

JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

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

JJ Bruwer ©

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NAME OF PLACE: ANNAN HOUSE



Left: Commissioner Street – view of *Annan House* and the *third Standard Bank Chambers* on the left. Top centre: view of stepped back top storeys. Top right: Fox Street elevation. Bottom centre: unusual view of the building (photo taken from the *third Corner House*). Bottom left: Commissioner Street elevation.

Previous/alternative name/s : second *Green's Buildings*

LOCATION: Street : Commissioner
 Street number : 86
 : [85 Fox]
 Stand Number : 140, 144
 Previous Stand Number:
 Block number : BC
 Suburb : Marshallstown
 GIS reference :

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

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

Height	: 154m.
Levels above street level	: ground floor and 17 floors up.
Levels below street level	: one.
On-site parking	: none.

According to Chipkin, "Castle Mansions [see AC-2] was the first modern building of the 1930s built in Eloff Street. Commenced in 1931, it took the contractors John Barrow sixteen months to complete what was advertised as the 'greatest building in South Africa': greatest in size (a whole city block in length), greatest in bulk (massive, symmetrical, fortress-like) and greatest in height. Its pre-eminence in the Johannesburg skyline was not based on its mandatory ten-storey elevation but on the height of its central Art Deco flagmast. It was regarded as the most modern building of its day, noted for its modern plateglass shop-fronts, with Art Deco brass trim and modernistic illuminated shop signage, its first-floor plateglass showroom windows and its dramatically modern entrance with sans-serif name letters. The previous competition for height had been won in the beginning of 1932 by Astor Mansions, eleven storeys high and 150 feet to the apex of its spire. This had surpassed Barbican Building [see S-1] (140 feet to the top of its attic sculpture) and Shell House, which the *South African Builder* of 1931, in an attempt at fair adjudication, recorded as 148 feet 9 inches to the top of its lift tower. Thus Astor Mansions held its pre-eminence by a mere 1 foot 3 inches 9375 millimetres). Now came Castle Mansions – massive ocean liner of a building, ten storeys high with a central attic tower and flagmast which the owners declared was 180 feet 7¼ inches (55 048 millimetres) above the pavement – a new height record for Johannesburg, superseding the short-lived claims of Astor Mansions, which had been completed only a few months earlier. But that seven and a quarter inches to the top ferrule of the flagmast on Castle Mansions did not in the end help much. Within five years a stepped infill building such as Annan House in Commissioner Street was five floors higher than Castle Mansions, and by the end of the decade there were at least five real skyscrapers (see definition under GENERAL NOTES) visible at the new record height-levels of the pre-war period: these held pre-eminence until they in turn were swamped by the building scale of the 1960s and 1970s." (Chipkin, C.M.: Johannesburg Style; Architecture & Society...) (The second *Castle Mansions* as well as *Annan House* were built by John Barlow (Pty) Limited, see BUILDER).

"Another indication of the variety of styles used during this period [1920 – 1940] was the streamlining of the salient series of balconies in some buildings. In this regard the most dramatic effect was achieved in *Normandie Court* (1937-8), 94/6 Kerk Street, where the rounded corners of the balconies were complemented and their effect reinforced by the cantilever concrete slabs at the corner of the building. Earlier the same effect was created in *Mackay Mansions*...albeit in a less integrated manner, while the treatment of the banded windows of *Annan Building* (1935-7). 86 Commissioner Street, was in much the same mould. In the latter building, however, it was ingeniously balanced by the recessed middle section with its narrow vertical concrete strips. In fact, this was a rather striking example of the stepped recession of the upper storeys in terms of the building regulations of those years." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

See also HISTORY below.

The original plans record of the building is incomplete. The following, however, appears from this record: the Basement plan provided for a Boiler Room and Transformer Room and a staircase on each side of a lift tower located in the central section of the building, extending down into the Basement; located on the Ground Floor were six shops (with parquet floors), which included the Bank Bar, near the Main Entrance in Commissioner Street; extending all the way along the eastern section of the Ground Floor from the Main Entrance in Commissioner Street to Fox Street, was a wide corridor (flanked on the one side by show cases) providing access to an Entrance Hall (paved with marble slabs) flanking the Elevator Lobby; the office floor layout from First Floor up was distinctly symmetrical.

