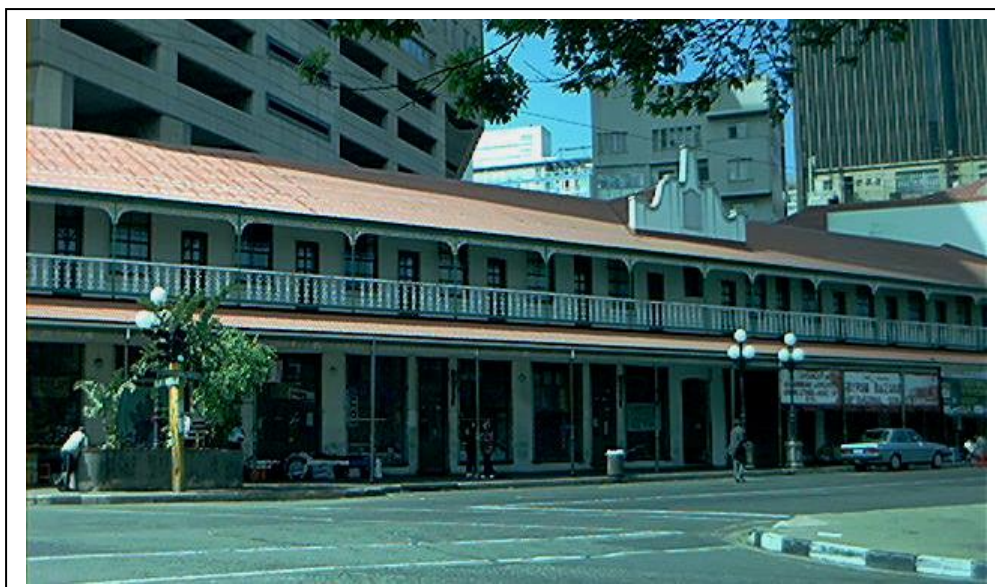


JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

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

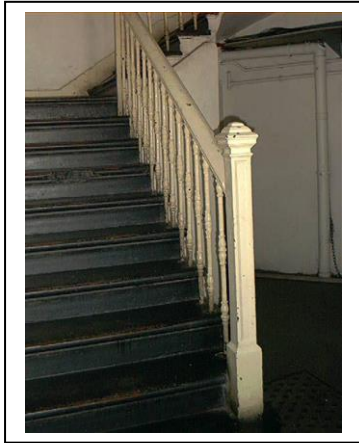
NAME OF PLACE: Nathanson's Building



Previous/alternative name/s :

LOCATION: Street : Diagonal
Street number : 22
Stand number : 758, 767 (previously 469, 478)
Block number : O

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



DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

This double storey building originally, consisted of seven shops, two storerooms and eight rooms on the ground floor. The entrance hall at the staircase to the first floor is placed slightly off centre. The top floor had 25 rooms (accommodation for 68 'Europeans' were approved) with a roofed balcony to the front and rear of the building. On top of the roof were five chimneys serving 18 fireplaces in 18 of the rooms on the first floor. The hall on the first floor was connected to the front balcony through French casements and to the rear balcony, through a glass door with fanlight.

At the back of the building, facing President Street, is a staircase of cast iron. In the triangle at the rear of Stand No. 767 stood a ten by six feet servants ('boys') room. Adjacent to this was a urinal and three E.C.'s (toilets) with glass louvered windows. On top of the ablution block, were two bathrooms and a separate sink; this part was only accessible via the balcony on the first floor. The granolithic covered triangular yard on both the stands were graded towards the gullies. The footpath, front balcony, entrance hall and staircase, as well as the hall on the first floor were all granolithic covered. The roof was crowned with three gables, the two gables at the ends being smaller and slightly less ornamented than the centre gable; according to the original building plans, the latter was also supposed to have had two vertically projected ornamental columns; the plans also provided for the name *Nathanson's Buildings* to be displayed on the centre gable. (cjmb)

"I'm so pretty, o so pretty..." everything a building of my age should be. Relatively unaltered, not much touched by time, placing you in another time, another place, envying the peaceful atmosphere. (cjmb)

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

Walls : burnt brick, plastered.

