

SUMMARY OF STATE HERITAGE PLACE

REGISTER ENTRY

Entry in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

NAME: Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre)

PLACE NO.: 26556

ADDRESS: Ramindjeri and Ngarrindjeri Country

37-41 Ocean Street, Victor Harbor

CT 5309/930 A94 F165303, CT 5309/931 D99 A86

Hundred of Encounter Bay

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) demonstrates the evolution of motion pictures as a new form of mass entertainment in the twentieth century, and in particular, the role of cinema-going and its contribution to community building in regional South Australia in the interwar period. As the first South Australian picture theatre purpose-built to screen 'talkies,' the Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) established the pattern for all picture theatres that followed and is both an influential and pivotal example of its class, demonstrating an unusually high level of intactness and integrity. The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) is an early, outstanding example of interwar streamlined architecture articulating many of the key attributes of the style such as clean, parallel lines, contrasting bands of dissimilar materials, and horizontal emphasis with vertical relief. The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) is also the only remaining intact picture theatre purpose-built by Ozone Theatres Limited, an innovative and influential family-owned exhibition company which grew to be the largest in South Australia in the first half of the twentieth century.

RELEVANT CRITERIA (under section 16 of the Heritage Places Act 1993)

(a) it demonstrates important aspects of the evolution or pattern of the State's history

In South Australia, cinema emerged as a dominant form of mass entertainment from around 1907. Cinema-going boomed during the 1920s, and by the end of the decade, most communities in South Australia possessed a venue for screening motion pictures, ranging from large, purpose-built picture theatres or town halls in

urbanised centres to small rural halls retrofitted with projection facilities. As well as providing a popular leisure activity, 'Going to the pictures' was a regular social occasion and played an important role in community building, especially in regional areas.

Unlike many other interwar cinema venues in regional locations, the Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) was purpose-built to screen motion picture entertainment, not adapted from an existing Institute or Town Hall. It was also the first purpose-designed and built picture theatre in South Australia for screening 'talkies' demonstrating a key transition in this significant form of twentieth century entertainment in South Australia.

Compared to other places with similar associations, the Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) has particularly strong associations with the theme of cinema-going due to its high level of intactness and integrity, and its location in a regional centre, where cinema-going played a particularly important role in building community during the interwar period.

(d) it is an outstanding representative of a particular class of place of cultural significance

The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) is an outstanding representative of the class of place known as purpose-built interwar picture theatres.

Cinema-going emerged as a dominant form of mass entertainment during the 1920s. By the end of the decade, venues for viewing motion pictures existed in most communities in South Australia, ranging from large purpose-built picture theatres to small rural Institute or community halls retrofitted with projection facilities. Picture theatres played an important role in building community, providing places for people to mix and socialise. A growing awareness of the social significance of picture theatres encouraged film exhibitors to incorporate expanded circulation and gathering spaces in their purpose-built picture theatres from the late 1920s onwards.

To be considered an exceptional example of a class, the place must display a range of characteristics that is typical of the class, at a higher quality, intactness or level of historical relevance than are typical of places of the class. The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) retains an unusually high degree of integrity and intactness and displays many of the principal characteristics of the class at a higher quality than many other examples. The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) also demonstrates many of the principal characteristics of the class in a way that allows the class to be readily understood and appreciated, including:

- architectural expression designed to create a sense of distance from the ordinary world, in this instance, through an interwar streamlined style,

expressing a sense of optimistic modernity removed from contemporary economic anxieties,

- a main entrance, vestibule, ticket box and foyer, with extensive circulation and gathering space and refreshment facilities, to encourage patrons to socialise and purchase refreshments inside the theatre,
- a single-volume auditorium (presently divided by reversible partitions), with a stadium-style gallery and extensive side boxes,
- a stage and simple backstage facilities including stage-house and under-stage store room,
- a reinforced concrete projection box with steel fire doors and glass projection ports, with rewind and transformer rooms,
- compartmentalisation of auditoriums from stage and projection facilities and neighbouring buildings through fire walls, fire doors, and parapet walls,
- features associated with the transport, storage and projection of flammable motion picture film, including cargo ports, chute and landing stage in store room under stage, and steel film storage cabinet in projection box,
- features associated with ventilation and climate control such as steel louvres over window openings, central auditorium ceiling ventilation spine, Diathermal heating installation and upright radiators,
- artificial lighting, including architecturally integrated auditorium lighting, and features designed to exclude daylight from auditoriums, including hit-and-miss screens over window openings (also achieved with steel louvres over window openings),
- features designed to facilitate rapid egress in the event of an emergency, including side exit, dual staircases from the dress circle, and emergency exits with panic bolts, exiting to laneways on both sides of the auditorium,
- self-contained shops flanking the main entrance.

The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) established a clear break with the past and also set the pattern for all purpose-built interwar picture theatres that followed, in terms of planning, acoustics, aesthetic expression and audience comfort. It is therefore considered to be an influential and pivotal example of the class of place.

(e) it demonstrates a high degree of creative, aesthetic or technical accomplishment or is an outstanding representative of particular construction techniques or design characteristics

The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) is an outstanding example of interwar streamlined architecture, demonstrating a high degree of aesthetic, creative and technical accomplishment.

The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) was rebuilt on the site of a previous picture theatre, with architect F. Kenneth Milne's new design opportunistically reusing parts of some walls and footings. However, due to the scale and extent of reconstruction, the Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) is considered to be a predominantly new structure.

The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) was one of the first buildings designed in an interwar streamlined style in South Australia and is understood to be the earliest surviving example. The Victa Cinema was also the first South Australian picture theatre designed in an interwar streamlined style. The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) finely articulates many of the key attributes of the style, namely,

- bold massing of simple geometric shapes,
- clean lines, rounded corners and minimal decoration,
- plain surfaces, light-toned cement (now painted) and face brick,
- horizontal emphasis, achieved through features such as contrasting bands of dissimilar brick and render, and banded friezes with integrated window openings,
- contrasting vertical relief, expressed through facade fin and proscenium arch features,
- parallel line motif, notably in banded friezes and details such as multi-part kickplates and fluted vitrolite,
- circle motif, notably in foyer, side exit and shopfront terrazzo work, ticket box, noticeboards, door glazing, cool drinks counter, stair rails, and proscenium details,
- wrap-around bands and rounded corners,
- long cantilevered awning element (sans clutter of supporting brackets or stanchions),
- steel casement window frames,
- roofs concealed by parapets,
- architecturally integrated lighting, including custom-made fittings in foyers and auditorium, illuminated structures on auditorium walls, and indirect lighting troughs in auditorium ceiling.

