



HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND
POUHERE TAONGA

New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero – Report for a Historic Place **The King's Theatre, STRATFORD (List No. 9865, Category 1)**



The King's Theatre, Stratford. Natalie Marshall, Heritage New Zealand, 15 August 2023.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to provide evidence to support the inclusion of The King's Theatre in the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero as a Category 1 historic place.

Summary

A centre of the Stratford District's social life since its construction in 1917, The King's Theatre has special significance in New Zealand history as an early provincial 'picture palace' and the location where 'talkies' technology was first demonstrated in Australasia. The enterprise shown here by company director William Kirkwood, who procured the sound-film technology from overseas, was influential in promoting and socialising this evolution in recreational entertainment with Australasian audiences. Saved and maintained by a trust of community members in the 1990s, and since run by a team of dedicated volunteers, The King's Theatre has outstanding community esteem.

Stratford lies within the rohe of Ngāti Ruanui, Ngāruahine and Ngāti Maru, to the east of Taranaki Maunga along the Pātea River's course from maunga to moana. Previously thickly forested, there is little evidence of permanent Māori settlements in the vicinity of Stratford, although the area was traversed by many tribes along the nearby Whakaahurangi Track. The town was built on land confiscated and ceded from the Ahitahi hapū of Ngāti Ruanui during the Taranaki Wars of the 1860s-1880s. Stratford developed from 1878, and thrived as the agricultural economy grew. By the 1910s the population could support regular screenings of movies, and in 1916 a group of enterprising businessmen formed a company, Stratford Pictures and Amusements Ltd, to build the town's first purpose-designed movie theatre.

Auckland architects Grierson and Aimer, emerging specialists in cinemas, won the commission and designed a theatre that shows relatively early elements of the 'picture palace' model that would develop more fully in the 1920s. The two-tier cinema, opened on 31 December 1917, could seat over 700 people, and was dominated by a three-storey façade with dramatic Greek-revival adornment. The exotic decorative scheme carried through to the interior's ornate plaster mouldings, combining classical influences with patriotic symbolism. The complex included a Marble Bar refreshment room to complete the experience.

In January 1925 select invitees gathered at The King's Theatre to experience the first demonstrations of 'talkies', sound-film technology, in Australasia. Company director W.P. Kirkwood had bought the

rights to the DeForest Phonofilm system, selected after international research. In November 1929 the theatre auditorium was adapted for regular screenings of sound-films, and business boomed. By 1950 however, the building was showing its age and was temporarily closed for roof repairs. The water-damaged plaster ceiling domes were replaced with a solid ceiling, and some of the plaster decorations removed. Declining audiences due to the advent of television hit hard in the 1960s, however new owners Kerridge-Odeon invested in a major makeover of the interior that removed some of the character features and converted the auditorium into a single level of seating.

In 1988 the cinema finally closed after years of declining revenue. However, the success of the 1990 Shakespeare Festival prompted a community trust to purchase the building for reuse as a live theatre venue for Stratford's resurgent performing arts scene. From 1991 the Stratford District Theatre Trust has worked tirelessly to raise funds to adapt the space for live productions and refurbish and restore the venue. Cinema screenings resumed in 1992 and this much-loved dual-purpose community asset has since provided audiences with a vibrant programme of films, theatre and music. Run by a team of enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers, the theatre displays its history with pride and is complemented by the fundraising bookshop in the old Marble Bar space.

1. IDENTIFICATION¹

1.1. Name of Place

Name

The King's Theatre

Other Names

The King's Theatre (1917 -1969); The Regent Theatre (1969-1988); Petrocorp King's Theatre (1992- 1997); Fletcher Challenge Energy King's Theatre (1997-2000); TET King's Theatre (2000-present)

1.2. Location Information

Address

213-215 Broadway (State Highway 3)

STRATFORD

Taranaki

¹ This section is supplemented by visual aids in Appendix 1 of the report.

Additional Location Information

The building spans between Broadway (at its front/east) and a service lane (at its rear/west).
GPS coordinates (NZTM): E1710665.70m; N5644868.68m

Local Authority

Stratford District Council

1.3. Legal Description

Pt Sec 318 TN of Stratford and Lot 2 DP 3509 (RT TNJ2/1086; TNJ2/1087), Taranaki Land District

1.4. Extent of List Entry

Extent includes the land described as Pt Sec 318 TN of Stratford and Lot 2 DP 3509 (RT TNJ2/1086; TNJ2/1087), Taranaki Land District, and the building known as The King's Theatre thereon, and the following chattels: one Fumeo 16mm projector, two Zenith X4001H 35mm projectors, two Gaumont-Kalee 35mm projectors, three sets of A. Eastern Ltd and Fisher film rewinding/editing equipment. (Refer to [map in Appendix 1](#) of the List entry report for further information).

1.5. Eligibility

There is sufficient information included in this report to identify this place. This place is physically eligible for consideration as a historic place. It consists of land and a building fixed to land which lies within the territorial limits of New Zealand.

1.6. Existing Heritage Recognition

Local Authority and Regional Authority Plan Scheduling

Scheduled in Stratford District Plan, Operative 2014, Map Ref H19 in Appendix 6: Known Heritage Resources of Significance Identified for Protection (Buildings and Structures).
Demolition and relocation are non-complying.

2. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

2.1. Historical Information

The town of Stratford lies at the base of the eastern slopes of Taranaki Maunga, also known to Māori as Pukehaupapa or Pukeonaki.² Traditions tell of the mountain's defeat by Tongariro in a competition to win the beautiful Pihanga's heart, and retreat from the central North Island to its present location, carving the Whanganui River in its trail. Taranaki Maunga is of immense cultural and spiritual significance to the iwi of the region.³

Stratford is located in an area that has a particular association with Ngāti Ruanui, whose ancestor Ruanui's grandfather Turi landed with his people in the Aotea waka.⁴ They settled at the mouth of the Pātea River, which runs through Stratford on its journey south from the maunga. The western half of Stratford town is overlapped by the rohe of Ngāruahine, who share ancestry with those who came on the Aotea and Te Rangiamutu waka.⁵ The rohe of Ngāti Maru extends from inland Taranaki across the northern part of the town. Ngāti Maru trace their origins to Maruiwi of the original tangata whenua people, and Maruwharanui, whose ancestors arrived on the Aotea and Tainui waka.⁶

Previously thickly forested, there is little evidence of permanent Māori settlements in the vicinity of Stratford, although the area was traversed by many tribes.⁷ A few kilometres east of the future town site ran the Taranaki region's most prominent north-south pathway, used

² Ron Lambert, 'Taranaki region - The mountain', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/taranaki-region/page-3>, 2009 (updated 2015), accessed 7 April 2020

³ Ngā Iwi o Taranaki (Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Mutunga, Taranaki Iwi, Ngāti Maru, Ngāruahine, Ngāti Ruanui and Ngāa Rauru Kītahi) and the Crown initialled the Taranaki Maunga Collective Redress Deed on 31 March 2023, to ultimately recognise the maunga in law as 'a person, a tupuna, and as an indivisible and living being'. URL: <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/ng%C4%81-iwi-o-taranaki-and-crown-initial-taranaki-maunga-collective-redress-deed-rua-reo>, accessed 23 May 2023

⁴ Tony Sole, 'Ngāti Ruanui', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, URL <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/ngatiruanui/>, 2005 (updated 2017), accessed 6 April 2020

⁵ Te Puni Kōkiri, 'Te Kāhui Mangai: Directory of Iwi and Māori Organisations', URL <http://www.tkm.govt.nz/localauthority/stratford-district-council/>, accessed 7 April 2020; Ngāruahine and The Trustees of Te Korowai o Ngāruahine Trust and the Crown, 'Ngāruahine Deed of Settlement', 1 August 2014, URL: <https://www.govt.nz/assets/Documents/OTS/Ngaruahine/Ngaruahine-Deed-of-Settlement-1-Aug-2014.pdf>, accessed 14 July 2020

⁶ Te Puni Kōkiri, 'Te Kāhui Mangai: Directory of Iwi and Māori Organisations'; Te Runanga o Ngāti Maru Taranaki, 'Evidence of Karl Burrows and Holden Hohaia for WAI 1609 claim', URL: <http://ngatimaru.co.nz/about-us/>, accessed 14 July 2020

⁷ Evidence of camps for seasonal activities has been found on the slopes of Taranaki Maunga west of Stratford, and in the hills to the east of the town. There is only one site in Stratford recorded in the New Zealand Archaeological Association's site recording scheme, Archsite. Q20/37, located on Avon Street, was where a large kumete (bowl) was found in swampy ground in 1995.

for centuries.⁸ This was known as the Whakaahurangi track, named from Ngāti Ruanui chieftainess Ruaputahanga's mid-sixteenth century journey back to her South Taranaki home as she fled unhappy marriages. She followed an old war-trail south, and camped for the night near modern Stratford, where her party observed that she slept on her back: 'whaka-ahurangi' means 'facing the heavens'.⁹ Another tradition relates the name to her looking at the sky when snaring ducks.¹⁰ Today this connection is remembered through the name of Stratford's Whakaahurangi Marae, established in the 1970s by the Ahitahi hapū of Ngāti Ruanui.¹¹

In 1842 agents of the New Zealand Company cut a bridle path along the Whakaahurangi track, to connect the fledgling colonial settlements of New Plymouth, Wanganui and Wellington.¹² Major General Trevor Chute's imperial forces also travelled along this route on their infamous 'forest march' in 1866.¹³ Tensions between Māori and Europeans had been simmering in the region since the establishment of New Plymouth in 1842 put pressure on Māori to sell their land.¹⁴ Outright war between the Crown and Te Ātiawa erupted in March 1860.¹⁵ Taranaki Māori joined Te Ātiawa in defending Māori land, and fierce fighting occurred around the region, including Chute's devastating 'scorched earth' campaign of retaliation in South Taranaki.¹⁶

⁸ The route ran between Kairoa Pā near Lepperton and Ketemarae near Normanby. John Houston, *Maori Life in Old Taranaki*, Reed Publishing (NZ) Limited, Auckland, 1965 (2006 edition), pp. 42-44

⁹ *ibid*; Tony Sole, *Ngāti Ruanui: A history*, Huia Publishers, Wellington, 2005, pp. 91-95

¹⁰ Ian Church, *The Stratford Inheritance: a history of Stratford and Whangamomona counties*, NZ Heritage Press, Waikanae, 1990, p. 13

¹¹ Stratford District Council, 'Whakaahurangi Marae', URL <https://www.stratford.govt.nz/live/community-facilities/whakaahurangi-marae>, updated February 2020, accessed 7 April 2020; Taranaki Regional Council, 'Contact Whakaahurangi Marae', URL <https://www.trc.govt.nz/council/working-with-iwi/iwi-contacts/ngati-ruanui/whakaahurangi-marae/>, accessed 7 April 2020

¹² Houston, 1965, pp.100-101

¹³ David Green, 'Chute, Trevor', Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, first published in 1990, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, URL: <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1c17/chute-trevor>, accessed 16 April 2020

¹⁴ Benjamin Wells, *The History of Taranaki: A standard work on the history of the province*, Capper Press, Christchurch, 1976 (originally published: Edmondson & Avery, New Plymouth, 1878), pp.85-87

¹⁵ The general reluctance of Taranaki Māori to sell land to the colonists, and conflict over who had the authority to sell, were factors. The political situation for iwi was further complicated in 1848 by the return home of Te Ātiawa people who had been displaced by the invasions of Waikato tribes in the 1820s. Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 'War in Taranaki 1860-63: Fighting begins', URL: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/taranaki-wars/fighting-march-june-1860>, updated 1-Nov-2019, accessed 16 April 2020

¹⁶ Ngāti Ruanui and Her Majesty the Queen, 'Deed of Settlement of the historical claims of Ngāti Ruanui', 12 May 2001, URL: <https://www.govt.nz/assets/Documents/OTS/Ngati-Ruanui/Ngati-Ruanui-Deed-of-Settlement-12-May-2001.pdf>, pp. 28-30

In 1863 the Crown enacted the *New Zealand Settlements Act*, allowing for the confiscation of Māori land without compensation.¹⁷ Three confiscation districts which covered most of Taranaki were created, formalising colonial encroachments despite continued fighting.¹⁸ Stratford would lie within Confiscation District 2, the Ngatiawa district. Although tensions lasted into the 1870s, the colonial government took control of the province, negotiated cession of the Waipuku-Patea Block from the Ahitahi hapū, and in 1874 vested the land around Stratford with the Taranaki Waste Lands Board for distribution.¹⁹

Early Stratford

From 1873 improved transport links, and Julius Vogel's public works and assisted immigration scheme helped attract more settlers.²⁰ In June 1877, the Taranaki Waste Lands Board ordered the survey of 600 acres of bush for a town at the Mountain Road's junction with the Pātea River, to service the growing agricultural community.²¹ The name 'Stratford-upon-Patea' was suggested by Board member William Crompton - a fan of English poets - and many of the streets were named after Shakespearean characters.²²

In October 1878 the first permanent building on Broadway (the main north-south thoroughfare through the town centre) was built.²³ The railway reached Stratford in 1879,

¹⁷ This Act delivered long-lasting and devastating consequences for Māori who it deemed to have been in 'rebellion' against the Crown. A further proclamation by the Governor in 1865 enabled the creation of Confiscation Districts.

