
JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

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

NAME OF PLACE: Rand Water Board Building

Previous/alternative name/s : Custom House (collective name)
(also known as the Leith Building)

LOCATION: Street : Fraser
Street number : 3, 5
Stand number : 4508 (previously 739, 741, 874 and 875)
Block number : C

ZONING: Current use/s : Business one
Previous use/s :

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

This building originally (a four-storey building) comprised the following: basement for parking, including records rooms, transformer room, as well as a sub-basement (boiler room); ground floor; and three floors up; lift motor room and caretaker's flat on top.

It is now a six-and-a-half storey building. See ALTERATIONS.

Aspects worth mention in regard to this building are as follows:

Ground floor - the marble floor and marble lining in the lobby and the entrance hall; the latter leading into a spacious board room with a committee room at its rear; the wood block floors in the remaining spaces, e.g. offices, as well as the panelled walls of the offices, board room as well as the committee room;

First to third floors - the terrazzo floors with marble margins as well as the black brick (with marble surrounds) walls at the lift lobby on each floor; the panelled walls and wood block floors in the offices.

"Gordon Leith's work at the Rand Water Board (1939) in Fraser Street was able to surmount the contradictory forces operating within his architectural consciousness and convert these disparate elements into a cohesive statement outside the particularism of the new classicism.

Polished red granite blocks with splay-cut arrises and deep joints: arched windows with water griffin keystones; a black granite plinth with bulging consoles and equally bulging wrought-iron grilles beaten into curvilinear shapes: a beautifully modulated facebrick superstructure with bull-nosed ends to receive the window surrounds; the overall dignity and human scale: these are the elements that bring together the Italian Renaissance, the modernising classicism Leith acquired from his pre-war tour, the clean Swedish forms and optimism. Leith himself was critical of this building but I regard it as a major statement of street architecture, unsurpassed in the Johannesburg townscape." (Chipkin)

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

Walls : brickwork, covered with variety of materials – socle (base/pedestal) of black polished granite (including framed entrance), red granite, infilling of aluminium sheeting and brick panelling.

Roof : concrete covering.

Windows: red granite framing, bronze coloured aluminium framed windows.

SITE FEATURES:

ALTERATIONS:

Conversion of existing store on the third floor to a toilet.

Architect: C.P. Robinson (Chief Engineer: Rand Water Board)

Plans passed: January 1956

In 1965, an additional one and a half storeys were added to the building by J. Fassler and M.D. Howie; the existing windows from the fourth floor were used for the new lift motor room; all the existing timber frame windows on the Fraser Street elevation were removed and replaced with new centre pivot (bronze coloured) aluminium frame windows at fourth floor level and with new sliding sash (bronze coloured) aluminium frame windows at fifth floor level; the existing granite coping was re-used as well as the existing black cornice; a new granite string course projected the division between the two uppermost floors; the use of brown granite fascia and window surrounds followed from the existing. On completion of the adjacent building (also for the Rand Water Board) on the corner of Market and Fraser Streets, through-passages (with marble floors and marble lining) were constructed on all floors of the building to the later building.

Internal alterations with respect to existing staircase from basement to ground floor.

Architect: R.J. Laburn (Chief Engineer: Rand Water Board)

Plans passed: 31 January 1978

Alterations to main entrance hall (new face brick to match existing).

Architect:

Plans passed: 18 July 1980

Pedestrian bridge between second floor of the Rand Water Board Building and the third floor of the Sanlam Building (the latter on Stand No. 4779).

Architect: L.H. James (Chief Engineer: Rand Water Board)

Plans passed: 15 January 1983

INTEGRITY:

The new work carried out to the building during the 1960s was quite successfully executed and cannot be seen on the façade. (RAU Report, June 1976)

INSCRIPTION:**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:**

Gordon Leith & Partners

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

On plan : 30 November 1939
Plans passed : 30 July 1940
Completed : 1941

BUILDING STYLE:

"...these are the elements that bring together the Italian Renaissance, the modernising classicism..." (Chipkin) Refer also to Chipkin's description under DESCRIPTION OF PLACE.

"Die gebou is tiperend van die rasonale Beaux Art mode, en herinner in feite sterk aan die Beaux Art gebou in Parys. Opmerklik egter is die lokale interpretasie wat uit die ekspressiewe, sensuele aanwending van materiaal en kleur spreek." (RAU Report, June 1976)

Art Deco – Stripped New Classical (Urban Features).

BUILDING TYPE:

Offices.

ENVIRONMENT:

See also DESCRIPTION OF PLACE

CONDITION:

Good.

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: B.S. Haddon

T10499/1989 Republic of South Africa

PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:

By 1890, the Standard Bank building stood on a portion of this site. Ten years later, the Primrose Building stood on another portion of this site.

HISTORY:

GENERAL NOTES:

According to an assessment of the building by the NMC, the building is a "finely proportioned and well-detailed building of outstanding architectural quality." (NMC Assessment Form dd. 28

February 1991) Thus, it was also recommended in the RAU Survey Report of 1976 that the building should be declared as a national monument.

The estimated cost of construction of the original building was £67 000.

SOURCES:

Opname Historiese Geboue In Johannesburg, Second Report June 1976, Inner City, RAU

"Goudstad –Geboue 24", Beeld, 22 Aug' 1977

NMC File 9/2/228/119: Rand Water Board Building, Fraser Street, Johannesburg : Coloured photograph included

Chipkin C.M. : Johannesburg Style architecture & Society 1880s – 1960s, David Philip Publishers, 1993

Goudstad – Geboue 24 (Die Beeld, 22 August 1977)

Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis, The buildings of Johannesburg 1886-1940, Chris Van Rensburg Publications, 1987

Johannesburg Building, Space & Urban Feature Classification, 1998: Inner City - Metropolitan Planning, Johannesburg Metropolitan Council (Cool Factory)

City Engineering Department, Stand No. 4508, Township Johannesburg (Planning Department), City of Johannesburg

Registrar of Deeds, Johannesburg

RECORDED BY:

Johann J and Catharina JM Bruwer.

Photographs by Chris JH Coxen (unless otherwise indicated).

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