

JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

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

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NAME OF PLACE: NEW PLAZA CENTRE BUILDING

Left: Jeppe Street elevation.

Top Centre: Rissik streetscape.

Top right: Jeppe streetscape.

Previous/alternative name/s : New Plaza Centre

LOCATION: Street : cnr Rissik, Jeppe
 Street number :
 : [65, 67 Rissik; 148, 150, 152 Jeppe]
 Stand Number : 4840
 Previous Stand Number: 1131, 1132, 1133, 1134
 Block number : AG
 GIS reference :

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

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

Height :
 Levels above street level : fourteen
 Levels below street level : two
 On-site parking :

Chipkin: "The new ten-storey building that replaced the cinema was a clear expression of skeletal construction, its cellular window walls fitted between the structure. On the street elevations vertical

mullions (imposed in a Miesian manner in front of the hard-edged columnar grid) precast cladding panels (fitted over the horizontal beams with continuous shadow-line sills) together created a gradation of light and shade as well as a crisp elegance that was regarded as an alternative solution to the Johannesburg regional office vernacular. The solution was greeted with considerable approval. The *Rand Daily Mail* reported that the new building had 'aroused an amount of comment which shows that people are not indifferent to the kind of city that is changing and growing around them'." (Chipkin, C.M.: Johannesburg Style; Architecture & Society...).

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

Walls:

Roof:

Windows:

SITE FEATURES:

ALTERATIONS:

1975, 1980, 1981, 1984: major internal alterations; architects - J.C. Cook & Cowen.

INTEGRITY:

The scars left by the demolished *Newlyn Mansions* nullifies all efforts made by the architects Gluckman & De Beer to ensure a smooth façade surface without the bare lateral walls seen so often in buildings dating from this period. Major internal alterations were done over different periods but none to the exterior of the building. The *New Centre Plaza* has weathered well and after forty-three years, still maintains its position as a building of prominence.

INSCRIPTION:

ARCHITECT:

Gluckman & De Beer.

BUILDER:

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

Date on plans : 1 February 1961
Approval of plans : 2 June 1961
Completion date : 11 August 1964

BUILDING STYLE:

Late Modernist.

BUILDING TYPE:

Shops to street and office building.

ENVIRONMENT:

Being a youngster amongst the giants i.e. the neighbouring historic *Trades Hall Building*, the majestically proportioned *Anstey's Building*, and the soft rounded lines of the *Mackay Mansions*, the *New Plaza Centre* remains a distinctive building.

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 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: New Plaza House Ltd.

PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:

MRS IDA STONE'S COTTAGES:

Chipkin: "This city office building was erected on the corner of Rissik and Jeppe streets, the site where in the 1890s Mrs Ida Stone's verandahed cottages had stood and where in 1930 Furner was supervising the erection of the Plaza Kinema, a landmark that survived for nearly three decades."

PLAZA THEATRE/KINEMA:



Jeppe Street, Johannesburg, with Anstey's Building on the left.

G.A. Leyds circa 1896: "When we finally did move it was to Rissik Street between Kerk and Jeppe Streets, where the Plaza Theatre was later. There we had a one-storey brick dwelling under an iron roof, which was damaged by the Braamfontein explosion." The Braamfontein explosion caused great damage to numerous buildings and also levelled city - or during that period - town blocks.

Kallenbach, Kennedy & Furner designed the *Plaza Theatre* in 1930; the building was completed during 1932 and stood at 150 and 152 Jeppe Street. Van Der Waal: "...ascribes the design to Stanley Furner."

Right: Jeppe Street, 1956 – looking west: just visible is *Manners Mansions*; across Joubert Street is *Anstey's Building*; almost hidden is the *Heritier Building*, and on the Rissik Street corner, stands the *Criterion Hotel*. Across Rissik Street is the *Plaza Theatre*. (Photograph: Stark, F. [Ed.]: *Seventy Golden Years...*).