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

Walls:	skeleton structure (see definition below), plastered brick walls.
Roof:	flat, concrete.
Windows:	steel frame casements.

According to Fraser, a skeleton construction is a "method of construction consisting of a framework...and an outer covering which takes no load...The skeleton may be visible from the outside...a structure whose weight is carried by the framework instead of by load-bearing walls. The term includes modern steel and reinforced concrete structures..." (Fraser, M. [ed.]: *Some Reminiscences...*)

SITE FEATURES:

ALTERATIONS:

See also HISTORY below.

Alterations to existing Mezzanine. Plans passed 4 March 1948. Architect: R. Chris Neill (address: 139 Annan House, Johannesburg). Estimated cost £25.

Minor internal alterations. Plans passed 22 February 1950. Architect: T.N. Duncan (address: 603 Union Castle Building, Loveday Street, Johannesburg). Estimated cost £100.

Minor internal alterations. Plans passed 8 January 1951. Architects: Wayburne & Wayburne (address: 80 Loveday House, Marshall Street, Johannesburg). Estimated cost £25.

Minor internal alterations. Plans passed 7 January 1959. Architects: Wayburne & Israel (address: 801 Loveday House, Marshall Street, Johannesburg). Estimated cost £1 750.

Alterations (nature and extent unknown). Name of architect not known. Plans passed: 30 April 1962. Estimated cost R1 375.

Alterations. Plans passed 29 July 1964. Architects: Stauch & Vorster (address: 101 Netherlands Bank Building, Pretoria). Estimated cost R600.

Alterations. Plans passed 7 October 1964. Architects: Stauch & Vorster (address: 101 Netherlands Bank Building, Pretoria). Estimated cost R3 600.

Alterations. Plans passed 22 June 1966. Architects: Murray & Telford. Estimated cost R2 750.

Alterations. Plans passed 31 August 1967. Architects: Murray & Telford. Estimated cost R800.

Major alterations. Plans passed 5 May 1969. Architects: G.W. Dok & Partners. Estimated cost R15 000.

Alterations. Plans passed 13 November 1968. Architects: Nurcombe, Summerley, Ringrose & Todd (address: 301 Portland Place, Jorissen Street, Braamfontein). Estimated cost R2 000.

Alterations. Plans passed 24 November 1970. Architect: Andrew Zennon (20th Century Building, Johannesburg). Estimated cost R400.

Renovations to *Annan House* for future offices of Johannesburg Mining & Finance Corporation (Ltd.): Approved by NMC during August 1988. This approval was given on the understanding "...that the north and south facades from the 1st floor...(to) the recessed floors (would) remain unchanged...that on the recessed sections the windows...(would be) enlarged and corners added, but (that) the proportions of the new fenestration...(would) relate to that of the mullioned windows below...There was (to be) a certain amount of remodelling on (sic.) the south façade's upper elements to match those of the north façade...There...(would be) a small addition on the roof which could not be seen from the public areas." All significant elements of the building were retained, and it was felt that the proposed changes to the windows would not destroy the ship-like quality of the superstructure of the building.

The renovations included a new atrium feature with openable glass roof and a new porch façade on the 17th floor; the renovation of existing windows to 1st to 10th floors; new terrazzo type stone chip finish to all exterior walls; the removal of existing mosaic from the vertical fins; the renovation of existing balustrades; the installation of new curved corner windows to the 9th floor and above; the provision of new double outward opening doors, allowing access to the balconies at 7th, 9th, 11th and 13th floor levels.

INTEGRITY:

Except for the changes effected to the northern and southern facades of the building during the late 1960s and late 1980s, the integrity of the buildings has remained relatively intact. The new work carried out to the top floor of the building with the addition of an atrium and a new porch façade, did not adversely affect the authenticity of the design of the building.

