

THE
RAMSGATE-SANS SOUCI
PALACE PICTURE THEATRE

"THE BEST BY TEST"

BY MICHELLE STEET

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Author's Note

Due to final editing to ensure ease of reading and a polished presentation, source End Note numbers may not appear at the end of some paragraphs but at the end of immediately subsequent paragraphs.



Introduction

When we think of “going to the movies” in the present day, we cast it off as just one of a multitude of visual entertainment options readily available to us. However, going to the cinema was once one of the only forms of entertainment, next to live theatre and horse races.¹

Cinemas, then better known as “picture theatres”, were for many the most (and sometimes only) affordable option, and picture theatres usually had more to offer than just seeing a film.

Picture theatres were socially significant, seen as an “instruction” as well as an amusement and a healthy tonic after the working day for men and women alike.

Picture theatres were often the focal point of many communities, with regular gatherings of music, dancing and singing. Picture theatres also provided a meeting place where large numbers of residents and the like could rally at any one time.

The early part of the 20th century thus saw the number and popularity of picture theatres continue to rise.

Long before television was introduced to everyday Australians in 1956, cinema was one of the most popular forms of entertainment and, by 1921, had become the most popular.^{2 3}

The rise in popularity resulted in the creation of a picture theatre in almost every suburb in the Sydney Metropolitan area.

Sans Souci was no exception and thus the Ramsgate-Sans Souci Palace Picture Theatre was born.

It must be noted that, although the theatre was initially named “Ramsgate-Sans Souci Palace Picture Palace” and was located in Sans Souci, it was more often than not simply called/referred to as the “Ramsgate Theatre”. The name/title “Ramsgate-Sans Souci Palace Picture Theatre” has been used for the purpose of this composition.

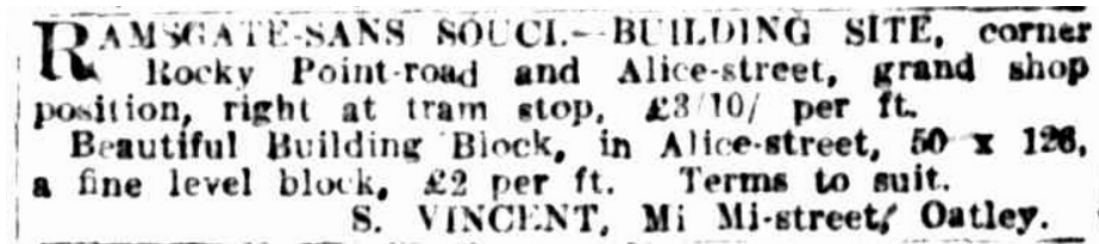
It must also be noted that the two, original proprietors of the theatre, Charles (Rupert Norman) Owen and George (William) Sellars, often used and were known by their second given name.

This composition focuses not only on the theatre itself, but also on the people who made it possible and what became of the theatre when it closed its doors for the very last time.



Acquisition of Land & Approval of Plans

In April 1921, two blocks of land, one of which was on a corner of Rocky Point Road and Alice Street, Sans Souci, were offered for sale. As it transpired, both blocks were on the eastern side of Rocky Point Road and on opposite corners of Alice Street.^{4 5 6}

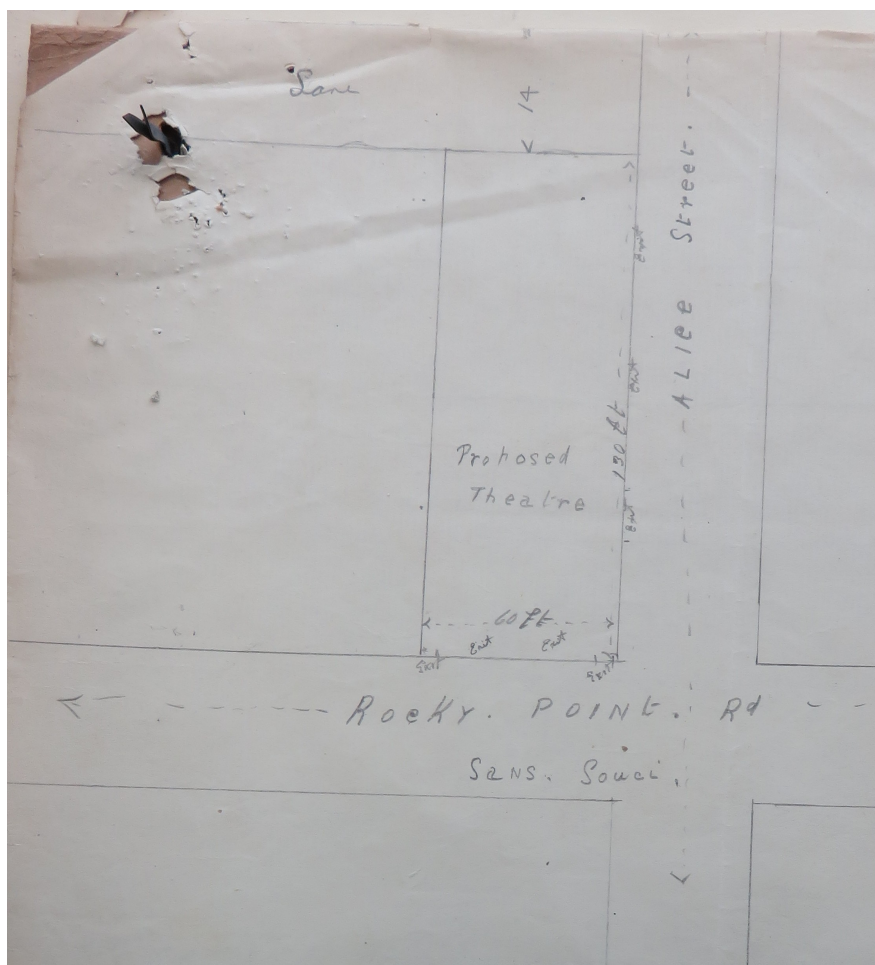


Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday, 23 April 1921

English born entrepreneur and businessman, William Pilling, likely saw the above advertisement and shortly commenced (successful) negotiations to acquire both blocks of land, especially the northern which was particularly suitable for what William Pilling had in mind. (William Pilling also later acquired the two remaining corner blocks at the intersection of Rocky Point Road and Alice Street.)⁷

It was William Pilling's intention to construct (any number of shops, offices and) a picture theatre in the Sans Souci/Ramsgate area. By late 1922/early 1923, William Pilling had successfully constructed and opened the Palace Picture Theatre Canterbury.^{8 9}

On 06 June 1923, William Pilling wrote to the Under Secretary (essentially the Chief Secretary's Department) in Sydney seeking permission to erect a picture theatre at Sans Souci, to the same design and construction as the Palace Picture Theatre Canterbury. The only difference would be slight modifications regarding exits.^{10 11}



William Pilling's proposed theatre layout/location, 06 June 1923

With his letter, William Pilling included his proposed layout/location for the Sans Souci/Ramsgate theatre and copies of the previously approved plans for the Palace Picture Theatre Canterbury. The Chief Secretary's Department granted its approval for the Sans Souci/Ramsgate theatre on 08 June 1923.^{12 13}

With the above approval, and in conjunction with Charles Rupert Norman Owen and George William Sellars, William Pilling and Charles Owen each submitted (likely identical) plans for the Sans Souci/Ramsgate theatre to Rockdale Council on 13 June 1923, although the plans submitted by Charles Owen noted the theatre's intended location to be on the corner of Rocky Point Road and Selmon Street (the next street north of Alice).¹⁴

On 18 June 1923, Rockdale Council's Building Committee made a recommendation to Rockdale Council that the building proposals of “Messrs Owen and Sellars” and William Pilling be referred back for various further and proper plans to be submitted, a recommendation Rockdale Council adopted. Meanwhile, a premature reporting of Rockdale Council’s approval appeared in the local Propeller newspaper.^{15 16}

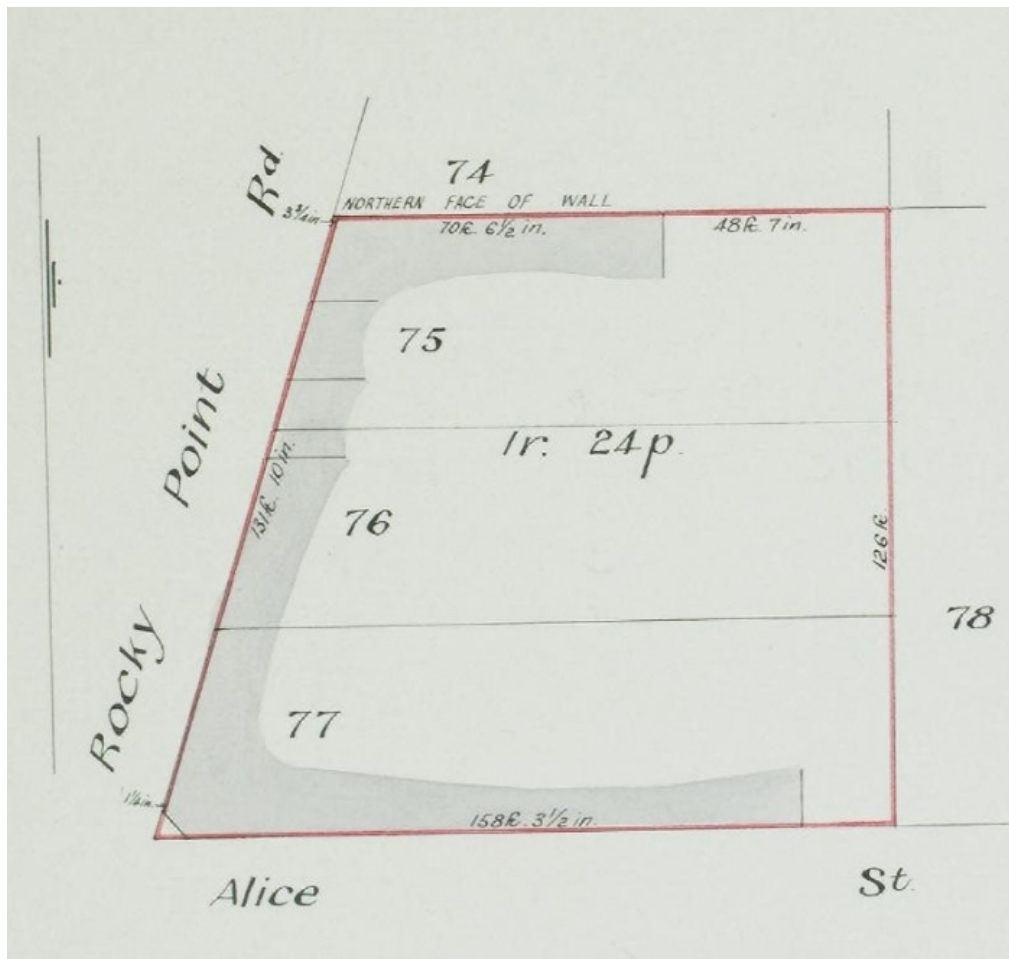
Despite plans for the theatre having not yet been approved by all relevant authorities and that William Pilling was yet to acquire the land upon which he wished to build, William Pilling was extremely confident and the following announcement appeared in the St George Call on Friday, 29 June 1923 and Friday, 13 July 1923.^{17 18}



St George Call, Friday, 29 June 1923

On 14 July 1923, William Pilling successfully acquired Lot 75 in the “Lawrence Estate” for a little over £153 sterling and, on 24 August 1923, acquired Lots 76 and 77 in the same estate for £352 sterling. Lot 77 comprised the north east corner block of Rocky Point Road and Alice Street, with Lots 76 and 75 adjoining Lot 77 to the north along Rocky Point Road.^{19 20}

Lots 75, 76 and 77 comprised a total land area of 1 rood 24 perches, the equivalent of approximately 1,619 square metres.^{21 22}



Lots 77, 76 & 75, Certificate of Title, Volume 4928 Folio 74

Meanwhile, further plans had eventually been submitted to Rockdale Council and, on 30 July 1923, Rockdale Council's Building Committee recommended that William Pilling's building proposal be approved. At its meeting on 02 August 1923, Rockdale Council unanimously adopted its Building Committee's recommendation.^{23 24}



The Theatre 1923-1949

The Ramsgate-Sans Souci Palace Picture Theatre was heralded to be “up-to-date” and one of the most comfortable and well ventilated theatres in the State. Another fine feature would be the inclusion of a lawn and garden laid out to the side.²⁵

Building commenced on 26 June 1923, apparently before William Pilling had formally acquired any land or had had relevant plans approved.²⁶

Construction took approximately five months and, at completion, the single storey theatre spanned all of Lot 77 and part of Lot 76.

The theatre was classed as a “b Grade hall” (as it was to accommodate in excess of 1,000 patrons) and a recommendation was made by the Chief Secretary's Department's Supervising Architect for the granting of a License under that classification.²⁷

The theatre was constructed of brick with an iron roof and had walls averaging a height of 17 feet above a timber floor.

A foyer with refreshment room and office either side was located at the front abutting Rocky Point Road, with the remainder of the frontage consisting of exits. A 14 feet wide court was located at the rear.

The auditorium/hall measured 110 feet x 58 feet and seating capacity estimated at 1,100. However, exact seating was to be determined after seats had been fixed.

The auditorium included a stage measuring 32 feet x 12 feet complete with sliding curtains and canvas screen (likely provided by Charles Owen and George Sellars, details later).

Three small rooms were formed under the stage, partitioned by Oregon pine, which were used as store and cloak rooms.

Toilets were apparently located at the rear outside the hall. However, this later appears to have not been the case.

The theatre also included the usual operating box, rewinding room and ticket office.

Seven escape doors were provided, two opening from the auditorium into the foyer, three opening directly onto Alice Street and two directly onto Rocky Point Road, at the extreme corners of the building. All doors opened outwards and included panic bolts. Standard exit lamps were also located over doors.

Of course in 1923 there was no airconditioning (as we know it) and thus four shutters, each approximately 5½ feet x 3 feet were included in the side walls, nine feet above the floor.

A louvred opening 9 feet x 3 feet was located in the rear wall and four 15” ventilators in the roof. Inlets in walls were also included, at a height of approximately 5½ feet above the floor.^{28 29}

The theatre also comprised a number of attached shops and offices, all of which were variously leased.³⁰

No photographs of the theatre (between 1923 and 1949) have yet been unearthed.

However and as previously mentioned, plans submitted by William Pilling for the Ramsgate-Sans Souci Palace Picture Theatre were identical to that of the Palace Picture Theatre Canterbury (save slight modifications regarding exits) and thus the (Ramsgate-Sans Souci) theatre likely looked remarkably similar.



