

JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

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

JJ Bruwer ©

Cellphone: 082 325 5823

NAME OF PLACE: S.A. RESERVE BANK BUILDING



Top left: corner Fox and Simmonds Streets. Bottom left: view of main section of south elevation, showing the freestone colonnade. Top centre: door, Main Entrance. Top right and bottom right: covering the window openings are richly emblazoned iron grilles. Centre left: view of granite plinth and surmounting granite podium. Centre right: Main Entrance, Simmonds Street.

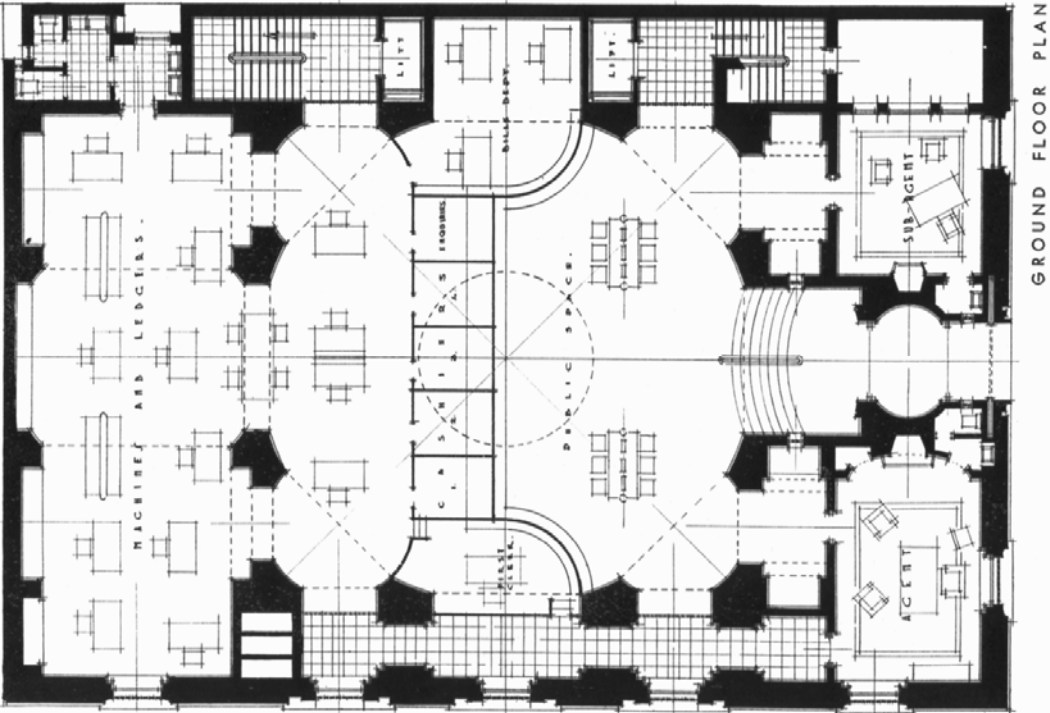
Previous/alternative name/s : *ORB Building; Old Reserve Bank Building; Matlotlo House*

LOCATION: Street : Simmonds
 Street number : 29
 : [78, 81 Fox]
 Stand Number : 35, 36
 Previous Stand Number:
 Block number :
 Suburb : Marshallstown
 GIS reference :

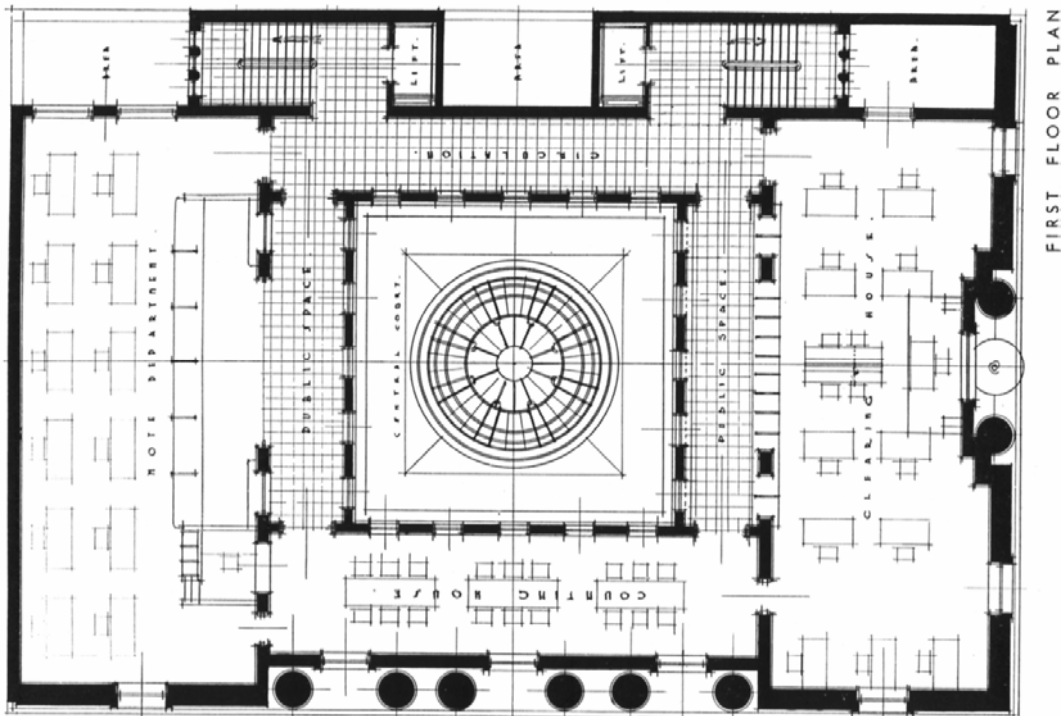
ZONING: Current use/s :
Previous use/s :

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

Height :
Levels above street level : three
Levels below street level : one
On-site parking : none



Above and below: copies of original ground and first floor plans (Lyall-Watson, D.: The South African Reserve Bank – Johannesburg Agency).