INSCRIPTION:**ARCHITECT:**

Emley & Williamson. (Address: 76 Market Street, Johannesburg).

BUILDER:

John Barlow (Pty) Limited.

Concrete engineers: Reinforcing Steel Co Ltd.

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

Date on plans : January 1935
Approval of plans : 21 October 1935
Completion date : 25 February 1937



Copy of "High Building Notice" published in *Rand Daily Mail* on 23, 25, and 26 February 1935.

BUILDING STYLE:

Art Deco - New York, 1930s.

"Architectural Merit: A very beautiful Art Deco building that is strongly modernist in its details, and expressive in its form." (Johannesburg Building, Space & Urban Feature Classification, 1998: Inner City).

"A typical example of A-Historical architecture where the projecting vertical bands on the façade constitute an aesthetic element in the expression of the structure." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

Extract from description accompanying a minuted decision by the NMC of 18 March 1988 to have the north and south facades of the building provisionally declared as a national monument: "Annan House...is a particularly interesting example of the Art Deco style. Coming as it does towards the end of that period, the exuberance and curves of that style is tempered by the influence of the Modern Movement. As such it makes a transition to the architecture of the 1940's. The crown of stepbacks characteristic of Art Deco echoes the curves below. Its smooth facades with rounded corners is also reminiscent of 'Ship Architecture'. This strongly symmetrical building has similar facades in both Commissioner and Fox Streets."

BUILDING TYPE:

Shops to street and office building.

ENVIRONMENT:

"The building literally forms a climax in the street façade of this block, largely on account of its three stepped-back top storeys." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

"Norman Hanson, describing Johannesburg in 1952, wrote that there were 'no boulevards, no monumental approaches, no interweaving parks, no city squares'. He neglected to say, however, that by 1952 Johannesburg possessed one metropolitan thoroughfare in the central city portion of Commissioner Street. When His Majesty's was completed, it made this thoroughfare work visually: looking eastwards, its own vertical signage extended the thematic vertical illuminations of the lesser Broadway from Broadcast House in the east up to Joubert Street in the centre. In addition, from its central position, His Majesty's [see BG-1] looked westwards to the financial quarter that extended from Eloff Street as far as Sauer Street. Here a whole series of secular statements of material power occurred: two substantial Victorian finance buildings, Permanent Building (extant as *Victory House*) [see BD-1] and Exploration Building [see Pre-History: BB-1]; four major Edwardian blocks, the Carlton [the first *Carlton Hotel*; see Pre-History: AA-1], the Rand Club [see BD-3], Standard Bank [see BC-3] and the Corner House [see E-1]; and massive 1930s statement of financial power at the S.A. Permanent [*Peoples Bank Building*; see D-1], S.A. Mutual [see E-3] and Barclays Mutual and Barclays Commissioner Street [see F-4]. On this east-west axis of variable character there was one stepped infill skyscraper, Annan House, besides the verticality of the CNA Building [see BF-1] on Rissik Street corner, Cook & Cowen had contributed a substantial building to this block, Shakespeare House [see BF-3] (on the corner of Joubert), which picked up the verticality of the CNA headquarters in its own vertical modular treatment. The superbloc [sic.] between Joubert and Eloff streets was the missing link, and it was here that Cook & Cowen would make connections and form the transition between the theatreland of the east and the financial sector of the west." (Chipkin, C.M.: Johannesburg Style; Architecture & Society...)

Johannesburg has never been a jealous guardian of its architectural heritage, rather like a bee, continuously disposing of one flower for another. The two substantial Victorian finance buildings have been reduced to one. The *Exploration Building* only exists on paper and of the four major Edwardian blocks, only three remain. The first *Carlton Hotel* had to make room for yet another skyscraper. The *CNA Building* has been abandoned and left to rot with the vacant stand to its rear, having left the building standing 'naked' and no longer as appealing to the eye as it used to be. The majestically His Majesty's has been partially 'dethroned' – her double crown – once a proud element in the Johannesburg skyline, has disappeared, and so also her original theatrical function. This building has in a sense, become just another 'ordinary' building in the environment. Commissioner and Fox Streets are no longer the socially vibrant streets of former times. (Catharina JM Bruwer).