*Palace Picture Theatre Canterbury
Photograph courtesy of Barry Sharp and
City of Canterbury Local History Photograph Collection*

William Pilling did not intend to operate the theatre, having formed a lease agreement which included the theatre and two adjoining lock-up shops with Charles Owen and George Sellars (hereafter “Messrs Owen & Sellars”) on 22 June 1923. The term of the Lease was 10 years at a rate of £17 10s per week, with an option to renew for a further five years at the same rate.³¹

Per the Lease, it was the responsibility of the Lessees (i.e. Messrs Owen & Sellars) to supply and fix 1,100 tip-up cushion chairs, two “Ermanian” (or similar) biograph machines, one rewinder and stand, chairs for the orchestra, all curtains and floor coverings, one rotary converter and a piano.

Also per the Lease, all such fixtures/fittings plus any further property supplied, fixed or brought into the theatre by Messrs Owen & Sellars would become the property of the Lessor (i.e. William Pilling).³²

Messrs Owen & Sellars were obliged to keep the theatre open and show movies at least two evenings per week, and were not to use the theatre for any purpose other than showing movies, concerts, vaudeville, theatricals, dancing or as an amusement hall.³³

With the Lease in order and construction and fitout nearing completion, Messrs Owen & Sellars intended opening the theatre in early November 1923.



St George Call, Friday, 12 October 1923

For whatever reason, Messrs Owen & Sellars did not apply to the Chief Secretary's Department for an appropriate License until 05 November 1923, noting that it was intended to also have dancing and that seating was designated to be up to 975. A notation on the letter included that Charles Owen had stated that the theatre was then intending to be opened about 28 November 1923.³⁴

The late November opening did not eventuate and, presumably whilst their application for a formal License was being processed, Messrs Owen & Sellars applied for a temporary License on 07 December 1923, as they then intended opening the theatre on 11 December 1923.³⁵

The Chief Secretary's Department responded same day (i.e. 07 December 1923) granting permission for use of the theatre on and from 11 December 1923.

However and as a result of a prior inspection by the (Chief Secretary's) Departmental Architect, a number of minor issues required addressing (if they had not already) prior to a formal License being issued.

The above issues included the words "This Way Out" or "Exit" to be legibly painted in 4" letters over each exit door. Candle (or oil) lamps or independent battery lamps were to be fixed over each exit and lamps for lighting were to be sufficiently high to be out of the reach of the public.

The operating box and separate rewinding room were to be of fire resistant construction and a variety of fire inhibiting/fighting measures were to be implemented.

Permanent screens were to be erected in front of toilets either side of and adjoining the stage.^{36 37}

Upon having attended to the above issues, a formal License was finally issued to Messrs Owen & Sellars on 04 February 1924, effective from 28 November 1923 for a period of 12 calendar months.³⁸

Meanwhile and with permission granted for the use of the theatre, the Ramsgate-Sans Souci Palace Picture Theatre was officially opened on Tuesday, 11 December 1923 by Mr F.A. McDonald, M.H.R.

Mr McDonald described the theatre as a fine, spacious brick building, reflecting excellent credit on William Pilling as the owner/builder.

The theatre had also previously been described as a beautiful building and a great acquisition to the district. Messrs Owen & Sellars had spared no expense in rendering the theatre as modern as possible.^{39 40}

At the official opening, which was greatly attended, Mr McDonald wished William Pilling and Messrs Owen & Sellars every prosperity and success, before cutting a St George (red and white) coloured ribbon which held the curtain.

Songs were shortly performed by Miss Gladys Toyer and Master Cecil Brown.⁴¹

Messrs Owen & Sellars, as part of the official opening, held a free matinee for children the following Saturday, 15 December 1923.⁴²

Net proceeds from the opening night amounted to approximately £33, which Messrs Owen & Sellars donated equally to the St George Hospital and the St George Ambulance, in response to an appeal by Ada Brokenshire.^{43 44 45}

BALANCE SHEET.			
SANS SOUCI-RAMSGATE PICTURE PALACE.			
Opening Night, December 11, 1923.			
Income.			
	£	s.	d.
Sale of Tickets	49	12	9
Donation, Mrs. Dillon .. .	10	0	
	£50	2	9
Expenditure.			
	£	s.	d.
A/c. from Mr. Owens.			
Films .. .	6	10	0
Orchestra .. .	3	2	6
Operator .. .		17	6
Advertising Signs, Placards ..	4	9	6
A/c. Mrs. Brokenshire.			
Dodgers and Tickets .. .	1	6	0
Stamps and Stationery .. .		4	6
Sundries .. .		9	6
Net Proceeds .. .	33	3	3
	£50	2	9
Audited and found to be correct, Alfred W. Stevens, J.P., Sans Souci. Ada Brokenshire, Organiser.			

St George Call, Friday, 21 December 1923

The picture theatre was an important part of society and, from its opening, not only movies were shown. Charles Owen (Manager) arranged a variety of concerts on Sunday nights including performances by the Balmain Amateur Orchestral Society, Tooth's Band, the Kogarah Band, the State Military Band and Westmead Boys' Band.

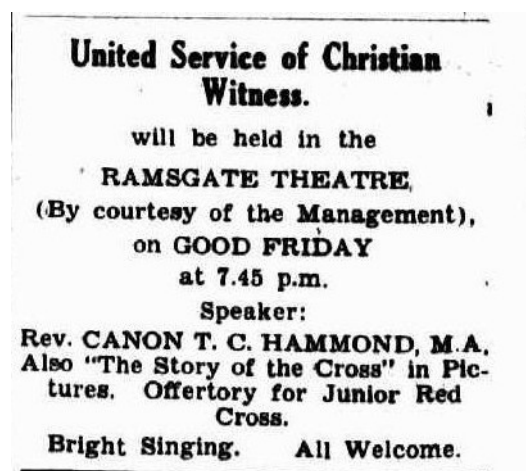
Many of Sydney's foremost vocalists and instrumentalists were also engaged to perform and, by 12 September 1930, the theatre had become "... the rendezvous of music lovers ...".⁴⁶

Messrs Owen & Sellars became well known for their generosity. They often unreservedly offered the theatre and the services of its full staff at no charge to charities such as the Sans Souci Red Cross Society and to those raising money for (usually widow and children) benefit funds, often including a picture programme also free of charge.

Children staying at “Cudgelo”, the Junior Red Cross Seaside Home in Sans Souci, were admitted to matinees of the “Talkies” free of charge, and Messrs Owen & Sellars received the accolades of the residents of Ramsgate and Sans Souci for their unwavering support of such causes.^{47 48 49 50 51}

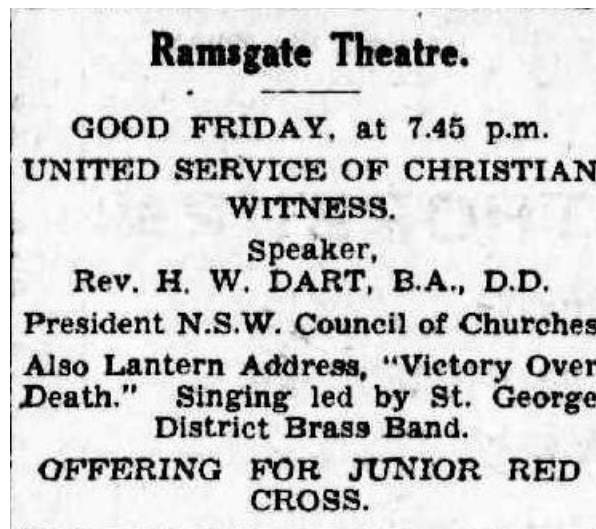
A variety of raffles, public gatherings and meetings of various organisations such as the Sans Souci Improvement Association and the Ramsgate Legion Club were held at the theatre, as well as large meetings of residents from the Sans Souci and Kogarah districts.^{52 53 54 55}

Easter services on Good Friday, arranged by local Anglican, Baptist, Congregational and Methodist Churches, were held at the theatre courtesy of Messrs Owen & Sellars. The service in 1942, during and in connection with World War II, was attended by more than 1,000 people and included a collection for the Junior Red Cross.^{56 57 58}



Propeller, Thursday, 02 April 1942

A similar service was held on Good Friday (23 April) the following year. Music was provided by the St George District Band and an offertory was again taken in support of the Junior Red Cross.^{59 60}



Propeller, Thursday, 22 April 1943

The female students of Sans Souci Public School held their Christmas concert at the theatre on 08 December 1926, which Charles Owen kindly lent for the occasion.⁶¹

Many schools including Sans Souci Public (over many years) held their Empire Day celebrations in the theatre, for which Messrs Owen & Sellars again provided free use of the auditorium and screening of several short films.⁶²

Empire Day had been observed on 24 May (Queen Victoria's birthday) each year following Queen Victoria's death in 1901. It was renamed Commonwealth Day in 1958 and although not a public holiday, some of us will remember it as "cracker night".⁶³

The theatre however was not without its faults.

Chatswood builder James Park became the owner of the property and improvements on 01 April 1924, just prior to which it had been found that the roofing of the theatre was defective. James Park described to the Under Secretary on 09 April 1924 how he intended addressing the issue, having recently arranged reinforcing iron work from ironfounders and blacksmiths, W. Thornley & Sons Pty Limited.

The Under Secretary later responded that it was not concerned with how the issue was addressed, only that it was rectified without delay to ensure the structural integrity of the building. Any (further) delay would jeopardise the theatre's License (a suspension thereof) until the work had been satisfactorily completed.

By 04 July 1924, it appeared that the above work had still not been conducted, although (presumably) such work was eventually so completed.^{64 65 66 67}

In 1925 and during an inspection by the Sanitary Inspector of the Office of the Director General of Public Health, the men's toilet was found to open directly onto the auditorium and to be offensive. The ladies' toilet, also attached to the main hall albeit by a narrow "approach", was also found to be offensive.

The Chief Secretary's Department advised Messrs Owen & Sellars that the resulting recommendations made by the Sanitary Inspector should be followed, including the regular and thorough cleaning out and washing of the toilets.

It was also recommended that Messrs Owen & Sellars ensure that the floors of the theatre were similarly scrubbed and that floors, seats and the lower portions of walls be sprayed with an approved flea exterminating agent.⁶⁸

Regular inspections by such as Kogarah Police (to facilitate annual license renewals), NSW Fire Brigade and the Office of the Director General of Public Health nonetheless found the theatre to be in a most satisfactory state with such as fire appliances efficient and adequate in number.⁶⁹

General maintenance issues were occasionally brought to the attention of Messrs Owen & Sellars following any given inspection and, in 1926, parts of the auditorium's lattice work ceiling were found to be sagging considerably and appearing insecure, and the issue of the men's toilet and its offensiveness had still not been resolved.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, Messrs Owen & Sellars successfully renewed their License on 22 December 1926, effective from 28 November 1926 for the usual 12 months, subject to the premises being placed in a satisfactory state of repair.⁷¹

On 09 February 1927, Kogarah Police reported to the Chief Secretary's Department (via the Commissioner of Police) that no repairs had been carried out at the theatre and that upon interviewing Charles Owen on several occasions, the Officer could obtain no satisfaction from Charles Owen on whether he (Charles Owen) intended effecting the required repairs.

Charles Owen had apparently informed the Officer on every occasion that the matter had been satisfactorily arranged with the Government Architect, something the Chief Secretary's Department denied.⁷²

Not seeing to the required repairs again placed the theatre's License in jeopardy.

Charles Owen later informed the Chief Secretary's Department that the lattice work ceiling and other repairs had been effected and proffered a solution to the issue of the men's toilet. However, Charles Owen's solution, which included the permanent closure of an exit door, was not possible.⁷³

On 10 July 1927, the aforementioned Officer from Kogarah Police reported to the Chief Secretary's Department (again via the Commissioner of Police) that, from experience, he found Charles Owen to be unreliable and from a recent inspection the Officer had made the Officer was unable to confirm whether repairs to the lattice work ceiling had in fact been conducted.

On 21 July 1927, a Mr Davey of 24 Parramatta Road, Summer Hill confirmed in writing that the overhaul and repairs to the lattice work ceiling (as instructed by Charles Owen) had been carried out. ^{74 75}

It is not known how/if the issue of the men's toilet had been resolved.

Structural and cosmetic repairs aside, the theatre also saw its share of excitement and tragedy.

On Sunday, 30 September 1926, Adam Huegil was found in an unconscious condition near the theatre. It appeared that Huegil had been struck by a piece of timber, leaving him in a serious condition with concussion and a possible fracture to the skull. ⁷⁶

The theatre seemed to have a special attraction for Edward Douglas who, late on the evening of Saturday, 02 June 1928, stormed the entrance of the theatre, shirt hanging out, trousers hanging loose and brandishing three bottles of beer.

When asked to leave quietly, Douglas continued to use indecent language before becoming violent. The burly constable in attendance simply and promptly bundled Douglas into an Ambulance van which had shortly arrived and proceeded to the police station. ⁷⁷

In October 1928, 18 year old Horace Duggan was fined £2 (or, in default, 14 days' imprisonment) for using indecent language outside the theatre and, in November 1929, a man attempted to break into the theatre and was chased by a Constable Scott for approximately a mile. ^{78 79}

On the evening of Saturday, 05 July 1930, nine year old Nancy Fletcher attended the theatre with her father. Sadly and upon leaving the theatre after the show, Nancy attempted to cross Rocky Point Road when she was knocked down and killed by a motor car. ^{80 81}

Speaking of shows, what of the motion pictures themselves?

In December 1931, “Mother's Millions”, the story of an unprincipled female financier trying to get even with a rival railroad buyer and starring world famous, Australian born May Robson, was showing.^{82 83 84}

In April 1932, the vampire thriller “Dracula” starring Bela Lugosi was showing, to be followed at a later date by another sensation from Universal Pictures, “Frankenstein”.^{85 86}



*1931 Universal Pictures Movie Posters
Images courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

On the evening of 20 July 1932, the theatre featured "The Menace" as part of a "Monster Entertainment" programme hosted by the Sans Souci Branch of the Illawarra Suburbs Lawn Tennis Association in an effort to raise funds to establish its own courts in the district.⁸⁷

I.S.L.T.A., SANS SOUCI BRANCH.

Monster Entertainment
PALACE THEATRE, RAMSGATE
WEDNESDAY, 20th JULY, 1932, at 8 p.m.

MUSICAL PROGRAMME.
"PERSONALITY FOUR," featuring **MISS MAGGIE FOSTER**
and her band of **THREE INSTRUMENTALISTS.**
MR. CECIL BROWN, Tenor.

