

FACT SHEET

PHILIP GOATCHER 1851-1931



Philip Goatcher was born on the 23rd November 1851, London, son of a scene painter. He left school in his early teens to work as a law clerk at Lincoln's Inn Chambers. In his spare time he would visit Sadler's Wells Theatre and at work he amused himself sketching stage art on office pads.

At 14 he undertook an apprenticeship with a Liverpool shipping firm and sailed to Melbourne in 1867. He jumped ship and walked to Ballarat, then at the height of its gold rush. Philip's sketches attracted the attention of John Hemmings, who had worked for the Theatre Royal, and was recognized as Melbourne's leading scene painter.

Hemmings predicted a great future as a painter for the young man but Philip had gold fever and moved on, first to New Zealand and then to San Francisco. It was there he met the young J. C. Williamson, an American actor and later a prominent theatre director in Australia. He became Principle Designer at Wallack's Theatre in New York from 1875 – 1885.

Photograph of Philip Goatcher

His work included designs for companies led by David Belasco, Edwin Booth, Dion Boucicault and Lillie Langtry was not until Goatcher returned to London that he began his new career in earnest.

Philip painted stage sets and curtains at Drury Lane and Covent Garden and then returned to the U.S. where he married, had four children, and painted for most leading theaters. Philip divorced in 1890 after which he returned to England with two of his elder sons. While there he worked for both Henry Irving and Richard D'Oyly Carte.

It is probable that this association with the successful Savoy operas influenced the offer made to him a year later in 1890 by J. C. Williamson.

J. C. Williamson brought him to Australia in 1890's as the highest paid scene painter in the world at 1000 guineas a year. Philip was nicknamed "Satin and Velvet" Goatcher because of the textile illusions he created. Philip Goatcher has been described as one of the finest designers of the late Victorian style. His preference in stage design was for painting the 'cloth', that is the pictures at the back of the set, because in that work 'nothing is left to mechanical effect. It is all art ...', his forte was the '*trompe l'oeil*' style. "*Trompe L'œil*" (trick the eye) is a form of illusionary art, designed to deceive the viewer into believing that depicted objects appear in three-dimensions instead of actually being a two-dimensional painting.

In Australia, Phil W. Goatcher as he signed himself, painted for most of J.C. Williamson's opera and drama productions. Beginning in 1890 at the, Princess Theatre Melbourne with the set for the production "The Gondoliers". Believing a drier climate would help his acute

bronchitis, Goatcher came to Perth with his surviving son James and his second wife in 1906. Together they set up a successful painting and decorating business in West Perth. His wife died there on Christmas Eve 1913. Goatcher had semi-retired in 1911 after his work for Williamson. He continued work in Perth and later took up land in Dalwallinu, in 1916, where he was a member of the Roads Board and a Justice of the Peace. Philip Goatcher died in West Perth on the 8th October 1931, aged 79.



The Bay of Naples

The Bay of Naples curtain at the Boulder Town hall is believed to be the only surviving theatre curtain of this form in Australia. The Boulder curtain depicts a Neapolitan scene with the volcano, Vesuvius in the background, surrounded by tranquil water. This is recognition perhaps of the number of Italians working in the Eastern Goldfields at that time. The central figure is an orange seller and it was described in 1908 that at a distance of 60 ft each separate

orange could be distinctly seen.



Boulder Town Hall

It was painted in 1908 as a drop-canvas to complement and close the 'picture frame' stage. Goatcher painted the curtain for £50, less than a year after painting one for the Midland Town Hall.

The curtain measures 6.25m in height and 8.45m in width, signed and dated 'Phil W. Goatcher 1908' was delivered to the Building Committee on 11th June 1908.

Goatcher Theatre Curtain

Conservation of the Goatcher Curtain

Over time the Goatcher curtain was forgotten, as the hall and stage scenery were less used. The curtain was in a state of disrepair largely because it had been intended to last only a limited number of seasons; as such the canvas was thin and unprimed, and the paints water soluble. The canvas became cut and torn in many places and the paint layer unstable, dust water leaks, vandalism, wear and tear and neglect contributed to its poor condition.

It was rediscovered in 1990, by a local artist sifting through back stage props. In 1991 a preliminary conservation report for the curtain was prepared by Gordon Hudson, of the Art Gallery of Western Australia. In 1994, a conservation report by professional artist and restorer Barbara Cena, M. A., estimated the cost of restoration at about \$224,000. A community group called "Boulder's Hidden Secrets" made up largely of volunteers took up the challenge to raise funds to carry out the work. Fundraising included years of selling postcards and conducting

tours of the Town Hall.

The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder also received funding from the National Estate grant program, a Commonwealth-finances grant scheme. The conservation project was carried out in 1997 by International Conservation Sydney at a cost of \$250,000. The conservation process, which included placing the canvas on a new stretcher, took six months to complete.

Other remaining works by Philip Goatcher

Given the ephemeral nature of stage scenery, often painted over as needed, it is believed that the Goatcher curtain at Boulder Town Hall is the only surviving Goatcher theater piece in the world. Other examples of Goatcher's art known to exist are a fresco mural in the chapel of St Gertrude's School, New Norcia, oil on canvas mural in the Romanesque style in All Saints' Anglican Church, Collie, 1922 and an oil on canvas painting, "The Annunciation" in St John's Anglican Church, Freemantle, 1916.