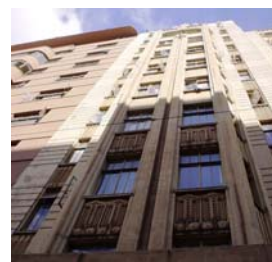


JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY**HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM**

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

JJ Bruwer ©

Cellphone: 082 325 5823

NAME OF PLACE: DORCHESTER MANSIONS

Main photo: view of Rissik Street elevation and Bree Street elevation to the right.
Top right: Bree Street – with *Dorchester Mansions* on the left and its neighbour, *Roehampton Court*, on the right. Right, centre: view of Entrance Hall and Lift Lobby.

Previous/alternative name/s :

LOCATION: Street : Rissik
: 75
: [234 Bree; 73, 75 Rissik]
Street number :
Stand Number : 4571
Previous Stand Number: 1012, 1013
Block number : AQ
GIS reference :

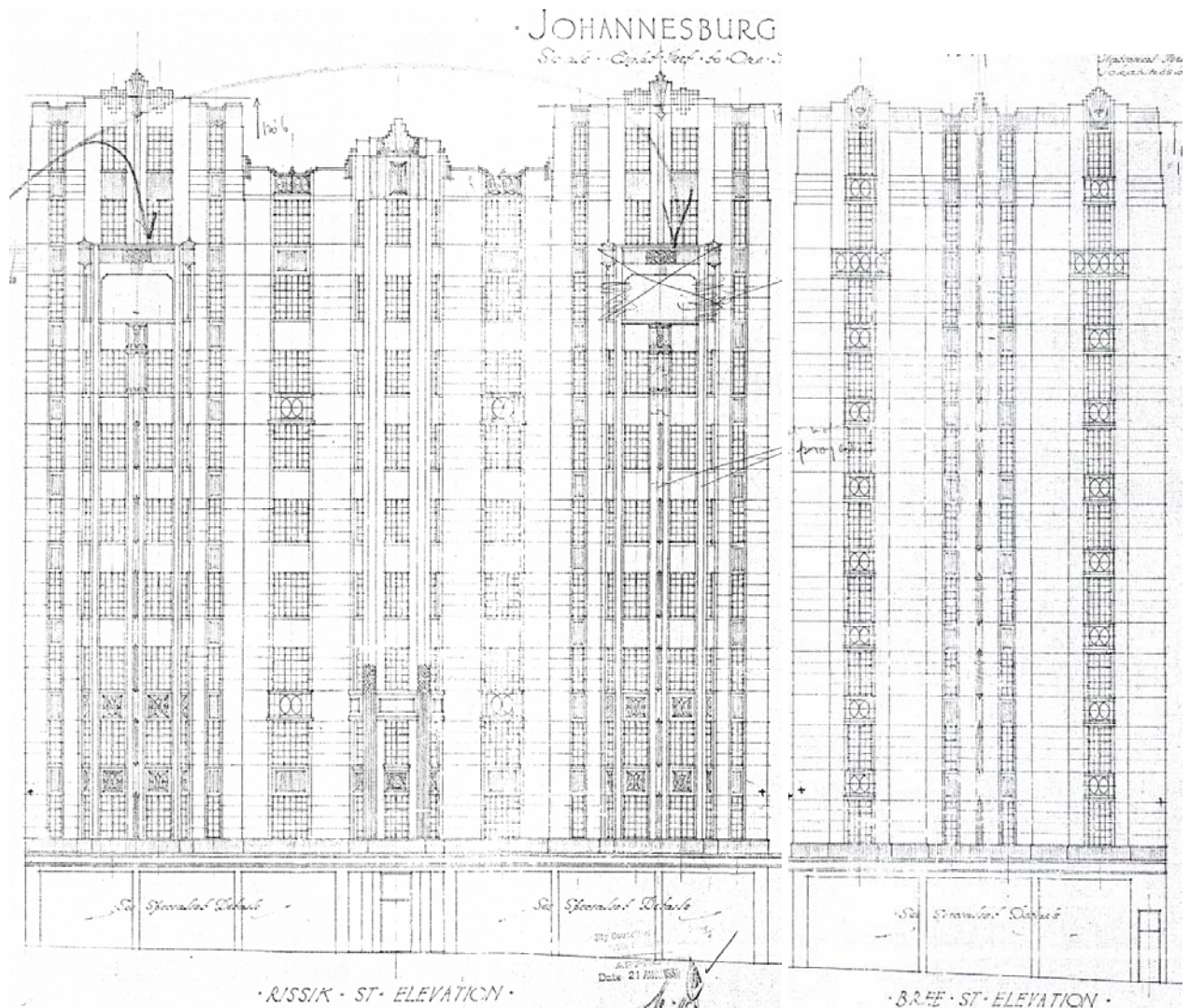
ZONING: Current use/s :
Previous use/s :

