

4. HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

4.1. WHAT IS HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE?

Before making decisions to change a heritage item, an item within a heritage conservation area, or an item located in proximity to a heritage listed item, it is important to understand its values and the values of its context. This leads to decisions that will retain these values in the future. Statements of heritage significance summarise the heritage values of a place – why it is important and why a statutory listing was made to protect these values.

4.2. HERITAGE LISTING

The Capitol Theatre is listed as a heritage item under Part 1 of Schedule 5 of the *Sydney Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 2012* as *Capitol Theatre including interior* (Item No. 1826) and on the State Heritage Register (SHR) under the *Heritage Act 1977* as *Capitol Theatre* (Item No. 00391). The following map shows the location of the Capitol Theatre in the context of other heritage items in the vicinity (Figure 218). The curtilage of the Capitol Theatre as listed under the SHR is displayed in Figure 219.

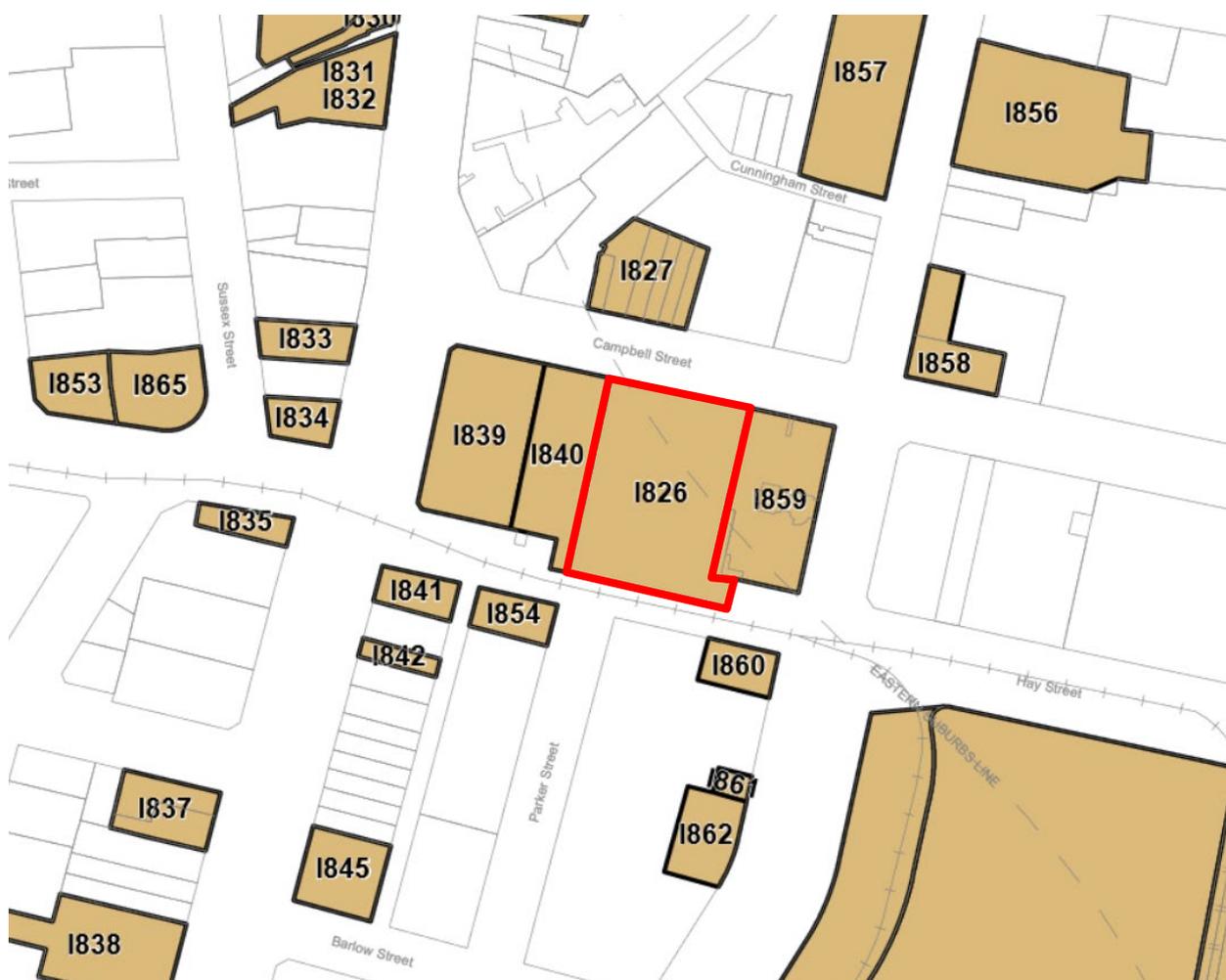


Figure 218 – Extract from the Sydney LEP Heritage Map showing the subject site outlined in red

Source: Sydney LEP 2012, Heritage Map – Sheet HER_015

Heritage Council of New South Wales

PLAN

Under the Heritage Act, 1977

Description *Part of land in Plan S6-2269A*
(Capitol Theatre)

~~Municipality~~ *City of Sydney* Locality *Sydney (Haymarket)*

Parish of *St. Lawrence* County of *Cumberland*

Scale 1:500



COMPILED FROM INFORMATION IN	FILE REFERENCE	PLAN APPROVED	PLAN NUMBER
<i>Search 78/590</i> <i>Sydney City Council Plan S4-7/7</i> <small>BY M. B. DATE 25-9-78</small>	<i>78/1057</i> H.C. 32157	<i>Clive Dalton</i> for SECRETARY, HERITAGE COUNCIL	H.C. 955

THIS IS THE PLAN REFERRED TO IN **INTERIM**/PERMANENT CONSERVATION ORDER No. 39/
 N. S. W. GOVERNMENT GAZETTE No. 89 OF 29 MAY 1987

SUBJECT LAND SHOWN THUS:

Figure 219 - Existing State Heritage Register NSW Curtilage for the Capitol Theatre.

Source: State Heritage Register Inventory form for 'Municipal Building',
<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/HeritageItemImage.aspx?ID=5045280#ad-image-7>

4.3. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The following Statement of Significant is taken from the "Conservation Management Plan – Capitol Theatre, 3-21 Campbell Street, Haymarket":

The Capitol Theatre is of state significance for its historic, associative, aesthetic and representative values, and for its rarity.

The Capitol Theatre has a faceted history of adaptation, reconstruction and restoration. The building was originally constructed as the New Belmore Markets in 1893 designed by George McRae. The building was dismantled and reconstructed as Wirths Hippodrome alongside the redevelopment of the Manning Building in 1914-1915 following the cessation of market-uses. In 1916, the Hippodrome was redeveloped as an atmospheric theatre for the silver screen by Henry Eli White. The Capitol Theatre opened in 1927, one of only five within Australia. Despite the downturn in the theatre following the depression, the Capitol Theatre was redeveloped as a first-class lyric theatre from 1993 to 1995. This reinvigorated the theatre as a place to show world class productions within the conserved atmospheric theatre. The site and Capitol Theatre building demonstrates the continuous use of the site as a place of public entertainment and further reflects the development of public entertainment from the 1860s through to the present day.

Capitol Theatre is associated with the work of three prominent architects of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in Sydney and New South Wales. First designed by George McRae as the New Belmore Markets (1891-1893), redeveloped by Robert Brodrick as Wirths Hippodrome (1914-1916) and again as the Capitol Theatre by Henry Eli White in 1927, the building remains as an example of their works. The most recent redevelopment of the site as a lyric theatre was the work of award winning Peddle Thorp and Walker Architects (1993-1995).

The site has associations with the Wirth Brothers Circus, Australia's largest and most prestigious circus company. The Wirth Brothers first established themselves as small circus at the Haymarket Reserve in 1882. Their association with the site continued through the redevelopment of the site as Wirths Hippodrome (1914-1916) until the site's redevelopment as the Capitol Theatre in 1927.

The Capitol Theatre, internally, is a rare and exceptional example within New South Wales and Australia of an atmospheric theatre designed by Henry Eli White under the influence of John Eberson. The atmospheric foyer, gallery and auditorium, were carefully restored between 1993 and 1995 recreating the Venetian style of the theatre designed to represent a public square in an old Italian town. The combination of electric blue ceilings, representing the night's sky, side walls penetrated by gates, arches, temples, balconies and gables, along with reproduction statuary and friezes and other decorative elements such as lights, banners, mirrors and artificial foliage, collectively create the atmospheric theatre experience.

