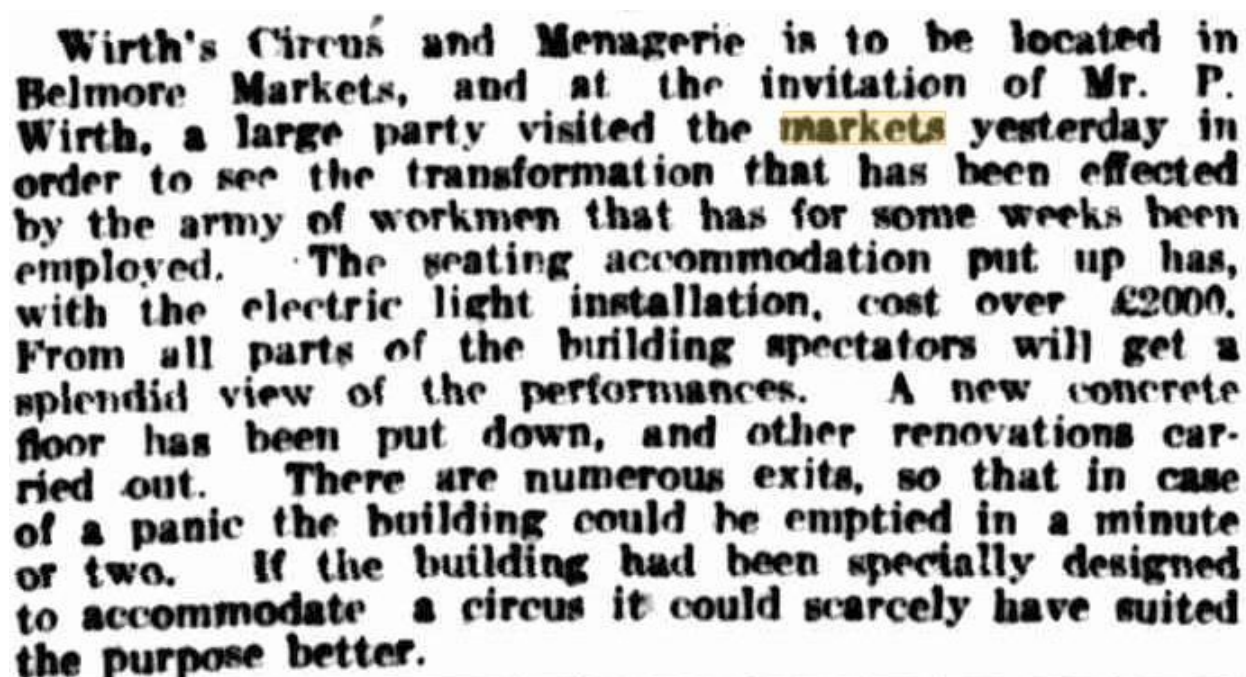


### 3.2.6. Redevelopment of the New Belmore Markets, 1913-1916

The emphasis of the Council on the erection of architecturally satisfying edifices was not matched by practical economic sense and neither the New Belmore Market nor the Queen Victoria Market building near the Town Hall (built 1893-98) proved to be a success. By the following decade the Council were seeking a new site, with rail and water access, on the reclaimed land west of George Street. The first of three stages of the new municipal market with frontages to Hay, Thomas and Quay Streets was opened in 1909 and completed in November 1911.

The opening of the first stage of the new market made the Old and New Belmore Markets redundant. In June 1910, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Council had decided that two theatres would be erected on this site. The Old Belmore Market was demolished and replaced on the Castlereagh Street front by the Adelphi Theatre and on Pitt Street by the Hotel Sydney. The Adelphi was later converted to an opera house and subsequently to the Tivoli Theatre before both it and the Hotel Sydney were demolished, to be replaced in turn by an office block and an unimproved car park.

In October 1911, the Council invited tenders for the lease of the New Belmore Market buildings for a period of 50 years.<sup>39</sup> The following January, the Council's finance committee accepted a tender from Wirth Bros for a six week season of their circus and hippodrome "at the Sir William Manning Markets" for £50 per week.<sup>40</sup> The impending visit of the circus company and the adaptation of the New Belmore Markets for this purpose was widely covered in the local press including the *Sydney Morning Herald* who were especially impressed by the transformation of the building comprising seating accommodation, electric light installation and new concrete flooring (Figure 162). "Wirth's Circus and Menagerie" opened on 16 March and was pronounced a spectacular success. Less than two months later, the Council extended Wirth Bros lease to ten weeks for a sum of £400.



**Wirth's Circus and Menagerie is to be located in Belmore Markets, and at the invitation of Mr. P. Wirth, a large party visited the markets yesterday in order to see the transformation that has been effected by the army of workmen that has for some weeks been employed. The seating accommodation put up has, with the electric light installation, cost over £2000. From all parts of the building spectators will get a splendid view of the performances. A new concrete floor has been put down, and other renovations carried out. There are numerous exits, so that in case of a panic the building could be emptied in a minute or two. If the building had been specially designed to accommodate a circus it could scarcely have suited the purpose better.**

Figure 162 – "A Change at Belmore Markets".

Source: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 March 1912, p6

In the meantime, in April 1912, the Council invited tenders for the "lease of Belmore Markets, Pitt, Hay and Campbell Streets [for] shops, factories, etc" indicating Council's preference for a remodelling scheme for the entire building, including the addition of two floors and construction of shops fronting Pitt Street. Yet within two months, Alderman A Kelly introduced a counter motion requesting the finance committee investigate the advisability of converting the market building into a municipal theatre. Consequently, the Council deferred

<sup>39</sup> "General notes", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October 1911, p5

<sup>40</sup> "Circus at Haymarket", *Daily Telegraph*, 26 January 1912, p11. Sir William Manning Markets is an alternative name for Belmore Markets

final consideration of the leasing tenders while the finance committee considered Kelly's motion. Following deliberations, the finance committee recommended that the Belmore Markets be remodelled to make them revenue producing. The Committee accepted the tender of Wirth Bros for "rear portion of building" for the sum of £2,000 per annum and 5 per cent on any additional expenditure incurred in fitting to their requirements.<sup>41</sup> This decision was set aside until September when the Council formally accepted the tender of Wirth Bros for a lease of the western half of the building for circus purposes for a term of 21 years, amounting to £2,050 and an additional 6 percent for remodelling of the building, amounting to approximately £9,000.

Simultaneously, the Council elected to redevelop the eastern half of the building as a coffee palace (later offices) and 18 shops fronting Pitt Street (present Manning Building).

**MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF SYDNEY.**

**LEASE OF BELMORE MARKETS, PITT, HAY, AND CAMPBELL STREETS. SHOPS, FACTORIES, ETC.**

The Municipal Council of Sydney proposes to remodel this building by the addition of two stories to the present structure, and the construction of commodious shops fronting Pitt-street.

Plans of proposed remodelling may be seen at the Office of the Comptroller of Assets, Town Hall, Sydney.

**Tenders** are now invited for the **lease** for a period of 10 or 12 years of the separate premises, and the Council are prepared to consider the requirements of intending Lessees in the remodelling scheme.

Tenderers are required to deposit with the City Treasurer the sum of Twenty Pounds (£20), and to lodge their **tenders** with the undersigned on or before **THURSDAY, the 18th APRIL, at 3 o'clock p.m.**

Dated this 2nd day of April, 1912.

**W. G. LAYTON,**  
Acting Town Clerk.

**Town Hall, Sydney.**

Figure 163 – Lease tender notice.

Source: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 April 1912, p26

The final two performances of Wirth Bros Circus were held at the Belmore Markets on 8 June.<sup>42</sup> The Company returned to Sydney the following March, opening their 1913 season at the "old Belmore Market Building" with an entirely new show. In the intervening period, the Wirths formed its family business into a registered company and applied to the Council to register the theatre lease in the new company name.<sup>43</sup> In March 1913, Wirths engaged Ernest Lindsay Thompson, architect to prepare preliminary plans for the

<sup>41</sup> "Belmore Markets", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 June 1912, p4

<sup>42</sup> "Wirth's Circus", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 June 1912, p20

<sup>43</sup> Lynne Dent, *The Capitol: its producer, director, auteurs and given circumstances: an epic of a "lucky" theatre*, 1998, p57



Hippodrome. Council's Architect prepared architectural plans based upon the original submission and forwarded these to the Chief Secretary's office for approval in accordance with the *Theatre and Public Halls Act of 1908*.<sup>44</sup> These were approved subject to certain conditions.

In March 1913, Wirths Bros announced the early termination of the Wirths circus season "as the Belmore Markets must soon go into the builders' hands to be converted into an up-to-date Hippodrome for Wirth Bros."<sup>45</sup> Likewise, the *Sydney Morning Herald* carried the following special notice (Figure 164).

As the building operation which will result in the conversion of the **Belmore Markets** into **WIRTH'S HIPPODROME**, a most modern structure, specially designed to fitly house **THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH**, will shortly be commenced, the current season must necessarily terminate at an early date.

Figure 164 – Special notice.

Source: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 April 1913, p2

The *Daily Telegraph* described in detail the City Architect's designs for the complete remodelling of the Belmore Market building which comprised one section, 175ft x 106ft, to be converted into a hippodrome for Wirth Bros; the remainder, measuring 175ft x 130ft, to be turned into shops and factory rooms at an estimated cost of £25,000 (Manning Building).

*The plans for the hippodrome are not yet complete, but tenders are already being invited for the other work. The whole roof is to be raised, and the building carried up another two stories. The present roof will be utilised as far as possible; also, the stone dressings and terracotta ornaments which run entirely round the building. There will be eight shops on the ground floor, with cart-entrances providing access from Pitt, Campbell, and Hay streets. The first and second floors will consist mainly of factory rooms. The whole of the shops will have highly-ornamental fronts, and will be floored with concrete. The upper floors will be of timber. Staircases and two goods lifts are to be installed. The main transverse steel roof and existing hip principles and cast-iron columns supporting the roof will be removed, and the whole of the walls with the exception of the stone and terracotta ornaments will be of brick and cement. Every effort has been made to keep the character of the additions in harmony with the existing elevation.*<sup>46</sup>

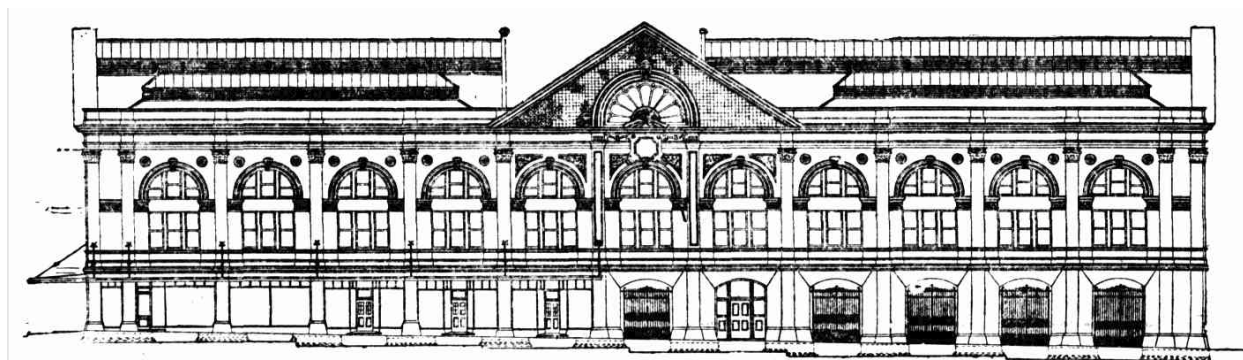


Figure 165 – "Belmore Market remodelled – shops, factories and hippodrome".

Source: *The Sun*, 9 June 1913, p5

RH Brodrick, City Architect, prepared plans and specifications for the proposed new Hippodrome "in accordance with the sketch plans prepared by the Lessees". These were duly approved by Council in September and two months later, Council invited tenders for "ALTERATIONS TO SIR WILLIAM MANNING

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>45</sup> "Stage song and show", *The Sun*, 31 March 1913, p10

<sup>46</sup> "Building & Construction: Transforming the Belmore Markets", *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 April 1913, p9

MARKETS, at HAYMARKET, in order to convert it into a HIPPODROME".<sup>47</sup> In mid-December 1913, Council accepted the tender of William Maston and Thomas Yates for the sum of £32,500.<sup>48</sup> Earlier in the year, JM and A Pringle tendered successfully for the redevelopment of the eastern half, now known as the Manning Building, for the sum of £30,368.

It is unclear when work commenced on the conversion of Belmore Markets into a Hippodrome, but by August 1914, progress was so advanced that more than one newspaper reported completion and occupation of the building was expected by the end of the year.<sup>49</sup> This timing was, as it turned out, incredibly optimistic, as Wirths did not open and occupy the Hippodrome until April 1916. However, the building cost had risen to £51,800, of which £4,000 resulted from alterations and amendments required by the Government Architect and Chief Secretary in order to comply with regulations set forth in the Theatres Act. The largest single extra (£6,065) was for a "Hydraulic Ring Pit (tank)"; the water tank was originally costed at £1,700.<sup>50</sup>

The Council's intention was to make the building commercially viable. Hence the extra height which allowed the inclusion of three lettable storeys to the east and the bulk of the Hippodrome to the west. This arrangement resulted in other alterations to the facade: the Campbell and Hay Street pediments were repositioned above the foyer and stage entries of the Hippodrome; the Parker Street pediment was omitted; and the newly-elevated arcading of the Manning Building was infilled with windows to serve the two floors of office space. The arcade of the Hippodrome was blocked or adapted to meet the requirements of its auditorium and stage. Despite this, the new cornice line remained unbroken right round the building and approximated to the alignment of Watkins' Terrace. Overall, the redesigned building exhibited that attention to well-mannered and urbane design which city architects then believed to be important.

### 3.2.7. Manning Building, 1913-1916 and 1916-1927

Unlike the Hippodrome with its new roof structure, the Manning Building to the east simply had the relevant parts of the Market roof and structure re-erected at the required height. A pair of the original lantern structures remain intact at the north-eastern corner of the building. They consist of steel trusses mounted on lattice girders supported by posts. The posts are probably Mort's original decorative iron members but, as they are now encased to improve fire rating, this has not been checked.<sup>51</sup>

In 1924, plans signed by Brodrick and Merriman were prepared for three additional floors and the removal of the Pitt Street pediment. Finally, only the southern part of the building was added to and the pediment removed. Since the 1920s, the building has remained substantially unchanged. The interiors reflect the Council's initial demand for economy and subsequent low maintenance requirements. Only the space under the trusses to the north-east has some potential for re-creation as a space of unusual quality.

## 3.3. WIRTHS HIPPODROME

The Hippodrome project was under the control of Robert Hargreave Brodrick, who had been appointed Architect and City Building Surveyor in 1897 when McRae left to become the Principal Assistant Architect for the Public Works Department and, later, Government Architect. Some of the plans for the new work carry James Merriman's signature. Both Brodrick and Merriman were long-serving and experienced officers explicitly acknowledged by McRae for their work on the market buildings in 1891- 92. Jim Kerr suggests that the decision to dismantle the facade and re-erect it above a new ground floor, which was in turn mounted on the old footings, was undoubtedly influenced by Brodrick and Merriman's involvement in the design of the original market building.

A series of RH Brodrick's design for the Hippodrome in 1913 are shown below at Figure 166, Figure 167, Figure 168, Figure 169, Figure 170, Figure 171 and Figure 172 (respectively numbered plans 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9 of the original set).

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<sup>47</sup> "Municipal Council of Sydney", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 November 1913, p4

<sup>48</sup> "Hippodrome at Manning Square", *The Sun*, 14 December 1913, p8

<sup>49</sup> "Wirths Hippodrome", *Daily Telegraph*, 25 August 1914, p3

<sup>50</sup> *Construction and Local Government Journal*, 18 January 1915, p10 and "Wirth's Hippodrome", *Daily Telegraph*, 7 January 1915, p7

<sup>51</sup> Kerr, *op. cit.*, p16



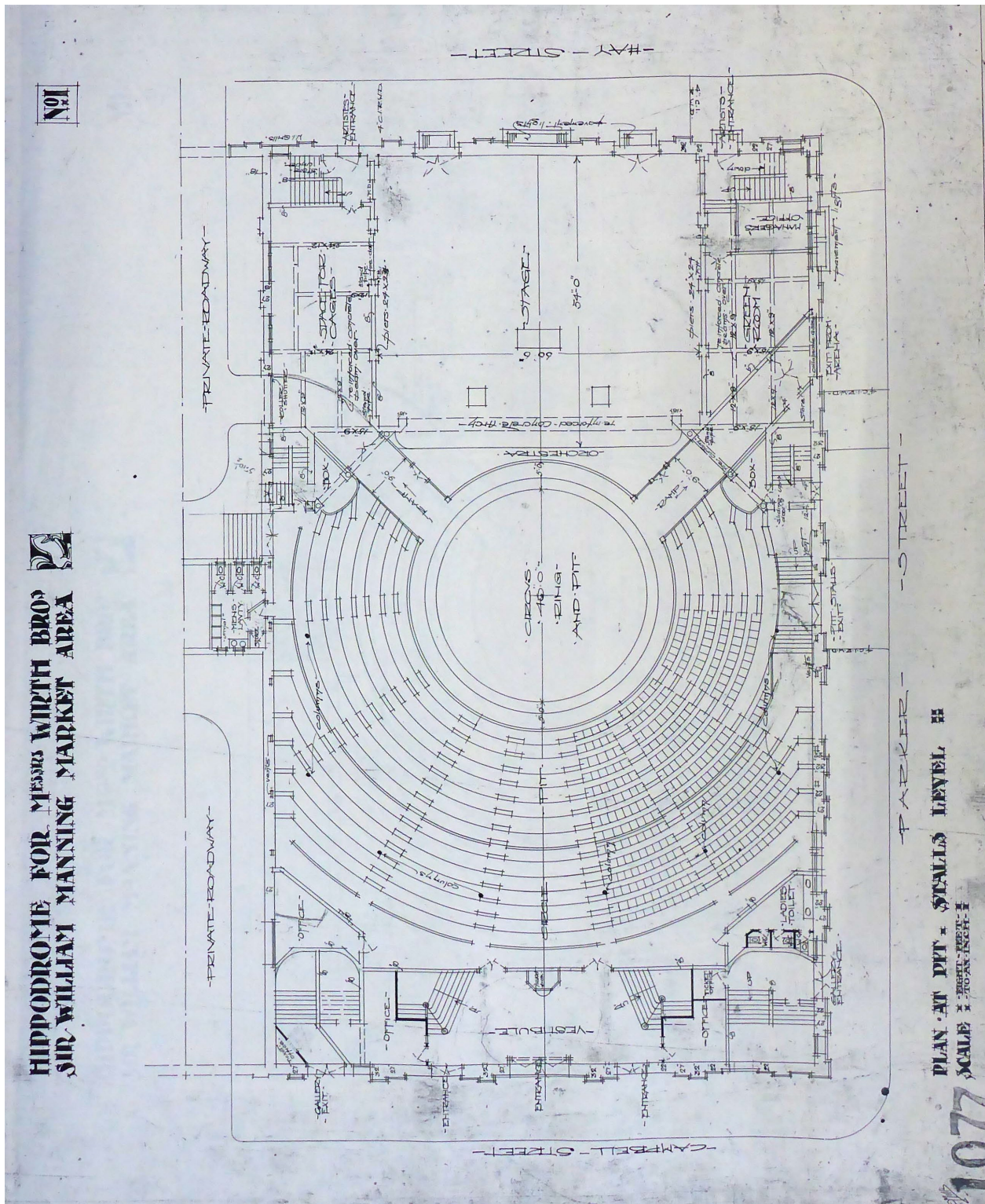


Figure 166 – “Hippodrome for Messrs Wirth Bros Sir William Manning Market Area – No 1, Plan at Pit, Stalls Level”, September 1913. Drawn by RH Brodrick.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, 1077