Roof : galvanized corrugated iron roof, pitched; corrugated iron (verandahs).

Doors : aluminium frame doors (ground floor); double composite, timber on first floor).

Windows: double-hung timber sash on first floor; aluminium frame shop fronts with roller shutters.

Balustrade: cast-iron balusters and timber handrail (balcony).

Columns: cast-iron (whole shop frontage).

Balcony: cast-iron columns, frieze and brackets.

Foundations : stone.

Verandah ceiling: narrow tongue and groove, painted (shop front and balcony).

SITE FEATURES:

ALTERATIONS:

New toilets on the first floor in existing bathroom. Interior wall, bath and sink removed. (Note: the plan for the bathroom not on the City Engineering Department's records, i.e. the plan is either missing or non-existing.) Estimated cost £25.

On plan : 25 October 1919
Completed : 14 November 1919

Internal alterations to shop on Diagonal Street, new mezzanine floor and basin. Estimated cost £90.

On plan : 21 June 1950

New quarters in yard, brick construction with corrugated iron roof and grano floor. Existing toilets removed. Accommodation approved for one 'Non-European'. Estimated cost £120.

On plan : 3 January 1952

Internal alterations to existing shop on Diagonal Street, new brick wall, door, and window. Estimated cost £50.

On plan : 4 April 1955
Completed : December 1955

New mezzanine in shop on Diagonal Street. Estimated cost £150.

On plan : 25 October 1957

Alterations to accommodate a butcher shop. Part of yard bricked up for separate back yard to the butcher shop. Internal alterations, new counters, doors, hand washbasin and drainage, geyser, sink, and fridges. Walls tiled up and new grano floor, door removed and bricked up.

Draftsman : F.C. Meeser
Plan date : 6 September 1960
On plan : 26 October 1960

New lean to change room and scullery with basin to back of existing shop to accommodate a butcher shop. This extension to building is a brick and corrugated iron structure, plastered and painted to match the existing building. Estimated cost R8,000.

Draftsman : Makhemele
Plan date : 31 July 1986
On plan : 2 February 1986

INTEGRITY:

The integrity of this building has remained largely unscathed. Noteworthy elements of its original fabric that have disappeared over a period of nearly a century, are as follows: the five chimneys, the removal of the name *Nathanson's Buildings* from the central gable; the large fixed timber shop fronts with fanlights; as well as the prominent double composite timber doors with bronze door furniture (shop fronts). It is worth noting that the installation of the distinctive frieze and brackets to the shop front verandah constitutes a falsification as this detail of ornamentation was not part of the original design of the building.

INSCRIPTION:

ARCHITECT/BUILDER:

Kallenbach & Reynolds
Set of original plans incomplete.

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

On plan : 29 April 1905
Commenced : 6 May 1905
Foundation : 13 May 1905
Completed : 30 December 1905

BUILDING STYLE:

Victorian.

BUILDING TYPE:

Shops to street with flats above.

ENVIRONMENT:

This Victorian building resembles no other building in the immediate vicinity, thereby adding to the variety and character of the colourful Diagonal Street precinct.

CONDITION:

The condition of the building is good, due no doubt, to its restoration / refurbishment at the end of the 1980's / beginning 1990's and subsequent remedial work in 1996.

URGENT ACTION:**SAHRA RECORD REGARDING ALTERATIONS, RENOVATIONS, RESTORATION:**

Refer to permits dd. 3 December 1987 (i.r.o. Stand Nos. 754, 755, 756, 765, 766 and the outbuildings on 767 and 756) issued by the NMC and record of the conditions that the developer were expected to meet: "The attached permit for demolition of the above buildings is subject to acceptance of the following condition by the owner of the properties concerned: 1. Fruit Alley a) This will be re-located west of shops; the same type of trading and the original shop frontages and quality of space between. b) The alley shall be open to the sky but the new office block east of the alley will be permitted to project discreetly of the alley. c) The entrance to the alley shall be emphasized by way of a suitable archway. 2. The new residential buildings a) These shall have the essential architectural character of the building on Stand 767.



b) The new residential section Stand 757 (should actually read 756) shall not interfere with the architectural and historic integrity[sic.] of Saxon Buildings. 3. The owner shall grant consent to the full proclamation of the buildings on Stand 767 & 757 as National Monuments. 4. The shop fronts to all trading facilities shall be restored to their original character. 5. In the event of any one or more of these properties being sold the above undertakings shall be included in the condition of sale as binding on the new owner/owners."