The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) also demonstrates a high degree of technical accomplishment and attention to detail in construction, including high quality bricklaying and pointing, rendering, joinery, metal casting, chrome-plating, and terrazzo work.

Architecturally, the Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) is highly intact. Modifications such as construction of the stage extension, addition of new screens and curtains, and partition walls creating two auditoriums from one, are considered to be reversible. These changes have not compromised the integrity of the building's architectural expression, nor diminished its ability to illustrate the main attributes of interwar streamlined architecture.

(g) it has special association with the life or work of a person or organisation or an event of historical importance

The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) is also associated with Ozone Theatres Limited, a family-owned South Australian company which grew to become the largest film exhibitor in interwar and early post-war South Australia. Ozone Theatres Limited shared an effective duopoly in the Adelaide suburbs and large regional centres with rival exhibitor D. Clifford Theatres Limited, which prevented dominant interstate exhibitors from establishing meaningful footholds in South Australia. Ozone Theatres Limited shaped public experiences and expectations of cinema-going during the interwar period, establishing high standards for film exhibition and introducing numerous innovations in architectural expression, technology and comfort, especially during the sound film era after 1929.

Ozone Theatres Limited was responsible for building and/or adapting many picture theatres in suburban and regional South Australia and was at the vanguard of the transition to 'talkies'. The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) was the first theatre the company purpose-designed and built embracing this new technology; it is the only surviving intact theatre purpose-built by them; and is also closely associated with the rapid expansion of Ozone Theatres Limited into regional South Australia. The Victa Cinema has a special association with Ozone Theatres Limited and the vital role the company had in providing recreational opportunities in suburban and regional South Australia through the medium of moving pictures.

SITE PLAN

Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre)

PLACE NO.: 26556

Ramindjeri and Ngarrindjeri Country, 37-41 Ocean Street, Victor Harbor



Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) (CT 5309/930 A94 F165303, CT 5309/931 D99 A86 Hundred of Encounter Bay)

Elements of heritage significance include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- Picture theatre (period of significance is 1934-1951) and outbuilding,
- Original exterior and interior materials and material finishes including fibrous plaster, vitrolite, faience, terrazzo, chrome and sandblasted glass,
- Original fittings, including light fittings, joinery, doors and door fittings, stair rails, mirrors, ticket box window and door fittings, fixed seating, footwarmers and associated water pipes,
- Original proscenium and stage front (concealed behind later additions)
- Cool drinks counter (candy bar counter) and light fitting,
- Storeroom chute, landing stage and associated cargo ports,
- Bio box fire doors and steel film cabinets in rewind room.

Elements not considered to contribute to significance of place include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- Façade and awning lettering and signage suspended from awning soffit,
- Air-conditioning system,
- Auditorium partitioning and downstairs projection room,
- 1990s-2020s candy bar fitout and appliances,
- Digital projection equipment, speakers, projection screens, masking and curtains,
- Fixed 35mm projector and platter.

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LEGEND

-  Parcel boundaries (Indicates extent of Listing)
-  Existing State Heritage Place(s)
-  Outline of Elements of Significance for State Heritage Place

Summary of State Heritage Place: 26556 6 of 34

Provisionally entered by the South Australian Heritage Council on 25 November 2022 under Section 17 (2) (b) of the Heritage Places Act 1993

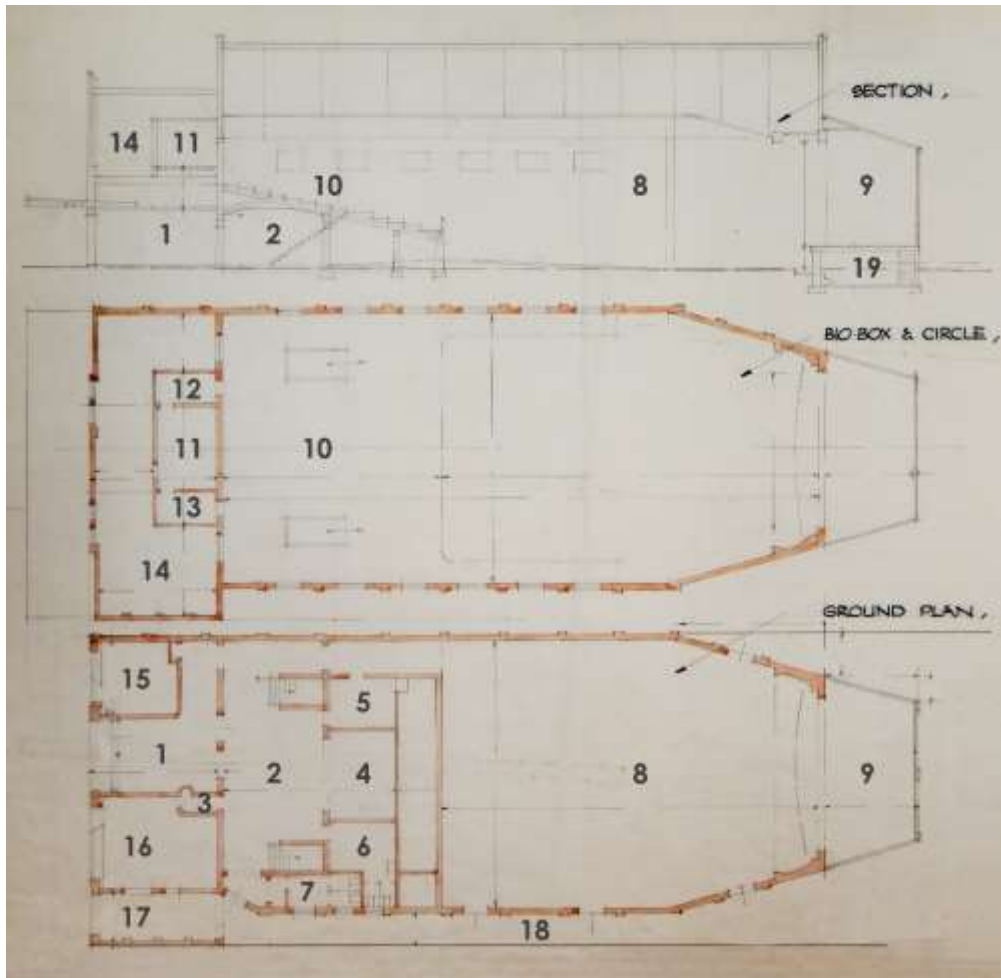
Confirmed by the South Australian Heritage Council on [add date] (tbc)