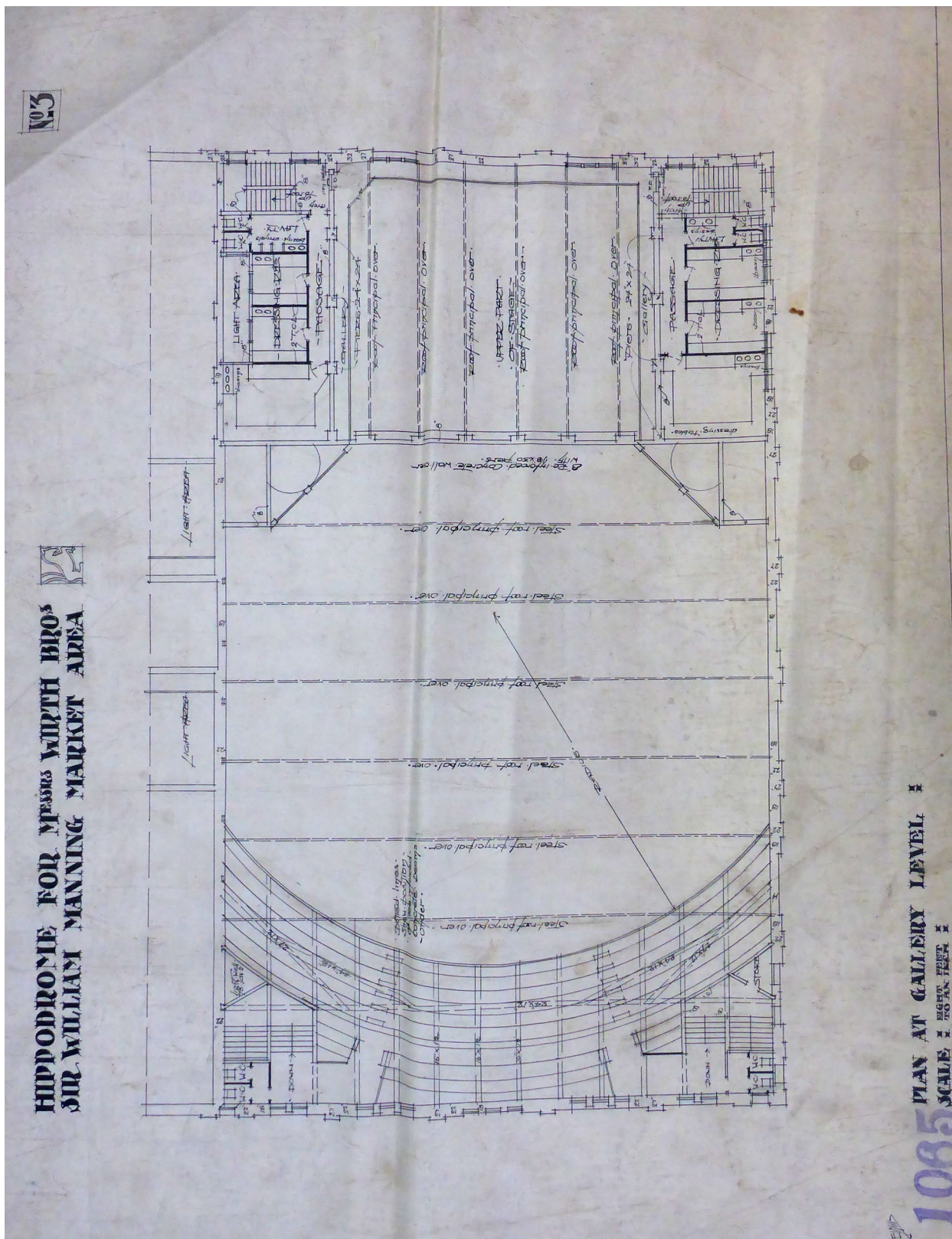


Figure 167 – “Hippodrome for Messrs Wirth Bros Sir William Manning Market Area – No 3, Plan at Gallery Level”, September 1913. Drawn by RH Brodrick.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, 1065



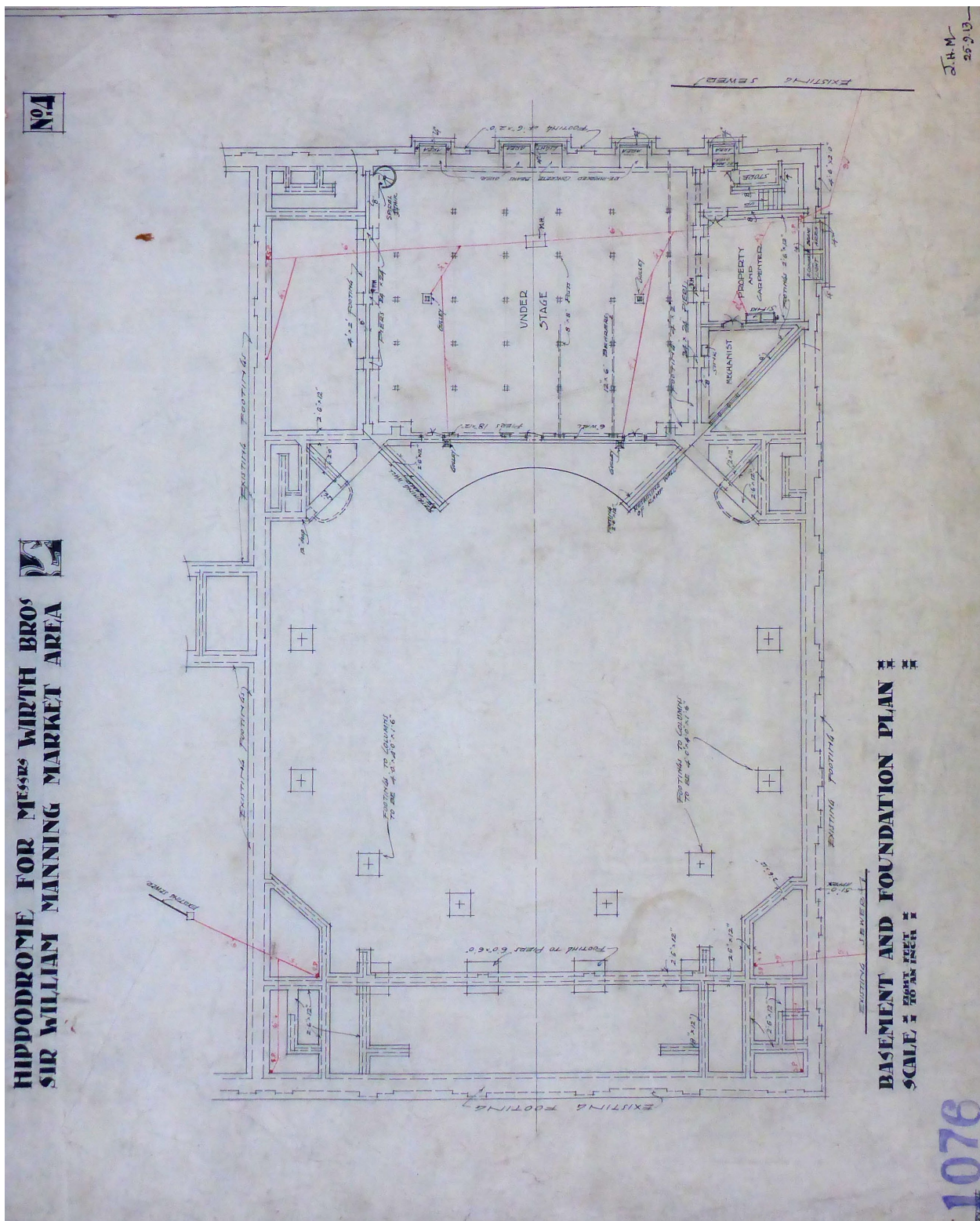


Figure 168 – “Hippodrome for Messrs Wirth Bros Sir William Manning Market Area – No 4, Basement and Foundation Plan”, September 1913. Drawn by RH Brodrick.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, 1076



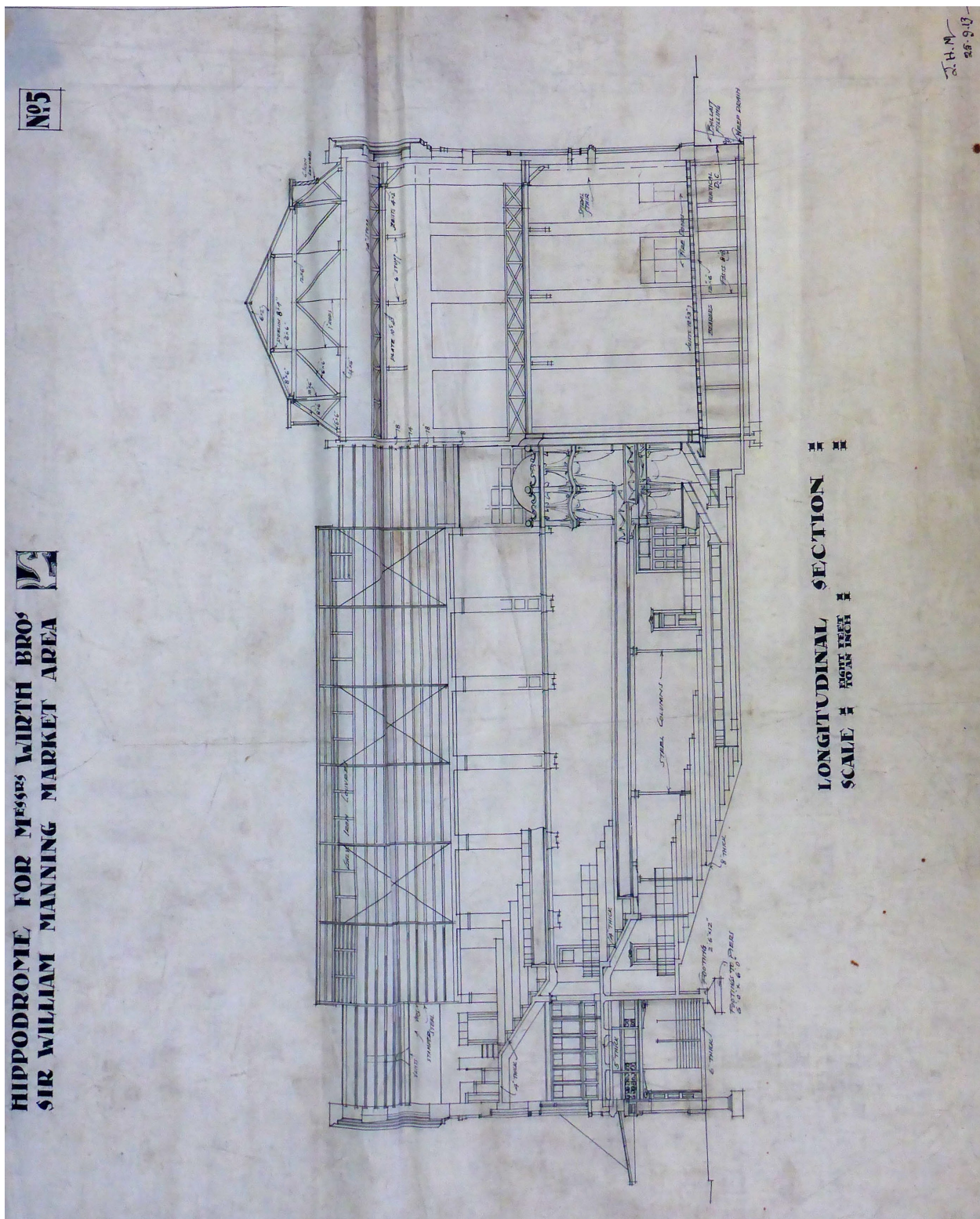


Figure 169 – “Hippodrome for Messrs Wirth Bros Sir William Manning Market Area – No 5, Longitudinal Section”, September 1913. Drawn by RH Brodrick.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, 1069







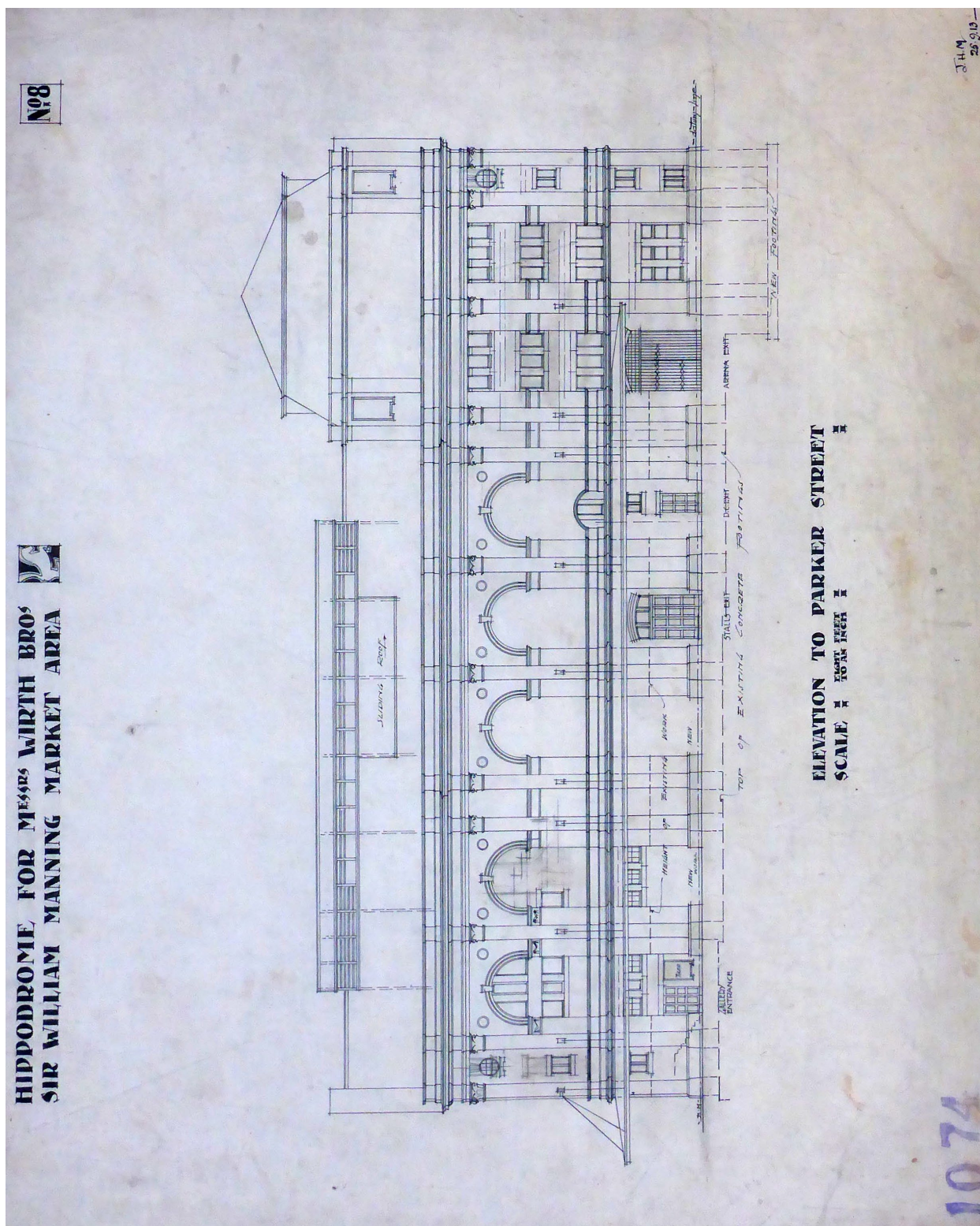


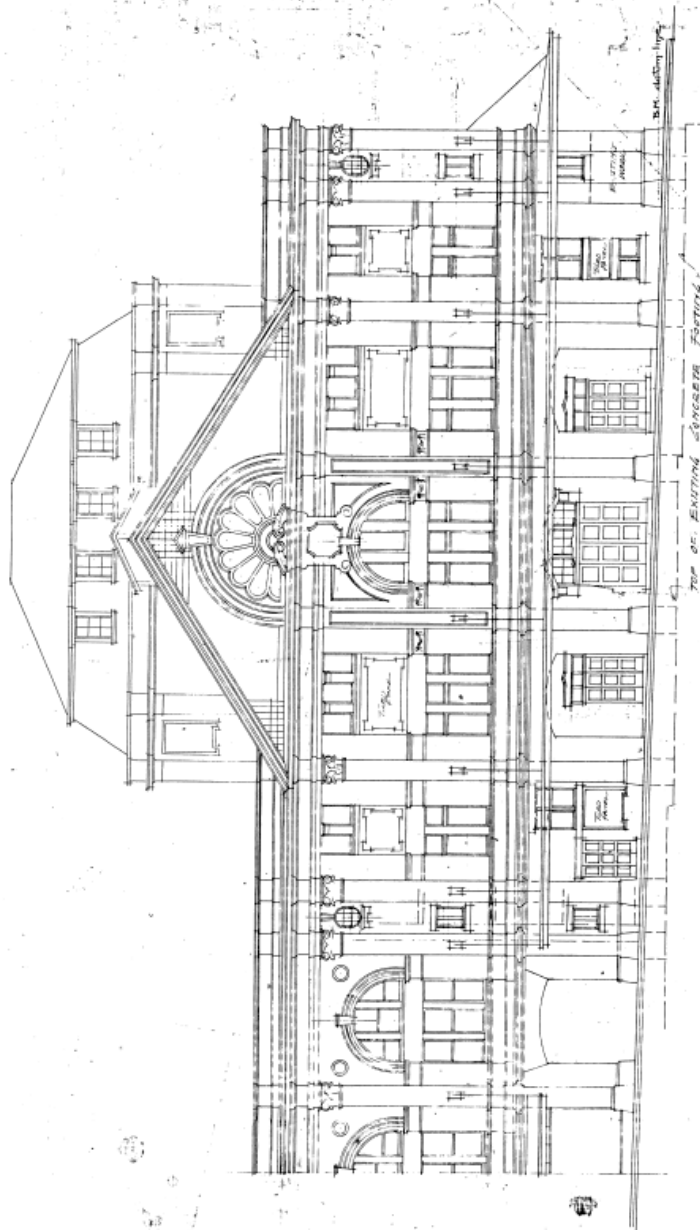
Figure 171 – “Hippodrome for Messrs Wirth Bros Sir William Manning Market Area – No 8, Elevation to Parker Street”, September 1913. Drawn by RH Brodrick.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, 1074



**HIPPODROME FOR MESSRS WIRTH BROS  
SIR WILLIAM MANNING MARKET AREA**

**No 9**



**ELEVATION TO CAMPBELL STREET**  
**SCALE 1/4" = 1' 0"**

Figure 172 – “Hippodrome for Messrs Wirth Bros Sir William Manning Market Area – No 9, Elevation to Campbell Street”.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, 208-01.pdf

The specifications required the contractors to exercise the greatest care in removing brick, terracotta and stone work preparatory to cleaning and re-use. Specifically mentioned were:

- frieze to new parapet [actually coping]. cornice, frieze, pediment tablets, corbels, etc.
- terracotta capitals, keystones, frieze [with swags], foliated and roundel ornaments in spandrels, and diaper tiles in the pediments
- moulded bricks in arches.<sup>52</sup>

Additionally, the ordinary brickwork was also to be taken down, cleaned and, subject to the approval of the architect, reused. It was a labour-intensive exercise – part preservation, part reconstruction, part adaptation and part new construction. The Council thoroughly documented the alterations and additions to the Manning Markets Building and dismantling of the New Belmore Market for conversion into the Wirth Bros Hippodrome. A selection of photographs are reproduced at Figure 173, Figure 174, Figure 175, Figure 176, Figure 177, Figure 178, Figure 179, Figure 180, Figure 181 and Figure 182.