Refer to comprehensive applications made during 1988-90 by RFB Consulting Architects to the NMC in regard to the proposed restoration / refurbishment of the existing buildings on Stand Nos. 757, 758 and 767, including the proposed construction of a new retail and residential building on Stand No. 756, as well as a new shopping mall on Stand Nos. 754 and 765. The NMC's architect Mr W. Martinson assisted closely with various aspects of the development of the applications.

The above applications included the following work in respect of Stand Nos. 758 and 767: bricking-up of existing window openings in the rear of some of the shops; new tongued and groove ceiling to underside of the verandah; demolition of change room, cold room and office behind one of the shops; refurbishment of existing toilets and bathrooms at first floor; new aluminium shop fronts and doors; new roller shutters where appropriate; repairing of existing plasterwork.

In 1996, the owner (i.e. Mine Pension Funds Properties) obtained the NMC's permission w.r.t. the refurbishment of the properties comprising the Arcade. Special mention was made by the applicant of the dilapidated condition of the T & G ceilings and the roof. A detailed report on the proposed work was submitted to the NMC. On 6 December 1996, the NMC approved the application: : "We would like to convey the National Monuments Council's (NMC's) appreciation for your concern and the proposed restoration of the building". It was suggested that the work be carried out under the supervision of an architect with conservation work experience.

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)

At the time of the Gardee's Arcade refurbishment / restoration project, the NMC advised the responsible owner that it was expecting the latter to consent to the formal protection of the building as a national monument. This however, was never finalised.

NOTES:**DEEDS INFORMATION:**

Original ownership: S. Nathanson Esq

By 1950: Roberts Investments (Pty) Ltd

By 1988: President Street Properties Pty Ltd

T54283/1988 Mine Officials Pension Fund

T54283/1988 Mine Employees Pension Fund

VA3817/2001 Mine Employees Pension Fund

B33520/2001 Growthpoint Prop Trust

T51164/2001 Growthpoint Prop Ltd

PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:

From available information it appears that the two stands, comprising the site of the present building, were each occupied by a brick and iron structures. These structures were demolished by January 1905 to make way for the present building.

HISTORY:

The building faces Diagonal Street, which in itself, has an interesting history in which the name 'Jubilee Street' also comes to mind. This street runs from Commissioner in the south to Bree Street in the north and was mentioned as early as 18 September 1897 in the Standard and Diggers News. The Post Office Directory for the Transvaal in 1906 referred to it as Jubilee Street. In the United Transvaal Directory for 1916 it appeared as 'Diagonal Street, also known as Jubilee Street'. The origin of the name is given in the Rand Daily Mail of 11 August 1930 as follows: The name 'emphasizes the curious run of a thoroughfare on the municipal maps'. It forms part of the western boundary of Randjeslaagte. The street is lined with small shops, mostly Indian-owned selling a variety of goods amongst which fruit and vegetables are prominent. Many of these shops have a long association with the Nathanson's Building.

The true meaning and historical context of the buildings lies within the following description of Diagonal Street and what it was like more than four decades ago. "Diagonal Street teemed with life and colour, noises and smells. One could buy silks, saris, samoosas or African muti. Whiffs of spices or incense wafted out here and there from shops displaying bowls of curry mixtures in vivid reds and yellows. From one shop would blare the reedy passion of an Indian song; from another the beat of an African pop hit. It was chiefly a black shopping area: the biggest retail fruit and vegetable market for Africans and a kind of semi-open air department store for cut-rate clothing, dresses, textiles, toiletries, scarves, knick-knacks of all kinds...On the balconies above the shops children played and lines of colourful laundry flapped. As in

Pageview, many of Diagonal Street's traders lived on the premises. It was no doubt this fact which spurred the Government's decision to declare it a white group area. Since the mid-1960s, with the threat of eventual eviction looming, the size and character of the quarter has been steadily eroded by a combination of politics and 'progress'."