COMMENTARY ON THE LISTING

Description and notes with respect to a place entered in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

Physical Description

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION



Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre) indicative floorplan

Source: Adapted from Architecture Museum S89/50/68

- | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Vestibule | 7. Women's Toilet | 13. Rewind Room |
| 2. Foyer | 8. Auditorium | 14. Void |
| 3. Ticket Box | 9. Stage House | 15. Shop 1 |
| 4. Servery/Cool Drinks Bar | 10. Dress Circle | 16. Shop 2 |
| 5. Manager's Office | 11. Bio Box | 17. Side Exit |
| 6. Men's Toilet | 12. Transformer Room | 18. Laneway |
| | | 19. Store room under stage |

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The Victa Cinema is a two-storey brick, steel and reinforced concrete interwar picture theatre with a dominant front elevation facing Ocean Street, Victor Harbor. The building has corrugated steel roofs covering a main auditorium and front of house, with box gutters and parapets to both roofs; a timber-and-corrugated steel stage house at the rear of the theatre, standing on a brick plinth wall; brick firewalls between both auditorium and front-of-house and auditorium and stage house; a single-storey brick annexe with a lean-to roof on the northern side; and laneways on the northern, western and south-western sides of the theatre. The front elevation has a cantilevered awning suspended above the footpath, with a rendered façade above and a main entrance and flanking shopfronts below.

Additional external features include:

- folded sheet-metal detailing to awning fascia and herringbone matchboard soffit,
- Wunderlich brickette string course details, steel casement windows with brickette spandrels, and vertical fin feature to façade,
- terrazzo floors to re-entrant shopfronts, and terrazzo main entrance step, with faience tiles on piers and black vitrolite above,
- chromed multi-part kickplates to main entrance and shop doors,
- steel louvres over auditorium window openings,
- cargo ports in plinth wall at rear of theatre,
- rendered-brick boiler house (outbuilding).

Main internal spaces of the Victa Cinema comprise:

- vestibule, accessed through glazed doors from street,
- ticket box, accessed from foyer with opening to vestibule,
- foyer, accessed from vestibule through glazed doors,
- side exit linking foyer to street, via lean-to annexe,
- servery (cool drinks bar), adjoining foyer,
- manager's office, accessed from foyer,
- men's and women's toilets, accessed from foyer,
- large upstairs auditorium [originally upstairs section of single auditorium] with tiered seating, accessed from foyer via pair of staircases,
- acoustic airspace behind upstairs auditorium screen [not original fabric, airspace was originally part of single auditorium],
- large downstairs auditorium, narrowing towards a proscenium, with raked floor [originally downstairs section of single auditorium], accessed from foyer,
- stud-wall projection room located under acoustic airspace [not original fabric],
- stage house adjacent to downstairs auditorium,
- storeroom under stage,

- reinforced concrete bio box (projection room), with associated transformer and film rewind rooms, accessed from back of upstairs auditorium,
- two self-contained shops (shop 1 and shop 2), accessed from street on either side of the vestibule entrance.

Features of the front of house include:

- terrazzo floors with circle motif pattern to vestibule and side exit, and diamond motif pattern to shop 2 [floor in shop 1 undetermined],
- semicircular ticket box with glass and chromed steel window screen, and wall-mounted pigeonholes,
- black fluted vitrolite skirtings and moulded timber dado to vestibule following curves of walls,
- circular noticeboards on vestibule walls with decorative fibrous plaster frames,
- glazed doors located between vestibule and foyer, with chromed, multi-part kickplates and chrome handles, some with sandblasted circle motif design in glazing,
- fibrous plaster light fittings to vestibule and foyer ceilings, with glass diffusers,
- multi-sconce light fittings to foyer walls, with mirrored wall plates,
- bevelled upright mirrors, with stepped motif, to foyer walls,
- backlit glass sign 'Ladies Toilet' over toilet door,
- chrome-plated custom-made steel handrails to internal staircases,
- upright radiators in foyer,
- solid timber serving counter and vertical feature light fitting, with chrome trim,
- chandelier light fittings in foyer [not original fabric].
- timber external door with herringbone motif detail between side exit and laneway,
- ceramic urinals and timber stall joinery and doors in men's toilets,
- timber stall joinery and doors, bevelled mirror with fibrous plaster frame and associated shelf with chrome trim in women's toilets.

Features of both auditoriums include:

- studwork balustrades,
- horizontal, banded frieze on auditorium side walls, with cornice above, integrated with hit-and-miss perforated screens over window openings and rectangular sconce light fittings below window openings,
- central spine feature, with perforated fibrous plaster in herringbone pattern covering ventilation flue openings, and rectangular light fittings in sheet-metal and glass suspended from central spine feature.

Features specific to upstairs auditorium include:

- some original seating,
- Diathermal heating 'Comfoot' foot warmers and associated hot water pipes,
- projection ports and steel fire doors,
- proscenium, screen, masking and curtains [not original fabric],

Features specific to downstairs auditorium include:

- rectangular main auditorium with trapezoidal proscenium bay,
- screen, screen masking, curtain and pelmet [not original fabric],
- original proscenium with large vertical flutes to both sides and perforated fibrous plaster grille above (concealed behind pelmet and screen masking),
- stage extension [not original fabric],
- original stage front with chrome trim and orchestra rail (concealed by stage extension),
- indirect lighting battens suspended from soffit of proscenium bay,
- large vertical light fittings in proscenium bay and small vertical light fittings on front of proscenium,
- side boxes (disused),
- panic bolts to escape doors.

Features of the under-stage store room include:

- fixed timber storage cupboards, racking, and cardboard ceiling [part extant],
- fixed timber film case chute and landing stage associated with cargo port,
- inspection hatch in front of original stage with associated steps behind.

Features of the bio box include:

- steel fire doors,
- 35mm projector, platter and other digital and analogue equipment [not original fabric],
- fixed workbench in rewind room with storage cupboard below,
- steel film cabinet mounted on rewind room wall,
- acoustic tiles to ceiling [not original fabric].

Features of shop 2 include:

- terrazzo skirting integrated with floor,
- corner display case with mirror inserts in base.

Elements of Significance:

Elements of heritage significance include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- Picture theatre (period of significance is 1934-1951) and outbuilding,
- Original exterior and interior materials and material finishes including fibrous plaster, vitrolite, faience, terrazzo, chrome and sandblasted glass,
- Original fittings, including light fittings, joinery, doors and door fittings, stair rails, mirrors, ticket box window and door fittings, fixed seating, footwarmers and associated water pipes,
- Original proscenium and stage front (concealed behind later additions)
- Cool drinks counter (candy bar counter) and light fitting,
- Storeroom chute, landing stage and associated cargo ports,
- Bio box fire doors and steel film cabinets in rewind room.