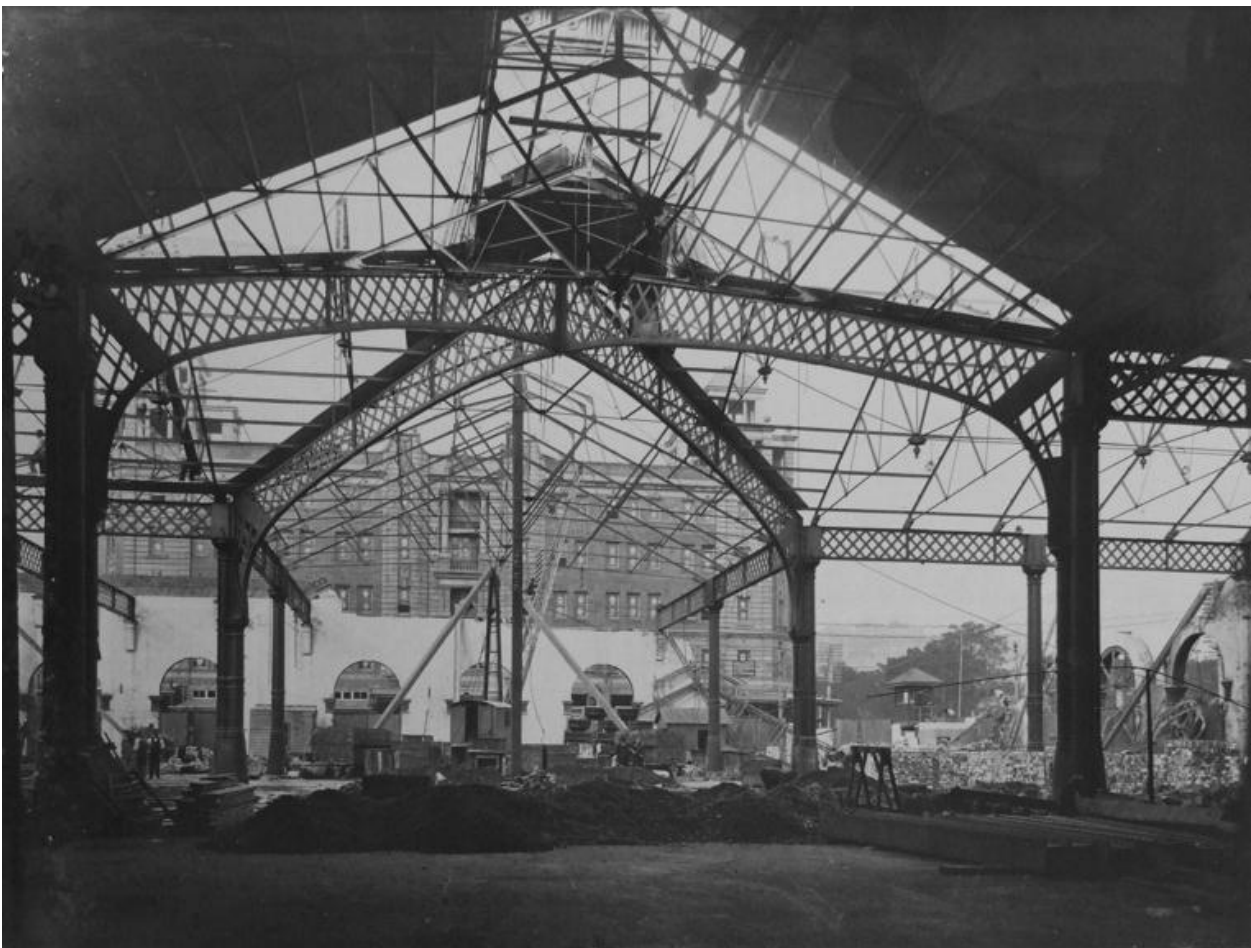


Figure 173 – Internal view looking towards Campbell Street showing demolition of market building in progress, 2 July 1913.

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3423

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<sup>52</sup> Specifications quoted in Thorne, *Capitol*, p6

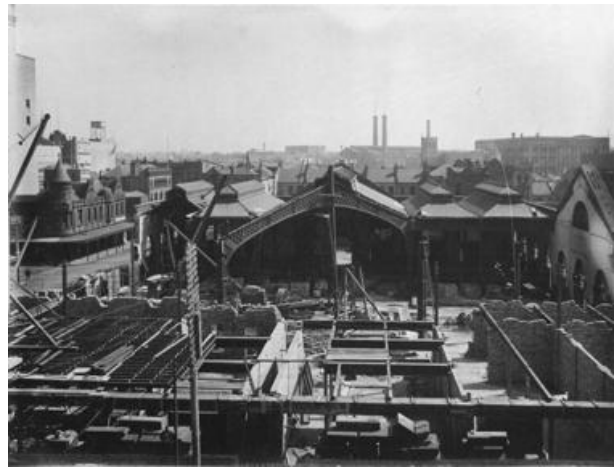
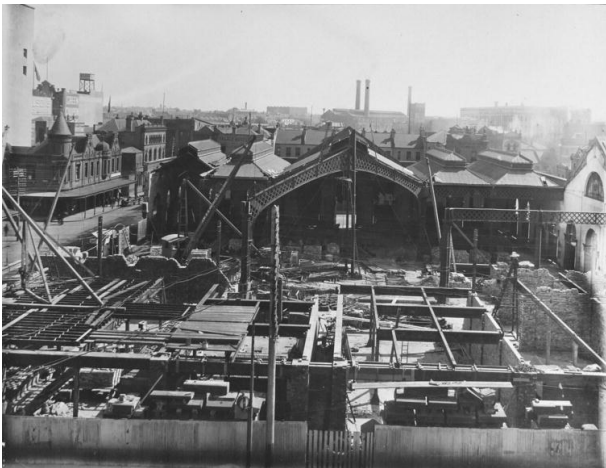


Figure 174 – Demolition of old and new Belmore Markets and construction of Manning building (foreground), 27 August 1913 (left) and 3 September 1913 (right). Site of Hippodrome in background.

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3430



Figure 175 - Conversion of New Belmore Market to Hippodrome for Wirth Bros, 18 August 1914.

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3270 (left) and NSCA CRS 51/3271 (right)

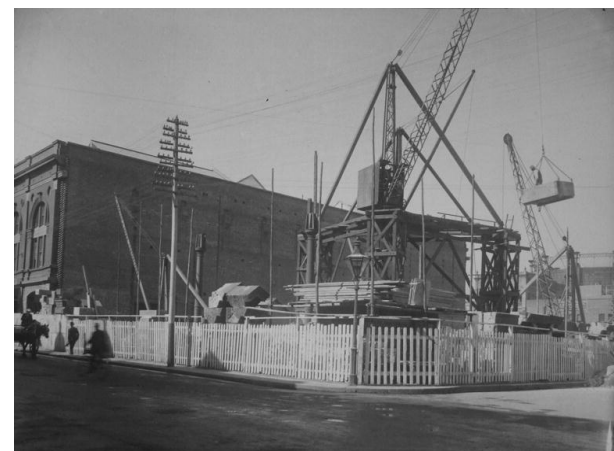


Figure 176 - Conversion of New Belmore Market to Hippodrome for Wirth Bros, 18 August 1914.

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3273 (left) and NSCA CRS 51/3274 (right)



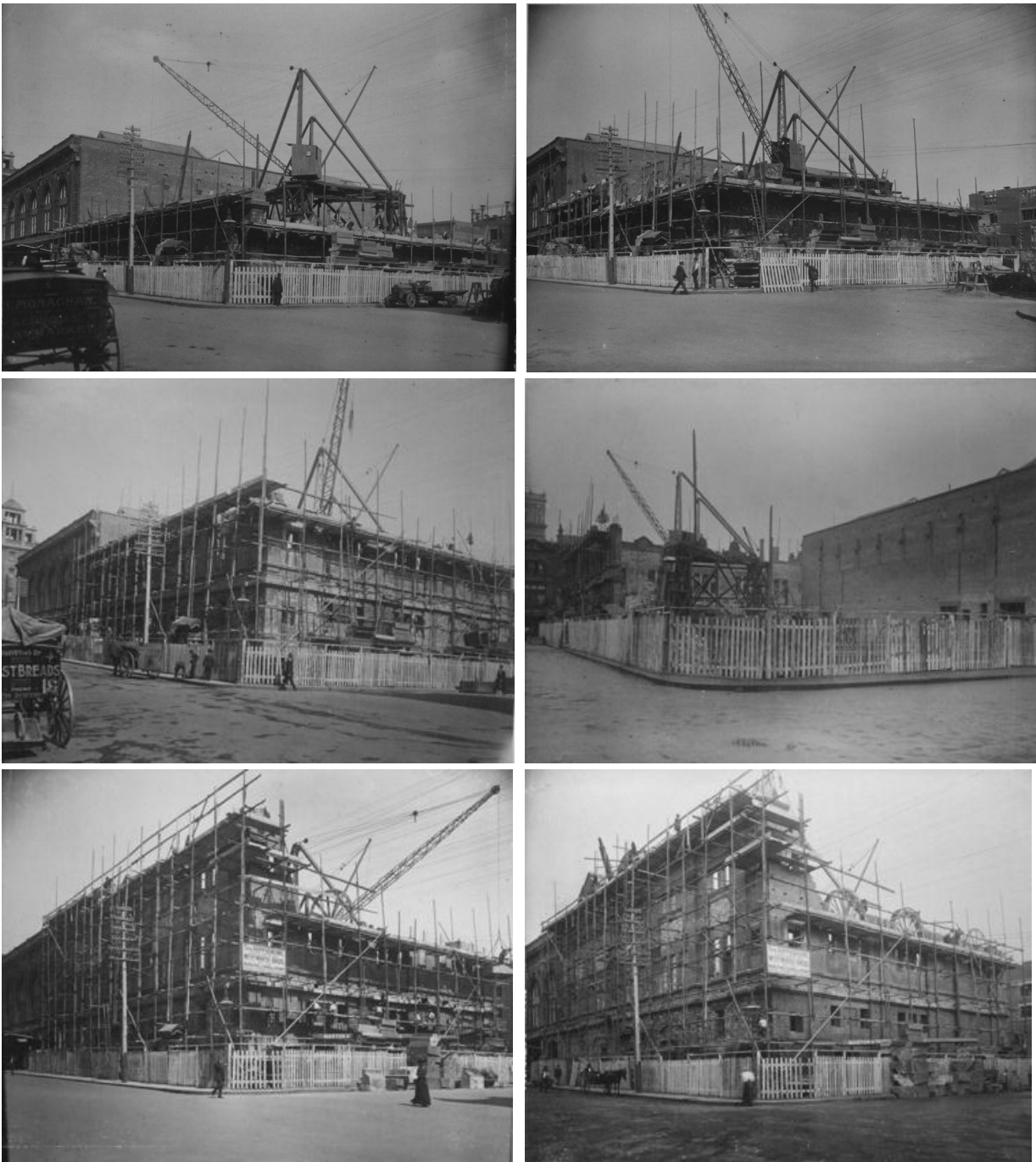


Figure 177 – Selection of photographs documenting building works to convert New Belmore Market to Hippodrome for Wirth Bros, 28 September - 23 November 1914.

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3283 (top left), NSCA CRS 51/3284 (top right), NSCA CRS 51/3290 (middle left), NSCA CRS 51/3292 (middle right) NSCA CRS 51/3297 (bottom left), NSCA CRS 51/3299 (bottom right)

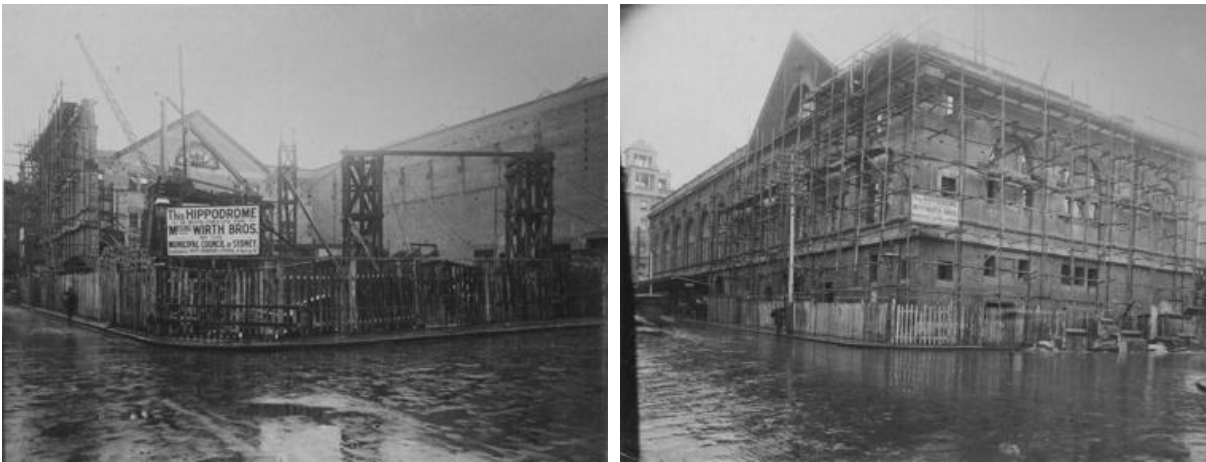


Figure 178 - Progress of construction of Wirth Hippodrome, 21 December 1914.

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3306 (left) and NSCA CRS 51/3307 (right)



Figure 179 - Facade of Wirth Hippodrome, 11 January 1915.

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3313

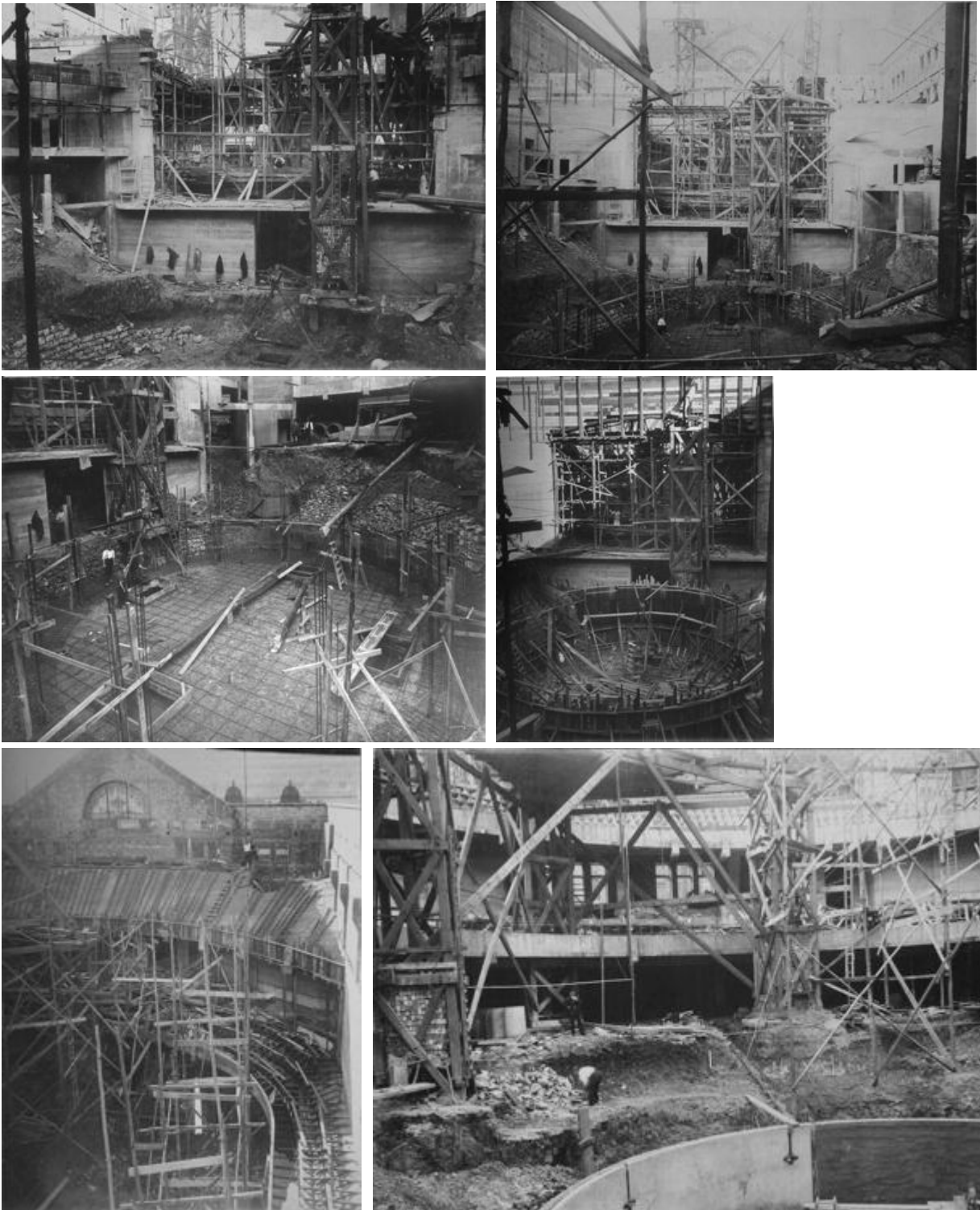


Figure 180 – Progress of construction inside Hippodrome, 1 June - 9 August 1915.

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3354 (top left), NSCA CRS 51/3355 (top right), NSCA CRS 51/3356 (middle left), NSCA CRS 51/3363 (middle right), NSCA CRS 51/3370 (bottom left), NSCA CRS 51/3375 (bottom right)



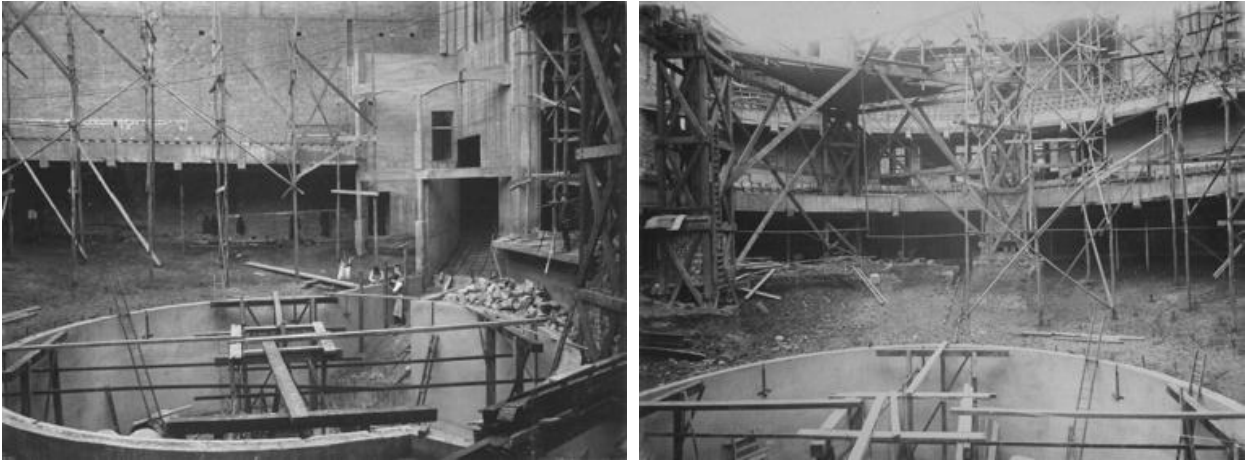


Figure 181 – Progress of construction inside Hippodrome, 23 August 1915.

