

CREMORNE GARDENS / CREMORNE THEATRE (Perth)

aka **Palace Gardens / Bijou Theatre**

Established in 1895 as an open-air venue at the back of a Perth hotel, the Cremorne became an enclosed theatre the following year. It was leased twice by Harry Rickards (1897 and 1898) before coming under the control of Jones and Lawrence (1899-1902) and Leonard Davis (1904-07). Rickards reestablished his association with the venue between 1907 and 1911. Hugh McIntosh (Tivoli Theatres) leased it out for films, boxing and occasional vaudeville shows before it closed down in 1914. It was later used by the Y.M.C.A.

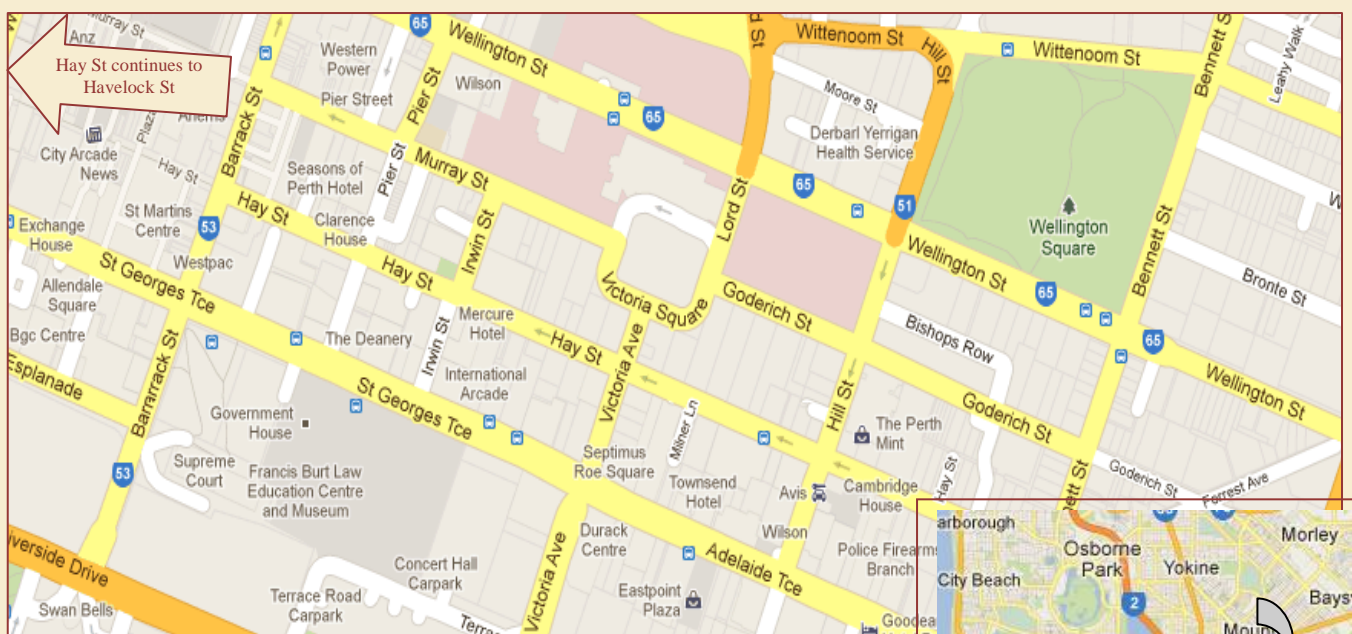


Rear stage wall facing Murray Street, ca. 1918,

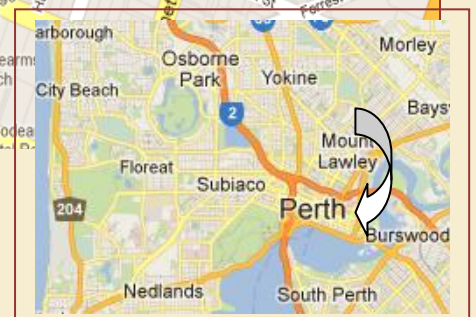
Source: theatreheritage.com

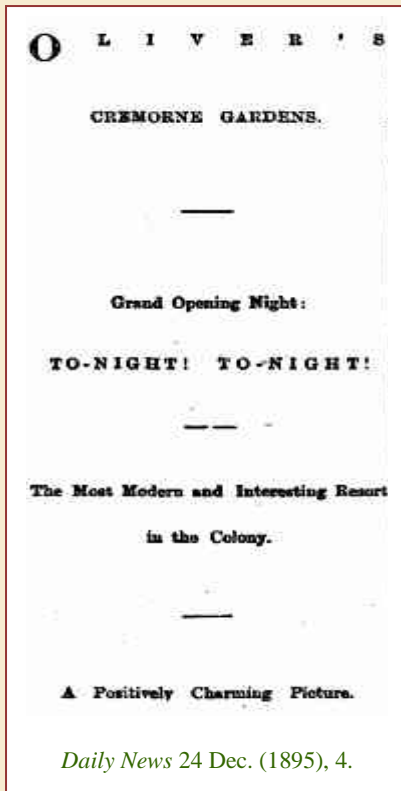
1895-1898

In April 1895 Mrs A. Oliver, formerly of South Australia and Broken Hill, assumed the proprietorship of Perth's Horse and Groom Hotel. She immediately announced her intention to extend the premises from its frontage in Goderich Street all the way back to Howick Street¹ in order to provide accommodation of the highest class (WA: 17 Apr. 1895, 1, 4). However, instead of accommodation, Oliver ended up turning the back of the hotel, renamed the Westralia, into a venue for amusements which she called the Cremorne Gardens (likely in honour of the well-known London pleasure grounds). In its preview of the official opening on Christmas Eve, the *Daily News* noted that the yard had been converted into an open-air venue comprising a rotunda, palms, rockeries and high brick walls painted with woodland scenery (3). George R Johnson (1840-98), an architect who had by then established his reputation for designing and erecting theatres throughout the colonies, had been given the commission to provide the architectural plans for both the garden and the hotel. The construction work was undertaken by Bunning Brothers.



¹ Now known as Hay Street, Howick Street was the name given to the thoroughfare which ran east-west between Barrack and Bennett Street. At that time Hay Street ran only between Havelock and Barrack Streets (to the west of Barrack St).





The *Daily News* further notes:

A new saloon bar and commercial room have been added on the south side of the hotel, the decorations of which are on an elaborate scale, though the materials used are mainly of a simple character. The doors and partitions are constructed of stained glass of artistic design and beautifully blended colours. The bar room is a harmony in blue, white and gold, and contains quite a wealth of nickel plating and railings. The garden consists of a lawn with verandah on one side and a number of summer houses and ferneries running around the other sides. The walls are built up high and contain panoramic views of scenery, chief amongst which is a view of Hobart and Mount Wellington in the background and the Derwent in the forefront. In the centre of the lawn is a carved rotunda, and here a band will nightly give promenade concerts (25 Dec. 1895, 5).