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

Height : 120' 6" (to roof level)
Levels above street level : eleven
Levels below street level : one
On-site parking :

The roofline of this building is one of the most fascinating in Johannesburg. The slightly feminine effect attained by the 'lace design' applied to the parapet wall, is accentuated by the aspect of strong vertical fenestration. Of special interest are the delicate moulded plaster forms; elaborate verandah brackets and stucco work.

The architect Marc Obel (of Obel & Obel) once recalled that they "were considered the first architects of that period" – a position hotly contested by the prolific firm of J.C. Cook & Cowen, who designed vast Art Deco piles and were working, at the beginning of 1934, on fourteen major buildings. Cook & Cowen were the architects of Dunvegan Chambers (AC-4), noted for its sculpted relief decoration, and Broadcast House, as well as buildings like Dorchester Mansions in Rissik Street and Stanhope Mansions in Plein Street, both embellished with startling Art Deco relief patterns." (Chipkin, C.M.: Johannesburg Style; Architecture & Society...)



Above: extract from original submission drawings by the architects J.C. Cook & Cowen – main elevations.

Basement:	included large storage space; space for boxes; furnace room; coal chute and high-tension room.
Ground Floor:	comprised seven shops with composite floors, recessed opening and double inward opening door; central main entrance to residential floors located in Rissik Street – an open passage, double inward opening doors leading to a vestibule and large rounded rectangular reception area with two lifts and main staircase; to the south of the reception area, was a separate yard with three W.C.s for shop owners; the service passage off Bree Street provided access to a coal chute, yard, W.C. for shop owners, and stairs leading to the basement.
First to Ninth Floor:	four bed-sitters or bachelor flats; two spacious flats, each with generous hall flanked by a kitchen and bathroom, a living room, and single bedroom; wooden floors to all rooms except the kitchen and bathroom.
Tenth Floor:	three bed-sitters or bachelor flats; one flat with hall, passage kitchen and bathroom; a bedroom and living room; originally, the central section on Rissik Street was a flat concrete area.
Roof:	staff quarters with shower and single W.C.; three water tanks to the lift house roof and two large concrete flat areas.

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

Walls:	reinforced concrete frame with hard-burnt brick infill.
Roof:	concrete, flat.
Windows:	steel frame (with parliament hinges) and fanlights over.
Doors:	double outward opening composite balcony doors (steel frame) with fanlights over.
Floor:	white marble to main entrance, stairs and lift lobby.
Interior walls:	vertical positioned polished marble and wood insets to dado height to vestibule; vertical positioned polished marble, all of same height creating a stepped effect to stairs.
Balustrade:	cast iron balustrade with wood handrail to staircase.

SITE FEATURES:

ALTERATIONS:

Deviation plan for Messrs Suzman & Green: new filter plant and stairs to roof area; portion of central roof area on Rissik Street elevation bath tiled. Approved – 18 February 1933; estimated cost – building £1 000; date on plan - 1 May 1931; architects - J.C. Cook & Cowen.

Additions to roof for Messrs Suzman & Green: new staff quarters (additional accommodation approved for two staff); approved – 15 February 1935; estimated cost – building £50; date on plan – 17 January 1935; architects – J.C. Cook & Cowen.

Alterations to shop (for licence purposes); Application for Approval of Plans form missing, plan signed by City Engineer 21 March 1951; Author unknown.

New partitioning to shop on ground floor (Rissik Street) for Erins Opticians; Application for Approval of Plans form missing; plan signed by City Engineer 13 December 1957; Author – S Nay.