Chipkin gives the following description of the Plaza Theatre and its designers: "In Johannesburg of the 1920's and 1930's there were New York names everywhere. There was a Plaza Kinema...Further to the north there was a scattering of medium and large cinemas: the Bijou on Bree Street (west of Eloff) [see Pre-history: AS-1,], two block away from the Plaza on Rissik Street ...The name 'bioscope' was a distinctive South African term for the cinema, which persisted well into the late sixties when its use began to pall. But the term resonates with its own culture not unrelated to the Café Bioskoop designed by Rietveld in Amsterdam. Whereas the Metro was interior spectacle, the Plaza (1929-1930) was architecture in a

formal sense, the first major statement of distinctive modernism in Johannesburg. It was designed by Stanley Furner, who had come out from England in 1925 to take up an appointment at the new Department of Architecture at Wits. Within weeks after his arrival he had written a seminal paper for the *South African Architectural Record* entitled 'The Modern Movement in Architecture', and for the first time in Johannesburg the name Le Corbusier was publicly mentioned. In 1928 Furner resigned from Wits to join the major practice of Kallenbach & Kennedy, which was renamed Kallenbach, Kennedy & Furner – a household name in the 1930s. And it was there that Furner worked on the design of the Plaza...Gerhard van der Waal refers to the Plaza as 'an unmistakable attempt to give expression to modernity in an ahistorical manner'. Gilbert Herbert describes the rationality of the design as 'stemming from an understanding of the problem; a forward-looking attitude to such technical aspects as lighting, ventilation and acoustics; an integration of the arts, in the form of decorative sculpture and painting, with the architectural form; and an attempt at an all-embracing architectural unity.' The Plaza Kinema was forward-looking but it was also unmistakably linked to the past. Its projecting roof cantilever had echoes of a classical cornice, and its strongly symmetrical, fluted window fins (emphasising the treble volume of the interior) suggested a classical colonnade on the exterior. With its blank cubic wall faces and giant windows, it is also linked to a whole cluster of modern influences, including the RIBA building in Portland Place, London, which was opened in 1934, a few years after the Plaza was completed. These ideas in the air are summarised by Margaret Richardson's description of the RIBA Building: it embodied 'the perfect compromise at the time between the classicists and the modernists'. Like the RIBA building, the Plaza is a classic exemplar of this architecture in Johannesburg. Even the name lettering appearing on the two street elevations as well as the vertical signage echoes the lettering on the *Folies Bergère* building in Paris. It is a nice thought that the Johannesburg architects may well have spent time studying and reflecting on architecture at this famous Parisian cabaret. There is a distinct irony related to the architecture of the Plaza. The frankness and sobriety always seemed inappropriate for the type of patron who attended the performances – rough motor-cycle 'jollers', attracted to the endless series of Westerns that were the cinema's speciality. Clearly the Plaza had been designed with a more high-minded type of patron in mind." (Chipkin, C.M.: Johannesburg Style; Architecture & Society...)

