

De Luxe Theatre (Former)

LHR0084

Place details

Address/location	64 Goodwin Terrace, Burleigh Heads
Title details	Lot 1 RP72012
Principle period(s)	ca. 1930 - 1975
City of Gold Coast division	12
Other known names	The Old Burleigh Theatre Arcade
Area for protection	Lot on plan
Place components	Whole building – all external walls, awning, structural fabric, fittings and fixtures related to 1954 rebuild, elements of spatial layout including clear open space(internal) related to original theatre hall (current area of gallery space) and central entrance way through front façade.
Place category	Building
Context	In situ, altered unsympathetically. Central portion of building partially demolished and rebuilt circa 1976-80.
Register entry date	6 December 2019

Statement of heritage significance

The Former De Luxe Theatre is a place of local heritage significance for its historic importance, rarity, aesthetic importance, social importance and special association as evidenced by, but not exclusive to, the following statement of heritage significance, based on criteria (a), (b), (e), (g) and (h) of the Gold Coast Local Heritage Register.

Criterion (a) Historic importance

The De Luxe Theatre building (former) is important in demonstrating the development of picture theatres on the Gold Coast and the important role that picture-going played in the life of Gold Coast residents from the 1930s to the 1960s.

The De Luxe, was built in 1930 as a dance hall and enclosed “talkies” theatre. It demonstrates the evolution of film exhibition venues on the Gold Coast, where community halls were used to show pictures prior to a conversion (or replacement) to a purpose-built theatre.

The De Luxe Theatre building (former) also demonstrates the practice of independent film exhibition by owner-operators on the Gold Coast.

Criterion (b) Rarity

The De Luxe Theatre is a rare early theatre building of the Gold Coast.

Criterion (e) Aesthetic importance

The De Luxe Theatre building (former) is an example of theatre architecture and exhibits distinctive exterior exposed brick detailing, stepped front parapet and contrasting coloured masonry banding above upper story windows. Contrasting masonry exposed and extruded window lintels, decoratively styled rainwater heads and well-crafted nameplate are also features of the building's primary frontage/ elevation.

The De Luxe Theatre building (former) is an important local landmark and makes a major contribution to the Goodwin Terrace streetscape and the Burleigh foreshore beyond. All facades of the Theatre are exposed and clearly visible from all approaches and surrounding streets. The front elevation is a striking feature when viewed from the beach, Mowbray Park and public promenade across the road to the North. The side and back elevations are a striking visual landmark when viewed from Memorial park and Burleigh Heads commercial precinct to the West and from the Gold Coast Highway to the South.

Criterion (g) Social importance

The De Luxe Theatre building (former) has an important, special and ongoing association with the Burleigh Heads community as a major entertainment venue from 1930 to 1966, and was important in establishing picture-going as a popular wartime social practice for both Australian and American soldiers stationed on the Gold Coast. The De Luxe was a desirable venue for numerous social gatherings, such as dances, club meetings and even religious services, for over thirty years. The Theatre provides important evidence of the early to mid-twentieth Century village life of Burleigh.

Criterion (h) Special association with particular person or organisation

The Theatre has a special association with William Fradgley and family and Thams Brothers, Lorenz and Charles, and family. The Fradgleys were responsible for the construction and early upgrades of the theatre. The Thams were responsible for later construction and development of the theatre. Both families were involved with other entertainment venues on the Gold Coast, and made a notable contribution to the area's development as a social destination.

Image



De Luxe Theatre (Former). Image courtesy of City of Gold Coast.

History

William Fradgley first settled in Burleigh Heads in 1917 and worked as a contractor. He was a prolific builder and responsible for the construction of several Burleigh buildings including the De Luxe Theatre, the Surf shed at Burleigh Heads, the original Hotel Burleigh and the first Burleigh Heads sub-centre of the Southport and District Ambulance Brigade, from plans provided by the Brisbane architects Hall and Prentice, as well as more than 60 houses in the area.¹

By 1923, Fradgley had leased land from the Justins Brothers and built the first open air picture theatre in Burleigh Heads in the vicinity of the corner of Connor Street and the Gold Coast Highway. The projector at this theatre was hand operated and Fradgley would turn the handle for up to 3½ hours to get the 20 000 feet of film through at 100 feet per minute. The building, known as Fradgley's Hall, was the venue for various community meetings and social events and was modified by Fradgley on a number of occasions.^{2 3 4 5 6}

In the late 1920s, Fradgley decided to build a more permanent picture theatre; however the Justins choose not to sell the land on which the open air theatre stood, so Fradgley purchased the block on Goodwin Terrace for £1500 adjoining Messrs Harvey and Kimlin's Café and Shaw's post office.^{7 8}

Plans for Fradgley's new picture theatre and dance hall, to be constructed of wood and iron, were submitted at a meeting of the Nerang Shire Council on Saturday 31 May, 1930.⁹ The picture theatre, measuring 54 foot by 70 foot, had a graded concrete floor while the dance hall, measuring 70 foot long by 30 foot wide, had a floor inlaid with crow's ash timber.

