

Heritage Citation



Rialto Theatre

Key details

Addresses	At 61 Hardgrave Road, West End, Queensland 4101
Type of place	Cinema
Period	Interwar 1919-1939
Style	Art Deco
Lot plan	L3_SP105754
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 1 July 2002 Date of Citation — July 2011
Construction	Walls: Masonry
People/associations	Greek community of West End (Association)

Criterion for listing

(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (C) Scientific; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic; (F) Technical; (G) Social

The Rialto Picture Theatre in Hardgrave Road, West End was built in 1926 for Garricks Entertainment Ltd. Grander in scale than most Brisbane suburban theatres, it was purpose built as a cinema although the auditorium has been used for live theatrical productions. During the 1960s, television caused a decline in Brisbane cinema audience numbers. The Rialto survived this trend by screening Greek language films to meet the specific needs of the West End migrant community.

History

as the second shopping precinct in West End, after Boundary Street, in the late 1890s. Shops were built to provide goods and services to residence in the nearby streets, as the Boundary Street shops would have been too far away for these people. The growth of Hardgrave Road was consolidated by improvements in transport. The tramways system was electrified in 1897, and the tramline in West End was extended. The earlier terminus at the intersection of Boundary and Vulture Streets was replaced. The line was extended westwards along Vulture Street, and then south along Hardgrave Road to Ganges Street, by 1901. This increase in potential custom provided an impetus for growth. Business premises developed along Hardgrave Road in the early part of the twentieth century, with grocers, butchers, fruiterers and the like in evidence. Apart from these establishments providing basic commodities, other premises were built which enhanced the quality of suburban living. Places of civic amenity providing recreational and leisure activities were constructed as the suburb consolidated. One such place of civic amenity was the picture theatre. The Lyric Picture Palace in Boundary Street was built in 1914, and in 1926, the Rialto Picture Theatre was built.

The site on which this theatre was built used to contain a grocery shop. George Valentine acquired a portion of land, containing 1 rood and 1.75 perches, in 1884 and constructed a grocery shop in 1887. This shop remained here until the late 1910s, and the land was subdivided in the 1920s. A company called Garricks Entertainment Ltd. Purchased 25.6 perches of this land and built the Rialto.

The 1920s was a boom period for the motion picture industry, with many cinemas being constructed in this decade. The art form of film proved to be more than a temporary phenomenon, and the improvements in technology saw a concomitant establishment of the cinema as an architectural form. The makeshift accommodation for the displaying of films like halls and tents gave way to permanent structures, ranging from modest buildings in the suburbs to grand picture palaces in the city. Suburban picture theatres tended to be more utilitarian and less glamorous than those in the city. A visit to the former was a more commonplace activity; a visit to a city cinema was a special event. This differentiation tended to be reflected in the comparative architecture of the buildings. While the Rialto followed the simple structure of the suburban picture theatre, it was a much grander example of this type. The existence of the Rialto, and of the Lyric Picture Palace in Boundary Street, testifies to the importance of West End as an inner suburb in Brisbane in the 1920s.

Description

The arrival of television in the 1950s and its immense popularity in the 1960s had a great impact on the motion picture industry. The decline in patronage due to television meant the closure of many cinemas in cities around Australia, but particularly those in the suburbs. The Lyric Picture Palace in Boundary Street did not survive these lean years but the Rialto did. The 1960s saw the growth of “ethnic” cinemas. Suburban cinemas that might have been forced to close due to television were often located in areas of high migrant populations. These theatres were taken over by Greeks or Italians and used to screen films of their home country. As West End had a significant migrant population at the time the Rialto was ideally situated to take advantage of this move. The Rialto screened Greek films at various times in the 1960s. The Greek Society bought the theatre in the early 1970s and used it to exclusively screen Greek films.

The Rialto has had a number of ‘regenerations’ in recent years, as owners and managers have attempted to relaunch the theatre in various cultural directions. The Rialto has been the venue for vaudeville shows, pantomimes, music concerts, and film screenings. Currently its primary use is theatrical.

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history for its contribution to the streetscape of Hardgrave Road.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage as one of the oldest cinemas in Brisbane.

Scientific

CRITERION C

The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the city's or local area's history

for its continuous use as a cinema/theatre for more than 60 years.

Representative

CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

as representative of a time when most suburbs had a local cinema.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as a fine example of the 'streamlined' style of architecture of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Technical

CRITERION F

The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technological achievement at a particular period

as the innovative use of low cost materials in its design has provided it with considerable presence within a modest budget.

Social

CRITERION G

The place has a strong or special association with the life or work of a particular community or cultural group for

social, cultural or spiritual reasons

for its important association with the Greek community of West End.

References

1. Lawson, Ronald *Brisbane in the 1890s: A Study of an Australian Urban Society*. St Lucia U of Q Press, 1973
 2. Brand, S 1983 *Picture Palaces and Flea-Pits*, Dreamweaver Books, Sydney. 1991, *The Southside Weekender*, Vol 1 No 3
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Note: This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner, before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

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