

**SMITH, Chris COLLECTION**  
**Architecture Museum, University of South Australia**

**SMITH, Christopher Arthur (Chris)**

**SERIES 334**

**BIOGRAPHY**

Chris Smith (19/11/1892–2/3/1952) figured prominently in the design and development of picture theatres and municipal buildings in Adelaide and regional South Australia during the 1920s and 1930s.

Born in the Port Adelaide area, Smith completed less than eight years of schooling, leaving in 1906 to start a film distribution business with his five brothers. By 1915 he had trained as a master carpenter under Frickers and Son. Although he had no formal architectural training he practised as an architect and structural engineer between 1922 and 1932 in offices in King William Street, Adelaide. In the early 1930s he bought a property at Prospect and designed a fine Art Deco-style home that H.J. Emery built on the property's tennis court; he then worked from an office and studio above the garage.

Although not fully accepted by Adelaide architects, Smith counted Caradoc Ashton, Norman Fisher, Jack Cheesman and Maurice Doley as friends. After the *Architect's Registration Act* came into force in 1939 he was registered from 1941 until his death in 1952, having fulfilled the requirement of working as an architect for the specified period.

While the extent of Smith's connection with the York Theatre (opened November 1921, demolished 1961) in the city is unclear, for the next ten years he was involved in the construction of cinemas, including the Austral Picture Palace, Kilkenny (1922); Capri at Goodwood (1926; now on the State Heritage Register (SHR); Ozone Amusements at Alberton (1924); the Princess Theatre, Marrayatville (1924, now known as the Chelsea and on the SHR for the 1941 Art Deco renovations designed by F.K. Milne); the Garden Theatre, Colonel Light Gardens (1926); and the Ozone Theatre, Enfield (1926), which was furnished and decorated on a lavish scale.

Smith designed town halls for the regional towns of Clare (1925) and Peterborough (1926–27). His municipal council buildings designed between 1935 and 1941 are all listed on the SHR. His Art Deco-style theatre/hall commissioned by the Hindmarsh Council (1936) is acknowledged as 'a remarkable example of civic architecture of the period.' Other municipal offices and council chambers, again in Art Deco style, were designed for the Brighton Council (completed 1937) and Port Adelaide (1939), the latter being described as a fine example of Inter-War Functionalism.

By 1941, Smith's calls for tenders had ceased, coinciding with his appointment as Inspector of Places of Public Entertainment. His years connected with film and the cinema ensured a strong commitment to public safety, and he criticised any practices that he regarded as unsafe. He was also on a committee during the war years for assessing buildings in case of bombing.

In January 1946 Smith was admitted as an Associate of the South Australian Institute of Architects, although by then he was no longer working as an architect. Posthumously, he has received some recognition from the profession, with five of his buildings appearing in the Royal Australian Institute of Australia's listing of South Australia Significant Twentieth Century Architecture.

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Smith died at home in his 60th year, having had a diverse and successful practice and leaving behind notable Art Deco buildings.

This is an abridged version of: Alison McDougall, (2008) 'Chris Smith', *Architects of South Australia database*, online at

[http://www.architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au/arch\\_full.asp?Arch\\_ID=39](http://www.architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au/arch_full.asp?Arch_ID=39)

**SOURCES**

Apperly, R., Irving, R. & Reynolds, P. (1989) *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, Angus & Robertson, Australia.

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Thorne, R. (1976) *Picture Palace Architecture in Australia*, Sun Books, Melbourne.

Walker, D. (1996) *Adelaide's Silent Nights*, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra

**COLLECTION DESCRIPTION**

The Chris Smith collection is comprised of a scrapbook containing newspaper clippings, photographs, correspondence, programmes and ephemera relating to buildings designed by Chris A. Smith c.1921-1939. It also contains a book on Grecian, Roman, Italian and Gothic Architecture and a folio on the architectural orders.

**Series List**

<u>Series No.</u>	<u>Description</u>
S334/1	Scrapbook containing newspaper clippings, photographs, correspondence, programmes and ephemera relating to buildings designed by Chris A. Smith c.1921-1939. Buildings include: architect's own house at 5 Prospect Road, Prospect; Hindmarsh Town Hall c.1936; Brighton Town Hall; Ozone Theatre, Alberton, c.1924; Roxy Theatre, Everard Park, 1937; Synagogue and Rundle Buildings, Adelaide; Austral Theatre, Naracoorte, 1935; Onkaparinga District (Woodside) Hospital, 1928; Ozone Theatre, Semaphore, 1929; The York Theatre, Adelaide, 1921; Star Theatre, Unley, 1928; West's Olympia Theatre (Winter Garden 1923); Marryatville Theatre (photographs); Port Adelaide Council Chambers, 1939; Picture theatre, Gawler, c.1934; Clare Town Hall, 1926; Sea baths, Glenelg; Semaphore Soldiers' Memorial Hall, 1929; National Pictures Ltd., Victor Harbor, 1923; Peterborough Town Hall, 1927; Colonel Light gardens Theatre; Kadina's Picture Palace, 1921; Prospect Theatre, 1923; Star Theatre, Norwood; Theatre, Murray Bridge; Glenelg Palais Theatre, 1922; and drawing of a gate-post lantern (ink on linen).
S334/2	Book - Parker, J.H. (1879) 'A concise glossary of terms used in Grecian, Roman, Italian and Gothic Architecture', James Parker and Co., London.
S334/3	Folio - American School of Correspondence, 'The Orders'

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