

**Former Cosy Theatre, 301-309 Heretaunga Street West**

Inventory Number: 35; Property ID: 25205; TRIM Reference: 25205#002#0004

Report by Warwick Johnston

Draft: 9 August 2007, updated 5 January 2010, updated July 2012 (Cochran & Murray); Final Report: November 2012

## Hastings CBD Heritage Inventory Project



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### FORMER COSY THEATRE

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**OTHER NAMES:** Embassy Building



Photo: R. Murray, 2012

### LOCATION:

*Street and Number:* 301-309 Heretaunga Street West

*Location Information:* Located on the corner of Heretaunga Street West and King Street

*City / Town:* Hastings

*Region:* Hawke's Bay

### LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

*Legal Description:* Lot 1 DP 786 Embassy Theatre, Shop 1 being Pt Lot 1 DP 786

*Certificates of Title:* HBF4/178 (1975), HBA4/619 (1964), HB4/276 (1926), Deeds Index 12/349

## **SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

### *Architectural value:*

The former Cosy Theatre has modest architectural value, largely resident in its exterior, as nearly the entire interior and most of the original theatre features were lost to extensive development from 1969 onwards. The exterior, particularly the main elevation, puts a strong street and competently designed front on the massive bulk of the theatre space.

### *Historic Value:*

The building represents an important aspect of the history of cinema in Hastings, having housed a picture theatre for nearly 50 years, from around 1920 until 1969. The building was associated with important figures in NZ cinema, including its original owner Kemball and later Kerridge, of Kerridge Odeon fame. Its subsequent history as a commercial building is, however, without particular distinction.

### *Aesthetic Value:*

The large building is located on a prominent corner site (King Street intersection of Heretaunga Street West). It has a strong presence in the local streetscape, and its mild Spanish Mission flavourings give it some distinction in an area of contemporaneous Art Deco commercial buildings.

## **HISTORY:**

Photographic evidence shows the Cosy Buildings and the Cosy Theatre<sup>1</sup> in about 1921; the architectural drawings for the first building on the site, a handsome Spanish Mission-styled structure designed by Clere & Williams, are dated November 1920<sup>2</sup>. However, in the *Wises Street Directory* for Hastings from 1921 to 1930 the name given to the Picture Theatre at this address was "Everybody's Picture Theatre".<sup>3</sup> Whatever the name of the theatre, it is clear from records that the Hastings Borough Council along with Mr. William Kemball (a prominent cinema and race-horse owner<sup>4</sup>), and Kemball Theatres Ltd., operated this theatre, with 1,000 seats, prior to the 1931 earthquake. Unfortunately in that earthquake, which leveled the theatre, a number of people were killed and injured.<sup>5</sup>

During the period of reconstruction the Fletcher Construction Company rebuilt the theatre at a cost of just under £10,000. It was that company's largest project to date.<sup>6</sup> The Theatre was reopened in August 1933,<sup>7</sup> with a name change to the De Luxe Theatre) as a joint venture between J C Williamson and Kemball Theatres Ltd. in conjunction with the Hastings Borough Council.<sup>8</sup> Kemball ran into difficulties in the Depression, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Wright M. *Town and Country. The History of the Hastings District Council.* 2001.p.365

<sup>2</sup> Hastings District Council files

<sup>3</sup> Wises Street Directory. 1921 to 1930 for Heretaunga Street.

<sup>4</sup> Kemball's other cinemas included the Deluxe Theatre in Wellington (designed by Williams, later renamed to the Embassy)

<sup>5</sup> Wright M. *Town and Country. The History of the Hastings District Council.* 2001.p.439

<sup>6</sup> Boyd. M. *City of the Plains.* 1984. p.270.

<sup>7</sup> Wright M. *Town and Country. The History of the Hastings District Council.* 2001.p.468.

<sup>8</sup> Fowler, M 2007 *From Disaster to Recovery: the Hastings CBD 1931-35,* Michael Fowler Publishing Limited, Havelock North pp. 163-165.

