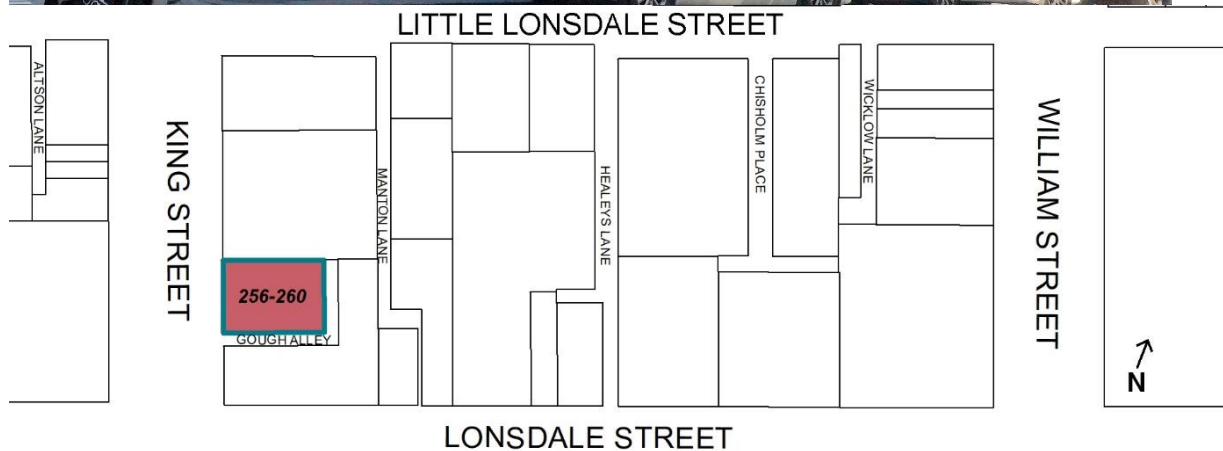


SITE NAME	Former Paramount House
STREET ADDRESS	256-260 King Street Melbourne
PROPERTY ID	105377



SURVEY DATE: October 2018

SURVEY BY: Context

HERITAGE INVENTORY H7822-1232

EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY No

PLACE TYPE Individual Heritage Place

PROPOSED CATEGORY Significant

DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST: Eric C Beedham

FORMER GRADE C
BUILDER: Not known

DEVELOPMENT PERIOD: Interwar Period (c1919-c1940)

DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION: 1929

THEMES

ABORIGINAL THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Research undertaken in preparing this citation did not indicate any associations with Aboriginal people or organisations.	Aboriginal Themes (Hoddle Grid Heritage Review, Volume 3 Aboriginal Heritage, March 2019) have therefore not been identified here.
HISTORIC THEMES	DOMINANT SUB-THEMES
13 Enjoying the city	13.1 Public recreation

LAND USE

HISTORIC LAND USE	
Archaeological block no: 10	Inventory no: 132
Character of Occupation: Commercial, Residential	
Land sale details not provided	
1866 Cox	Buildings shown along most of King Street frontage
1880 Panorama	Two-storey building
1905/6 Mahlstedt	Small single-storey building with kitchen at rear
THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE	
1890s	Residential
1920s	Theatres and Cinemas
1960s	Theatres and Cinemas

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an Individual Heritage Place.

Extent of overlay: Refer to map

SUMMARY

The former Paramount House at 256-260 King Street, Melbourne is a two-storey interwar commercial building built in 1929 to a design by architect Eric C Beedham. It was built as one of many 'exchange' centres set up by American film companies around Australia in the 1920s, which were responsible for the distribution and marketing of films. The building initially comprised offices, film vaults, storage accommodation and a small private theatre. The former Paramount House continued to be associated with the moving picture industry for 60 years until 1989. By the 1970s, the building was occupied by Cinema International Corporate Pty Ltd (later CIC-Fox and United International Pictures), a combined distributing venture for American film studios including Paramount Pictures, Universal Pictures, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), United Artists, 20th Century Fox and Walt Disney Productions.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Enjoying the city

Public recreation

The first films screened in Melbourne in the 1890s, where audiences watched films in a variety of venues: vaudeville theatres, suburban halls and at open-air venues such as cricket grounds and beaches. Dedicated cinema buildings appeared after 1907. In 1909 T J West opened Melbourne's first purpose-built cinema at the corner of Sturt Street and City Road, South Melbourne. By 1916, there were eight cinemas in Bourke Street presenting continuous screenings (Catrice 2008).

