

**CATHS Research Working Group**  
**Report from Meeting**  
**Thursday 30 July 2026**

*We live three times as long since man invented movies. They give us twice what we get from daily life.*

(Director Edward Yang.)

**PRESENT:**

Peter Benn, Ross Campbell, Geoff Gunst, Cameron Hall, Ross King, Phil O’Kane and Ian Smith,

**APOLOGIES:**

Geoff Gunst, Royce Harris, Ross King and Keith Stevens

**BUSINESS ARISING**

**1. Film Distribution Story:**

- Final adjustments to first story - 35 mm Major Distributors

Text was considered satisfactory. Suggestions: (i) Include addresses in Melbourne and Sydney.

(ii) Include some adverts from Film Weekly for promotions and exaggerations to logos.

(iii) Include Mitchell House (UA) and Peacock House (Paramount) as interesting Melbourne offices.

(iv) First image should be film trunks on racks. David K to organise photo.

- Draft of Minor 35 mm Players

Work on this is in-hand by Kilderry and Smith. Additional entries have been sought from David Coles, Greg Lynch, David Donaldson and John Holloway.



**2. What is Happening Behind the Black Fabric at the Forum?**

Two companies - Melgrand and Crowntex Australia – are contracted for restoration of the façade to its original design, while adhering to strict heritage requirements. The work includes innovative techniques such as glass reinforced concrete for weight reduction. According to Google, the restoration of the façade is entirely self-funded by the Marriner Group.

**3. Jam Factory Renewal.**

The \$5 billion redevelopment from Gurner Group and Qualitas is the biggest project along Chapel Street but not the only one approved to rejuvenate the strip.

Tim Gurner says of the redevelopment, “When you drop a \$5 billion project, two hotels, active hospitality, active retail, it literally transforms overnight.” Gurner expects 4,000 people to live, visit or work at the Jam Factory when it opens in late 2029. The complex will include more than 800 apartments, luxury hotels, and 20,000 square metres of retail or commercial space – including a cinema – across five towers, with the tallest 32 metres high. With these proposed five-star appointments, the architecture of the cinemas will need to be a match.

**4. Warner Bros./Paramount Sale.**

The sale has been blocked by court order on the basis that it is anti-competitive. David Kilderry pinpoints the beginning of the downfall to the disastrous decision 30 years ago to merge Warner Bros as a Time -Warner Company. The pending sale was forced by a combination of mounting corporate debt, structural instability as Warner Bros Discovery, and an unsolicited \$110.9 billion takeover bid. While WBD originally intended only to spin off the company's cable channels into a standalone entity, a chain reaction of corporate manoeuvres upended these plans:

**Crushing Debt and Market Struggle:**

Following the initial merger that created WBD, the company struggled to establish a clear direction. It was bogged down by massive debt, resulting in aggressive cost-cutting measures, mass layoffs, and shelved projects that damaged industry goodwill.

### The Paramount Domino Effect:

In September 2025, Paramount Skydance (led by David Ellison) launched a series of unsolicited acquisition offers. This aggressive pursuit disrupted WBD's spin-off plans and effectively forced the WBD board of directors to place the entire company up for auction in October 2025 to maximize shareholder value.

### The Netflix Bidding War:

The auction sparked a fierce bidding war. WBD initially accepted an \$82.7 billion deal to sell its streaming and studio assets to Netflix.

### A Hostile Counter-Offer:

Refusing to back down, Paramount bypassed WBD leadership and launched a hostile tender offer directly to shareholders. Paramount ultimately sweetened its bid to \$31 per share (totalling \$110.9 billion) and included a "ticking fee" to protect shareholders against regulatory delays. Netflix declined to match this offer.

### Current Status (Mid-2026)

The sale is currently on hold until at least mid-2027. A coalition of 12 US states, led by California, filed a major antitrust lawsuit to block the merger, arguing that it will severely reduce competition in movie distribution and cable licensing.

## **GENERAL BUSINESS**

### **1. *If you're not in a recliner, you're not at Hoyts***

A TV screen message in the food court above Southern Cross Station.

It's taken the company a few years, but David says Hoyts has now equipped every screening room in every multiplex with reclining seats. More chance of nodding off.

### **2. Paramount's 1934 Australian poster competition for *Alice in Wonderland*.**



The studio co-opted all its creative talent to develop this first major live-action film adaptation, but audiences did not warm to favourite actors behind masks, and the film was a failure. A few actors were identifiable. For example, W. C. Fields with his round head was an obvious Humpty Dumpty, but who was it hidden under a rabbit head?

Gary Cooper was the White Knight, Cary Grant was the Mock Turtle, Richard Arlen the Chesire Cat and Louise Fazenda played the White Queen. Contemporary reviewers said she looked as though she was swathed in inner tubes (see below). Charlotte Henry played Alice to fine

reviews, but her career thereafter was in B pictures.



Paramount Australia announced a nation-wide competition for the best poster by either an amateur or professional artist. Mr John Rule of Carnegie won the prize of 30 pounds (which is \$3,700 today).

The details of the competition can be found on Trove, but there is no image of the poster. Did Paramount display it at theatres showing the film? **Action:** Ian to check with Carnegie Historical Society (or nearby Society) for any information.

### **3. Phoenix Cinema at the Rex, Daylesford**

The Phoenix is a 67-seat venue set within the balcony of the 1929 theatre, the size of the building now tripled to also house boutique shopping. Its avant-garde art spaces are reminiscent of MONA in Hobart. Every detail of the interior is quality workmanship.

The cinema is the best designed of the single screen venues visited by CATHS. According to the volunteer staff on duty for the 4.30 session on Tuesday 28 July, the on-again, off-again, history of this project finally became on-again with assistance from leaders in the independent cinema industry, including Mike Smith of the Sun Yarraville.

#### 4. The Odyssey at IMAX

IMAX Melbourne has the biggest 1.43 screen in the Southern Hemisphere (possibly the world), perfect for Nolan's 70 mm extravaganza. According to a spokesperson patrons will see 40 percent more image than on a standard screen, one reason why screenings are booked out one month in advance. The Sydney Ritz and Melbourne's Astor and Rivoli cinemas will also screen the film in the analogue format. Is this a temporary nostalgia-driven trend? Melbourne's IMAX projectionist Dan Drobik sees it as a lasting resurgence because "people are seeking out a quality experience". He claims "audiences are sick of picture-perfect streaming, "brain-rot" and pervasive digitisation, and want to turn to physical media that harkens back to simpler times and requires genuine craft." [The Age Tuesday July 14, 2026.]

#### 5. Hard Quiz Question

Q: Who was the former star who became the first female board member of a Hollywood studio?

A: Grace Kelly. It's well known that she never made another film, but lesser known is that she joined the board of Twentieth Century-Fox in 1976, and attended every meeting until her untimely death in 1982. She was also a script reader, which was perhaps a Fox ploy to tempt her back to the screen if she recognised the right project. Interesting too, that she didn't go back to MGM or Paramount, the sources of her major films.

#### 6. Touring in Turin



Italy's National Museum of Cinema is housed in the grandiose Mole Antonelliana building intended as a synagogue. It never housed a single religious service. In a burst of manic energy architect Antonelli went so far beyond his brief that when it was finished in 1896 the congregation could not pay for it. For years it was believed to be the tallest cement-render building in Europe.

#### NEXT MEETING

September 2026