

# Theatre Royal

Further information on the Theatre Royal and the important role it has played within the theatrical world of Victoria, Australia and the world, as quoted in the Argus article

## **“The eventful history of one of the most widely known theatres of the world”**

The Argus Melbourne Victoria Monday 20th December 1937

### GAY ERA IS RECALLED OLD THEATRE ROYAL BRONZE PLAQUE UNVEILED

The gay theatrical era of 40 years ago was recalled yesterday, when about 200 actors and actresses, many of them with grey hair, met at the site of the old Theatre Royal in Bourke Street. The meeting was held in Manton's emporium, which was built on the foundations of the theatre.

A bronze plaque was unveiled by Miss Lucy Coppin, a daughter of the late Mr. George Coppin, who managed the theatre for many years. **the inscription on the plaque, - one speaker said, traced the strange, eventful history of one of the most widely known theatres in the world.**

“Mr. A. S. Kenyon in an introductory address said that the last night of the Theatre Royal, on November 17, 1933 was probably the most memorable night in the history of the theatre. The building was crowded and the audience did not leave until after midnight.

The chairman of the meeting (Mr. Charles Daley) outlined the history of the theatre from its first play on July 16 1855, Sheridan's "School for Scandal. “Three generations of playgoers had seen some of the world's finest actors there, he said. Mr. A. Peters said that the flesh and blood theatre will come up again after the motion picture has said its last. Among those who attended were Miss Joan Coppin, who is a great-granddaughter of the late Mr. Coppin; Mr. William Anderson; Miss Meta Pelham, who is said to be the oldest actress in the world; Mr. Fanning, who on his 16th birthday was the first person in the gallery on the opening night of the theatre; and Miss Lillie Bryer, whose name is on the Royal's oldest playbill.

# GAY ERA IS RECALLED

## OLD THEATRE ROYAL

### BRONZE PLAQUE UNVEILED

The gay theatrical era of 40 years ago was recalled yesterday, when about 200 actors and actresses, many of them with grey hair, met at the site of the old Theatre Royal in Bourke street.

The meeting was held in Manton's emporium, which was built on the foundations of the theatre. A bronze plaque was unveiled by Miss Lucy Coppin, a daughter of the late Mr. George Coppin, who managed the theatre for many years.

"The inscription on the plaque," one speaker said, "traced the strange, eventful history of one of the most widely known theatres in the world."

Mr. A. S. Kenyon in an introductory address said that the last night of the Theatre Royal, on November 17, 1933, was probably the most memorable night in the history of the theatre. The building was crowded and the audience did not leave until after midnight.

The chairman of the meeting (Mr. Charles Daley) outlined the history of the theatre from its first play on July 16, 1855, Sheridan's "School for Scandal." Three generations of playgoers had seen some of the world's finest actors there, he said.

Mr. A. Peters said that the "flesh and blood theatre will come up again after the motion picture has said its last."

Among those who attended were Miss Joan Coppin, who is a great-granddaughter of the late Mr. Coppin; Mr. William Anderson; Miss Meta Pelham, who is said to be the oldest actress in the world; Mr. John Fanning, who on his 16th birthday was the first person in the gallery on the opening night of the theatre; and Miss Lillie Bryer, whose name is on the Royal's oldest playbill.



The unveiling of the plaque Manton's Dec 20 1937 Historical Background & Currently The plaque in question begins with second Theatre Royal on the north side of Bourke Street, built in 1855 by John Black, the theatre, designed by architect J. R. Burns, was as big as London's Covent Garden with an elaborate stage large enough to accommodate the mounting of any extravaganza or "glorious pantomime", and seating for well over 3000. The opening production on 16 July 1855 was Richard Sheridan's The School for Scandal.



Theatre Royal Melbourne, 1861. State Library Victoria H20742

Barry Sullivan was sole lessee and manager from March 1863 to 16 February 1866, when he relinquished management. His lease still had a year to run, and he sublet it to William Hoskins, it was then taken over by a partnership of Richard Stewart, H. R. Harwood, T. S. Bellair, Charles Vincent, John Hennings, and J. C. Lambert.

In 1867 George Coppin joined, and Bellair, Lambert and Vincent dropped out. Coppin bought his partners out, and was sole manager in April 1872 when the theatre burned down.



The Theatre Royal, Melbourne, 1877. State Library Victoria H84.3/17

Coppin immediately rebuilt it bigger and better (the new theatre could seat 4,000 people over four tiers), and opened in November the same year, under joint management by Coppin, Stewart, Harwood and Hennings.

It was remodelled in 1904, seating fewer people more comfortably on three tiers, but the growing popularity of the moving pictures in the 1920s affected theatre attendance, and the effects of the Great Depression led to the closure of the theatre in 1932. In 1933 it was finally demolished, and replaced by Manton's department store, later becoming a Coles store, itself redeveloped into a Target store in the 1970s. Kmart now occupies the site.



The bar of the Theatre Royal,  
pictured: WJ Wilson W Pitt (top hat)  
George Coppin LL Smith Barmen  
Tupper and Peachmen





William Pitt Snr



His wife Jane Pitt



George Seth Coppin



One very happy man  
Greg Sampson who  
tracked down the  
plaque and  
documented it's story.