Elements not considered to contribute to significance of place include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- Façade and awning lettering and signage suspended from awning soffit,
- Air-conditioning system,
- Auditorium partitioning and downstairs projection room,
- 1990s-2020s candy bar fitout and appliances,
- Digital projection equipment, speakers, projection screens, masking and curtains,
- Fixed 35mm projector and platter.

History of the Place

Please refer to the Assessment Report for the full history.

Seeking a seaside climate following a 'breakdown in health,'¹ David Henry Griffin arrived in Victor Harbor with his family, including sons George Henry (Harry) and Edgar David Gladstone, in 1918. In August the following year Griffin acquired land on Ocean Street, Victor Harbor. Trading with his two sons as D. H. Griffin & Sons, he built a 'fine and well-equipped motor garage'² to serve holiday motor traffic visiting the town.

D. H. Griffin subsequently became a notable community leader in his various activities including membership of the Freemasons, Oddfellows and Rechabites, and was elected 'unopposed' to the office of Mayor in 1921, a role he fulfilled for seven years. Meanwhile D. H. Griffin's sons toured Kangaroo Island, Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Lower Murray regions with a travelling picture show³ from about 1912. Griffin's Pictures established a reputation for 'clean, up-to-date and interesting'⁴ programmes and often screened at the Victor Harbor Town Hall (former Institute) (SHP 14055), especially after the First World War.⁵

In February 1921, The Griffins considered building a 'picture palace' on top of their motor garage. After receiving advice from Thomas Edwin Smith, inspector of places of public entertainment, that such a scheme would be 'extremely dangerous,'⁶ the Griffins decided instead to relocate the motor garage business further along Ocean Street and build a conventional ground-level theatre in place of the garage, known as the Victor Theatre.

The Victor Theatre was designed by Adelaide architect Chris A. Smith, built using local Port Elliot bricks and completed in four and a half months under the supervision of J. C. Leslie Tardrew,⁷ for a contract price of £6,000.⁸

The Victor Theatre was licenced to seat 617⁹ and was designed for future expansion, with provision for an additional storey at the eastern end of the building to house gallery (cantilevered balcony) seating accommodating 300. Described as 'commodious, cool and comfortable'¹⁰ in the local press, the Victor Theatre opened on 24 November 1923.

Just under a month afterwards on 22 December 1923, National Pictures Limited opened a competing picture theatre in Victor Harbor, the Wonderview Theatre (demolished 1991), also designed by Chris A. Smith. The Wonderview was a slightly larger building, located on Flinders Parade opposite the Soldiers' Memorial Gardens (SHP 12746), built with an integrated soda lounge that served carbonated beverages.



The Wonderview Theatre (1923) on Flinders Parade, with its integrated soda lounge on the left-hand side.

Source: University of South Australia Architecture Museum Collection S334/1

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Induced by the competition, the Griffins built their own 'commodious' soda lounge and cafe along the northern side of the Victor Theatre.¹¹ The Griffin's lounge extended the full length of the theatre with a lean-to roof rising nearly to the same height as the theatre roof,¹² and is inferred to have cost an additional £4,000.¹³

From 24 November 1926,¹⁴ the Victor Theatre was licenced to National Theatres Limited¹⁵ on a lease from D. H. Griffin. National Pictures then operated both Victor Harbor theatres into January 1928,¹⁶ when Ozone Theatres Limited acquired the lease of the Victor Theatre and freehold ownership of the Wonderview Theatre as part of their takeover of National Pictures.

Ozone Theatres Limited (hereafter Ozone Theatres), originally the Ozone Picture Company and subsequently Ozone Amusements Limited, was a family-owned South Australian company which grew to become one of two dominant film exhibitors in interwar and early post-war South Australia and the largest exhibitor in South Australia after 1938. Ozone Theatres shared an effective duopoly in the Adelaide suburbs and in large regional centres with rival exhibitor D. Clifford Theatres Limited, which prevented interstate exhibitors from establishing meaningful footholds in South Australia.

Ozone Theatres was founded by Semaphore stationer Hugh McIntyre Waterman and friends Les and Horace Warn, Jim Woods and Chris Flaherty in 1911 and was later reorganised as a family business led by Waterman and his seven sons. Ozone Theatres Limited shaped public experiences and expectations of cinema-going during the interwar period, establishing high standards for film exhibition and introducing numerous innovations in architectural expression, technology and comfort, especially during the sound film era after 1929.

Hugh Waterman initially planned 'thorough' renovations to the Victor Theatre, including a raised roof and gallery to seat 350,¹⁷ however, all evidence indicates these plans were not carried out.¹⁸ Ozone Theatres subsequently purchased the Victor Theatre freehold from D. H. Griffin (settled January 1930).¹⁹

Despite the slightly larger size of the Wonderview Theatre, licenced to accommodate 696,²⁰ the Victor Theatre became the focus of Ozone Theatres' activities in Victor Harbor. Ozone Theatres installed a Western Electric sound system in the Victor Theatre in early November 1930, costing £3,000²¹ and the first 'talking' pictures screened there on 25 November.²² The Wonderview Theatre was not wired for sound; over the next few years the building saw use as a government High School during the daytime from February 1930²³ and sporadic use as a dance hall at night.

Around 1932 local carpenter Allan Woodard became manager-projectionist of the Victor Theatre, having worked his way up from an assistant when Ozone Theatres were screening in both the Victor and Wonderview Theatres.²⁴



The Victor Theatre (right) on Ocean Street, Victor Harbor c1930.

Source: B 41882 <https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/B+41882>

The fire

Shortly after midnight on Monday 15 January 1934, a fire broke out in the soda lounge²⁵ of the Victor Theatre. Reputedly the largest fire in the history of the town,²⁶ the incident was viewed by 'hundreds' of citizens and holidaymakers, 'many of whom had hurriedly left their beds in their pyjamas to watch the blaze.'²⁷

As well as damaging David Bell and Co's premises on the northern side of the theatre, the fire left stairs at the rear of the soda lounge 'destroyed' and the theatre roof 'sagging,' with 'considerable' water-damage to the floor.²⁸ The fire resulted in £3000 damage,²⁹ nearly a third of the cost of construction. Following the fire, manager Allan Woodard moved film projection and sound reproduction apparatus to the Wonderview Theatre, where screenings resumed while the fire-damaged theatre was rebuilt.³⁰

The Ozone Theatre

Instead of repairing and enlarging the Victor Theatre with a cantilevered gallery along lines suggested by Chris A. Smith in the 1920s, Ozone Theatres chose to build a largely new theatre on the site of the old, purpose-designed for screening talkies. Architect F. Kenneth Milne's design opportunistically re-used footings and lower walls from the southern and eastern sides of the old Victor Theatre. The northern and rear walls, front parapet and roof of the Victor Theatre were all demolished and some of the bricks

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reused in the new theatre. The new auditorium was substantially taller and wider than the first;³¹ purchase of Institute property at the rear of the Victor Theatre allotment³² also allowed the new theatre to be substantially longer.