The building was large enough to seat 1200 and had amenities including ladies and gentlemen's cloak rooms, stage dressing rooms, a supper room under the stage and four shop fronts under a cantilevered awning at the front of the building. Provision was made for the picture theatre to be lit with modern coloured lights. It was anticipated that the new picture theatre would be completed within two months at an estimated cost of £6000.¹⁰

The contractors for the picture theatre were P. Warendorp and F. Pike from Brisbane, who dismantled Fradgley's earlier hall and reused the timber and iron to construct the new building.^{11 12} The theatre, named the De Luxe, was officially opened by the Chairman of the Nerang Shire on Wednesday 14 October 1930.¹³ In December 1931, it closed briefly to upgrade sound facilities through the installation of a Western Electric Sound plant.¹⁴ Unspecified improvements also occurred in 1936.¹⁵

The Fradgley family, including William's wife Louisa and their three sons, Bill, Jack and Tom and daughter, Betty were all involved in the operation of the theatre.^{16 17} William Fradgley and his son Bill operated the projector, Jack collected tickets at the door, Betty worked as an usherette and Louisa ran the box office.¹⁸

The building was not only used for a picture theatre, its dance floor and stage ensured that it was a frequent venue for balls, concerts, dance classes, fund raising activities, tournaments, social evenings and official meetings for clubs, associations, religious congregations and organisations across the South Coast. Other events, including indoor skating, rallies for electoral candidates, flower shows, Christmas fetes (with gift giving to children from Santa), community singing and pre-wedding functions took place in the De Luxe.^{19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31}

For approximately four years the Roman Catholic Church held services in the theatre every Sunday morning until the opening of the Infant Saviour Church in February 1935.³²

The De Luxe Theatre was the venue for the formation of Air Raid Precautions (ARP) during World War II³³ hosted fund raising events, farewells to local soldiers^{34 35} and held a combined thanksgiving service on Wednesday 9 May 1945 to acknowledge the cessation of fighting in Europe.³⁶

The De Luxe experienced an increase in business during World War II after the establishment of the Australian army convalescent camp at Tallebudgera and the American convalescent camp at West Burleigh. Instead of

pictures being shown twice a week, they were shown seven days a week. Fights between the Australians and the Americans resulted in the theatre organising separate nights for each group.³⁷

In addition to their theatre and building work, the family were involved in many sporting and service clubs in the area and William and his wife were highly regarded by the community.³⁸ William was a full member at the formation of the Burleigh Heads Bowls Club, and was also involved in other organisations including the Burleigh Heads State School Committee, Southport and District Ambulance Brigade and Burleigh Heads and District Sports Committee.^{39 40}

William's sons, Bill and Jack, were important to the economic development of Burleigh through their carrying business. The Fradgleys carted bananas from Tallebudgera Creek, supplied fire wood to the Norco butter factory at Tweed Heads and held the contract for carting goods to Fletchers store at West Burleigh. Later, as the firm expanded they carted from Brisbane to Murwillumbah. They held the contract to carry workers from Southport and Tweed Heads during the building of the Broadbeach Hotel. They also had a contract with most of the Ipswich campers who holidayed at Burleigh each year. They would pack up and store the camp gear in their depot and then deliver it the next holiday season. In 1947, the brothers obtained the licence for the Shell agency at Burleigh and supplied all the petrol and other Shell products in the area.⁴¹

The Fradgleys ran the theatre until 1945 when they leased it to the Thams Brothers, a company started by Lorenz and Charles Thams in 1912.⁴² The Thams family were contractors/builders and theatre operators with interests in the Regant (also known as the Regent), Pier Theatre, Sundale and Drive-in theatres in Southport and the Grand Theatre in Labrador. In addition to their involvement in organisations and committees, the brothers helped establish the Southport Show at Owen Park and the Southport Returned Servicemen's League (RSL).⁴³

Prior to their involvement in cinemas, the Thams family, who settled on the Gold Coast in the 1880s, constructed the concrete seawall between Nind and Queen Streets in Southport, the area's first cricket pitch, part of the Southport School, sections of the Cable Station, Star of the Sea Convent, the first timber Guardian Angels Catholic Church, Chelmsford House and Seabank.