While making no report on the entertainment programme in its review of the opening night, the *Daily News* was highly complementary, and somewhat poetic, in its observations regarding the setting:

Lights gleam everywhere, from the kiosk in the centre, from the summer-houses round the sides, and from the grotto of ferns and rock-work at the southern end of the lawn, in which the musical splash of a fountain, falling in tinkering cadences, sounds soft upon the ear (27 Dec. 1896, 3).

The venue's first music director was a Mr Gardner. His small orchestra was also engaged for the event.

Some four months after opening the Gardens, Oliver began construction of an enclosed theatre on the site, opening it on 25 June as the Cremorne Theatre. The *West Australian* described the new theatre as "a pretty little place" that appeared "to be admirably adapted for the purpose it [was] intended to serve," and noted that its design was once again the work of George Johnson:

The hall is entered by a passage from Goderich-street, which is the main entrance, and there is also another one from Cremorne itself. The hall is 90ft long by 42ft wide, and its height is 25 ft. It has a balcony opposite the proscenium capable of seating 120 persons, while the body of the hall will hold 620 comfortably, and without any inconvenience the whole theatre can be made to seat 800 persons. The stage is 42ft long and 20ft deep, and has four dressing rooms leading on to the stage by a small staircase, and a dressing room on the same level as the stage. There are four exits from the body of the hall, and Mr Johnson says that in any case of emergency the hall can be easily cleared in a minute and a half (25 June 1896, 2).

The new venue's opening programme, performed in front of His Excellency the Governor and Lady Smith, comprised Melbourne and Adelaide artists such as Gwen Davies and Miss Gilhori, and Messrs, Fletcher, Patterson, Lambert and R. Shepherd. The musical direction was overseen by W. Ernst Crome.

The entertainment, and the use of the hall by local organisations, was initially managed entirely by Mrs Oliver herself (WA: 12 Dec. 1896, 4). The proprietress was forced to abandon her involvement some six months later, however, when she fell seriously ill (ICN: 11 Sept. 1896, 5). In early October it was announced that Mr King Hedley, well-known to Perth audiences, had undertaken to lease the Cremorne from the end of the month, and that he was presently in Melbourne securing a first class company of artists. This after some time lying vacant, the theatre reopened on 21 October with a programme billed as comprising "rational amusements" (WA: 2 Nov. 1896, 6).