Externally, the Capitol Theatre is representative of a Federation Free Style building, designed by George McRae and adapted by Robert Brodrick, Henry Eli White and Peddle, Thorp and Walker Architects. Together with the Manning Building and the collection of largely nineteenth century surrounding buildings, including the Corporation Building and Haymarket Library, makes a precinct of considerable townscape quality.

The Capitol Theatre is socially significant as a public entertainment venue in Sydney which, in its various incarnations, illustrates the changing nature of public entertainment from the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries. The theatre is of social significance to special interest groups.

The Capitol Theatre is rare as one of five atmospheric theatres constructed in Australia, only three of which remain. It is the only atmospheric theatre to survive in New South Wales and is the only example of an atmospheric theatre designed by Henry Eli White.

5. INTERPRETATION PLAN AND OPPORTUNITIES

The following Heritage Interpretation Plan (HIP) highlights the historic themes and interpretation opportunities for the subject site. The HIP draws on the historic information outlined in Section 3 with specific reference to the intended audience profile and available resources and forms of heritage interpretation media. The interpretation detailed herein outlines recommendations for the potential locations, themes, key messages and interpretative devices that may be used and/or installed throughout the site.

This interpretation has been informed by the heritage significance of the place and current use and as such could be altered if elements or designs vary.

5.1. AUDIENCE PROFILE

The interpretation aims to reveal meanings and connections to the subject site. To effectively achieve this, interpretation is predicated on identifying audiences and using appropriate media. It is important to identify specific audiences so that interpretation responds to audience needs and also takes into consideration literacy levels, disability, genders, ethnicity and age.

Due to the location of the subject site within the CBD, and the current use of the site as a lyric theatre, the subject site is visited by a diverse audience. Some of the current and potential audiences include:

- Regular visitors, including those who work at the theatre
- Patrons of the theatre coming to see performances
- Tourists visiting the Haymarket area, including patrons of the neighbouring Capitol Square and Palace Hotel;
- Special interest groups such as heritage, theatre and architecture enthusiasts and learning audiences.
- General public, workers and residents of immediate area.

The Capitol Theatre has significance at a state level for its historic, associative, aesthetic and representative values, and for its rarity. This is reflected in the remaining physical fabric of the place including the original 1927 intact interior. The significance of the Capitol Theatre is multi-faceted. However, it is impracticable to communicate every facet of that significance. Therefore, it is appropriate to identify themes and strategies for communicating them effectively and creatively to the foreseen audience.

5.2. INTERPRETATION THEMES AND NARRATIVES

The historic themes and interpretation are adapted from the historic overview prepared for this Heritage Interpretation Plan. The interpretation will identify and recognise all parts of the history of the site as having significance. Interpretative themes and messages can be derived from the evidence according to the thematic framework for items of local significance.

The history of the Capitol Theatre is multi-faceted and has numerous layers. The Historic Themes that have been used to inform the recommended narratives are outlined in Table 2. These narratives take into consideration the significant history and potential future audiences.

Table 2 – Historical Themes

Australian theme	NSW theme	Local theme	Discussion
3. Economy- Developing local, regional and national economies	Commerce	Activities relating to buying, selling and exchanging goods and services	The Capitol Theatre lies on part of the early Government Paddock in conjunction with the Hay, Corn and Cattle market. Between the 1860s and the 1880s, the block bound by Campbell, Pitt, Hay and George Streets was known as Paddy's Market with open air markets along with theatre, circus and sideshow entertainment. The old Belmore Markets, located to the east of the site grew too congested by the mid-1880s and it was decided by Council that the New Belmore Market was to be constructed on the site of the old Hay, Corn and Cattle Market. After many delays, the New Belmore Market, designed by

Australian theme	NSW theme	Local theme	Discussion
			<p>George McRae, was erected on the site between 1891 to 1893. Within ten years of the New Belmore Markets erection, it proved unsuccessful and a new market location was sought.</p> <p>The New Belmore Markets became redundant with the erection of the new municipal market further to the west in Haymarket (current Paddy's Markets).</p> <p>By 1911, the building ceased to be utilised for market purposes, and was leased to the Wirth Brothers as a circus and hippodrome. In 1912, the decision was made to redevelop the New Belmore Markets, with the Wirths Circus in the western portion (current Capitol Theatre site) and the eastern half (current Manning Building) as a coffee palace (later offices) and shops. By 1914, the New Belmore Markets had been dismantled and were under construction for a new Hippodrome for the Wirth's Brothers.</p>
8. Culture-Developing cultural institutions and ways of life	Creative endeavour	Activities associated with the production and performance of literary, artistic, architectural and other imaginative, interpretive or inventive works; and/or associated with the production and expression of cultural phenomena; and/or environments that have inspired such creative activities.	<p>As early as the 1860s, the site of the Capitol Theatre was used for the purposes of entertainment, in conjunction with Paddy's Markets. Between the 1860s and 1880s, theatre, circus and sideshow entertainment was present alongside the open-air markets. During the 1870s the grounds of the old Hay, Corn and Cattle Markets was leased to a succession of international and Australian circuses including Chiarine's Royal Italian Circus (1873), Wilson's San Francisco Palace circus (1876) and Cooper, Bailey and Company's Internal Circus Allied Shows (1877).</p> <p>In 1882 the Wirth Brothers opened a sideshow on the reserve and continued to perform on the open site until mid-1888. From 1911 to 1913, the Wirth Brothers performed within the market building, before ceasing performances for the reconstruction of the western portion of the New Belmore Markets for the construction of Wirth Brothers Hippodrome, designed by Robert Hargrave Broderick. With the building completed, the Wirth Brothers began performing in the new Hippodrome in April 1916. The Hippodrome was used from 1916 for other theatrical performances including William Anderson, the melodrama specialist and boxing programs. With mounting costs in the late 1920s, Wirths applied to Council to convert the Hippodrome into a picture theatre in 1927, engaging Henry E White to design the remodelling of the building first as a hard-top cinema, and then revised for an atmospheric theatre. Within weeks of the plans being approved by Council, the lease of the building was transferred from the Wirth Brothers to Union Theatres, ending Wirth Brothers association with the site.</p> <p>The remodelled building was to be known as the Capitol Theatre, an atmospheric theatre fit for the silver screen. The</p>

Australian theme	NSW theme	Local theme	Discussion
			<p>Capitol Theatre officially opened in 1928 and the subsequent year fitted to screen 'talkies'. In 1932, the theatre was closed for refitting and began screening second rate movies from 1933.</p> <p>Over the next 50 years the theatre deteriorated, and the building fell into disrepair following a range of tenancies including Greater Union Theatres, ballet and dance company productions, and the performance of Jesus Christ Superstar from 1972-3. The Capitol Theatre was closed from 1979 to 1983 and occasionally during this time was used as a concert venue.</p> <p>In 1989, Council called for expression of interest to conserve the Capitol Theatre and develop it into a first class lyric theatre. The theatre was restored between 1993 and 1995 and was reopened in January 1995. Since the theatre's restoration, the Capitol Theatre has continued to show world class productions within the conserved atmospheric theatre.</p>

5.2.1. Historic Use

The history of the subject site can be separated into four significant phases based on the use and occupancy of the site. The Capitol Theatre has a long and rich history of adaptation, reconstruction and restoration. The following outlines these four phases.

5.2.1.1. New Belmore Markets (1893-1913)

As noted previously the Capitol Theatre site was associated with market use since the mid nineteenth century until 1912. Originally part of the early Government Paddock in conjunction with the Hay, Corn and Cattle market, the Capitol Theatre site later became what was known as Paddy's Markets from the 1860s to 1880s. With the closure of the Old Belmore Markets, due to congestion, the Capitol Theatre site was developed as the New Belmore Markets, designed by George McRae and erected between 1891 to 1893.

The use of the site for market purposes, however, was only short lived. By 1911, the New Belmore Markets had become redundant due to the development of the new municipal market further to the west in Haymarket. The New Belmore Markets were dismantled and re-erected in 1914, with Wirths Circus at the location of the existing Capitol Theatre site, and the eastern portion as a coffee palace and shops.

