

GORE DISTRICT COUNCIL
HISTORIC HERITAGE ITEM RECORD FORM

HERITAGE ITEM NAME

St James' Theatre

ADDRESS

59-65 Irk Street, Gore

PHOTOGRAPH

(April 2022)



DISTRICT PLAN ITEM NO.
(at time of assessment)

n / a

HNZ LIST NO. & CATEGORY

n / a

LEGAL DESCRIPTION

Section 7 Block VI Town of Gore

GDC FILE NUMBER

3274072

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION

1935-36

**ARCHITECT/DESIGNER/
BUILDER**

Llewellyn Williams, architect; Fletcher Construction Company, contractors

STYLE

Art Deco Moderne

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Two-storey building with rectangular footprint and gabled and hipped roof forms. Principal, north-facing elevation is symmetrical with three bays of windows on the first floor above a suspended veranda. Two shops with recessed entries flank the entry to the theatre; a door at the east end provides fire egress. The shallow parapet features a wave pattern in relief and screens the roof beyond. A three-storey fly tower with lantern vent on the roof is located at the south end of the building.

MATERIALS/STRUCTURE

Reinforced concrete, brick, cement plaster, corrugated metal.

ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS

Interior refurbished (2008).

SETTING

The theatre stands on the south side of Irk Street, west of its intersection with Main Street. The former H & J Smiths' department store, a scheduled heritage item, is located on the eastern boundary of the theatre and the streetscape features a number of other interwar Art Deco Moderne style buildings. The scheduled setting is the land parcel on which the building is located.

HISTORY

St James' Theatre was built by a local consortium for lease to Messrs Fuller & Sons, the movie theatre exhibitors. Construction started in October 1935 and the theatre was originally going to be called the Grand. Fullers decided that it should be called the St James', and so it was. The theatre opened in March 1936. St James', which now accommodates two auditoriums seating 450 and 78 people, continues to show movies and provide a venue for live theatrical events. Fund-raising is currently underway for seismic strengthening and refurbishment of the building.

HISTORIC AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

St James' Theatre has historic and social significance for its association with the social life of Gore since 1936. New Zealand had one of the highest rates of movie going per capita in the world during the interwar period and this, along with developments in projection technology, sparked a flurry of cinema building around the country during the period. As was often the case the building was also designed to be able to host live performances.

CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

St James' Theatre has cultural significance as a place of community identity and historic continuity. The theatre is also esteemed as an example of Gore's Art Deco heritage.

ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

St James' Theatre has architectural significance as an interwar Art Deco Moderne style building. Llewellyn Williams (1884-1967) was a Wellington architect who specialised in theatre designs; he was also responsible for the Embassy Theatre in Wellington (1924) and the Regent Theatre in Greymouth (1933-35). The St James' is featured in the Gore section of Terry Moyle's *Art Deco New Zealand – An Illustrated Guide*, which was published in 2016.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE

St James' Theatre has technological and craftsmanship significance for the quality of its interwar concrete, brick and plaster construction and detailing. Founded by James Fletcher in 1908, Fletcher Construction Company had become a major contracting firm with a national reach by the interwar period. Fletchers also built the University of Auckland's Arts building (1926) and the Civic Theatre in the same city (1929), as well as St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Devon Street (1958-59).

CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE

St James' Theatre has contextual significance for the important contribution it makes to the interwar character of Irk Street within the town centre.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE

Although the building post-dates 1900, its site may have potential archaeological values relating to the colonial development of Irk Street.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

St James' Theatre has overall heritage significance to Gore and to the district of Gore as a whole. The building has historical and social significance for its association with the entertainment history of Gore and cultural significance as a place of community identity and historic continuity. St James' Theatre has architectural significance as an Art Deco Moderne style building designed by specialist theatre architect Llewellyn Williams and technological and craftsmanship significance for its concrete construction and detailing by national contractors Fletcher Construction Company. St James' Theatre has contextual significance for

the contribution it makes to the interwar, Art Deco Moderne character of Irk Street; its site may have potential archaeological value.

REFERENCES

- *Otago Daily Times* 9 September 1935, p. 1; 29 April 1939, p. 28.
- *Southland Times* 1 June 2012 & 9 June 2021 (available online).
- *Mt Benger Mail* 16 October 1935, p. 3.
- *Evening Star* 3 October 1935, p. 10.
- <https://www.sbstjamesgore.co.nz/about-us>
- <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/55700>
- T Moyle *Art Deco New Zealand – An Illustrated Guide* Auckland, 2016.
- <https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7500>
- <https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/2145>

REPORT COMPLETED

13 May 2022

AUTHOR

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Extent of scheduling, St James' Theatre, 59-65 Irk Street, Gore.