies volume 2, 1960, p. 145); 'Obituary, Mr. J.T. Watson', *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 12 December 1960, n.p. (found in New Zealand Biographies volume 2, 1960, p. 145).

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ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Element	Significance
Form and detail of the first floor façade above the verandah	Townscape, architectural, aesthetic
Steel windows, verandah	Townscape, architectural

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES:

Hawke's Bay Tribune, 25/9/1933

Wises Street Directory 1934

CT HB 10/245, 10/246 and 10/247, LINZ, Napier

CT HB A4/1492, A4/1493 and A4/1494, LINZ, Napier

Dictionary of New Zealand Biography: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>

Building Consent 94/0200, Hastings District Council

HDC Permit records:

"Building Heretaunga Street Hastings for Dennis Donovan Esq.", permit approved 27.7.1931, J T Watson Architect and Structural Designer (in electronic file with New Grand Hotel drawings)

OTHER INFORMATION:

NZHPT Register: Not registered

District Plan: The State Theatre is not specifically listed as a Heritage item in the Hastings District Plan, however, it is located within the Central Character Precinct.

New Zealand Historic Places Act 1993: This site has been identified as a potential archaeological site under Section 2 of the New Zealand Historic Places Act 1993.

ARCHIVE PLAN(S):

Hastings District Council does not currently hold the original plan for this building.