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)

The north and south facades of the building were previously provisionally declared as a national monument. See extract from relevant Government Gazette No. 11873 of 19 May 1989: Government Notice No. 967 dated 19 May 1989. This provisional protection was for a period of five years from date of publication of the Notice. The period of provisional declaration was not extended.

**DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL
EDUCATION**

No. 967

19 May 1989

NATIONAL MONUMENTS ACT, No. 28 OF 1969

PROVISIONAL DECLARATION OF A NATIONAL MONUMENT.—THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN FACADES OF THE SO-CALLED ANNAN HOUSE, SITUATED IN COMMISSIONER AND FOX STREETS, AT MARSHALLTOWN, JOHANNESBURG

In terms of section 5 (1) (c) of the National Monuments Act, 1969 (Act No. 28 of 1969), the National Monuments Council hereby provisionally declares the northern and southern facades of the so-called Annan House, situated in Commissioner and Fox Streets, at Marshalltown, Johannesburg, as described below, to be a national monument.

Description

The northern and southern facades of the so-called Annan House, situated in Commissioner and Fox Streets on portions of Stands 140 and 144, in the Township of Marshalls on the farm Turffontein 21 (now known as Marshalltown), in the District of Johannesburg.

Certificate of Conversion to Freehold Title T2721/30, dated 11 July 1930.

G. S. HOFMEYER,
Director, National Monuments Council.
(18 Mei 1989)

NOTES:

It was recommended in the 1976 RAU Survey report that the building should be declared as a National Monument.

DEEDS INFORMATION:

Original ownership: Green's Buildings Ltd. (Certificate Of Conversion To Freehold Title T2721/30 dd. 11 July 1930).

By 1956 Green's Buildings Ltd., appears as a subsidiary of African City Properties Trust. The plans designed by Emley & Williamson indicates "Green's Buildings For African City Properties Trust Ltd."

By 1976: Greens Building Ltd, P.O. Box 2174, Johannesburg, 2000.

By 1992: Greens Building Ltd, (30 Simmonds Street (Pty) Ltd), P.O. Box 1124, Johannesburg, 2000.

PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:

GREEN'S CHAMBERS:

Designed by Clayton & Williams in 1893, and completed in 1894, the three-storey un-plastered brick building (Neo-Queen Anne style) replaced the *Green's Building*, occupying the stand on which the current building now stands.

This was the only known building in Johannesburg designed by A Clayton and H Williams, this partnership lasted from 1893 to 1894. There were four covered arcades in the business district of Johannesburg during the period 1890 to 1900. It is interesting to note that these arcades (all positioned on a north-south axis between Commissioner and Fox Streets), situated in close proximity to one another (within an area of five city blocks). The arcades were the *Exploration Building* (see Pre-History: BB-1); *Barnato Building* (see Pre-History: BC-3) and its immediate neighbour *Green's Chambers*, as well as *Jeppie Arcade Building* (see Pre-History: BF-1).

"On the face of it ", according to Van Der Waal, "these arcades would appear to have been out of

place in this district, but the fact that they were used almost exclusively for offices and were not at all as colourful as *The Arcade* [see Pre-History: G-7], shows that this type of construction was 'borrowed' from the commercial buildings and adapted for office use. The office area certainly was no place for women..." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

FIRST GREEN'S BUILDING:

By 1887, the *first Green's Building* stood at 86 Commissioner Street. "To meet the increasing transport requirements of the people of Johannesburg one of the original coach services had a terminus situated in Green's Building in Commissioner Street between Harrison and Simmonds streets, more or less on the site of today's Annan House. On this site a booking office was also provided to reserve seats for longer trips." (Norwich, O.I.: A Johannesburg Album; Historical Postcards).