¹⁸ Waitangi Tribunal, *The Taranaki Report: Kaupapa Tuatahi (WAI 143)*, Legislation Direct, Wellington, 1996, pp. 118-124

¹⁹ Colonial development was slowed by the impacts of Ngāti Ruanui leader Riwia Titokowaru's response to the land confiscations and Imperial offensives in South Taranaki. After losing his hope for peaceful reconciliation he turned to war in 1868, winning a series of victories against the British before retreating to the north. James Belich, 'Titokowaru, Riwia', Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, first published in 1990, updated April 2011, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, URL <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1t101/titokowaru-riwha>, accessed 29 April 2020. The Waste Lands Board was constituted under the *Taranaki Waste Lands Act 1874* to administer the development and sale of confiscated land. Wells pp. 263-264. The purchase of the 20,700-acre Waipuku-Patea Block for £3,200 was negotiated by 'deed of cession', a method which came before the West Coast Commission hearings of 1880 due to issues over dubiously reserved lands and the questionable ethics of Crown authorities involved in the negotiations with the Māori owners. David Walter, *Stratford: Shakespearean town under the mountain, a history*, Dunmore Publishing, Wellington, 2005, pp. 7-8

²⁰ Construction of a railway line began from New Plymouth in 1873, and the Mountain Road (future State Highway 3) was developed from 1874. Wells, 1976, p.293; Gail and Ron Lambert, *An Illustrated History of Taranaki*, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 1983, p.70; 'Vogel's vision', URL: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/the-vogel-era/vogels-vision>, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, updated 30-Apr-2018, accessed 6 May 2020

²¹ Walter, 2005, p. 10

²² Ron Lambert, 'Taranaki places - Stratford', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/taranaki-places/page-9>, 2009 (updated 2016), accessed 5 May 2020. Fenton is a character in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

²³ A section of the Mountain Road was renamed Broadway. This first building was the Curtis Bros. store. Walter, 2005, p.13.

and the town's population grew.²⁴ Stratford's first boom was during the 1890s, when 'the population increased almost six-fold, and new buildings and businesses mushroomed'.²⁵ Photos from the turn of the twentieth century show a streetscape of predominantly timber Victorian buildings.²⁶ Stratford's commercial and public building stock began to transform to masonry in the 1910s, as export commodity prices boomed during the First World War.²⁷ This overall period of growth for Stratford was due to its steadily increasing population, its rail junction being a hub for the regional economy, technological advances that increased farm productivity, and a program of civic improvements that boosted local confidence.²⁸

Entertaining the population

Public entertainment in Stratford took a leap forward when the first Town Hall – also a performance venue – opened in 1884.²⁹ A lively culture of performing arts including theatre, music, storytelling and illustrated lectures had developed in colonial New Zealand since the early 1840s.³⁰ The exhibition of projected moving pictures was added to recreational options

²⁴ Stratford District Council, 'History and Heritage', 2013, URL: <https://www.stratford.govt.nz/council/about-stratford/history-heritage>, accessed 20 March 2020; McAllister, 1976, p. 37

²⁵ Walter, 2005, p. 36

²⁶ For example, 'Broadway, Stratford', Ref: 1/1-012236-G, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, /records/23097358. Three rare remaining non-residential buildings from this period (pre-1910) are: the Empire Hotel (built c.1886 or 1893, with later modifications), southeast corner of Broadway and Fenton Street, http://ketenewplymouth.peoplesnetworknz.info/stratford_buildings/topics/show/4534-empire-hotel-stratford; Marire Hospital (1907, with 1911 additions by John D. Healy, 'Page 6 advertisements Column 5', *Stratford Evening Post*, 3 July 1911, https://www.stratford.govt.nz/images/Heritage_Inventory/Stratford%20-%20Marire%20Hospital.pdf) 24 Juliet Street; and the Stratford Club (1909-10, architect John D. Healy), 60 Juliet Street ('Page 1 Advertisements Column 3', *Hawera & Normanby Star*, 23 October 1909)

²⁷ Returned service personnel also added money into the economy. The transformation of Stratford's urban landscape picked up pace in the mid-late 1920s. Walter, 2005, p.42; Geoff Mew and Adrian Humphris, *Raupo to Deco: Wellington Styles and Architects 1840-1940*, Steele Roberts Aotearoa, Wellington, 2014, p.244

²⁸ In 1916 the population was 2713; in 1921 it had increased by nearly 400 people to 3085 (mostly as a result of a baby boom following the First World War); and the 1926 census recorded further growth to 3332 people. Stratford District Centennial Committee, *Stratford District Centennial 1878-1978*, Stratford District Centennial Committee of the Stratford Borough Council, 1978, p.61; Walter, 2005, p. 42; 'Overview', URL: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/the-1920s/overview>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 1-May-2020, accessed 22 July 2020

²⁹ Walter, 2005, p. 22

³⁰ New Zealand's first known performance venue was Auckland's Albert Theatre - a back room of a hotel - which hosted the colony's first play on Christmas Eve 1841. The first purpose-built theatre was the Royal Victoria Theatre on Manners Street, Wellington, built in 1843. Ben Schrader, 'Theatres, cinemas and halls - Colonial period', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/theatres-cinemas-and-halls/page-1>, accessed 25 May 2023

after the first public screenings using the 'kinematograph' in 1896.³¹ Travelling exhibitors regularly toured the country with projectors and screens, setting up in local halls.³²

By 1910 'picture shows' were prominent around the country and had moved from being an item in a programme of otherwise live performance to events in their own right.³³ While theatres and halls were still used for movie screenings, the first purpose-built 'picture house' - Wellington's King's Theatre (1910) - heralded a new age of cinema-going in Aotearoa.³⁴

Garnet Saunders is credited with first bringing silent movies to Stratford in 1910, and soon three companies were screening regular picture shows there.³⁵ Venues included the Town Hall, and particularly His Majesty's Theatre on Broadway, which made movies the focus of its programme from 1911.³⁶ However, both buildings had been adapted for the purpose. His Majesty's Theatre was reportedly built as stables, and when the 'cinema operating box' was removed from the Town Hall in May 1914 the restoration of the Dress Circle to its 'normal appearance' was celebrated by those who had considered the addition a 'hideous eyesore'.³⁷

The King's Theatre

A purpose-built, modern 'cinema house' was required, and so on 27 June 1916 a group of businessmen met with that purpose in mind.³⁸ Stratford Pictures and Amusements Ltd (SPA)

³¹ The first New Zealand presentation of the kinematograph was in the Auckland Opera House on 13 October 1896. Clive Sowry, 'Whitehouse, Alfred Henry', Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, first published in 1993, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2w16/whitehouse-alfred-henry>, accessed 25 May 2023

³² Bruce and Selwyn Hayward, *Cinemas of Auckland 1896-1979*, The Lodestar Press, Auckland, 1979, p. 3

³³ 'CINEMA', from An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, edited by A. H. McLintock, originally published in 1966, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/1966/cinema>, accessed 26 May 2023; Wikipedia, 'Cinema of New Zealand', https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinema_of_New_Zealand, accessed 26 May 2023

³⁴ Ben Schrader, 'Theatres, cinemas and halls - Early 20th century', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/theatres-cinemas-and-halls/page-2>, accessed 26 May 2023

³⁵ Walter, 2005, p.211

³⁶ His Majesty's Theatre, which was located on Broadway where Mountain Motors now is, closed in 1920. Stratford Pictures and Amusements proprietorship of His Majesty's Theatre began on 2 July 1917. Walter, 2005, p.211; 'Amusements', *Taranaki Daily News*, 10 August 1910, p.2; 'Amusements', *Stratford Evening Post*, 2 June 1911, p.5; 'Page 1 Advertisements Column 1', *Stratford Evening Post*, 5 August 1911, p.1; 'Local and General', *Stratford Evening Post*, 30 August 1911, p.5; 'Local and General', *Stratford Evening Post*, 28 April 1917, p. 4; 'Amusements', *Stratford Evening Post*, 2 July 1917, p.5

³⁷ Salmond Architects, *A Plan for the preservation of Fletcher Challenge Energy Kings Theatre Stratford [Conservation Plan]*, 1998, p.3; 'Local and General', *Stratford Evening Post*, 13 May 1914, p.2

³⁸ J. Masters chaired the meeting, attended by R. Masters, A.W. Budge, and S.M. Porritt. At the first General Meeting on 3 October, J. and R. Masters (who owned the adjoining section to the south of the new theatre), A. W. Budge and A. Coleman were elected inaugural Directors. 'Kings Cinema Minutes – page 1', Stratford Recollect (Stratford District Library)

was formed, and immediately made arrangements ‘for the erection of an up-to-date picture theatre to be commenced at once’.³⁹ They purchased and cleared a site on central Broadway.⁴⁰

Auckland architects Grierson and Aimer were commissioned to design the new picture house.⁴¹ They had recently completed the ‘Everybody’s Theatre’ (the Mayfair) in New Plymouth, but would become most celebrated for the Auckland War Memorial Museum.⁴² Familiar with the special requirements for cinema design, at The King’s Theatre they provided a screened compartment for the orchestra in the front of the pit and sited the projection box in the centre of the theatre seating (rather than the extreme rear), to improve projection quality.⁴³

Grierson and Aimer called for construction tenders on 16 December 1916, and the main contract was awarded to Auckland firm Johns and Son for £7134.⁴⁴ ‘The King’s Theatre’ was

Archives),

<https://stratford.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/1381?keywords=Kings%20theatre&type=all&highlights=WyJraW5ncylslnRoZWFOcmUiXQ==&lsk=6b12097cecfdfcc9a8307bb791da5653>, accessed 1 June 2023

³⁹ ‘Local and General’, *Stratford Evening Post*, 6 July 1916, p. 4

⁴⁰ Part Section 318 and Section 357 Town of Stratford was bought from solicitor Thomas Cracroft Fookes; the existing building that was demolished had housed the premises of G.W. Mills’ Stationer and Stratford Cycles. A twelve-inch-wide strip along the northern boundary was bought for construction of a party wall. Record of Title TN31/140, Land Information New Zealand; Memorandum of Transfer 30371, 1917, Instrument on Record of Title TNJ2/1087, Land Information New Zealand; Salmond Architects, 1998, p.3. The previous building is visible in ‘Broadway, Stratford’, McAllister, James, 1869-1952: Negatives of Stratford and Taranaki district. Ref: 1/1-012236-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, [/records/23097358](#).

⁴¹ Salmond Architects, 1998, p.3

⁴² The Mayfair, Category 2 historic place, List No. 898, was designed in 1916, and the Auckland War Memorial Museum in 1921, when Keith Draffin had joined the firm. Other cinemas they designed were Everybody’s Theatre in Queen St, Auckland (1913-1915); Capitol Theatre, Balmoral, Auckland (1922); Majestic Theatre, Queen St, Auckland (1923); the Rialto (1924) in Newmarket, Auckland, Edendale Theatre, Sandringham, Auckland (1926). Another of the firm’s notable designs was the Wellington Cenotaph. Wellington Heritage, ‘Grierson, Aimer and Draffin’, Wellington City Council, 2015, <https://wellingtoncityheritage.org.nz/architects/grierson-aimer-and-draffin>, accessed 1 June 2023; ‘Everybody’s’ New Theatre Building at New Plymouth for the Taranaki Amusements Ltd [plans], ARC2004-645, Puke Ariki, <https://collection.pukeariki.com/objects/36132/everybodys-new-theatre-building-at-new-plymouth-for-the-taranaki-amusements-ltd-plans>; ‘The hill of bitter memories’, *New Zealand Herald*, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/aucklands-175th-anniversary-the-hill-of-bitter-memories/2IW7CTQSP5IBXLLKW56VBV3A6U/>, accessed 1 June 2023; Salmond Architects, 1998, p.22; ‘Everybody’s Picture Theatre remodelling for Everybody’s Picture Theatre Company Ltd, 1913-1915’, Architecture Archive – University of Auckland, https://archives.library.auckland.ac.nz/archival_objects/everybodys_picture_theatre_remodelling_for_everybo; ‘Theatre for Rialto Picture Theatre Co. Ltd, 1924’, Architecture Archive – University of Auckland, https://archives.library.auckland.ac.nz/archival_objects/theatre_for_rialto_picture_theatre_co_ltd

⁴³ ‘The King’s’, *Stratford Evening Post*, 29 December 1917, p.5

⁴⁴ Subcontractors included Bellringer Bros (painting), Cooper in conjunction with Frederic and McMillan (plumbing), Mr Bater (plastering), Carrara Ceiling company (fibrous plaster work), Fama Company (flooring), NZ Shop Fronts Ltd (fronting), Mr Bowskill (marble flooring), Messrs Evans and Tichbon, and G.E. Wilson (erection of seating). Salmond

decided as the name by April 1917, and the press reported construction milestones as anticipation for the new theatre grew.⁴⁵ Despite 'many unforeseen difficulties, largely due to war conditions [placing] obstacles in the way of the completion of the work', a New Years' Eve grand opening was scheduled.⁴⁶ Not the least obstacle would have been both the architects' involvement in active military service, so Mr G.S. Goldsboro supervised the project's finish.⁴⁷



Fig 1: The King's Theatre, nearing completion but still with scaffolding erected at its facade. 'Broadway, Stratford'. McAllister, James, 1869-1952: Negatives of Stratford and Taranaki district. Ref: 1/1-012809-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/23204267

On 31 December 1917 Stratford turned out in force to celebrate the cinema's opening, with all proceeds donated to the Wounded Soldiers' Fund.⁴⁸ The building's architectural

Architects, 1998, p.3; 'Page 2 Advertisements Column 7', *Dominion*, 16 December 1916, p.2; 'The King's', *Stratford Evening Post*, 29 December 1917, p.5.

