

JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

Compiled by: Dr JJ Bruwer, 2002-07-29

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NAME OF PLACE: HILSON HOUSE

Left: Pritchard Street elevation.

Centre: part of Pritchard Street elevation.

Right: view of the subject building and its western neighbours, from left to right, *The Royalty Building* and *Dunvegan Chambers*.Previous/alternative name/s : originally – *Hepworths*; 1954 – *Hepworth's Building*

LOCATION: Street : Pritchard
 Street number : 70
 Stand Number : 670
 Previous Stand Number: originally 1672
 Block number : AC
 GIS reference :

ZONING: Current use/s :
 Previous use/s :

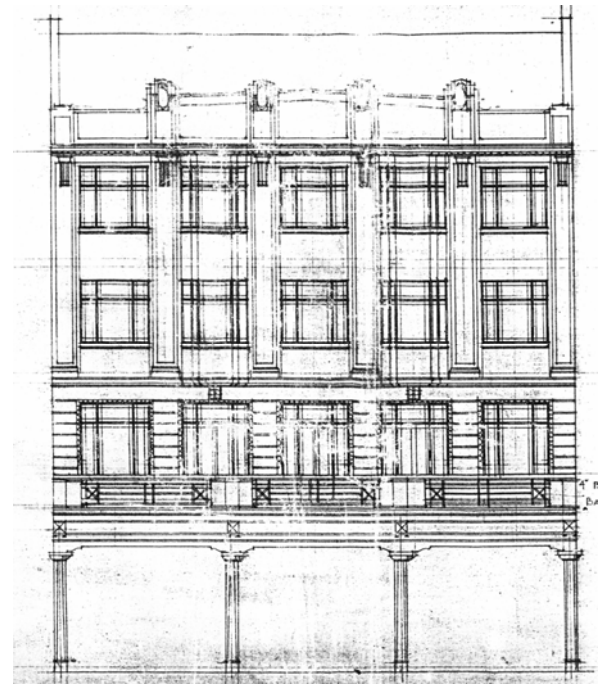
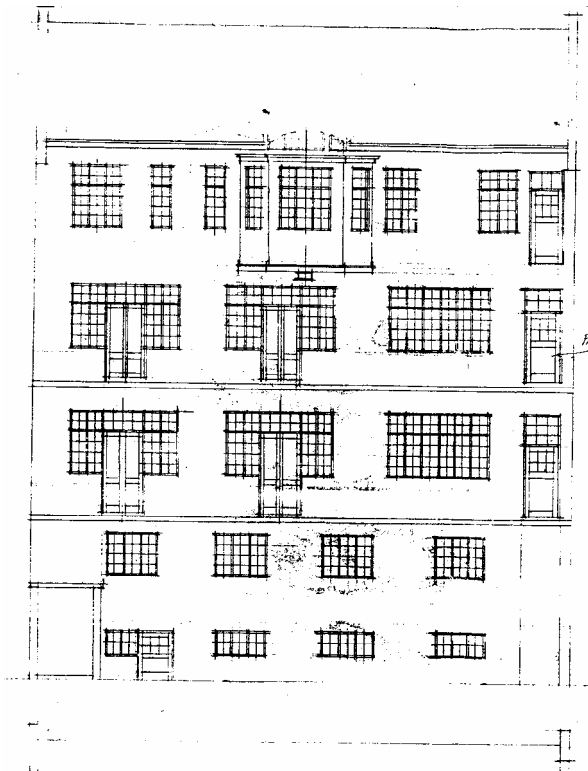
DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

Height :
 Levels above street level : four
 Levels below street level : none
 On-site parking : none

Van Der Waal: "While the commercial buildings were vertically orientated, especially in the upper portions of their facades, they did not entirely escape the force of the strong horizontal lines and planes of the display windows and pavement hoods. Verandahs with their pillars began to be replaced

by cantilever pavement covers in the early 1930s, but such hoods were first used in the *Paramount Building* (see AE-1) as early as 1911. In Johannesburg this change-over was more gradual than in Sydney, Australia, where new building regulations introduced in 1912 banned verandahs altogether...Initially, Johannesburg's hoods were fitted with bearer beams on the underside. Later however, beams were placed on the upper side of the hood to leave an uncluttered ceiling over the pavement. The effect of this practice was that the hoods, together with the long bands of display windows, reinforced the suggestion of horizontal movement in the smooth street and pavement surfaces." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

The prominently sculptured brackets under the oriel windows are a most attractive but purely ornamental feature. The use of such non-functional design elements is, however, typical of the work of the architects J.C. Cook & Cowen.