TENNIS PICTURES.
W. TILDEN (Big Bill) demonstrating the Cannon Ball Service, Strokes, etc.
Supported by another Tennis Picture, both recently shown at St. James
Theatre, Sydney.

STAR PICTURE.
"THE MENACE"
From the Story, "THE FEATHERED SERPENT," by **EDGAR WALLACE.**
H. B. WARNER plays the leading role.
Also **BETTE DAVIS** and **WALTER BYRON.**
EDGAR WALLACE out-thrills thrills in this scary Drama of vengeance.

Sans Souci Branch Tennis Association is conducting this entertainment for
the specific purpose of launching a scheme to establish their own Courts
in this District.
The Management has generously donated the Theatre and is working in
conjunction with Association.

THE WHOLE OF THE PROCEEDS WILL GO TO THIS WORTHY OBJECT.

ADMISSION :
LOUNGE SEATS 1/9, BACK STALLS 1/6, FRONT STALLS 1/-
Seats may be reserved free by ringing **LW 1663**, or at the Theatre.
Tickets obtainable at Theatre Booking Office, **B. Johnson's Sports Store,**
Ramsgate, or from Council Members.
C. R. SMITH, President. **N. F. UPTON, Hon. Secretary.**

St George Call, Friday, 08 July 1932

Messrs Owen & Sellars were always looking to improve the theatre and, in December 1932, undertook alterations and renovations carried out under the supervision of well known scenic artist and decorator, John P. Carter.

Renovations included autumn scene leadlight panelling to walls and stenciled columns in three tones and “date finished” in black and white marble.

The proscenium (the arch framing the opening between the stage and the auditorium) included richly toned/shaded columns and prominent flower panels either side.

Newly designed lattice work added beauty to the garden setting and the entire make-over was claimed to be the latest achievement in theatre decorating.⁸⁸

Messrs Owen & Sellars continued to successfully operate the theatre and, after more than 10 years and following the expiration of their (original) Lease, eventually renewed same with the then owner, James Jamieson, on 25 August 1934.⁸⁹

As theatre Licenses were to be renewed each year, Messrs Owen & Sellars again submitted an application, which was granted via License No. 12552 dated 20 November 1934.⁹⁰

Further issues continued to arise and, on 18 March 1935, Kogarah Police reported to the Chief Secretary's Department that although a number of notice boards in the foyer of the theatre were not causing obstruction to any exits, the boards would be an obstruction should any panic situation arise.

Charles Owen (Manager) was instructed to remove all notice boards from the foyer whenever the theatre was open to the public. This could have later potentially proved critical.⁹¹

At 7.15a.m. on Wednesday, 07 August 1935 a fire originating on the stage of the theatre broke out. Firemen from Kogarah, Hurstville and Rockdale attended and found the ceiling and stage ablaze. It took firefighters 30 minutes to bring the blaze under control.

Next door neighbour, Mr McNeice, was having breakfast but, immediately upon learning of the fire, attached a hose to a bathroom tap to help put it out.

The fire damaged much of the ceiling, parts of which dropped in flaming pieces onto seats below.⁹²

The front portion of the theatre, including the operating box and its equipment were saved, but almost £3,000 of damage had been done. The stage and ceiling were destroyed, along with a piano and recently installed screen and sound equipment. Other equipment in the theatre was damaged by smoke and heat.

Several months of (further) re-decorating by John P. Carter and the installation of up-to-date seating had also recently been conducted, and all work had almost been completed.^{93 94 95}

John P. Carter (a cigarette smoker who used a petrol lighter) had been working on the stage from approximately 11.00p.m. the night before until approximately 1.45a.m. on the morning of the fire.

It was speculated that lights John P. Carter might have left on upon departing might have caused the fire.

However, John P. Carter maintained that he had switched off the lights (via main switches in the office), which was later confirmed.⁹⁶



A FIRE CAUSED £3000 damage at Ramsgate picture theatre yesterday. The remnants of the piano are shown.

Newcastle Sun, Thursday, 08 August 1935

The improvements were so badly damaged that they could no longer be used for entertaining. This did not deter Messrs Owen & Sellars who decided that the entire building, including the operating box which had been saved, should be demolished and rebuilt. However, some of the existing frontage might have been retained. Approximately 450 sheets of roofing iron salvaged from the rear of the theatre were subsequently offered for sale. ^{97 98 99}

As a result of the decision to demolish and rebuild, Messrs Owen & Sellars engaged well known theatre architects, Guy Crick and Bruce Furse (hereafter “Messrs Crick & Furse”), who prepared the necessary plans on 24 August 1935 and submitted same for approval to the Chief Secretary's Department on 17 September 1935. Meanwhile and on 13 September 1935, Messrs Owen & Sellars submitted (likely identical) plans to Rockdale Council for its approval. ^{100 101}

The plans included a similar layout to the original theatre but with the addition of a dress circle/gallery complete with own foyer.

Total seating capacity was increased to 1,130 (881 in the lower stalls and 249 in the upper dress circle) although later, more detailed seating plans indicate there were 911 seats in the stalls and 231 in the dress circle.

Upon entering the theatre, the existing shop/refreshment room to the right of the foyer and the existing Manager's office to the left would remain. The foyer included two staircases, one each to the left and right, leading to the dress circle and its foyer.

The stage was to be in the same location as before, as were the men's and ladies' toilets either side of same.

The biograph and rewinding rooms were located on the upper floor.

The front portion of the existing roofing would remain and the auditorium's roof was thus to be of a type similar to the existing.¹⁰²

On 16 September 1935, Rockdale Council's Building Committee approved Messrs Owen & Sellars' (re)development application, subject to the approval of the Chief Secretary's Department.

Rockdale Council's Building Committee also specified that its Building Inspector was to supervise the constructional alterations via periodical inspections and was to see that proper sanitary accommodation within the theatre was provided.

Rockdale Council subsequently also approved the application under the same conditions save that Rockdale Council required the adequate provision of strength in the walls.^{103 104}

On 19 September 1935, the Chief Secretary's Department approved the plans submitted by Messrs Crick & Furse subject to a number of items being attended to, subject to the plans being submitted to the local Council for its approval (which had occurred) and subject to the provision of fire fighting appliances to the satisfaction of the Chief Officer of the Fire Brigades.

The above items requiring attention included that side walls nearest to seating were to be of high fire resistant construction and handrails were to be rounded at all angles and continuous.

The biograph room was to have intake ventilation and three vents, and the window in the room was to have a fixed steel frame with wired glass.

All exit doors were to open outwards (a rear exit door had been indicated as opening inwards) and additional lighting was to be supplied by a battery in the event of a breakdown of the general lighting system.

A switch and main intake fuse room was to be constructed of fire resistant material, in an approved location and ventilated directly outside. The ticket box was to have no connection with the existing shop indicated on the plans.¹⁰⁵

Upon completion, the theatre was again classed a “b Grade hall”.¹⁰⁶

On 26 November 1935, Messrs Crick & Furse (on behalf of Charles Owen) sought approval from the Chief Secretary's Department to re-open the theatre on 30 November 1935.

The Chief Secretary's Department informed Messrs Crick & Furse that a formal License would not be issued until the building had been completed in accordance with its prior approval and the fire service being satisfactory.

Seating plans were approved and returned, albeit seating in the stalls was not to exceed 900. A number of further items also required attention.^{107 108}

Despite the above, the theatre re-opened on Saturday, 30 November 1935, equipped with the latest RCA (Radio Corporation of America) equipment. A record crowd attended and the “full house” sign was up by 7.30p.m.^{109 110}

On 24 January 1936, Kogarah Police reported to the Chief Secretary's Department that all required work had been completed, that the approval of Rockdale Municipal Council had been obtained prior to the commencement of any work, that all fire appliances had been inspected and passed and that the final seating capacity of the theatre was 1,129 (Stalls 896 and Gallery 233).¹¹¹

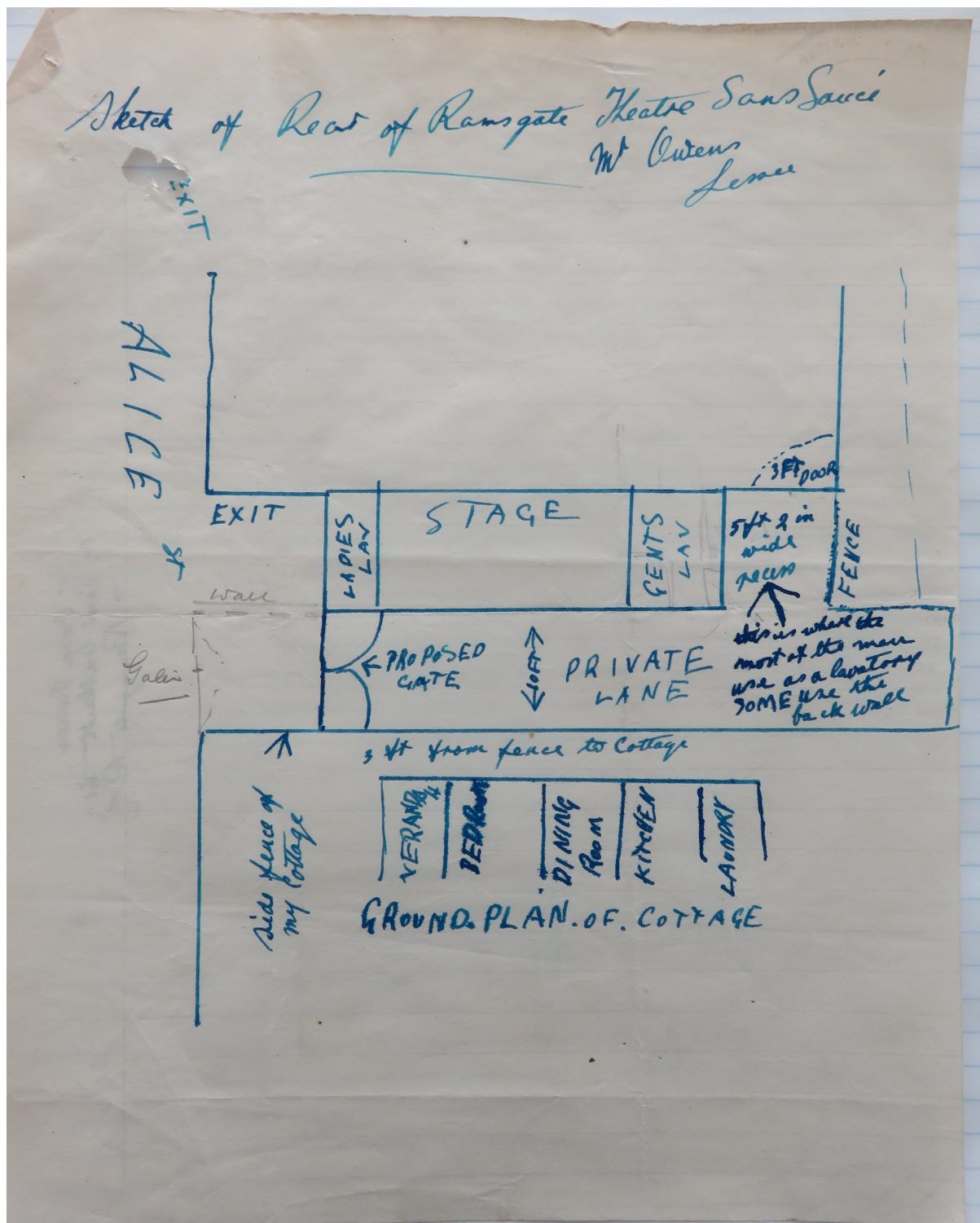
Formal (renewed) License No. 16008 was eventually issued to Charles Owen (rather than “Messrs Owen & Sellars”) on 01 April 1936, effective from 28 November 1935 for the usual 12 calendar months.¹¹²

No complaints appear to have been made by the public about the theatre, its facilities and/or its operations, that is, until April 1936.

In a letter dated 02 April 1936 Arthur Wallace complained to the Chief Secretary's Department about male patrons urinating in the laneway (a right of way behind and part of the theatre) adjacent to his property in Alice Street, maintaining that there were no signs within the theatre indicating the location of the men's toilets.

Arthur Wallace (and his wife when Arthur was working night shift) were allegedly forced to stand at the corner of his property next to the laneway in an attempt to prevent the nuisance.

In an effort to assist with resolution, Arthur proffered a potential solution.¹¹³



Arthur Wallace's proposed solution

The matter was referred to the Director General of Public Health for an inspection, which confirmed Arthur Wallace's complaint as justified. A recommendation by the Metropolitan Medical Officer of Health on 17 April 1936 was to extend the back wall of the theatre in a northerly direction to Alice Street and the installation of a gate at the street line. The Officer's reference to "northerly" likely should have been "southerly" (Alice Street being to the south of the theatre), per his markings (in pencil) on Arthur Wallace's sketch.

