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**City of Johannesburg**  
**Arts, Culture and Heritage Services**

**IMMOVIBLE HERITAGE INVENTORY FORM**

Name of Site: **Moth Memorial**

**Other Names (if any):**

Erf No.: 1864 and 1865

**Street Address:** Remembrance Square, off Loveday Street, west of Park Station

**District/Province/Region:** Johannesburg, Gauteng

**Ownership:** City of Johannesburg

Previous Owner:

Previous Title Deed	Title Deed Number	Date of Transfer	From Owners Names	To Owners Names	Amount	Other
L63/1953	G49/1953	8 June 1953	Union of South Africa	City of Johannesburg	The two stands were worth £2 500	Deed of Grant title granted to the City of Johannesburg under section 10 of Act 10 1909.

L521/19 43	L63/195 3	28 March 1953	Conway Mansio ns Pty Ltd.	City of Johannesbu rg.	Expropriat ed.	The stands were expropriate d in terms of the municipality' s power of expropriatio n Ordinance of 1903.
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**Present Owner:**

**Site Type:** War Memorial

**State of Conservation:** Good, with commemorative plaques still intact. The Moth Hall and surrounds are however run-down.

**Description:** Slender three-sided needle on traffic island facing the Moth Hall. Each side carries the crest of a section of the South African defence forces: Air Force; Army ; and Navy.

**History:**

The M.O.T.H. building and memorial stand somewhat neglected and ignored tucked away to the west of Rissik St and immediately to the south of the railway tracks. The building was designed in 1958/9 by Clifford Raphael Kallenbach (09/02/1915 – 27/12/1985) for the M.O.T.H. sited on land owned by the Johannesburg City Council. Clearly marked by large metal letters on the top floor of the north facade: M.O.T.H. , traces of the building's later functions ere evidenced in various signs. After the M.O.T.H. moved in ca 1992, the building was leased by the City Council to an inner city school: Excelsior Primary and High School and was then subsequently taken over by the Metro Police. A sign with contact numbers for staff members can be seen in a room on the first floor and on ground floor there is a sign indicating the emergency contact number 10111.

M.O.T.H. stands for the Memorable Order of Tin Hats, a veteran organization founded in 1927. It is a Brotherhood of white soldiers who have all seen active service and who want to remember and honour those who died in the past wars. The main M.O.T.H. headquarters was located at Albany Grove in 1933. In 1937 the extant M.O.T.H. headquarters in South Africa was built in Old Fort Rd Durban

– the Gateway building. Shellholes, which were like chapters of the Order were established throughout South Africa. These chapters fell under District and Provincial Dugouts and ultimately under the M.O.T.H national headquarters housed in the Gateway building in Durban. In late 1959 construction started on the M.O.T.H. memorial centre in Johannesburg which functioned as a meeting place for at least 20 Shellholes. From 1965 onwards it became the headquarters of the provincial Dugout (then the Southern Transvaal), a club, and an entertainment venue.

As a marker of the M.O.T.H. The most obvious marker is the needle monument located outside on Remembrance Plain. Set on a larger triangle, each face of the triangular needle has a plaque dedicated to one of the three divisions of the Defence Force: Airforce, Navy and Army. Richard Wilson the present provincial Old Bill (interview 19/09/07) said that there has been a request for permission to move this memorial to where the cenotaph is in town but that this was turned down. Other symbols of the M.O.T.H. are evident in the chapel inside the building. There is a well-preserved mosaic above the altar with the M.O.T.H. emblem of 12 stars, the reversed arms and the tin hat with candle. The 12 stars motif is repeated in the lighting of the suspended blue concave false ceiling.

### **Statement of Significance:**

Together with the M.O.T.H. building behind it, this monument provides a physical marker which signals

1. a particular era of ex-servicemen (and some women)
2. historically located gender hierarchies and racial exclusion. The internal contradiction between the ethos of universal brotherhood so prevalent in the M.O.T.H. discourse on one hand, and the principles and membership qualifications [whites only] set out in the M.O.T.H. Constitution on the other, reflect not only the racial exclusions of that historical period in South Africa, but also the lack of awareness of the irony of these contradictions.
3. an historically located brand of white South African nationalism. The M.O.T.H. arose at a particular historical moment. Unlike Britain and Europe where memorials and traces of the Great War were all around in the landscape and in the towns and cities, South Africa moved forward with its own agendas forging its own brand of white nationalism. The Wars (both First and Second) became removed through both space and time – fostering a particular brand of nostalgia. The men returning from the 1918 war found that, in time, the memory of active service in the war was dimming after nearly a decade had passed. It was this context which saw the origins of the M.O.T.H. The strain of patriotism that was invoked was, for obvious reasons in this early phase of the M.O.T.H., one of King and Empire. Ian Fraser of the St. Dunstons Shell Hole writes that the ‘strong patriotic feeling which is thus engendered and maintained must be of great value to the country and Empire’. (Letter to the Moths, published in *The Moth's Annual Armistic Souvenir* 1928 :25)

Post 1945, after World War II, the M.O.T.H. had a new intake of ex-servicemen. (It is to this era that the Monument dates). 'The blokes did not generally join immediately. Most of us settled down first and then joined to escape our bawling babies once a month.' (Howard Vercoe M.O.T.H. national chairman quoted in *Scope* 1986: 16) After World War II the Order had over 100,000 members. Whereas the earlier rhetoric of patriotism had been couched more in terms of serving the Empire, later rhetoric is couched more in the discourse of a united white South Africa. Moth General Smuts said the Moths are

'helping to build a non-racial front and English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans join hands in the work. We find old burghers and veterans in the country in command of Moth Shell-holes – and comradeship unites men of both races in the true South African spirit. As the Springbok is symbolic of South Africa, so the Moths may claim to be the Brotherhood of the Springbok. The work they are doing for South Africa will grow and last forever'.  
"May it please Your Majesty" *Royal Tour 1947*: n.d.