Permanent cinemas were built in the suburbs from 1910. As Daniel Catrice writes:

By 1919 there were 67 suburban cinemas and 11 cinemas in the city. These cinemas were modest in design and scale compared to the luxury cinemas built during the 1920s. The first of the American-style picture palaces was the Capitol Theatre in Swanston Street, designed by Walter Burley Griffin and opened in 1924. Two of Melbourne's grandest cinemas, the State Theatre in Flinders Street and the Regent Theatre in Collins Street, were opened in 1929. The atmospheric State Theatre was decorated after the style of an ancient Italian courtyard, with trailing clouds and twinkling stars on a blue dome ceiling (Catrice 2008).

The introduction of sound films in 1929 contributed to changes in cinema design, and the picture palace era ended with the depression of the 1930s. Most of the new construction activity was centred in the suburbs, where Hoyts established itself as the major cinema chain. Construction activity in the city was confined to newsreel cinemas, which screened continuous programs of newsreels (each session lasting about an hour), designed for a smaller, more transient audience (Catrice 2008).

SITE HISTORY

By 1866, buildings existed along most of the King Street frontage of the subject site at 256-260 King Street, Melbourne. By 1880, a two-storey building had been constructed however, by 1906 this had been replaced with a single-storey building with a separate kitchen at the rear (Fels, Lavelle & Mider 1993, Inventory no 132). The last occupant of the site in 1927, which then consisted of two bluestone and brick cottages, was Lewis John Michel. After Michel's death in 1927, the subject site was sold (*Argus* 21 February 1927:1; *Age* 5 March 1927:3).

The current building at 256-260 King Street was constructed in 1929 (MBAI 11213; *Table Talk* 12 December 1929:26). Built as a two-storey office building for Lasky Films Ltd, it was designed by architect Eric C Beedham (*Royal Victorian Institute of Architects Journal*, September 1931, as cited in AAI, record no 33397).

In 1916, Americans Arthur S Friend and Jesse L Lasky merged their motion picture production companies to establish the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation in Hollywood and acquired Paramount to distribute their films. By 1933 the subject building at 256-260 King Street was occupied by the Paramount Film Service (also called the Paramount Exchange). The aforementioned film companies had a complicated history of merging and name changing directed by their American head office however, from 1933 to the 1960s, the company was almost exclusively referred to under the

Paramount name, as seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2 (S&Mc 1933; Silent Era 2018; Lasky Productions).

By early 1930, at a time when sound had just been introduced to moving pictures, the Paramount organisation was in occupation of the new building (Figure 2), described as 'offices, film vaults and storage accommodation'. In addition, one of the most interesting features of the premises was 'the small private theatre at which trade showings [were] given weekly' (*Argus* 4 February 1930:13).

As Australians developed an appetite for the new visual culture brought by the widening accessibility of films in the 1920s, America's influence over the market began to stifle the production of feature films by Australian companies (NFSA 2018). In 1925, Australians imported 674 films from America in that one year alone (NFSA 2018). With this expansion, American film companies began to set up 'exchange' centres around Australia, which were responsible for the distribution and marketing of films, and as a place from where the business interests of the companies in Australia could be managed (NFSA 2018). The building at 256-260 King Street was an example of one of these exchanges opened by Paramount in Australia.

Very little change was made to the building until 1959, when windows on the ground floor were altered and alterations were made to internal partitions (MBAI 33745).

The former Paramount House was occupied by the dominant international film distributors through to the late 1980s. From the mid-1960s, 256-260 King Street was occupied by two international film distributors; 20th Century Fox Corporation (Australia) Pty Ltd and Paramount Film Services Pty Ltd (S&Mc 1965, 1970).

Due to the decline in cinema audiences in the 1960s, Cinema International Corporation Pty Ltd (CIC) was formed by Paramount Pictures and Universal Pictures as a combined international distribution venture. In 1972, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) joined the CIC, and by the mid-1970s, the 20th Century Fox's Australian distribution arm merged with the CIC to form CIC-Fox. CIC-Fox also represented Walt Disney Productions in Australia (Ross 2016:100, 105; *Age* 14 March 1981:13). Shortly before the merger, in 1974, both the CIC and 20th Century Fox Corporation were listed as the occupants of the subject building. (S&Mc 1974).

The only major alteration to the building during this period was the installation of a theatrette on the first floor in 1975: This is notable due to the building's original use as offices of a film company (MBAI 46076).