On 11 December 1896, with her state of health still remaining "indifferent" Mrs Oliver announced her decision to sell the property. The *West Australian* said of her role as one of Perth's more prominent businesswomen, and also one of Western Australia's pioneering theatrical entrepreneurs: "Under her sole management the hotel and gardens have prospered in a remarkable manner, in fact to Mrs Oliver belongs the credit of establishing the most agreeable place of amusement in the colony. Few would recognise in the present Cremorne the dilapidated

CREMORNE THEATRE.

Proprietress ... Mrs. Oliver
 Lessee and Manager ... Mr. King Hedley.

ATTRACTION EXTRAORDINARY.
TO-NIGHT! TO-NIGHT!

THE MARVEL OF THE AGE.

THE GENUINE CINEMATOGRAPHE,
 Showing the following Pictures, with every
 Movement of Persons, Individually, and in
 Crowds, and Animals as completely and natu-
 rally as in real life:—
 Arrival of a Train, Soudanese Diving, Drags
 Leaving the Racecourse, Grand Steeplechase,
 Buckjumping Horse, Child and Dogs at Play,
 Watering Cavalry Horses, Fishing Party, A
 Game of Cards, a Street Scene, and Other..

THE GREAT SENSATION.
 Exhibitions at 8.30 and 9.30
 sharp

THE GENUINE CINEMATOGRAPHE.
 ADMISSION—ONE SHILLING.
 Children under 12, 6d.

Entrance from the Front of the Theatre and
 from Cremorne Gardens.

West Australian 12 Dec. (1896), 1.

Horse and Groom Hotel and grounds of but two years ago" (12 Dec. 1896, 4). It took until nearly the end of the year, however, before Oliver struck a deal with Edward Ingram, previously the proprietor of the Grand Hotel, to buy the property. In the meantime she continued to allow other firms lease the theatre. Interestingly, the day after he announcement she and King Hedley joined the ranks of Western Australian film pioneers when they presented the second-ever season of moving pictures - exhibited by the "Genuine Cinematographe."²

In April the following year Harry Rickards leased the Cremorne for a brief season with the intention of using the theatre as his base in Western Australia. In an interview with Perth's *Inquirer and Commercial News*, Rickards' representative, William Jenkins indicated that the company would not be using the gardens for performances, stating that the "artists [were] too valuable to run the risk of their catching throat infections." He did acknowledge, however, the importance of the outdoor areas as a promenade for people to stroll around during intermissions, and in this respect Mrs Oliver had "promised to effect certain alterations in the whole place [so as to] make it equal on a small-scale to the Madison-square gardens of New York" (9 Apr. 1897, 8).

Rickards' debut at the Cremorne saw the company headed by Charles Godfrey. Other key artists were the Leslie Brothers (Will and Fred), Alf Lawton and Master Fred Leslie. When Rickards ended his lease at the end of May, Charles Harper took over the theatre's management after having arranged to secure several of the Tivoli entrepreneur's leading artists. Thus the opening night bill similarly included the Leslie Brothers, Master Fred Leslie and Alf Lawton, with newcomers comprising such names as Frank York, Millie Herbert and Daisy Chard.

The theatre was next managed by Charles Harper before being purchased at the end of the year by Edward Ingram, previously the proprietor of the Grand Hotel. When Rickards sent a company back to the Cremorne in 1898 it was then being leased by the partnership of Watson and Bloom.

1899-1904

In late 1899 George A. Jones and George Lawrence took over the Cremorne. Arguably Perth's leading entrepreneurial firm at the turn of the century, the pair had previously run the city's Ye Olde Englyshe Fayre and Theatre Royal. The pair had become insolvent in March 1898, having over-extended their financial resources in the latter venture, but within less than two years were able to return to theatrical management. They opened their account at the Cremorne with a production of *Little Red Riding Hood*, and over the next three years presented an array of entertainments, including minstrelsy, vaudeville, pantomime and operetta. The partnership continued through until 1902, at which time Jones briefly became sole lessee. His association with the venue, during which time he renamed it the Bijou, concluded shortly after he was given a complimentary benefit in July 1902.