⁴⁵ 'Local and General', *Stratford Evening Post*, 28 April 1917, p.4; 'Local and General', *Stratford Evening Post*, 8 May 1917, p.4; 'Local and General', *Stratford Evening Post*, 9 June 1917, p.4; 'Stratford Borough Council', *Stratford Evening Post*, 20 November 1917, p.3; 'Local and General', *Stratford Evening Post*, 7 December 1917, p.4

⁴⁶ 'Local and General', *Stratford Evening Post*, 15 December 1917, p.4

⁴⁷ Salmond Architects, 1998, pp.3-4; 'The King's', *Stratford Evening Post*, 29 December 1917, p.5

⁴⁸ Proceeds totalled £69 19s. 'Local and General', *Stratford Evening Post*, 14 July 1917, p.4; 'Amusements', *Stratford Evening Post*, 2 January 1918, p.8

prominence, ferro-concrete construction and ‘artistic’ furnishings were lauded, while the concealed interior lighting, plaster screen, tip-up raked seating, ventilation and inset radiator heating were considered thoroughly modern.⁴⁹ Many of the 720 seats were filled with patrons who enjoyed the inaugural programme of *Cactus Nell* and *Madcap Madge* (‘a sparkler, written round the doings of the most unruly minx ever caught by the camera’), and the Stratford Municipal Band’s balcony performance.⁵⁰



Fig 2: The King’s Theatre auditorium in the 1920s, showing original plasterwork, corbels and ceiling domes. Image published in Wayne Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus: The Heyday of the New Zealand Picture Theatre 1925-1970*, Godwit/Random House, Auckland, 2008, p.246

Musical accompaniment for the silent features required skill and immense agility to provide unrehearsed sound. The orchestra was usually a handful of musicians playing the piano, violin, cello, woodwind and drums.⁵¹ The orchestra leader had music available for all scenarios and often made the music selection just from reading a synopsis of the film’s plot, as time did not allow for a pre-run of each show.⁵² Talented percussionists used a large kit

⁴⁹ ‘The King’s’, *Stratford Evening Post*, 29 December 1917, p.5

⁵⁰ The theatre had seats for 100 in the pit, 270 in the orchestra stalls, and 350 in the dress circle. ‘The King’s’, *Stratford Evening Post*, 29 December 1917, p.5; ‘Amusements’, *Stratford Evening Post*, 29, 31 December 1917, p.7

⁵¹ Salmond Architects, 1998, p.7; Walter, 2005, p.211

⁵² Projectionist Wilf Burgess, quoted in Salmond Architects, 1998, p.7

(including a pistol that fired blanks) to provide on-the-spot sound effects.⁵³



Fig 3: Kings Theatre, Stratford. McAllister, James, 1869-1952: Negatives of Stratford and Taranaki district. Ref: 1/1-012798-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. **/records/22888391**

In the shopfront adjoining the theatre's street entrance, the Marble Bar refreshment room opened a week later to cater for cinema patrons and the general public.⁵⁴ Marble Bars were a trend that became popular in Aotearoa in the 1910s, serving 'the latest Americanised

⁵³ Walter, 2005, p.211; 'Speaking pictures', *Stratford Evening Post*, 3 October 1924, p.2

⁵⁴ 'Local and General', *Stratford Evening Post*, 9 January 1918, p.4.

refreshments'.⁵⁵ Stratford's featured two service counters and modern conveniences including an underground plant for the manufacture of ice creams, an automatic soda dispenser, water filter, and dishwasher.⁵⁶



Fig 4: Interior of the Marble Bar, Stratford. McAllister, James, 1869-1952: Negatives of Stratford and Taranaki district. Ref: 1/1-012924-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/23085741

Grierson & Aimer's 1917 design places the building as a reasonably modest and early example of a 'picture palace' in historian Nerida Campbell's analysis of New Zealand cinema design. An architectural phase that flourished in the mid-1920s, 'picture palaces' feature distinctive architecture and dining/lounge areas to enhance the experience of 'going out'; creating 'a complete entertainment environment in which patrons were effectively transported beyond the burdens of everyday life.'⁵⁷ This moved beyond the simple 'embellished hall for entertainment' of first-phase (1910-1916) purpose-built movie theatres.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Marble Bar refreshment rooms were operating in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin and Whanganui by 1914. 'Business Notes', *Wanganui Herald*, 20 February 1914, p.2

⁵⁶ 'The King's', *Stratford Evening Post*, 29 December 1917, p.5

⁵⁷ Salmond Architects, 1998, p.19

⁵⁸ *ibid*

The King's Theatre makes history: sound film

In late 1924 The King's Theatre hosted a milestone in Aotearoa cinema history, being the first place where New Zealanders' experienced 'talkies' (movies with synchronised soundtracks technologically coupled to the film). Chairman of SPA, former mayor William P. Kirkwood, was a future-focused individual who had kept an eye on international developments in cinema-sound technology.⁵⁹ After enquiries in England, the United States and Europe, Kirkwood elected to back Dr Lee De Forest's 'Phonofilm' system. De Forest's method recorded sound vibrations as light waves at the side of the same strip of film as the photographic action, solving the synchronisation issues of earlier gramophone-accompanied techniques.⁶⁰ Kirkwood purchased the Australasian rights to Phonofilm in July 1924, and in late December the test equipment arrived in Stratford.⁶¹

On the morning of 30 December 1924 a group witnessed the first trial and marvelled at short films of a xylophone performance and a man speaking about De Forest's invention.⁶² Screenings to larger invited groups were held on 16 and 23 January, and 2 and 16 February 1925, where they enjoyed a performance of a singing dog among other clips.⁶³ Kirkwood then toured the equipment for demonstrations in Wellington, Dunedin and Australia.⁶⁴ Fully public demonstrations were held at The King's Theatre the following year, in late March 1926.⁶⁵

It took some years, however, until The King's Theatre was ready for regular commercial screenings of 'talkies'. The movie production industry had to adopt and refine the

⁵⁹ Walter, 2005, p.211

⁶⁰ 'Speaking pictures', *Stratford Evening Post*, 3 October 1924, p.2. The first exhibition of a movie with a separately-recorded soundtrack had taken place at the Paris Exposition in 1900, and the first exhibition of the Phonofilm system was in New York's Rivoli Theatre on 15 April 1923. 'Sound Film', *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sound_film, accessed 14 June 2023

⁶¹ 'Speaking pictures', *Auckland Star*, 14 July 1924, p.4; 'The Cinema', *Hawke's Bay Tribune*, 19 July 1924, p.10; 'Speaking pictures', *Stratford Evening Post*, 3 October 1924, p.2; 'Speaking pictures', *Stratford Evening Post*, 30 December 1924, p.5

⁶² 'Speaking pictures', *Stratford Evening Post*, 30 December 1924, p.5; 'A wonderful invention', *Hawera Star*, 31 December 1924, p.9; 'Speaking film', *Taranaki Daily News*, 31 December 1924, p.9; 'Speaking pictures', *Taranaki Daily News*, 24 January 1924, p.8

⁶³ At the semi-public demonstration to 200 select Stratford residents on 2 February, Kirkwood's address revealed they had initially intended to limit the audience to men, 'But the ladies will have their say... and so they are here to-night.' The demonstration on 23 January included members of the press. 'Speaking pictures', *Stratford Evening Post*, 3 February 1924, p.8; 'Speaking pictures', *Taranaki Daily News*, 24 January 1924, p.8; Salmond Architects, 1998, p.9

⁶⁴ 'De Forest Phonofilm', *Stratford Evening Post*, 25 March 1926, p.3

⁶⁵ *ibid*

technology.⁶⁶ And the cinema building had to be adapted: its poor acoustic performance had been noted at the first De Forest demonstrations.⁶⁷ Walls were padded and thick felted curtains hung to reduce echoes. A new perforated screen was built, with a sound-tower behind; and the operating box was enlarged for the new equipment.⁶⁸ The cinema was redecorated to match the new blue and gold drapery, and the façade refurbished to look its best under new floodlighting.⁶⁹ And the Western Electric sound system, which arrived in 40 cases, was installed over a week in early November 1929.⁷⁰

On 9 November 1929 regular ‘talkies’ kicked off.⁷¹ The impact of ‘talkies’ was demonstrated by a huge jump in the cinema’s annual takings: from £5423 in 1929, to £8281 in 1930.⁷² While Wellington’s Paramount Theatre was New Zealand’s first cinema to commercially screen talkies (from March 1929), Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision has acknowledged Stratford’s King’s Theatre as the location of the first operation of the technology in Australasia, four years earlier.⁷³

Decades of entertainment

By the 1950s, apart from a month’s closure during the 1918 influenza pandemic, the cinema had operated continuously, including during World War Two when it was an important conduit for news.⁷⁴ Events such as 1927’s Paramount Week competition, the donation of tickets to the unemployed during the 1930s Depression, and the filming and screening of local Stratford events in a *Kings Cinema Review* segment on Saturday nights ‘made people feel like the cinema was theirs.’⁷⁵

⁶⁶ ‘Sound Film’, *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sound_film, accessed 21 June 2023

⁶⁷ ‘Speaking pictures’, *Taranaki Daily News*, 24 January 1924, p.8

⁶⁸ Salmond Architects, 1998, p.12

⁶⁹ *ibid*

⁷⁰ By this time, Phonofilm had been beaten by the competition. Salmond Architects, 1998, pp.11-12; ‘Phonofilm’, *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonofilm>, accessed 29 June 2023

⁷¹ Salmond Architects, 1998, pp.11-12

⁷² ‘Kings Cinema Minutes – page 4’, Stratford Recollect (Stratford District Library Archives), <https://stratford.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/1362?keywords=kings%20theatre&highlights=WyJraW5ncyIsinRoZWFOcmUiXQ==&lsk=2415e29064ee4438e8c3dc8d3332d74a>, accessed 1 June 2023

⁷³ Walter, 2005, pp.211-212; NZ History, ‘First ‘talkie’ draws crowds in Wellington’, URL: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/first-talkie-plays-at-wellingtons-paramount-theatre>, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, updated 16-Feb-2023; ‘De Forest confirmation letter’, Stratford District Theatre Trust collection

⁷⁴ Salmond Architects, 1998, pp.8-9

⁷⁵ *ibid*, pp.10-11, 13-14; *The Reel People of New Zealand*, short film (Director Nick Homler), 2016, <https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/the-reel-people-of-nz-2016/overview>, accessed 8 June 2023; ‘Kings Cinema Minutes – page 5’, Stratford Recollect (Stratford District Library Archives),

Unfortunately, the building was showing signs of age. Water damage caused small chunks of plaster from the decorative ceiling to fall on some patrons, and the Stratford Borough Council closed the building for repairs during 1950-1951.⁷⁶ Much of the ornate Carrara plasterwork was removed from the auditorium during these works, including the replacement of the two ceiling domes with a solid plaster ceiling.⁷⁷

The 1950s also saw a change of ownership.⁷⁸ Stratford had two cinemas by this time. The Plaza had been built in 1934 by Stratford Theatres Ltd, a company directed by notable Wellington theatre owner William Kemball.⁷⁹ Stratford Theatres Ltd also took over The King's Theatre lease in 1934, and staff were shared between the two cinemas.⁸⁰ In 1943 Kemball sold his theatre chain to cinema mogul Robert Kerridge, hence Kerridge first became associated with The King's.⁸¹ Kerridge formed Kerridge-Odeon in 1948, by which time he controlled 70 percent of Aotearoa's cinema industry, owning 130 movie theatres plus companies controlling film distribution, equipment and confectionary retail.⁸² By 1960 SPA's finances were suffering. The King's Theatre was sold to Kerridge's Fullers Theatre Corporation in 1961 and Stratford Pictures and Amusements was wound up.⁸³