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3379 (left) and NSCA CRS 51/3380 (right)

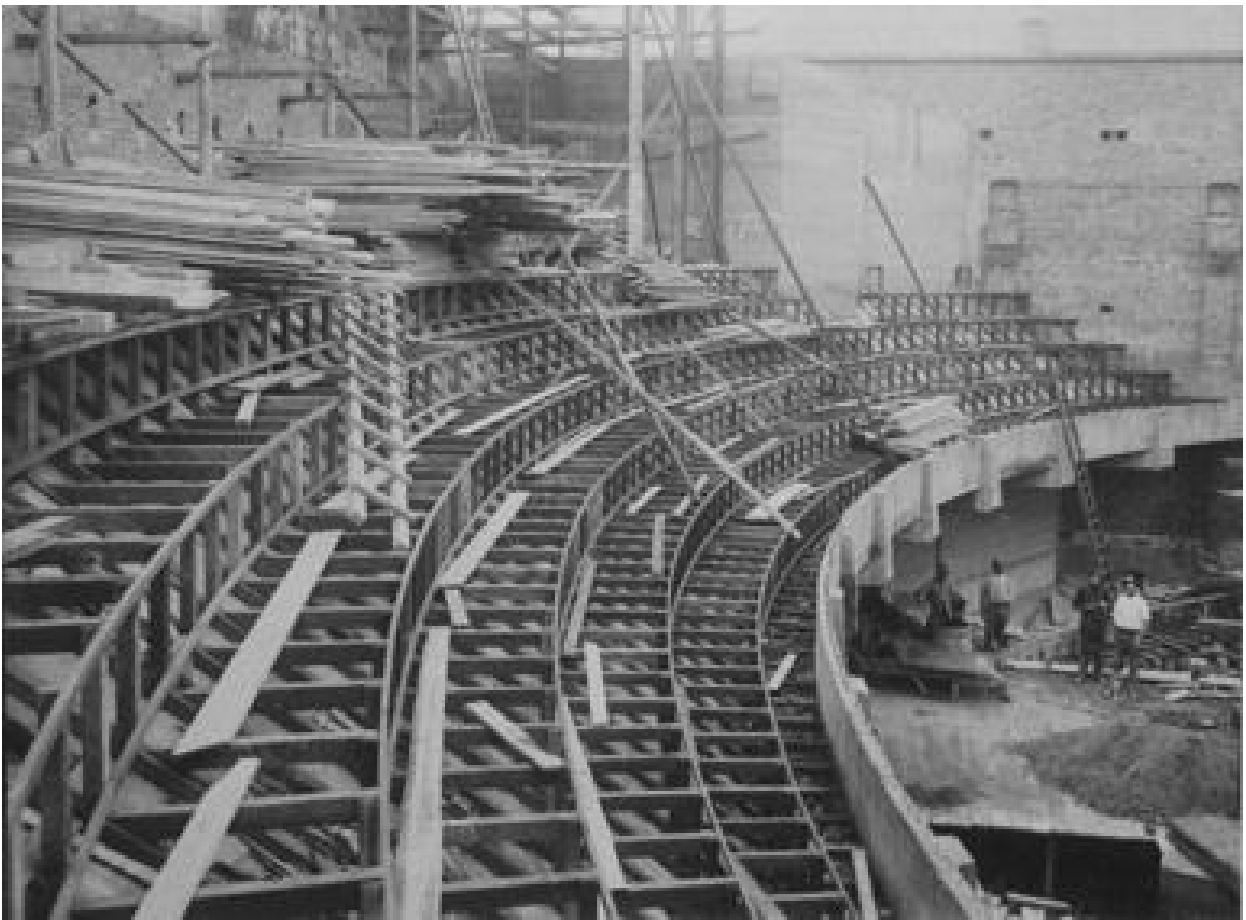


Figure 182 – Construction of seating within Hippodrome, 13 September 1915.

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3385

### 3.3.1. Hippodrome Design

Wirth Bros Circus, like its Australian rivals, kept in touch with performers and developments in the United States. One of the latter was the New York Hippodrome, designed by J.H. Morgan and erected in 1904.<sup>53</sup> It was claimed at the time to be the largest building in the world, but the feature which caught the attention of Wirth Bros was the water tank for aquatic spectacles. This they decided to introduce into their comparatively diminutive antipodean Hippodrome.

The Sydney tank, constructed of reinforced concrete, was forty feet in diameter and twelve feet in depth. Large box section slides entered it from the wings to facilitate the entry of seals and polar bears. When not in use the pool was covered by a strong steel-framed platform which, when locked into place, converted the area to a circus ring with a low perimeter parapet. The platform was raised hydraulically from the base of the pool.<sup>54</sup> Although no plans survive of the actual tank, it is clear from Merriman's basement plan of September 1913, that the pool was intended early on, although it was not included in the original tender. The tank was photographed under construction in August 1915 (Figure 183). Although an opening has been cut in the stage end and the parapets have been removed, the concrete fabric of the tank remains in place.

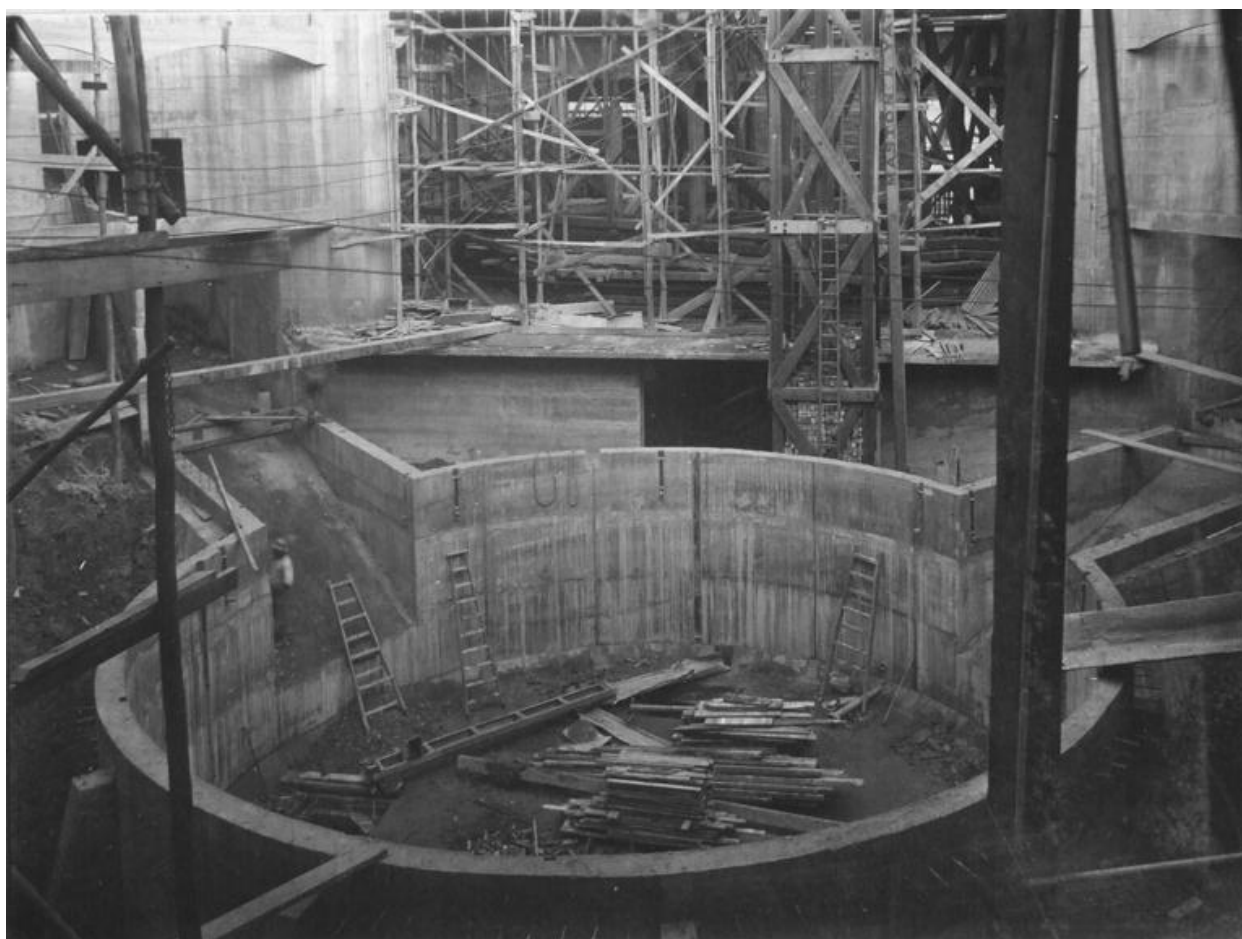


Figure 183 – Aquatic tank nearing completing within the Hippodrome, 9 August 1915.

Source: *City of Sydney Archives, NSCSA CRS 51/3374*

A commodious stage, 72 feet wide (60'6" clear) and 54 feet deep<sup>55</sup>, was separated from the pool by a concave orchestra pit. On the remaining three sides, amphitheatric stalls seating was arranged. Two narrow galleries were superimposed at the rear of the auditorium. The stalls patrons gained access from the centre of the Campbell Street vestibule and large exits were provided for them in the centre of the Parker Street facade and the eastern wall. The lower of the two galleries (dress circle) was gained via the marble stairs

<sup>53</sup> Hanson, *op. cit.*, pp11,18

<sup>54</sup> *Vade Mecum*, quoted in Thorne, *Theatre Buildings*, p11, 9

<sup>55</sup> 72 feet equals 21.0 metres. 60 feet 6 inches equals 18.56 metres. 54 feet equals 16.45 metres.

flanking the vestibule, and additional exits were provided behind the boxes near the proscenium arch. Patrons of the upper or "peanut" gallery used separate entrances and enclosed "fire resisting" stairs at the north-eastern and north-western corners of the building and could only escape by the same route. The Council listed seating as: gallery, 460; dress circle, 410; stalls, 1,000; and an extra 357 if the circus ring was not needed for a performance.<sup>56</sup> There were a few additional seats in the pairs of boxes on either side of the proscenium arch.

Because the dress circle and upper gallery were so narrow, sight lines for stage, ring and even aerial acts were unimpeded from almost any part of the auditorium. Supporting gallery posts presented the only problem. The Council claimed the auditorium could be used as a hippodrome, circus, theatre, opera house, concert hall, vaudeville entertainment hall or for "photo plays" (early silent motion pictures).

A steel truss roof covered the Hippodrome. Six of the original seven trusses were raised some 12 feet (3.65 metres) in 1927-28 to accommodate the atmospheric ceiling of the Capitol Theatre. As the trusses were not taken down but raised simultaneously by screw jacks, the original timber framing which held the stamped metal coffers or domes remains between the Hippodrome trusses. The frames would also have carried ventilating apparatus and lighting equipment.<sup>57</sup>

On completion in 1916, the auditorium was decorated with a surprisingly old-fashioned and conservative Late Victorian colour scheme of dark brown dado, deep chocolate dado line and cream above. This scheme was visible in 1990 on an exposed western wall of the auditorium.



Figure 184 – Wirths Hippodrome, 1916.

Source: *City of Sydney Archives*, NSCA CRS 43/1916 p177

<sup>56</sup> NSCA/1 plan collection, City of Sydney Archives

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p9 and *Building*, 12 February 1929, p61 and inspection of fabric, 1990



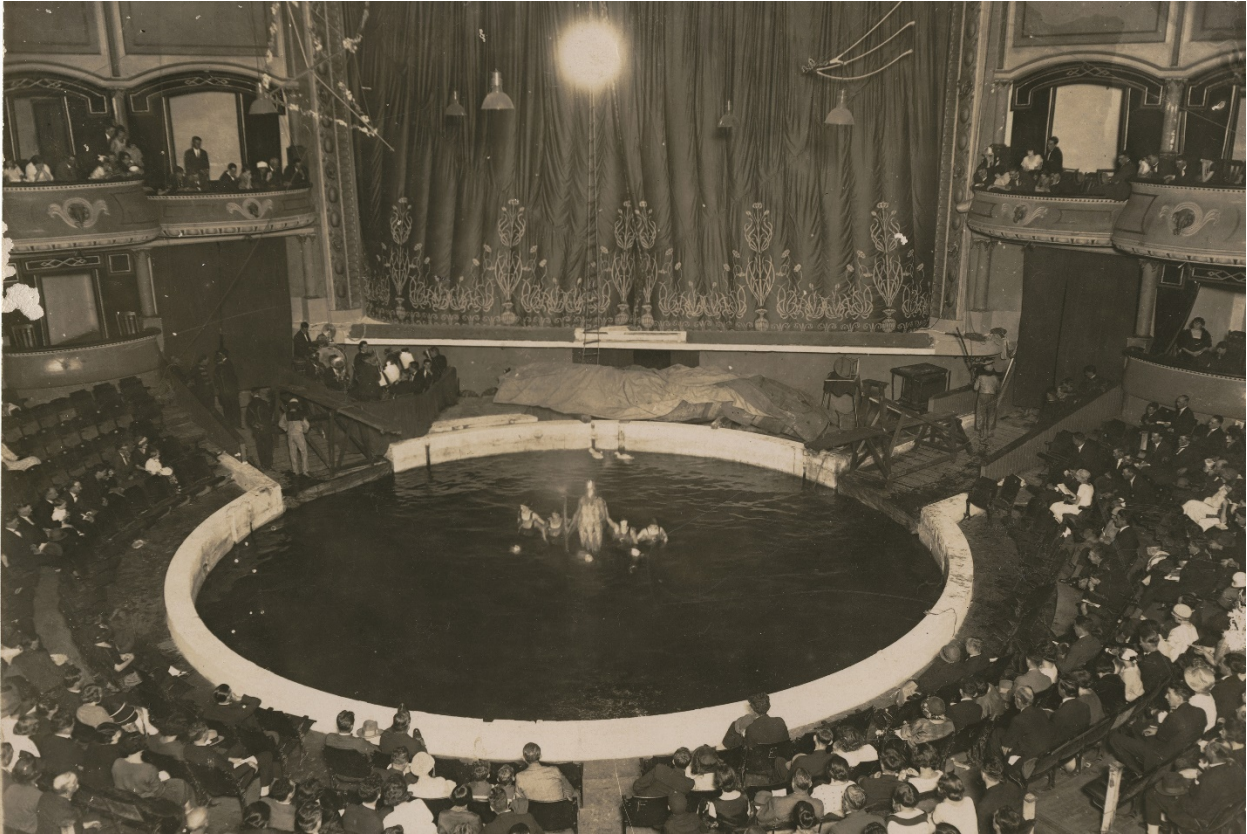


Figure 185 – Hippodrome aquatic tank, c.1916.

Source: MAAS Collection, 2012/104/1-3/61

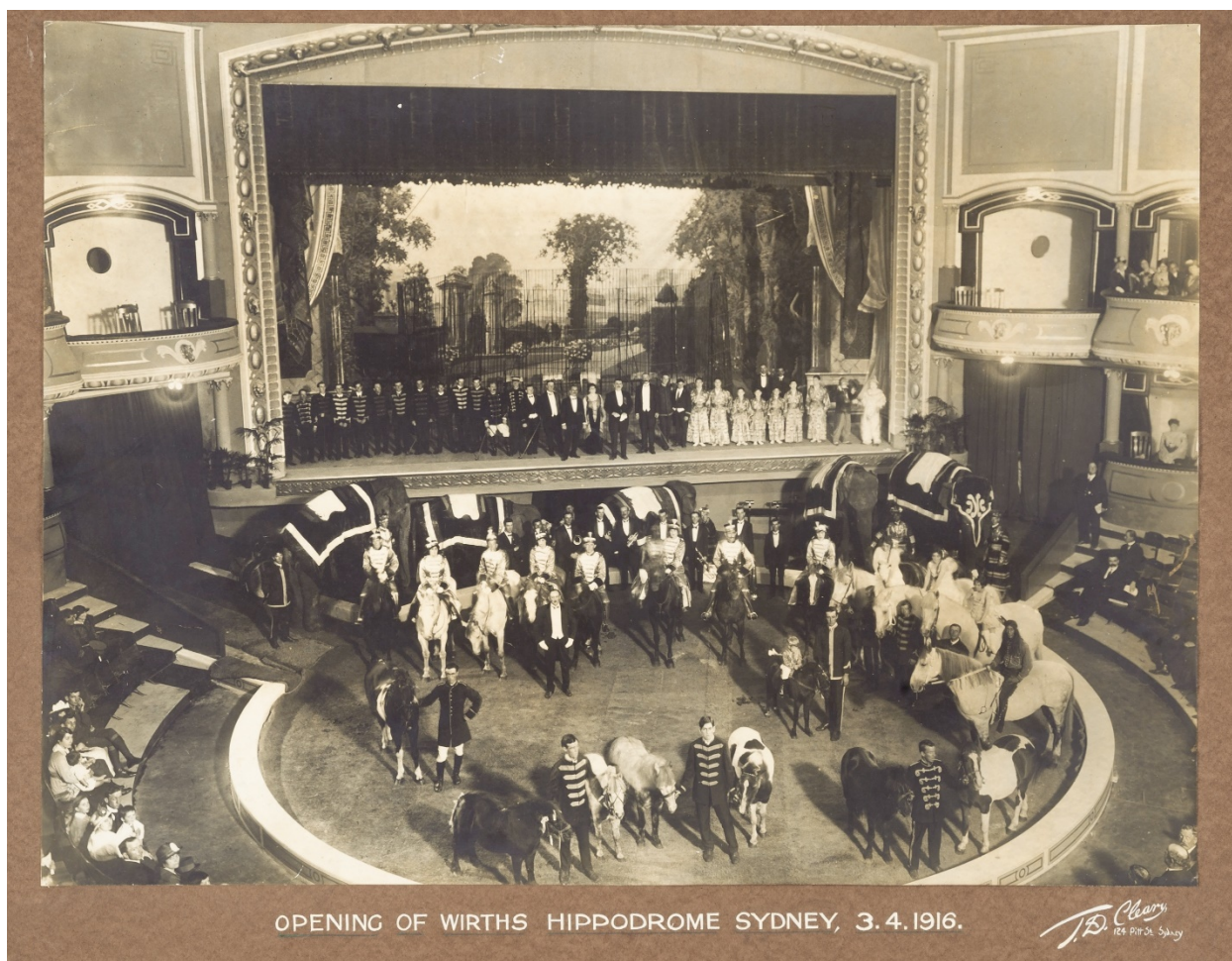
Wirths Hippodrome was officially opened on 29 March 1916. The opening night program having been delayed to the following Monday on account of the late arrival of English, Japanese and other artists travelling from Europe aboard the RMS Mooltan. The opening show opened to widespread acclaim, with the newspapers congratulating the Council and Wirth Brothers on their enterprise. *The Sun* hailed the opening show a great success. Several acts merited special mention, including the Riogoku Family (Japanese acrobats), Captain Hulling's performing seals, Miss May Martin Wirth (equestrienne), Cossack cavalry exhibition by M Mussie Mamive, Losetta Twins (trapeze work) and Lovani's high wire act.<sup>58</sup> *The Referee* pronounced Wirth Brothers new venture a "brilliant opening success"<sup>59</sup> while the *Freeman's Journal* praised Wirth Bros. "clever and dashing entertainment in which quite a constellation of brilliant stars took part".<sup>60</sup> The show played to packed houses throughout April and May. Leonard Durrell's military "aqua-drama" *Kultur* premiered in the Hippodrome on 1 June.

<sup>58</sup> "Wirth's New Hippodrome", *The Sun*, 4 April 1916, p8

<sup>59</sup> "Wirth Brothers' Hippodrome", *Referee*, 5 April 1916, p15

<sup>60</sup> "Wirth Bros' Hippodrome", *Freemans Journal*, 6 April 1916, p29





OPENING OF WIRTHS HIPPODROME SYDNEY, 3.4.1916.

J.D. Cleary  
124 Pitt St. Sydney

Figure 186 - Official opening of Wirths Hippodrome Sydney, 3 April 1916. Photograph by JD Cleary.

Source: MAAS Collection, 2012/104/1-2/9

The opening season was a financial success, unlike the programs which followed in 1916 and 1917 which included two seasons of films presented by Wirths Hippodrome Pictures, Kemp's Buck Jumping Show and the circus's Eastern Season featuring King Neptune and the "lovely diving mermaids". However, Wirth Brothers could not recapture the highs of 1916. Despite the Wirth family's best efforts to make the theatre financially viable as a circus, the Hippodrome lay 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 rent three times.