Top: Copies of original elevation drawings.

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

- Walls: reinforced concrete; burnt brick walls; plastered façade.
- Roof: originally gabled corrugated iron roof and timber rafters; now flat; concrete.
- Windows: steel frame; casement.
- Canopy: originally, Corinthian columns to canopy and balustrade to balcony.

SITE FEATURES:

ALTERATIONS:

- 1955: building converted to warehouse and name changed to *Hilson House*.
- 1972: alterations done for Clicks.

See INTEGRITY.

INTEGRITY:

Some 'bright spark' thought it good to remove the original corrugated iron gable roof but did not stop there. Whilst wondering if this is enough to deface the building decided the beautiful Corinthian

columns supporting the canopy should also go and all ornamental work on the canopy front should be erased. Standing back and admiring the handy work decided the balustrade to be very attractive and this would not do; with the balustrade gone decided yes, now I have done all I could to destroy this nice-looking building! Catharina JM Bruwer.

INSCRIPTION:

ARCHITECT:

J.C. Cook & Cowen.

BUILDER:

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

Date on plans :
Approval of plans : 28 December 1928
Completion date : August 1929

BUILDING STYLE:

Art Deco - Stripped Neo Classical.

BUILDING TYPE:

Hilson House originally designed as a store for the well-known clothing chain store Hepworths.

ENVIRONMENT:

The overpowering scale of the *Dunvegan Chambers* (AC-4) emphasizes the fragile and delicate appearance of *The Royalty*. The slightly more elaborate *Hilson House* stands in successful contrast to the richly decorated Edwardian *Cuthberts Building* (a Stucke & Banister design, see AC-7). The architects J.C. Cook & Cowen designed all three abovementioned buildings, which collectively, represent a good example of the diversity and talents of these architects.

Here in Pritchard Street, between Joubert and Eloff Streets, is to be found one of the most interesting collections of buildings in the City, all designed by the well known architectural practice of J.C. Cook & Cowen. This collection, which clearly illustrates the diversified talents of J.C. Cook and Maurice Cowen, comprises of the *Dunvegan Chambers* (AC-4), *The Royalty Building* (see AC-5), and the *Hilson House*. The dominant member of this ensemble of buildings, no doubt, is the *Dunvegan Chambers*, which, notwithstanding the difference in scale, form and materials between this building and its neighbours to the east continues to show valuable qualities of interconnectedness with the *Royalty Building*, and the *Hilson House*. The effect of its dominancy furthermore, tends to be countered by the imposing architecture of the *Cuthberts Building* on the southwestern corner of Pritchard and Eloff Streets.

The June 1976 RAU Report describes the building's façade as having certain features in common with the *Cuthberts Building* and due to its design, contributes to the environment, the building is also rated as worth keeping.

CONDITION:

Seen from the outside, the building appears to be in a good condition.

URGENT ACTION:

SAHRA RECORD REGARDING ALTERATIONS, RENOVATIONS, RESTORATION:

PROTECTION STATUS: (under National Heritage Resources Act, 1999)

General protection:	Section 34(1) structure/s	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Formal protection:	provincial heritage site	<input type="checkbox"/>
	national heritage site	<input type="checkbox"/>

provisional protection	<input type="checkbox"/>
heritage area	<input type="checkbox"/>
listed in provincial heritage resources register	<input type="checkbox"/>

Relevant Gazette Notice:

Gazette description:

FORMER PROTECTION STATUS: (under National Monuments Act, 1969)

NOTES:

DEEDS INFORMATION:

Original ownership: Hepworths.

By 1976: Mining Officials Pension Fund

PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:

VACANT STAND:

This stand remained vacant for quite some time and the *Duffus Bros. Building* was the first known building to be erected on this stand.

DUFFUS BROS. BUILDING:

The *Duffus Bros. Building* previously stood on this site. This Neo-Queen Anne style building was designed by the architects Emley & Scott. Completed in 1893, it had a richly ornamental façade, comprising carefully selected sections of red brick and plastered surfaces.