Charles Owen had apparently indicated to the Metropolitan Medical Officer of Health that he was prepared to undertake any alterations necessary to meet the approval of all concerned and was later requested by the Chief Secretary's Department to submit a plan showing all necessary alterations. The Chief Secretary's Department stipulated that the design of the wall and gate(s) were to be such that egress from the exit(s) of the theatre would not be impeded.^{114 115}

Meanwhile and by 15 July 1936, two further neighbours had submitted similar complaints to the Chief Secretary's Department. Those complaints extended to include locals who were not necessarily attending the theatre but who simply used the laneway as a lavatory.¹¹⁶

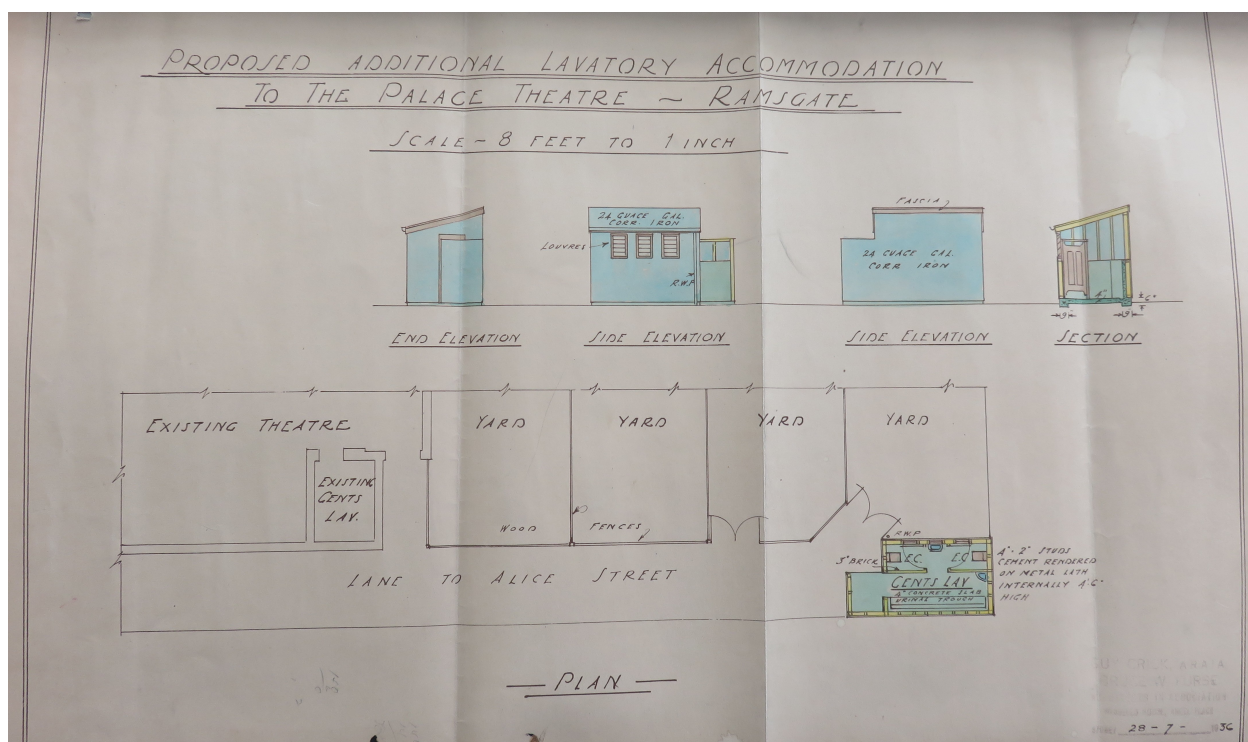
On 26 July 1936, Arthur Wallace again wrote to the Chief Secretary's Department, advising that he had spoken to Charles Owen who had indicated to Arthur Wallace that he (Charles Owen) had no intention of erecting a gate in the laneway maintaining that, when opened, the gate would block the theatre's rear exit. Charles Owen had also apparently appeared disinterested in seeking any resolution.

Arthur Wallace continued in his letter with a variety of further complaints including a suggestion that the exit which would allegedly be blocked by the gate was, in any case, dangerous, especially in any panic, and that in summer noise from the theatre night after night was "awful".¹¹⁷

By 28 July 1936, Charles Owen had still not submitted any relevant plans as requested, and the Chief Secretary's Department subsequently threatened action with respect to the theatre's License.¹¹⁸

The following day (29 July 1936), Messrs Crick & Furse submitted plans for a proposed new “Gentlemen's Lavatory” (and extensions/alterations to the ladies' lavatory).

The plans showed the proposed new men's lavatory to be located at the end of the laneway adjoining the rear of the property of the fourth neighbour north of the theatre on Rocky Point Road, and the rear of Arthur Wallace's property in Alice Street to the east.¹¹⁹



Plan submitted by Messrs Crick & Furse, 29 July 1936

One can see why, on 17 August 1936, the Chief Secretary's Department indicated to Guy Crick (of Messrs Crick & Furse) that "... the scheme shown will be rigorously opposed by interested parties occupying neighbouring premises ...". The Chief Secretary's Department then suggested that Guy Crick arrange a meeting between himself (Guy Crick), Charles Owen and the Departmental Architect.

The proposal seemed to offer little in the way of a solution, confirmed by Arthur Wallace who described potentially having ten times the nuisance to contend with. Arthur Wallace even suggested to the Chief Secretary that the Chief Secretary himself visit the theatre to experience same first hand.^{120 121}

Messrs Crick & Furse eventually submitted further plans which proposed to convert an area under the stage backing onto the laneway into an additional men's lavatory. Access to the additional lavatory would be from the laneway only. This also appeared to offer little in the way of a solution.

However and in a letter dated 24 August 1936, Arthur Wallace posed no objection provided a lavatory with access from within the theatre was also provided. Arthur Wallace apparently assumed that flues to carry off any odour would be installed to the outside lavatory.¹²²

Approval was eventually granted by the Chief Secretary's Department on 07 September 1936, subject to the plans and specifications being submitted to and approved by the local (Rockdale) Council and a number of items specified by the Chief Secretary's Department.

Such items included additional lighting to the new exit passageway, three basins in the ladies' lavatory, a second doorway to the men's lavatory or the proposed door to be doubled in width and adequate illumination of the laneway.¹²³

Arthur Wallace viewed the proposed plans at Rockdale Council Chambers a little over two weeks later on 24 September 1936 and same day objected in writing to windows rather than flues being installed in the lavatory, maintaining that the windows would be on the same level and opposite his dining room and kitchen windows.

However, Arthur Wallace indicated to the Chief Secretary's Department that, should the windows be fully covered with galvanised flues rising to approximately 9 feet above the top of the windows and the door be close fitting, he would withdraw his objection. The communication was referred to the Town Clerk, Rockdale.

Eventually and by 06 May 1937, the subject conveniences (men's and ladies') had been built/renovated and re-inspected by the Office of the Director General of Public Health and Rockdale Council's Health Inspector. All were found to have been built/renovated to a modern design and most satisfactory. According to Rockdale Council's Health Inspector, Arthur Wallace was also finally satisfied.^{124 125}

Ventilation in the theatre also posed a problem and, during September and October 1936, Messrs Owen & Sellars sought approval (via the usual channels) to have a "Multivane Fan" and a special "Giant Ventilating Fan" installed over two areas of the dress circle.¹²⁶

Work was later conducted by Unit Heating Systems (Australia) Ltd subject to a number of stipulations including that the ceiling construction be carefully examined to ensure the structure intended to support the ventilating equipment could do so.

Thermostatic controls were to be provided near the base of each fan and wired to automatically stop the motor(s) in the event of a fire.

Grilles in the ceiling located immediately under the fans were to be formed from high fire resistant materials and a manhole of sufficient size and in a position to give ready access to the roof areas was to be provided.

A catwalk, leading to the location of the fans from the manhole, which itself was not to be located in the ceiling of the biograph or attached rooms, was also to be provided.¹²⁷

As Licenses were only valid for 12 (calendar) months, Kogarah Police (as instructed by the Chief Secretary's Department) conducted its usual inspection of the theatre on 08 October 1936. All was in order and License No. 17830 was issued to Messrs Owen & Sellars on 16 November 1936, effective 28 November 1936. Seating remained at a total of 1,129.^{128 129}

With any number of structural, health and cosmetic problems apparently resolved and their License renewed, Messrs Owen & Sellars renewed their Lease on 22 December 1936 with (the still then owner) James Jamieson. It appears that the (William Pilling's) option of renewing for a further five years was no longer available when Messrs Owen & Sellars first renewed their Lease in 1934.¹³⁰

Despite its occasional setbacks, the theatre continued to experience a high level of patronage, including by members of the "Whaka Tennis Club", St George Leagues Club Swimming Club and the Illawarra Suburbs Lawn Tennis Association.^{131 132 133}

However, problems soon continued and, by March 1937, it was found that the ventilation plant was proving unsatisfactory and that Unit Heating Systems (Australia) Ltd was to shortly dismantle and remove same. Messrs Owen & Sellars subsequently looked to install new "airconditioning" plant (two gas-fired air heaters).

On 19 July 1937, Unit Air Conditioners Pty Limited submitted plans and specifications to the Chief Secretary's Department, which were approved on 12 August 1937. Slight alterations were made to the initial plans so that the motor for a ventilating fan could be located in a compartment which was originally a lavatory.¹³⁴

^{135 136 137}

By 11 October 1937 no work had commenced but Unit Air Conditioners Pty Limited indicated that it would likely be able to carry out the work in approximately November of that year. Work was eventually completed by 13 January 1938.^{138 139}

In November 1937 and during the renewal of their License, Messrs Owen & Sellars were accused of increasing the seating capacity in the stalls to 905, despite a stipulation in 1935 that seating (in the stalls) was not to exceed 900.

It was later ascertained that Kogarah Police had miscalculated at its inspection.

Seating in the stalls had actually decreased and numbered 887, as some seats had been removed due to patrons not being able to see from the angle at which the seats had been located. Seating in the gallery had increased by one to 224, giving a total theatre capacity of 1,111.^{140 141}

Messrs Owen & Sellars eventually bought the entire property and improvements (i.e. Lots 75, 76 and 77) on 02 February 1938 from Ellen McKerrin, who exercised a power of sale as the then mortgagee.¹⁴²

A change of name from “Palace Theatre” to “Ramsgate Theatre” was noted when Messrs Owen & Sellars applied on 16 February 1938 to have their existing License (No. 17830) endorsed. However, much earlier newspaper advertisements had already included the headline “Ramsgate Theatre”.

It is unclear if Messrs Owen & Sellars’ License was so endorsed. However, the theatre continued to operate, showing films six nights per week with matinees on Saturdays and holidays. It would thus be reasonable to conclude that such endorsement had occurred.^{143 144}

RAMSGATE THEATRE

"THE BEST BY TEST." Ring LW 1663 for Reserves.

FRIDAY AND SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6 AND 7

**Sensational Engagement of
Australia's Queen of Song**



**GLADYS
MONCRIEFF**
IN PERSON.
In her Latest and Best Numbers.

UNION
THEATRES
CELEBRITY
ARTIST

GEORGE ARLISS in—
"OLD ENGLISH"
This Picture eclipses his marvellous "Disraeli."

MARION DAVIES in—
"FIVE & TEN"
The Screen Version of that famous novel by Fannie Hurst
and of course, other supporting features.

ATTENTION! Please Remember our Extra Special and
WONDERFUL MATINEE THIS SATURDAY, NOV. 7
at 2 o'clock.

THE SECOND EPISODE OF—
"THE SPELL OF THE CIRCUS."
The Serial above all serials.
And of course, the usual big prizes will be given.
Children! Bring your parents, they'll enjoy the whole
programme.

NEXT MONDAY, TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY,
NOVEMBER 9, 10 and 11.

THOMAS MEIGHAN and HARDY ALBRIGHT
in that famous Fox Picture
"YOUNG SINNERS"
"In the swamps, they just were young scamps."

CLARA BOW in—
"KICK IN"

SUPPORTED BY OTHER SPLENDID FEATURES.

*Ramsgate Theatre Programme
St George Call, Friday, 06 November 1931*

Ramsgate Theatre

"The Best by Test."

Ring LW 1663 for Reserves.

TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW,
BUSTER KEATON and POLLY MORAN
in that uproarious comedy:

"The Passionate Plumber"

Assisted by that wonderful comedian, JIMMY DURANTE.

SUPPORTED BY

RICHARD ABLEN, JACK OAKIE, VIRGINIA BRUCE, ROBERT COOGAN
in that splendid Paramount Talkie:

"THE SKY BRIDE"

SATURDAY NIGHT ONLY!

RE-APPEARANCE OF



SATURDAY, 2 p.m., THE USUAL EXCELLENT BIG MATINEE.

NEXT MONDAY, TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY.

CLAUDETTE COLBERT, MELVYN DOUGLAS, LILYAN TASHMAN
and WILLIAM BOYD in

"The Wiser Sex"

Ladies, are you the wiser sex?

This talkie answers the question.

SUPPORTED BY

"The Woman in Room 13"

Featuring ELISSA LANDI and RALPH BELLAMY.

COMING SEPTEMBER 29, 30 and OCTOBER 1.—Robert Montgomery,
Nora Gregor and Heather Thatcher in "BUT THE FLESH IS WEAK."

Ramsgate Theatre Programme
St George Call, Friday, 23 September 1932

Fifteen years after opening, the theatre was popular as ever, if not more so, and transport to and from the theatre posed its own problem. William Pilling had had the foresight to choose a location on which to build which had, at its door, a tram stop. In 1938 and to cater for the number of patrons attending the theatre, the Tempe Depot arranged for two extra, dedicated trolleybuses to be on standby on Saturday nights from 10.30p.m. to escort patrons home.¹⁴⁵

From approximately 1942 until beyond World War II, the theatre included a milk bar on its Alice Street corner, which served refreshments to patrons before and after shows, and during intervals.¹⁴⁶



1943 Aerial View of the Theatre
Courtesy of Bayside Council/Bayside Library Service

In order to maintain the theatre's “up-to-date” reputation, Messrs Owen & Sellars installed a new “Brakell” cinematograph screen on 27 May 1946. They were later obliged to provide a sample of same, together with certification that the sample was of the same material as that of the installed screen, to the Chief Secretary's Department, for testing by the Board of Fire Commissioners. Charles Owen also later confirmed that the screen had been installed in a such a manner so as not to interfere with its non-inflammable qualities.^{147 148 149}



*Screen sample submitted by Messrs Owen & Sellars,
later tested by the Board of Fire Commissioners
Photograph by Michelle Steet*

The sample was fire tested (as can be seen) and found to be satisfactory. A Fire Brigade Officer also visited and inspected the theatre on 22 March 1948, confirming to the Chief Secretary's Department that the frame supporting the screen was of hardwood and that all flammable materials associated therewith had been rendered fire resistant.¹⁵⁰

Ventilation again became an issue in 1948 when a regular patron of the theatre complained to the Chief Secretary's Department that, whenever he attended, only one window on the western side was ever open. The patron maintained that, on Saturday nights when the theatre was crowded, the interior became stifling and that others had similarly complained. It appears that the patron had confused his directions, as the western "side" of the theatre comprised its entrance and foyer.¹⁵¹

In response to the above complaint, an inspection was made on 20 March 1948 by the Department of Public Health during a performance at which 999 patrons attended. It was found that not all available natural ventilation was being used (due to other patrons complaining of a draught) and that the mechanical ventilation was also not being used (again due to complaints of draughts). It was thus deemed that the ventilation should be improved.¹⁵²

The Chief Secretary's Department subsequently intimated to Messrs Owen & Sellars that the mechanical ventilation system would, if used, be capable of meeting the relevant Regulations. It was suggested that perhaps the design of the mechanical ventilation be altered to remedy any design fault that might have existed.¹⁵³

A further inspection was made at the request of the Chief Secretary's Department on Saturday, 28 August 1948. At this inspection 869 patrons were present. Of two available shutters on the northern side both were closed and of nine available shutters on the southern side seven were closed and two were partly open.¹⁵⁴

Messrs Owen & Sellars eventually rectified the mechanical ventilation and same was thus put to full use. Messrs Owen & Sellars installed an extra window in the operating box, which also improved ventilation.