The origins of this richly flavoured corner of Johannesburg go back to the city's infancy. Originally, there was a kind of no-man's-land just west of Diagonal Street which did not seem to bother the officialdom. Here, there curiously was no strict enforcement of the old Transvaal Republic's Law 3 of 1885 – which restricted the property rights of 'the coloured native races of Asia...'. Indians were left to find what accommodation they could – either in Pageview (the 'Malay Location' – or in fringe areas, such as at Diagonal Street and its environs. The result of this was that Diagonal Street became a racially mixed area.

This is the historical context within which the Nathanson's Building was erected. The estimated cost of the original new building was £5,000. The sanitary (including urinal) was removed by Municipal pail system.

"Further laws however, such as the Gold Law of 1908 and the Asiatic Land Tenure and Trading Amendment Act of 1919, imposed new restrictions on Indians. Yet again, little if anything was done to enforce them: trading licences continued to be issued, and no alternative areas were offered. From the beginning therefore, many Indians effectively owned 'white' property through nominees. Business knew no real boundaries. And as the town centre, meanwhile, shifted eastwards across towards Rissik and Eloff Streets, the Asians of Diagonal Street were left undisturbed." (Benjamin)

Then came the lengthy enquiry between 1934 and 1937 by a commission headed by Judge Richard Feetham. In its report, it was recommended that the existing position in Diagonal Street, among other parts, should be legalised. This was done through a new Land Tenure Act in 1936. At last, Indian landlords could invest in their premises of trading. The area started to take on a more prosperous look. But this was not to be forever. The draconian measures following from the Group Areas Act in 1950 stripped Indians of their rights. "Thus 'progress' was helped to cast its long shadow over Diagonal Street. The worst was to come when the Diagonal Street proper was declared a white area by a Group Areas proclamation of 3 December 1970. The future couldn't have been more uncertain and cloudy for the traders and their families in the Diagonal Street precinct. "Landlords stopped spending money on any but essential maintenance; rebuilding was in any case forbidden and the quarter became progressively more shabby." Who could have blamed the traders for this! (Benjamin)

Many years later, it was suddenly reported in The Star ("JCI plans to demolish Indian shops"), of 18 March 1987 that the Johannesburg City Council's planning department had been approached by Johannesburg Consolidated Investments (JCI) with a view to the proposed demolition of the city's most famous street scene. "The Victorian shops on Diagonal Street between Pritchard and President Streets, with their balconies, filigree iron work and the colourful Cairo-style fruit market date back to 1896. The street was recently renovated and fitted with Victorian streetlamps by Anglo American at a cost of R800 000. The public is unlikely to take the news sitting down. The shopkeepers, whose shops are a tourist attraction, were appalled when they heard the new yesterday." It was reported that the Argus company had sold its Diagonal Street property behind The Star building to JCI for R3,7 million. "The block of flats and line of shops opposite the glass tower of Barnib House will be demolished and JCI will build an office block on the site, subject to planning permission being granted."

This was followed by a report in The Star of 21 March 1987 ("Battle for Diagonal Street 'national monument' looms: Traders to fight back") from which it became clear that JCI was to meet serious opposition: "Indian market traders in Johannesburg's Diagonal Street have united in a bid to frustrate efforts to force them out the shops they have run for more than half a century. The 40 tenants in the mainly fruit and vegetable market have appointed attorneys to investigate ways of preventing..." Johannesburg Consolidated Investments from putting up an

office block on the site. "Shops premises on Diagonal Street were recently renovated by Anglo American at a cost of R800 000. The shops became a tourist attraction in their setting opposite the blue glass Barnib House, one of the most avant garde buildings in the city."

In The Star (dd. 26 March 1987) in the 'Letters To The Editor Column', various members of the public objected to the plans by JCI. Rob Allington stated as follows: "Every civic-minded individual and organisation recognises ...(the Diagonal Street area) to be an irreplaceable national treasure historically and architecturally. JCI blandly asserts that 'any new building which takes the place of the old property can only be for the better'. Better for whom? This brings to mind the similar case of 'betterment' which resulted in the end of the Colloseum." J.G. Collett also objected vehemently to the proposed new JCI development: "Diagonal Street is an important part of our city. It is as much part of this country as we are. I saw the street for the first time four years ago and have loved it ever since. It has the spirit that only street scenes here could have – vibrant coloured clothes hanging around doors and fruit and vegetables."

