

The CSU Regional Archives is currently extending its opening hours to include the first Saturday of the month. This initiative has been put in place to cater for those researchers who are unable to visit the Archives on weekdays during normal business hours.

The next Saturday opening will be on February 2, 2013, from 10am to 3pm.

The interior of the Civic Theatre once included an orchestra pit and a central stairway leading from the foyer to the middle of the auditorium [from the Tom Lennon Collection, RW1574/120].



Theatres from Wagga's past

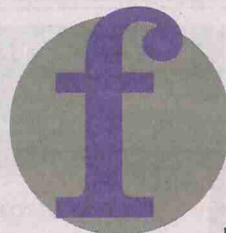
Entertainment giants of Wagga (Part 2)

what you need to know

■ The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building on South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue. Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straight-forward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour including copying and postage. For further information, phone 02 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au, or visit our website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.

at the archives

Wayne Doubleday



From as early as the mid-1800s to present day, the theatre has been one of society's most popular social venues. Many of

these entertainment giants have risen and fallen in Wagga – several without our notice. They are historic relics of our past and, whether they still stand or not, deserve to be acknowledged as valuable participators in the development of our present culture and city.

The Oxford Theatre

THE Oxford Theatre (previously named the Oddfellows Hall) was located in Fitzmaurice Street, in the area now occupied by Dennison and Day Lawyers and was constructed during Queen Victoria's reign. It was there that Wagga celebrated her Diamond Jubilee in 1897, and Wagga's first Eisteddfod was held. The old theatre had also been honoured with a visit from the renowned "Kangaroos" as they travelled to their Liverpool camp during the beginning of World War I.

During its time, the theatre hosted a number of famous performers such as Dame Nellie Melba, Marie Narrelle, Merian Leister, Allan Wilkie, Billy Kerr, Browning Mummery and the Reinner Sisters.

But despite its historical and cultural significance, the Oxford hosted its last musical, a comedy titled *Glassasheen*; during December 1936.

As it fell into decline, the theatre's trustee, Mr Fitzpatrick, opened the theatre briefly for short-term rental before it was purchased by a local firm, Jeremy, Brown & Cox, on January 20, 1959. The company sold wholesale and retail farming products and only planned to use the Oxford's ground floor.

Jeremy, Brown & Cox initially began as Thompson, Manning and Jeremy in 1863. Two of the founders were local to Wagga: Thompson's father was Wagga's first police magistrate and Jeremy was the catalyst for the construction of the Tumbarumba railway. The firm later became Jeremy and Co. in 1900 and 50 years afterwards, Jeremy Brown Pty Ltd.

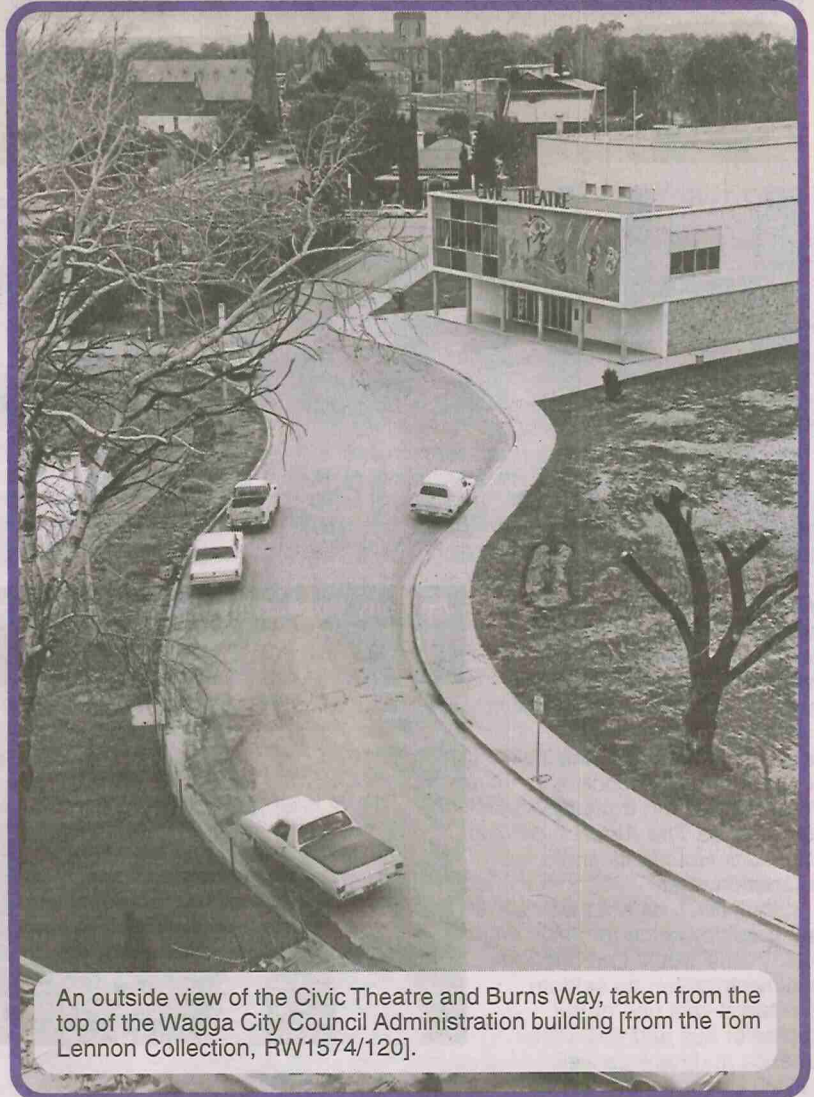
However, despite its long success, the firm did not hold a solid grip on the old Oxford Theatre. The building was later altered into an army disposal store and eventually demolished on June 22, 1968.

In its place were development plans for a finance company.

The Civic Theatre

THE Civic Theatre was built through a collaboration of funding from various groups, including the Wagga City Council, the Wagga School of Arts (£57,000), the Wagga War Memorial City Hall Fund (£6000), and The Community Aid Fund (£6756).

The School of Arts sold its own building in Fitzmaurice Street to raise the funds for the new theatre and the Wagga War Memorial City Hall Fund contributed the money it had been raising for a number of



An outside view of the Civic Theatre and Burns Way, taken from the top of the Wagga City Council Administration building [from the Tom Lennon Collection, RW1574/120].

years on the condition that a plaque memorialising those who had fallen in both world wars was included in the building.

Designed by SJ O'Halloran, the theatre held a seating capacity of 500 as well as 25 seats for an orchestra.

Construction of the theatre began in February 1962 by the Seibels Brothers and was officially opened on June 29 the following year.

The Civic Theatre was to one of many buildings in the Civic Precinct, which has been one of

Wagga's most ambitious developments. The Civic Theatre alone had cost a total of £165,000 and was the largest building in the area. Once completed, the Civic Precinct included: a Baby Health Centre (opened in November 1961, prior to the theatre), WWCC administration building offices, a Civic Auditorium and a public library, museum and art gallery.

Presently, the Civic Theatre is still in full use and has become a popular entertainment venue in Wagga for all ages and groups.

■ Compiled by Rebekah Lai