Changing times for cinemas

1953 was one of the peak years for New Zealand cinemas, with 589 movie theatres serving a population of 2 million.⁸⁴ However, the rise of television in the 1960s drastically affected

<https://stratford.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/1364?keywords=kings%20theatre&highlights=WyJraW5ncyIsInRoZWFOc mUiIXQ==&lsk=2415e29064ee4438e8c3dc8d3332d74a>

⁷⁶ *ibid*

⁷⁷ Salmond Architects, 1998, p.14

⁷⁸ Equipment was upgraded in 1956. 'Kings Cinema Minutes – page 6', Stratford Recollect (Stratford District Library Archives), <https://stratford.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/1363?keywords=Kings%20&highlights=WyJraW5ncyJd>

⁷⁹ Kemball's company Kemball Theatres, later renamed New Zealand Theatres Ltd, owned around 30 cinemas in the Wellington region. 'New Zealand: new companies registered', *Everyones*, 27 September 1933, p.36, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-564412492/view?sectionId=nla.obj-576116805&partId=nla.obj-564452453#page/n35/mode/1up>, accessed 22 June 2023; 'Wellington Theatres', *Sun [Auckland]*, 3 July 1930, p.13; 'King's Theatre', *Stratford District Heritage Inventory*, <https://www.stratford.govt.nz/repository/libraries/id:2cvuccagl1cxbygm8445/hierarchy/Heritage%20Inventory%20Documents/Stratford%20-%20Kings%20Theatre.pdf>

⁸⁰ 'Kings Cinema Minutes – page 5'; Pers comm. David Walsh to Blyss Wagstaff, 20 August 2023

⁸¹ L. R. Shelton, 'Kerridge, Robert James', Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, first published in 1998, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4k10/kerridge-robert-james>, accessed 28 June 2023

⁸² Brittenden, 2008, p.13

⁸³ *ibid*; Record of Title TN31/140, Land Information New Zealand; 'Kings Cinema Minutes – page 6', Salmond Architects, 1998, p.14

⁸⁴ Brittenden, 2008, pp.141-2

cinema attendance. The average person went to the movies 19.3 times a year in 1950, but only 4.6 times a year by 1970, the year after state broadcasting had commenced.⁸⁵ The Plaza closed down in 1967, and the King's Theatre, by this time a run-down B-movie theatre colloquially known as 'the Bughouse', may have also temporarily closed down around this time.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, Kerridge-Odeon fought the tides with a major 'modernisation' of the King's Theatre in the late 1960s. Architects Rigby Mullan converted the two tiers of seating to a single 'stadium-style' sloping floor with 320 seats – halving the number of staff needed.⁸⁷ The solid marble entrance staircase was covered with carpeting, and the 'union jack' balustrading was enclosed in plain board panelling (apparently to preserve the modesty of mini-skirt wearers).⁸⁸ Other changes alluded to by the mayor in his official reopening speech on 7 November 1969, included reroofing, and alterations to the entrance, proscenium and screen, and mezzanine/toilet facilities.⁸⁹ The renovated cinema was rebranded 'The Regent'.



Fig 5: The entrance foyer of the new 'Regent', with enclosed balustrades of the staircase, after the 1969 renovations. Stratford District Theatre Trust collection.

⁸⁵ *ibid*, p.143; Trisha Dunleavy, 'Television - History of television in New Zealand', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/television/page-1>, accessed 29 June 2023

⁸⁶ Walter, 2005, p.212

⁸⁷ Salmond Architects, 1998, pp.14, 27; Joanne Stallard, 'Application for entry on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero', 18 August 2022, p.7

⁸⁸ Stratford District Theatre Trust, A brief history of TET King's Theatre [brochure], Updated February 2023

⁸⁹ Salmond Architects, 1998, pp.14-15; Rigby Mullan, 'Alterations to theatre – plan - demolition, boiler room, service bureau – Broadway – P1392', 15 May 1969, Stratford District Council building file

Business continued, albeit more quietly than in its heyday, until the mid-1980s. From 1974-1986 it was managed with flair by Gwelfa Burgess (1925-2019), recognised as one of the longest serving ushers in New Zealand cinemas, who worked in to her 80s.⁹⁰ The sense of community Gwelfa and her team created throughout this period of stability was boosted by the theatre's popular resident cat, Precious Kerridge.⁹¹ By 1986, however, attendances had fallen again and the Regent had been running at a loss for some time. The cinema was finally forced to close in January 1988, and the projection equipment was moved to Whakatane.⁹²

A new era: the rescue of The King's Theatre

Two years later, Stratford's Shakespearean connection would prove a lifesaver for the building. The town had long shown pride in its relationship to William Shakespeare's birthplace and works through its active relationships with other Stratfords of the World, and its regular Shakespeare performances and competitions.⁹³ May 1990's successful Shakespeare Festival sparked motivation for the town to have a theatre once again to serve its resurgent performing arts community, led by the Stratford Shakespeare Society and Stratford Theatre Group.⁹⁴

The Stratford District Theatre Trust formed in 1991 to purchase the neglected cinema and convert it into a multi-purpose venue.⁹⁵ A four-stage restoration plan was devised. Fundraising events, sponsorships and grants from many individuals and businesses, including rates assistance from Stratford District Council, achieved the Stage 1 aim of opening the theatre for its first live performance (*Worzel Gummidge*) in November 1991.⁹⁶ The following January, the projectors were retrieved from Whakatane and movie screenings

⁹⁰ Brittenden, 2008, p.93

⁹¹ Salmond Architects, 1998, p.14; Brittenden, 2008, p.97

⁹² Salmond Architects, 1998, pp.15-16

⁹³ Stratford's first Shakespeare Society was formed in 1896. The new Borough of Stratford in 1898 featured the Shakespeare coat of arms in its crest. Mayoral links with Stratford-upon-Avon and Stratford Ontario were celebrated in 1939 and 1954, and a delegation attended the 1997 Stratfords of the World reunion in Stratford-upon-Avon. In 1999 the town hosted over 100 international Stratfordians of the World, and Taranaki has sent delegations to many international Stratford reunions ever since, including 2023. A notable Shakespeare Festival was organised in 1964 to commemorate the Bard's 400th birthday. Walter, 2005, pp.225,268; Stratford Shakespeare Trust Facebook page, post 3 August 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/stratfordshakespearetrust>, accessed 11 Aug 2023

⁹⁴ The Stratford Theatre Group is now known as Stratford On Stage. Salmond Architects, 1998, p.16; Walter, 2005, p.217

⁹⁵ Walter, 2005, p.213

⁹⁶ Salmond Architects, 1998, p.16

recommended.⁹⁷ Stage 2 afforded the extension of the stage and orchestra pit for live performances, and improved dressing rooms.⁹⁸

Public response was overwhelmingly positive. In its first full year of use, 20,000 patrons came through the doors: twice the population of the Stratford district.⁹⁹ Corporate sponsorship and grants in 1992 from Petrocorp, the TSB Community Trust, Taranaki Electricity Trust and NZ Lotteries Commission allowed for Stage 3's facilities upgrades.¹⁰⁰ Dame Malvina Major and the Ars Nova Choir praised the now world-class acoustic properties of the auditorium after their November performance.¹⁰¹ The next few years saw further improvements including restoration of the decorative 'union jack' balustrades, installation of a new sound system, upgrade of cinema equipment, and refurbishment of foyers, mezzanine, and auditorium.¹⁰² 2000 saw a further name change to honour the Taranaki Electricity Trust's corporate sponsorship.¹⁰³



Fig 6: The refurbished mezzanine in the 1990s. Stratford District Theatre Trust collection.

⁹⁷ *ibid*

⁹⁸ *ibid*; 'Permit K06220 Internal upgrading of Cinema – TET Kings Theatre', 1992, Stratford District Council building file P1392

⁹⁹ Walter, 2005, p.213

¹⁰⁰ Salmond Architects, 1998, pp.16-17

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, p.17

¹⁰² The theatre was renamed 'Energy King's Theatre' in 1997 to reflect Petrocorp's name change. *ibid*, p.18

¹⁰³ Stallard, 2022, p.2

The cinema now screens a mix of mainstream and arthouse films, and hosts live events, including distinguished performers Sir Dave Dobbyn and Sir Ian McKellen.¹⁰⁴ It was a principal venue in 2023's revived Shakespeare Festival.¹⁰⁵ The King's also provides education about film history through film club patronage and tours of its own Film and Equipment Archive, which includes news reels and historical footage of local events, and examples of early camera/projection technology.¹⁰⁶ Locals with an interest are welcomed to learn hands-on about the operation and maintenance of this historic equipment.¹⁰⁷



Fig 7: Kings Cinema entrance foyer in the 1990s, with balustrading uncovered. Stratford District Theatre Trust collection.

¹⁰⁴ Dave Dobbyn's Open Up Tour played two nights (25-26 October 2020) at the King's Theatre, his only Taranaki venue. Sir Ian McKellen performed an earthquake-recovery fundraiser for Christchurch's Isaac Theatre in 2013. Eventfinda, <https://www.eventfinda.co.nz/2020/dave-dobbyn-open-up-tour/stratford>, accessed 29 June 2023; 'Cinemas of New Zealand: TET Kings Theatre (Stratford)', <https://www.cinemasofnz.info/tet-kings-theatre-stratford.html>, accessed 29 June 2023

¹⁰⁵ April 2023 Shakespeare festival programme, <https://www.stratfordshakespearefestnz.co.nz/>, accessed 11 August 2023

¹⁰⁶ Stallard, 2022, pp.3-4

¹⁰⁷ The volunteers group includes young people enthusiastic about learning about this equipment, and keeping it in running order. Pers. comm Stratford District Theatre Trust to Blyss Wagstaff, 14 August 2023.

The building and equipment require regular maintenance and upgrades.¹⁰⁸ Funding is innovatively sourced by the Stratford District Theatre Trust committee, including the successful fundraising book shop, The King's Emporium, opened in the 2010s in the former Marble Bar. The theatre's snack bar, with lollies bagged by volunteers in the evenings, contributes revenue.¹⁰⁹ Like many of Aotearoa's masonry buildings from the time period, the building has been found to be potentially earthquake prone.¹¹⁰ Evolving structural strengthening requirements remain a challenge.

Currently (2023), the only paid staff member is a part-timer who organises the film programming.¹¹¹ All other roles are filled by a cast of around 30 volunteers on behalf of the community, and a 'Roll of Honours' board of numerous donors and sponsors in the foyer demonstrates how the community has responded in kind. Former staff stay in touch, and a 'grand reunion' in 1993 gathered around fifty former employees, including an orchestra member from the silent-movie era.¹¹² Connections continue to be made through patronage by local theatre, music and dance groups, and district schools as it is the Taranaki venue for the annual SGCNZ University of Otago Sheilah Winn Shakespeare Festival.¹¹³ A documentary on the theatre, filmed in July 2023 noted: 'Talking to people we realise just how big a part of people's lives [the King's Theatre] has played over the years'.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ The screen, soundproofing, carpet and bathroom facilities have been upgraded in recent years. Stallard, 2022, p.2; 'Stratford's historic King's Theatre to star in new documentary', *Stratford Press*, 1 June 2023, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/stratford-press/news/stratfords-historic-kings-theatre-to-star-in-new-documentary/GNY2BR3ZOF2NO37NKIZJ2I3CQ/>, accessed 29 June 2023;

¹⁰⁹ *The Reel People of New Zealand*, short film (Director Nick Homler), 2016, <https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/the-reel-people-of-nz-2016/overview>, accessed 8 June 2023; 'Stratford's historic King's Theatre to star in new documentary', *Stratford Press*, 1 June 2023, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/stratford-press/news/stratfords-historic-kings-theatre-to-star-in-new-documentary/GNY2BR3ZOF2NO37NKIZJ2I3CQ/>, accessed 29 June 2023

¹¹⁰ The initial assessment resulted in the foundations being strengthened in 2012-2014. A desktop assessment in 2019 concluded the building was potentially seismically prone.