The Thams Brothers company continued after the death of Lorenz in 1934 and the company bought the De Luxe from Fradgley in 1950.^{44 45} In 1952, the De Luxe took part in the celebrations in honour of the Thams' family forty year involvement in the cinema industry on the Gold Coast.^{46 47 48} After Charles' death in 1953, the involvement with the De Luxe Theatre continued with Charles' sons, Neville, Colin and Morton, who continued with the family theatre business.

On Friday 19 and Saturday 20 February 1954, Burleigh bore the brunt of a cyclone, and the De Luxe was severely damaged with sections of the roof and sides torn off.^{49 50 51} Despite this, the theatre was operating as a 'semi-open-air' venue four days later with a screening of *The Silver Whip* while repairs were underway.⁵²

A modernised brick De Luxe Theatre was constructed by the Thams at a cost of £8,000 in 1955 using 150,000 bricks.^{53 54 55} It included a house and six flats on the top storey and shops on the ground floor. The Thams ran the theatre until 29 June 1966. The final film shown was *The Circus World* starring John Wayne.⁵⁶

The involvement of both the Fradgley and Thams families in the construction, upgrade and management of the De Luxe makes it the only picture theatre on the Gold Coast which was owned by these two pioneering cinema (and construction) families of the region. Fradgley Hall above Burleigh Heads Library is named in honour of the Fradgley family. Thams Park on the Broadwater is named in honour of the Thams family. The Rotary Classification Pole (c 19) located across the intersection on X has a flag with camera motif made specifically in honour of the Fradgley family and the Picture Theatre. The Rotary Classification Pole is listed in the Gold Coast Local Heritage Register.

By May 1975 the theatre was vacant and an application to convert the existing premises to a ground floor shopping and display areas was made to the Gold Coast City Council.⁵⁷ Circa 1980's the Theatre's auditorium was demolished and rebuilt to create the Old Burleigh Theatre Arcade.⁵⁸

Description

The De Luxe Theatre (Former) is a large two-storeyed rectangular brick building prominently located at 64 Goodwin Terrace, Burleigh Heads. Built in 1930, this substantial building occupies the whole of the 1,181m² lot on which it sits. The building was remodelled in 1954 after it was substantially destroyed by a cyclone and exhibits some elements of mid-century styling. Circa 1976-1980 the Theatre underwent extensive remodelling which included the demolition and rebuild of the central portion of the building. The interior has been modified to accommodate shops and offices on two levels. The exterior of the Theatre retains its distinctive form, face brick façade and central name plate with the former Theatre name which was likely cast during the 1950s remodelling to indicate its use as a theatre. The building is a prominent landmark and makes a high contribution to the streetscape of Goodwin Terrace. Highly visible on its Northern, Western and Southern facades to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic (and in particular on the pedestrian approach from the Burleigh commercial centre to the West), the Theatre makes a strong contribution to the urban character of the Burleigh locality.

Setting

The Theatre addresses Goodwin Terrace and is visible from the public promenade, Mowbray Park and Burleigh foreshore area across the road. The Theatre is bounded by a petrol station to the West, a residential tower to the East and a restaurant to the South. The theatre is easily visible from the Gold Coast Highway, which runs to the West and South of the theatre.

The Theatre makes a strong contribution to the local streetscape. Its prominent siting establishes the Theatre as a local landmark and an integral feature of the urban character of Burleigh. The Theatre provides physical evidence of early to mid-twentieth Century village life of Burleigh Heads.

Exterior

The Theatre has a distinctive brick façade, with stepped parapet and painted contrast detailing band at window lintel height. The building has a solid, substantial appearance as a rectangular, massed form, and an awning overhanging the full width of the Goodwin Terrace footpath and along the entire length of the building's Northern elevation. The front stepped parapet is edged with protruding brickwork laid perpendicular to the brick walling and features a painted (possibly metal) sign that reads 'DE-LUXE' in large lettering and "THAMS BROS EST. 1912" in smaller lettering below.