Endeavouring to reverse the theatre's fortunes, Wirths reached agreement with other enterprises for the use of the Hippodrome, including William Anderson, the melodrama specialist. Wirths and Anderson jointly produced several dramatic entertainments. Weekly plays included "Robbery Under Arms", "When London Sleeps". The Hippodrome also hosted several popular vaudeville and pantomime programs. Another innovation was the screening of films, which had commenced soon after opening in 1916.

One of the great success stories in this period was the popularity of boxing programs run by Wirth Brothers in conjunction with Harry Keesing, and subsequently Stadiums Ltd. The first boxing event took place in May 1918 and included a programme of vaudeville events.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the success of a range of popular entertainment programs at the Hippodrome, Wirths reportedly applied unsuccessfully to Council to end their lease in 1919. Locked into a twenty-one-year lease and with mounting costs, in 1927, Wirths applied to the Council to convert the building into a picture theatre, and simultaneously engaged Henry E White to act for them. In May the same year, William Kenworthy, architect, submitted White's plans for the remodelling of the Hippodrome to the Chief Secretary's Department. The drawings were approved subject to fourteen requirements. The plans show a traditional "hard top" cinema.

<sup>61</sup> "Boxing at the Hippodrome", *Sunday Times*, 12 May 1918, p4

White submitted revised drawings for Union Theatres for an “atmospheric” theatre along the lines of those designed by American architect, John Eberson.

Soon after, an agreement was signed by Wirths, the Council and Capitol Theatre (Sydney), a division of Union Theatres, whereupon the residue of the lease was conveyed to the film exhibitor, and the lease reassigned to Wirths as mortgagee. Simultaneously, Wirth Bros vacated the premises.

Wirths “long and costly association with the Hippodrome property” came to an end in 1927, “driven out by escalating costs, expensive improvements to safety and ventilation, and changing audience expectations”.<sup>62</sup>



Figure 187 – Wirths Hippodrome, 19 August 1919.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 51/4709

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<sup>62</sup> Dent, *op. cit.*, p89





Figure 188 – Wirths Hippodrome, 1920-1928. Manning Building at far-right fronting Campbell Street.

Source: SLNSW, hall\_34998h.jpg



Figure 189 – Traffic in Hay Street, 5.30 pm, October 1923 showing Wirths Hippodrome in centre looking east from George Street.

Source: SLNSW, d1\_17776h.jpg

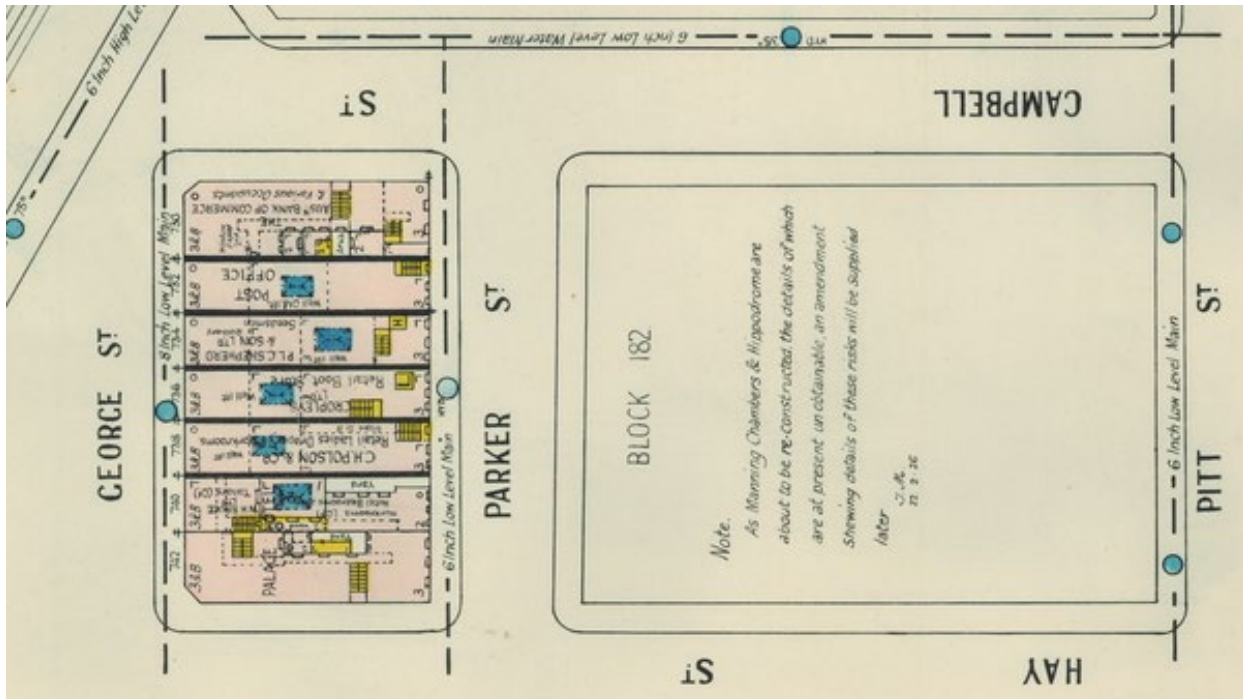


Figure 190 – Fire Underwriters Association of N.S. Wales Detail Survey Maps, Hippodrome Block No. 182, 22 February 1926. North to top of page.

Source: SLNSW, Digital order no. a1358104h.jpg

### 3.3.2. The Atmospheric Theatre

The period 1924-32, was the grand era of the atmospheric theatre. During this brief period, over 100 atmospheric theatres were built in the United States. Their progress was only halted by the depression. Then, when construction resumed, "Moderne" cinemas had become the predominant mode. From 1927, five atmospheric theatres were built in Australia: The Capitol, Sydney, 1927-28; The State, Melbourne, 1928-29; the Ambassadors, Perth, 1928; the Empire, Goulburn, 1929-30; and the Plaza, Paddington, Queensland, 1930.

Most picture palace buffs agree that the "atmospheric" theatre arrived almost full blown with John Eberson's 1923 design of Hoblitzelle's "Majestic" in Houston, Texas. It was a distinct departure from the mainstream picture palace design which had developed progressively during the first quarter of the twentieth century from the conventions of the opera house. Such orthodox theatres had increasingly luxurious decoration and were intended to provide a palatial architectural setting for their patrons. In the trade, they were known as "hard tops" and the State Theatre, Sydney, is a fine example.

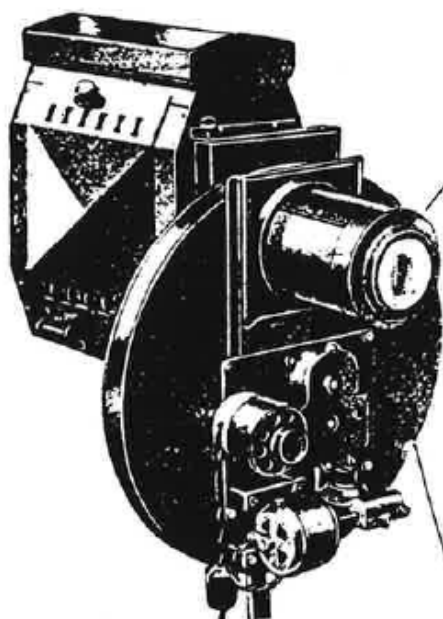
Atmospheric theatres, on the other hand, sought to create the illusion that the patron was sitting in an exotic and romantic courtyard or amphitheatre under a brilliant night sky. It was a sky that could be transformed by dramatic lighting effects projected from a highly developed version of the magic lantern (Figure 191). The Brenkert Company's 1928 catalogue lists some of the effects:

*Aurora Borealis, Babbling Brook, Blizzard, Descending Clouds (for imaginary ascension trip), Flying Angels, Flying Birds, Flying Butterflies, Fire and Smoke, Flames, Lightning, Fast Moving Dark Storm Clouds, Moving River, Ocean Waves, Rain, Sand Storm, Snow, Volcano in Eruption (with flowing lava and rain of fire and ashes), Waterfall, Waving American Flag, Flying Fairies, Flying Aeroplanes, Falling Roses, Twinkling Stars, Rainbow and Rising Bubbles.*

To provide an appropriate ground for these atmospheric performances a ceiling of smooth plaster, painted electric (nearly blue bag) blue, curved from behind the side walls without interruption or blemish. For those who haven't experienced an atmospheric theatre - Will Longstaff's "Menin Gate at Midnight" in its specially lit room at the Canberra War Memorial Museum approximates the effects. It is perhaps not coincidental that Longstaff painted this, his most atmospheric of pictures, in 1927 at the height of the craze for atmospheric



theatres. A wide span garden pergola, or its equivalent, was the only distraction permitted in this smooth facsimile of the sky, but as it was located at the rear of the auditorium behind the backs of the patrons at a place when the seating was closest to the sky, it had a certain logic. The pergola's practical advantage was that it provided a cover for ventilation grills.



## BRENOGRAPH Junior

*Reliable  
and built to remain so*

Like every unit in the complete line of Brenkert projectors and lighting devices, Brenograph Junior was designed to produce certain results, effectively and well. It is absolutely reliable.

It may be operated over a wide range of speeds and is automatic and reliable over the entire speed range. Brenograph Junior is especially well adapted to short range work for covering large areas, and its automatic operation and compactness make it ideal for remote control, with the origin of the effects hidden from the patrons of the theatre. It is decidedly to your advantage to write for full details.



For concealed work, Brenograph Junior with its motor driven effect and automatic operation requires a space but 14" wide 10" high and 30" deep. No matter where located it may easily be controlled from the main switchboard.

# for Atmospheric Theatres

## The Appeal of Light in Motion

A canopy of clouds, moving majestically across a field of twinkling stars! Atmosphere! Illusion! The romance of pictures viewed beneath nocturnal skies! The atmospheric theatre, combining light and motion, produces these effects that carry an almost irresistible appeal.

Brenograph Junior creates this—and more. Animated scenic effects, projected back stage from the wings, from overhead or, in small theatres from the projection room, are now available, at a minimum cost—through Brenograph Junior.

Its interchangeable discs, projected at any desired speed, give you, easily and realistically, moving clouds, flying birds and swiftly passing country panoramas. Or, at a moment's notice, you may have a driving rain, falling flowers or ocean waves.

*Let us send you an illustrated folder describing Brenograph Junior in full and listing moving scenic and color effects now available. Free on request.*

**BRENKERT LIGHT PROJECTION CO.  
DETROIT**

# Brenkert

**PROJECTORS—EFFECTIVE LIGHTING DEVICES**

Figure 191 – Advertisement for Brenograph Junior, projector of illusionary effects for atmospheric theatres.

Source: Motion Picture News, 20 December 1927, p14 as reproduced in Kerr, op.cit., p18

All standing elements under this sky were treated as if they were external architectural features: the projection box and the proscenium arch were capped by roofing elements; and the side walls were penetrated by gates, arches and niches and supported temples, balconies, and gables depending on the character chosen. Eberson tried to avoid repeating his auditorium interiors - a difficult feat considering his prodigious output. To reduce the problem, he researched a wide variety of exotic styles and situations. For example, illustrations in a 1927 edition of the *Motion Picture News* show his use of the following themes:

- Baroque Deluxe
- Classic
- Castillian Castle
- French Fantasy
- Greek
- Italian Renaissance
- Italian Colonnade
- Italian Garden Court
- Moorish
- Oriental
- Persian Shrine
- Courtyard
- Roman Temple
- Rustic Spanish
- Spanish Churrigueresque
- Spanish Mission.<sup>63</sup>

Nor did Eberson mind mixing his themes where the result might help provide a novel and spectacular ambience for the patrons. Such vulgar eclecticism might have displeased art and architectural critics, but it helped pack people into the theatres.

Eberson's invention of the atmospheric clearly owed much to his familiarity with the highly decorated Baroque and Rococo elevations and coved tromp l'oeil ceilings of Dresden and Vienna where he had received his education. After settling in St Louis, Missouri, in 1901, the young Eberson would have had these impressions reinforced by the designs for the great expositions then fashionable in the United States. Jane Preddy describes them as "theatrical, impermanent, eclectic and escapist" and notes the abundance of "statuary, gazebos, trellises, columns, cherubim and urns". Typical of this oeuvre was the 1904 St Louis World Fair to which Eberson was doubtless exposed.<sup>64</sup>

Apart from his creative and organisational skills, Eberson was a super salesman. Moreover, his product was as alluring to theatre management as it was to the patrons: the lightly constructed plain ceilings and interchangeable plaster decoration made his auditoria much cheaper than the grand hardtops of the 1920s. In addition, Eberson backed up his design and supervision by organising a workshop ("Michelangelo Studios") to supply plaster ornamental and sculptural features to his clients.<sup>65</sup>

The atmospheric theatre was intended for silent movies and the live performance of sound. Its acoustic characteristics, whether sophisticated or not, were designed with this in mind. Recorded sound did not become effective until the late 1920s and was introduced to most of the theatres as an afterthought. The fact that Eberson and his contemporaries called their creations "theatres" emphasised the live dramatic components.

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<sup>63</sup> *Motion Picture News*, Part II, 20 December 1927

<sup>64</sup> Preddy, *Palaces of Dreams*, 1989

<sup>65</sup> Naylor, Theatres, in James Semple Kerr, *The Haymarket and the Capitol: A conservation plan for the area bounded by George, Campbell, Pitt and Hay Streets, Sydney* (May 1990) p. 19



The feature movie was accompanied by an orchestra, the size of which depended on the importance of the theatre. Performances were given on Robert Hope-Jones' extraordinary invention the "unit orchestra" - the most famous manufacturer of which was Rudolf Wurlitzer. Apart for its capacity to imitate all the instruments of the orchestra, it could, as Ben Hall said:

*conjure up nightingales, canaries, galloping horses, steamboat and train whistles, auto horns...fire engine sirens, air planes, hurricanes, swishing surf, rain on the roof, telephone bells, door bells, trolley bells and the sound of smashing crockery - all with hair-raising verisimilitude.*<sup>66</sup>

It was capable of producing honest music of compelling emotional force when properly played. Without it the movie palace would have been as soulless as an armory.<sup>67</sup>

Ross Thorne's quote from "Roxy" Rothafel puts the presentation of programs during the 1920s into perspective:

*Of course the picture is important, and we could not do without it, but what we have tried to do is build around it an atmospheric program that is colorful, entertaining and interesting. This type of program, with its ballets, musical presentations, stage settings, and lighting effects ... was originated by ourselves (i.e. the creative management of the individual theatre).*<sup>68</sup>

### 3.3.3. Capitol Theatre Conversion, 1927-1928

Despite the Hippodrome's versatility, it was not a commercial success and, by 1926, Wirths had decided to remodel the building as a picture palace. In February 1927, Henry White prepared plans for the theatre conversion of the Hippodrome for "Capitol Theatre Sydney Limited". Simultaneously, Wirths wrote to the Sydney City Council requesting a "remodelling" of the building for its proposed new function. It is unclear whether Wirths were acting on their own behalf or whether they had already come to an informal arrangement with Stuart Doyle, the managing director of Union Theatres Ltd.

White's design comprised the conversion of the Hippodrome to a conventional "hard top" with a capacity of 2,999 seats (Figure 192). His plans were drawn up by WBG (?) and EWM, the latter initials being EW McGowan, who about that time was in the "Architectural Department" of Union Theatres.<sup>69</sup> The plans were "approved" by GN Kenworthy (who later designed the Cremorne Orpheum), probably because White had already departed for the United States with Stuart Doyle to review the latest developments in theatre design. It had been Doyle's stated intention "to build a chain of picture palaces to be known as the Million Dollar Theatres in capital cities"<sup>70</sup> and this was probably given an added impetus by Paramount threatening to build their own chain of theatres in Australia if Union did not "raise theatres good enough for Paramount's supposedly spectacular product".<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Hall, *Seats*, pp182-2

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p179

<sup>68</sup> Thorne, *Psychology*, p178

<sup>69</sup> Taken from stalls plan 3A for Capitol Theatre (provided by PTW) quoted in Kerr, *op. cit.*, p20

<sup>70</sup> O'Brien, *The Greater Union Story*, p32

<sup>71</sup> Blackmore, *op.cit.*, p10 quoting Tulloch

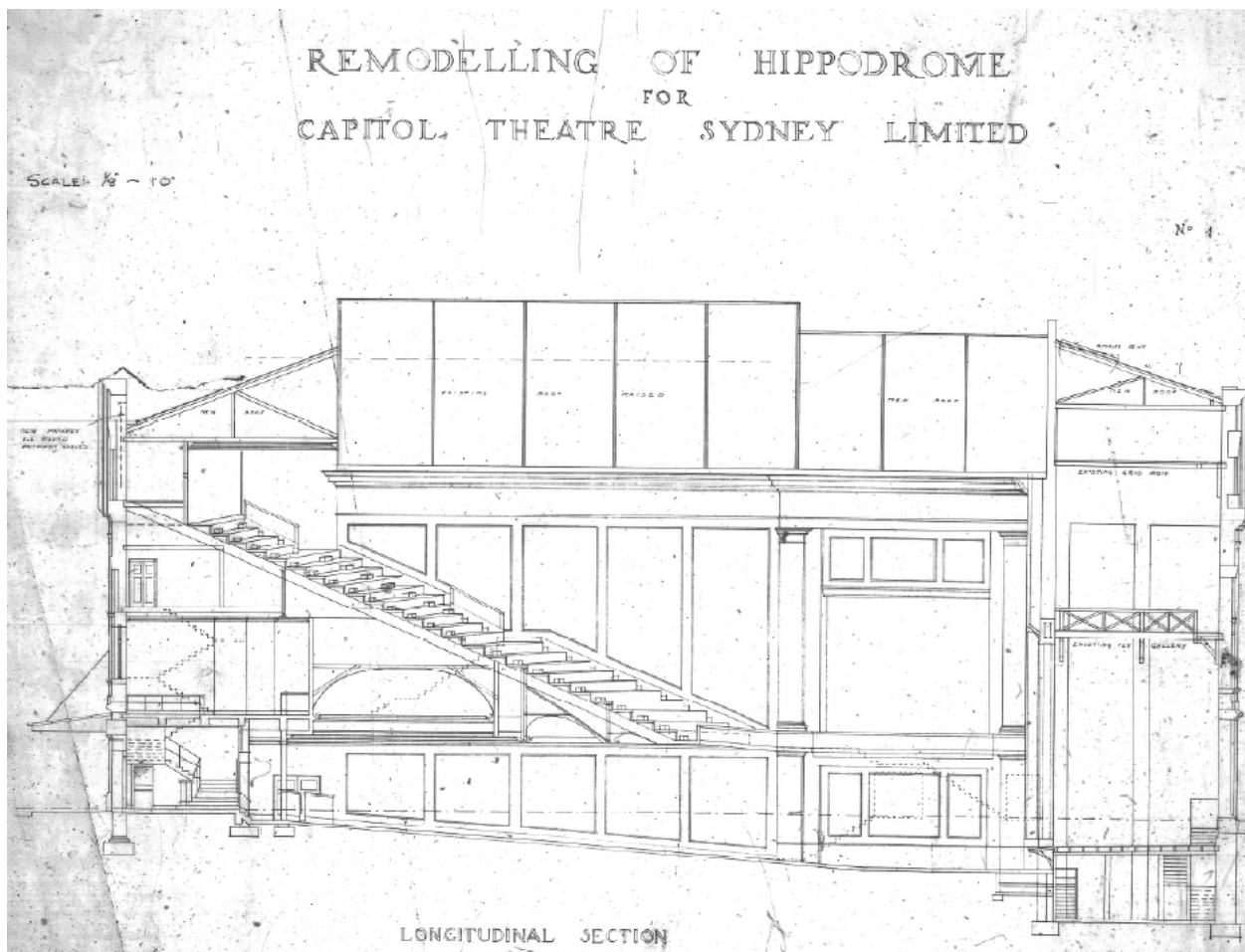


Figure 192 – John Eberson and Henry White sketches of the redesign of the Hippodrome.