Following the above repairs/alterations, the theatre was confirmed as complying with the requirements of the Chief Secretary's Department.¹⁵⁵

The lavatories again raised several issues, including a direction by the Chief Secretary's Department to repair broken seats (and to maintain same) in both the men's and ladies' toilets, to provide fly proof lids on box seats and that a sign reading "Men" be located in a prominent location on the men's toilet block.¹⁵⁶

Over two decades and despite its occasional setbacks, the theatre thrived and proved to be the great acquisition to the district predicted in late 1923.¹⁵⁷

Having successfully operated the theatre for almost 26 years, Messrs Owen & Sellars finally sold the entire property and improvements (i.e. Lots 77, 76 and 75) to Union Theatres Investments Limited on 14 April 1949. The land upon which the theatre and two adjoining lock-up shops were located (comprising Lot 77 and part Lot 76) had an unimproved value of approximately £615 and an improved value of £15,000.^{158 159 160}

License No. 48677 dated 14 December 1948 and effective 28 November 1948 for 12 months was thus duly transferred to Union Theatres Investments Limited on 04 May 1949.¹⁶¹



William Bernard Pilling, Original Owner/Builder

William Pilling was born in 1889 in Warrington Lancashire England, the son of John and Louise Pilling.¹⁶²

William arrived in Sydney on 30 June 1912 on board the “S.S. Norfolk” from London via Melbourne.¹⁶³

William married Nellie Tuke in December 1915 at Burwood. However, they later divorced in 1934 on account of William's alleged adultery.^{164 165}

William was an engineer, builder and highly successful businessman. He established the “Balmain Markets”, located at Darling Road, Balmain. The markets were officially opened on Friday, 27 May 1921, consisted of 32 stalls and had visitors numbering approximately 5,000. William also established the “Burwood Arcade” and, as previously mentioned, the Palace Picture Theatre Canterbury.¹⁶⁶

William was also a Director of the Melbourne based company, “Eastern Prospecting Syndicate, No Liability”. He often travelled overseas in connection therewith in search of (and usually finding) iron ore.¹⁶⁷

William lived mainly in the Sydney Metropolitan area, including at Enfield (1920), Marrickville (1921 to 1923), Concord (1924), Harris Park (1927, during which time he also owned a pastoral property at Nimbin near Lismore), Burwood (1928) and Sydney (1929, at the Carlton Club Hotel, Young Street, which he also owned). He later lived at Robertson (1931 to 1934) at the Hotel Ranelagh which he also owned.¹⁶⁸

Over the course of his life, William owned a vast number of properties throughout New South Wales, including 284 acres at Penrith.

William also owned a number of hotels including at Craboon (in the Gulgong district), Riverstone and Mullumbimby. William bought the Commercial Hotel in Mullumbimby in 1925, for which he reportedly paid £12,000.^{169 170 171 172 173 174}

By 1930, William owned seven brick and slate roof properties in West Avenue, Darlinghurst with a combined gross annual value (in 1930) of £435.¹⁷⁵

In 1931, William purchased the well known “Hotel Ranelagh” at Robertson for £28,500. However, he sold the hotel three years later in 1934. The Hotel Ranelagh still exists today but is now known as “The Robertson Hotel”.^{176 177 178}



Sydney Morning Herald, Monday, 05 June 1933

It was during William's ownership of the Ranelagh Hotel (and at that very Hotel) that his alleged adultery with one of his waitresses, Margaret Mulquiney, allegedly occurred.

After taking Margaret dancing in the Hotel's ballroom (amongst the Hotel's guests, something he had apparently done on many prior occasions), William later “entertained” Margaret in his wife's room. The prior incidents had not gone unnoticed by William's wife, who had (privately) pointed out to him that not only was it not good for their marriage, but the hotel's business was also at risk, as guests had been complaining.

At the time of William's alleged adultery, William's wife had been in Sydney to see a Doctor. Meanwhile, William had sent their young son off to his aunt (also in Sydney) unbeknown to his wife. It was only when William's wife telephoned William from Sydney to check on their son's wellbeing that she learnt of their son's recent despatch. William's wife shortly filed for (and was granted) a divorce in 1934.¹⁷⁹

The above events likely led to William shortly selling the Hotel Ranelagh.



Nellie Pilling (nee Tuke)
Truth (Sydney), Sunday, 21 October 1934

In 1939, William owned 80 Bayswater Road, Rushcutters Bay, a property of 10 flats over three floors known as “Maison Michel”. The property had a gross annual value (in 1939) of £1,174. The property today appears to be known as “The Mark” and likely remains the very same building. William also owned 106 Elizabeth Bay Road, Elizabeth Bay (then known as “Tudor House” but now the “Riveria” Home Units), 2 Roslyn Gardens, Rushcutters Bay (then known as “Avalon”), seven properties on Burton Street, Darlinghurst and five properties on Bourke Street, Darlinghurst, No. 329 of which was (likely leased and) housed the “Relief Home for Destitute Women & Children”.^{180 181}

William was the owner of a number of racehorses including bay filly “Style” and bay gelding “Tobin”.^{182 183}



Sydney Mail, Wednesday, 26 October 1927

In late 1947, William purchased (syndicate) Ticket No. 18234 in Lottery No. 1575, which he named “Alone” and with which he won £6,000. However, William did not collect his winnings until four months later, on 12 March 1948.^{184 185}

William occasionally lost his way, having been fined once each on 8 February 1940 and 11 March 1948 for driving under the influence of alcohol. Appeals against both fines were dismissed. William had also once been convicted of dangerous driving.

On Tuesday, 29 November 1949 William was fined £5 (a much lesser amount than previously) for again driving under the influence. William had been seen by Police Constable Hewitt at 9.00p.m. on 06 October 1949 swerving from the kerb to the centre of the road. Upon alighting, William was unsteady on his feet, slurring his speech and had alcohol on his breath. He was detained at Darlinghurst Police Station where he asked to be seen by a Doctor. A Doctor was summoned and confirmed that William was still under the influence at 10.30p.m.

At his subsequent court appearance, William's lawyer informed the court that William was suffering from coronary occlusion, a gastric ulcer and blood pressure and that William's Doctor had recommended that William go to hospital for a “12 months' rest”.¹⁸⁶

Despite William's apparent success and wealth throughout his life, at the time of his death his estate was worth little more than £20,000.¹⁸⁷

William died on 20 September 1956 and was cremated at the Northern Suburbs Memorial Gardens. His death notice appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on Friday, 21 September 1956.^{188 189 190}

PILLING, William Bernard -
September 20, 1956, late of 142a Glen-
Ayr Avenue, Bondi, loving father of
Eileen, Bernard, Ronald and Nash, and
dear brother of Elsie and brother-in-law
of Jack and Nell.



Northern Suburbs Memorial Gardens
South-West Terrace, Wall 125
Image courtesy of HeavenAddress



Messrs Owen & Sellars, Original Proprietors

Charles Rupert Norman Owen

Charles Owen was born in 1894 in Balmain, the son of Robert and Elizabeth Owen. He married Edith Margaret Frances Bisgrove in 1916 in Balmain.^{191 192}

Charles was an upholsterer and together with his brother-in-law and fellow upholsterer, George William Sellars, upholstered theatre chairs. Charles was likely a proprietor in the firms “Owen and Knox” furniture makers at Marrickville in 1925 and later “Owen, Knox & Co”, theatrical chair manufacturers at the same Marrickville address in 1930.^{193 194}

Charles lived in the Balmain/Rozelle area until 26 May 1936, when he purchased the waterfront property “Palmyra” at 17 Vista Street, Sans Souci.¹⁹⁵



*Charles Owen c.1942
Photograph courtesy of Denise Colbert*

Charles had “quite a chain of theatres in country districts”. He was the proprietor of the Roxy Theatre in Gulgong and, in partnership with Ron Sutton, built and operated the Roxy Theatre in Nowra.

Charles was the Lessee of the Civic Theatre in Scone and once owned the Carlton Theatre (in New South Wales), which his daughter and son-in-law managed for some years. Charles sold the Carlton Theatre at approximately the same time as he (and George Sellars) sold the Ramsgate-Sans Souci Palace Picture Theatre.^{196 197 198 199}

Like William Pilling, Charles owned a number of racehorses including “Ducal Gem” (in partnership with an F.J. Alderman) which won by three lengths in the “Nursery Handicap” in her first season, something Charles never doubted before the race.

Four other racehorses he named “My Hero”, “Lancaster Pilot”, “Field Captain” and “Bubba Boy” in honour of his son, RAAF Sergeant Robert Owen, who was shot down and killed over Germany during a flying battle on 20 September 1942.^{200 201 202}

Tragedy struck again seven years later when, on 06 February 1949, three and half year old Warren Worner drowned in the pool at Charles' Vista Street property. The young boy (and his sister) had been swimming in the pool earlier under the watchful eye of Charles' wife, Mrs Owen.

At lunchtime, Mrs Owen lifted Warren over a small brick wall which separated his house from the pool, at which time Warren's mother dried and changed him. However, Warren did not later answer when his mother called him for lunch.

A search of the Kogarah Bay foreshore was conducted without success. At 12.45p.m., Charles' son-in-law found the little boy at the bottom of the pool. Warren was immediately taken to the home of a nearby doctor and then onto St George Hospital for further treatment.

However, Warren did not respond and it was suggested that the little boy had already been dead when first retrieved from the pool.²⁰³

Charles resided in the Sans Souci area for nearly 20 years, becoming a Justice of the Peace in 1948, before selling the Vista Street property on 24 October 1955.^{204 205 206}

Sans Souci — Vac. Poss. Brick Villa
TILE SWIMMING POOL — LAWN TENNIS COURT
17 VISTA STREET.

Waterfrontage Home of Distinctive Charm
SITUATED AMIDST GOOD-CLASS HOMES and standing on a FINE LAND AREA, this VERY WELL-CONSTRUCTED Brick Cement-rendered VILLA OFFERS an EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY to the DISCERNING HOME BUYER. OUTSTANDING FEATURES are the ATTRACTIVE TILED SWIMMING POOL and LAWN TENNIS COURT. An IDEAL SPOT FOR THE FAMILY MAN WISHING TO PROVIDE FULL ENTERTAINING FACILITIES FOR A YOUNG FAMILY

Now for Genuine Sale. Why Not Inspect To-day?
INSPECTIONS ANY TIME TO-DAY BY APPOINTMENT THROUGH CO-AGENTS.

THE EXCELLENT ACCOMMODATION COMPRISES: Large entrance vestibule, lounge, dining-room, sunroom, large bedroom (opens on to terrace), modern bathroom, MODERN KITCHEN, large walk-in pantry, 2nd Sunroom, laundry with 2nd BATHROOM and toilet, 2 other bedrooms. UPSTAIRS: EXTENSIVE BALLROOM OPENING ON TO BALCONY with large BUILT-IN COCKTAIL BAR with sink, Bottle cupboards and refrigerator, H.W.S. Septic Sewerage. Double Garage.

LAND: 122ft 1in x 151ft. TORRENS.

In Conj.: R. T. GOLBY & CO., Kogarah. LW4898
Solicitors: DAWSON, WALDRON, EDWARDS & NICHOLLS.

Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday, 11 December 1954

Charles moved to Brighton-le-Sands, where he was listed as an upholsterer and furniture manufacturer on the NSW Electoral Roll.

Charles remained in Brighton-le-Sands until his death on 13 July 1965.

His death and funeral notices appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on Thursday, 14 January 1965 and Friday, 15 January 1965 respectively.^{207 208 209}

OWEN, Charles Rupert Norman - January 13, 1965 (suddenly), of 7 Selwood Street, Brighton-le-Sands (formerly of Sans Souci), dearly loved husband of the late Edith Margaret Frances Owen, loved father of Joyce (Mrs Colbert) and Robert (R.A.A.F., deceased), and fond grandfather of Denise, Craig and Graham.

OWEN - The Relatives and Friends of Mrs. J. Colbert and Family, of 7 Selwood Street, Brighton-le-Sands, are invited to attend the Funeral of their dearly loved Father and Grandfather, Mr CHARLES RUPERT NORMAN OWEN, formerly of Sans Souci, which will leave our private chapel, Seven Ways, Rockdale, This Friday, after service commencing at 1 p.m. for the Crematorium, Woronora.

OWEN - Carss Park Bowling Club Officers and Members are invited to attend the Funeral of their late esteemed Member, Mr CHARLES RUPERT NORMAN OWEN.

OWEN - The St. George Motor Boat Club Officers and Members are invited to attend the Funeral of their late esteemed Member, Mr. R.N. OWEN.

George William Sellars

George Sellars was born in 1875 in Rotherham Yorkshire England, the son of Arthur James Sellars and Elizabeth Ann Eltringham.^{210 211}

George arrived in Australia with his parents before 1884, when they settled at Lilyfield.

George married Charlotte Owen (sister of Charles Owen) on New Year's Day at the Methodist Church, Johnston Street, Annandale. George's future brother-in-law (Charles Owen) was then just eight years of age and one of two page boys at the wedding.^{212 213 214 215}

George was also an upholsterer and later upholstered theatre seats with his brother-in-law, Charles Owen.²¹⁶



*George Sellars and wife Charlotte (nee Owen) c.1912
Photograph courtesy of Ron Atherton*

Unlike Charles Owen, George lived his entire life mainly in the Five Dock/Drummoyne areas.²¹⁷

George regularly attended the theatre (in both a working and personal capacity) and usually manned the auditorium doors, collecting tickets.^{218 219}



George William Sellars (1937)
Photograph courtesy of Ron Atherton

George Sellars died on 26 June 1960 and was cremated at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium. His death and funeral notices appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on Tuesday, 28 June 1960.^{220 221}

SELLARS, George William – June 26, 1960, of 331 Lyons Road, Fivedock, dearly loved husband of the late Charlotte Sellars, loved father of Linda, Gwen and Mavis (Suva), fond father-in-law of Alf, Stan and Jack (deceased), dear grandfather of their children, aged 84 years. *At rest.*

SELLARS – *The Relatives and Friends of the late GEORGE WILLIAM SELLARS, of Fivedock, are invited to attend his Funeral; to leave the West Chapel of the Metropolitan Funeral Home, Railway Parade, Burwood, This Day, after service commencing at 2.45 p.m. for Northern Suburbs Crematorium. No flowers by request.*



John Mackellar Giles

There is brief mention in the Sun (Sydney) newspaper in late February 1926 of “J.M. Giles, Sans Souci Picture Theatre”, who was fined for having not supplied relevant information in relation to “entertainments” held by him for taxation purposes.