While the market use of the site was discontinued since 1912, the area immediately surrounding the site continued to be used for these purposes. Some of the distinctive Federation Free style design of the New Belmore Markets is retained in the elevations of the Capitol, including the large arched openings and prominent pediments. Details, including face brickwork, sandstone and moulded terracotta details also remain from the New Belmore Markets. The following images provide some example of images that can accompany the New Belmore Markets narrative.

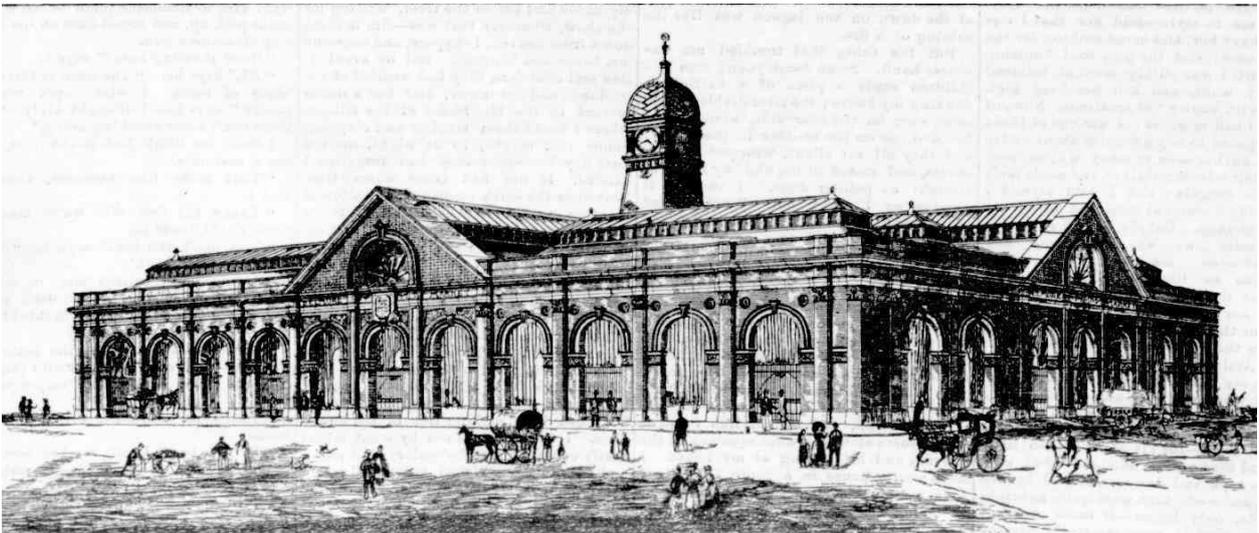


Figure 220 - "The Belmore Market, Sydney, now in course of erection – as the building will appear when completed".
Source: *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 24 December 1892, p31



Figure 221 – New Belmore Market entrance, 1904.
Source: *City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 43 p104*



Figure 222 – Inside New Belmore Market, 1904.

Source: *City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 43 1904 p107*

5.2.1.2. Wirths Hippodrome (1914-1926)

With the site ceasing to be used for market purposes in 1911, the decision to redevelop the site with the Wirths Circus in the western portion (current Capitol Theatre site) and the eastern half (current Manning Building) as a coffee palace (later offices) and shops was made in 1912. The Wirth Brothers had performed at the site since 1882 when they had opened a sideshow on the reserve and continued to perform on the site until mid-1888. When the building ceased to be used for market purposes, between 1911 and 1913, the Wirth brothers performed again at the market building until ceasing to allow for the reconstruction of the western portion of the New Belmore Markets for the Wirth Brothers Hippodrome, designed by Robert Hargrave.

When the building was completed, the Wirth Brothers began performing in the new Hippodrome in April 1916. The Hippodrome was used from 1916 for other theatric performances including William Anderson, the melodrama specialist and boxing programs. With mounting costs in the late 1920s, Wirths applied to Council to convert the Hippodrome into a picture theatre in 1927, engaging Henry E White to design the remodelling of the building first as a hard-top cinema, and then revised for an atmospheric theatre. Within weeks of the plans being approved by Council, the lease of the building was transferred from the Wirth Brothers to Union Theatres, ending Wirth Brothers association with the site.

The exterior remodelling of the New Belmore Markets into the Wirths Hippodrome still largely remains today. Internally, one of the main elements that remain of the Wirth Brothers Hippodrome is the concrete tank, which has now been integrated into the back of house areas as the orchestras dressing rooms. Originally the concrete tank allowed for aquatic performances, including displays by seals and polar bears. When the tank wasn't in use as a pool, it 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. The following images provide some example of images that can accompany the Wirths Hippodrome narrative.

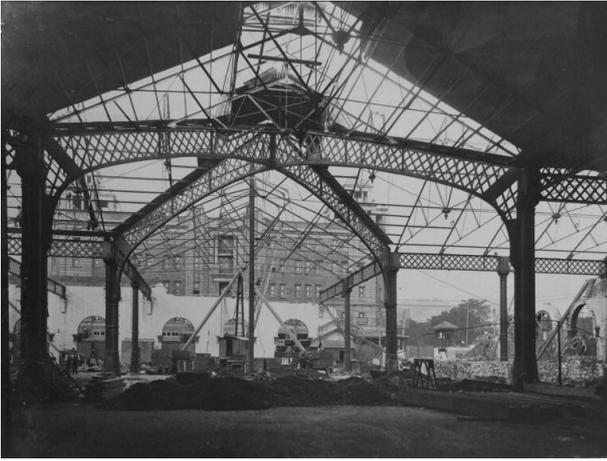


Figure 223 – Internal view looking towards Campbell Street showing demolition of market building in progress, 2 July 1913.

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3423



Figure 224 – Reconstruction as Wirrths Hippodrome, 18 August 1914

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3273



Figure 225 – Reconstruction as Wirrths Hippodrome, 28 September - 23 November 1914.

Source: NSCA CRS 51/3299

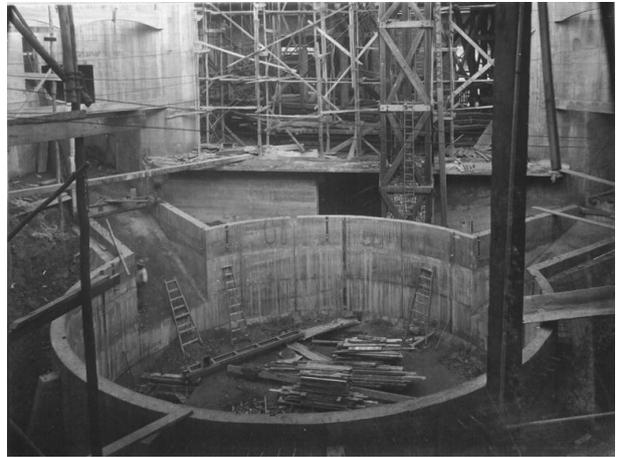


Figure 226 – Aquatic tank nearing completion within the Hippodrome, 9 August 1915.

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



Figure 227 – Wirths Hippodrome, 19 August 1919.
Source: City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 51/4709