Source: City of Sydney Archives

By 1927, Henry Eli White, originally from New Zealand, was a very experienced theatre designer based in Sydney. Before he closed his office in the 1930s depression, he had designed over 120 theatres for stage and cinema as well as the Bunnerong Power House.<sup>72</sup> Doyle, on the other hand, started his show business career as a "conjurer, ventriloquist and all round social entertainer".<sup>73</sup> No doubt his interest in illusion was one of the reasons he was so impressed by the new atmospheric theatres in the United States and engaged Eberson to provide White with designs for the conversion of the Hippodrome - designs which Doyle was to draw on again for atmospheric theatres in Perth and Melbourne.

The earliest surviving evidence of the Eberson White association is a series of plans dated 31 March 1927 and inscribed

*H.E. White – Sydney*

*John Eberson – Chicago*

*Associated Architects*

These, and all subsequent joint plans, were for an atmospheric auditorium very like Eberson's Riviera at Omaha, Nebraska, to which Doyle and White had taken a fancy.<sup>74</sup> Eberson was presumably less worried about duplication when the location was on the other side of the Pacific.

<sup>72</sup> Thorne, typescript biography of White, quoted in Kerr, *op.cit.*, p21

<sup>73</sup> O'Brien, *loc.cit.*, p32

<sup>74</sup> *Argus*, 6 January 1927, quoted by Thorne, *op. cit.*, p8



In May 1927, the Sydney City Council approved Wirths proposed alterations as shown in White's original February plans for the Hippodrome conversion, provided that the seal tank could be fully reinstated if required at the expiry of the lease and in the meantime would be made rat proof.<sup>75</sup> Sydney administrators still had a vivid memory of the disastrous bubonic plague carried by the rats of the city in 1900. Seven weeks later the lease was formally transferred to Union Theatres.

Construction work commenced on site on 12 August with a dedication ceremony. Well-known film actress, Edith Roberts, dedicated the Capitol, to "the art of the motion picture" and broke a bottle of champagne on the foundation stone.<sup>76</sup> The event was reported widely in the local press including in the *Sydney Morning Herald* which offered the following detailed description of the design of the new Capitol Theatre:

*A new era of motion picture theatre construction in Australia was ushered in yesterday by the dedication and christening of the Capitol Theatre, which is being erected in the Haymarket for Union Theatres Ltd., at a cost of £120,000. With a seating capacity of 3,200, it will not only be the largest theatre in the Commonwealth but also will embody a design entirely new to Australia. It will be what is known in London and American cities as an "atmospheric" theatre-a building in which a certain locality or period will be ex-pressed by art and decoration. It is dedicated to the "Art of the Silver Screen."*

*A patron when he enters the auditorium, surrounded by tapestries, statuary, and paintings, will look up, not to an orthodox roof, but to a seemingly illimitable space. He will be led to imagine that he is sitting beneath the open sky, for stars will twinkle in all naturalness, and clouds will pass across his field of vision. Rainbows he will see, as well as strikingly beautiful sunlight effects. This will be brought about by the special "star" and "cloud-making" machinery. In the purchase of which hundreds of pounds have been spent. Ingeniously designed spotlights will give rise to scenes of sunrise and sunset.*

*Both inside and out the Capitol will be designed in Venetian style. An elaborate piazza and garden will be reproduced, Venetian pictures will grace the walls, and the general effect will represent a public square in the old Italian town. Examples of marble statuary and art treasures will decorate the amphitheatre and loggia, such as wrought-iron gates, carved chairs, authentic copies of the grotesques on the Palace of Montepulciano, massive vases and jardinières and paintings.*

*The ground space of the Capitol will be 170ft by 102ft, and the auditorium will be 140ft x 102ft. As in most modern theatres, a gallery is being dispensed with, the plans providing for a dress circle and stalls only. The stage and orchestra stalls will be in the form of terraces. There will be one terrace for the string instruments of the orchestra, another for the wind instruments; the stage itself will represent another, and the screen on which the pictures are projected will constitute the fourth. A distinctive type of motion pictures and presentation, which will have many of the features of a stage revue and symphony concert, will be another innovation, providing for the engagement of perhaps 40 artists and performers each week. In this respect the tendency in the United States of filling almost half the programme with a musical presentation and the other half with a film will be followed.*

*Mr. AK Emmelheinz, who arrived in Sydney a few days ago to superintend the arrangement of the lighting effects, brought with him four cloud-making machines, 500 star-twinkling machines, and 120 spotlights, including a powerful naval searchlight. A number of important pieces of statuary are due to arrive shortly by the Aorangi, including such figures as the Venus de Medici, busts of Ajax, Venus Melos, Diana, The Wolf of the Capitol, Romulus and Remus, Minerva, Apollo, Venus of Capua, Julius Caesar, Amazonian Venus, and others. It is expected that the theatre will be opened in February of next year.*<sup>77</sup>

The Capitol duplicated Capitol Theatre, Chicago (Figure 193) and the Riviera Theatre, Omaha (Figure 194).

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<sup>75</sup> SCC Minutes, 31 May 1927 (343), CRS 1105/27, City of Sydney Archives, in Kerr, *loc. cit.*, p21

<sup>76</sup> "Unique christening", *Daily Telegraph*, 13 August 1927, p2; "Unique ceremony", *The Sun*, 12 August 1927, p9; "The Capitol", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 August 1927, p16

<sup>77</sup> "The Capitol: Dedication of the Theatre, Art of the Screen", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 August 1927, p16



Figure 193 – Capitol Theatre, Chicago, after 1925. – Designed by famed theatre architect John Eberson. Closed in 1974 and demolished in 1985.

Source: Cinema Treasures website, Capitol Theatre <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/987>, accessed 19 February 2019

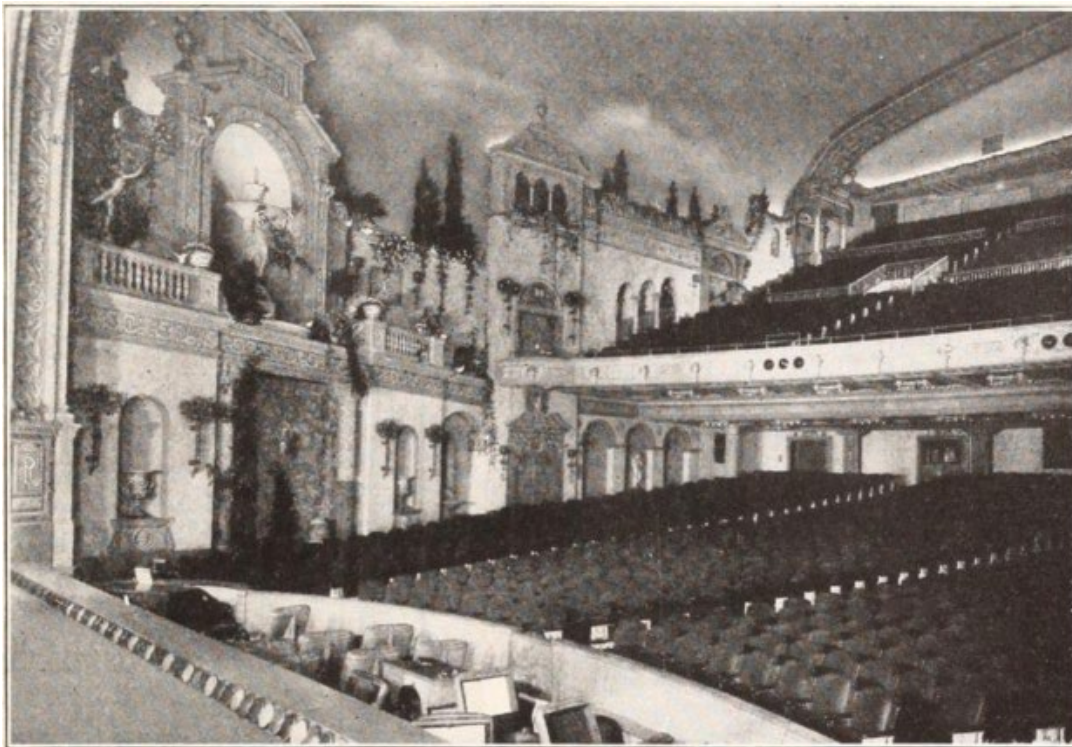


Figure 194 – Riviera Theatre, Omaha, after 1926. Name change to the Astro in 1960. Closed in the early 1980s but saved from demolition by Mrs Rose Blumkin. Theatre restored and reopened at Rose Blumkin Performing Arts Centre.

Source: Cinema Treasures website, <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/906>, accessed 19 February 2019



Figure 195 - The New Capitol Theatre, to cost £120,000.

Source: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 August 1927, p18

During succeeding months, Sydneysiders were kept informed on progress of the remodelling of the Hippodrome for the Capitol Theatre. *The Truth* reported in January 1928 that "Sydney's new Capitol, now being erected in the Haymarket, is running up figures that read like telephone numbers, or motor licence plates. Art treasures, £50,000; organ, £21,000; stage drapings, £3,000; electric signs, £5,000 – are a few items apart altogether from the constructional costs which alone exceed £145,000."<sup>78</sup>

The Hippodrome conversion followed closely the sketch plans prepared by Eberson under the architects' joint names, redrawn in more finished form by White's Sydney office. Similarly, the detailed American drawings of the ornamental side walls and proscenium arch specifically prepared for the Capitol were re-copied in Sydney. Both the American and Australian versions of the proscenium arch have survived, and it is possible to confirm that the latter was a precise copy of the former. Hence, it was deliberately misleading to omit Eberson's name from the Sydney version even if it was in the cause of chauvinistic propaganda for Union Theatres.

Although the design of the Capitol as an atmospheric theatre should certainly be attributed to Eberson, White's role as supervising architect, with all the organisational, structural and mechanical problems of conversion, was considerable. It was, moreover, an area in which he was particularly experienced and competent.

The conversion involved lifting the six northernmost roof trusses twelve feet to make room for the extended slope of the new gallery and the atmospheric ceiling. White dealt with the external consequences of this in a summary and rather unsatisfactory way, probably as a result of client pressure for rapid completion but perhaps also because the perceived value of the precinct as townscape was being devalued by changing fashion. He simply extended the parapet to the required height, rendering it a disproportionate, overbearing and poorly detailed feature. In addition, he plastered the bays of the Campbell Street facade with an

<sup>78</sup> "Capitol-£350,000", *Truth*, 22 January 1928, p22



inappropriate, grossly textured, rough cast and had little regard for the quality of the facade when making some of the window insertions. Finally, the theatre was painted white, thus losing the relationship of brick, terracotta and Pyrmont stone, although this was probably required by Union Theatres to increase night visibility.<sup>79</sup>

It seems that the treatment of the heightened facade was either referred to Eberson or tackled on his own initiative. In December 1927, he prepared a more grammatical remodelling of the Campbell Street fabric to cope with the problem. He removed the pediment (and thus its awkward relationship with the parapet), improved the parapet detailing (including large ventilator cartouches) and gave the former arcade bays a more sympathetic treatment. The effect was typical of the Neo Georgian revival of the 1920s. Francis Greenway, Hardy Wilson and Morton Herman would surely have considered it a great improvement on what was actually constructed.<sup>80</sup>

As lighting was to be a major feature, Union Theatres' technical manager, AE Emmelhainz, was dispatched to the United States to study atmospheric techniques, returning in August 1927. The bulk of the plans on which the interior conversion was based were prepared the same month and continuously revised over the next few weeks in what must have been a very intensive exercise. Plans for decorative detailing and fittings followed in December and January.

*Building* claimed that refinements in the ventilation system perfected by Emmelhainz were subsequently adopted by Eberson in the United States<sup>81</sup> and that the installation in the Sydney Capitol was one of the most effective and, at £10,000, the most expensive in Australia.<sup>82</sup>

The opening of the Capitol in April 1928 was a grand affair. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the first nighters:

*...passed into an enchanted region where the depth of the blue heavens had something magical about it, and something heavily exotic. Clouds passed light over; then stars began to twinkle. Then again all was blue and clear.*

*This "atmospheric" effect had been carried out, not only in the auditorium itself, but also in the entrance lounge, so that it leapt upon the visitors the instant they left the street. The construction and decorations were all in the Venetian style. Facing the entrance above the doors which led to the stalls ran a slender balustrade, with tapestries hanging over it and lying against the pinkish-brown, variegated stucco of the walls. At either end stairways in two flights ran up to the balcony. Everywhere one looked there was bas-reliefs set into the wall, tapestries hanging, twisted pillars of red and gold.*

*In the auditorium itself there was a much greater profusion of sculpture and architectural detail and objects of art; but the great size of the place enabled all this to be set forth with no suspicion of cramping. Indeed the designers have achieved a remarkable feeling of depth and vastness. The two sides of the theatre are quite dissimilar in treatment. On the left, as one faced the screen the irregular facade terminated in a delightful garden, with a round tower in the midst supported by red and white Florentine pillars, with flowering vines drooping down towards the orchestra. with flocks of snowy doves. On the right a series of huge pedestals and niches, bearing reproductions of the Hermes of Praxiteles, the Capitoline Wolf and other famous statues, and thrown into relief by the decorative cypress trees behind, led down to a large palace-front with a balcony. As for the proscenium itself, that was roofed in red tiles, to heighten the feeling of out-of-doors, surmounted by groups of beautiful glowing lamps, and very richly ornamented. A particularly attractive feature being a row of peacocks with electric lights behind them.*

*The lighting in fact played a great part in the theatre's success. In general it was diffused and gained a pleasantly restful quality from the blue that floated in the roof: but at the same time bulbs had been concealed here and there, so as to bring out the features of the decoration and give the surroundings vivacity. Sometimes, when all the main lights had been extinguished, there remained a charming half-glow on the proscenium with the lamps a glow of scarlet in the niches behind the statues and a yellow glare behind some trellising at the sides as the dominant notes.*<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Kerr, *op. cit.*, p22

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Building*, 12 February 1928, p87

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> "The Capitol, richly ornamented theatre, opening ceremony", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 1928, p4

The *Herald* went on to comment on the orchestra and the Wurlitzer rising into the auditorium on their platform lifts, the jazz band performing on the stage, and the shorts and feature films. Not mentioned, but part of the early programs, was a twenty-member Capitol Ballet. The following year (1929) the theatre was fitted to screen “talkies”. It was a spectacular but brief flowering as by 1931-32 Greater Union was in financial difficulties with the depression. In November 1932, the Capitol closed its doors for renovations and alterations, and in the words of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, bring it “into line with the most modern theatres on the Continent and in America”.<sup>84</sup>



Figure 196 – Foyer decorated with fresh flowers for Opening Night, 1928

Source: <https://www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/history.aspx>, viewed 3 December 2018

<sup>84</sup> “The Capitol”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 November 1932, p10



Figure 197 – Capitol Theatre in 1928, viewed from the corner of Campbell Street and Parker Lane.

Source: <https://www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/history.aspx>, viewed 3 December 2018

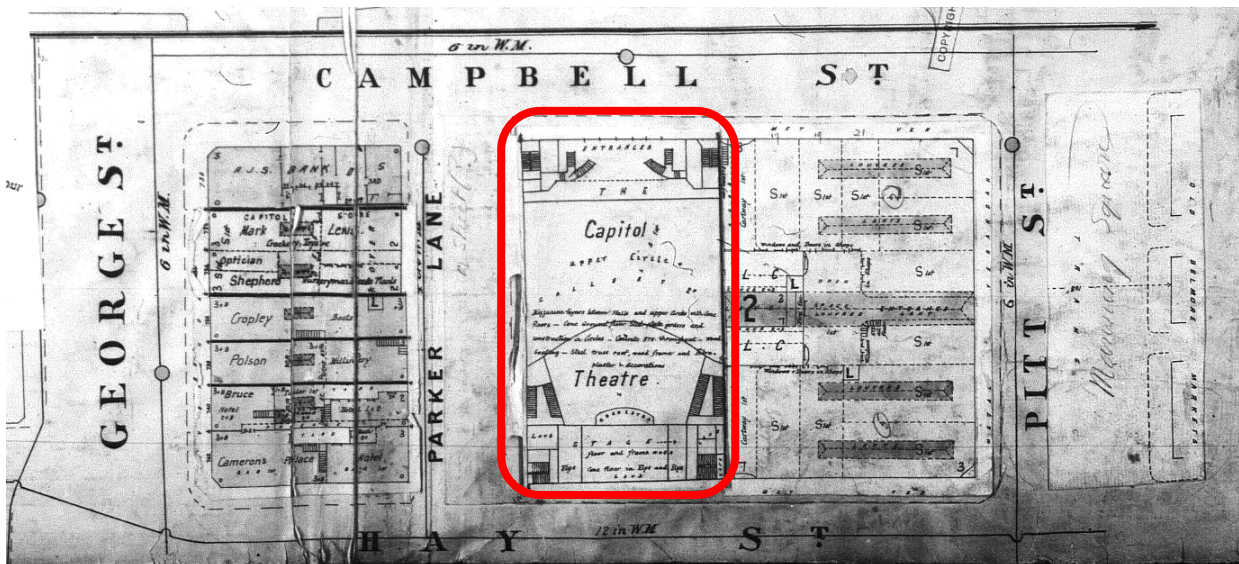


Figure 198 – Detail from Structural Plans of the City of Sydney “Ignis et Aqua” Series Sheet 3 Vol 1, 1907 with later annotations to c.1928. Capitol Theatre outlined in red.

Source: SLNSW, Z/MAXX 811.17/1892/1 FM4/10537



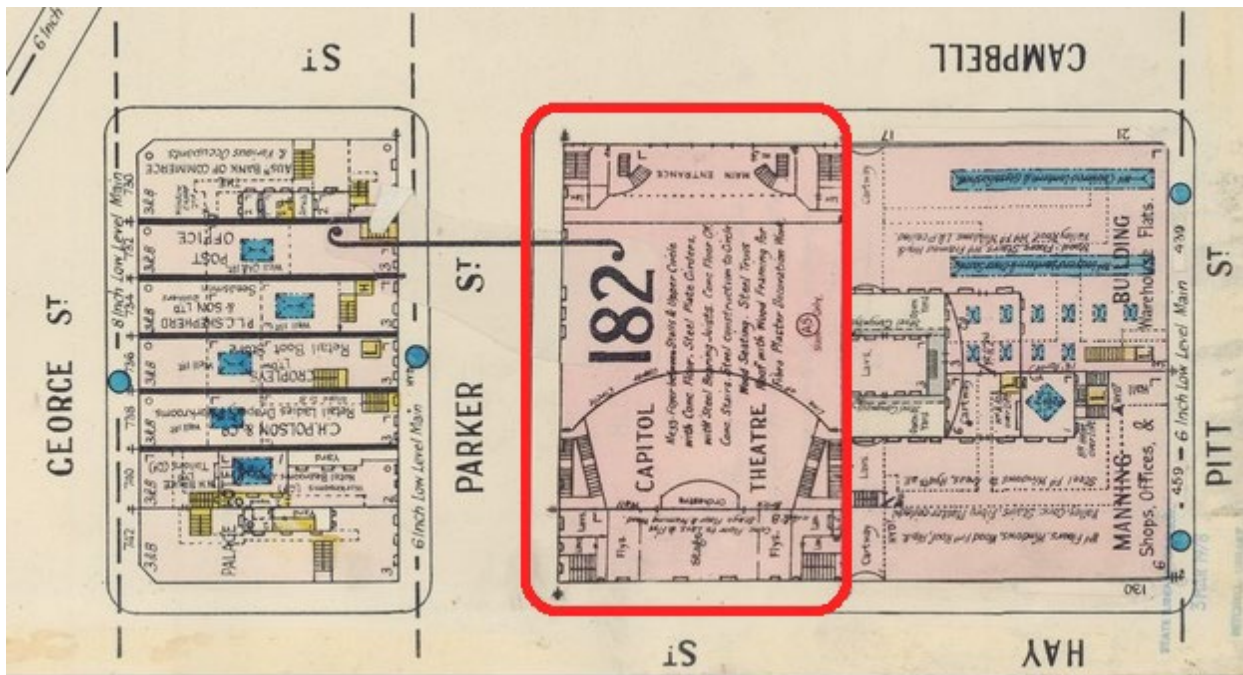


Figure 199 - Fire Underwriters Association of N.S. Wales Detail Survey Maps, Hippodrome Block No. 182, c.1928.