In modern times one, according to Van Der Waal, one "had grown accustomed to identifying a theatre building immediately. Prior to 1900 a theatre was concealed behind a distinctive theatre front, but after 1902 the theatre space was integrated with the surrounding support rooms to such an extent that the structure was no longer readily identifiable as a theatre from the outside. The older theatre buildings had a tall front gable in the classicist style and the entrance was distinctive. Later theatres were distinguished from commercial buildings only by large billboards announcing current and future attractions. During this period Johannesburg's theatres did not develop a distinctive identity of their own. This is probably partly explained by the fact that theatres then began to provide for cinema shows as well, and that there was still some uncertainty about the future of these film shows. In addition, it would appear that, for financial reasons, the owners decided to include shops on the ground floor of their buildings and flats in the upper storeys. The most significant theatre building of this period was the five-storey *Orpheum Theatre* (1912), 160/2 Jeppe Street ...The *Orpheum* was the second theatre (after the *Bijou* of 1910) to be built in this area where the *Plaza* [at 150, 152 Jeppe Street] would also be erected in 1930. [The *Royalty* - also erected during 1930 - at 68 Pritchard Street also falls in this category and is longer used as a theatre.] Thus there emerged a second concentration of theatres after those in Commissioner Street – on the boundary between the commercial district and residential area and close to a number of club buildings. After 1910 this area must have been particularly lively during the evenings. Like the *The Orpheum*, the *Empire* [Empire Place of Varieties (1905-6), 135/7 Commissioner Street] provided a focal point in its environment, in which several well-known theatres, such as the *Colosseum* and *His Majesty's* were destined to arise later. During this period several existing buildings were converted into theatres. An example is the *Goldreich Building* (1893), 118 Commissioner Street, which was used as the post office while the Rissik Street Post Office [I-1] was being constructed. In 1903 it was converted into the first His Majesty's Theatre with seating for 1 100 patrons. In 1912 similar extensions and alterations converted the *YMCA Building* (1894), 71 Pritchard Street, into the *Vaudette Theatre*. This process of conversion was taken a step further in the case of the *Palladium Theatre*, 69, 71/3/5 Commissioner Street. In 1912 the interior of the empty Exchange Building was converted into a theatre while the exterior was altered to such an extent that it was no longer recognisable...With the exception of two, theatres did not play a significant role in the cityscape of Johannesburg during this period, but the relatively large number (seven) of new theatres was a pointer to the rather lively social activities of the city centre. The theatres were a popular form of relaxation where residents sought respite from the tensions brought on by feverish business activities. The fact that the theatres were located so close to the financial and business districts would seem to indicate that the former were regarded as a perfect foil for the latter. Compared with the hierarchical and insulated formalism of the banking and office buildings, the theatres represented a democratic and integrated approach to architecture." See table below for relevant document numbers and status of building. The *Goldreich Building*, which

included the first *Majesty's Theatre* was refurbished and the building was there after known as the *Majesty's Theatre* and the *Starlite Cinema* was demolished for the sole purpose of becoming a parking garage.

Name:	Document Number And Or Previous Name:	Status Of Building:
<i>Bijou</i>	Pre-History, Document AS-1	Demolished
<i>Colosseum</i>		Demolished
<i>Carlton Theatre</i>	Pre-History, Document AA-1	Demolished
<i>Empire Palace of Varieties</i>	Pre-History, Document BA-1, <i>Globe Theatre</i>	Demolished
<i>Gaiety Theatre</i>	Pre-History, Document A-1	Demolished
<i>Goldreich Building</i>	Pre-History, Document BG-1	Refurbished as theatre
[Second] <i>His Majesty's</i>	Document BG-1	Converted to a store
<i>Orpheum Theatre</i>	Pre-History, Document AF-2	Demolished
<i>Palladium Theatre</i>	Pre-History, Document D-4	Demolished
<i>Plaza Theatre</i>	Pre-History Document AG-4	Demolished
<i>Standard Theatre</i>	Pre-History, Document I-2	Demolished
<i>Starlite Cinema</i>	Pre-History, Document M-2	Demolished
<i>The Royalty</i>	Document AC-5	Disused as theatre
<i>Vaudette Theatre</i>	Pre-History, Document AD-5, <i>YMCA Building</i>	Demolished

There is a song 'Video killed the radio star' – I think the Boomtown Rats recorded it –which is an apt description of the demise of a large number of cinemas in South Africa. The video machine is connected to the television set and the arrival of television in South Africa during 1976 started a downhill period for the cinema and theatre industry. Out of own experience I remember going to the theatre at least once a month and to the cinemas once a week. The television changed that for a while and a large number of South Africans remained glued to their television sets during the evenings. It is also interesting to note that at least three of the above mentioned theatres [*Carlton Theatre*, *Gaiety Theatre* and the *Palladium Theatre*] were in one way or another were connected to the I.W. Schlesinger organisation, the destruction of these buildings left a void of night life. Another factor is the demolition of a large number of residential buildings in the inner city. This started a vicious circle – the number of inner city residents was systematically reduced – this meant an automatic reduction of patrons to the cinemas and theatres – leading to less people during the evenings in the city and as we all know; safety in numbers – an important factor – as this could have saved the heart of the city from a slow death and all the crime that followed. This is a leading factor making Johannesburg the capital city of crime in the world at one stage and sadly this city rot has filtered through to the areas adjacent to the inner city, making a place like Hillbrow for example an almost no go area for tourists. A huge abandonment of buildings followed this crime wave leading to the building boom in Sandton. This notorious title is still taking a toll on the inner city - and it is taking a lot of hard work from various people and organizations to make Johannesburg once again the glorious City of Gold. (Catharina J M Bruwer).