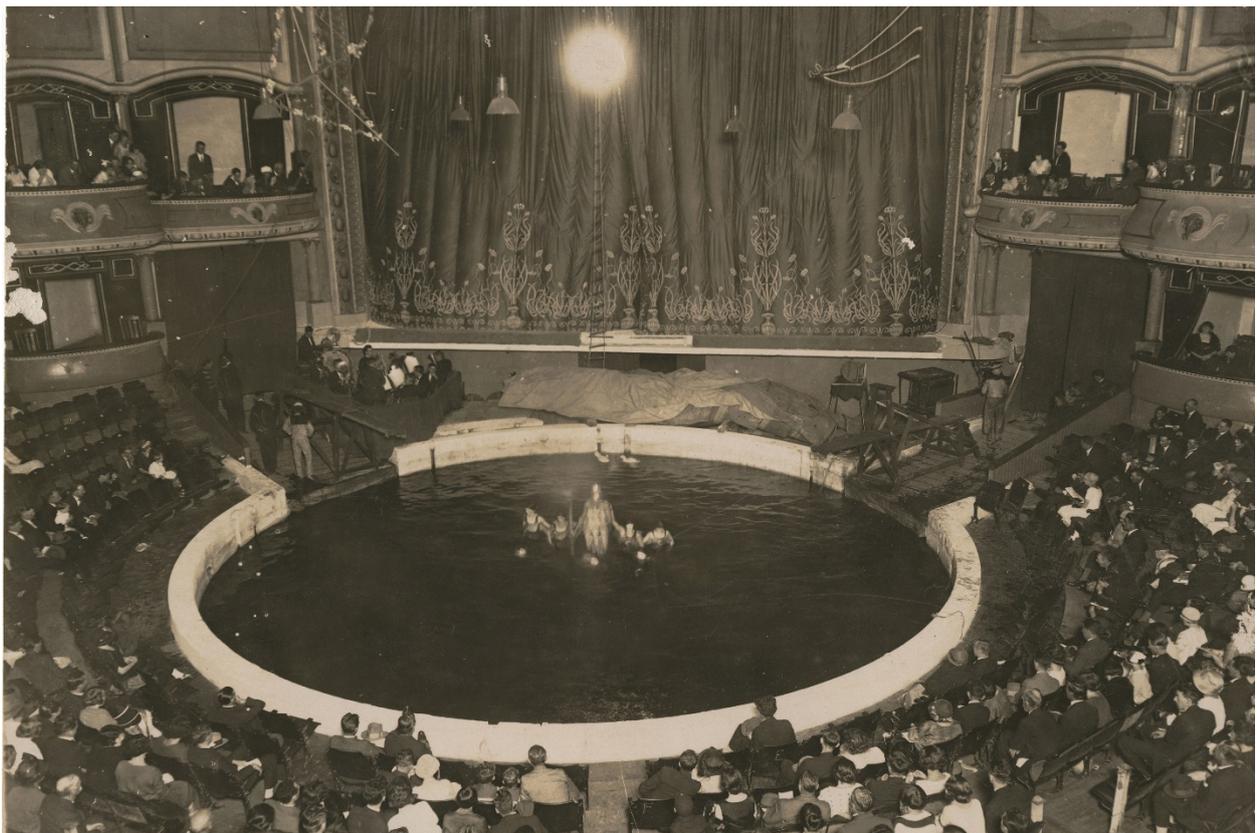


Figure 228 – Hippodrome aquatic tank, c1916.
Source: MAAS Collection, 2012/104/1-3/61



Figure 229 - Official opening of Wirths Hippodrome Sydney, 3 April 1916. Photograph by JD Cleary.

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

5.2.1.3. Capitol Theatre (1927-1991)

With the Wirth Brothers application to Council to convert the Hippodrome into an atmospheric theatre, designed by Henry E. White, works began on the conversion in 1927. The building was again remodelled, retaining the exteriors of the New Belmore Markets and Hippodrome, with some alterations and additions. Internally, the building was substantially remodelled. Within weeks of the plans being approved by Council, the lease of the building was transferred from the Wirth Brothers to Union Theatres, ending Wirth Brothers association with the site.

The remodelled building was to be known as the Capitol Theatre, an atmospheric theatre fit for the silver screen. On the opening night of the Capitol Theatre in April 1928, it was a grand affair reported by the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

...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.*¹⁰³

Within the year following the official opening of the Capitol Theatre it was fitted to screen 'talkies'. The Capitol Theatre only experienced a spectacular but brief flowering, as by 1931-1932 Union Theatres was in financial difficulties with the depression. In 1932, the theatre was closed for refitting and began screening second rate movies from 1933.

Over the next 50 years the theatre deteriorated and the building fell into disrepair following a range of tenancies including Greater Union Theatres, ballet and dance company productions, and the performance of Jesus Christ Superstar from 1972-3. The Capitol Theatre was closed from 1979 to 1983 and occasionally during this time was used as a concert venue. The following images provide some example of images that can accompany the Capitol Theatre narrative.



Figure 230 – Patrons of the Capitol Theatre in 1930s

Source:

<https://www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/history.aspx>



Figure 231 – Ushers and a matron in the first floor foyer of the Capitol Theatre, c. 1932

Source: Mitchell Library, Sam Hood Collection, reprinted by Playbill for Capitol Theatre, Sydney

¹⁰³ "The Capitol, richly ornamented theatre, opening ceremony", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 1928, p4



Figure 232 – Foyer decorated with fresh flowers for Opening Night, 1928

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



Figure 233 – 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

5.2.1.4. Restored Capitol Theatre (1992-Present)

In 1989, Council called for expression of interest to conserve the Capitol Theatre and develop it into a first class lyric theatre. In September 1989, the tender of developers Ipoh Gardens (Aust) Ltd was accepted. Involved in the restoration of the Capitol Theatre were Eadie and Trevor Waters from Peddle Thorp and Walker Architects, guided by the Conservation Plan prepared by James Kerr. The alterations and additions to the Capitol Theatre upgraded the building to be functional for the end of 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 deconstruction and reconstruction of the new fly tower involved extension into Hay Street, and excavation for the new sub-stage areas. The atmospheric theatre elements of the foyers, gallery and auditorium were repaired and conserved, with some alterations undertaken to accommodate the new use of the building as a lyric theatre. A new foyer and gallery were also created in a portion of the Manning Building, which was then interconnected with the Capitol Theatre.

The restoration works occurred restored between 1993 and 1995 and Capitol Theatre reopened in January 1995. Since the theatre's restoration, the Capitol Theatre has continued to show world class productions within the conserved atmospheric theatre. Refer to the images contained in Section 3.3.4 for images that can accompany the Restored Capitol Theatre narrative.

5.2.2. Creative Endeavour

The following narratives stem from the significant history of creative endeavours at the site of the Capitol Theatre. Below is a potential narrative for interpretation of the Capitol Theatre.

5.2.2.1. Atmospheric Theatres

The beginning of the atmospheric theatre era arrived with John Eberson's 1923 design of Hoblitzelle's "Majestic" in Houston, Texas. Eberson, an American architect, designed many of the approximately 100 atmospheric theatres throughout the United States. Approximately 16 of his theatres are still in operation. Unlike the United States, only a handful of atmospheric theatres were developed within Australia. These included 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). Of these five theatres, only three remain, the Capitol Theatre (Sydney), the State Theatre (Melbourne) and the Plaza (Brisbane), however, the latter no longer operates as a theatre. The Capitol Theatre is the only remaining atmospheric theatre within New South Wales and is the most intact in Australia.

Atmospheric theatres were a distinct departure from the mainstream picture palace design which had developed during the first quarter of the twentieth century. These theatres featured luxurious decoration and were intended to provide a palatial architectural setting for their patrons. 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. The sky could be transformed by dramatic lighting effects projected from a highly developed version of the magic lantern.

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. A wide span garden pergola, or its equivalent, was the only distraction permitted in this smooth interpretation 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.

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. Eberson's designs included themes such Greek, Italian Renaissance, Moorish, Oriental and Spanish Mission. He would also mix these themes where the result might help provide a novel and spectacular ambience for the patrons.

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. The feature movie was accompanied by an orchestra, the size of which depended on the importance of the theatre.

5.3. EXISTING HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

5.3.1. External

Two historic markers are located on the Campbell Street (north) elevation and western elevation of the Capitol Theatre. These markers highlight the commencement (Figure 237) and completion (Figure 238) of the Capitol Theatre during the 1990s. While these plaques acknowledge the restoration and reconstruction works undertaken to the Capitol Theatre, they do not provide any insights in the interpretative themes outlined in Section 5.2. Despite this, the plaques should be retained (either in situ, or be relocated or replaced if required to be removed due to any approved works) and it is recommended that additional interpretation be installed on the exterior of the Capitol Theatre to address the Interpretation Themes identified.