In the early 1980s, the CIC became United International Pictures Pty Ltd (UIP), representing American film studios Paramount Pictures, Universal Pictures, MGM and United Artists. A 1982 image of the building shows a cantilevered verandah with attached sign that reads 'Paramount Universal MGM Cinema International Corporation' (see Figure 3). The UIP vacated the building at 256-260 King Street in 1990 (*Age* 30 December 1989:21; 19 September 1990:23).

The building was refurbished in 2002 and is still listed as office space (CoMMaps).

EVERYONE'S
November 2, 1933, Page 11

Paramount Short Features

worth Billing for any show!

PARAMOUNT BRITISH SOUND NEWS
"The Eyes and Ears of the World"
Issued every week.

PARAMOUNT TWO-REEL COMEDIES
Harry Langdon,
Bing Crosby,
Eugene Pallette,
Walter Catlett.
Short Features with long laughs.

PARAMOUNT SCREEN SONGS
featuring outstanding artists
produced by Max Fleischer.

BETTY BOOP CARTOONS
Betty Boop and her merry troupe
of cartoon characters sit in for
another season's hilarity.

PARAMOUNT PICTORIALS
Absorbing single-reelers.
A Short that is long on entertainment.

SCREEN SOUVENIRS
Original and first in the field.
Humorous glimpses of by-gone days.

GRANTLAND RICE SPOTLIGHTS
Supreme sport reel of the world.

PARAMOUNT HEADLINERS
Stars of Radio, Stage and Screen.
Single reels of entertainment and
amusement.

POPEYE THE SAILOR
New cartoon single reel feature,
produced by Max Fleischer.

HOLLYWOOD ON PARADE
Intimate glimpses of the who's who
in Hollywood.

The Book of the Year!
**PARAMOUNT'S
PRODUCT
ANNOUNCEMENT
FOR 1934**

will be mailed next week to every exhibitor
in Australia and New Zealand.

If you fail to receive the industry's most
important announcement get in touch
immediately with the nearest Paramount
Exchange.

New South Wales: 66 Riverside Street, Sydney,
F. Gardner, Manager.
Queensland: 447-411 Ayns Street, Brisbane,
G. Brooks, Manager.
Victoria: 256-260 King Street, Melbourne (C.I.),
H. Kelly, Manager.
Tasmania: 11 Charles Street, Launceston,
G. Hayes, Manager.
South Australia: 175-174 Gawler Place South, Adelaide,
G. Abbotson, Manager.
Western Australia: 230 Wilton Street, Perth,
G. Neeson, Manager.
New Zealand: Crown Buildings, Cor. Cuba and Dixon
Streets, Wellington. S. H. Ong, Manager.
Auckland: Civic House, 261 Queen Street,
F. Thompson, Manager.



Figure 1. Advertisement in 1933 for Paramount, listing Victoria's Paramount Exchange at 256-260 King Street. (Source: *Everyone's* 1933: 11)

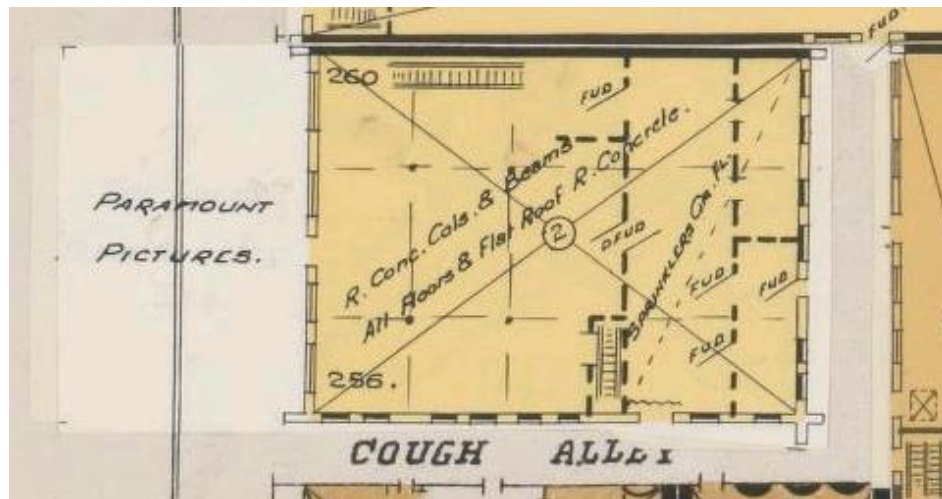


Figure 2. Mahlstedt plans showing subject site labelled Paramamout Pictures c1930. (Source: Mahlstedt Map Section 2, no 2A, 1923 (amended))