No reference to “J.M. Giles” or akin thereto has been found in any correspondence, documentation or similar in connection with the Ramsgate-Sans Souci Palace Picture Theatre. The reference to “Sans Souci Picture Theatre” appears to have been in error or perhaps falsely identified by J.M. (John Mackellar) Giles, who was apparently a thief and embezzler.

An earlier article in the Sun (Sydney) on 03 February 1926 refers to “John Mackellar Giles, picture showman, of Sans Souci” which might suggest that he was of Sans Souci but not necessarily of the Ramsgate-Sans Souci Palace Picture Theatre.^{222 223}



“Greater Union's” Tenure

As previously described, Messrs Owen & Sellars sold the entire property and improvements (i.e. Lots 75, 76 and 77) to Union Theatres Investments Limited (hereafter “Union Theatres”) on 14 April 1949. Also as previously described, the theatre's License was transferred to/put in the name of Union Theatres shortly thereafter.^{224 225 226}

It appears that Messrs Owen & Sellars did not continue to operate or have any further involvement in the theatre. However and going forward, two other companies (in addition to Union Theatres) were involved, those two companies being Greater Union Theatres Pty Ltd and Acme Theatres Pty Ltd. The involvement of all three later caused some confusion.

From Union Theatres' acquisition until late 1951, the theatre remained known as the “Ramsgate Theatre”, even though “Greater Union” had apparently added the theatre to its “Odeon” chain prior to 1951. Although the above three companies were involved, to the outside world and with its trademark sign, the theatre eventually simply became the “Ramsgate Odeon”.

Meanwhile and leading to and during June 1949, a prospective coal power crisis resulted in severe restrictions being imposed by the NSW Government regarding the use of electricity. Fortunately, the Ramsgate Theatre had its own power plant. Movie sessions continued as usual and the theatre continued to host a variety of events, including a gala show to announce the winner of “Miss Ramsgate”, who would go on to vie for the 1949 “Miss Australia” title.^{227 228 229 230 231 232}

On 20 June 1950, Architects “Guy Crick & van Breda” submitted plans on behalf of Greater Union Theatres Pty Ltd (hereafter “Greater Union”) to the Chief Secretary's Department for proposed alterations to the theatre.

Such alterations included relocation of the Manager's office and ticket box, removal of existing shop display areas and show windows, the inclusion of a new “buffet”, bricking up of existing windows and the construction of new ones and a new, fifth exit. Further alterations included raising the theatre's awning so that it aligned with an adjacent awning and the installation of two, new entrance doors.²³³

The Department of Public Works' Government Architect later recommended that the plans be approved subject to (inter alia) the plans being submitted to and approved by Rockdale Council, and any requirements specified by Rockdale Council.²³⁴

Rockdale Council's Building and Subdivisions Committee recommended approval of the plans at its meeting on 06 July 1950, a recommendation Rockdale Council adopted at its Ordinary Meeting of Council on the same date.^{235 236}

On 18 July 1950, the Chief Secretary's Department informed “Guy Crick & van Breda” that it had also approved the plans, subject to some included recommendations by the Department of Public Works' Government Architect. It was generally considered that, overall, the alterations would provide a distinct improvement to the theatre's main entrance.^{237 238}

The theatre continued to operate between the apparent expiration of the then current License (renewed by Messrs Owen & Sellars prior to sale and valid until 28 November 1949) and Greater Union's application for renewal the following year (i.e. in 1950). Regular advertisements for the theatre appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald, usually on Saturdays.^{239 240 241}

As had occurred during Health Week in 1949 and when more than 5,000 school children attended local theatres to view a variety of health orientated films, Rockdale Council's Chief Health Inspector arranged for similar films to be screened (again at a variety of local theatres) in association with Health Week 1950.

The Inspector had anticipated the films being screened during Health Week, set down for 20 to 27 October 1950. However, it transpired that the films would not be available until the following week. It was thus arranged to have the films screened during the week commencing 30 October 1950.

The generosity and co-operation of the then proprietor(s) in making the Ramsgate Theatre available for the screenings allowed Sans Souci Public School (although in the Municipality of Kogarah) to be invited to attend, along with the already attending Ramsgate Public School.^{242 243}

Greater Union eventually applied for renewal of the theatre's License on 17 November 1950, despite the License having previously been transferred to and in the name of Union Theatres. Kogarah Police, at its prior inspection, had found all to do with the theatre in good order, noting that the total number of seats remained at 1,111 (887 in the stalls and 224 in the gallery).

License No. 1668, effective 28 November 1950 for the usual 12 calendar months and in the name of Greater Union, was subsequently issued to Greater Union on 19 December 1950, noting a change in name of the theatre to “Odeon Theatre, Sans Souci”. License No. 1668 was apparently issued despite correspondence from Kogarah Police to the Chief Secretary on 05 December 1950 reporting that some required work had yet to be completed.^{244 245 246 247}

As previously described and although the theatre was recorded as the “Odeon Theatre, Sans Souci” and similar in various reports and correspondence pre November 1951, from Union Theatres' acquisition in 1949 until 10 November 1951 it continued to be known and advertised as the “Ramsgate Theatre”.

It wasn't until late November 1951 that the theatre was at least advertised as the “Ramsgate Odeon”.^{248 249 250}

The “Odeon” chain of cinemas was created by Oscar Deutsch in 1928 in the United Kingdom and the name was claimed to have been an acronym for Oscar Deutsch's motto, **O**scar **D**eutsch **E**ntertains **O**ur **N**ation. ^{251 252}

However, “odeons” (amphitheatres) originated in ancient Greece and the title “Odeon” was used by cinemas in France and Italy in the 1920s. ^{253 254}

Following Oscar Deutsch's death, his widow sold the “Odeon” chain to J. Arthur Rank, whose corporation by then owned 50% of the Australian subsidiary, “Greater Union Organisation”. ^{255 256}



Ramsgate Odeon, c.1951(?)
Photograph courtesy of Cinema and Theatre Historical Society Inc.

Meanwhile and in early 1951, Union Theatres was advised that, in order for all draperies and stage curtains at several of its theatres to comply with the relevant regulation in respect of fire resistance, it had the option of having new curtains fireproofed during manufacture or having existing curtains treated with fire retardant when removed for cleaning or re-dyeing. In either case, Union Theatres was obliged to provide a sample of the end material with accompanying certification.²⁵⁷

As with Messrs Owen & Sellars during their tenure, Union Theatres was slow to attend to various requirements. Following an inspection of the theatre by a Fire Brigade Officer on 18 January 1951 on behalf of the Board of Fire Commissioners of NSW, the Chief Secretary was informed that no stage curtains, draperies and the like had been treated with an approved fire retardant.

The Chief Secretary was similarly slow to act in the above regard, finally writing to Greater Union (rather than Union Theatres, with which it had previously corresponded) on 25 May 1951, reminding Greater Union of its obligations. Greater Union apparently subsequently arranged for stage curtains and draperies at a number of its theatres, including the (Union Theatres') "Odeon Theatre, Sans Souci", to be treated. However, new curtains were expected to be fitted approximately six months later.^{258 259 260 261}

On 19 November 1951, Kogarah Police conducted its usual annual inspection in regard to the theatre's upcoming License renewal. It was noted that the theatre was "Now known as the *Odeon Theatre*", although the previous year's License (No. 1668) had already noted a change of name to "Odeon Theatre, Sans Souci". It was also noted that the theatre was used exclusively for the exhibition of motion pictures.

The inspection also found that the Brakelite screen installed by Messrs Owen & Sellars on 29 May 1946 remained and that the theatre otherwise met all requirements for the renewal of its License, which occurred on 20 December 1951.^{262 263}

By 25 June 1952, no new fire retardant curtains had been installed (as had previously been intimated would occur in November 1951) nor had any existing stage curtains, draperies and the like been treated with an approved fire retardant.²⁶⁴

G.R. Brakell (supplier of the Brakelite screen installed at the theatre) eventually supplied samples of the red and yellow curtain material from the theatre on 04 September 1952. Confirmation that the samples had been subsequently flame tested and proved satisfactory was provided by the Board of Fire Commissioners of NSW to the Chief Secretary on 24 September 1952.^{265 266 267}

Strangely, a Fire Brigade Officer who inspected the theatre on 09 October 1952 reported that the stage curtains and draperies had been removed from the theatre for treatment with a fire retardant.²⁶⁸

In early November 1952 (and as it had the previous year), Union Theatres applied for renewal of the theatre's License, despite the License being in the name of and issued to Greater Union.

The usual inspection by Kogarah Police on 28 October 1952 had found that the building was still considered substantial and fit and that no unauthorised structural or seating alterations had been made. It was noted that the theatre was still known as the "Odeon Theatre, Sans Souci" and that it was operating six nights and one matinee weekly.^{269 270}

During December 1952, the confusion surrounding Union Theatres and Greater Union in respect of the theatre's License and its renewals was raised by the Under Secretary.

Greater Union later informed the Chief Secretary that the most recent renewal should be regarded as having been made by it and not by Union Theatres. However, no explanation was provided.

From Union Theatres' acquisition in 1949, payment of the annual theatre License renewal fee was usually made by Acme Theatres Pty Limited (hereafter “Acme”), presumably a Union Theatres/Greater Union associated company, having at least the same address. This is the only involvement Acme appears to have had.^{271 272 273 274 275}

The theatre's License was thus once again renewed (in the name of and issued to Greater Union) on 23 December 1952, with an authorised capacity of (still) 1,111.²⁷⁶

In early January 1953, the theatre was inspected by a Fire Brigade Officer who confirmed that stage curtains, draperies and the like had been treated with an approved fire retardant in November 1952 and had proved satisfactory when flame tested. This was in spite of the earlier supply and satisfactory testing in September 1952.²⁷⁷

Although approval of plans for alterations to (inter alia) the front and main entrance to the theatre had been granted on 18 July 1950, the Under Secretary did not appear to enquire about progress of the works until 15 January 1953, when it wrote to “Guy Crick & van Breda”. “Guy Crick & Associates” (by which they were then known) subsequently confirmed that all work had been completed.^{278 279}

By February 1953, the theatre was managed by a Mr Davis who accompanied the Department of Public Works' Government Architect during an inspection. The inspection revealed that the theatre had an (apparently unauthorised) extra ticket box, a large and spacious foyer to the dress circle and confirmed that all seating met requirements. The inspection also revealed that there were no toilets on the dress circle level but that those at the rear of the theatre at ground level were clean and well kept. No complaints regarding ventilation had been received.

All that required attention was the provision of a balustrade and handrail to a ramp outside an exit door at the rear. The adjoining footpath was more than 500mm lower than the ramp, posing an obvious hazard.²⁸⁰

FIRST FILMS
*Procession and
 Abbey Ceremony*
**CORONATION
 FILMS**
TONIGHT
 and until Next
 Saturday.

ASHFIELD KINGS
 BALMAIN KINGS
 BEXLEY ODEON
 BONDI KINGS
 BROADWAY
 CAMPSIE ODEON
 CAMPSIE ORION
 CANTERBURY
 CARLTON ODEON
 C'WOOD KINGS
 CLOVELLY KINGS
 COLLAROY Odeon
 CONCORD WEST
 CRONULLA
 DARLINGHURST
 WESTS OLYMPIA
 DEE WHY ODEON
 DOUBLE BAY
 VOGUE
 DRUMMOYNE
 ODEON
 DULWICH HILL
 BRITANNIA
 EASTWOOD Odeon
 KINGSFORD Odeon
 LAKEMBA Magnet
 LAKEMBA Royal
 LANE COVE RIO
 LINDFIELD KINGS
 MANLY EMBASSY
 MANLY ODEON
 MARRICKVILLE
 ADDISON
 MARRICKVILLE
 KINGS
 MOSMAN KINGS
 NARRABEEN Odeon
 NEWTOWN HUB
 PENSHURST Odeon
 PETERSHAM Odeon
 RAMSGATE Odeon
 RANDWICK Odeon
 ROCKDALE Odeon
 STANMORE Theatre
 SUTHERLAND
 ODEON

*Advertisement in connection with
 Queen Elizabeth II's coronation,
 02 June 1953
 Sun (Sydney), Tuesday, 09 June 1953*

“Greater Union” continued to annually renew the theatre's License. However and despite earlier advice by Greater Union to the contrary, the application for renewal in 1953 was again made by Union Theatres. No question was raised regarding the application having been made by Union Theatres and, on 19 October 1953, License renewal No. 6037 was issued, but again to/in the name of Greater Union.^{281 282}

The theatre continued to operate six nights and one matinee per week, and the above trend continued until late 1955/early 1956.²⁸³

On 13 May 1955, the Under Secretary forwarded a supplied sample of the theatre's new screen, which had recently been installed on 18 March 1955, to the Board of Fire Commissioners of NSW, requesting information regarding whether the theatre's screen had been marked with its date of installation, the type of material from which it had been manufactured and the manufacturer's name. Information regarding whether the frame supporting the screen and all fittings associated therewith were of non flammable or slow burning material was also requested.^{284 285 286 287 288}

The above sample was tested and found to be fire resistant. An inspection of the theatre on 05 July 1955 found that a new Brakelite Plastic Flame Proof screen had been so installed by G.R. Brakell on 18 March 1955 and that the screen (which was mounted on a tubular steel framework) and all associated masking and drapes had been marked accordingly and had been satisfactorily flame tested.²⁸⁹

At its annual inspection later same year, Kogarah Police (correctly) recorded that the screen was a Brakelite screen but (incorrectly) recorded that it had been installed on 27 May 1946.

The above inspection also recorded that seating was 244 in the dress circle (rather than the previous 224). This was an error on the part of Kogarah Police, which later confirmed seating in the dress circle at 224.^{290 291}

In late 1955 and despite the theatre's License (still) being in the name of Greater Union, application for renewal for 1956 was again made by Union Theatres. Payment of the prescribed fee was also (again) made by Acme.^{292 293}

The resulting confusion (the involvement of all three companies) was again raised by the Chief Secretary's Department on 17 November 1955.²⁹⁴

Greater Union itself became confused, informing the Chief Secretary's Department that (renewal) applications following the original made by Union Theatres in 1950 should have continued to have been made by same but that, due to changes in staff, those applications had been made in error by Greater Union.

Greater Union also informed the Chief Secretary's Department that it had been unable to locate its original License which was held at the theatre itself, again due to changes in staff. No mention was made of payment having been made by Acme or why.²⁹⁵

The original (renewal) application in 1950 had actually been made by Greater Union (not Union Theatres) and License No. 1668 had shortly been issued in the name of and to Greater Union.²⁹⁶

All subsequent renewal applications had actually not been made by Greater Union but had been made by Union Theatres (as Greater Union had recently indicated should have been the case). However, all Licenses had been issued in the name of and to Greater Union.