¹¹¹ 'Stratford's King's Theatre looks to Scotland for its film shows', *Taranaki Daily News*, 15 July 2022, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/taranaki-daily-news/news/129228605/stratfords-kings-theatre-looks-to-scotland-for-its-film-shows>, accessed 12 July 2023

¹¹² Salmond Architects, 1998, p.17

¹¹³ Stallard, 2022, p.2; University of Otago, 'SGCNZ University of Otago Sheilah Winn Shakespeare Festival', <https://www.otago.ac.nz/humanities/about/otago077780.html>, accessed 13 July 2023

¹¹⁴ 'Stratford's historic King's Theatre to star in new documentary', *Stratford Press*, 1 June 2023, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/stratford-press/news/stratfords-historic-kings-theatre-to-star-in-new-documentary/GNY2BR3ZOF2NO37NKIZJ2I3CQ/>, accessed 29 June 2023

Associated List Entries

N/A

2.2. Physical Information

Current Description

Setting

The King's Theatre stands prominently on the western side of Stratford's main street, Broadway (State Highway 3). Located amidst the one or two-storey buildings of the main street shopping area, the King's Theatre's imposing three storeys are surpassed in height only by the Glockenspiel Clock Tower southeast down the block. Single-storey commercial buildings adjoin the north and south facades of the King's Theatre; both were constructed after the theatre and are anchored to its walls.¹¹⁵ Along with the Municipal Building further south (built 1916), The King's Theatre (1917) was influential in historically setting the architectural tone for Stratford's future commercial streetscape of mostly inter-war, classically-influenced masonry buildings.¹¹⁶ While the eastern side of the Broadway shopping zone retains an almost unbroken stretch of pre-war and inter-war heritage buildings, The King's Theatre is now one of the few remaining heritage buildings along the western side of the block.¹¹⁷

Exterior

Focus is firmly on the building's eastern (Broadway) façade with its striking Greek Revival features. It is likely that Hugh Grierson led the design work.¹¹⁸ Each of the three interior levels are discernible in the decorative arrangement, which is enhanced by a contrasting gold, red and black paint scheme on a warm beige background.

¹¹⁵ Transfer instrument 60794 on Record of Title TNJ2/1086; Transfer instrument 31730 on RT TNJ2/1087, Land Information New Zealand

¹¹⁶ For a fuller discussion of Stratford and Broadway's built heritage context see 'Contextual Analysis' in Blyss Wagstaff, 'Egmont Chambers, Category 2 historic place List entry report', 2020, List No. 9737, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/9737/Egmont%20Chambers>. Municipal Buildings, List No. 924: [https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/924/Municipal%20Chambers%20\(Former\)](https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/924/Municipal%20Chambers%20(Former)); Stratford Heritage Inventory https://www.stratford.govt.nz/images/Heritage_Inventory/Stratford%20-%20Municipal%20Building%20Hall%20of%20Remembrance.pdf.

¹¹⁷ The stretch of pre-World War Two buildings along the eastern side of Broadway between 222-310 is only punctuated by the 1980s glockenspiel clock tower at 276 Broadway, and 264 Broadway (date unknown). The building at 201-205 Broadway also dates from the 1920s-1930s.

¹¹⁸ Salmond Architects, 1998, p.22



Fig. 8: The building is prominent in the streetscape. Natalie Marshall, Heritage New Zealand, 14 August 2023.

The lower third comprises the street frontage. The theatre entrance is set back from the street in the southernmost bay of the ground level, allowing advertisement of films in poster displays on the sidewalls. Two sets of timber-framed glass doors (installed 1969) span the full width of the entrance bay, with panes of leadlighting above. The northernmost two-thirds of the ground level comprises The King's Emporium fundraising secondhand bookshop. The shop's street frontage has been completely rebuilt with aluminium joinery. This remodelling also removed the original ticket office that used to sit between the theatre and Marble Bar doors. A pedestrian canopy extends the full width of the footpath but is no longer supported by the original four verandah posts (these had Ionic capitals to echo the interior scheme. Two of them were removed to Pioneer Village for a time.¹¹⁹ The Trust plans to restore them.)¹²⁰ The canopy no longer functions as a balcony for the level above and has lost its original ornate 'union jack' metal balustrading and the leadlight 'Pictures' signage that previously emblazoned a small pediment over the theatre entrance bay. The theatre signage is now painted on plain sheet boarding along the canopy street edge, and on a tripod sign protruding above it to promote the King's Theatre as the 'Birthplace of the Talkies in New Zealand'.

¹¹⁹ 'Resource consent – Verandah Poles – TET Kings Theatre', 1994, Stratford District Council building file P1392

¹²⁰ Stallard, 2022, p.5

The first floor is distinguished on the façade by three identical feature window architraves (surrounds), each formed in shallow relief from pilasters (flat columns fixed to the wall) supporting a horizontal entablature with two roundels (decorative disc medallions), and a triangular pediment above. Each pediment is decorated by a central wreath, and is topped by three acroteria (ornamental sculptures), the outer ones turned in profile to increase the illusion of three-dimensionality. The central door opening which previously accessed the balcony has been entirely filled in (in 1969), and the original multi-paned windows in the flanking architraves have also been mostly filled in, with just some small louvered openings now hinting at the location of the toilet facilities inside. Above these architraves, a raised plaque is inscribed with 'CINEMA – THE KING'S – THEATRE', the central words in a larger font size.

The top level of the façade decoration is a cornice (ornamental moulding, with classical frieze) below a low parapet that projects above the roof edge. Eight tablets (triglyphs) are spaced along the cornice frieze, each with a decorative plaque featuring palmettes above a fluted pilaster. The metopes (spaces between the triglyphs) are plain, and the two at the outer edges of the span are covered by large oval plaques that overlap the metopes between the outer pairs of triglyphs. Fixing holes are visible in these plaques, an echo of the wrought iron light brackets that used to project from them. Blocks decorated with small suspended drop-like ornaments (guttae) sit beneath the soffit (undersurface) of the cornice. The parapet rises to a shallow central peak that was, for a short time between 1917-1919, topped by a decorative globe, and then later a filigree metal finial.¹²¹ The outer corners of the parapet are distinguished by what Salmond Architects describe as 'the most idiosyncratic element... of a highly stylised composition': organic spiral reliefs that echo the Ionic volutes (scrolls) seen elsewhere in the interior. Salmond considers that the prominence of these 'seem to act as a foil to the formality of the building as a whole'.¹²²

Exterior walls are rendered brick in concrete framing, with timber roof trusses supporting a single gabled, corrugated steel roof.¹²³ The building's box form steps down from the street front, and the front of the roof gable is half-hipped to sit below the façade's parapet. The eastern half of the building is the higher part (with 14-metre-high sidewalls), containing the façade, foyer, refreshment and reception areas, and the western half's 11-metre-high walls

¹²¹ Salmond Architects, 1998, p.23

¹²² Salmond Architects, 1998, p.23

¹²³ Salmond Architects, 1998, p.22

contain the auditorium and stage. A shallow lean-to addition shelters the stage door at the rear of the building, with low utility shed attached beside the loading ramp. The western façade is clad in corrugated steel. A ramp affixed to the northern boundary wall overhangs the neighbouring carpark below and provides fire egress from the auditorium to the rear of the theatre.



Fig 9: The rear of the building. Natalie Marshall, Heritage New Zealand, 14 August 2023.

Interior



Fig 10: The entrance foyer and marble stair to the mezzanine. The honours board is near the entrance doors. Natalie Marshall, Heritage New Zealand, 14 August 2023.

In the entrance foyer, a ramped floor slopes gently upwards towards a reception counter, past the honours board of trustees, sponsors and donors, and a 1930s Gaumont-Kalee 35mm projector on display. Previous entrances to the Marble Bar, ticket booth and entrance to the original stalls have been closed off; now a door behind the counter leads through to the back of house area of the theatre. A marble staircase with 'union jack' balustrade supporting a polished timber banister turns 180 degrees to lead up to a mezzanine floor. The open space above the staircase is supported by Ionic columns. Decorative cornice detailing and the column capitals are picked out in a regal paint scheme throughout the space, and backlit windows behind the counter echo the union jack balustrade theme with their diagonally crossed mullions. A bust of William Shakespeare is on display.

The first-floor mezzanine contains the ticket counter and snack bar ('The Nook') flanked by Ladies and Gents toilets. A seating area to the north of the stairwell is surrounded by a display of historic film equipment, and another display of memorabilia is next to the Nook counter. Gwelfa Burgess's special contribution to the King's Theatre is commemorated with a tribute board on the north wall. Stairs at each end of the gallery lead up into the auditorium at what was the former dress circle-level.



Fig 11: The auditorium in cinema mode. Natalie Marshall, Heritage New Zealand, 14 August 2023.

The auditorium is entered halfway up the slope of 320 seats. The first impression is of the large volume of the space, with the high ceiling soaring above. The ceiling betrays the previous two-tiered flooring arrangement, with the stepped roof-height demarcated by a curve down to the lower section. Ceiling panels are largely plain but remnants of the 1917 ventilation system (squares of lattice in reed-and-ribbon frames) remain around where the original domes were. Decorative plasterwork (perhaps from 1951) remains in the form of cornices featuring Greek meander pattern picked out in gold on black, below fluted panels and gold art deco-style corbels. These, along with the blue acoustic wall curtains, red seating, and chandelier lighting, add greatly to the richness of the room. The rows of tip-up seats are arranged in three vertical sections, with two stepped aisles separating a central block of ten seats from four seats near each wall. Seats date from 1969 and feature embossed rosettes on the row end-panels. Low timber panelling partitions divide the seating horizontally into three blocks. Front rows can be removed to accommodate different stage/orchestra arrangements.



Fig 12: The film storage room in the cinema operating area, with ornamental plasterwork visible on the walls. Natalie Marshall, Heritage New Zealand, 14 August 2023.

The cinema operation area is at the top of the auditorium. Steps lead up through a transitional/storage space into the projection room, which houses four projectors for various formats (a 16mm Fumeo projector, two Zenith X4001H 35mm projectors with ventilation ducting, and the current digital projector.) An adjacent storage room houses reels of film in metal canisters, and benches hold sets of tools for maintenance of the film stock (crank handles for rewinding and cutting/splicing equipment for assembling reels of trailers). The

creation of this area from what was previously the upper dress circle is evident from the segments of the auditorium's decorative plasterwork (and previous colour schemes) that remain visible on the exterior walls, and lattice ceiling vents now cut into by the partitions.



Fig 13: The cinema sound system is winched aside and screen retracted to reveal the live performance stage. Natalie Marshall, Heritage New Zealand, 14 August 2023.

The movie screen retracts up and the behind-screen cinema sound system can be winched aside, and house and stage-lighting system employed to turn the auditorium into live performance mode. Meander-pattern decorative cornices extend above the wings of the stage, and the stage extends all the way to the rear (west) wall of the building. In the crossover space behind the performance stage, the proscenium of the original cinema screen can be seen against the back wall. Centrally placed above this extend a pair of plasterwork wings flanking a face.

The 'backstage' area of the King's Theatre is beneath the stage/auditorium, at the level of the original stalls. Accessed via stairs at the rear stage left, the lower level contains dressing rooms, Green Room, toilet facilities and costume/set storage areas. The warren of rooms leads through to a staff room immediately behind the reception counter in the theatre lobby.



Fig 14: Backstage, the proscenium for the original screen - and plaster 'wings' motif centrally above – are visible at the rear wall of the building. Natalie Marshall, Heritage New Zealand, 14 August 2023.



Fig 15: The Green Room/dressing room area. Natalie Marshall, Heritage New Zealand, 14 August 2023.

The relationship between the theatre and the adjacent King's Emporium book shop is evident from the Ionic columns supporting the shop's ceiling beams. Moulded cornices enhance the décor. Beneath the shop, a basement, including the foundation columns, is accessible from the shop's rear storage rooms. This was where the freezer equipment for making the Marble Bar's ice creams was housed. The foundations were strengthened in the early 2010s.¹²⁴



Fig 16: The King's Emporium bookshop, in the former Marble Bar. Natalie Marshall, Heritage New Zealand, 14 August 2023.

Construction Professionals

Grierson and Aimer (Architects); Rigby Mullan (Architects, 1969 renovations); Johns and Son (Builders); Carrara Ceiling Company (Plasterers)

Grierson and Aimer

Hugh Cresswell Grierson (1886-1953) and Kenneth Walter Aimer (1891-1959) formed an architectural partnership in 1915.¹²⁵ Grierson and Aimer developed a practice in which theatre – notably purpose-built movie theatres – was a speciality that gave them a national reputation in this rapidly growing field. Cinemas designed by the firm (including after Malcolm Draffin had joined in 1921) include Everybody's Theatre in Auckland (1915) and Everybody's Theatre in New Plymouth (which would become better known as The Mayfair,

¹²⁴ Stallard, 2022, p.5

¹²⁵ Biographical information on Grierson and Aimer's architectural practice is from Salmond Architects, 1998, pp.27-28, and 'Construction Professionals Biography: Grierson, Aimer & Draffin', Heritage New Zealand Pātaka database.

built 1916); The King's Theatre in Stratford (1917); the Capitol Theatre (1922), Rialto (1923), Colosseum/Majestic (1923) and Edendale Theatre (1926), all in Auckland. The firm, who had each served in World War One, were also renowned for their civic monuments, including the Auckland and Wellington Cenotaphs (both 1929) and their major work, the Auckland War Memorial Museum (designed in 1921).