"As in the pioneering days" according to Van Der Waal, "theatre buildings had a more important role than church buildings in the architectural development of Johannesburg from 1920 to 1940, during which period four enormous theatres and cinemas were built in the city centre. This would seem to indicate that after 1920 the interest and taste in entertainment shifted to new and experimental social activities, including spectacular shows. It is probably also explained by the acknowledged need for entertainment in times of stress, such as those of the world-wide depression and the searing drought in the South African countryside around 1930 (the year *The Royalty* was constructed). The development of talking pictures, which were shown in Johannesburg for the first time in 1929...gave conventional theatre an important partner. Both created a rich new fantasy world and these buildings reflected the attraction of the unusual. Moreover, these developments were also a reflection of a more democratic tendency, in that an effort was made to entertain the masses, just as the infant broadcasting system was doing at the time. Previously, when British imperialism with its autocratic approach held sway, entertainment of the masses was considered unimportant. The excitement created by the theatres and cinemas made the city centre a very lively place every night – not only by drawing large numbers of people and vehicles into the streets but by enlivening the area with large illuminated bill-boards." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...). *The Royalty* seems to be isolated from the rest of the theatre and cinema groups, this could partly explain the survival of the building.

"Theatre and cinema buildings", according to Van Der Waal, "occurred in two groups in the city centre. One was in Jeppe and Bree Street, and the other in Commissioner Street. The *Bijou Theatre*...just north of the shopping district and near the *Orpheum*, was rebuilt in 1931 and given a new façade while the interior was also refurbished. The interior and exterior decoration was reminiscent of Oriental architectural styles. Nearby the Plaza Cinema...was built in a bolder, more experimental form.

The modernist design by Kallenbach, Kennedy & Furner must in fact have come as something of a shock to most Johannesburgers. Whereas the buildings in the Edwardian and Traditional styles still articulated the building mass by moulding the façade and interrupting the roof-line, the *Plaza* was a simple block with a broad roof overhang. The façades were divided into rectangles which, together with narrow fins in open middle sections, gave the building the appearance of a classical temple, while the abstract treatment of the fins was intended to imitate the vibrating sounds of music. The same effect was created by applying ribs in the lateral interior walls and by the Art Deco patterns in the foyer. The *Plaza* did not reflect all the theoretical ideals of the International Style, such as a sculptured articulation of space, the expression of various user functions in the different parts of the building and a free plan. Nevertheless, the single stereometric form and the geometric treatment of the façade did reveal an unmistakable attempt to give expression to modernity in an ahistorical manner in concrete. At that stage, such a consistent attempt at architectural renewal was unique in South Africa. No wonder that in 1975 the *Plaza* was described by G Herbert as stylistically the most modern building in South Africa during its own time. The *Metro Theatre* was built in 1932 at 221 Bree Street, not far from the *Bijou* and *Plaza*. Like these two theatres and the *Orpheum*, the *Metro* was also of limited size. In this way these buildings fitted with their environment where, prior to the building expansion which came after 1933, all other buildings were also relatively low. While the other theatres consisted of a single cuboid, the form of the *Metro* was broken up into severe block increasing in height towards the street corner. As in the case of the *Plaza*, pilaster-like strips in panels were used to create the illusion of a temple front. The building was designed by Thomas W Lamb, the New York architect of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, who directed that R40 000 be spent on air-conditioning...This provides an interesting sidelight on architectural development in Johannesburg during that time. While the theatres and cinemas north of the shopping district were all low-rise buildings, those east of the office area were much larger and also more sensational. These 'entertainment palaces' obviously felt at home in the vicinity of the tall office blocks which arose in this area, especially in Commissioner Street, which became known as the 'Great White Way' because of these buildings. In fact, the theatre buildings were so well identified with the environment that parts of them were fitted out as office accommodation. Nevertheless, they could be readily identified in the street aspect by their modelled and richly ornamented façades and large illuminated signboards." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