Following Greater Union's (somewhat confused) advice, the Chief Secretary's Department's "Follow-Up Copy" of License No. 1668 appears to have thus then been amended (by hand), removing the reference to "Greater Union Theatres Pty Ltd" and replacing same with "Union Theatres Investments Limited".²⁹⁷

On 10 January 1956, License renewal No. 11233 was finally issued (in the name of and to Union Theatres), commencing as usual on 28 November (1955) for a period of twelve months. All subsequent Licenses were issued in the name of and to Union Theatres.²⁹⁸

Kogarah Police conducted its next annual inspection on 02 October 1956, (again incorrectly) recording the date of the Brakelite screen's installation as 25 June 1955. At this time, the theatre had altered its showings to (only) seven nights per week.

The theatre's License was again renewed on 14 November 1956, the application having been made, as usual, by Union Theatres and payment having been made, as usual, by Acme.^{299 300 301 302}

By November 1957 little had changed, save the theatre was showing seven nights per week and matinees on Saturdays, and required some minor alterations/maintenance including to some doors and locks thereon. The theatre's License was again subsequently renewed.^{303 304 305}

On 20 October 1958, New South Wales Fire Brigades conducted an inspection. Fire appliances in the theatre were all satisfactory and included two hydrants, two extinguishers, one asbestos blanket and two buckets, one each of water and sand. Panic lighting was tested and proved satisfactory.

The general condition of the theatre was clean. However, barrel bolts on the foyer doors had yet to be removed, as previously instructed by the Under Secretary on 09 December 1957.³⁰⁶

In November 1958, Union Theatres apparently leased the theatre to V.M. & E.A. Griffiths of Bexley. However, it is not known in what capacity, for what purpose or for how long.³⁰⁷



*View looking south along Rocky Point Road c.1959
The (Ramsgate) Odeon sign can be seen to the right
The theatre extended all the way to the left, its roof peppered with vents
Photograph courtesy of Lindsay Bridge*



*View looking north along Rocky Point Road
Photograph taken in 1959 by the late John Burgess
Courtesy of Ian MacCowan*

A number of issues were raised by the Under Secretary on 02 May 1960 following an inspection by a Fire Brigade Officer on 12 April 1960. Some minor maintenance was required, most of which was attended to.³⁰⁸

However, some more major work was also required, including the fitting of a new muffler to the auxiliary lighting plant, which was to be lagged and carried above the roof of the plant's compartment.³⁰⁹

By October 1960 the above work had not been carried out and the Under Secretary enquired of Union Theatres about progress.^{310 311}

A general downturn between 1938 and 1940 may have been the beginning of a decline in theatre patronage (and perhaps Messrs Owen & Sellars had seen this trend continuing, hence their sale in 1949). However, the introduction of television in Australia in 1956 had undoubtedly had a profound impact.^{312 313}

This was confirmed by Greater Union on 26 November 1960 when, in response to the abovementioned enquiry by the Under Secretary regarding works to the auxiliary lighting plant, Greater Union indicated that the theatre was operating under extremely adverse conditions and sought a deferral in relation to the work. Greater Union indicated that it would likely be forced to close the theatre in the very near future.³¹⁴

Greater Union was granted such deferral, with the matter to again be raised in approximately April 1961.³¹⁵

Union Theatres and Acme continued to respectively apply and pay for the theatre's License renewal.

Greater Union increased the theatre's showing to nightly and (daily) matinees, likely in an attempt to maintain/increase business.^{316 317}

In response to a request by the Chief Secretary's Department, the Board of Fire Commissioners of NSW inspected the theatre on 14 April 1961 in relation to the (previously required) works regarding the auxiliary lighting plant, which were subsequently allowed to stand over for a further six months.^{318 319}

On 14 July 1961, Greater Union confirmed that it intended to cease operating the theatre on Thursday, 27 July 1961, due to adverse economic conditions affecting the motion picture industry. However, Greater Union was hopeful that it might re-open the theatre when conditions became more favourable.³²⁰

Kogarah Police reported to the Chief Secretary on 10 October 1961 that it was unable to conduct a complete inspection of the theatre in relation to the theatre's annual License renewal, as the theatre had been closed for some time. It was also noted that the theatre, in its then state, would fall short of the standard expected for any such license.³²¹

Following the above advice, the Under Secretary enquired of Greater Union (rather than Union Theatres, which then held the License) whether it (Greater Union) wished to renew the theatre's License.³²²

Greater Union confirmed on 20 October 1961 that it so intended renewing and that a duly completed form and payment would shortly be forthcoming.³²³

No completed form appears to have been submitted, but payment of the License renewal fee (this time by Union Theatres) was made on 24 October 1961.³²⁴

License renewal No. 25392 dated 04 December 1961 and in the name of Union Theatres was subsequently issued to same.³²⁵

However, the theatre never re-opened.

Greater Union (again rather than Union Theatres) declined to renew the theatre's License the following year (1962), confirming it saw no prospect of re-opening.³²⁶

One of the last advertisements for the Ramsgate Odeon appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on 21 July 1961.³²⁷

JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED . . . A CRAZY EX-
TRACTION OF LAUGHTER Those crazy "Carry On" stars
carry the fun right into the dentist's chair to prove there's a
funny side to almost anything.

VICTORY and ODEON-KINGS Suburbs
"DENTIST IN THE CHAIR"

Starring Bob Monkhouse, Kenneth Connor, Eric Barker and
Peggy Cummins (G). Plus (at city only) "The Treasure of San
Teresa," Eddie Constantine (A). City Sess.: 10.15, 1.30, 4.40,
7.45. Plans: State Booking Bureau and Victory. MA6866
527 GEORGE STREET.

FROM TODAY AT THESE SUBURBAN THEATRES
Lindfield Kings, Marrickville Kings, Collaroy Odeon, Cronulla
Odeon, Kingsford Odeon, Lakemba Odeon, Penshurst Odeon,
Petersham Odeon, Ramsgate Odeon, Newtown Hub. For Sub.
Theatre details see directory this paper.

Sydney Morning Herald, Friday, 21 July 1961

Sadly, the theatre (had thus) closed its doors for the very last time on Thursday, 27 July 1961.

The theatre remained closed and used for storage only until late 1964.^{328 329}



Later Uses of the Theatre

“Tom The Cheap Grocer”

On 17 September 1964, Tom The Cheap Grocer Pty Ltd (hereafter “Tom the Cheap”), which had leased the premises from Union Theatres Investments Limited, opened its (105th but) first store in New South Wales, having converted the theatre into the area's first supermarket with a floor space of approximately 10,000 square feet. The store's layout was based largely on those established by its proprietor, Sir Thomas Wardle, in South Australia and included a butcher shop and fresh fruit and vegetable section.³³⁰

From the air, the property and improvements showed little change from previous years.



*1965 Aerial View
Courtesy of Bayside Council/Bayside Library Service*

But inside, things were very different. The store's grand opening was 9.30a.m. sharp and included performances by Graeme Bell and his all star band, the chance to win £1 of groceries and thousands of free gifts including packs of steak knives, glass tumblers, plastic salad dishes and a pyrex casserole dish. ³³¹



St George & Sutherland Shire Leader, Wednesday, 16 September 1964

GRAND OPENING

OF MY FIRST STORE
IN SYDNEY AND
105th IN AUSTRALIA



THE "BAD BOY"
TOM THE CHEAP GROCER

Symbol of rebellion
against high prices!

IMPORTANT NOTICE

"MY PRICES FOR PERSONAL SHOPPERS, NOT FOR OTHER RETAILERS," SAYS TOM



Customers Say
"WE LOVE HIM"



RAMSGATE

OLD ODEON THEATRE, ROCKY POINT ROAD

**9.30 a.m. SHARP, THURSDAY
17th SEPTEMBER**

TOM'S RAMSGATE SUPERMARKET

AUSTRALIA'S GREATEST PRICE CUTTER—NOT
JUST A FEW "SPECIALS" BUT EVERY LINE
PERMANENTLY PRICE CUT, "AND NO LIMITS"
AT MY PRICES, SAYS TOM

- See and hear **GRAEME BELL and his All Stars Band** at my opening. From the Chevron-Hilton
- **FREE Sample Bags and Balloons**
- **FREE Barbequed Chops and Sausages**
- **FREE Ice Creams and Lots of Novelties**
- **FREE 1000's of gifts worth hundreds of £'s**

ROTHMAN KING SIZE FILTER, 20's 2/10 PKT. "Beat the budget price rise at my opening," says Tom	FAIRY MARGARINE 9d ½ lb. FACTORY FRESH, TASTES BETTER "Cooks better at this price," says Tom	TEK TOOTH BRUSHES 11½ "Great savings in my Chemistry Department."
--	---	--

St George & Sutherland Shire Leader, Wednesday, 16 September 1964

Tom the Cheap essentially offered discounted shop-wide prices and “no frills” service, and his catch cries “Competitors Say *He’ll Ruin Us*” and “Customers Say *We Love Him*” proved only too true.³³²

Tom

The CHEAP Grocer

*Over 200 stores across the nation
and still growing... because it's
the overall savings that count.*

TRIANGLE ASPARAGUS SPEARS 16 oz 43c	SNOWFLAKE PLAIN 13c S. R. 14c FLOUR 2lb. 15c	JONQUIL MARGARINE 1 lb. 28c
PEPSODENT TOOTHPASTE ECONOMY 28c	SMITHS CRISPS (22c) TWISTIES (22c) CARNIVAL CORN (25c) 15c	TOP TASTE MADEIRA 1 lb 29c
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> ★ EVERY LINE PERMANENTLY PRICE CUT ★ NO LIMITS EVER! </div>		
PEARS SOAP 15c	PEEK FREANS COOKIES GALORE 39c	BLYS STEEL WOOL KING SIZE 11c
KINKARA TEA ½ lb 27c	BEGA MATURED CHEESE Random weights 54c 1b	CAFE ROYAL 2 oz 29c
PINE-O-CLEEN 20 oz 23c	SUNKIST FISH FINGERS 10 oz 41c	Preslo VIENNA FRANKFURTS 16 oz 59c
CARINGBAH 29 PRESIDENT AVE.	RAMSGATE ★ 396 ROCKY POINT ROAD ★	PENSHURST 11 BRIDGE ST. ★
LIVERPOOL No. 1 SHOPPING MALL ★	CHESTER HILL Cnr. Wellington and Chester Hill Roads ★	LALOR PARK Cnr. Sackville and Stephen Sts. ★
	EARLWOOD 356 HOMER ST. ★	MARRICKVILLE ★ 273 ILLAWARRA RD.
	RIVERWOOD 261 BELMORE RD. ★	LAKEMBA 22 HALDON ST.

Sydney Morning Herald, Tuesday, 09 September 1971

The cheaper prices offered affected many small corner/convenience shops in the area.

Doris Steet's store, at the corner of Rocky Point Road and Griffiths Street, was one such shop. Doris was unable to purchase goods (essentially wholesale) cheaper than for what Tom the Cheap was retailing them. This eventually led to Doris closing her store (and replacing same with a bedding store).^{333 334 335}

Tom the Cheap was still going strong in 1971, but the Ramsgate store had passed the halfway point of its life.

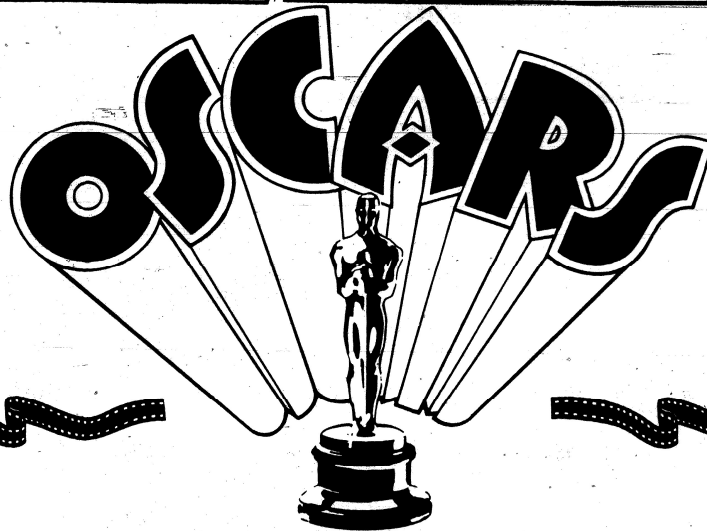
Although Tom the Cheap's Lease (originally dated 05 October 1964 but likely commencing months prior) expired in late 1978, the cut price supermarket had been converted into a theatre restaurant by late 1976.^{336 337}

Oscar's Hollywood Palace Theatre Restaurant

On 20 September 1976, Alan Victor Parker applied for a permit to sell and supply liquor in a restaurant to be known as "Oscar's Hollywood Palace", located at the premises formerly occupied by "Tom the Cheap" (and likely subleased from same).^{338 339}

Theatre restaurants were gaining in popularity, offering dinner and a show under one roof for a package price.³⁴⁰

The restaurant subsequently opened with "Connelli at the Palace", a collection of musical comedy numbers from the 1930s through to the 1970s featuring musical comedy star, Judi Connelli.³⁴¹



HOLLYWOOD PALACE
presents



JUDI CONNELLI
in

"CONNELLI AT THE PALACE"

with

Ross Coleman Jan Hogan Terrence M. Mahboub
Grant Pommeroy

Musical Director:- Garey Campbell
Staged and Choreographed by Ross Coleman

Miss Connelli's costumes by Bill Goodwin — other costumes by Rose Jackson

OPENS WEDNESDAY 3rd NOVEMBER
BOOKINGS NOW OPEN

Generous concessions for all bookings
made before November 22

Book now at The Palace-cnr Alice St. and
Rocky Point Road. Sans Souci or phone **5294455**

Price for show and dinner (which includes an entree plus your choice
of 1 each of 9 savoury meals and 9 sweet dishes) is \$12.00 per head.