Sole practitioner Milne's design for the Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre drew directly upon experience and knowledge gained during a trip to Britain and Europe between March and December 1933, with a newspaper report noting his design was based on 'modern Continental theatre practice.'³³ While Milne 'took a keen interest' in Georgian architecture,³⁴ his was also impressed by emerging European Modernism, Art Deco and interwar streamlined architecture, recording details of numerous such buildings and building interiors in his diary for future reference, including works by Dudok. Certain features of the new theatre, such as double-brick banding on the façade and auditorium light fittings in the shape of 'v-projections' are strikingly similar to features of Dudok's Hilversum Town Hall that Milne recorded in his sketchbook.³⁵

Milne's design for the Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre established the pattern for the sound-era theatres that followed, with architectural expression in a modern idiom, serving acoustic needs as well as aesthetic preferences; an auditorium planned with consideration to both sightlines and acoustics, instead of sightlines only; a greater reliance on architecturally integrated artificial lighting, with ventilation openings in the side walls that served to efficiently admit and expel air while carefully excluding natural light; and larger and more complex indoor spaces encouraging patrons to gather, circulate and consume refreshments before and after programmes and during intermission.

The Victor Harbor Ozone was the first South Australian theatre designed in a modern architectural idiom and the first purpose-designed for screening 'talkies' (the earlier Semaphore Ozone Theatre of 1929 was an adaptation and retrofit of an existing 1880s auditorium). The Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre is also understood to be one of the first complete buildings in South Australia designed in an interwar streamlined style.³⁶

Streamlining, especially as applied to picture theatres, became 'highly emblematic of bright, comfortable modernity and progress'³⁷ around the world and was pervasive in South Australian commercial architecture by the late 1930s,³⁸ expressing a sense of optimism for the future as the state emerged from economic depression.³⁹ Streamlining could be less expensive than traditional architectural styles, with less reliance on applied ornamentation, and was particularly suited to picture theatre auditoriums, where smooth, protuberance-free surfaces were preferred on acoustic⁴⁰ and hygiene grounds.

Milne's design made use of numerous newly-available materials, including chrome-plated metal⁴¹ and curved and fluted vitrolite. Chromed features included the ticket box window fittings, custom-made stair rails, multi-part door kickplates, and long strips lining the stage and side boxes. Custom-made black curved and fluted vitrolite was

employed as skirting in the vestibule, following the curve of the semi-circular ticket box.

Milne also used familiar materials in new ways. Unlike picture theatres of the 1920s which typically had vestibules with tiled floors and walls, Milne employed terrazzo for the vestibule and side exit floors to create a seamless surface. Fibrous plaster was used to create the smooth foyer and auditorium ceilings and side walls, with architecturally integrated lighting in the auditorium while Celotex building board was used to line the fronts of balustrades and side boxes in the auditorium to reduce the prevalence of echoes.

Compared with most silent-era theatres, the Victor Harbor Ozone featured unusually extensive circulation space its front-of-house area, comprising a vestibule with ticket box, a large foyer and a servery, which encouraged theatre patrons to remain in the theatre to buy refreshments instead of doing so elsewhere. These enlarged spaces reflect a growing awareness among film exhibitors of the social significance of cinema-going during the interwar period and the importance of picture theatres as places of socialisation as well as entertainment.

Glazed doors between vestibule and foyer were designed to trap sea breezes and prevent them entering the foyer and auditorium, a successful feature replicated by Milne in all subsequent Ozone theatres. Greater attention to audience comfort was also signalled by the presence of carpeted aisles throughout the theatre featuring an 'amazing' pattern of 'black rippled stripes on a cream ground'⁴² (carpeting of the aisles also had an acoustic rationale). The theatre was also the first in South Australia to be fitted with Latex sponge rubber cushions to the auditorium seating.⁴³

Openings in the side walls of the theatre were fitted with steel louvres concealed behind hit-and-miss fibrous plaster screens designed to trap daylight while allowing air to pass freely. Steel casement windows in the front elevation could be opened to allow ventilation of both the bio box and the theatre, the latter through openings in the rear wall of the auditorium. Hot air was also exhausted from the auditorium through a continuous perforated fibrous plaster spine in the ceiling, which connected to a series of ventilator openings in the roof. Unlike many picture theatres of the 1920s (including the first Victor Theatre) where large areas of the ceiling were nailed directly to the underside of purlins, the Ozone Theatre had substantial roof space over the whole auditorium, improving its thermal and acoustic performance.

The Victor Harbor Ozone was Milne's first commission from Ozone Theatres. During the 1920s the company relied upon Adelaide architect Chris A. Smith almost exclusively for their architectural work,⁴⁴ then switching to the services of Adelaide designer and interior specialist E. Grant Walsh in the early 1930s. Milne subsequently served as Ozone Theatres' appointed architect for all South Australian projects until about 1942, when wartime restrictions curtailed new construction.

The new Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre was built by contractor W. T. Weetman of Russell Terrace, Woodville.⁴⁵ Work began in early September 1934⁴⁶ and was completed ahead of schedule,⁴⁷ allowing the theatre to be opened⁴⁸ on 22 December 1934.⁴⁹ The new theatre cost about £15,000⁵⁰ and was licenced to seat 661 in the stalls (downstairs) and 302 in the dress circle (upstairs), a total of 963.⁵¹

Weetman followed Ozone Theatres' preference for subcontracting and/or employing local labour whenever possible and employed at least twenty men on the project.⁵² Theatre manager Allan Woodard (then aged 23) is likely to have been subcontracted in the early stages of the project as a carpenter; in the later stages, he is said to have supervised construction in his capacity as theatre manager to the satisfaction of both Milne and Ozone Theatres' directors.⁵³

The Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre was particularly popular during 'sour' weather over the holiday season, when hotel guests had nothing else to do.⁵⁴ During the early 1940s, manager Howard Williamson was able to regularly 'pack' the theatre on rainy days by phoning the local hotels and advising a 'special matinee' was being organised.