Figure 234 – Bronze plaque at western elevation highlighting the commencement of reconstruction and restoration of the Capitol Theatre

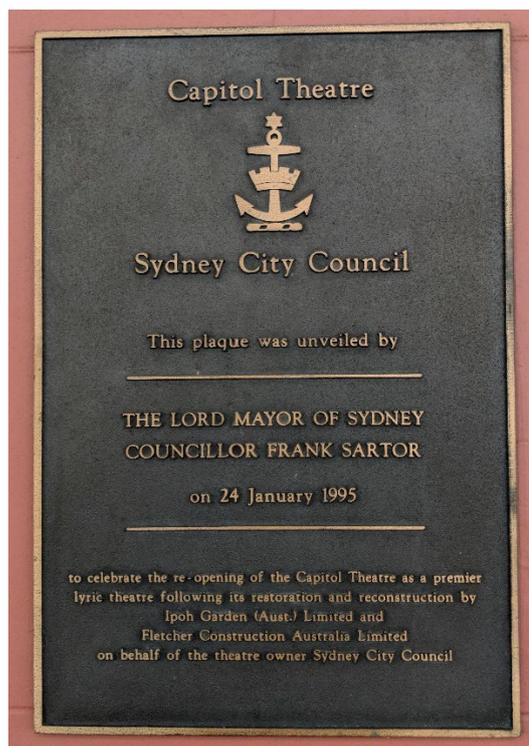


Figure 235 – Bronze plaque at Campbell Street (northern) elevation highlighting the completion of reconstruction and restoration works of the Capitol Theatre.

5.3.2. Internal

Within the front of house areas, there is some existing heritage interpretation pieces. Within the original gallery, mounted on the northern wall, is a heritage interpretation panel that provides an overview of the history of the site and is presumed to have been installed following the completion of the restoration and reconstruction works undertaken during the 1990s (Figure 239). The positioning of the panel is not in a prominent position and is easily missed. While the panel provides a good overview of the history of the site, the panel is hard to read due to the small size of the text and dim lighting. It is recommended that this panel be replaced with a more engaging panel of the history of the Capitol Theatre and site.

A series of historic images are displayed within the VIP Room, "The Peacock Room" located off the auditorium at Stage level. The series of historic images depict the site through the various stages of the development of the site from the New Belmore Markets, to Wirrths Hippodrome to the Capitol Theatre (Figure 240 and Figure 241). While these series of images provide an insight into the history of the site, the room in which they are placed is not accessible to the general public and theatre patrons. It is recommended that these historic images are retained or, if required, replaced with the same of similar images along with text that provides an engaging overview of the evolution of the site.



Figure 236 – Heritage interpretation panel in original gallery



Figure 237 – Historic images in “The Peacock Room”



Figure 238 – Historic images in “The Peacock Room”

Within the back of house areas there are a number of interpretation elements. Within the corridors of the back of house, there are framed posters of previous productions held at the Capitol Theatre, some signed by the performers. These posters should be retained as interpretative elements within the back of house areas. However, if they are required to be removed, it is permissible provided that a similar type of interpretation is used as a replacement.

Adjacent to the exterior of the doors of the dressing rooms there are small gold-coloured plaques with the name of prominent performers who used the dressing room whilst performing at the Capitol Theatre. These plaques should be retained insitu. However, if the plaques are required to be removed, they may be replaced provided that the names of the performers which are recorded on the outside of the dressing rooms are recorded and displayed in some way.



Figure 239 – Posters of previous productions held at the Capitol Theatre in the corridors



Figure 240 – Posters of previous productions held at the Capitol Theatre in the corridors



Figure 241 – Small gold-coloured plaques outside dressing room recording previous performers



Figure 242 – Small gold-coloured plaques outside dressing room recording previous performers

5.4. POTENTIAL INTERPRETATION MEDIA

The following section details proposed interpretation media for the Capitol Theatre, including nominating key themes and messages and appropriate locations for interpretation. The proposed Interpretation within the subject site should incorporate the policies outlined in the CMP, especially with the conservation of significant fabric and built form. The proposed media incorporates a variety of strategies including digital content, signage and other media.

The proposed media outlined below will need to be further developed in consultation with the City of Sydney and Foundation Theatres.

5.4.1. Built Form Interpretation

Built form interpretation will be on the exterior and interior. Built form interpretation should inform the retention of significant architectural features outlined in the CMP and treatment of significant fabric and features. This plan should be consulted during, and prior to, any potential future development works.

The following spaces and elements have been graded as having 'Exceptional' or 'High' significance and should be retained as part of a built form interpretation plan. It should be noted that the areas outlined below are only a sample of the significant areas outlined in the CMP.

- The original atmospheric foyers, gallery and auditorium have been ranked as having exceptional significance. These spaces are intrinsic to the significance of the Capitol Theatre as an atmospheric theatre and must be retained.
- The movable items and atmospheric theatre details are ranked as having high significance and should be retained. The movable items and atmospheric theatre details, which includes a mix of original and reconstructed elements, including statuary, bas-reliefs, busts, tapestries, mirrors, lights etc. are integral parts of the significance of the atmospheric theatre. These elements should continue to be retained and conserved.

- The Federation Free style portions of the Campbell Street (northern), western and Hay Street (southern) elevation which contain fabric from the New Belmore Markets and Hippodrome should be retained as evidence of the evolution of the site since the 1890s.

Opportunities for built form interpretation should be incorporated into any future development or detailed design proposal for the subject site. This includes any proposal for conservation, refurbishment or adaptive reuse. The following photographs (Figure 246 and Figure 255) illustrate a selection of significant features the Capitol Theatre as mentioned above.



Figure 243 – Ground floor foyer viewed from dress circle foyer



Figure 244 – Ground floor gallery



Figure 245 – View of east wall of auditorium from dress circle



Figure 246 – View of west wall of auditorium from the stalls



Figure 247 – Statuary, lighting and mirrors in the first floor foyer.



Figure 248 – Tapestries and bas-reliefs in the foyers

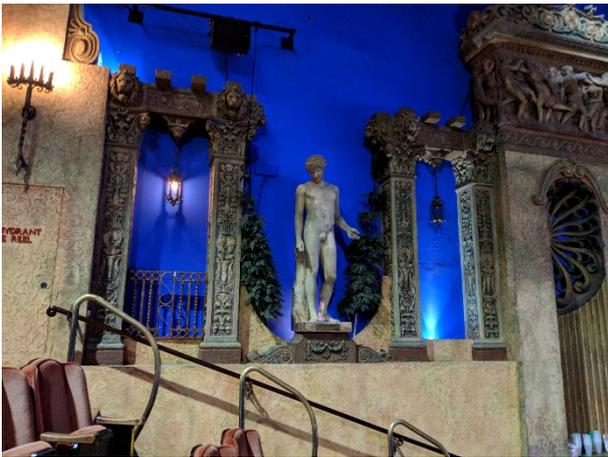


Figure 249 – Statuary, lighting and artificial plants in auditorium



Figure 250 – Statuary, lighting and artificial plants in auditorium

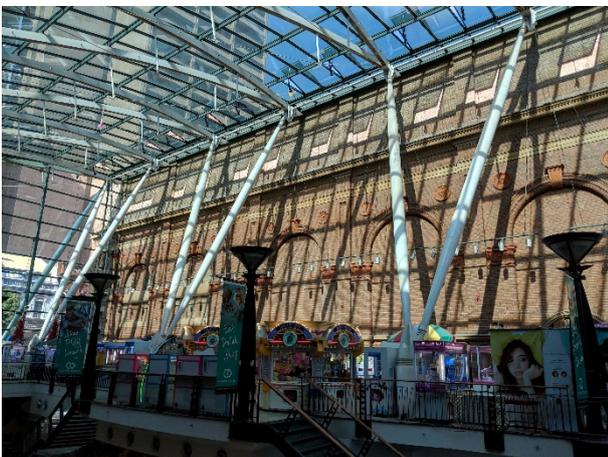


Figure 251 – West elevation viewed from the interior of Capitol Square



Figure 252 – Hay Street (southern) elevation

5.4.2. Signage and Historic Markers

Interpretative signage could be incorporated within the Capitol Theatre, both internally and externally. Heritage signage and historic markers should be used to outline the history and changing historic use of the building. The signage should incorporate text and imagery that evoke the four main phases of the site developments including the New Belmore Markets, Wirths Hippodrome, Capitol Theatre, and the restored Capitol Theatre.

Exterior

Externally, new historic markers should be installed in addition to the two existing historic markers present on the Campbell Street (northern) and western elevations. These should explore the early phases of the site through the transformation from the New Belmore Markets to Hippodrome to Capitol Theatre.