G.-M. van der Waal describes the *Duffus Bros. Building* as follows: "There was also a marked difference between shops built before 1895 and those that came after. The first shops constructed after the economic depression of 1889-90 were of simple design and modest in scale and ornamentation. Examples were: *Juta Building* (1892), 43 Pritchard Street [see Pre-History: V-1]; *Kimberley House* (1892), 44 Pritchard Street [R-1]; the first *Thorne & Stuttaford Building* (1893), 58, 60 Pritchard Street [see Pre-History: T-2]; *Duffus Bros Building* (1893), 70 Pritchard Street; *Henwood Building* [see Pre-History: AE-1] and *Paddon & Brock Building* (1893) [see Pre-History: and AC-5], 56 [sic. this should be 44] Joubert Street and 68 Pritchard Street. The first four were built in the style of the period before 1890 – a free and folksy interpretation of classicist building forms. By contrast, *Duffus Bros* and *Paddon & Brock Buildings* in particular were cast in a new style, the picturesque Neo-Queen Anne, as revealed mainly by the prominent gables and colourful variations between red-brick wall surfaces and pale plaster accents. The interruption of the street wall's roof silhouette by gables gave the buildings an individual colour and aspect, so that these 'gable buildings broke away from the homogeneity which was such an important feature of building styles prior to 1890. The commercial buildings erected between 1894 and 1899 underscored this differentiation still further, thereby reinforcing the identity of the shopping district." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

HISTORY:

Helen Grange in a most informative newspaper article titled "Graceful old stores have all gone" (date of publication not known) on department stores in early Johannesburg, writes as follows: "Of all the character changes which have left their mark on Johannesburg none has been more noticeable than the disappearance, in the 1970s, of the graceful old department stores. Its contemporaries – Ansteys, Belfast, Ackermans, Paramount and Stuttafords went too. So complete was the rout that Stuttaford's building in the city remained derelict for years. Some would even remember the firm of Blinman, Holwell and Islip – a department store with style and panache in the British manner in Eloff Street on the site now occupied by the OK. The OK was one of the stores which stayed – and flourished. Historically, these stores all stood relatively close to each other, in the city's prime spots. Their siting was considered to be of huge significance in terms of fashion appeal – and only very few streets were regarded as fashionable. These streets were all north of Commissioner Street – that part of the city which the Transvaal Republic auctioned to the public in 1886 when Johannesburg was born. South of that street on what historically mine-owned land, are the grandiose old mining and financial houses. John Orr's had been a pioneer department store. Stuttafords had also been a household name since

early in the century. But when Sam Cohen launched the cash-and-carry store called OK Bazaars in 1927 he was told it would fail – it was, people said, on the ‘wrong side of Eloff Street’. Not only did the Eloff Street store do a roaring trade, it triggered a new age of cash stores and remained a powerful force even when similar cash stores were foundering. Instalment credit Because large department stores occupying four to five floors presented management difficulties, speciality department stores emerged – and quickly grew. One of the earliest speciality stores to open its doors was Hepworths, a menswear [sic.] retailer launched in 1894 in Harrison Street [on the corner of Eloff Street]. Edworks, the country-wide shoe chain opened its first Johannesburg shop on the corner of Joubert and Pritchard streets in 1924 – Foschini’s clothing outfitters started in 1925 (in Pritchard Street) and Truworths opened soon afterwards in 1926 (on the corner of President and Eloff). But the most noteworthy speciality store was Edgars, which started in 1939 as a tiny business specialising in giving instalment credit to typists and shop assistants when John Orr’s was serving the upper end of the market. Since then, Edgars has established the largest and most successful speciality department store in Market Street (where the Belfast used to be) while also spreading its chain into shopping centres and other central areas nationwide. Its subsidiaries [sic.], Sales House and Jet Stores are major chains in their own right, each aiming at identifiable segments of the market. It was management difficulties which saw the closure of the old-timer, Greatermans, in 1982. The space vacated was promptly taken by Dions, a very successful speciality store dealing in furniture, sporting and photographic equipment and appliances....While some department stores went to the suburbs some, like Ansteys whose tall stepped building was the city’s highest for years, and the bargain-basement shop, Paramount, simply disappeared. Ackermans, a giant in the 1920s, was bought out by Pep stores and today exists only as a supplement to Pep.”

See also *Foschini Building* (Joubert Street), Document AC-9.