Alterations for Messrs Suzman & Green: approved 23 March 1959; estimated cost – building £30; completed 14 July 1961; architect - CR Kallenbach.

Alterations for Dorchester Mansions (Pty) Ltd: approved 19 June 1959; estimated cost – building £50; architects - J.C. Cook & Cowen.

Addition and drainage for South African Permanent Building Society (owner): municipal submission plans missing; approved – 12 June 1969; estimated cost – building R8 750; drainage R1 000; architects Stucke, Harrison, Ritchie & Smail. Of interest is the fact that the necessary plans were submitted on 22 December 1966 but only approved two and a half years later; this however, did not prevent the work from being carried out; completion date given as 13 February 1968!

Alterations South African Permanent Building Society: approved 1 February 1968; estimated cost – building R2 750; drainage R300; Stucke, Harrison, Ritchie & Smail.

Alterations South African Permanent Building Society: estimated cost – building R15 000. Plans for this appear not to have been approved.

INTEGRITY:

Seen from the exterior, the design of the original building from the first floor up has remained unaltered. Very little, however, remains of the original main entrance of the building as most of the space was allocated to additional shop coverage.

INSCRIPTION:

"In March 2003 South Africa hosts the Seventh Annual World Congress on Art Deco. This will be held in Cape Town and to link into this, Jo'burg is erecting plaques on buildings evidencing the Art Deco theme. We start with the TOP TWENTY – great buildings in the Inner City will be identified by means of distinctive blue and white heritage plaques. A further forty buildings of similar merit will follow in the hall of fame. These include more in the centre of town but also those spread across Johannesburg, noticeably blocks of flats. Art Deco was not just the preserve of the wealthy corporates (sic.)- it belonged to everyone, and the purpose of this project is to highlight a period in the history of Jo'burg which created a valuable architectural and social treasure. Some of these buildings are, sadly, deteriorating but dilapidation and decay cannot conceal the glorious and exuberant architecture." (Information sourced from Art Deco Plaques\main.htm).

The information appearing on such a plaque affixed at the Main Entrance to the building in Rissik Street, reads as follows:

"This block of flats with shops on the ground floor was designed in 1931 by J.C. Cook & Cowen. The elaborate decoration on the facade, combined with the name of the fashionably grand hotel being built at the same time in London, were used to attract wealthy tenants. The roof parapet details and clusters of streamlined moulded plaster forms and stylised keystones on the balconies are of special interest." (Information sourced from Art Deco Plaques\list1.htm).

ARCHITECT:

J. C. Cook & Cowen.

BUILDER:

Reinforced concrete engineers: A.S. Joffe & Co.

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

Date on plans	: 1 May 1931
Approval of plans	: 29 October 1931
Phase One	: 12 April 1932
Phase Two	: 22 August 1932
Completion date	: 24 January 1933

Right: copy of original advertisement appearing in *The Star* (Saturday) 25, (Monday) 27, (Tuesday) 28 April 1931.

BUILDING STYLE:

Art Deco - Exhibition Style.

"Architectural Merit: A well articulated corner art deco building". (Johannesburg Building, Space & Urban Feature Classification, 1998: Inner City).



BUILDING TYPE:

Shops to street and residential building.

ENVIRONMENT:

Dorchester Mansions are flanked by *Mackay Mansions* and *Roehampton Court* (all three in the Art Deco idiom). This ensemble of buildings is an excellent example of buildings designed to stand together, by fully complimenting and harmonizing with one another.

CONDITION:

The building appears quite neglected and appropriately fits the description of the condition of many of the City's buildings, mentioned in the following description by Nel Fraser: "The buildings that provided inspiration and engender pride in millions of people. Yet here their fading facsimiles generally add to the blight of the cityscape and reinforce the negative perceptions of the city that still abound. Just a coat of paint or a scrub down and some basic TLC would be a good starting point for these buildings to emerge from the drabness and greyness into which they have been allowed to disappear." (Fraser, N.: CITICHAT Joburg Art Deco Buildings 2 – "The Top Twenty", February 24, 2003).

URGENT ACTION:

The owners should ideally be advised not to paint the moulded plaster forms to the facades.

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: Messrs Suzman & Green.
By March 1959: Messrs Suzman & Green.
By June 1959: Dorchester Mansions (Pty) Ltd.
By 1967: South African Permanent Building Society.

PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:**HISTORY:****GENERAL NOTES:**

Estimated cost of building : £56 000
Estimated cost of drainage : £5 000
Accommodation approved : 116 'Europeans' and five 'Natives'
Phase One valuation : £18 000

Phase Two valuation : £12 000
Valuation at completion : £45 000
Occupied : yes

"THE MYSTIFYING DEATH OF BUBBLES SCHROEDER

1949

"Within days of her murder, everyone had heard of Bubbles Schroeder. But why did her death attract such unprecedented public interest? For one thing, she was young and desirable. She was also what was euphemistically called a 'good-time girl'. And, of course, She was dead. But was there something else? Something less tangible? Perhaps it was that, to many people, she typified the new, post-war age: a world of fast cars, fast living and easy virtue. Jacoba 'Bubbles' Schroeder was born in Lichtenburg on 8 June 1931. She was educated at Benoni and Vereeniging. When she was four years old, her mother had to go out to work, and she was cared for by a cousin in Vereeniging until she was 13. For the next four years she lived with her mother in Johannesburg. Then, in March 1948, she returned to Vereeniging to work for a coal agency but, unbeknown to her relatives, she moved back to Johannesburg two months later. Soon after her return to the city, she moved into the apartment of a fifty-two-year-old bookmaker named Philip Stein, whom she had met at a dance in Orange Grove. Although Stein liked having Bubbles around, he soon realized that his new guest could sometimes be a lot more trouble than he had bargained for. Bubbles was in the habit of throwing a tantrum when she couldn't get her own way. "She was a young woman, a little loose in her morals," Stein said. "But she was very sweet-except when she was drunk. Then she became unmanageable." Matters finally came to a head early in June 1949. Bubbles had come home drunk once too often and Stein asked her to leave. Shortly after this, she moved to Dorchester Mansions in Rissik Street, where she shared an apartment with a girlfriend named Mrs Griffin, who was a 'hostess'. Although Bubbles never held down a regular job in all the time she was living in Johannesburg, she was never short of money. Nor was there a dearth of men willing to pay for the pleasure of her company. "Bubbles was a glamour girl," Mrs Griffin would say. "She'd spend her day at the beauty parlour and her nights at night clubs. And she could be most chaining (sic.). Until she had a few drinks in her, of course. Then she became obstinate and difficult." On Thursday, 11 August 1949, Morris Bilchik visited Dorchester Mansions. He made a date with Bubbles for the following Saturday night, and the two duly went out together. At the end of the evening, they went back to Bilchik's home and spent the night together. On the following Monday morning, Bilchik boasted of his conquest to his friend, David Polliack (21). At lunchtime, the two men visited Bubbles at her apartment. The plan was that she would get hold of her girlfriend, Penny, and the four of them could go out together that night. Unfortunately, Penny was nowhere to be found. In the end, they decided simply to make up a threesome. After Bilchik and Polliack had left, Bubbles went to visit Philip Stein. She spent the afternoon at his apartment, where she had a few glasses of brandy, and then returned home at 6 p.m. When she reached Dorchester Mansions, Bilchik and Polliack were already waiting for her. She apologized for keeping them waiting and invited them inside while she changed into a green dress and put on some make-up. Around 7.30 p.m. they set out for Polliack's house, Hlatikulu, in the plush suburb of Illovo. (Polliack's mother was in Durban at the time, so the three of them had the house virtually to themselves.) Bubbles traveled (sic.) with David Polliack, while Bilchik took his own car. They reached the house at about eight o'clock, just as Polliack's cousin, Hyman Balfour Liebman (20), was leaving for Houghton to pick up his girlfriend. Polliack and Bilchik invited Liebman to bring his girlfriend back to the house to join the party, but Liebman declined. They had already arranged to go to the cinema for the evening. After Liebman had driven off, the other three went into the house. Polliack asked Irene, the cook, to prepare some food, and at about 9.30 p.m. they sat down to eat a meal of tinned asparagus soup, followed by chops with chips. For dessert they had a can of tinned peaches. Afterwards, they went into the living room. Bubbles drank a few glasses of brandy and snacked from a tin of peanuts. At about 11.15 p.m. Bilchik left for home. It seemed obvious to him that Bubbles and Polliack wanted to be left alone. After Bilchik had left, Bubbles and Polliack cleared up in the living-room, then went upstairs to listen to records in Polliack's bedroom. Not long afterwards, Bilchik phoned. Jealousy, it seemed, had finally got the better of him. First he spoke to Bubbles, then he apologized to Polliack for disturbing them. After about fifteen minutes, he rang off. Around midnight Hyman Liebman returned from his cinema date. (Although he lived in the Brits district, he often stayed at Hlatikulu when Mrs Polliack was away.) Polliack met him in the hallway and told him that Bubbles was in his room. The trouble was that she'd had too much to drink and he wanted to get her home before she passed out. Liebman went upstairs to see for himself. It was clear to him, he later said, that Bubbles had been drinking, but she was far from drunk. She insisted on having another drink. Eventually, Liebman got her a glass of weak brandy. At about 12.30 a.m., Bubbles suddenly wanted to go home. Her mother was staying with her, she said, and expected her back by 1.00 a.m. Eventually, at about 1.30 a.m., the three of them walked out onto the driveway, where the cars were parked. Polliack wanted to take her home, but she got into Liebman's car and wouldn't get out. In the end, Liebman offered to drive her home and, with Bubbles complaining that she wanted to drive, they set out for Dorchester Mansions. Fifteen to twenty minutes later, Liebman pulled back into the driveway. This time, he was alone. "That girls a lunatic," he told his friend. "She