The existing two historic markers which identify the restored Capitol Theatre should be retained in situ as they identify the restoration of the Capitol Theatre in the 1990s. New historic markers could be installed on the Campbell Street and Hay Street elevations. A small plaque could be installed in proximity to the existing Campbell Street plaque on a pilaster between the two openings to the Box Office. Interpretation of the evolution of the site from the New Belmore Market to Hippodrome to Capitol Theatre could also be incorporated into the pavement out the front of the main entrance to the original foyers Capitol Theatre. Recommendations for the placement for these interpretative elements are identified in Figure 256 and examples of these elements are included at Figure 257 to Figure 260.

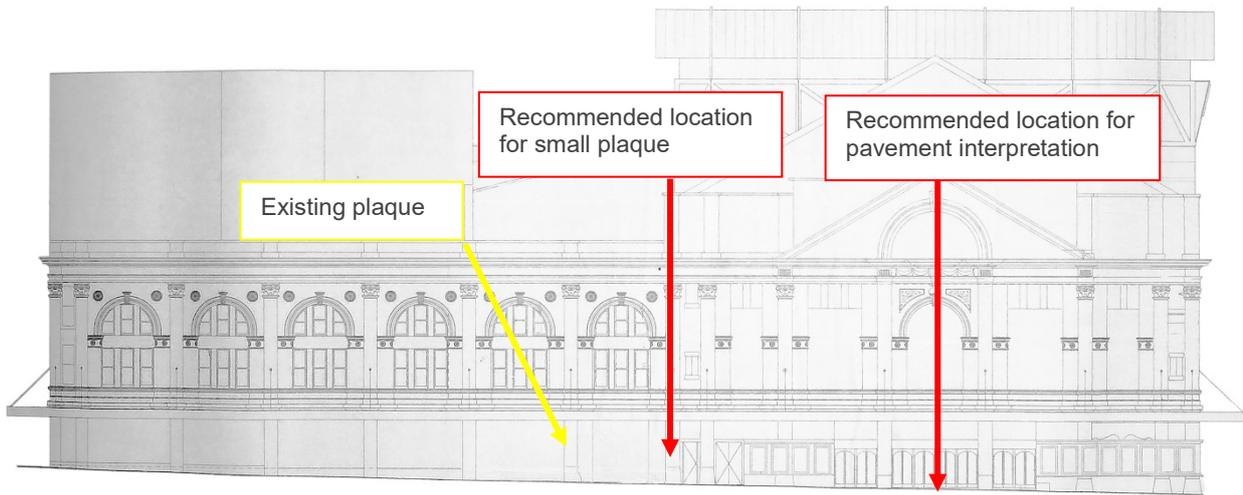


Figure 253 – Campbell Street elevation with the location of the proposed position of interpretive elements identified.



Figure 254 – Example of a round bronze plaque at 246 George Street, Sydney

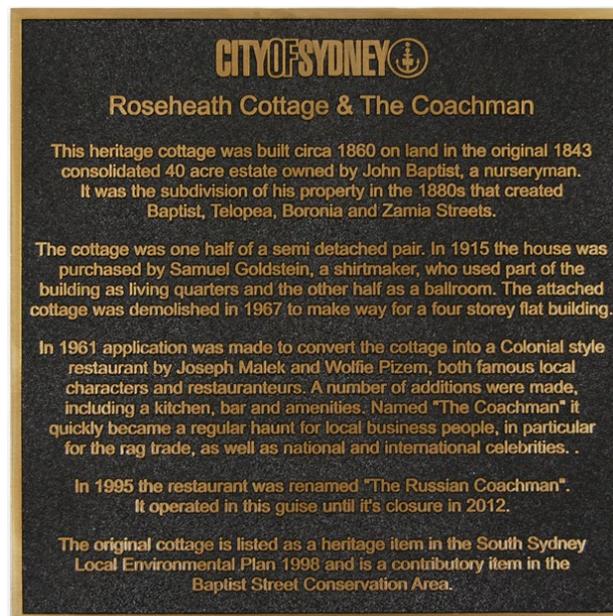


Figure 255 – Example of rectangular bronze plaque

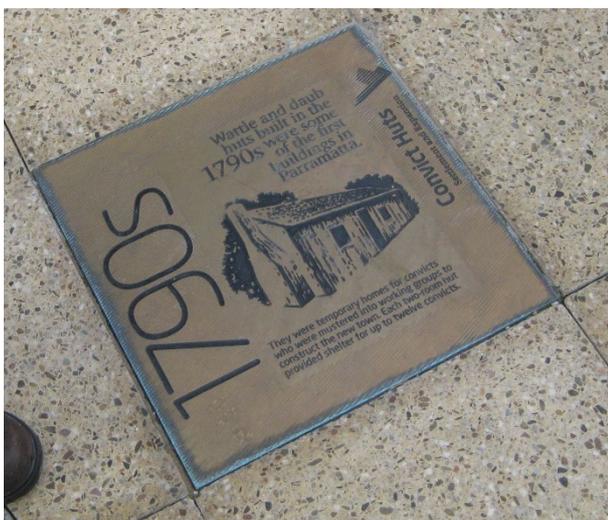


Figure 256 – Example heritage interpretation panel set into pavement



Figure 257 – Example of pavers with etched heritage interpretation

On Hay Street, larger interpretative signage, which primarily utilises imagery over text, could be located in the empty alcoves of the facade. These could include imagery of the external architectural transformation of the building, or showcase the various world-class productions that have played at the Capitol Theatre. These could present as interpretative artworks or murals set on panels that are fixed into the alcoves. Recommendations for the placement for these interpretative elements are identified in Figure 256 and examples of these elements are included at Figure 257 to Figure 260.

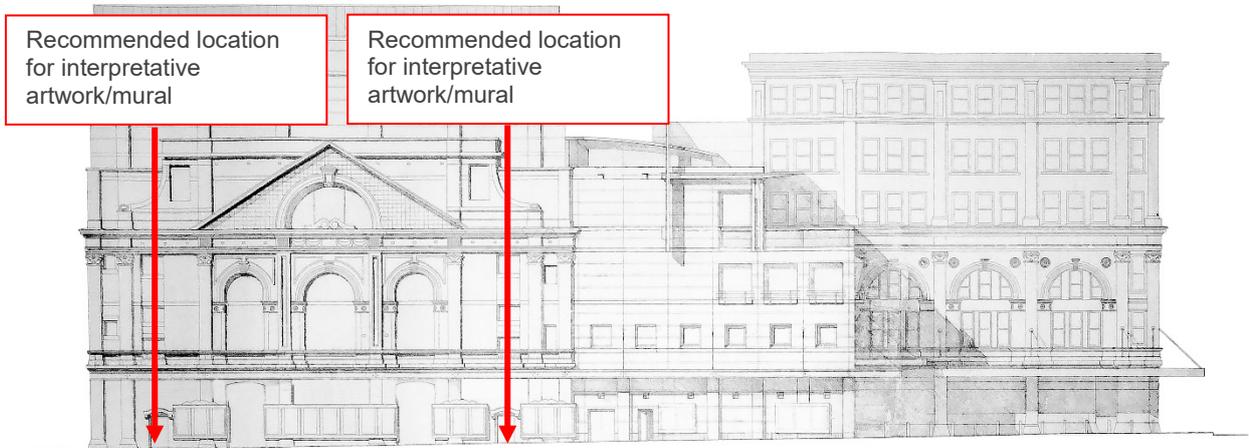


Figure 258 – Hay Street elevation



Figure 259 – Example of a tiled artwork for a converted fire station



Figure 260 – Example of artwork incorporating old post office boxes with historical imagery.

Interior

Further heritage interpretation should be included in the interiors of the Capitol Theatres, in both the original foyers and gallery and the 1990s foyer and gallery. New interpretative signage should seek to convey the themes identified in Section 5.2. Narratives relating to the overall historical development of the site could be included, or snippets of the historical narrative of the Capitol Theatre could be scattered, logically, around these front of house areas so that patrons to the theatre may peruse the information whilst they linger in the foyers and galleries, before, during and after the performance they have come to see.

Materials for interpretation can vary extensively and may be specific to the interior design of the Capitol Theatre, whether it be placed in the atmospheric theatre or placed in the 1990s foyer and gallery. Signage should be fixed permanently and must be designed in regard to durability, installation and maintenance. The location of the signage should consider pedestrian traffic, accessibility, presentation and historical accuracy/relevance. Signage should not be visually otherwise intrusive, and if placed within the atmospheric theatre portions of the Capitol Theatre, should not detract.