The venue remained neglected for over a year before Leonard Davis re-opened it as the Palace Gardens in 1904. Davis eventually handed over the sole lease of the venue to Harry Rickards in 1907 (although remaining sub-lessee). After considerable renovations were carried out in 1908 Rickards maintained an almost constant association with the Palace through until 1911, at which time came under the management of the Palace Picture Company. The following year Hugh D. McIntosh used it as a boxing stadium, with Leonard Davis advertised as his representative. Although Davis soon afterwards re-instated vaudeville there, increasing competition from new Perth-based entrepreneurs saw its falling patronage become unsustainable. After another brief period as a boxing stadium in 1914 the Palace finally closed down. It later became a Y.M.C.A.

SEE ALSO

- [Jones and Lawrence](#)
- [Harry Rickards](#)

CREMORNE THEATRE
Lessee and Director... **MR. HARRY RICKARDS**
Acting-Manager ... **W. M. A. JINKINS.**

THIS (SATURDAY) EVENING.

INAUGURATION NIGHT
OF
MR. HARRY RICKARDS'
TIVOLI COMPANY: TIVOLI COMPANY

[SPECIAL.]

In deference to the evident desire on the part of the Amusement-loving public the old-time Minstrel and Variety Performances has slowly but surely, given place to a Higher and Distinctly more REFINED CLASS of ENTERTAINMENT, which at the present time is the Aim of Leading London Managers to place before their Patrons. The MANAGEMENT of CREMORNE will be CONDUCTED PRECISELY on the SAME LINES that prevail at MR. RICKARDS' EASTERN THEATRES and which has been such a pronounced success. These observations serve to introduce an point to the OPENING—

THIS (SATURDAY) EVENING
Of the
Following Exceptionally Strong
COMPANY OF STARS

FIRST APPEARANCE OF
Mr. CHARLES GODFREY,
England's Greatest Descriptive Actor-Vocalist
and Character Impersonator, whose name is
now a household word throughout the English-speaking world.

West Australian 17 Apr. (1897), 1.

² The first recorded exhibition of film before the Perth public had occurred on 1 December at Ye Olde Englyshe Fayre under the management of Jones and Lawrence.

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. The London Cremorne Gardens was a popular pleasure ground which flourished between 1845 and the late 1870s. It situated by the River Thames between Chelsea Harbour and the end of the King's Road.

Phoebus Levin. "The Dancing Platform at Cremorne Gardens." (1864).
Source: *Wikipedia*



2. When Perth City Council met for its monthly meeting in February 1896, Councillor Molloy delayed the ordinary business of the council in order to first make an explanation/apology for comments he had made about the Cremorne Theatre at the previous meeting. The *West Australian* records:

On that occasion [Cr Molloy had] expressed an adverse opinion of the fact that the building surveyor had permitted such a structure to be put up in the city. He referred at the time, as most of the councillors know, to the place generally known as the Horse and Groom Hotel. In common justice to the proprietress of this place he had that evening to tell them that he had been prevailed upon to pay a visit to the building himself, and he was now of the opinion that it was everything that could be desired. His previously expressed opinion he now found to be entirely unfounded (Hear, hear.). The place was a pleasurable resort, properly conducted, and did great credit to the proprietress (8 Feb. 1896, n. pag.).

FURTHER REFERENCE

- "[Amusements.](#)" ICN: 30 Oct. (1896), 12.
"[Burglary at the Horse and Groom: Activity by the Detectives - Arrest of Two Men.](#)" WA: 30 Apr. (1895), 3.
"[Burglaries in Perth: A Professional Band at Work, The Horse and Groom Visited - An Iron Safe Carried Off, The Contents Taken.](#)" WA: 29 Apr. (1895), 2.
"[Cremorne Gardens Charged 1/-](#)" WA: 3 Jan. (1953), 12.
"[Cremorne Gardens: Opening Concert.](#)" WA: 2 Nov. (1896),
"[Cremorne Gardens, Perth, W.A. The.](#)" WM: 10 Dec. (1897), 140.
"[Cremorne Theatre: The Opening Concert.](#)" WA: 26 June (1896), 2.
"[Cremorne Theatre: This Evening's Opening Concert, The.](#)" WA: 25 June (1896), 2.
"[New Cremorne Gardens.](#)" DNP: 27 Dec. (1895), 3.
"[News and Notes.](#)" DNP: 25 Dec. (1895), 5.
"[Vaudeville Show: Harry Rickards in Perth, A Talk with Mr Jenkins, A](#)" ICN: 9 Apr. (1897), 8.

See also:



WA: 17 Apr. (1895), 1, 4.
DNP: 24 Dec. (1895), 3.

Cremorne Gardens, interior.
Leader 1 Nov. (1898), n. pag.
Source: theatreheritage.com