Ellen Palestrant on social events: "In 1937 Mrs Barney Barnato visited South Africa after an absence of forty years. That year too, slum clearance activities were commenced at Prospect Township while under the new municipal scheme, Orlando houses were available for renting. A large tract of land had been bought on the farm Klipspruit Number Eight for the development of the location. The 'Natives' (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, had required local authorities to provide accommodation for 'natives' legally employed and resident within the area of their jurisdiction and a 'Native' Municipal Affairs Department had been set up. The Plaza Theatre that year continued to hold talent contests and a documentary short was screened about *Jim's day off*, how 'some of the 'natives' spend their Sundays in Johannesburg. With more facilities for sport the menace of idle hands might be removed.' There was so much to do, so much to enjoy, so much entertainment...1945...and at the Plaza, Frank Sinatra, [the one and only Blue Eyes - film star and singer - much beloved by all generations, even today] 'the sensational rage of America in R.K.O. radio's glittering show 'Higher and Higher.' '...Johannesburg continued to remain largely pro-Smuts and on 23 May 1950, the day before his eightieth birthday, three hundred thousand people lined the streets to honour him as he was given the freedom of the city...At the Plaza Yvonne De Carlo starred in *Buccaneer's Girl*'..." (Palestrant, E.: Johannesburg One Hundred).

1956: "Pioneer Building Material Merchants" - Established In 1888, Only Two Years After The Opening Of The Gold Fields, Hubert Morisse & Co. (Pty.) Limited Have Been Playing Their Part In The Building Of The Golden City. One of the most prized possessions of Hubert Morisse & Company (Pty.) Limited of 8 Hall Street, Johannesburg, is a document appointing that Company as forage merchants to His Excellency, the Right Hon. Earl of Selborne, P.C., G.C.M.G., and the fact of that appointment is proudly emblazoned on the firm's letterheads. Such an honour is not lightly given and is some indication of the esteem in which the Company was held in those early days - an esteem which has grown and increased with the years. The firm was established in 1888 by Mr. J. R. Morisse and is only two years younger than Johannesburg, the city which it has seen grow and develop from an insignificant mining camp into the hub of the African Continent, playing itself no small part in the building up of this City of Gold. The Company was one of the first to handle locally-produced cement and lime and is to-day a wholesale distributor of building materials, animal feeds, coal, produce and mealie meal, lime and cement. Mr C. W. R. Morisse, son of the founder, is the chairman of the Company. The other directors are J. R. Morisse and A. Cronk. Some of the important contracts which this Company has handled are those for His Majesty's Building [BG-1], Escom House [17, 19, 21, 23 Rissik Street; now demolished], Plaza Theatre [see Pre-History: AG-4; now demolished] and Barbican Buildings [S-1; abandoned]. All mighty edifices of which Johannesburg is truly proud, and which bear

ample testimony of this old-established and honourable firm of building-material merchants. At present time the Company has contracts for the new United Building Society building, York House [V-7], for Castle Breweries at Isando and for the new bridge at Vereeniging. For the past fifty years Hubert Morisse & Company (Pty.) Limited has supplied coal to Corner House, headquarters of the gold-mining industry in this country [the third *Corner House*: E-1]. Here, indeed, is a firm which has played an important part in the building of Johannesburg, and is destined to play an even greater part in the city's development, as Johannesburg continues to grow and expand in the years to come." (Stark, F. [Ed.]: *Seventy Golden Years...*).

HISTORY:

GENERAL NOTES:

Estimated cost of building	: £1 500 000
Estimated cost of drainage	: £5 000
Accommodation approved	:
Valuation at completion	:
Occupied	:

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:

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Unless otherwise indicated photographs by Catharina JM Bruwer.



28 9 2003

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