In 1937 the capacity of the Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre was expanded slightly to seat 687 in the stalls and 312 in the dress circle, a total of 999.⁵⁵ From 1940, Ozone Theatres installed 'Diathermally' heated 'Comfoot' foot-warmers⁵⁶ in all of its theatres. Diathermal heating was installed in the Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre by April 1949.⁵⁷ Like Ozone Theatres' other suburban and country venues, the Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre was acquired by Hoyts Ozone Theatres Limited in 1951.



Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre c1950

Source: Victa Cinema

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Subsequent history

The arrival of television in the United States in the late 1940s spurred the major Hollywood film studios to differentiate their product from television through technological innovation to remain competitive. One of these innovations, namely films presented in various wide-screen formats through proprietary technology, became pervasive during the post-war period.

Hoyts Ozone Theatres installed wide-screen CinemaScope (2.55:1 picture ratio) equipment in their suburban and country theatres during 1955. At the Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre, a new screen was installed on the stage, replacing the old Academy Ratio (1.37:1) screen. This meant major changes were not required to the proscenium,⁵⁸ unlike some other theatres such as Marryatville (Regal Theatre), where the proscenium was partly destroyed.

Attendances at the Ozone Theatre dwindled after the introduction of television in South Australia in September 1959. By 1960, the Theatre was closed on four days each week outside school holiday periods and by April 1962 was only open on Saturdays. Beginning in 1963 the theatre closed entirely for several months of the year, a pattern which continued over the next seven years.



Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre auditorium before CinemaScope installation, 1955

Source: Victa Cinema/John Thiele

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Hoyts Ozone Theatres closed their Victor Harbor theatre for the 1970 summer season on 28 March, then sold the property in September to Roy Denison, trading as South Coast Drive In Theatres Pty Ltd,⁵⁹ for \$25,000.⁶⁰ Denison reopened nightly⁶¹ for the 1970/1971 Christmas school holidays as the Victa Theatre,⁶² committed to Friday, Saturday and Sunday screenings over the next four years, and subsequently operated the venue regularly each school holiday period until 1995.⁶³ Denison also operated the South Coast Drive-In Theatre at Port Elliot and film prints were regularly shuttled between the two venues for screening on the same night.⁶⁴

In 1975 Denison extended the stage area forward into the auditorium to accommodate live concerts and shows, with a new screen, mask and curtain in front of the old proscenium. He also rewired the theatre. These changes cost \$40,000, including a \$5,000 grand piano, and reduced the seating accommodation to 919.⁶⁵ The original stage front and orchestra rail remains largely intact underneath the stage extensions.

After Roy Denison's retirement, the Victa Cinema was purchased by local man Geoff Stock in September 1995. With the help of his family, Stock began restoring the theatre, repainting the exterior in July 1996, removing drapes in the foyer, repainting the foyer walls, and reinstating original light fittings which had been removed and stored. Stock also changed the name from Victa Theatre to Victa Cinema.⁶⁶

During the late 1990s, film distribution companies favoured multiplex (multi-screen) cinemas, leading Stock to 'reluctantly' twin the Victa Cinema in 1998. After the Victa Cinema closed for renovations on 10 August 1998, Stock used local builders and tradespeople to build a pair of walls in front of the dress circle balcony, with an airspace in between and a new projection room below, dividing the auditorium in two. During renovations the seating was reupholstered, light fittings were restored, fibrous plaster surfaces repaired and the foyer recarpeted. Original ventilation openings in the rear wall of the auditorium were also covered over at this time. The new upstairs cinema seating 286, opened on 11 September 1998, while the new downstairs cinema, seating 297, opened on 6 November 1998.⁶⁷

David and Carol Stonehill purchased the Victa Cinema in 2005. In 2007-2008 they installed reverse-cycle air conditioning. Seating was also upgraded in both auditoriums in 2008, with some older seating remaining upstairs. An eCinema digital projector was installed downstairs in 2009 for screening limited digital content. Both cinemas were refitted with 2K digital projectors in November 2012 and a new screen was installed downstairs. A 3D projector was also installed downstairs in July 2015.⁶⁸

In January 2016 the exterior of the Victa Cinema was again repainted and older signage was replaced. In late 2016 the City of Victor Harbor installed a digital projector on the other side of Ocean Street, forming part of the City's Main Street Precinct upgrades, allowing digital art to be projected onto the façade of the

building seven nights a week. In October 2020 the Victa Cinema was purchased by the City of Victor Harbor, with an intention to incorporate the building into a future Arts and Cultural Centre.⁶⁹

Chronology

Year	Event
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- | | |
|------|--|
| 1912 | Harry and Edgar Griffin tour Kangaroo Island, the Adelaide Hills, the Fleurieu and Lower Murray with a travelling picture show. |
| 1918 | D. H. Griffin arrives in Victor Harbor with his family. |
| 1919 | D. H. Griffin and Sons open motor garage on Ocean Street, Victor Harbor. |
| 1921 | D. H. Griffin elected mayor of Victor Harbor.
D. H. Griffin and Sons consider building a picture theatre on top of their motor garage. |
| 1923 | 23 November, Victor Theatre opens.
24 November, Victor Theatre is licenced to National Theatres Limited on a lease from D. H. Griffin. |
| 1928 | 31 January, Hugh Waterman announces Ozone Theatres Limited takeover of National Pictures Limited from Victor Harbor. |
| 1930 | 8 January, Ozone Theatres acquires Victor Theatre from D. H. Griffin.
25 November, first talkies screen at the Victor Theatre. |
| 1932 | Allan Woodard becomes manager-projectionist of the Victor Theatre. |
| 1934 | 15 January, a fire breaks out on the soda lounge of the Victor Theatre resulting in £3000 damage.
2 October, L. C. Waterman, manager of Ozone Theatres, submits Milne's plans for 'reconstruction and modernisation' of the Victor Theatre to the Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment.
22 December 1934, Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre opens.
Capacity of the Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre expanded to seat 999. |
| 1940 | (approx.) Howard Williamson replaces Woodard as manager of the Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre. |
| 1951 | Ozone Theatres sells suburban and country theatres, including Victor Harbor, to Hoyts Ozone Theatres Limited. |
| 1955 | CinemaScope equipment installed at the Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre.
September, introduction of television into South Australia. |
| 1960 | Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre is closed on four days each week outside school holidays. |

