

A BUNDABERG EVOLUTION

Mike Trickett



The site at 117 Bourbong Street Bundaberg has a rich history as the location of several different theatres over a course of more than 100 years.

the **Olympia Theatre**, some times adding "at the **Austral Hall**", at other times, referring to it as **Austral Hall Pictures**.



The first theatre to be built on the site at a cost of £6000 was the open-air **Olympia Airdome**, built and operated by Birch and Carroll. The official opening was on Wednesday 14 April 1920, having been delayed from the preceding Saturday night for unspecified reasons.

Both operations continued under the direction of Birch and Carroll, sometimes screening the same program at both venues.

The retention of both venues was necessary, as the **Airdome**, being open-air was not used during the winter months. In 1923, the theatre was enlarged and the sides enclosed, but the roof remained open to the elements.

Demolition under way at the Olympia Airzone



From 18 August 1911, Olympia Pictures under the direction of Birch & Carroll had been screening at the **Queens Theatre** and later at the **Austral Hall**. Screenings at the Austral Hall continued after the **Airdome** was opened, the venue eventually being renamed (for pictures)

Left: The opening program included *Sunnyside* starring Charlie Chaplin.



Above: The new Olympia exterior c. 1956

Photos of the **Olympia Airdome** at the time show a facade with a very modern appearance. In common with many open-air theatres of the time, the elaborate facade doubled as the projection room and box office, with the screen at the back of the property.

In 1955, the **Olympia Airdome** was closed and demolition started. Local tradesmen were amazed at the quality of the original construction, and demolition was not as easy as first thought.

A new modern theatre to be called the **Olympia Theatre** was built on the site. The theatre was built along modern lines, with curtains on the side walls and comfortable seating on two levels. It was opened on

7 August 1956. The first film to be screened was the CinemaScope release *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*.

It was again refurbished in 1973 and was renamed the **Crest Theatre**. The air-conditioned cinema was opened on 19 December 1973 by the then Queensland Premier, Sir Joh Bjelke Petersen. The **Crest** was managed by a variety of managers over the next five years until the purchase by Bundaberg City Council.

Between 1985 to 1987, the theatre underwent major changes to provide facilities for live theatre, as well as a cinema and was renamed the **Moncrieff Theatre**. The Theatre was officially opened on

Below: the modern interior styling of the newly opened Olympia Theatre c. 1956



16 August, 1987 by the Mayor of Bundaberg. The first movie to be screened was *Star Trek IV - The Voyage Home* on Wednesday 17 December 1986. The first stage show to be presented was *Johnny Chester*.

With the update of the venues' facade in October 2011 it underwent another name change, this time to the **Moncrieff Entertainment Centre**, a name which better describes the venue, as all forms of entertainment, including cinema, live theatre, concerts and conferences are held there. The **Moncrieff Entertainment Centre** is named after the world famous musical star Gladys Moncrieff, who was born in Bundaberg. ★

Credits:

Bundaberg Mail (Trove)
Moncrieff Entertainment Centre website
Personal visit

Images:

CATHS Archive
Mike Trickett



Above: As the Moncrieff Theatre c. 1988



Above: The spacious foyer and the well appointed auditorium



As the Moncrieff Entertainment Centre