St George & Sutherland Shire Leader, Wednesday, 20 October 1976

Word spread quickly about the show and the restaurant became a huge (albeit brief) success. “Connelli at the Palace” ran for eight months, finishing in approximately June 1977.³⁴²

Following on from “Connelli at the Palace”, July 1977 saw the arrival of “The Glitter Sisters”. This show also proved popular and ran for six months finishing on 01 January 1978.³⁴³

Nostalgia show by Glitter Sisters

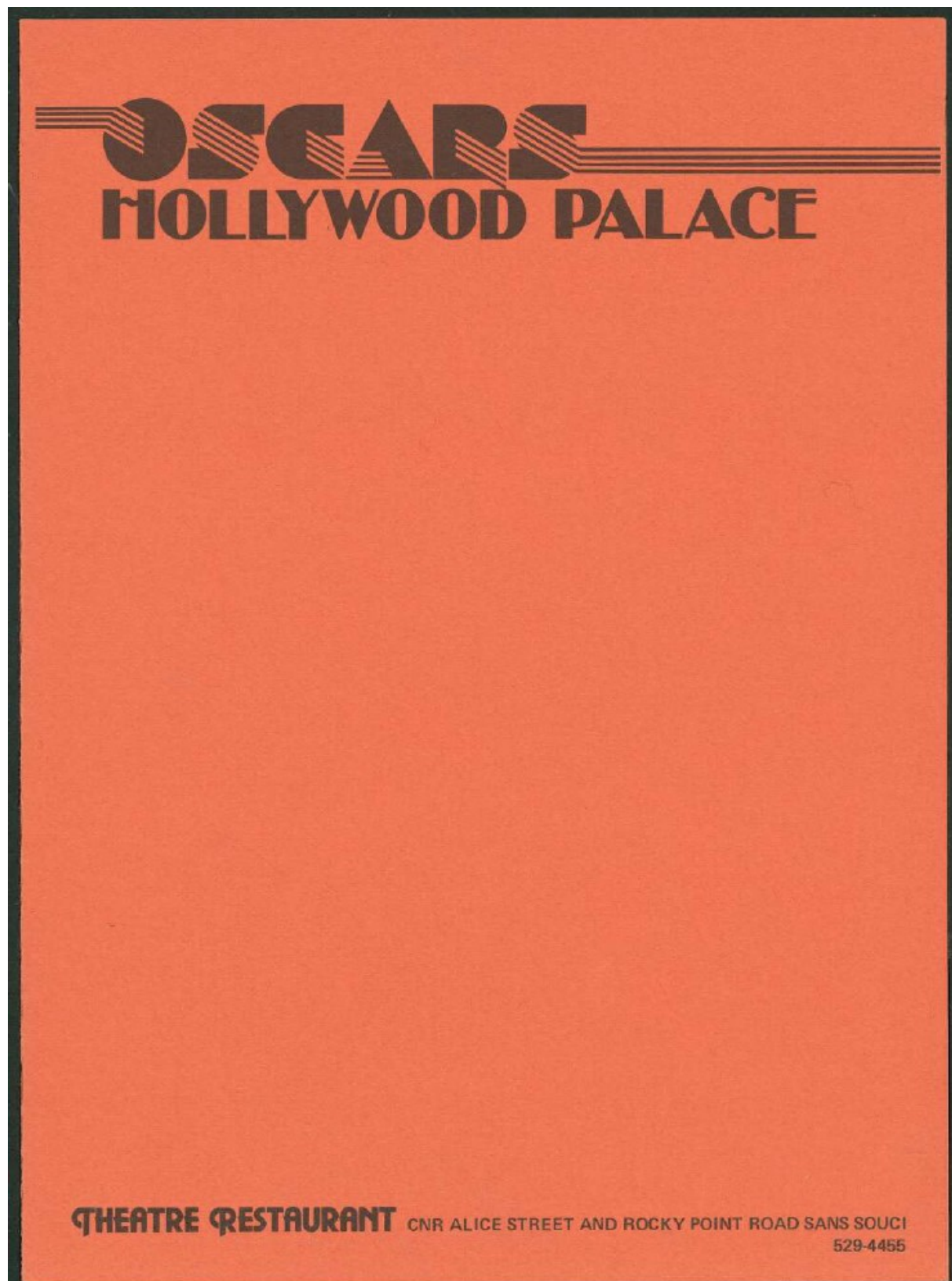


The Glitter Sisters

The Glitter Sisters brought their 1940s musical act to Sydney on Tuesday night when they opened a six-month season at Oscar's Hollywood Palace, Sans Souci.

Sydney Morning Herald, Thursday, 14 July 1977

On 10 February 1978, the final show to appear at Oscar's Hollywood Palace was a production by Don Battye and Peter Pinne, “Fasten Your Seat Belts”, which ran until 08 July 1978.³⁴⁴



BARRIE WELLS &

OSCARS

HOLLYWOOD PALACE

PRESENTS

JON FINLAYSON'S PRODUCTION

★ **THE** ★
★ **GLITTER** ★
★ **SISTERS** ★

SING THE FASCINATING 40's

A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY
TO THE SONGS AND STYLES
OF 30 YEARS AGO

Devised & Written by
GARY DOWN & JON FINLAYSON

Directed & Staged by
JON FINLAYSON

Musical Director
GAREY CAMPBELL

Set Design
MIKE ROBERTSON

Wardrobe Designed & Executed by
BILL GOODWIN

Dresser

NEIL WILKINSON

Stage Costumes Dry Cleaned by

SANS SOUCI DRY CLEANERS

Publicity by

SUE DAVIDSON 311938

Artwork by

AXIS ART 569 7648

★ ★ ★

Shoes Supplied by

Le-Rami Fashions

Shop 32, Kogarah Town Centre

and

587-1442

325 Bay St. Brighton-Le-Sands.

599-1747

Early in 1975, the "GLITTER SISTERS" were launched by Jon Finlayson and Bill Joseph at the Whitehorse Theatre Restaurant in Melbourne. Later that year they transferred to the Chevron Hotel in the re-named "Glitter Room".

They played Melbourne for a further record-breaking nineteen months — then a three month Brisbane season. Now in Sydney, here is the mixture of nostalgia, humour and harmony that has brought audiences to their feet over the last two years.

Enjoy it with us — and spread the word about the fabulous GLITTER SISTERS

★
★ **JOY** ★
★ **MILLER** ★

★
★ **GERALDINE** ★
★ **MORROW** ★

★
★ **RONA** ★
★ **COLEMAN** ★

★
★ **MAGGIE** ★
★ **STUART** ★

★
★ **LYN** ★
★ **LOVETT** ★

MENU

ENTRÉE

FRESH PATÉ

FOR THOSE LOOKING FOR A DELICATE TASTE

PRAWN COCKTAIL

FRESH PRAWNS, A DASH OF LEMON AND A SELECTED SAUCE

MINTED PINEAPPLE

A TANGY TASTE FROM THE SUNNY NORTH

MAIN COURSE

ROAST BEEF

SLICED PORTIONS OF BEEF WITH GARDEN FRESH VEGETABLES

BAR-B-Q CHICKEN with lemon sauce

SELECTED CHICKEN THAT WOULD MAKE "THE COLONEL" SIT UP AND TAKE NOTICE

SALMON CRÊPE with tartare sauce

SALMON WRAPPED IN FINE CRÊPES WITH A TOUCH OF TARTARE SAUCE

ROAST PORK with apple sauce

DESSERT

PAVLOVA

SERVED WITH PASSIONFRUIT AND CREAM

CHEESECAKE

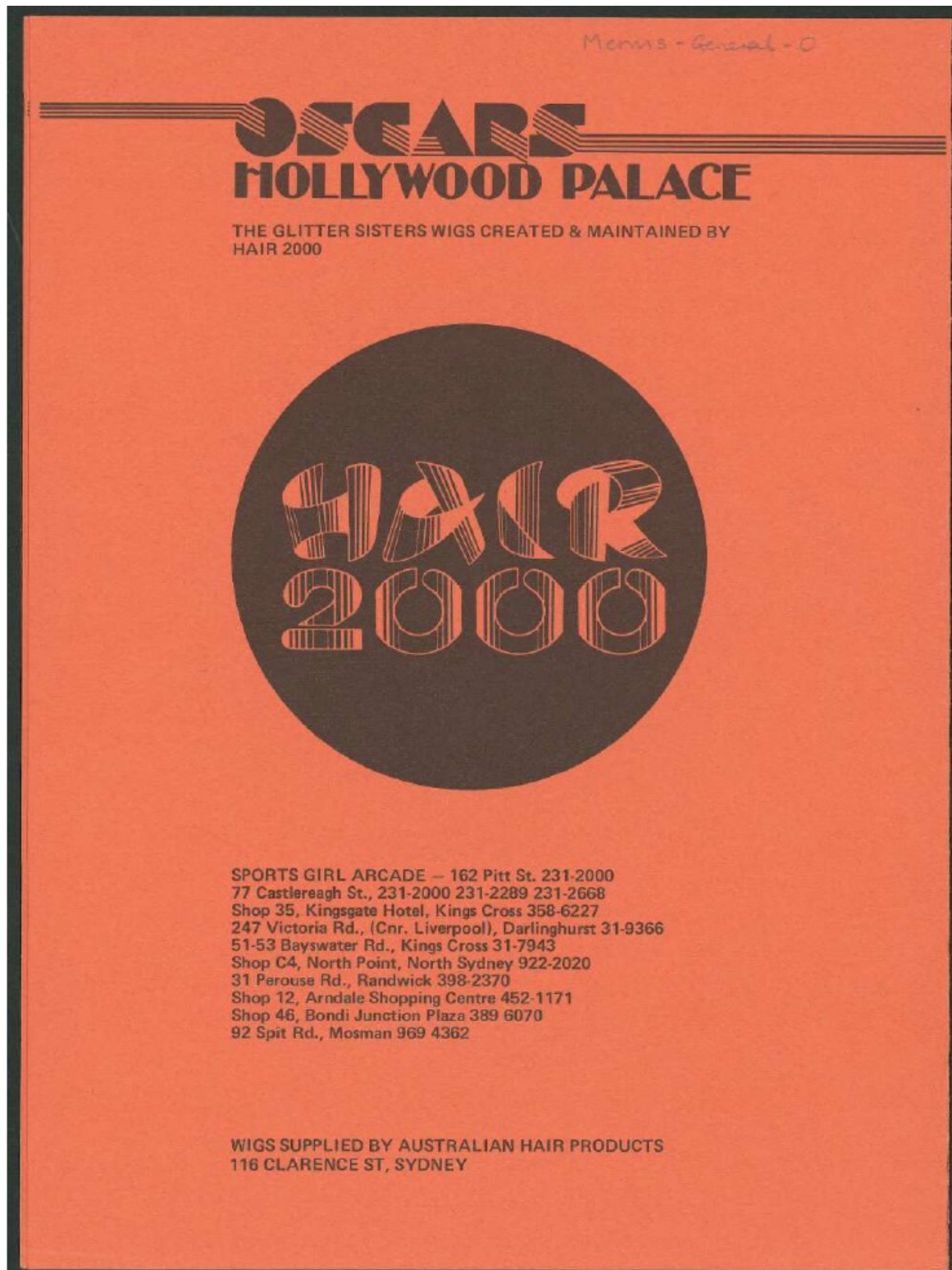
A WEIGHT-WATCHERS NIGHTMARE

FRUIT SALAD

A CARMEN MIRANDA HAT COVERED WITH CREAM

COFFEE WITH AFTER DINNER MINT — 50c
IRISH COFFEE \$1.40





Programme/Menu Courtesy of National Library of Australia



Present Day (2017)

In early 1979, Union Theatres Investments Limited sold the property and improvements to Famkel Pty Limited, which shortly sold to Brian Roger Metham, antiques dealer and restaurateur of Beverly Hills and Oyster Bay.^{345 346}

In mid 1980, Brian Metham sold the property and improvements (Lots 75, 76 and 77) to Lend Lease Homes Pty Limited.³⁴⁷

Lend Lease Homes Pty Limited (hereafter “Lend Lease”) also acquired an adjoining Lot (78), which ran perpendicular to the rear of Lots 75, 76 and 77.³⁴⁸

The combination of all four lots became Lot 175 in Deposited Plan 610770 and resulted in a total land area of 2,091 square metres.³⁴⁹

Demolition of the existing improvements took place almost (if not) immediately upon Lend Lease's acquisition. The construction of 24, resort style luxury two bedroom units shortly followed, with the bricklaying of approximately 200,000 modular bricks and 6,500 concrete blocks commencing in approximately July 1980.^{350 351}

Almost 12 months later and on 20 May 1981, Lend Lease's subsequent Strata Subdivision No. 15/81 (of 24 units) was approved by Rockdale Council.³⁵²

Strata Plan No. 17047 was registered shortly thereafter on 03 July 1981.³⁵³

In August 1981, the newly constructed units became available for purchase, at a starting price of just under \$73,000.00.³⁵⁴

RAMSGATE. Fr. \$72,950.
OPEN FOR INSPECTION
SAT., SUN. 1.30-4.30.
396 ROCKY POINT ROAD.
(Cnr. Alice St.)
 Most admired project of 24
 luxury 2 bedroom units located
 in handy location to shops and
 transport.
FEATURING:
 7 units with no steps.
 Award winning Knebel
 kitchen with wall oven and
 hot plates.
 Built-in robe in master with
 full length mirror.
 Own laundry with dryer.
 L-shaped lounge/dining.
 Choice of w.w. carpets.
 Security system and i.u. gar.
 Inspect this weekend as new
 units in this price range and
 suburb are almost unobtainable.
HONER & JOHNSTON R.E.
570 8422. A.H. 546 2049.

Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday, 15 August 1981



*1989 Aerial View
 Courtesy of Bayside Council/Bayside Library Service*



384-396 Rocky Point Road (cnr Alice Street)
22 July 2017
Photograph by Michelle Steet



Conclusion

Today nothing remains of the Ramsgate-Sans Souci Palace Picture Theatre or even of its successors.

Gone is the stately entrance with its winding staircases, leadlight panelling and marble columns.

Gone is the splendid proscenium and delightful garden setting.

Gone is one man's vision and the dedication and hard work of two others.

One must applaud William Pilling on his initiative, but it is Messrs Owen & Sellars who must be truly admired. For more than a quarter of a century, and through a depression, a world war and yet further adversity, they successfully operated, improved and even once re-built the theatre.

1923 to 1949 were, without a doubt, the theatre's glory years. Supported by a steadfast and consistent patronage, the theatre thrived, and generously gave back to its community.

"Greater Union's" tenure (albeit less than half in duration) was, by comparison, particularly "corporate" and rather dull and uneventful.

"Tom The Cheap" gave the theatre a new look and purpose but, as it had done to others, was itself driven out of business by even larger competitors.

Oscar's Hollywood Palace Theatre Restaurant brought a resurgence of live theatre, with the added extra of a meal, but was extremely short lived.

Recent generations and generations to come might simply look upon the present day unit complex as though it had always existed in that manner. Yet something much more grand, something of great social importance, had once occupied that very space, brushed aside by progress and long forgotten.

So, the next time you look around your suburb, try imagining what once might have been, rather than just looking at what you see.



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