Potential locations for interpretative signage for interior signage are displayed in the following figures. These locations have been recommended as they will not obscure any atmospheric elements, and are least likely to detract from the appreciation of spaces within the Capitol Theatre. Ten locations have been identified, however, approximately four of these options, across both the atmospheric portion of the theatre and the 1990s portion of the theatre, are recommended. Some examples of internal signage are included at Figure Figure 266 to Figure 269.

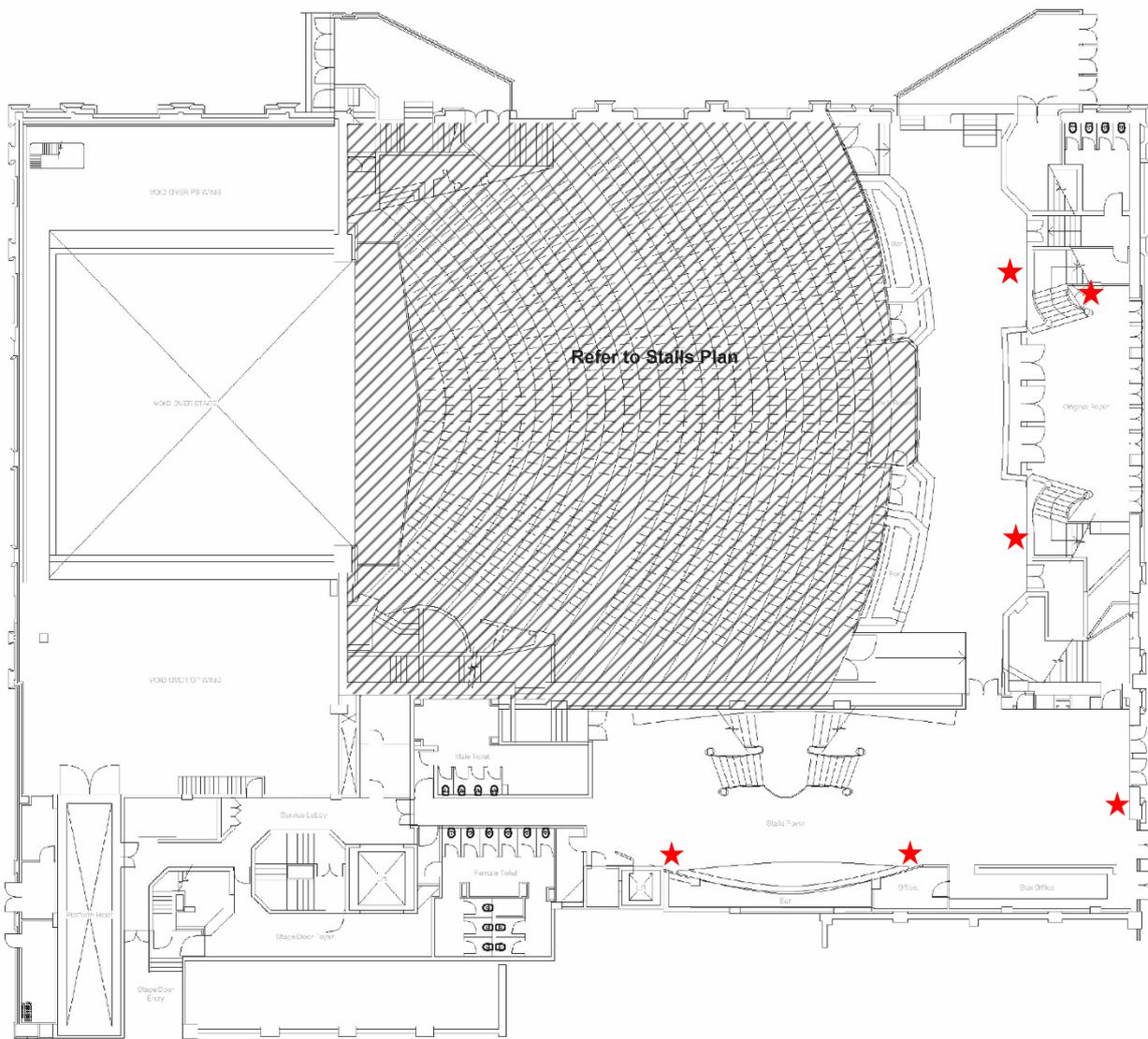


Figure 261 – Potential locations for interpretative panels in ground floor of front of house areas

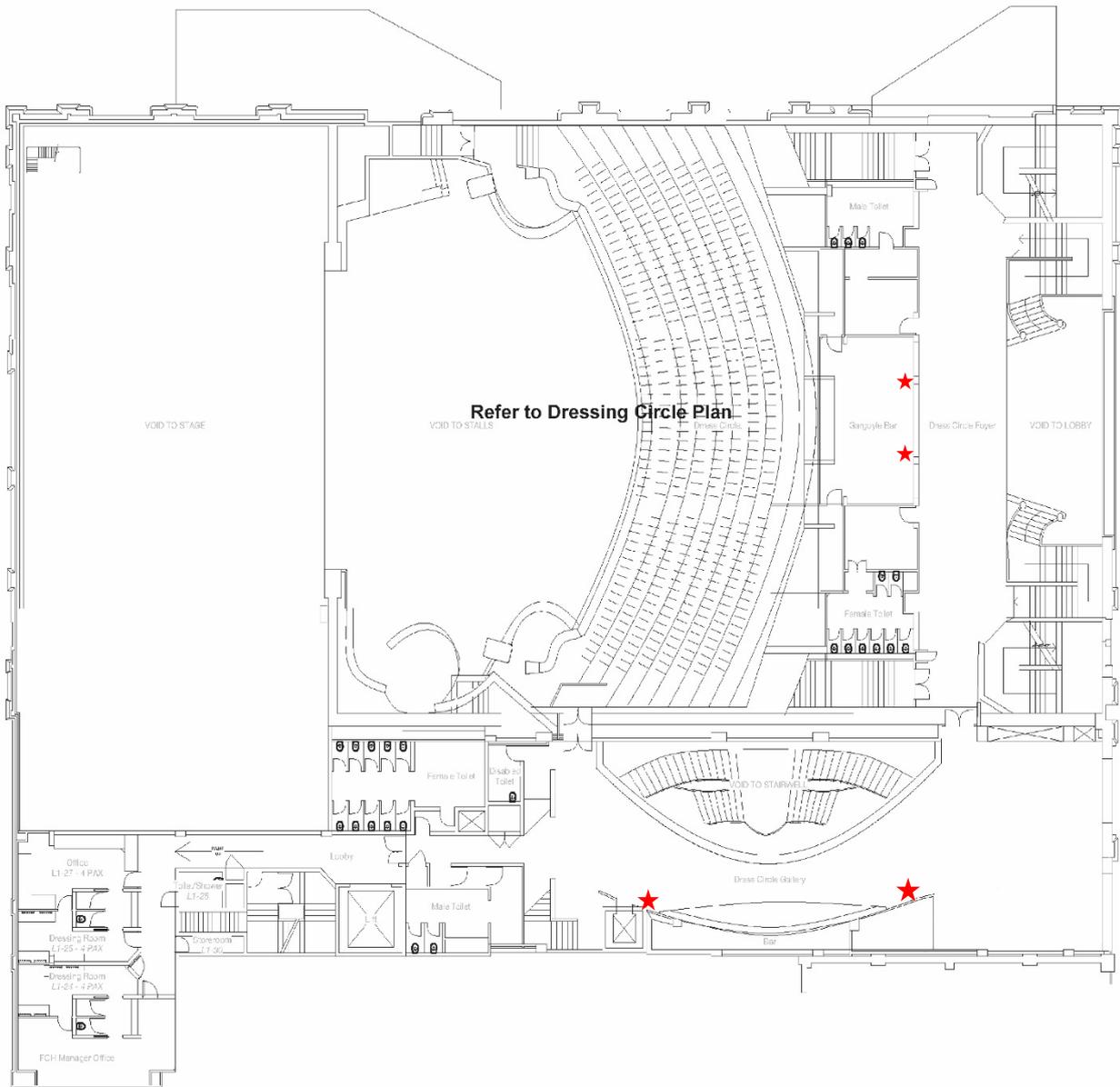


Figure 262 – Potential locations for interpretative panels on first floor of front of house areas