wanted to drive and when I wouldn't let her she made me stop and got out. I told her to be sensible but she wouldn't listen." Polliack was angry. "You mean you let her walk? Where did you let her out?" he asked. "At the Dunkeld bus terminus." "And did she say anything?" Lieberman nodded. "Yes," she said, "which way to town?" "I told her to follow the bus wires along Oxford Road. The last thing she said to me was, "You will be surprised to read about my corpse in the morning papers." "Don't you realize what can happen to the girl?" shouted Polliack. "Yes, of course I do," his friend snapped, "but at this time of night I didn't think she'd come to any harm." Lieberman was tired and fed up. "I'm going to bed," he added, and went into the house.

Polliack was worried about Bubbles. Although it was nearly 2.00 a.m., he set off in his own car to try to find her. About an hour later, he returned home. Bubbles Schroeder had vanished. The two young men assumed that Bubbles had managed to get a lift with a passing motorist. Neither of them dreamt anything was wrong until Morris Bilchik phoned Polliack at work the next day. That morning, Bilchik had called at Dorchester Mansions to see Bubbles, but had learnt from her mother that she hadn't returned home from her night out. Soon after he had heard this news, Polliack went to see Mrs Schroeder himself. Later Bilchik, Polliack and Mrs Schroeder drove down to Rosebank Police Station to report that Bubbles was missing. Polliack also telephoned the general hospital to see if she had been admitted there. Bubbles Schroeder's body was discovered, thirty hours after her death, at Birdhaven plantation by Samuel Ngibisa Mobela. The plantation was less than a kilometre [sic.] from the spot where Liebman claimed to have dropped her off. She was lying on her back among burnt-out grass about 30 metres [sic.] from the road. Her face was turned to the right, and her left leg was laid over her right. Her left arm was pressed against the side of her body, while her right was flung out at an angle of about 75 degrees. She was hatless, shoeless, and her coat was missing. Although there were scratch marks and some bruising on her neck, there were no footprints around the body, nor any signs of violent struggle. The first thing that struck Dr J. Friedman, the Johannesburg [sic.] District Surgeon when he arrived on the scene of the crime was the position of the body. From the way Bubbles was lying, it appeared that she had been placed carefully on the ground, which suggested that she had been murdered nearby and then carried (probably over the shoulder) into the plantation. This assumption was substantiated by the fact that, although both of the victim's shoes were missing, there was neither grass nor soil on the soles of her feet. She certainly had not walked to the spot where her body was discovered. The bodice of the green dress she wore was slightly ripped and one button was missing. The lower right leg of her stocking was also snagged in a number of places. Her panties were torn on the right side, but her black petticoat and black brassiere were intact. The post-mortem revealed that she had not been sexually assaulted. In her mouth were some pieces of a hard, clay-like material. Although some of the bits lay deep in her throat, there were no particles in her lungs, proving that the clay had been forced into her mouth after death. Dr Friedman examined the contents of Bubbles' stomach. The extent of digestion of the various foods particles he found was to entirely substantiate Polliack and Bilchik's subsequent account of events on the night of her death. A highly significant fact that emerged during the post-mortem was that Miss Schroeder was suffering from a condition of the thymus gland which would have caused her to fall unconscious very quickly from only slight pressure around the neck. The bruising on her neck indicated that she had been strangled from behind, probably by a scarf or something similar, and had scratched herself in an effort to tear the ligature from her throat. Dr Friedman concluded that cause of death was asphyxia and inhibition due to the pressure on her throat and the impaction of a hard clay-like substance (similar to that in a heap of builder's lime a couple of metres [sic.] away) in her hypopharynx [sic.]