While waiting for their own premises to be completed, Standard Bank leased offices in the W.J. *Green's Building* from March 1887 at a monthly rental of £14!

Right: "Commissioner Street, Looking East. On the corner on the right is the Robinson Building, then Green's Building and the Standard Bank. The large building on the corner of Harrison Street is Permanent Building (Victory House). On the left is the iron work veranda of the early Corner House." (Norwich, O.I.: A Johannesburg Album; Historical Postcards, postcard 35).



HISTORY:



Left: Copy of photo from SAHRA archive file 3/1/1Joh/143: Annan House, 86 Commissioner Street, Marshalltown.

As *Annan House* was erected for the African City Properties Trust (1952) Ltd., the following description by Stark (dated 1956) becomes appropriate: "One of the modern romances of big business that will one day take up an important chapter in the history and development of Johannesburg lies behind the story of the emergence of the African City Properties Trust 1952 Ltd. as the largest property-owning concern in Southern Africa today. Originally established in London in 1894 with the object of acquiring properties in the Union, A.C.P.T. Limited, amongst other valuable holdings, owned six of the highest-valued properties in Johannesburg, facing on Eloff Street. On these sites there existed buildings which in their day were looked upon as the last word in modern architecture but which had long been outmoded by the fast pace of the city. In 1940 there came into being a company called Controlled Investments Limited, owned and operated by two brothers, Mr. Samuel L. Glazer, J.P., who came to the Union in 1926, and Mr. Bernard Glazer, who came to Johannesburg in 1930, and who were mainly responsible for the development of Hillbrow. The company built the Skyline Hotel and a new block of shops,

Hillcrest Buildings, on an adjoining corner, which will eventually rise to eleven storeys. In 1947 the Glazer brothers realised that Eloff Street - South Africa's most valuable strip of land - was lagging far behind in the meteoric progress and growth of the country. The story of how the Glazer brothers made successive trips to England, wooed the shareholders of African City Properties Trust, and finally managed to purchase a controlling interest in the company, is one that will be discussed in financial

circles in South Africa for years to come. At that stage the company owned the following properties: Castle Mansions, of 10 storeys, on the corner of Eloff Street and Jeppe Street [see AE-2]; [second] Manners Mansions, of 13 storeys, on the corner of Jeppe Street and Joubert Street [see AE-3]; Davidson Mansions (now the famous Waldorf), of five storeys on the corner of Eloff Street and Bree Street; Walter Mansions, of four storeys, on the corner of Eloff Street, Bree Street and Jeppe Street, which had since been demolished, a modern skyscraper being erected in its place; Pollock Mansions, of four storeys in the heart of Eloff Street, now demolished to make way for African City – one of the landmarks of Johannesburg's commercial centre; [first] Marlborough House, of four storeys, bounded by the corner of Eloff Street, Commissioner Street and Fox Street, now demolished to make way for a modern skyscraper standing there today; St. James Mansions, of five storeys, on the corner of Eloff Street and Bree Street, and Norfolk House, of four storeys, on the corner of Joubert Street and Bree Street, which has since been demolished for the erection of the new Bosman Building [see AS-4]; Lauriston Court, of five storeys in Louis Botha Avenue, Houghton; Stanley House, corner of Commissioner Street and Bree Street [sic. should be 89, 91 Commissioner and 37 Loveday Streets; see Pre-History: F-5], which was subsequently sold, and a subsidiary, Green's Buildings Limited, which owns 17-storey Annan House, Commissioner Street, which today [i.e. 1956] houses the headquarters of African City Properties Trust...With complete control in their hands, the Glazer brothers and associates now turned to the second part of their long-term programme. This was the organization and flotation of a public company known as A.C.P. Investment Limited, which acquired the total controlling interest in African City Properties Trust Ltd. This new company perfected the plans for the rebirth of Eloff Street, demolishing existing buildings and erecting gigantic modern edifices which today form new and progressive landmarks of the city's main shopping thoroughfare. At the same time the company gained further suburban interest by taking over Carnarvon Hotels Limited, owners of the Orange Grove Hotel, in Orange Grove, and a block of 14 shops next to the hotel. The company also bought out Stedelike Grondbeleggers Beperk, owners of bank premises in De Villiers Street, Johannesburg. The Organisation has since bought Mackay Mansions, of 11 storeys, on the corner of Rissik and Jeppe Streets [see AQ-7], Ridgeway Court, corner of Bok Street and Nugget Street and Parkleigh Court, in Wolmarans Street. The Glazer brothers have always worked together. For more than two decades they have planned real estate and building operations with an implicit faith in the future of Johannesburg and the still greater future of the country where-in their interest now extends to Bechuanaland [now known as Botswana] and the Central African Federation. But the story does not end there. As South Africa moves forward in the face of inevitable progress, so African City Property Investment Limited and its associated companies will move forward with it, secure in the knowledge that its prosperity is intimately bound up in that of a progressive country." (Stark, F. [Ed.]: Seventy Golden Years...).