Behind the parapet, the roof form is angled with a boxed eave overhanging the exterior side walls. Large, raised letters that articulate 'THE OLD BURLEIGH THEATRE ARCADE' are affixed to the Southern rear roof parapet. A large, unsympathetic advertising sign is positioned on top of the Southern end of roof. The exterior side walls feature vertical brick pillars that extend from the ground to eave height. Construction of the more recent (c1976) central section of the building is unsympathetic and visibly different featuring block work external walls and rounded edged block piers. The roofing over this section of building tucks behind the original brick portion of the building to the North and is angled to include high clerestory windows facing the East. At ground level along both the eastern and western walls, narrow service passages run the length of the building. Wrought iron gates along Goodwin Terrace close off the access ways to the upper story areas within the original front brick area of building.

The rear elevation features a contrasting painted band extending to the first pillar at each side wall and at the height of the first level of windows. The upper level of windows feature contrasting painted lintels set flush with the brick walls. Two painted metal downpipes extend from inside the roof eaves. A metal staircase extends across the building façade from an upper level doorway to the ground. An arched entrance portal is located at the Western end of the rear façade, with a large contrasting lintel painted above a single layer of bricks set in an arch. An unsympathetic sign noting the rear entrance to the existing Arcade is painted above.

The front façade features contrasting painted, raised lintels above each of the fifteen windows and brick detailing below. A contrasting painted band is featured at the level of the lintels of the top row of windows, and extends to the painted metal rainwater head and downpipe on each side of the façade, and visually unifies the facade. The awning is suspended from the masonry façade by six painted metal rods. The underside of the awning is covered over with soffit lining however a small section at the Eastern end has a stepped detail soffit lining exposed. The awning has a number of unsympathetic advertising signs affixed. Six distinctive brick pillars with curved profiles support the front of the building and define the central entrance and side access ways. The open entrance is framed by a non-original wooden head and jamb. To either side of the open entrance, tenanted shops are unsympathetic design elements.

Interior

The interior of the Theatre has been substantially altered from its original form, and it is unclear what elements remain from the 1954 renovation. In plan, the substantial original theatre space has been partially built in with a number of retail spaces on the ground and first floors surrounding a central, open gallery area that features exposed roof trusses and large clerestory windows towards the eastern side of the space. The gallery area is circled by a first floor balcony/walkway. The areas of exposed floor in the gallery slope slightly from North to South.

Ground floor

The original floor has been covered with a tiled finish with a decorative pattern at the centre of the gallery space. The building is entered via a short arcade with a ceiling featuring decorative cornice mouldings. This short arcade space leads through to the open gallery area featuring two prominent staircases, one at either end, that extrude into the gallery space and are used to access the upper level balcony/walkway and offices. The staircases are constructed of timber and metal and feature decorative wrought iron railings. At ground level retail tenancies line the Eastern and Western walls of the gallery with the 'Montezumas' restaurant that bounds the gallery to the South. Contemporary metal and glass partitions enclose the retail tenancies. To the rear of the gallery is a gently sloping tiled walkway/corridor that leads through to an arched brick entryway at the rear of the building. Enclosed access ways are located on either side of the building along the front façade. These provide and provide

First and Second floors

The two identical timber and metal staircases at the North and South ends of the gallery lead up to a first floor balcony. The balcony cantilevers into the gallery space and is lined with sheeting under and polished timber floorboards over. Decorative wrought iron railings with timber handrails line the entire upper floor walkways that surround the open gallery space below. Offices border the upper level on all sides and are enclosed with glazed aluminium partitions/walls.

Above the partitioned offices, distinctive wall mounted lamps are located at regular intervals which are visible from the gallery and are a feature of the space. The lamps are mounted on decorative bases attached to painted timber weatherboards, which extend to the ceiling at the west and north of the gallery space. A large bulkhead, which may have been the original projection room of the Theatre, protrudes into the open space above the central gallery to the South. To the East, large clerestory windows admit abundant natural light into open space of the gallery below. Two large, steel roof trusses are exposed over the gallery area, with the ceiling lining sitting above the truss top chords which angle upwards to the East.

At the Northern end of the first floor and above the ground floor entranceway to the building, a single-room office is surrounded by decorative metal and timber railings matching those located throughout the building. The office has a corrugated metal pitched roof with faux bull nose veranda that extends over three sides. The roof is supported by decorative metal posts, spaced evenly on three sides.

At the Northern end of the building two levels of rooms/offices sit directly behind and within the original brick building (directly above the shops on the ground floor). These spaces are accessible via timber stairways accessed via the external access ways either side of the building on Goodwin Terrace. Timber handrails and flooring were observed to be features; however access to these areas was limited. Similarly areas at the 'back' (Southern end) of the building were not able to be accessed.

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