Figure 3. The subject site, to the left-hand side of Kilkeny Inn, with a sign on the cantilevered verandah reading 'Paramount Universal MGM Cinema International Corporation'. (Source: Butler 1982 [copyright](#))

Eric C Beedham, architect

The *Dictionary of Unsung Architects* contains this entry for architect Eric C Beedham (1895-1947):

Born in Hobart on 4 September 1895, Eric Claude Beedham...commenced his professional career as an articled pupil of his elder brother, Lancelot Kipling Beedham (1889-1944), who had established an architectural practice in Hobart in 1912. Completing his articles in 1916, the younger Beedham joined the Hobart City Council as an Assistant Engineer & Architect...Later that year, Beedham moved to Sydney and joined the office of John & H G Kirkpatrick, which, at that time, was the preferred architectural firm of the Commonwealth Government. Beedham rose to the position of Managing Assistant for Australia, which required him to oversee the firm's projects undertaken outside New South Wales. In that capacity, Eric Beedham supervised the construction of the Banknote Printing Office in Fitzroy (1923) and the new Commonwealth Bank buildings in Collins Street, Melbourne (1920-24), Moorabool Street, Geelong (1925) and Queen Street, Brisbane (1927-28). Beedham was also involved in the development of the Commonwealth's ambitious War Service Homes programme to provide architect-designed dwellings for returned servicemen.

Concurrently, Eric Beedham...maintained a private architectural practice in both Sydney and Melbourne. [In Melbourne] his private practice initially concentrated on residential commissions...by 1930... [Beedham began] to move away from residential projects towards larger-scale commercial and industrial ones. In 1934, he entered into partnership with architect John W Wright (1892-1962)...In partnership for about four years, Beedham & Wright undertook a string of commissions of various types, although the bulk of their output

was factories - most of which, moreover, were located in the booming industrial heartland of South Melbourne...By mid-1937, Beedham was again practising on his own, although he continued to specialise in factory design.

As was typical for many, Beedham's architectural practice diminished during the later years of the Second World War, but, unlike some, it re-emerged afterwards, when he resumed designing factories in Melbourne's inner industrial suburbs. These, however, proved to be his last projects (Built Heritage 2017).

SITE DESCRIPTION

The former Paramount House at 256-260 King Street, Melbourne is a two-storey commercial office building constructed in 1929. Located on the eastern side of King Street between Lonsdale and Little Lonsdale streets, it also has a side and rear frontage to Gough Alley.

The King Street façade is generally of painted render over loadbearing brickwork, with some moulded decorative elements above and below the first floor window bays at both ends of the building. Above street level the facade was originally of face brick with the render finish limited to the details (see Figure 3). The façade to the first floor is symmetrical, with a plain wide central bay of three windows and a narrower single window bay at each end. These end windows have recessed semicircular arches above and rectangular panels below, infilled with shields, fluting and other decorative elements. A simple cornice or lintel runs across the tops of all the windows and there is a simple stepped parapet above. The original steel frame windows are extant within the original openings.

The ground floor was substantially altered after 1982. The current shopfronts comprise large panes of glazing set in polished stone clad panels.. A full-length suspended box awning sits above the shopfronts.

The side and rear elevations to Gough Alley are largely intact, being of painted loadbearing face brickwork laid in English bond. The rendered finish applied to the King Street façade continues down for two bays of the southern elevation to Gough Alley. The original or early industrial multi-pane steel frame windows are largely retained on the laneway elevations with painted render lintels over the openings. Some of the windows feature a ventilation system where one row of sashes is angled back and the gap above covered in mesh to provide a measure of permanent ventilation. The steel doors with industrial top-light on the eastern elevation are original. There is a large opening with roller gate on the southern wall, which is a later addition.