It was highly fashionable in the Seventies to collect trousseau and I still possess some of the articles collected during those years; a wooden cutlery-holder bought at the main OK as it was known then; pieces of a dinner-set from *Greatermans* with the words ‘Microwave oven safe’ printed on the bottom – keeping in mind that microwave ovens were not a household name in the 70s in South-Africa; a rose-pattern stainless steel kitchen utensil set from *John Orr’s* at a sale price of R25.00 – remember the rose-pattern, it was on everything such as glasses, dinner sets, carving sets and cutlery. Every Easter season a special stand was allocated for Easter eggs in *Greatermans* at the entrance on Rissik Street, the eggs I remember were the size of an ostrich egg, hand decorated with icing sugar and by special request, a name was iced on the egg. The best place to have breakfast on a Saturday morning was at the restaurant located on one of the upper floors in *Greatermans* – their scrambled eggs and toast was well known. My first account was opened at Edgars, the manageress was a Mrs. Van Den Heever, and with her help the account was opened without the permission of my parents, keep in mind that during the 70s women had fewer rights than now! The amount I could buy for was a staggering thirty rand! *John Orr’s* had a Jucy Lucy bar and it was very vogue to say ‘O, I went to John Orr’s today.’ The clothes sold at *Foschini’s* and *Truworths* were more expensive but their window dressing was always very tasteful and nice shops to do window-shopping at. Catharina JM Bruwer.

GENERAL NOTES:

Estimated cost of building	: £13 500
Estimated cost of drainage	: £500
Accommodation approved	:
Valuation at completion	:
Occupied	: yes

In a letter dated 25th May 1992 to J Hugo, Director: City Planning, City of Johannesburg, Flo Bird, then chairperson of the Transvaal Plans Committee of the former NMC, stated as follows:“...We have been asked to approve the demolition of yet another block of flats in the CDB. This is Mansfield House (101 President Street), on the north-east corner of President and Joubert Streets. The developer has purchased the entire block (the city block bounded by President, Eloff, Pritchard and Joubert Streets), having been warned in advance of the historical importance of a number of buildings on it. These include Cutherts (see AC-7), Penlan (see AC-2), Hilson (see AC-6), The Royalty (see AC-5), Dunvegan Chambers (see AC-4) and possibly Ranath House (see AC-8)...When that assessment was made some years ago, Mansfield was not considered of great significance. It is a good substantial building, with relatively modest Art Deco facades, designed by the same architects as Hilson, the (sic.) Royalty and Dunvegan ie (J.C.) Cook and Cowen, but less lavishly – presumably because it was done in the Depression (during the early 1930s). A case can be made to some extent for its conservation in terms of the National Monuments Act, but it is not of such outstanding significance as to be worth retaining if that is the only contribution it makes. The NMC has always tried to work with the City Council in terms of planning policies, because it is our belief that conservation is most successful where it is

integrated into planning. According to numerous press statements the Council is deeply concerned with increasing the residential component of the CDB. We understand it is fundamental to all proposals for revitalising the City Centre. If this is the case, is the City Council opposed to the demolition of Mansfield House? Is there a plan which deals with maintaining or increasing the residential stock in this sector? And if there are plans for this what incentives are being offered to landlords and/or developers? The redevelopment of the block as outlined by the developers exclude any residential component. It is proposed to erect two stories of retail space, with a floor of offices above. They are prepared to retain the facades and a certain module of the original building behind (at least up to the pitch of the roof where applicable) in respect of Hilson, the (sic.) Royalty, Ranath and Penlan. Cuthberts will be retained intact since it is already a fully declared National Monument. But is it proposed to remove Dunvegan Chambers, as well as the two newer buildings, Fine Arts (see AC-3) and Franwell."

It was recommended in a Conservation Area survey by the former NMC – undated – that the *Hilson House* should be declared as a national monument.

PREVIOUS TENANT:

By 1954: Levson's Studios.

CURRENT TENANT:

Totalsports.

SOURCES:

For additional illustrative information, see relevant supplementary photo album in electronic format.

See SOURCES DOCUMENT for information on sources consulted with reference to this document.

ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Historic Value:

- Associated with historic person, group or organisation
- Associated with historic event or activity

Architectural/Aesthetic value:

- Important example of building type
- Important example of a style or period
- Fine details, workmanship or aesthetics
- Work of a major architect or builder

Social/Spiritual/Linguistic value:

- Associated with social, spiritual, linguistic, economic or political activity
- Illustrates an historical period

Scientific/Technological value:

- Example of industrial, technical or engineering development/achievement
- New, rare or experimental building techniques

RECORDED BY:

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Unless otherwise indicated photographs by Catharina JM Bruwer.







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Totalsports



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