Figure 263 – Example of interpretative panel



Figure 264 – Example of interpretative panels

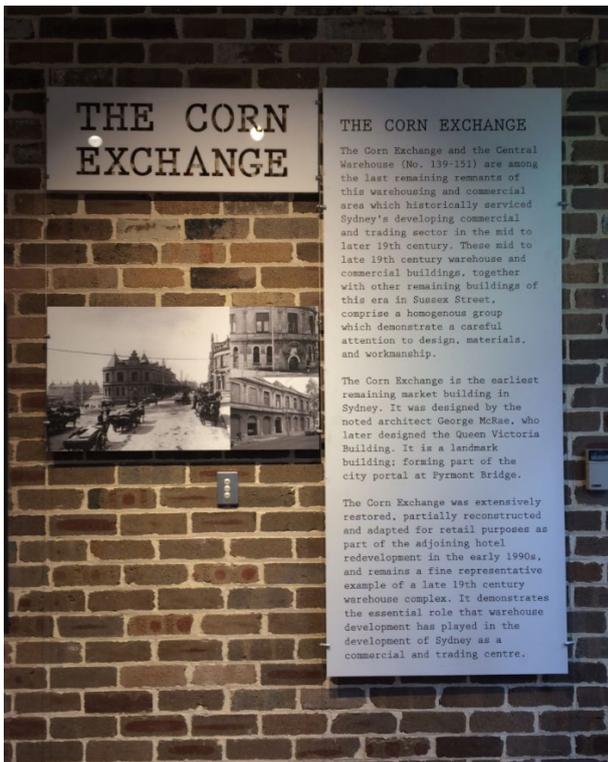


Figure 265 – Example of interpretative panel



Figure 266 – Example of interpretative panel

In addition, as noted in Section 5.3.2, the historic images located in “The Peacock Room” should be retained or if required, replaced with the same or similar images along with text that provides an engaging overview of the evolution of the site. The posters located in the back of house corridors should be retained as interpretative elements within the back of house areas. However, if they are required to be removed, it is permissible provided that a similar type of interpretation is used as a replacement. The gold-coloured plaques located on the outside of the dressing rooms should be retained insitu. However, if the plaques are required to be removed, they may be replaced provided that the names of the performers which are recorded on the outside of the dressing rooms are recorded and displayed in some way.

5.4.3. Digital Media – Website

As part of the interpretation strategy, it is recommended that the existing website for the Capitol Theatre is reviewed and updated to incorporate additional imagery and to update the existing history. Content for the website can be updated using the history contained within this report and the identified themes in Section 5.2. The existing website is shown in Figure 270.

Digital media has the flexibility to be altered based on further research or events held at the subject site. Digital media has the potential to uncover and highlight narratives and associations with the subject site through personal accounts. The website has the potential to be periodically updated with stories and narratives relating to the Capitol Theatre. For example, not many patrons would know that the concrete tank once used for Wirth Hippodrome for aquatic performances is still present and now used as the orchestra’s dressing rooms.

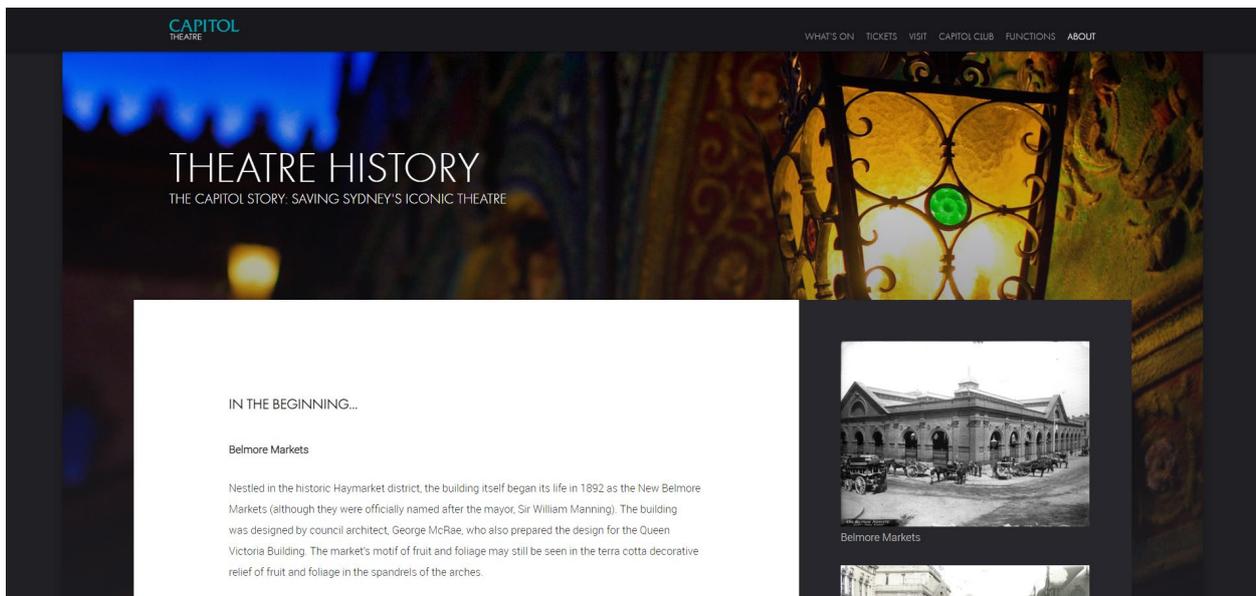


Figure 267 – Existing website for Capitol Theatre, under ‘Theatre History’ tab of website

Source: Capitol Theatre website, <https://www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/history.aspx>

5.4.4. Events and Ongoing Access

Public access to the subject site is a key part of heritage interpretation. The front of house areas of the Capitol Theatre are open to ticket holding patrons of the Capitol Theatre during show times. Outside of show times, access to the Capitol Theatre by the public is limited to the Box Office area accessed off Campbell Street.

Access to the public is also provided through existing tours that are offered by the Capitol Theatre. The tours provide a guided 1.5- 2 hour tour of the Capitol Theatre led by a tour guide who provides a journey through the history of the Capitol Theatre from “from hippodrome to picture palace to rock venue to finally become a world-class musical theatre venue”.¹⁰⁴ Tours are scheduled on non-show days.

The existing level of access to the public to the Capitol Theatre is satisfactory, considering the site use as a lyric theatre.

¹⁰⁴ Capitol Theatre website, <https://www.capitoltheatre.com.au/about/tours.aspx>

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Heritage Interpretation Plan has been prepared for the City of Sydney in conjunction with the Conservation Management Plan (2019), prepared by Urbis. The Capitol Theatre, located at 3-21 Campbell Street, Haymarket is listed as a heritage item under Part 1 of Schedule 5 of the *Sydney Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 2012* as *Capitol Theatre including interior* (Item No. I826) and on the State Heritage Register (SHR) under the *Heritage Act 1977* as *Capitol Theatre* (Item No. 00391).

It is not expected in the near future that the use of the Capitol Theatre will change. However, if any changes are proposed to the Capitol Theatre, this document should be consulted if and when any detailed design plan are proposed. Dependant on any future change to the Capitol Theatre, further opportunities for interpretation that have not been outlined in this report should be researched.

It is recommended that the City of Sydney seeks to implement the recommendations provided within this report. To achieve these recommendations, this report has outlined the historical significance and include a historical overview of the subject site (Sections 3 and 4). These sections have informed the themes and narrative that have been highlighted in Section 5.2. A summary of the key themes and narratives are outlined below:

- Historic Use – highlighting the four key phases of the site from the New Belmore Market, to Wirth Hippodrome to the Capitol Theatre and the theatre restoration.
- Creative Endeavour – Highlights the use of the Capitol Theatre as an exceptional example of an atmospheric theatre inspired by the works of John Eberson, the atmospheric theatre designer.

This HIP also recommends a number of interpretation media including:

- Built form interpretation;
- Signage and historic markers:
- Digital media; and
- Events and ongoing access.

Detailed information has been included in Section 5.3 that links the media with the particular themes and suggests potential locations. This information is subject to any proposed changes to the Capitol Theatre. For this reason, this document should be reviewed by the City of Sydney Council and Foundation Theatres, should any future changes be proposed.

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