INTEGRITY

The former Paramount House at 256-260 King Street is relatively intact with some changes visible to the original or early fabric. The building retains its original scale; principal upper-level façade with decorative panels, cornice and stepped parapet to King Street, fenestrations, pattern of openings and steel framed multipane windows to all elevations. Changes include the rendering of the original face brick walls to its principal façade, the replacement of the original shopfronts, and the over-painting of the side and rear face brick walls. Overall, the building is of moderate/high integrity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The former Paramount House was constructed in 1929 as a modest commercial building, incorporating Art Deco influences into its design with reference to classical and regency motifs. As an

example of a low-scale brick building built in the interwar period, the former Paramount House may be compared to the following examples, being of a similar use, scale, or creation date. The below images, dating from 2000s or later, and descriptions are provided by CoMMaps unless stated otherwise.

307-311 Elizabeth Street, 1927 (Significant in HO1204 Elizabeth Street West Precinct)

307-311 Elizabeth Street is a two-storey brick building built in 1927 as a motor showroom for Stillwell & Parry (Lovell Chen 2017:51).



Figure 4. 307-311 Elizabeth Street, built in 1927. (Source: Lovell Chen 2017)

7-9 Elizabeth Street, 1933 (Recommended as significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage review)

7-9 Elizabeth Street is a two-storey building built in 1933 by Hansen & Yuncken to a design by architect Harry A Norris. The building originally housed shops and a café on the ground floor with office space above. Built for tobacco retailer, G Damman & Co, the company occupied the building until at least 1974.



Figure 4. 7-9 Elizabeth Street, constructed in 1933.

114-122 Exhibition Street, 1925 (Recommended as significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Review)

A three-storey brick former office building. Built in 1925. Refurbished and converted to a bar and restaurant in 2003.



Figure 5. 114-122 Exhibition Street , 1925.

256-260 King Street is a relatively intact example of a modest interwar commercial building, utilitarian and functional yet refined in its design. The restrained design features and detailing are typical characteristics of low-scape interwar commercial buildings.

256-260 King Street is comparable to 307-311 Elizabeth Street (Significant to HO1204 Elizabeth Street West Precinct), 7-9 Elizabeth Street, constructed in 1933 (recommended as significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Study) and 114-122 Exhibition Street (recommended as significant in the Hoddle Grid Heritage Study), as a stylistically restrained example of small-scale commercial building constructed of brick during the interwar period.

Alterations observed in the former Paramount House are consistent with many central city buildings of this era that have experienced these changes.

Interwar buildings associated with moving picture industry

By the 1930s new theatres had appeared in many suburbs, built in the 1920s' period of unprecedented growth in the motion picture industry (VHD record for 'Westgarth Theatre, 89 High Street, Northcote'). The architecture of the picture palaces loosely followed that of live theatres. Most had a large auditorium, coved ceilings, and decorative plasterwork. Stylistically, many of the theatres built in the interwar period drew on the Art Deco style, with reference to Classical and Regency styles, Moderne, Ancient Egyptian symbolism, and other flamboyant and fanciful motifs. Within central Melbourne, although being of much greater scales, the Comedy Theatre (1928) at 228-240 Exhibition Street (VHR H2237; HO632) and the former State Theatre (1929) at 150-162 Flinders Street (VHR H0438; HO653) exhibit similar non-conventional, fanciful motifs typically seen in the interwar theatre architecture.

While a number of interwar period picture theatres of similar scale and style survive in other municipalities (with the inner-city examples in Northcote, Collingwood, Richmond and Burnley), there is no comparable individually significant example within the Melbourne CBD. A contributory-grade Palace Theatre at 20-30 Bourke Street (contributory in HO500 Bourke Hill Precinct) is the only example that somewhat comparable to 256-260 King Street, being of a similar style, construction date and use associated with the moving picture industry. Both the subject building and the Palace Theatre demonstrate the moving picture industries' preference towards Art Deco styling with references to classical and regency motifs; however, the comparison is somewhat limited due to their different historical functions and roles in the film industry.

The former Paramount House is of particular interest as it was specifically designed and continued to be used until at least 1989 as the headquarters for a number of moving picture distribution companies. In 1930, there were at least 15 Australian and international film distribution companies operating in central Melbourne (S&Mc 1930, 1931). Most of these companies rented a space in multi-storey office buildings such as Temple Court at 422 Collins Street (HO609) and Masonic Club Building at 164-170 Flinders Street (HO505) (S&Mc 1930, 1931, 1940). By the 1940s, American film distributors Universal Pictures and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) had established their own headquarters at 572-574 Lonsdale Street and 270 Queen Street. Both buildings remain extant but have been considerably altered. Also, the associations between these buildings in Lonsdale and Queen street and the film industry was short-lived because operation of both businesses consequently merged into the former Paramount House (S&Mc 1940, 1955, 1965).