- 1962 April, Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre is only open on Saturdays.
- 1970 28 March, final screening under Hoyts ownership.
September, Roy Denison trading as South Coast Drive In Theatres Pty Ltd purchases the Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre.
December, Roy Denison reopens the Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre as the Victa Theatre.
- 1975 Denison extends the stage and installs new screen, masking and curtains.
- 1993 Roy Denison reports record (post-1970) attendance at the Victa Theatre.
- 1995 September, Victa Theatre purchased by Geoff Stock and renamed Victa Cinema.
- 1997 December, projection platter system and Dolby Digital Sound installed.
- 1998 10 August, Victa Theatre closes for renovations.
11 September, upstairs auditorium reopens.
6 November, downstairs auditorium reopens.
- 2005 Victa Cinema purchased by David and Carol Stonehill.
- 2008 Reverse-cycle air conditioning installed, and some seating upgraded.
- 2012 November, 2K digital projectors installed.
- 2016 Exterior repainted.
- 2020 Victa Cinema purchased by the City of Victor Harbor.



The Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre), 28 November 2022

Note: unless otherwise indicated, the images in this report were taken during the site visit on 28 November 2022

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SITE DETAILS

Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre)

PLACE NO.: 26556

37-41 Ocean Street Victor Harbor

FORMER NAME:	Ozone Theatre
DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:	Two storey picture theatre and outbuilding
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION:	1934
REGISTER STATUS:	Nominated 3 November 2022 Provisionally entered 25 November 2022
LOCAL HERITAGE STATUS:	Local Heritage Place, 2 October 2003
CURRENT USE:	Picture theatre/cinema 1934-Present
ARCHITECT:	F. Kenneth Milne 1934
BUILDER:	W. T. Weetman, Woodville 1934
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:	City of Victor Harbor
LOCATION:	Street No.: 37-41 Street Name: Ocean Street Town/Suburb: Victor Harbor Post Code: 5211
LAND DESCRIPTION:	Title CT 5309/931; CT 5309/930 Reference: Lot No.: A86; A94 Plan No.: D99; F165303 Hundred: Encounter Bay

PHOTOS

Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre)

PLACE NO.: 26556

37-41 Ocean Street, Victor Harbor



Downstairs auditorium showing proscenium bay



Downstairs auditorium ceiling

PHOTOS

Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre)

PLACE NO.: 26556

37-41 Ocean Street, Victor Harbor



Upstairs auditorium looking towards screen



Upstairs auditorium looking towards projection box

PHOTOS

Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre)

PLACE NO.: 26556

37-41 Ocean Street, Victor Harbor



Vestibule showing terrazzo floor



Ticket Box in vestibule, note curved black vitrolite skirting



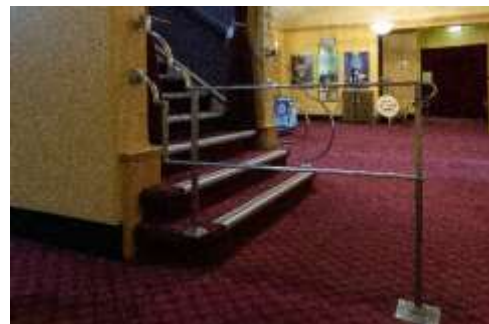
Notice board in vestibule, with fibrous plaster frame



Details of doors between vestibule/ foyer, note sandblasted motif and chromed kickplates



Vestibule terrazzo floor



Star rails in foyer

PHOTOS

Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre)

PLACE NO.: 26556

37-41 Ocean Street, Victor Harbor



Foyer sconce light fitting



Foyer radiator



Auditorium ceiling light feature



Auditorium wall light feature



Upstairs auditorium seating



Diathermal foot warmer

PHOTOS

Victa Cinema (former Ozone Theatre)

PLACE NO.: 26556

37-41 Ocean Street, Victor Harbor



Original proscenium hidden behind screen with perforated fibrous plaster frieze at top



Cargo port, chute and landing stage in store room under stage



Terrazzo and corner display case in Shop 2



Interior stage house



Side exit terrazzo floor



Terrazzo re-entrant floor to Shop 1

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- ¹ "Death of Mr. D. H. Griffin" in *Southern Argus* 13 July 1938 p. 6
- ² "Griffins' Motor Garage" in *Victor Harbor Times and Encounter Bay and Lower Murray Pilot* 5 December 1919 p. 4
- ³ "The Late Mr. G. H. Griffin" in *Victor Harbour Times* 27 July 1945 p. 2
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- ⁵ "Country News. Victor Harbor. March 7th." in *Southern Argus* 9 March 1916 p. 3
- ⁶ GRG 67/33 File 9/1921 SRSA
- ⁷ "The Victor Theatre. A Few Facts and Figures." in *Victor Harbor Times and Encounter Bay and Lower Murray Pilot* 14 December 1923 p. 1
- ⁸ Alexander Glouftsis, *Hindmarsh Town Hall* (1985) n.p.
- ⁹ GRG 67/33 File 81/1923 SRSA
- ¹⁰ "Opening of Victor Theatre." in *Southern Argus* 6 December 1923 p. 4
- ¹¹ "The Victor Theatre. A Few Facts and Figures."
- ¹² This structure is visible in SLSA B 4965 and B 4966
- ¹³ After the fire, total cost of construction was stated to have been £10,000, while Chris A. Smith valued the contract price of the Victor Theatre at £6,000.
- ¹⁴ GRG 67/33 File 81/1923 SRSA
- ¹⁵ "Ozone Amusements Limited. Take Over National Pictures Limited." in *Victor Harbor Times and Encounter Bay and Lower Murray Pilot* 3 February 1928 p. 1
- ¹⁶ "National Theatres, Victor Harbour." in *The Victor Harbor Times and Encounter Bay and Lower Murray Pilot* 20 January 1928 p. 3
- ¹⁷ "Ozone Amusements Limited. Take Over National Pictures Limited."
- ¹⁸ A scheme to install a gallery is indicated, with sightlines, in pencil on drawings of the Victor Theatre held by the University of South Australia Architecture Museum, S5/8/5.
- ¹⁹ CT 1565/179
- ²⁰ GRG67/33 Files 81/1923 and 89/1923 SRSA
- ²¹ "Talkies for Victor Harbour. £3,000 equipment for Victor Theatre." in *Times Victor Harbour and Encounter Bay and Lower Murray Pilot* 14 November 1930 p. 1
- ²² Donovan and Associates, *Victor Harbor Heritage Survey* p. 1-53; see also "Talkies at Victor Harbour." in *Times Victor Harbour and Encounter Bay and Lower Murray Pilot* 28 November 1930 p. 2
- ²³ "Victor Harbour High School, Opened by Director of Education" in *Victor Harbor Times and Encounter Bay and Lower Murray Pilot* 14 February 1930 p. 3
- ²⁴ "Films Switch-Boy Now Director, Promotion for Alan Woodard" in *Victor Harbour Times* 9 December 1947 p. 3
- ²⁵ "South Australia" in *Weekly Times* (Melbourne) 20 January 1934 p. 8
- ²⁶ "Victor Harbor Fire, Biggest In History of Town, Damage About £1200" in *Barrier Miner* 16 January 1934 p. 4
- ²⁷ "Huge Blaze at Victor Harbor" in *Recorder* 15 January 1934 p. 1
- ²⁸ "Victor Harbor Fire, Biggest In History of Town"
- ²⁹ "No Enquiry into Victor Fire" in *News* 16 January 1934 p. 5
- ³⁰ GRG 67/33 File 81/1923 SRSA
- ³¹ S5/08 University of South Australia Architecture Museum
- ³² "Corporation of Victor Harbour" in *Victor Harbour Times* 24 August 1934 p. 3
- ³³ "Building Trade Improving, More Houses Being Erected, Two Country Theatres" in *Advertiser* 30 October 1934 p. 16
- ³⁴ Susan Collins, "Milne, Frank Kenneth"
- ³⁵ https://architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au/arch_full.asp?Arch_ID=57 ;
- ³⁵ S3 University of South Australia Architecture Museum