Then on 30 March 1987, it was reported in The Star that Johannesburg's oldest street scene – Diagonal Street's turn-of-the-century Indian shops – would not be demolished after all! "The developers of the site which extends across all seven stands behind The Star ...have decided to develop only the area behind the shops. Even the alleyway market will be spared. The decaying interiors will be restored."

In The Star of 31 March 1987 ("Diagonal Street lesson"), it was consequently reported that conservation had won the day: "Diagonal Street is all sorts of things to Johannesburg: it has, for a start, the only surviving Victorian street scene in town and the area uniquely spans the whole architectural and human cultural mix of this city. Yet we nearly lost its last surviving 19th century remnant. But for an official who discovered he was obliged to inform the National Monuments Council (because the buildings were more than 50 years old) the last intact block of Diagonal Street might well have been demolished before the public could react."

By this stage, detailed discussions were taking place between the developer (i.e. Johannesburg Consolidated Investment – JCI) and JCI and the NMC. The latter eventually indicated that the two buildings on Diagonal Street (i.e. the Nathanson's Building and the Carmel Building) needed to be retained but agreed to the re-positioning of the adjacent Fruit Arcade. The NMC had also been approached by a number of tenants who had lived in this area for many years. "They seemed to be a settled community, small traders totally dependent on their daily trade in the small shops." NMC agreed to the demolition of the eastern building, alongside The Star Building. "The intrinsic merit of the buildings is therefore not great. It is the shopping character and the relationship to President and Kort Streets and the rest of Diagonal Street that makes this exceptionally valuable." (Flo Bird, NMC April 1987)

In a letter dd. 17 September 1987 to the NMC's Chairman, Mrs Flo Bird explained the NMC's position as follows: "The final proposal is that the two most important buildings be retained intact, the fruit arcade be re-erected further west on the same alignment and with additional space to accommodate the tenants from the Thirties building (i.e. on Stand No. 755), and that on the old site of the fruit alley and the Thirties building the new JCI office block be erected. During construction the Indian shopkeepers will be housed in temporary stalls in Diagonal Street, which the City will close along one side to traffic. Temporary accommodation for the flat dwellers they will find themselves, but JCI will pay R250 per month to each tenant. JCI have now applied for the demolition permit, for the Thirties building and the arcade..."

According to a report in Business Day dd. 21 February 1990 ("Diagonal St gets a new face"), Diagonal Street will regain some of its history with the reopening of Gardee's Arcade and its colourful fruit and vegetable shops. In addition, the Victorian shops and first floor flats on Diagonal Street across from First National House are to be revamped. Work on this project will begin in March. The Mine Employees' and Mine Officials' pension funds, which own the new Ernst & Young office building and Gardee's Arcade, have appointed Ampros to administer both

the old and the new space. The arcade, between Pritchard and President street, and the adjacent Ernst & Young House have been developed by JCI Properties and are now nearing completion. JCI will also be responsible for the refurbishment."

In the Financial Mail of 13 April 1990 ("More Than Skin Deep"), it was reported that work had started on a R1 million programme to upgrade the historic market stalls in Diagonal Street to their 'original Victorian splendour'. It involved the proposed refurbishment of about 12 shops and a similar number of flats above. The project formed part of a R52 million redevelopment scheme, which was to include the construction of the Ernst & Young House, and the replacement of the fruit stalls in Gardee's Arcade (on the west side of the new office building) between President and Pritchard Streets."

According to a report in The Star dd. 15 May 1990 ("Re-development retains traditional Indian trading site"), the "colourful Traders' Alley", between Pritchard and President Streets had been given a new lease of life. "The re-development provides for the incorporation of residential accommodation for the Indian families and the restoration of Traders' Alley to maintain its traditional characteristics of urban scale and flavour. Occupancy by the entire Indian trading community has been retained and one-month leases have been replaced by five year leases."