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company was later taken over by Robert Kerridge (later to be one of the owners of Kerridge Odeon Theatres). By 1940 a company called Hawke's Bay Amusements Limited operated the De Luxe Theatre. The cinema was later renamed the Embassy, but was eventually closed in June 1969.<sup>9</sup>

The building was then turned into a commercial arcade known as Embassy Court.<sup>10</sup> The Brown-Thomas brothers brought the building in 1978 but later sold it to Ashleigh Brown-Thomas.<sup>11</sup> The current owners are Sentiero Properties Limited. Current tenants include Pumpkin Patch and The Baby Factory. There have been a number of dramatic changes both inside and out, especially with the conversion to a Mall in the 1950s, which effectively resulted in the loss of the entire interior of the cinema. However, the basic exterior structure has remained largely intact.

### PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

*Architect:* Clere and Williams (first building), Llewellyn E. Williams (present building)

*Builder:* Fletcher Construction Ltd. (present building)

*Date of construction:* 1920 (original), 1932 (present building)

*Construction details:* Reinforced concrete structure, steel truss roof frame, corrugated steel roof, steel windows

*Description:* The former Cosy Theatre is an imposing and dominant building on its open corner site on Heretaunga and King Streets. It towers above the nearby single- and two-storey commercial buildings. The principal elevation faces Heretaunga Street; the King Street elevation is very much a secondary one. The building, perhaps courtesy of later changes, has a soft Spanish Mission influence in its exterior design.

Below the stayed verandah (which retains its original tongue, groove and veed timber soffit), only the concrete structural frame remains of the original cinema entranceways and shop-fronts, with all openings enclosed using modern aluminium joinery. Above the verandah, the main block of office and projection space rises up in a four-square tower, which has a central section projecting towards the street and two wings, which are recessed back and stop-ended on the theatre proper. The few steel windows to the tower are symmetrically spaced. The tower is lightly decorated with a geometric frieze running just under the flat parapet. Original drawings show a strong central fin with the Cosy name on it, but no trace of this remains today, if it was ever constructed.

The King Street elevation has some interest, aside from the vast roof of the theatre with its distinctive ventilator cowls, in its notional paired "windows" and brackets for sunshades above. These items do not appear on the 1932 drawings, and their exact provenance is not known. They seem unlikely to have been original as their proportions have little to do with other features on the building. An over-scale modern "porch" with a shallow hipped roof and an arch provides access to one of the main tenancies.

Inside, there is little evidence of the cinema that once was. The theatre space is split longitudinally and also subdivided vertically.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> [www.hawkesbay.com/places/hastings/district-history/4](http://www.hawkesbay.com/places/hastings/district-history/4)

<sup>11</sup> Certificate of Title HBF 4/178

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**ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:**

Element	Significance
Form and detail of street facades	Townscape, aesthetic, architectural

**MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES:**

Certificate of Title HBF4/178

Boyd. M, 1984, *City of the Plains* p.270

*Wises Street Directory. 1921-1930*

Wright. M, 2001, *Town and Country: The History of the Hastings District Council.*

[www.hawkesbay.com/places/hastings/district-history/4](http://www.hawkesbay.com/places/hastings/district-history/4)

*HDC Permit records:*

“Theatre, Hastings”, 9.8.1932, Llewellyn E Williams Architect

Undated drawing of modifications to office spaces, J W Petherick Architect, Wellington

“Cosy Theatre Hastings, for W R Kemball Esq.”, 11.1920, Clere & Williams Architects & Structural Engineers

**OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION:**

*NZHPT Register:* Not registered

*District Plan:* Located within the Central Character Precinct of the Operative Hastings District Plan.

*New Zealand Historic Places Act 1993:* This site has been identified as a potential archaeological site under Section 2 of the New Zealand Historic Places Act 1993.

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**OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS:**



Heretaunga Street frontage under the verandah, 2012. Note the concrete structural frame and tg&v verandah soffit lining that remain from the original theatre construction.