Below: extract from S.A. Mining & Industria Who's Who 1943.

ANNAN, Robert; Director of Companies; Resident Engineer, New Consolidated Goldfields, London; Director: Anglo-African Selected Investments Ltd., Australian Selection Trust Ltd., Camp Bird Ltd., Consolidated Gold Fields of S.A. Ltd., Fresnillo Co. (London Committee), Gold Exploration & Finance Co. of Australia Ltd., Gold Mines of Kal-goorlie Ltd., Homebush G.M. Co. Ltd., Indian Copper Corporation Ltd., Konongo G.M. Ltd. (Chairman), Lagares Tin Mines (1933) Ltd., Lake George Metal Corporation Ltd., Lamplough C.M. Co. Ltd., Lyndhurst Deep Level (Gold and Silver) Ltd., Madam Hopkins G.M. Co. Ltd., Mawchi Mines Ltd., Mexican Corporation Ltd., Mill Close

Mines Ltd., Mount Elliot Ltd., New Consolidated Gold Fields Ltd., South American Copper Co. Ltd., Etc.; President, Institution of Mining & Metallurgy, London, 1936; paid first visit to South Africa and visited the Rand, Oct. 1936; Add: 49 Moorgate, London, E.C. 2 and 38 Orchard Court, Portman Square, London, W. 1.

During August 1987, the NMC was approached by the architect R.D. Ringrose regarding the proposed refurbishment of the building. It was envisaged to carry out fairly drastic changes to provide for more suitable office accommodation. The NMC's position, however, was that the building was of conservation value, comprising strong Art Deco features "such as the ribs, the smooth surface treatment, the curved walls and the general form of the building with the diminishing floors at the top..." Although the NMC was not against the proposed adaptation of the building for the Johannesburg Mining and Finance Corporation, it was felt that a balanced approach was called for. The north and south facades of the building were of sufficient importance so as to be retained intact. The decision was therefore taken by the NMC on 18 March 1988 to provisionally declare the street

facades as a national monument. See attached copy of letter dated 10 March 1988 from Ms Marilyn Martin (a then Honorary Curator of the NMC) to Mrs Flo Bird, then NMC Councillor, regarding the architectural importance of the building. See also attached copy of memorandum dated 15 March, titled "Annan House", under co-authorship of Prof Dennis Radford and Mr Herbert Prins.

The above decision by to NMC caused the owners to openly question the conservation value of the building in a written legal representation dated 5 April 1988, to the Building Survey Branch, Planning Department of City of Johannesburg. It was contended, *inter alia*, that "the facades were altered substantially some 10 years ago. The preservation of the original facades...(was) therefore no longer possible."

In August 1988, the NMc finally approved certain minor alterations to the main facades of the building See ALTERATIONS.

GENERAL NOTES:

Estimated cost of building	: £69 000.
Estimated cost of drainage	: £1 220.
Accommodation approved	: 4 Europeans / 8 'Natives'
Valuation at completion	: £60 000 (£15 000 at partial completion on 7 March 1936).
Occupied	: yes.