Construction Materials

Reinforced masonry, concrete, steel, plaster, glass, timber

Key Physical Dates

1917	Original construction
c.1919	Removal of parapet sphere ornament
1929	Refurbishment/renovation: Alterations to screen and projector room for installation of 'talkies' system; construction of sound tower behind screen
1929	Maintenance/repairs: Repairs to facade
1950-1951	Maintenance/repairs: Repairs to auditorium ceiling /roof leaks result in removal of ceiling domes and neo-classical corbels and replacement with solid plaster ceiling. Plaster scrollwork on auditorium wall panels removed; meander-pattern cornices and art deco corbels installed
c.1969	Refurbishment/renovation: Reroofing of building; conversion of two-tiered auditorium seating to a single tier; new cinema seating installed; first floor façade window and door openings to balcony filled in; construction of toilet facilities and snack bar in first-floor mezzanine; foyer staircase balustrades covered up by plain boarding; new entrance doors and removal of original stained glass and ticket booth; alterations to proscenium and screen, and rear lean-to's
Unknown	Modification: removal of balcony balustrade and entrance portico signage; replacement of original street frontage and entrances to theatre and former Marble Bar/shop
1991	Refurbishment/renovation: New cinema screen installed
1992	Refurbishment/renovation: Stage, dressing room and orchestra pit reconstructed; new heating system installed; façade repainted
1993-1994	Refurbishment/renovation: Theatre foyer refurbished and coverings of ornate balustrades removed; improvements to toilets and dressing rooms; auditorium redecorated

2012-14	Structural upgrade: Foundations strengthened. ¹²⁶
2021-2022	Refurbishment/renovation: Mezzanine toilet facilities upgraded; retractable cinema screen installed



Uses

Civic Facilities – Cinema/movie theatre; Stage; Hall, concert.



Trade – Milk Bar (former); Restaurant/café/tearoom (Former); Shop.

2.3. Chattels

This List entry includes chattels that contribute to the heritage significance of the place.

	<p>1 x Fumeo 16mm projector</p>
 <p>Zenith projectors (with digital projector in between).</p>	<p>2 x Zenith X4001H 35mm projectors</p>

¹²⁶ 'BC 12 1489 – Repairs and strengthening of basement columns – TET Kings Theatre', Stratford District Council building file P1392

	2 x Gaumont-Kalee 35mm projectors
	3 x sets of A.Eastern Ltd and Fisher film rewinding/editing equipment

2.4. Sources

Sources Available and Accessed

Historians of The King's Theatre benefit from the impressive archives held by the Stratford District Theatre Trust, including minute books from the early days of Stratford Pictures and Amusements, and photographs. The 1998 conservation plan, *A Plan for the Preservation of Fletcher Challenge Energy King's Theatre, Stratford*, by Salmond Architects with a detailed history by Kate Hill, drew on a range of sources to compile a robust record of the building's first 81 years. Wayne Brittenden's book *The Celluloid Circus: The Heyday of the New Zealand Picture Theatre 1925-1970* provides good context on New Zealand's movie-going culture, and historic newspapers record detail on the theatre's construction and early operation. Original architectural plans from 1917 were not found (early council archives were destroyed in a fire), but Stratford District Council archives provide details of the 1969 major renovation and subsequent building upgrades. Many thanks to the Stratford District Theatre Trust for their

assistance with the preparation of this report.

Further Reading

Salmond Architects, *A Plan for the preservation of Fletcher Challenge Energy Kings Theatre, Stratford* [Conservation Plan], Auckland, 1998

'The King's', *Stratford Evening Post*, 29 December 1917, p.5

Wayne Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus: The Heyday of the New Zealand Picture Theatre 1925-1970*, Godwit/Random House, Auckland, 2008

3. SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT¹²⁷

3.1. Section 66 (1) Assessment

This place has been assessed for, and found to possess aesthetic, architectural, cultural, historical, and social significance or value. It is considered that this place qualifies as part of New Zealand's historic and cultural heritage.

Aesthetic Significance or Value

The King's Theatre is a major contributor to the heritage character of Stratford's main street shopping precinct. The building's three-storeys and striking Greek Revival façade are an undeniably prominent local landmark. The highly stylised yet idiosyncratic neo-classical façade decoration successfully creates a sense of theatre in the streetscape. The exoticism of the ornamental scheme, carried through the interior décor, creates a 'palatial' environment calculated to appeal to audiences' senses and enhance the experience of escape from everyday reality.

Architectural Significance or Value

The King's Theatre is a notable provincial example of a twentieth-century purpose-built cinema. It is an early example of the 'picture palace' theatre model that would develop more fully in the 1920s and 30s, here signified by the sophistication of the ornamentation (which draws on the classical conventions of the era) and inclusion of an eatery in the complex. The building is a relatively early example in architects' Grierson and Aimer's portfolio of movie theatres, a speciality for which they would earn a national reputation. The success of their

¹²⁷ For the relevant sections of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 see Appendix 4: Significance Assessment Information.

design is demonstrated by the building's endurance and the retention of its function as a performance venue for over 100 years, and the restoration of elements of their original scheme.

Cultural Significance or Value

The King's Theatre has become a symbol and centre of Stratford's performing arts culture. The 1990 Shakespeare festival revealed such a flourishing culture of the performing arts that it motivated the formation of the Stratford District Theatre Trust and the saving of the King's Theatre as a dual-purpose theatre venue. As well as allowing appreciation of the cinematic arts, The King's Theatre hosts performances of plays, including the annual SGCNZ Otago University & Sheilah Winn Shakespeare competition for secondary school students, dance, and music. The King's Theatre has provided opportunities for many people to experience the culture of performing arts, fostering the next generations of cast and crew.

Historical Significance or Value

The King's Theatre is representative of the presence and impact of movies in New Zealanders' lives throughout the eras of the medium's evolution. It is notably significant as a leader in introducing 'talkies' to Aotearoa and Australasia. It is also representative of the importance of the performing arts in New Zealand's history, and Stratford's development as a provincial service centre in the twentieth century.

Social Significance or Value

The importance of the King's Theatre as a nexus for people to socialise and appreciate cinema and live productions is clearly demonstrated by the dedication and enthusiasm of the Stratford District Theatre Trust in saving and revitalising the building. The ongoing patronage of the theatre by user groups, audiences, sponsors and donors, and the team of volunteers who operate and maintain this much-loved municipal asset, shows how much it matters to the community.

3.2. Section 66 (3) Assessment

This place was assessed against the Section 66(3) criteria and found to qualify under the following criteria: a, b, e, f, g. The assessment concludes that this place should be listed as a Category 1 historic place.

- (a) The extent to which the place reflects important or representative aspects of New Zealand history

The booming agricultural economy of the early twentieth century afforded New Zealanders money and time to spend on leisure activities. The construction of this purpose-built 'picture palace'-style cinema complex, only a few years after regular commercial screenings of movies began in Aotearoa, demonstrates the passion local audiences had for this new recreational option. The building's construction during World War One is openly referenced in the 'union jack' ornamentation - patriotic symbolism reflecting the architect's wartime service as enlisted soldiers. The King's Theatre also directly reflects the fluctuating fortunes of the cinema medium, as a major 'modernisation' in 1969 attempted to win audiences back from the advent of television, then in 1991 the cinema was restored and adapted with a dual purpose as a live theatre. The building's connection with Stratford's Shakespearean culture also demonstrates the development of promotional strategies for New Zealand's provincial towns to ensure their survival in a changing economy.

- (b) The association of the place with events, persons, or ideas of importance in New Zealand history

The King's Theatre has special significance in New Zealand film history as the place where the new technology of 'talkies' was first experienced by Australasian cinema audiences in January 1925. Director of the owning company, William P. Kirkwood of Stratford Pictures and Amusements, researched, selected and then introduced to Australasia the DeForest Phonofilm system of sound-film. Kirkwood's enterprise, which first demonstrated Phonofilm at the King's Theatre before wider national and Australian presentations, was influential in promoting and socialising this evolution in recreational entertainment with local audiences.

- (e) The community association with, or public esteem for the place

The King's Theatre has had, and continues to play, a significant role in the history of Stratford. The vivid recollections of residents from throughout the theatre's century record the building's importance as a place to gather and not only see a good film but also catch up on news, eat, and socialise. That the King's Theatre continues to not only perform this role but also fosters a thriving culture of performing arts is testament to how much it is valued by people. The public campaign to rescue the building in 1991, the significant and regular support from local businesses, and the operation of the venue by a

crew of volunteers and a dedicated committee for over 30 years now, establishes the outstanding community esteem of the King's Theatre.

(f) The potential of the place for public education

The Stratford District Theatre Trust are proud of the theatre's history and promote education and appreciation of it through public tours and displays of their film and equipment archive. The film and equipment archive allows new generations to actively learn about the operation and maintenance of historic cinema technology.

(g) The technical accomplishment, value, or design of the place

Although Stratford's Broadway heritage buildings are stylistically linked by their masonry inter-war style and classical ancestry, the decorative scheme of the King's Theatre's principal façade stands out for its more 'theatrical' character in comparison with the surrounding buildings. The architects' skilled employment of shallow-relief moulded pilasters and pediments forming window architraves is reminiscent of stage sets; and the exuberance of the parapet spirals adds to the sense of drama. These features marry well with the building's purpose.

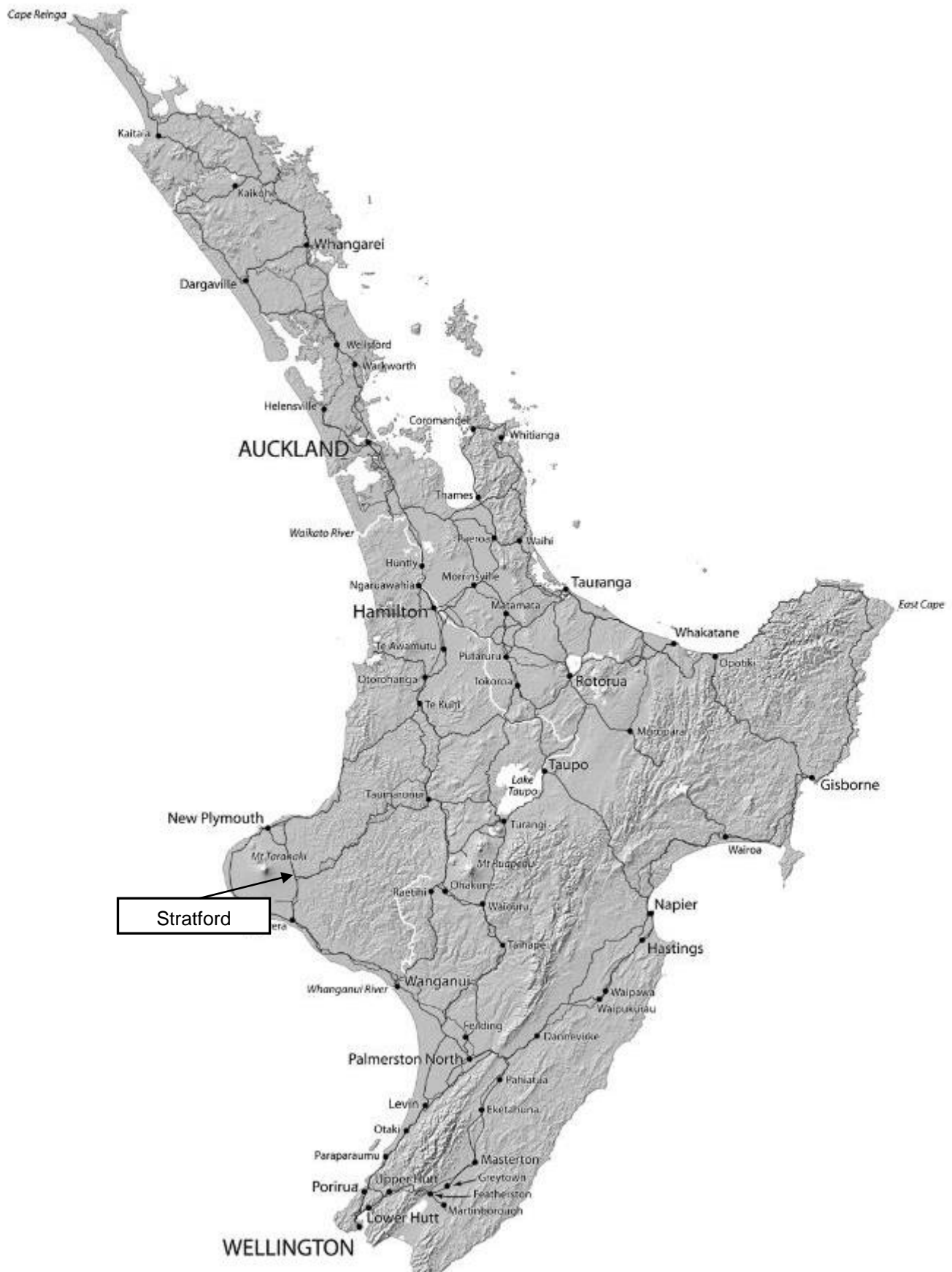
Summary of Significance or Values

A centre of the Stratford District's social life since 1917, The King's Theatre has special significance in New Zealand history as an early provincial 'picture palace' and the place where 'talkies' technology was first demonstrated in Australasia. The enterprise shown here by theatre company director William Kirkwood, who brought the sound-film technology in from overseas, was influential in promoting and socialising this evolution in recreational entertainment with Australasian audiences. Saved and restored by passionate community members, The King's Theatre has social and cultural significance, and outstanding community esteem. The importance of the King's Theatre as a nexus for people to socialise and experience cinema and live productions is clearly demonstrated by the dedication and enthusiasm of the Stratford District Theatre Trust. The ongoing patronage of the theatre by user groups, audiences, sponsors and donors, and volunteers shows how much it matters to the community.