King Street Cosy Theatre façade (S. Akers, 2009)

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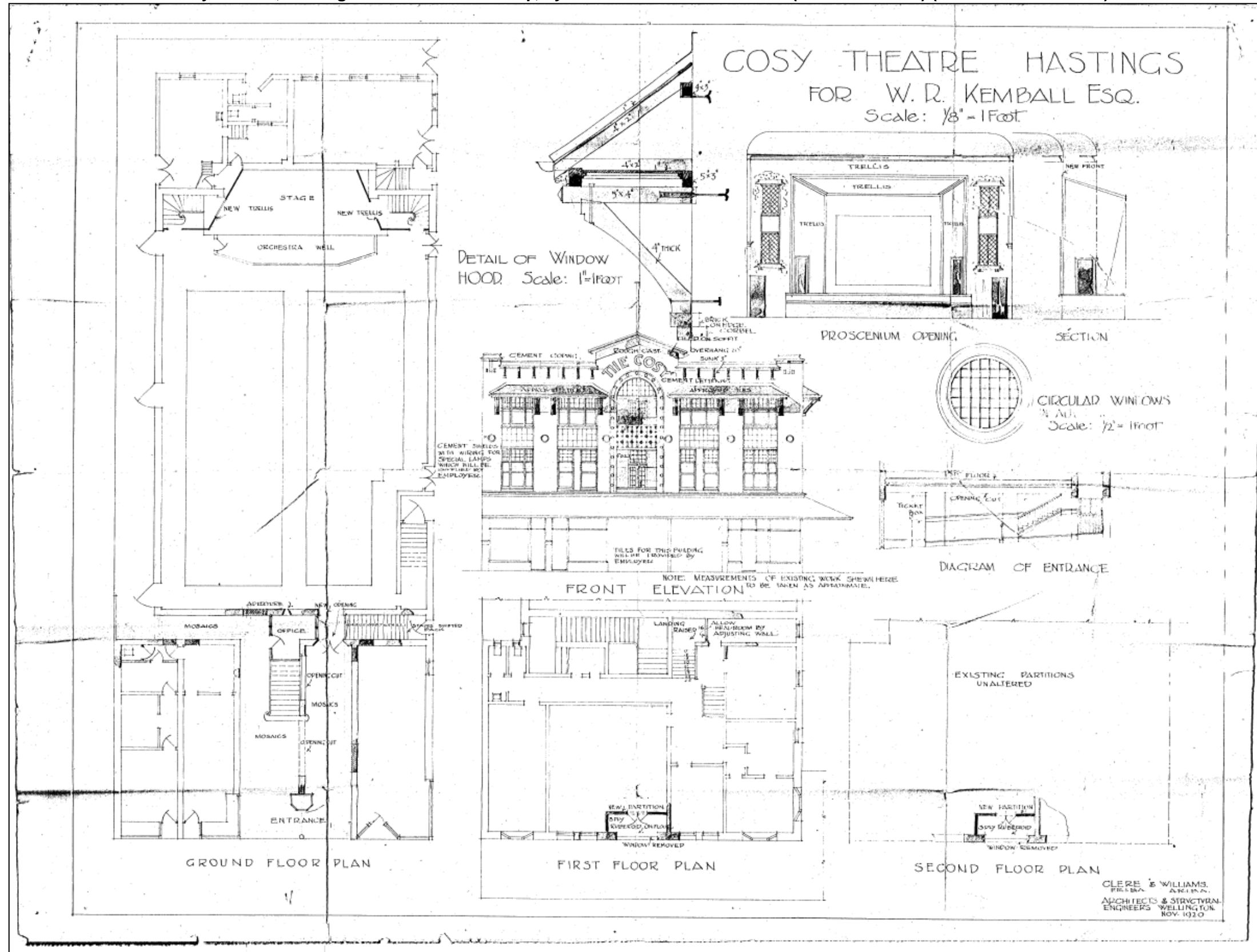
King Street Cosy Theatre façade (S. Akers, 2009)



Heretaunga Street Cosy Theatre façade (S. Akers, 2009)

ARCHIVE PLAN(S):

Cosy Theatre, Hastings for W.R. Kemball Esq., by Clere & Williams Architects (November 1920) (TRIM Ref: 25205#029)



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**1932 Llewellyn E. Williams Architect (TRIM Ref: 25205#028)**

