

NEW OXFORD CINEMA, LEEDERVILLE



PLACE INFORMATION	
Place name	New Oxford Cinema
Other names	Luna Cinema Nickelodeon Olympia
Place type	Individual building or group

HERITAGE LISTING	
inHerit ID:	2206
State Heritage Register:	
Other Listing:	Uniting Church Inventory Completed 01 Oct 1996, Municipal Inventory Adopted 13 Nov 1995

SITE LOCATION	
Street address	139 Oxford St
Locality	Leederville
Survey	LOT: 1 D/P: 8580
Vol/folio	1717/160
Reserve	—

SIGNIFICANCE	
Level of significance	Considerable Very important to the heritage of the locality. High degree of integrity/authenticity.
Management category	Category 2 Conservation of the place is highly desirable. Any alterations or extensions should reinforce the significance of the place.
Statement of significance	<p>Although altered, the place is a good representative example of a suburban cinema in the Interwar Art Deco style located on a prominently located landmark which makes a major contribution to the streetscape of the town.</p> <p>The place has historic value for its association with the Inter War period in which cinema became widespread and popular in suburban Perth, and the Leederville area was becoming more densely settled.</p> <p>The place has historic value for its association with architect Samuel Rosenthal who was prominent in the design of cinemas in Perth and general architectural practice.</p> <p>The place contributes to the community's sense of history for its longevity in the streetscape as prominent element and for its continuity of function since 1927.</p>

PLACE USE	
Original use	Social/Recreation: Theatre or Cinema
Current use	Social/Recreation: Theatre or Cinema
Other use	

CONSTRUCTION DETAILS	
Construction date	1927; 1979; 1981; 1995
Walls	Painted Brick
Roof	Corrugated metal sheeting
Architectural Style	Inter-War Art Deco
Physical description	The cinema occupies a prominent corner location. Whilst not designed as a corner building in the same manner as the Regal Theatre in Subiaco, it is of comparable size, period and function as a generator of activity in the town centre. In recent times the cinema activity has undergone a resurgence of fortune which has been largely responsible for much of the restoration of vitality in the town centre. The two storey facade is embellished with stucco decoration. Its façade is styled in Art Deco rather than the modern used in theatres of a similar period such as the Astor, Cygnet and Regal. The theatre dominates the intersection and anchors this corner. The original roofline has been raised and the original verandah has been replaced. The side and rear facades are functionalist in their character and the side façade contributes little to Vincent Street. Nil setbacks to both street frontages and corner truncation. Considerable particularly in the subdivision of the interior and ground floor frontage.
Condition	Good
Integrity	Moderate/High
Authenticity	High

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The New Oxford Theatre was designed by architect S. B. Rosenthal and constructed by E. A. Allwood. It was opened on 2 March 1927 by the Minister for Works, A. McCallum before a capacity audience of 1,286. The opening programme included vaudeville, music by the New Oxford Orchestra, a short play, some comedy, and a special appearance by Miss Australia, Beryl Mills. Its first managers were W. Bellion and Mr Cunningham. Silent movies were shown to the accompaniment of a piano or organ, with the first piano being lent by the Billy Edwards Music Company. Local resident Gordon Hughes recalled films with Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd as the stars. At that time the admission was threepence and later on it was sixpence.

This was the first suburban theatre to install sound but not all of its patrons were happy with the change. Some called sound 'a one-hit wonder' and others said after the initial attraction they preferred the silent ones. Local personality Harry Wilkes worked there early on as a fireman and Cecil Hill was the film operator from 1930-39. The theatre was then owned by the Ampol Oil Company and Ralph Stewart was the operator until August 1959. Evelyn and Bob Manorgan owned the theatre from 1959 to October 1966. After they sold it, the theatre was closed for two months and then re-opened as the Nickelodeon.

During the 1960s it became very rundown and the curtain was broken and not used after 1966. It was then run by the church group 'Gold' and a rock and roll promoter. Following that, the manager was Mr Perrie and for the next seven years most of the films were Italian or Greek, a reflection of the changing demography of the suburb. At this time it was known as the 'Olympia'. According to Wise's Post Office Directories in 1930 the New Oxford Tea Rooms, S. E. Warman proprietor, was situated in the shop on the south-east corner of the building and next door, possibly in the shop at No. 159, was Miss Agnes Brown, a dressmaker. In 1949 Mrs M. Stewart ran the tea rooms on the corner and Miss Ethel Dumbrill had a retail frock shop in the other shopfront, which was listed as No. 159.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A picture garden was also established on Newcastle Street, near the corner of Oxford. This seated 2,248 people. The picture garden closed in early 1964, and an Ampol service station was built on the site by the owners. Cyril Watson was the next to take over the lease of the theatre in Oxford Street. At this time, the freehold was then owned by the Carboni family. Watson, together with partner Roger Hunt and his wife Christine, worked hard at upgrading the theatre; and it was also rewired and the curtain mechanism repaired. It then reopened as the New Oxford on 18 August 1979 showing family-type films. The response was not as good as expected and Watson tried 'R'-rated films to boost attendances. This had the desired effect and new fittings and carpets were purchased as a result. A coffee bar was also opened upstairs.

In 1981 a new roof was installed and a large 13-metre screen, new projection equipment and new seating were purchased. Shortly after that the coffee bar and upstairs lounge were turned into a small cinema, using one of the old projectors which had been reconditioned. This sat around 150 people and it was named 'Star Theatre'. Watson began providing live music on Sunday afternoons and it was around that time that he bought the rights to 'The Gods Must Be Crazy' which proved to be so successful. It became the longest running film, showing at the theatre for three years.

In the mid 1980s, the theatre, now fully refurbished, began to show other independent films and in both 1998 and 1999 it was named the best Indie-Urban Cinema in Australia. In the 1990s, it was renamed the Luna Cinema. Alterations were made to the existing cinema and in 1995 there were celebrations for the launch of twin cinemas within the complex. A summer picture garden was also opened at the rear of the adjoining shops at No 163-167 Oxford Street, which seated 200. Two extra screening rooms are located in the former residential section of No 163

In the 1990s films were also shown in the 1,000-seat outdoor Luna in the Park in the old Leederville Primary School grounds. In 2001 the Luna's manager was Ingrid van den Berghe. In 2002 the owner's request for permission to put new signage up on the northern side of the building on the second level was refused.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Luna and Palace Cinemas amalgamated in 2000 and, in 2008, the company's portfolio includes the Luna, Cinema Paradiso, Luna on SX, Astor Cinema and Camelot. As of 2024 Luna Palace Cinemas' portfolio only includes Luna, Luna on SX (Fremantle), Luna Windsor (Nedlands), and the outdoor Luna in Leederville during the summer months. Camelot no longer runs its outdoor cinema, and Cinema Paradiso has been permanently closed.

Aerial photographs from the mid 20th century onwards indicate that the form and extent of the subject place has changed little since that time.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Historic theme	Cultural Life: Recreation - Arts, Culture and Entertainment. Economy: Commerce	
Associations	Samuel Rosenthal E. A. Allwood	Architect Contractor
Sources	Municipal Heritage Inventory 2006 Landgate Aerial photographs 1953-2024.	

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS



ARCHIVAL IMAGES



New Oxford Cinema, 1985. Courtesy SLWA image b3663069.