As a result, the former Paramount House is a rare example of an interwar building associated with the film industry in the City of Melbourne, particularly in terms of it being purpose-built as a film distribution centre with exclusive long-term use (from 1930 to 1989) as the headquarters for a number of prominent international film distribution companies.

ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

✓ **CRITERION A**
Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).

✓ **CRITERION B**
Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).

CRITERION C
Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).

CRITERION D
Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).

CRITERION E
Importance of exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).

CRITERION F
Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance)

CRITERION G
Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).

CRITERION H
Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an Individual Heritage Place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Melbourne Planning Scheme:

MELBOURNE PLANNING SCHEME

EXTERNAL PAINT CONTROLS	No
INTERNAL ALTERATION CONTROLS	No
TREE CONTROLS	No
OUTBUILDINGS OR FENCES (Which are not exempt under Clause 43.01-3)	No
TO BE INCLUDED ON THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER	No
PROHIBITED USES MAY BE PERMITTED	No
ABORIGINAL HERITAGE PLACE	No

OTHER

N/A

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PREVIOUS STUDIES

**Central Activities District
Conservation Study 1985** D

**Central City Heritage
Study 1993** C

**Review of Heritage
overlay listings in the
CBD 2002** Ungraded

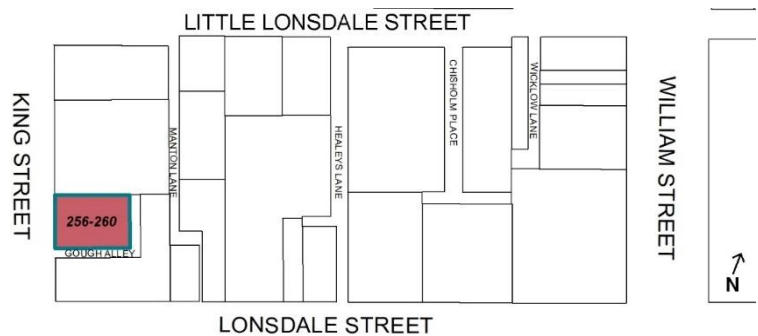
**Central City Heritage
Review 2011** Ungraded

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Paramount House



PS ref no: HOXXXX



What is significant?

The former Paramount House at 256-260 King Street, Melbourne, a two-storey commercial building built in 1929-30 to a design by architect Eric C Beedham.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- The original building form and scale;
- The original painted render (possibly originally unpainted) and face brick walls and pattern of fenestration including cornice, parapet, decorative recessed semicircular arches above and rectangular panels below upper floor windows, painted render lintels and pattern of window openings; and
- The original multi-pane steel frame windows.

Later alterations made to the street level façade are not significant.

How it is significant?

The former Paramount House at 256-260 King Street, Melbourne, is of local historic and rarity significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The former Paramount House at 256-260 King Street, Melbourne, constructed in 1929 is historically significant for its ability to demonstrate one aspect of Melbourne's social and cultural history related to the provision of entertainment and the transmission of American popular culture through film from the interwar period. Through its association with American film company Lasky Films Ltd (later Paramount Films), the building also demonstrates the increased distribution of American films in Melbourne and Australia at a time when sound was introduced to picture making and film production had increased in America. With this expansion, American film companies established 'exchange' centres for the distribution and marketing of films in countries such as Australia. By the 1970s, the building was occupied by Cinema International Corporate Pty Ltd (later CIC-Fox and United International Pictures), a combined distributing venture for American film studios including Paramount Pictures, Universal Pictures, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), United Artists, 20th Century Fox and Walt Disney Productions.

The building was long associated with the moving picture industry, from its construction in 1929 to 1989. The building at 256-260 King Street, opened by Lasky Films Ltd, and including a small private theatre at which trade showings were given, provides tangible evidence of this component in the film distribution industry. (Criterion A)

The former Paramount Film Service building at 256-260 King Street is significant as a rare surviving example of a purpose-built interwar commercial building associated with the film industry. Constructed in 1929 to act as a headquarters of prominent international film distribution companies, the building originally incorporated offices, film vaults and storage accommodation and a small picture theatre for trade showings. Its exclusive long-term use (from 1930 to 1989) as the core distribution centre is significant, as no other building of its type within Hoddle Grid is known to have such long-term associations. (Criterion B)

Primary source

Hoddle Grid Heritage Review (Context & GJM Heritage, 2020)