It became inevitable during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that, as most members came from a generation of men from World Wars I and II, the numbers would begin to dwindle as many 'answered the sunset call'. In the mid to late 70s the Order opened to National Servicemen who had done service in operational areas and a fair number were accepted into the Order. The border wars, in a familiar contemporary military rhetoric, were framed within a particular discourse of good and evil: 'On the borders of both our countries [SA and Rhodesia] many young men have already died and many more are daily in danger of being killed in the bitter life struggle against those forces of evil that are unhampered by the convention or humanitarian principles' (*Home Front* 1976) During these times the M.O.T.H. liaised with the SA Defence Force fund. Many of the soldiers who fought in the border wars came out (and indeed went into war) with a very different attitude both to war and to the virtue and nobility of their cause. The soldiers of the 1980s were not volunteers but conscripts and serving on the border was no longer a 'matter of honour, duty and doing the right thing.' (*Scope* 1986:16) Further more because of the nature of the bush war, regular call-ups over a number of years meant that nostalgia had little meaning for them (*ibid*).

Changes over time indicated the need to adapt to be more relevant in a different historical moment. So there was a gradual move from exclusivity, from the penchant for secrecy and a dilution of the fraternal quality. (*ibid*) Because members of the Order got older and died, and because only about 1000 border war veterans signed up (despite an active recruitment programme), the Order reduced drastically in number – from 100,000 after World War II to 15,000 in the mid 1980s (*Scope* 1986 :16) and there is every indication that it will eventually close down.

3. an historically located way of dealing with war and of remembering and memorializing. The inscription on the memorial: "WE WILL REMEMBER THEM" is another way of saying 'lest we forget'. By its very founding principles the Order is nostalgic; relies on overt symbols and simple rituals; emphasizes the spirit of camaraderie (rather than the horror of war) and patriotic jingoism; uses in its rhetoric, many capitalized words like Honour, Memory and Comradeship, and is a whites-only club where the men are called boys. So phrases like 'brotherly spirit of the trenches', 'the many fine things we can remember', the 'cheery spirit which made even the biggest things seem small', are rife. This early rhetoric should be seen within its historical context of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century after the 'Great War.' It obviously filled a need of World War I veterans when, long before the days of the recognition of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, there was virtually no framework for dealing with the dreadfulness of war and soldiers' experience of it. An option, was through a denial of the horror and, to put in its place, an emphasis on acts of bravery, heroism and camaraderie. The glorification of the past and the nostalgic reminiscences seem built in to the ethos of the organization from the very start. There is a paradox however in the ethos of remembrance. For certain the Moths recollected and re-imagined the spirit of camaraderie and harmony between each other. However, as Winter in his book *Sites of Memory Sites of Mourning* (1995: 2) writes: 'To remember the anxiety of 1,500 days of war necessarily entailed how to forget; in the interwar years those who couldn't obliterate the nightmares were locked in mental asylums and throughout Europe. Most people were luckier. They knew both remembering and forgetting, and by living through both, they had at least the chance to transcend the terrible losses of war.' So part of the M.O.T.H. mode of remembrance, entailed within it, the flipside of 'forgetting'.
4. a brotherhood of men who work primarily towards the benefits of their members although will also do wider community work, like the FreeMasons, and slightly differently, the Broederbond. Apart from providing a camaraderie and support group who kept the memory of the Wars going, the M.O.T.H. also aimed to do good for the community of ex-servicemen and women. So M.O.T.H. cottage schemes were built throughout the country providing low cost or no cost housing accommodation for aged and indigent ex-servicemen [and women?] and their families. M.O.T.H community halls were erected, recreation centres and swimming baths were built, financial and other assistance was provided for ex-servicemen and their widows and other underprivileged and Holiday Homes were established. The M.O.T.H. made provision for bursaries and educational grants, donated to various charities and service organizations, donated ambulances, ran a blood transfusion service, and erected memorials to their comrades. The M.O.T.H. was represented on the National War Fund and worked with other ex-servicemen organisations particularly in the area of improved pension benefits from the State.

## **Inscriptions:**

[East Side]:

[above]

“WE WILL REMEMBER THEM”

[below]

“S.A. Lugmag  
S.A. Air Force”

[West side]:

[above]

MOTH

[below]

“S.A. Floom  
S.A. Navy”

[North side]

“S.A. leer  
S.A. Army”

## **Legal Status (Decree/Act):**

Protected under Section 37 of the National Heritage Resources Act: Public Monuments and Memorials.

## **Authority Responsible**

## Use

Previous

Current

### Documentation/Research

Photos  Maps  Site Plans  Others.....

### Source(s) of Information

*The Moth's Annual Armistic Souvenir* 1928

*M.O.T.H. Constitution and Standing Orders* 1946

*"May it please Your Majesty" Royal Tour* 1947

*Home Front Voice of the M.O.T.H.* October 1968 Vol XXXXI no 3

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*Scope* April 13 1984: 9-16

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- Sinclair, Allan The M.O.T.H. S as a community of the museum: the Crown and Anchor Shellhole comes to the South African Military Museum of Military History unpublished ? page typescript

Winter, Jay

*Sites of Memory Sites of Mourning The Great War in  
European Cultural History* Cambridge: University Press 1995  
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**Position:**

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**Signature**

**Date**