Source: SLNSW, a1358104h

Shorn of its live acts (excepting the Wurlitzer) and screening second-rate movies, the theatre re-opened in an economy mode in April 1933 with an all Australian programme. However, the Capitol never recovered its former glory. Over the next fifty years its erratic downhill progress makes depressing reading.<sup>85</sup> Maintenance economising gradually put machinery and lighting out of action and in 1945 all "unwanted" decoration (including banners, tapestries and artificial foliage) was stripped from the interiors.

<sup>85</sup> Blackmore, *op. cit.*, pp23-30 and Hanson, parts V and VI



Figure 200 – Detail from Milton Kent aerial view of Haymarket, c.1940-February 1957. Capitol building in bottom right corner.

Source: SLNSW, c079000010

In her thesis, Lynne Dent discusses Sydney City Council and Greater Union's "equivocal" relationship. She questions the Council's apparent lack of concern and/or awareness over the deteriorating condition of the building, and why did the Council overlook Greater Union Theatres' neglect and disinterest in the Council's property? Dent did not uncover any evidence in Council files, nor Chief Secretary's files, that the company made any attempt to maintain the building according to conditions in both lease and licence.<sup>86</sup>

Kate Blackmore also discusses at length the decline of the theatre from the 1930s to 1970s.

*From the onset of the Depression through to 1971, the theatre was held by Greater Union (in its many corporate forms) on six-month, one year or occasionally two year leases from Council, and from 1961 to 1972 on a weekly tenancy. Initially showing 'B' grade westerns through the 'thirties, it then became one of the few cinemas in Sydney to have a weekly changeover of prestigious re-runs during the 1940s and 1950s. In the late 1950s, it is alleged it was the only theatre in Sydney showing Australian films.*<sup>87</sup>

*Periodically throughout these years, Council Sub-Committees looked at alternative options for the theatre but all were without concrete result. For example, in 1959, Council decided to put the lease out to tender in an attempt to extract a minimum three-year lease and to encourage capital expenditure on the building. At this date, Greater Union would only accept a two-year lease and their rental was 'pegged' by the Fair Rents Board at a sum still slightly higher than that proposed by the only other tenderer (Hoyts).<sup>88</sup> One decade later, however, and in the midst of Australia's second long boom, Council policy and Greater Union's attitude seem to have been reversed.*

<sup>86</sup> Dent, *op.cit.*, p177

<sup>87</sup> Conversation with Bruce Pattison, 3 August 1989 in Blackmore, *op.cit.* p26

<sup>88</sup> Minute Paper, Properties Department, 29 January 1959, CRS 34/5425/58, City of Sydney Archives

*Early in 1970, after the closing of the Tivoli, the Stadium and the Palace Theatre and only a few months before the destruction by fire of Her Majesty's Theatre, Greater Union wrote to Council with "various proposals to either buy or lease the property to enable us, in conjunction with associates, to renovate the theatre so that it could be used for the dual purpose of live entertainment and/or as a cinema". No action resulted. Then, in August, after the destruction of Her Majesty's, Greater Union wrote again, this time offering to expend in excess of \$100,000 "to replace the roof and ceiling and to modernise the front of house and auditorium and dressing rooms". Their condition, however, was a minimum three-year lease.*

*The matter was referred to Council's Finance Committee and consideration briefly deferred. In the interim, JC Williamson Ltd made a tentative approach to Council as to the possibility of using the Capitol as a temporary replacement for Her Majesty's...*

*In December 1971...the Lord Mayor received an approach from Harry M Miller of Harry M Miller Attractions offering to lease the building from Council for a rental of \$2,000 per week for a minimum period acceptable to the Council and with guaranteed expenditure of \$100,000 on facilities.<sup>89</sup>*

Council officer, Ron Dunphy photographed the interior of the Capitol Theatre after the building was vacated by Greater Union and before it was leased to Harry M Miller. The series of photographs, a selection being reproduced at Figure 201, Figure 202 and Figure 203, show the years of neglect including water stains, holes in the roof and ceilings, and peeling painted surfaces. The atmospheric and ornamental fabric of the interior suffered further indignity in 1972 when the theatre lease was removed from Greater Union Theatres and awarded to Harry M. Miller for the very successful production of *Jesus Christ, Superstar* (Figure 204). Preparations involved the replacement of the atmospheric plaster ceiling, the addition of various facilities of substandard design and carpentry, and coating much of the original polychrome decor with ochre paint. The Theatre Organ Society purchased the Wurlitzer and finally found a home for it in the Orion Theatre, Campsie.

*Jesus Christ Superstar* premiered at the Capitol Theatre on 4 May 1972 and ran until 1973 (Figure 204). Thereafter, the Capitol had an intermittent list of tenancies, including ballets and dance company productions sponsored by Edgley and Dawe, a shortened season of Chinese documentary films, and a return season of *Jesus Christ Superstar* (June- October 1976). Harry M Miller Attractions' lease expired in October 1976, leaving the Capitol vacant for almost two years. During this period the Council attempted unsuccessfully to attract tenders for the lease for five or ten years. The fabric of the building continued to deteriorate to a dangerous state, and any prospective lessees expected Council to pay all costs for repairs and alterations in return for reducible rentals set at, or below, the rental paid in 1972.

In the 1970s, various organisations and individuals sought to preserve the Capitol. The first such move was in 1976, when the National Trust of Australia (New South Wales) classified the theatre building. Two years later, the Australian Heritage Commission listed the Capitol on the Register of the National Estate. Later the same year, the NSW Heritage Council recommended to the Minister for Planning that he place a Conservation Order on the Capitol, which was duly approved on 22 January 1979. However, the Interim Conservation Order (ICO) lapsed in March 1981, leaving the building unprotected from development pressures.

At the same time, "the theatre's deteriorating condition and inadequacies – such as its small stage and sight lines limited by the proscenium – made lease negotiation protracted and difficult".<sup>90</sup> Consequently, between 1979 and 1983 when the Capitol finally closed, the theatre was used primarily as a concert venue.

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<sup>89</sup> At that date, Greater Union were paying a rental of \$260 per week. Minute of the Town Clerk, 8 December 1971, CRS 34/397/61, City of Sydney Archives

<sup>90</sup> Murray op.cit., p11





Figure 201 – Series of interior shots taken to record the contents and condition of the theatre in connection with the lease of the Capitol Theatre to Harry M Miller in 1972. Photographs by Ron Dunphy.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 356

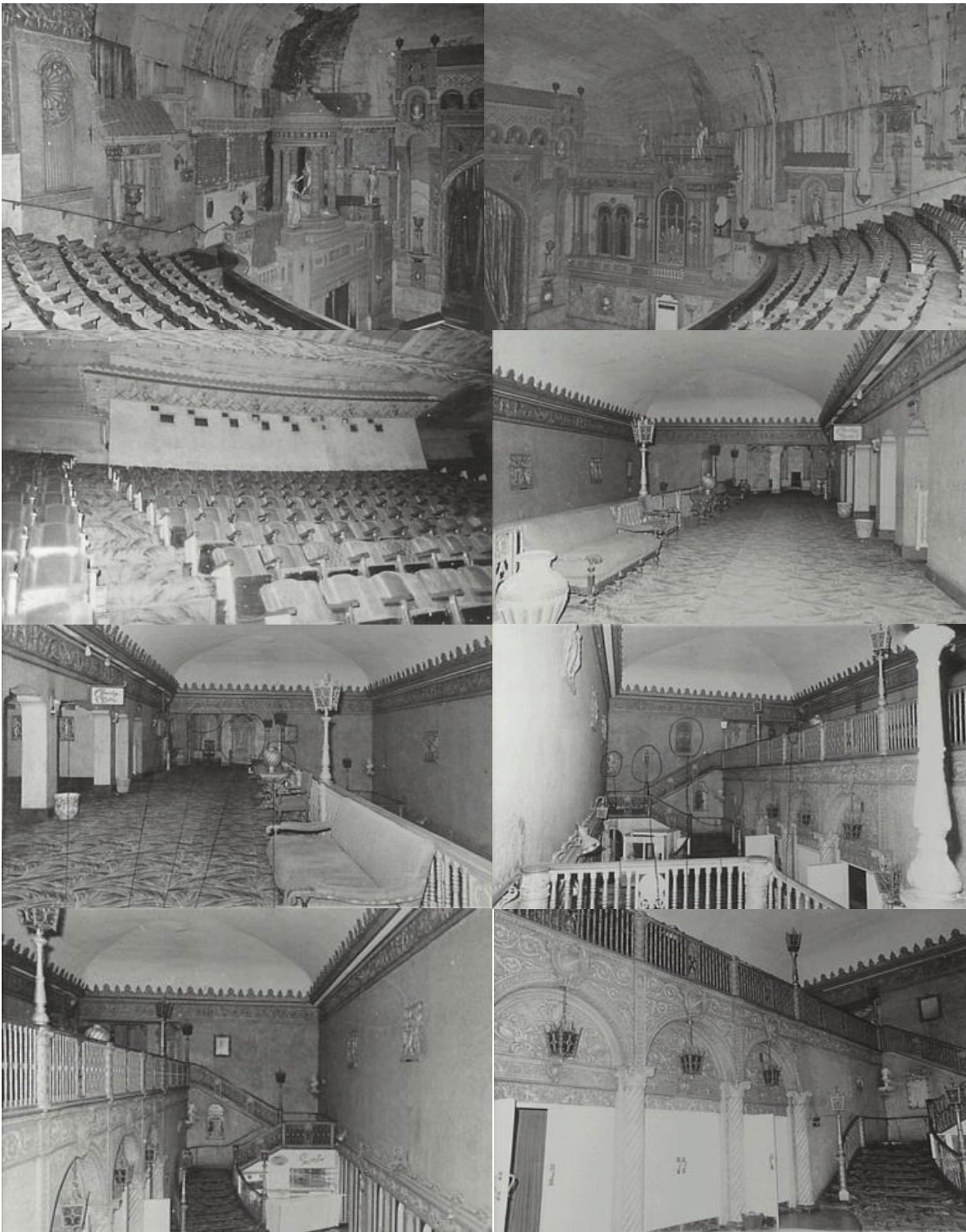


Figure 202 - Series of interior shots taken to record the contents and condition of the theatre in connection with the lease of the Capitol Theatre to Harry M Miller in 1972. Photographs by Ron Dunphy.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 356



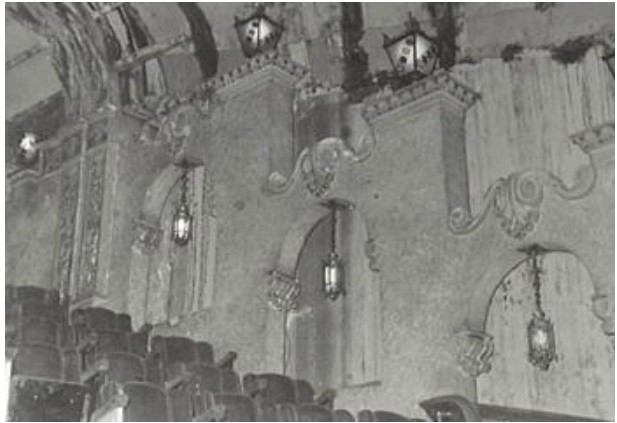
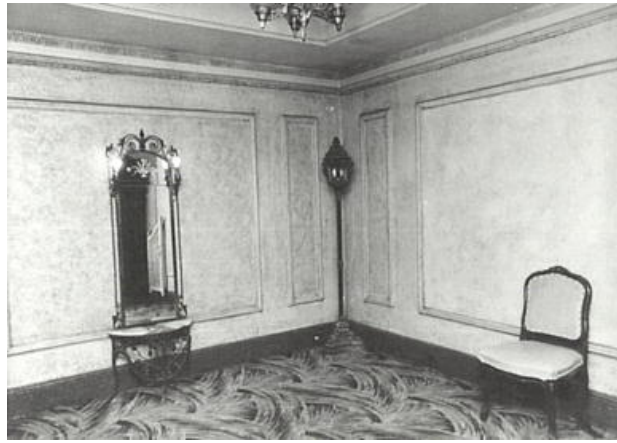


Figure 203 - Series of interior shots taken to record the contents and condition of the theatre in connection with the lease of the Capitol Theatre to Harry M Miller in 1972. Photographs by Ron Dunphy.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 356





Figure 204 – Several views of production of Jesus Christ Superstar, Capitol Theatre, 1972.

Source: Milesago: Australasian Music & Popular Culture 1964-1975, <http://www.milesago.com/stage/superstar.htm>

### 3.3.4. Restoration of the Capitol Theatre

Following its closure in 1983, the theatre remained boarded up and gradually deteriorated as Sydney City Council debated its fate, pitting it against the Regent Theatre, facing a similar predicament. The Interim Heritage Order (IHO) on the Capitol expired in March 1981. However, the Minister granted a new IHO on the building in 1985, followed in 1987 with a Permanent Conservation Order (PCO). Despite heritage protection, the Capitol's future was still in doubt, as there were competing factions in the City Council for and against the retention of the Capitol, and the feasibility of restoring the building as a lyric theatre.

Eventually, in March 1989, the Council called for Expressions of Interest for the conservation of the Capitol Theatre. Developers were asked to conserve the atmospheric auditorium and also update the Capitol into a first class lyric theatre. In return, Council was offering a 99-year lease on the development site bounded by George, Haymarket, Pitt and Campbell Streets.

Four final development proposals were selected, namely: Bond Properties; Essington Developments; Capital Land Corporation; and Ipoh Garden Developments (Aust.). Bond Properties and Essington Developments both incorporated very high towers on the western boundaries. Capital Land Corporation and Ipoh Garden Developments maintained a height that was more compatible with the buildings in the immediate area.

In September 1989, the Council accepted the tender of Ipoh Gardens (Aust) Ltd. Following protracted and difficult negotiations, the developer signed a contract with the City of Sydney in March 1992 to redevelop the site. Soon after, the development application (DA) was lodged with both the Heritage Council and Sydney City Council. The DA was awarded conditional approval in May that year, however, a series of design amendments were made to the plans throughout the rest of the year. Tenders for construction were called in October 1992. Ipoh appointed Fletchers (Aust) Ltd as the preferred tender. Council assented to the building contract in June 1993.



Figure 205 – Capitol Theatre before restoration, c.March/April 1992.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 908/1258)





Figure 206 – Facade of Capitol Theatre before restoration, c.March 1992.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, STC 18251, 18252 & 18253

The upgrade of the theatre was a major job requiring architectural and engineering ingenuity. Ipoh's Project manager, Tim Tait, had gathered a range of professionals to work on the project. Andrew Andersons, Robert



Eadie and Trevor Waters from Peddle Thorp and Walker Architects had been involved in the project since Ipoh's first tender in 1989. An initial partnering program was held to bring all the team together along with key stakeholder groups. Architects, builders, plasterers, engineers, Heritage Council representatives and council staff attended workshops on site in the Manning Building to discuss the vision of the project. The process was particularly successful in focusing the project team on the job ahead and ensured a collective understanding of the project's philosophy and goals as well as different stakeholders' expectations.<sup>91</sup>

The project team was lucky to have access to all the original plans for both the Hippodrome and the Capitol Theatre. Council had kept all these, as owner of the building, and they have important clues for construction, design and restoration. The project team was also guided by the Conservation Plan prepared by James Kerr. This identified all the significant heritage elements of the theatre. Kerr established the point at which compromise would "adversely affect the quality of the atmospheric experience" and suggested alternative approaches for solving the particular problem.<sup>92</sup>

Trevor Waters was the conservation architect on the job, responsible for recreating White's Florentine open-air garden. The second half of 1993 was spent documenting all the significant fabric using photographs and measured drawings. As demolition progressed, Waters devised a methodology for the removal of the exterior stone and terracotta work, which were reused in the construction, he also reviewed cleaning methods for the stained glass, tested paint colours, and sourced appropriate light fittings.<sup>93</sup> Many of the original statues had disappeared, so Waters had to identify appropriate statues in other theatres and collections and recast them. His quest for appropriate carpet is indicative of his dedication. He had found on site examples of a standard Greater Union carpet dating from about 1934, and another carpet that had appropriate colours but photographs proved was not the original carpet. Dissatisfied with having to reproduce the Greater Union carpets, Waters scoured the theatre for a second time:

*I came back to look again and sat down on this really brown, muddy carpet which had plasterer's dirt walked into it. Some worker had ripped up the edges of it, looking for the old carpet and I looked down and realised I was actually sitting on a piece of the original stuff.<sup>94</sup>*

Waters washed and unpicked the carpet to determine its original design pattern and colours. The carpet print mimicked old stone flagging, with small flowers and weeds creeping through the cracks. This was the carpet design that was finally reproduced and used in the restoration.

The Capitol Theatre redevelopment was an exercise in pragmatic restoration. Both the timetable and the budget were tight. This had advantages and disadvantages. Tait, Waters and Barry Osmotherly, the project manager from Fletcher Construction, worked hard to minimise costs. Fletchers tried to demolish as little as possible and to reuse materials, which meant that there was less intervention into the fabric. Waters commended Fletchers and their subcontractors for their efforts to protect and preserve the heritage fabric of the theatre.<sup>95</sup> Despite his earnest efforts to monitor works, Waters recorded several examples of significant interior fabric being altered, demolished or damaged before he could inspect it. This included the original ceiling adjacent to the bio box, exit doors c.1928 to Campbell, Parker and Hay Streets. Screen ornaments, handrails, light fittings and lamps.

A number of significant changes were made to make the theatre functional for the twenty-first century. The floor was raked to improve sight lines. Modern lighting and equipment were introduced. The stage was extended, and the fly tower rebuilt. The construction of the fly tower was made all the more difficult in engineering terms because after Fletchers had finished excavating for the fly tower, it didn't stop raining for three months. Fletchers' approach to the fly tower's materials reflects their pragmatic approach to the restoration.

One negative impact of this approach was the tendency to take shortcuts in melding the new with the old, such as the installation of technical equipment. This concerned the Heritage Council, which had a watching brief over the construction. Overall, however, it was satisfied with the Capitol's restoration.<sup>96</sup> The restoration was faithful to the intent of the original design. The theatre was an atmospheric theatre, designed to create a mood. It used motifs and architectural details, not accurately, but to suggest a certain place, a certain time.

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<sup>91</sup> Mary Knaggs, personal communication, 10 July 2002; Trevor Waters' Project Diary, 20 July 1993, p17, CRS 84/15.

<sup>92</sup> Kerr, *The Haymarket and the Capitol*, p.iv; Kerr, *The Capitol Theatre: Supplementary policy and guide*.

<sup>93</sup> Trevor Waters' Project Diary, CRS 84/15.

<sup>94</sup> Trevor Waters quoted by Tim Elliott, "Sleuthing guides Capitol renaissance", *SMH*, 16 July 1994, Spectrum, p12A.

<sup>95</sup> Trevor Waters' Project Diary, p33. CRS 84/15.

<sup>96</sup> Elliot, *SMH*, 16 July 1994; Memo – Mary Knaggs to Sue Holliday 26 February 1992, HC 32157 Capitol Theatre File vol 4; National Trust Board Meeting no. 34, Minutes, 8a) Addendum – Capitol Theatre Update, NT Capitol Theatre File.