4. APPENDICES

4.1. Appendix 1: Visual Identification Aids

Location Maps

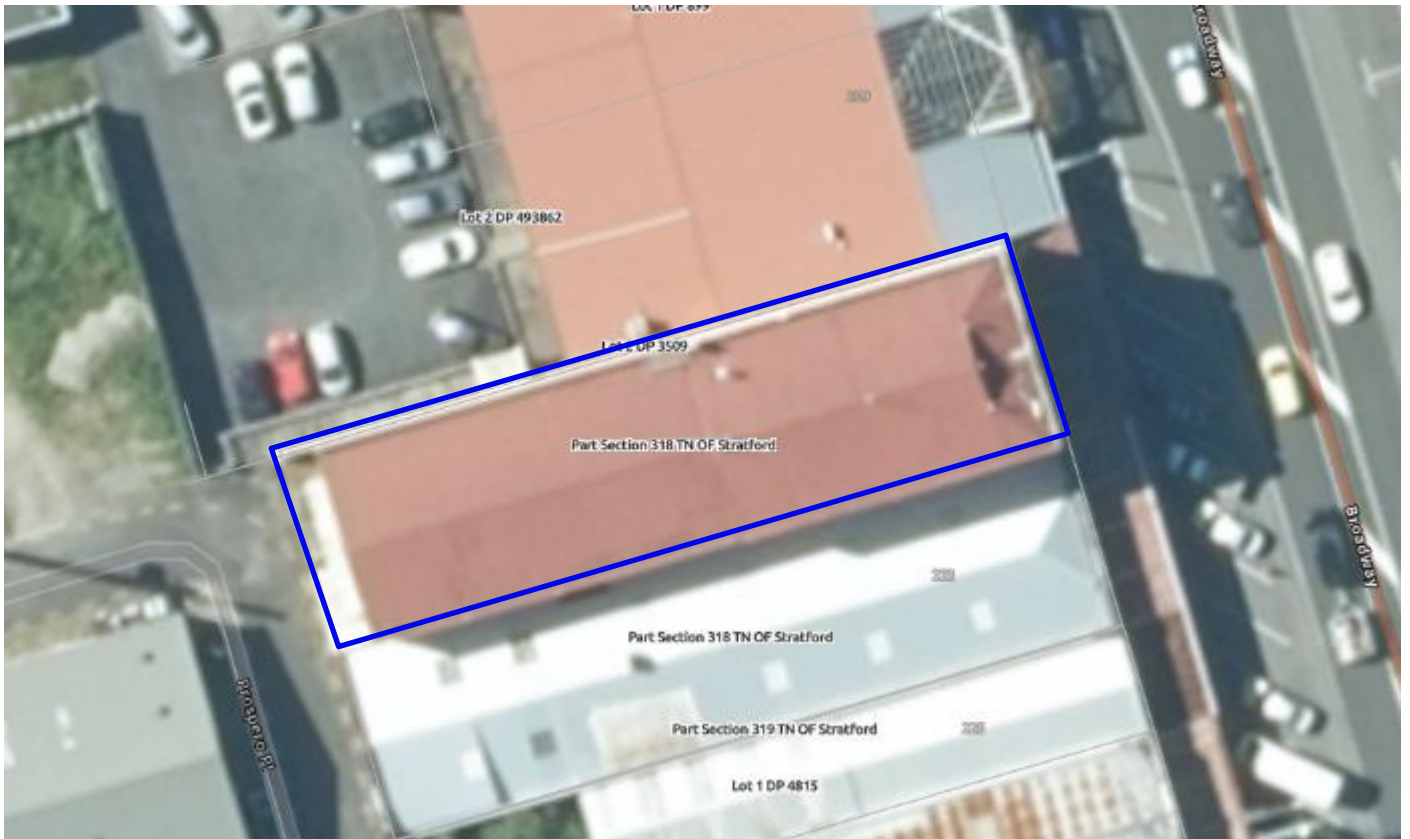




The King's Theatre's location within Stratford's main commercial precinct on Broadway (State Highway 3), just north of the Pātea River.

[Image: Heritage New Zealand Pātaka database].

Map of Extent



Extent includes the land described as Pt Sec 318 TN of Stratford and Lot 2 DP 3509 (RT TNJ2/1086; TNJ2/1087), Taranaki Land District, and the building known as The King's Theatre thereon, and the following chattels: one Fumeo 16mm projector, two Zenith X4001H 35mm projectors, two Gaumont-Kalee 35mm projectors, three sets of A. Eastern Ltd and Fisher film rewinding/editing equipment.



**RECORD OF TITLE
UNDER LAND TRANSFER ACT 2017
FREEHOLD
Search Copy**




R.W. Muir
Registrar-General
of Land

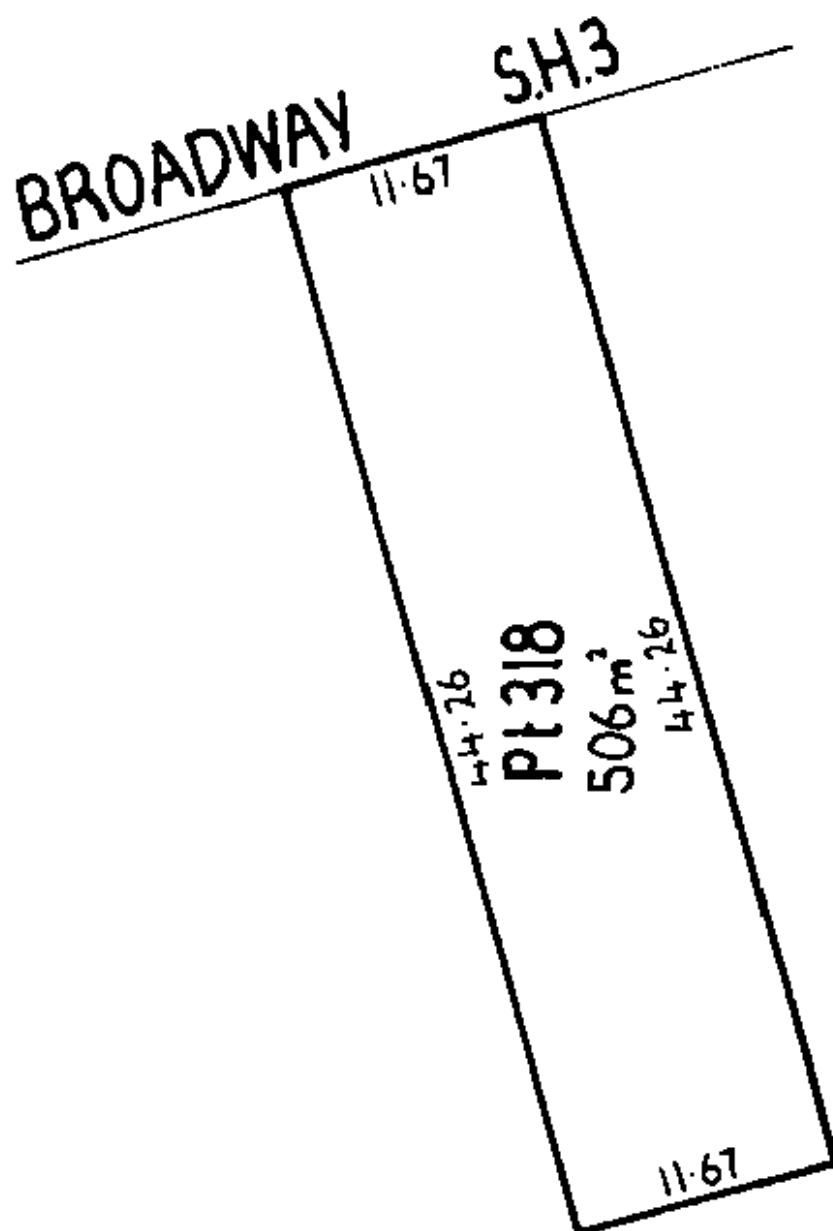
Identifier **TNJ2/1086**
Land Registration District **Taranaki**
Date Issued 06 August 1992

Prior References
TN31/140

Estate	Fee Simple
Area	506 square metres more or less
Legal Description	Part Section 318 Town of Stratford
Registered Owners	Stratford District Theatre Trust Incorporated

Interests

Subject to a right to attach a building to the wall on the southern boundary of the within land and the right of support of such building from the said wall created by Transfer 60794
421399 Mortgage to TSB Bank Limited - 25.5.1995 at 9.58 am





**RECORD OF TITLE
UNDER LAND TRANSFER ACT 2017
FREEHOLD**

Search Copy




R.W. Muir
Registrar-General
of Land

Identifier **TNJ2/1087**

Land Registration District **Taranaki**

Date Issued 06 August 1992

Prior References

TN90/95

Estate	Fee Simple
Area	13 square metres more or less
Legal Description	Lot 2 Deposited Plan 3509
Registered Owners	Stratford District Theatre Trust Incorporated

Interests

Subject to a right of support from a wall over part created by Transfer 31730
421399 Mortgage to TSB Bank Limited - 25.5.1995 at 9.58 am

BROADWAY S.H.3
0.31

2
13m²

44.26

44.26

0.31

4.2. Appendix 2: Visual Aids to Historical Information

Historical Plans

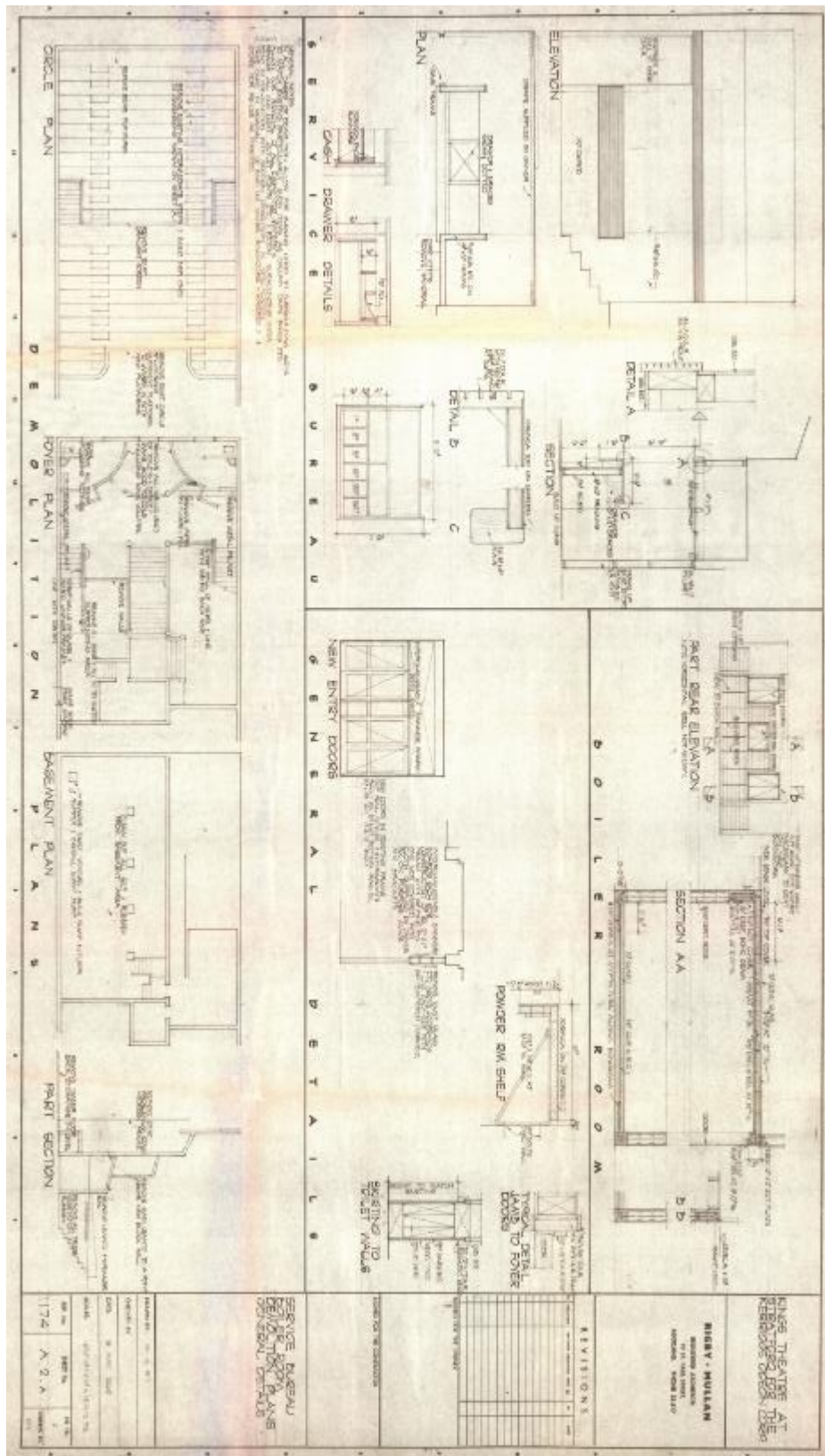


Fig 17: Rigby Mullan Architects, 'Kings Theatre: Alterations to Theatre – plan – demolitions, boiler room, service bureau', May 1969, Stratford District Council building file P1392



Fig 19: *King's Theatre, Stratford* [c. 1920s-1930s]. Wall, John Reginald, 1870-1944: Photographs, 1907. Ref: 1/1-012963-G, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Copy accessed 13/07/2023, from Stratford Heritage Collection, <https://stratford.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/516>



Fig 20: The mezzanine level prior to the 1969 renovations. Stratford District Theatre Trust collection.



