

CATHS Research Working Group

Report from Meeting

Wednesday 28 January 2026

Movies are so life-like. We live three times as long since man invented movies. They give us twice what we get from daily life. Director Edward Yang at a Q&A about his film *Yi Yi*.

PRESENT:

Peter Benn, Ross Campbell, Cameron Hall, Royce Harris, Ross King, Ian Smith, Keith Stevens and Tony Tibballs. Tony was a very welcome and unexpected visitor.

APOLOGIES

Geoff Gunst and Phil O’Kane.

BUSINESS ARISING

1. Film Distribution Story

Eric White and David Kilderry have written a bio of maverick distributor Bob Johnson. David also discovered a press feature lauding his achievements in the industry, which David dismissed as mostly fiction. Ross King has a juicy anecdote to add to the story. Film distribution (the firms and the people) is a huge topic, which will run in CR as an occasional series.

GENERAL BUSINESS

1. Jim White

A *Season’s Greetings* card was received from Jim. The group reciprocated by signing a card wishing Jim well in the next stage of his life: a Leongatha retirement home. Jim is now 95.

2. Five Masters of Plaster

Lyall’s Plasterer’s and Hoyts in CR 128 is worthy of a follow-up article highlighting the achievements of Picton Hopkins, William Brilliant, S Millsom and Sons, and more about Lyalls. A real find was to unearth the story of Otto Was chat and his Stucoid Plastic Art Company, which won the contract to shape the interior of the Capitol Swanston Street.

3. Palais St Kilda: Performers Comment on the Good and Not so Good.

Twenty-six million dollars was spent on renovations in 2017. New air-conditioning was an additional expense in 2025. An article in The Age Tuesday October 14, 2025 quoted performers who praised the Palais as a resplendent theatre, with unmatched acoustics. The downsides were the counter-weight rope pulley system for raising and lowering sets, and the primitive backstage conditions. The orchestra waits in a small, damp-smelling room beneath the stage, then crawls into the pit via a four-foot high ‘Hobbit’ door. When it rains water comes down the walls. For a building which has taken the brunt of corrosive salt air for 80 years, it’s a miracle there isn’t more water.

4. Brunswick Picture House Opens

Based on the success of his Thornbury Picture House Gus Berger and wife Lou opened the 81-seater on Sydney Road in October 2025. The initial feature was *Just One Thing After Another* (De Caprio), which Gus said mirrored the story of the project. The building is in a shopfront which dates to 1878.

5. Phoenix Cinema at the Rex Daylesford.

Daylesford would seem to be the ideal holiday town to support a cinema, but the project can’t get lift-off. A raffle of a Bromley painting (the artistic couple in the partnership) was drawn on Australia Day, and donations continue to be sought. Keith Stevens said that the community is divided about the idea, which isn’t the best starting point for a new idea. Workers can occasionally be seen entering via the temporary front door.

6. Update on Jam Factory Renewal.

The building is one-third demolished, and is now an L shape. The demolished chimney is to be re-erected in a different position. Untouched as yet, is David Kilderry's former office.

7. George Cinemas St Kilda. What is the building now?

Ralph Taranto's cinemas in St Kilda (run by Gus Berger for a short time) became The Alex Theatre. Transformed into a two-stage performance venue around 2015, it has served as a cultural hub featuring live theatre, rehearsals, and events. As of late 2024/2025, the venue was listed for sale, with its future potentially transitioning away from a theatre. (Information from Google.)

8. Vicki Shuttleworth's Louise Lovely Biography

Vicki was forced to re-work the book after a Tasmanian author published first. She has been working on an ABC *Compass* documentary about Labassa Caulfield. (Louise will get a mention.) She has three other projects on the go which involve other people or organisations.

9. West's Olympia - Sydney and Melbourne



T J West obviously had a penchant for V-shaped land, something only available in Melbourne well outside the CBD. His Melbourne Olympia opened in 1909, on a V-shaped site in South Melbourne; its barn-like appearance in keeping with the mix of factories, enclosed and open-air entertainments south of Princes Bridge.

The YMCA building, now also demolished, later occupied the site. This film image is courtesy of David Kilderry, and is believed to show West's employees on their way to their annual picnic.



West's Sydney Olympia in Paddington, opened two years later, is a landmark building. Les Tod explained that it was updated several times, to include an art deco treatment in 1941. Name changes were: Odeon 1954, Pallas 1966, Mandala 1969 and Academy Twin 1973. It closed in 2010, but re-opened in 2014 as the New Olympia for a rock show which lasted four weeks.

Reincarnated as The Grand Pacific Ball Room, it became one of the frontrunners of the small bar scene. Empty from 2015 it is now the

25hoursHotel The Olympia. (Quite a mouth full.) David Kilderry said that as the Academy Twin it retained the original large foyer, and the two cinema names were the 300 and the 500, reflecting their seating capacities.

10. Forum Flinders Street

Two questions were submitted to Royce: ownership and extent of repair work on the façade.

Safety netting was erected when masonry began falling from the building. Black fabric - which obscures what tradies are doing - has since been erected across part of the frontage. This might mean that repair work has started or is imminent, but we do not know. The building was last painted in 1981.

As for Marriner selling the Forum, the Research Group have no knowledge of that. (Google says 'No'.) The venue gets a lot of use with live music and solo acts.

11. Progress on Reassembly of the Capitol Organ

Organist Julian Arnold has the organ in storage in his large suburban workshop. A tender is out for the next stage of restoration.

12. Lakes Entrance Cinema Remains Closed

The dual squash courts and cinema closed during Covid, and judging by Facebook entries it is sadly missed. It did not open for the 2025/26 summer holidays, and is said to be on the market again.

13. Former Waverley Gardens.

For what was a nice complex there seem to be no photos of the interiors. [Royce has found a few interior pics, but nothing of the exterior.] Photographing a twin cinema from 1981 was apparently of little interest.

14. Former Grand Footscray

The building was sold in December, but we have no information about the buyer, or plans for it.

15. Former Western West Brunswick

Designed by prolific architect Charles Bohringer and opened in 1928, the building displays some of his favourite ideas, including a domed roof over the auditorium and skillion roof over the stage. It is Bohringer in a minor key. The building has been Estonian House for many years.

15. Books: *Who Knew* by Barry Diller, CEO Paramount 1974

20th Century-Fox: Darryl F Zanuck & the creation of the modern film studio - Scott Eyman

The Warner Brothers – Chris Yogerst

David has read both the Fox and Warner Bros book.

At Fox Zanuck was always in the editing room, intent on ensuring that every scene moved the story along. You can see this in two of the studio's best and widely different works: *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *Laura* (1945).

The Warner's book enlarges on how Jack bluffed older brother and company head Harry Warner into thinking that Jack would agree to Harry's plan to sell the company. Instead, Jack secretly arranged for his return as head man. This created a permanent family rift. Jack is not buried in the Warner family vault.

16. Warner Bros. - Netflix or Paramount?

No resolution has been announced.

Next Meeting:

Thursday 9 April 2026.