Peddle Thorp and Walker, and Trevor Waters in particular, carefully recreated the idea of a Florentine garden, an Italian place of dreams. Jim Barrett believes that Ipoh's track record with the QVB helped in the whole design and construction process. "We came with a reputation where I was, Ipoh was trusted [by the NSW Heritage Council]. And even Frank trusted me, to a point," laughs Barrett."<sup>97</sup>

Frank Sartor judged the new foyer as the least successful design element of the refurbishment. It was incorporated into the side of the Manning Building to provide more foyer space and better patron circulation. Originally Andrew Andersons, architect with Peddle Thorp Walker, planned to just use the original foyer spaces; the rationale being it was equivalent to the foyer seat ratio of the Theatre Royal. However, Council's architect, Lawrence Nield, believed this was insufficient. Barrett backed the Council's request for more foyer space. After discussions with Sartor, Andersons returned to the drawing board. Functionally, the foyer works, but the design compromises the restoration heights reached in the theatre.

Frank Sartor was instrumental in negotiating the completion of the theatre to Council's satisfaction and on time. Indeed, Fletcher Construction finished the Capitol on time for the opening of the theatre on 24 January 1995, five months ahead of schedule. Likewise, Ipoh managed the project tightly.



Figure 207 – Internal view of auditorium during restoration work, c.1993-94

Source: SRC18247

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<sup>97</sup> Jim Barrett, interview with author [Lisa Murray, City Historian], 20 November 2001, NSCA.





Figure 208 – Restoration work in progress at Capitol Theatre. One left: statues were repaired and recast based on replicas from other theatres (1994). On right: an artist at work during restoration (1994).

Source: [www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/history.aspx](http://www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/history.aspx), viewed 3 December 2018



Figure 209 – Restoration underway in foyer, 1994.

Source: [www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/history.aspx](http://www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/history.aspx), viewed 3 December 2018





Figure 210 – Seal pit rediscovered during restoration, 1994.

Source: [www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/history.aspx](http://www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/history.aspx), viewed 3 December 2018



Figure 211 – Old stage and mechanics were replaced with modern theatre facilities during restoration, 1994.

Source: [www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/history.aspx](http://www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/history.aspx), viewed 3 December 2018

Opening night of the restored Capitol Theatre was a glamorous affair. Few patrons were aware of the list of outstanding works and defects still waiting to be finished. These included provision of lounge chairs to the new foyers, auditorium acoustic doors, theatre services, the cloud projectors for atmospheric lighting, and paving and footpath works.<sup>98</sup> But there were, in the scheme of things, minor glitches.

Even the theatre industry, despite “some bitching” that an Australian production didn’t get the coveted long run spot after opening, was pleased (and no doubt relieved) that the Capitol Theatre had finally been saved and updated to modern theatre standards.<sup>99</sup>

The design of the auditorium was soon to change. Cameron Mackintosh wanted to introduce balcony boxes along the side of the auditorium for his production of *Miss Saigon* in July 1995. Consultations by Andrew Andersons with the theatre industry during the design and construction phases had indicated that these would be welcome additions to the auditorium, as they would help integrate the gallery and the stage. But they had not been built, apparently due to time constraints. Lawrence Nield, consultant architect to Council, insisted that the construction of the balcony boxes be reversible as a matter of heritage principle. Another change requested by Mackintosh for the staging of *Miss Saigon* was the squaring roof of the proscenium. Mackintosh paid an \$80,000 security deposit that the changes to the auditorium would be reversed. The balcony boxes are still there.<sup>100</sup>

The final completion of the Capitol Theatre restoration was signed off on 18 January 1996, nearly twelve months after the theatre re-opened.<sup>101</sup> It was the end of extremely long, fraught and at times acrimonious battles within the Council to restore the Capitol and provide Sydney with a modern lyric theatre. Since then, the Capitol has played host to a series of productions including *West Side Story*, *Chicago*, *Porgy and Bess*, *My fair lady*, *Hair*, *The Lion King*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Billy Elliot*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Wicked*, *The Boy from Oz*, *Mary Poppins*, *Les Miserables*, *Cats*, *The Sound of Music*, *Kinky Boots*, *Aladdin*, *Fame*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Jersey Boys* and *Mamma Mia*.

### 3.3.5. George McRae, City Architect

George McRae was born in Edinburgh in 1858, where, after completing his schooling, he was apprenticed to Messrs. George Beattie and Sons, architects. After several years in private practice, he decided to emigrate to Australia. McRae arrived in Sydney in 1884, as a young architect. Soon after arrival, he was appointed as principal assistant to the City Architect, TH Sapsford. McRae was soon appointed as City Architect and City Building Surveyor in 1889, a position he held until 1897.

One of Sapsford’s major projects at the time was the second stage of the Sydney Town Hall, which was completed in 1888. McRae spent much time with Sapsford on this project and saw it through to completion. McRae was directly responsible for the design and erection of the Eastern Fish Market in Woolloomooloo, the Queen Victoria Building and the Fruit and Vegetable Market Building in Belmore Street.

In 1897, McRae was appointed principal assistant architect in the Public Works Department of New South Wales. In 1912, he succeeded WL Vernon as Government Architect, a position he held until his death in 1923. In this position, he participated in the design and construction of many prominent public buildings, including the old Fisher Library building, the southern cloister of the Quadrangle, the Anderson Stuart Medical School at the University of Sydney (c.1907 and c.1910), the Parcels Post Office at Railway Square (1912-13), the Department of Education Building (1912-14), Manly and South Steyne Surf Pavilions, part of the Jenolan Caves House (1914), Taronga Park Zoo (1915), Central Railway Station and the old Treasury Building in Bridge Street (1916-19).<sup>102</sup> Some of these building are shown at Figure 213, Figure 214 and Figure 215.

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<sup>98</sup> Facsimile, Tim Tait to Carleen Devine, 16 January 1995, P05-00340/22; P05-00340/26; Capitol Theatre Fourth Deed of Variation to Agreement to Lease, 6 April 1995, P05-00340/27.

<sup>99</sup> Ava Hubble, “A new age of comfort for theatre-goers” in *SMH*, 17 January 1995, p30.

<sup>100</sup> Peter Cochrane, “Capitol cause for concern”, *SMH*, 29 July 1993, p21; Carleen Devine, Special projects Officer, Report – Capitol Theatre Project – Variations to mandatory Work 26 October 1994, P05-00340/22; Ava Hubble, “Captiol enhances intimacy”, *SMH*, 8 May 1994, p17; Lawrence Nield to General Manager, 28 February 1995, P05-00340/26.

<sup>101</sup> P05-00340/27.

<sup>102</sup> Stenning, Nicholas & Eve 1977, “George McRae”, Undergraduate Thesis, Sydney University.





Figure 212 – Portrait of George McRae, c.1890.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, SRC 15120 (originally CRS80/7)



Figure 213 – Eastern Fish Market, Woolloomooloo, c.1870

Source: SLNSW, in John Shaw 1987, *The Queen Victoria Building 1898-1986*



Figure 214 – Parcels Post Office at Railway Square (now converted to a hotel), 1967

Source: City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 48/6206



Figure 215 – Department of Education Building, Sydney, 1915

Source: State Library of NSW, Government Printing Office 1 - 18335

### 3.3.6. Robert Hargreave Brodrick (City Architect and City Building Surveyor)

Robert Hargreave Brodrick was born in Cheshire, England. He came to Australia in 1882, having previously served his indenture in Manchester. In March 1883, he commenced employment with City of Sydney Council



and served in various capacities before being appointed to take charge of the City Architect's department in 1898. He was promoted in June 1919 to City Architect and City Building Surveyor.

He was responsible for the erection of nearly all of the city's buildings for the 30 years from the time of his appointment to his retirement, and including all buildings for the electric light department, numbering about 300. He also supervised the construction of the Domain Baths and the municipal markets.

Brodrick passed away in September 1934, having retired from the Council in 1928. His death was marked by an illustrated obituary in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 25 September 1934.



Figure 216 – Portrait of RH Brodrick.

Source: City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 54/336

### 3.3.7. Henry Eli White (Theatre architect)

The following biography is reproduced from Julian Thomas, 'White, Henry Eli (1876–1952)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/white-henry-eli-9074/text15995>, published first in hardcopy 1990, accessed online 20 February 2019.

*Henry Eli White (1876–1952), theatre architect, was born on 21 August 1876 at Dunedin, New Zealand, son of English parents Joseph Eli White, bricklayer, and his wife Susanna, née Scholfield. On leaving school, Henry joined Joseph's contracting business and learned bricklaying, painting, plumbing and carpentry while studying engineering and architecture. Finding it difficult to work with his father, he established his own business as a builder in 1896. 'Big Henry' was over six feet (183 cm) tall and weighed more than 16 stone (102 kg). He married Margaret Hallinan at Dunedin on 24 December 1900; they were to have four children.*

*Although his first major project was a tunnel on the Waipori River hydro-electric scheme, White gravitated towards theatre design: he was interested in using steel frames and reinforced concrete, and in the problems of ventilation, acoustics and visibility posed by auditorium design. By 1905 he had established himself at Christchurch. With the contract to build His Majesty's Theatre, Wellington, for (Sir) Benjamin Fuller in 1912, White moved his thriving practice to that city where he also built the Midland Hotel.*

*By 1915 White was building theatres in Australia for Hugh McIntosh and was well placed to take advantage of the boom in theatre investment in the 1920s. He adapted from the American architect John Eberson the 'atmospheric' style, one which was supposed to evoke an exotic garden or courtyard and used Spanish, Moorish, Venetian and Indian motifs. White's theatres in Sydney (where he made his headquarters) included the Capitol, the St James (for the Fullers) and the Majestic (Elizabethan) at Newtown. His only significant industrial project in Sydney was the Bunnerong power station, begun in 1925. He designed over 130 theatres, among them the Tivoli, Brisbane, and the St James Theatre, Wellington, New Zealand.*

Sydney's baroque State Theatre (opened in June 1929) is White's best-known work. The building, which includes shops and an office block in Market Street, cost Union Theatres Ltd £1 million in an attempt to entice middle-class film-goers. The auditorium was divided into three levels of comfort and expense. Much loved by audiences for its excessive Art Deco ornamentation, its interior made lavish use of marble, gold and ivory decoration, and featured paintings, sculpture and exotic objects (such as the 'Fujiyama cameo', removed during World War II). The cinema's lavatories were named the 'Empire Builder's', 'Pompadour', 'Futurist' and 'Pioneer' rooms.

The Depression marked the end of White's architectural career. He won a competition to design a college at Auckland, but plans were shelved; he closed his office and lost money through farming in New Zealand. By 1937 he was back in Sydney. His plans for a block of flats at Point Piper were disallowed by Woollahra Municipal Council. Although his cement manufacturing project near Bathurst fell through, dolomite was discovered on the site and during World War II his company supplied it for windows and light bulbs made in Australia. White spent much time sailing and big-game fishing.

Survived by his wife and two sons, he died on 3 March 1952 at Kings Cross, Sydney, and was cremated with Anglican rites. He had reputedly earned over £1 million in architectural fees, but was not an astute businessman; his estate was sworn for probate at £1147.



Figure 217 – Palais Theatre, St Kilda (top left); Civic Theatre, Newcastle (top right), State Theatre, Sydney building photographed by Arthur Ernest Foster (bottom), various dates.

Source: NAA, a1200, L43547 (top); University of Newcastle Library (centre); SLNSW, On 30/Box 69/ON30/Box 70 (bottom)

## 3.4. HISTORICAL TIMELINE

The following tables contains a chronology of significant events in the history of the site and the subject building as summarised from Sections 3.2 and 3.3 and building/development application information drawn from the City of Sydney Planning Cards.

The development of the site can generally be separated into four phases of development, as follows:

1. New Belmore Market                      1893 - 1913
2. Wirths Hippodrome                      1914 – 1926
3. Capitol Theatre                          1927 – 1991
4. Restored Capitol Theatre              1992 - Present

Table 1 – Historical Timeline

Date	Event
1866	Construction of Belmore Markets begins on a site bounded by Castlereagh, Hay, Pitt and Campbell.
1869	Belmore Markets opens on 14 May.
<b>Phase 1: New Belmore Markets</b>	
1893	Second Belmore Markets (Capitol site) open. Used for theatrical and circus performances on Saturday nights.
1910	Council decides that the Tivoli and Capitol (two theatres) would be erected on the sites of the old and new Belmore Markets.
1912	Wirth Bros takes a 10-week lease on the new Belmore Theatre for a 'circus and hippodrome'. The council claimed the auditorium could be used as hippodrome, circus, theatre, opera house, concert hall, vaudeville entertainment hall or for photo plays (early silent motion pictures).
<b>Phase 2: Wirths Hippodrome</b>	
1914-1915	Belmore Markets dismantled and re-erected as the Hippodrome – home of Wirths Circus in Australia. The detail of the market walls was erected 10 metres higher.
1916	<p>On April 3, Wirths Circus and Hippodrome opens – the largest theatre in Australia.</p> <p>The 13-metre ring in front of the proscenium arch had a hydraulically operated floor which dropped to fill with water for aquatic events.</p> <p>Beneath the stage were animal pits. Part of the Hippodrome show was an exhibition of numerous caged animals. At other times, the Hippodrome was used for dramatic stage shows, variety concerts, vaudeville and, in fact, anything that attracted a large audience.</p> <p>The Hippodrome failed financially that same year.</p>



Date	Event
1926	Wirths in negotiation with Stuart Doyle, MD of Union Theatres, plans to remodel the building as The Capitol Picture Palace.
<b>Phase 3: Capitol Theatre</b>	
1927	(June) Union Theatres acquires the lease from Wirths and the construction of The Capitol begins within the walls of the Hippodrome, Managing Director of Union Theatres, Stuart Doyle, has plans for a chain of 'atmospherics' around Australia to be known as 'Million Dollar Theatres'.
1928	<p>The Capitol opens with a 2,999-seat auditorium. It featured an 'open air' Italian garden surrounded by walls and balustrades, statues, tress, doves, shawls and period furniture – all beneath a 'blue sky' which darkened as session time approached.</p> <p>When all was dark, stars began to twinkle in the 'night sky' as fake clouds drifted overhead. Included in the décor was a massive pergola across the entire rear of the dress circle, from which clung vines and ferns.</p> <p>Statuary, bas-reliefs and panels throughout were replicas of famous European works of art. The courtyard at the entrance to the back stalls was an exact replica of the courtyard of the Pitti Palace in Florence.</p> <p>More than 23,000 people attended in the first two days.</p> <p>Opening Program:</p> <p>Overture, featuring CAPITOL ORCHESTRA plus WURLITZER</p> <p>ORGAN; NEWS &amp; VIEWS OF THE WORLD; FEATHERS, a colour study; TODDLERS, a Paramount novelty featurette; On Stage, TED HENKEL &amp; HIS BAND.</p> <p>Intermission, FRED SCHOLL at the mighty WURLITZER, OPERATIC INTERVAL interlude from Mignon.</p> <p>Main Feature: "HIS LADY" starring John Barrymore &amp; Dolores Costello, musical score by Ted Henkel.</p>
1929	(April 20th) The first 'talkie' film is screened – 'Beware of Bachelors'
1932	<p>The theatre runs into financial difficulties and films are scarce.</p> <p>Also, the central shopping district moves to the other end of town, and the Depression hits hard forcing The Capitol to close on November 24<sup>th</sup> for alterations and renovations.</p>
1933	(April) Capitol reopens, with 2 Australian productions from Efftee Studios. No orchestra – only the Wurlitzer played by Billy Dick. The orchestra pit is filled with pot plants and a fountain.
1930s	Throughout the 1930s, the Theatre gains a reputation for lesser quality films (horror and westerns). Special guests appear from the Tivoli. There is an upturn in box office

Date	Event
	receipts, but a downturn in theatre maintenance. Lighting effects were not repaired, cloud machines stood motionless, the famous blue lighting around the wall started to fade away. The Theatre was in disrepair.
1945	<p>The Capitol closes for 'makeshift' repairs. Workmen remove unwanted decorations such as banners, tapestries, artificial foliage, and those lighting effects which weren't working simply had their wiring cut.</p> <p>In March, the Capitol re-opens as a first release house using Deanna Durban as a drawcard.</p>
Late 1940s	<p>From the late 40s through to the early 50s it was obvious that the first release policy was a failure. Electricity bans force more lights off.</p> <p>The famous organ closed down in October 1947. The theatre begins to experiment with Jazz Concerts and Beach Girl contests.</p> <p>The theatre is threatened with demolition to allow construction of the Eastern Suburbs Railway.</p>
1954	Greater Union attempts to resurrect theatre for first release films.
1970	<p>(August) Australian Opera moves to The Capitol with 'Othello' for 3-months after Her Majesty's theatre is destroyed by fire.</p> <p>A new aspect emerges about The Capitol – it has perfect acoustics and sightlines providing the audience with an amazing new visual and sound experience. The Sydney Morning Herald and Australian newspapers praise the acoustics.</p> <p>(September) Lord Mayor requested meeting with Greater Union., JC Williamson., Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, Empire Talkies &amp; NCT Productions to discuss future of theatre. Greater Union was granted a lease for 3 years from 02/012/70 on understanding that they spend not less than \$150,000 on repairs and renovations.</p>
1971	(21st December) Harry M. Miller takes over lease for 'Jesus Christ Superstar'. Paid rental of \$2,000 per week. Re-equipped stage and generally tidied up inside, installing drink bars in rear of back stalls where seats were removed. Housed orchestra in several 'bunkers' under stage connected by TV monitors. The theatre exterior was painted 'Superstar' brown.
1972	<p>(February) The massive 3/15 Wurlitzer plays its last tune and dismantled. Re-erected at Orion Theatre, Campsie in 1988.</p> <p>(29th February) Greater Union vacates Capitol after over 40 years of lease. Harry M. Miller takes over lease for 'J.C. Superstar'</p>
1974	A 2-year success for 'Jesus Christ Superstar' makes it the most successful stage presentation in Sydney's history. The theatre then falls into disrepair.

Date	Event
Mid-1970s	Hoyts lease theatre for sexploitation films.
1977	The Capitol Theatre is classified by the National Trust (NSW).
1979	(4th May) 'Telegraph' Sydney City Council advertises for tenders for The Capitol.  (September) Bill Shopov takes 2-year lease (\$2,000 per year plus \$30,000 rates) to use Capitol Theatre for rock venue.
1980s	Various rock concerts and rock videos.
1983	Sydney City Council attempts to interest developers in the site and at one time proposed the construction of a modern lyric theatre to replace the dilapidated Capitol. Ian Hanson and members of Australian Theatre Historical Society approach council for inspection of theatre.  Mike Walsh from <i>The Sun</i> backs Capitol renovations.
1985	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i> – letter from Noel Ferrier says demolish Capitol.
1986	Used as film set for 'Les Patterson Saves the World', 'Those Dear Departed' and 'Nellie Melba', plus various commercials and rock clips.  The theatre begins to slowly degrade. In 1988, leaking box gutters caused damage to side walls and sections of plaster.
1987	Placed on National Estate by Heritage Commission.
1988	State Government and City of Sydney make firm commitment to restore The Capitol and return it to live theatre.
1989	(January) Sydney City Council calls for tenders to redevelop the Capitol area, conditional to restoring theatre.
<b>Phase 4: Restored Capitol Theatre</b>	
1993-1994	Restoration work undertaken to Capitol
1994	(February) Cameron Mackintosh announces Capitol has acquired Australian premiere of musical, <i>Miss Saigon</i> .



Date	Event
1995	<p>(24th January) Capitol Theatre reopens to widespread acclaim for its magnificent restoration and facilities, continuing more than 100 years of entertainment tradition on the site.</p> <p>The restoration and extensions into a lyric theatre, including new galleries and back stage facilities cost \$35 million.</p>