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³⁶ Besides a showgrounds kiosk in a semi-streamlined style dated September 1932 ("New Kiosk and Cafeteria..." in *News* 6 September 1932 p. 6, demolished) and a similar café interior dated 1933 ("Adelaide's First Food Market" in *Building and Construction* 16 February 1933, Gavin Lawson Scrapbook S327/9 Architecture Museum Collection, also demolished), no earlier examples have been located; see *Building and Construction* 1930-1934; Cheesman Collection Scrapbooks S327/9/2-4 Architecture Museum; contemporary newspapers via TROVE.

³⁷ Bruce Peters, "The Impact of the Talkies on Scottish Cinema Architecture" in *Visual Culture in Britain* (2019) p. 210

³⁸ Carol Cosgrove, *Moving to the Modern*

³⁹ Chris Burns, *Art Deco in South Australian Architecture*

⁴⁰ Bruce Peters, "The Impact of the Talkies" pp. 204-207

⁴¹ "NEW CINEMA AT VICTOR HARBOUR" in *Advertiser* 24 December 1934; chrome-plating process was first commercialised in the United States during the late 1920s, <https://www.pfonline.com/articles/history-of-chromium-plating>

⁴² "Surf Spartans Cheered On By Shivering Crowd" in *News* 24 December 1934 p. 6

⁴³ "Ozone Theatre to Open in a Fortnight" in *Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record* 5 December 1940 p. 1

⁴⁴ Chris Burns, Chris A. Smith: Register of Works in South Australia (February 2015), unpublished, University of South Australia Architecture Museum Collection

⁴⁵ "Building Trade Improving,

⁴⁶ "Building Boom in Victor Harbour." in *Victor Harbour Times* 7 September 1934 p. 2

⁴⁷ "Opening of New Theatre" in *Victor Harbour Times* 7 December 1934 p. 3

⁴⁸ A 19 September 1934 Victor Harbour Day [sic] picture show, reported to have been held in the then under-construction Ozone Theatre ("Cinema History in Victor Harbor Spans 75 Years" in *Times* 19 November 1998 p. 17), was actually held in the nearby Wonderview Theatre: "Victor Harbour Day" in *Victor Harbour Times* 21 September 1934 p. 3

⁴⁹ "New Cinema at Victor Harbour, Official Opening By Mayor" in *Advertiser* 24 December 1934 p. 10; Allan Woodard is not mentioned in any of the press coverage associated with the new Victor Harbor Ozone Theatre.

⁵⁰ "May be Rise in Cost Of Building Materials" in *News* 21 November 1934 p. 9

⁵¹ GRG 67/33 File 81/1923 SRSA

⁵² 'Gleaner', "Gleanings" in *Victor Harbour Times* 23 November 1934 p. 2; "Labour for Ozone Reconstruction" in *Recorder* 10 August 1933 p. 2

⁵³ Brian Pearson, "Celebrating Alan Woodard Cinema Pioneer" in *CinemaRecord* (70/2011) p. 20

⁵⁴ John Thiele "The Victa Theatre at Victor Harbour, South Australia" in *Kino Quarterly* (Autumn 1999) p. 7

⁵⁵ GRG 67/33 File 81/1923 SRSA

⁵⁶ "Port Adelaide Ozone Theatre" in *Citizen* 31 March 1940 p. 6; "Advanced form of Central Heating in use at Theatre" in *News* 2 June 1941 p. 7

⁵⁷ "Modern Heating System for the Ozone Theatre, Victor Harbour." in (1949, April 1). *Victor Harbour Times* 1 April 1949 p. 1

⁵⁸ Roberts & Hall Collection, SLNSW

⁵⁹ CT 1565/179

⁶⁰ John Thiele "The Victa Theatre" p. 8

⁶¹ Advertising in *Victor Harbour Times* 23 December 1971 p. 6

⁶² Victa Cinema History <https://www.victacinemas.com.au/history/>

⁶³ John Thiele "The Victa Theatre" p. 8

⁶⁴ Tony Crawford, "South Coast Memories" in *CinemaRecord* (81/2014) p. 41

⁶⁵ "Victa Theatre Feature" in *Victor Harbour Times* 23 December 1975 p. 9

⁶⁶ John Thiele "The Victa Theatre" p. 8; the Victa Theatre was occasionally referred to as the Victa Cinema in the late 70s, however the name was not formally changed until Stock acquired the venue; see for example advertising in *Victor Harbour Times* 8 March 1978 p. 11

Summary of State Heritage Place: 26556 33 of 34

Provisionally entered by the South Australian Heritage Council on 25 November 2022 under Section 17 (2) (b) of the Heritage Places Act 1993

Confirmed by the South Australian Heritage Council on [add date] (tbc)

⁶⁷ John Thiele "The Victa Theatre" p. 9; Victa Cinema History <https://www.victacinemas.com.au/history/>

⁶⁸ Victa Cinema History <https://www.victacinemas.com.au/history/>

⁶⁹ Victa Cinema History <https://www.victacinemas.com.au/history/>