. He estimated the time of death as around two o'clock on the morning of Tuesday, 16 August. The police launched a large-scale search in the area around Birdhaven Plantation, but without success. However, on 13 October, almost two months after the murder, Hyman Liebman and David Polliack were arrested 'in connection with the murder of Bubbles Schroeder'. They appeared in court the following day and were remanded in custody. Later, they were granted bail of £5 000 and £500 respectively. Their trial began a few days later at the Johannesburg Magistrates' Court. The evidence, which the police presented to the court was almost entirely circumstantial. The prosecution based its case upon the fact that Liebman and Polliack had been with Miss Schroeder late on the night of her death. There was no direct evidence to suggest that either of the two men were connected in any way to her murder, however, and eventually they were acquitted. So who did kill Bubbles Schroeder? The police contended that Liebman had strangled her in his car using a scarf. This was after he had driven her to Birdhaven Plantation and attempted to have sex with her. When she fell unconscious, he had carried her body away from the road. But there was not a shred of evidence - apart from the fact that Liebman did give her a lift in his car - to support this claim. A second theory was that Bubbles was robbed and killed by a passing African. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that her mouth was stuffed with lime. (Among certain African peoples it is customary to place something in the mouth of a victim who has suffered a violent death, to prevent him or her from speaking ill of the killer in the after world.) But this theory has a number of obvious weaknesses. For example, if the motive for the crime was robbery, why was Bubbles killed? And why was the body so neatly laid out? A third, and possibly the most plausible answer was advanced by the late Benjamin Bennett, who was crime writer for The Argus at the time. Bennett suggested that Bubbles probably tried to hitch a lift home and was picked up by a passing

motorist. (If there had been two men in the car, the passenger would have moved into the back so that Bubbles could have the front seat.) She was assaulted - the man in the back was in a perfect position to put a scarf around her neck to restrain her - and she was 'accidentally' asphyxiated. Afterwards, her body was carried into the nearby plantation and dumped. Lime was put into her mouth simply to confuse the police into thinking the crime had been perpetrated by an African. All this is mere conjecture, however, and we are still left with the question of who killed Bubbles Schroeder? It seems unlikely that the truth will ever be known." (Information sourced from Crimes & Mysteries of South Africa.htm)

PREVIOUS TENANTS:

By 1951: Dorchester Supply Store.

By 1954: 73 Rissik Street – Random Books Ltd; Dorchester Supply Store; Muller's Pharmacy; "Le Chapeau" - millinery specialist; Frank Ogilvie – tailor; Vermey Bros, Cutting Works.

By 1957: Erins Opticians.

The lettering "Suid-Afrikaanse Permanente Bouvereniging" and "South African Permanent Building Society", previously displayed on the canopy band, has been removed.

CURRENT TENANT/S:

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:

Heritage Resources Management team Johann J and Catharina JM Bruwer.
Unless otherwise indicated photographs by Catharina JM Bruwer.







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Joshua D...



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DORCHESTER MANSIONS

This block of flats with shops on the ground floor was designed in 1931 by J.C. Cook & Cowen. The elaborate decoration on the facade, combined with the name of the fashionably grand hotel being built at the same time in London, were used to attract wealthy tenants. The decorative plasterwork resembles the striking linear forms used in jewellery of the period, culminating in the diadem which crowns the central bay

Joburg