PREVIOUS TENANTS:

By 1954: ground floor - Grahamstown Building Society; Bank Bar.
Room 56 – Pan African Air Charter Ltd.
86 Commissioner Street basement – Cecil Nurse (Pty) Ltd.
Rooms 141/5 - Head Office Balmoral Gold Mining Company Ltd.

During the June 1976 RAU Survey the Café Royal occupied a section of the ground floor.

Definition of skyscraper: "On the whole the word 'skyscraper' means: a multi-storey building with a steel or reinforced concrete frame which supports the weight of the building. The development of this method of building dates from the 1880's in Chicago where it was applied in conjunction with the installation of high speed electric elevators." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

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



Department of Architecture

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Mrs Flo Bird
National Monuments Council
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Parktown North

Reference:

Enquiries:

☎ (011) 716-2702

Date: 10 March 1988

Dear Mrs Bird

ANNAN HOUSE

I have been requested by professor Dennis Radford and mr Herbert Prins to give an opinion regarding the architectural merit of Annan House, Commissioner Street, Johannesburg.

It is particularly interesting example of late Art Deco, the curves and exuberance of the style being tempered by the influence of the Modern Movement. As such it makes a transition to the architecture of the 1940s and pre-figures the hybrid buildings which were to be erected in New York in the 1940s, such as Universal Pictures (Kahn & Jacobs) and Look Building (Roth & Sons). The crown of stepbacks characteristic of Art Deco echoes the curves below.

The façades on both Commissioner and Fox Streets are identical and present a thoroughly thought-through resolution between horizontality and verticality: the sculptural wings are complemented by the rhythm of 'pilasters' stretching up the main bulk of the building. This is again counterpointed by means of the rectangular windows inbetween.

The building shows a kinship with Ansteys Building and Manners Mansions and it plays a particular part in the fabric of its site. It is proudly and unambiguously of its time and as such forms a subtle link between the older Standard Bank and its younger neighbour. This is a particularly interesting part of Johannesburg and its architectural history should remain undisturbed. During a recent visit to this city, the internationally known Chilean architect Alberto Sartori expressed the opinion that Johannesburg was one of the richest cities in the world as far as the Art Deco heritage is concerned. Ironically, as the 'real' buildings are going, much of Post-Modernism is nothing but a pastiche of Art Deco.

I sincerely hope that the National Monuments Council will take the necessary steps to preserve this valuable building.

Yours sincerely

Marilyn Martin
Honorary Curator, NMC

The University of the Witwatersrand rejects racism and racial segregation. It is committed to non-discrimination particularly in the constitution of its student body, in the selection and promotion of its staff, and in its administration.

ANNAN HOUSE

Annan House was designed by the architects Emley and Williamson. The plans were submitted for approval in 1935 and the building was completed on 25th February 1937.

Annan House is a particularly interesting example of the Art Deco style. Coming as it does towards the end of that period, it shows very strong influences of the Modern Movement. Its smooth facades with rounded corners is strongly reminiscent of 'Ship Architecture'.

The building is adjacent to the Standard Bank Building at the corner of Commissioner and Harrison Streets in an area of town in which there are situated many important historic and architecturally significant buildings, such as the third Corner House opposite - one of the first 'skyscrapers' in Johannesburg.

The building, which is strongly symmetrical has similar facades in both Commissioner and Fox Streets and both are of great value as landmarks in this area which contains many other important buildings.

With the demolition of Escom House few modernistic buildings remain in the city. We believe that this building is an excellent example of the Art Deco style and that the facades of the building in Commissioner and Fox Streets should be retained.

We therefore propose that the facades be declared provisionally by the National Monuments Council.

Enclosed is a copy of a page from Dr van der Waal's Listing of Johannesburg's Buildings. He also recommends National Monument status.



Dennis Radford



Herbert Prins

15th March 1988

RECORDED BY:

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



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