In a subsequent letter dd. 10 July 1990 to Mr Murray Hofmeyr, Chairman of JCI, Mrs Bird expressed her satisfaction with what had been achieved: "This is a belated 'thank you' for the very enjoyable celebration which marked the opening of Ernst & Young House and of the Traders Alley in May this year. It was a very special occasion in Johannesburg's 'coming of age' when retaining the old was not seen as a stumbling block to progress. I feel that JCI deserves the thanks of all our citizens for having taken on this very complex conservation of buildings, activities and a community..."

GENERAL NOTES:

An NMC Drawing dated August 1989 by Mr William Martinson (Diagonal Street – Shopfront Restoration Proposals on Stand No's 757, 758 & 767, Johannesburg, NMC-DS-01-1989) gives the tenants of the shops at ground floor of the buildings as follows: Limbada & Co., D.K. Patel & Sons, T.J. Butchery, G.O. Patel, and Diagonal Bargain Centre.

It is interesting to note that Mrs Flo Bird in 1987 referred to the Nathanson's Building as "the nameless gabled building". According to her, this building is similarly designed (i.e. to the Saxonia and Hanson – refer to Carmel Building on Stand No.757) "with ground floor shops and rooms above, but it is only two storeys in height. Its decorative cast iron balustrading on the verandah is deceptive, for its is really a much simpler building than Saxonia. However it is a good representative of what was a much more common style of building in Johannesburg around the turn of the century, i.e. the verandah with each room having access to it. This of course is common in most Colonial architecture – the adaptation to the hotter climate. But it automatically provides another feature which links these two buildings, and those beyond this site i.e. the canopied shopping arcade created by the overhanging verandah. The gabled building is perhaps the prettier of the two and is more frequently photographed."

Mrs Bird in 1987, also made the following comments: "Originally a much simpler building than...(the adjacent Saxonia and Hanson Building) in 1984 Anglo American Properties decided to give it a pretty face. The miniature Flemish gables are false. The caste-iron balustrading seems unlikely - more probably wooden balustrading though cast iron was in use at the time." (The original plans of the building show that the gables were certainly not false and that the balustrading was of cast-iron.)

"The small retail area which has been home to this Indian community for more than eighty years, has a special charm derived partly from the small scale of the Edwardian buildings with shops at ground level and accommodation above." (NMC statement, ca. 1988)

Reporter Sally Dewar in The Sunday Star – 'Timeout' of 10 April 1988, reported as follows on her visit to the Diagonal Street precinct: "It is vibrant and alive, and colourful, peopled by a hotchpotch of many races, religions and cultures to whom Diagonal Street is a way of life: nothing special, just a few rows of shops that they and their fathers have always patronised for their daily needs...I spent some time there. I wondered down Diagonal Street...then back along Kort Street, dodging the stacks of tin trunks and pyramids of saucepans spilling out from doors of overstocked shops, stepping round neat piles of fruit on wooden trestles...In most of these little shops which sell just about everything, the precaution is with health. In the northern suburbs they have their health shops; here they have all the traditional remedies of the black culture, with a smattering of the old Afrikaans, and a little of the Oriental thrown in too...Over all hangs an aura of incense, which is sold in most shops and burns in many... Kitchenware comes high on the list, from small gadgets to great sets of enamelled or aluminium saucepans...I felt a flutter of anticipation as I walked into the cool depths of a shop stocked from floor to ceiling with bolts of cotton cloth – mostly African prints...I pass time in a wholesale and retail merchant's shop, in which the scene must be familiar to travellers from Hong Kong, Cairo...or Mombassa – wherever Asians ply their trade."

SOURCES:

NMC File 9/2/228/5/5: Diagonal Street Conservation Area, Johannesburg (incl. coloured photographs of building)

NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/111 : Appendix - Diagonal Street Conservation Area Johannesburg (including colour photograph)

NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/124: Harrison Street Conservation Area, Johannesburg

City Engineering Department, Stand Nos. 758 and 766, Township Johannesburg (Planning Dept., City of Johannesburg)

City Engineering Department, Stand Nos. 754, 755, 765 and 766, Township Johannesburg (Planning Dept., City of Johannesburg)

The Star: 18, 21, 26, 30 and 31 March 1987

The Saturday Star: 10 April 1988

Business Day: 21 February 1990

Financial Mail: 13 April 1990

See also The Star, 19 March 1987: "Don't destroy this"

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