Warner Hollywood Theatre, opened 1928 (date of photo), 2350 seats, closed

HISTORIC MOVIE THEATRES
HOLLYWOOD & LOS ANGELES
BUILDING ENGINEERING SERVICES

BRIAN ROBERTS
INTRODUCTION

Grauman’s Chinese, opened 1927, 2200 seats. The world’s most famous historic theatre

The author, now long retired, visited Hollywood and Los Angeles on both business and as a tourist in the 1970s and 80s, viewing skyscrapers (then very few in LA), hotels and even toured a film studio, but never managed to view the engineering services in the many movie theatres.

Now, during the first months of the 2021 coronavirus pandemic lockdown, I have put together and have had privately printed just a few copies of this book containing some 60 behind-the-scenes photographs of the remains of engineering services and equipment in a few historic theatres. These services, in the largely redundant basement areas, now contain the rusting remains of air conditioning: fans, spray-type air washers, ductwork, refrigeration machines, boilers, pumps and electrical power-lighting panels. Some photographs include the modern replacement electrical panels.

Just a few of the featured movie theatres, dating from the 1920s, are still in use, some part-time, some closed, one demolished; over time a few have been converted to a nightclub, a church and one even to a jewellery store.

The photographs have been taken from the specialist websites losangelestheatres.blogspot with some additional pictures and information from cinematreasures.org, the latter having information on some 55,000 theatres (but not the engineering) across the world.

BMR, Budleigh Salterton, 2021.
CONTENTS

WARNER THEATRE, BEVERLEY HILLS 1931, 1500 seats, demolished: page 3

LOS ANGELES THEATRE 1927, 2190 seats, open: pages 4 to 13

WARNER HOLLYWOOD THEATRE 1928, 2380 seats, closed: pages 1, 14 to 21

SHRINE AUDITORIUM 1926, 6308 seats, open: pages 22 to 29
The largest in the USA, even more seats than Radio City Music Hall, New York

TOWER THEATRE 1927, 906 seats, jewellery store: pages 30 to 37

WILTERN once WARNER THEATRE, 1931, 1850 seats, open: pages 38 to 44
Los Angeles theatre in 1931. Opened 1927, 2190 seats
Air conditioning by Carrier
LOS ANGELES THEATRE

Detail of single phase switchboard (left)

Main single phase switchboard
Newer 3-phase switchboard
LOS ANGELES THEATRE

Replacement refrigeration plant
Main 3-phase switchboard
Looking past switchboard into fan room
The single phase switchboard
LOS ANGELES THEATRE

Mechanical room switchboard

Main supply fan
LOS ANGELES THEATRE

Sump pumps with section of 3-phase switch board

Air washer and steam coils
Early Carrier centrifugal chiller with square heat exchangers
WARNER HOLLYWOOD THEATRE

Air conditioned with ammonia refrigeration system
WARNER HOLLYWOOD THEATRE

Boiler plant
WARNER HOLLYWOOD THEATRE

Ammonia refrigerating compressors
WARNER HOLLYWOOD THEATRE

Main boilers (background) with smaller unit (in front) and water heaters (left)

Elevator motor in roof penthouse
WARNER HOLLYWOOD THEATRE

Ductwork system under auditorium
WARNER HOLLYWOOD THEATRE

Fan room

Spray air washer chamber
WARNER HOLLYWOOD THEATRE

Fan room and distribution ductwork
WARNER HOLLYWOOD THEATRE

Refrigeration compressors

Fan and mechanical equipment control panel
Los Angeles, opened 1926, 6308 seats (the largest in the USA),
Air conditioned
SHRINE AUDITORIUM

Theatre switchboard

Emergency generator
SHRINE AUDITORIUM

The organ blower

Hub stage switchboard 1926
SHRINE AUDITORIUM

Centrifugal fan and drive guard
SHRINE AUDITORIUM

Centrifugal supply fan

Centrifugal supply fan and water heating plant
SHRINE AUDITORIUM

Boiler plant
SHRINE AUDITORIUM

Theatre switchboard

Centrifugal chilled water refrigeration machine
SHRINE AUDITORIUM

Fire curtain mechanism
TOWER THEATRE

Downtown Los Angeles 1927, the year the theatre opened with 906 seats
Original air conditioning by Carrier
Hydraulic mechanism for organ lift
TOWER THEATRE

Looking into the boiler room
TOWER THEATRE

In the boiler room

Main lighting control panel
TOWER THEATRE

Direct expansion cooling coil
TOWER THEATRE

Trane refrigeration system (original installation was Carrier)

Air conditioning plant
Remains of the 1927 air conditioning system
Mechanical equipment room
WILTERN THEATRE

Wiltern Theatre (once Warner Theatre) in the mid-1930s. Opened 1931, 1850 seats. Originally evaporative spray washer cooling system, refrigeration added in 1984
WILTERN THEATRE

Upstairs fan room
WILTERN THEATRE

Main exhaust fan
WILTERN THEATRE

Spray washer chamber
WILTERN THEATRE

Air washer and supply air ductwork

Refrigeration added in 1984
WILTERN THEATRE

Mechanical room

Electrical switchboard
WILTERN THEATRE

Projection room control panel

Projection room