

CATALOGUE NO: I-2

DATE RECORDED: Aug/Sept 2002

JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

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

NAME OF PLACE: Oppenheimer Park



Previous/alternative name/s : Oppenheimer Garden

LOCATION: Street : Joubert
Street number : 31 - 37
Stand number : 1/4784, 2/4784, RE/4784
Block number : I

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



DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

...s (my 'bokkie park') is one place I remember with great fondness, having spent many half-an-hour lunch breaks in the park. If you where lucky you could find a bench facing the fountain and the ('bokkies') impala. The benches where large, and they lined the path, sturdy and painted (can't remember if they were wood or metal benches, only the shine of the gloss paint and maybe they were brown, can remember the 'Whites Only' signs on them). There used to be dozens upon dozens of doves, eagerly waiting to share your lunch, which you gladly did. I remember the water spilling from the fountain, leaving puddles of drinking and bathing water for the doves. Life slowed down in the park, the slim tall trees behind the Post Office and the gardens could make you believe you were somewhere else, people never ran through the park, they always slowed down. Sometimes if you where lucky you could hear the running water, sometimes you could even feel the spray of the water. The tight pack of impala with their greenish colour, jumping over the fountain in an arch always fascinated me, wondering if they really could jump in that way. This was almost thirty years ago, I had to fight the tears seeing the Post Office and the Park for the first time in twenty odd years, all that is left are the skeletons of these two places. (cjmb)

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

SITE FEATURES:

ALTERATIONS:

INTEGRITY:

A far cry from what it use to be. People's memories of this open space are in stark contrast to the current conditions of the park. See DESCRIPTION.

INSCRIPTION:

ARCHITECT/BUILDER:

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

On plan :

Completed :
BUILDING STYLE:

BUILDING TYPE:

ENVIRONMENT:

The facades of the park comprise *inter alia*, of the rear sections of the neglected old Post Office, as well as the NBS Building and Game. Contextually, the park currently contributes very little to the qualities of its immediate setting.

CONDITION:

This urban space is badly neglected. It has presently no meaning and has lost all its former attributes as a public open space.

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:

Stand No. 1/4784 (previously 1/349):
T12511/1992 South African Post Office Ltd

Stand No. 2/4784 (previously 2/349):
T3308/1964 Republic of South Africa

Stand No. 4784 (previously 349, before that 349-352, 357-359):
T3307/1964 City of Johannesburg

PRE HISTORY OF SITE:

The site of this park is where the old Standard Building and Theatre stood. This building was demolished in 1955 despite a big protest.

HISTORY:

Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, the founder of the country's most successful mining-finance house, died in 1957. He is commemorated in Johannesburg by the attractive fountain with a herd of impala leaping over the water, originally set in the centre of the Square on the eastern side of the Rissik Street Post Office. This memorial added a note of charm to the central area, and was donated to the City by his son, H.F. Oppenheimer and unveiled by the Mayor, Councillor Alec Gorshel, on the 16 of July, 1960. The sculptor was Herman Wald.

On 17 November 1999, it was reported in the Beeld ("Fortuinsoekers skend standbeeld in park") that the sculpture had been vandalised. The heads and some of the legs of the leaping Impala had been cut off! Vandals probably thought that the statue was of copper or bronze, Not so – it is of rather inexpensive metal. Police later recovered one of the 10 missing heads from a Boksburg scrap dealer. One of the missing legs was found in a pawnshop in Johannesburg in November 1999.

What remained of the sculpture was subsequently removed from the Park. It was taken to the artist Mike Wald, the son of the original sculptor. The Star reported on 6 September 2000 ("Impala sculpture to leap right back into Joburg CBD) that the legs and heads would be remodelled "before the work is mounted in a new, more secure piazza near Johannesburg's Magistrate's Court."

GENERAL NOTES:

The Park is understandably, a comparatively recent addition to the sequence of public open spaces in the CBD (compare with the public open spaces precinct west of the City Hall).

SOURCES:

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

NMC File 9/2/228/67, Vol. 4: Rissik Street Post Office, Rissik Street, Johannesburg

Shorten, J.R.: The Johannesburg Saga, John R. Shorten, Second impression, 1966

Benjamin, A.: Lost Johannesburg, Macmillan SA, 1979

The Star, 6 September 2000

Restorica, Summer 1991 (The Civic Spine)

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