Fig. 21: The auditorium viewed from the stalls, prior to the 1969 renovations. Stratford District Theatre Trust collection.

4.3. Appendix 3: Visual Aids to Physical Information

Current Plans

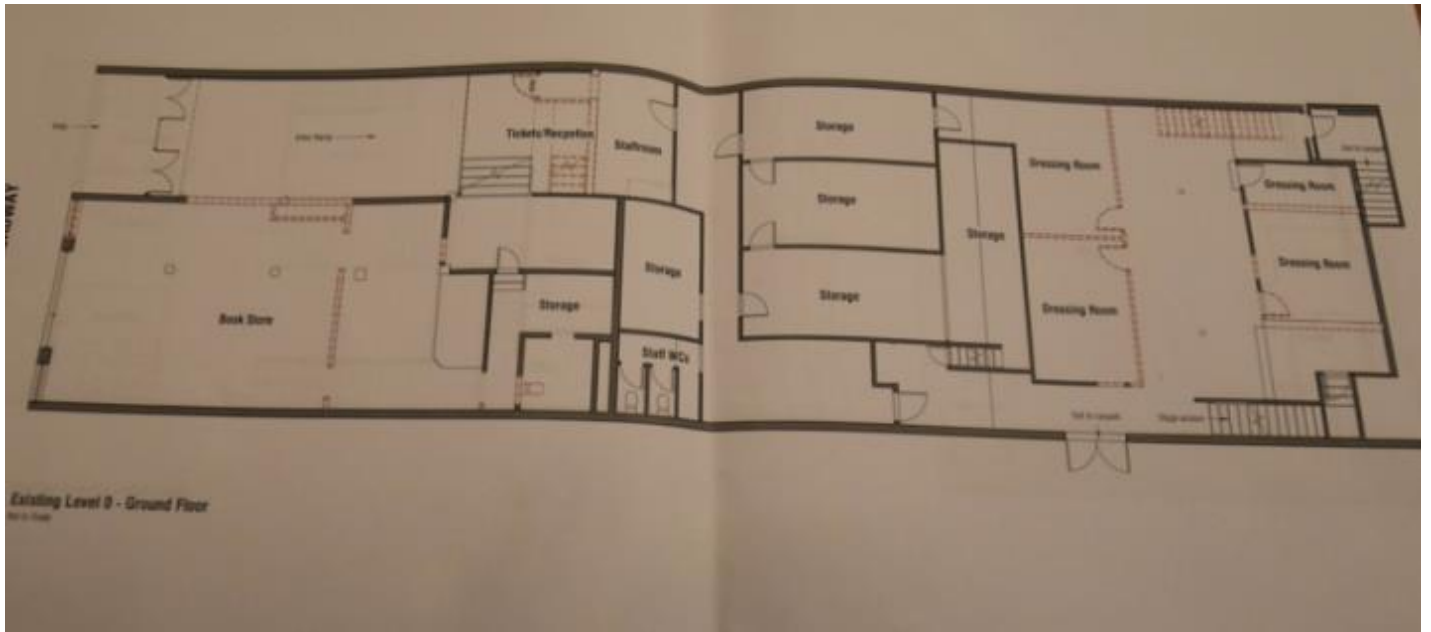


Fig 22: Ground floor. Boon Team Architects, 2018. Stratford District Theatre Trust collection.

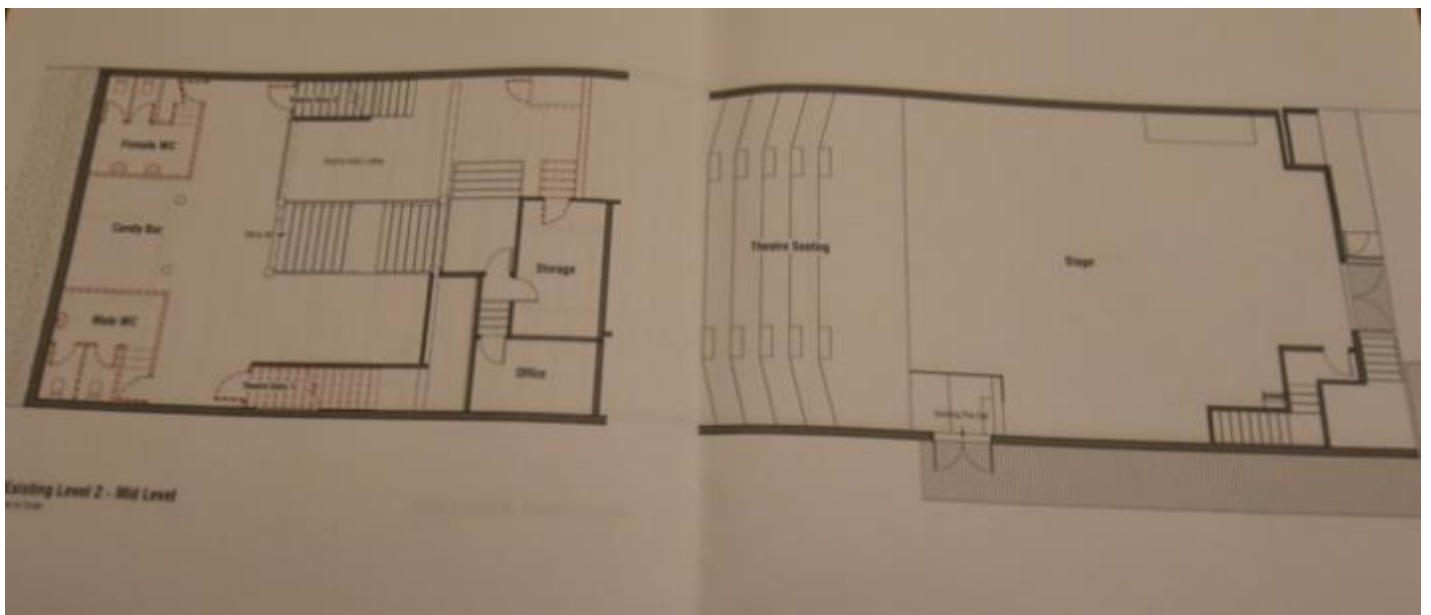


Fig 23: Mezzanine and stage level. Boon Team Architects, 2018. Stratford District Theatre Trust collection.

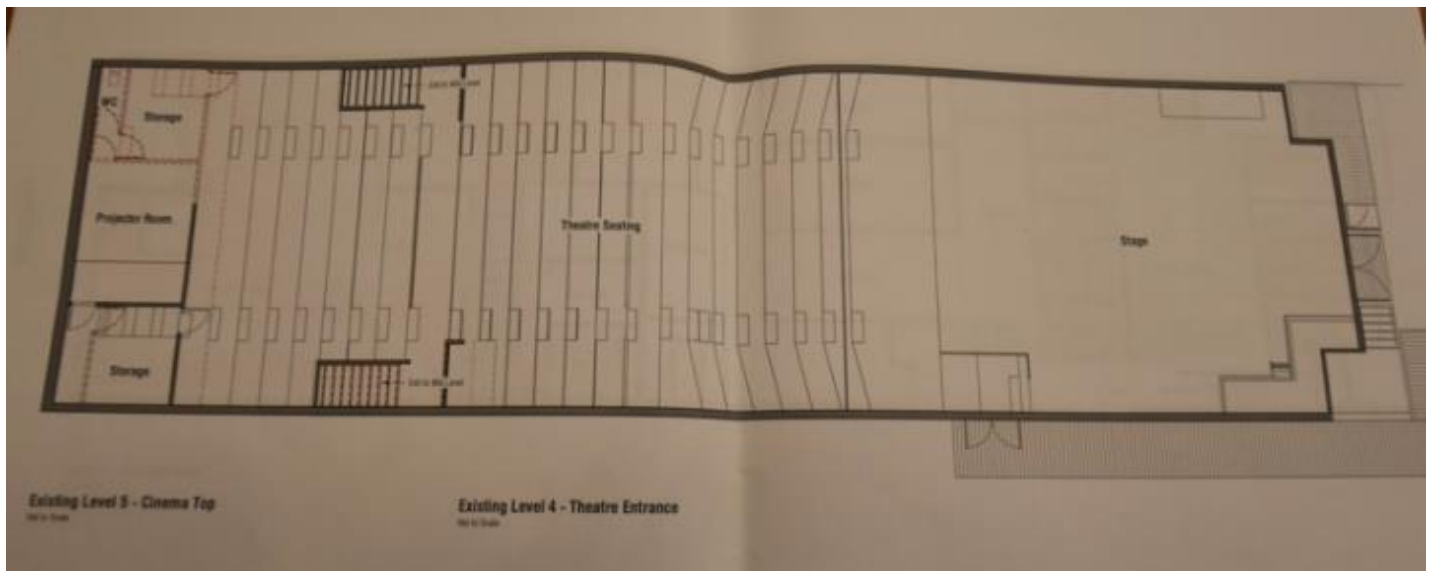


Fig 24: Auditorium, projection, stage. Boon Team Architects, 2018. Stratford District Theatre Trust collection.

Current Photographs of Place

All photos by Natalie Marshall, Heritage New Zealand, 14 August 2023



Fig 25: The grand staircase.



Fig 26: The mezzanine foyer with displays of historic film equipment and heritage ephemera.



Fig 27: The auditorium in live performance mode, with cinema projection room at the top of the seating.

4.4. Appendix 4: Significance Assessment Information

Part 4 of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014

Chattels or object or class of chattels or objects (Section 65(6))

Under Section 65(6) of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, an entry on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero relating to a historic place may include any chattel or object or class of chattels or objects –

- a) Situated in or on that place; and
- b) Considered by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga to contribute to the significance of that place; and
- c) Proposed by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga for inclusion on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero.

Significance or value (Section 66(1))

Under Section 66(1) of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga may enter any historic place or historic area on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero if the place possesses aesthetic, archaeological, architectural, cultural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, technological, or traditional significance or value.

Category of historic place (Section 66(3))

Under Section 66(3) of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga may assign Category 1 status or Category 2 status to any historic place, having regard to any of the following criteria:

- a) The extent to which the place reflects important or representative aspects of New Zealand history
- b) The association of the place with events, persons, or ideas of importance in New Zealand history
- c) The potential of the place to provide knowledge of New Zealand history
- d) The importance of the place to tangata whenua
- e) The community association with, or public esteem for, the place
- f) The potential of the place for public education
- g) The technical accomplishment, value, or design of the place
- h) The symbolic or commemorative value of the place
- i) The importance of identifying historic places known to date from an early period of New Zealand settlement
- j) The importance of identifying rare types of historic places
- k) The extent to which the place forms part of a wider historical and cultural area

Additional criteria may be prescribed in regulations made under this Act for the purpose of assigning Category 1 or Category 2 status to a historic place, provided they are not inconsistent with the criteria set out in subsection (3)

Additional criteria may be prescribed in regulations made under this Act for entering historic places or historic areas of interest to Māori, wāhi tūpuna, wāhi tapu, or wāhi tapu areas on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero, provided they are not inconsistent with the criteria set out in subsection (3) or (5) or in regulations made under subsection (4).

NOTE: Category 1 historic places are ‘places of special or outstanding historical or cultural heritage significance or value.’ Category 2 historic places are ‘places of historical or cultural heritage significance or value.’