"In 1933-4 Leith was working not only on the Germiston Town Hall project but also on the South African Reserve Bank in Johannesburg as well as the Nurses' Quarters at the Johannesburg Hospital...But it is the modernised classicism of his bank buildings that first captures our attention. The South African Reserve Bank (1934-8) building on the corner of Fox and Simmonds streets represents the establishment of a modernised Renaissance *palazzo* in Johannesburg, 'providing a building', as the *South African Architectural Record* described it, 'of classical feeling combined with modern services'...The massive dressed granite rustication of the ground floor has deep recessed joints and enormous voussoir blocks to the entrance arch. This massiveness contrasts with the burnished surface of the polished black granite plinth. This is stone work controlled by a master in the San Michele tradition; the skill of John Barrow's stonemasons was commensurate with the task. The light sandstone of the upper levels, where we find modernised capitals on the giant orders and simplified classical windows surrounds (which Leith picked up during his European tour), is an anti-climax but it reflects, perhaps, that restricting national romanticism which Leith thought appropriate for his monumental work. As a counterpoint to the curvature of the massive tunnel-vault entrance arch, Leith placed a wide-bowl hemispherical urn – a 'birds' bath motif', it was called – above the massive entrance doors below the arch. A detailed urn shape comes straight out of Leith's Swedish notebook of 1932. Lyall-Watson, writing in the *Record*, summarises his thoughts on the building and its details: 'By virtue of its very character, this building will now doubt invoke criticisms from contemporaries and future generations, but whatever the critics postulate, there can be no doubt that the architects have at any rate created a monument worthy of, and reflecting for the time to come, the stability and security of the institution its houses...' The Reserve Bank, then, is a counterblast from a major architect of the National School directed at what Leith regarded as ephemeral Modern Movement buildings that were then making their appearances in Johannesburg's streetscape. Bernard Cook (who himself was one of the principal architects of the Modern Movement in the Transvaal) likens the Reserve Bank with its 'austerity and grace' to the work of the Swedish masters like Ivar Tengbom...He interprets Leith's movement away from classical precepts towards greater simplicity as being 'in deference to, if not in sympathy with, the Modern Movement'. This is certainly correct as far as it goes, but there is another hidden element, and enigma like the unknown element in Elgar's *Enigma Variations*...Looking back from the 1990's to Leith's sensitive 'feeling for materials and texture', Bernard Cooke remembered Leith as a considerable talent in his own 'particular metier of classical Italian architecture' – heavily influenced by the *palazzi* of Verona...It is such generous recognition that Leith's body of work deserves – a recognition, Leith himself felt, he had never received fully during his active and prolific career." (Chipkin, C.M.: Johannesburg Style; Architecture & Society...)

"This building" according to the architect André Van Graan and N Fraser, "is one of Gordon Leith's finest buildings and pin points a late development of Neo Classicism at a time when it had largely gone out of fashion. The classical qualities give the building great vitality by drawing on both the Italian Renaissance Palazzo format with its powerful cubic form and mannerist elements such as the entrance within a sharply defined void. The crisp handling of the details raises it above other Neo Classical buildings of this time in Johannesburg. The rustication of the base particularly, is an indication of...masterly design control." (NMC Data Sheet, May 1990: SAHRA CURRENT FILE 9/2/228/150...)

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

Exterior:

- Roof: concrete, flat; tile covering.
- Walls: ashlar masonry cladding with polished black granite plinth; superimposed string course and polished grey granite podium; colonnade of fluted, coupled Corinthian columns rhythmic composition – 'one, two, two, one) with carved capitals (south façade); delicately detailed entablature and attic.
- Windows: sash and steel casements with highly decorative and individually patterned iron grilles; the semi-circular headed ground floor fenestration (south façade) and window openings on ground floor (Simmonds Street) are crowned with projecting keystones.
- Doors: timber; centrally-positioned entrance in Simmonds Street, framed in polished granite.
- Entrance: "...the massive tunnel-vault entrance arch. Leith places a wide-bowl hemispherical urn – a 'birds' bath motif', it was called – above the massive entrance doors below the arch." (Chipkin) (Chipkin, C.M.: Johannesburg Style; Architecture & Society...); the entrance is framed in polished granite.
The pigeons also recognize this birdbath effect; when photographing the building,

several pigeons were noticed on the rim. (Catharina JM Bruwer).

Decorative elements: narrow projecting cornice with dentils on the soffit.

Interior:

Walls: plastered brick.

Floors: concrete with parquet finish.

Doors: timber.

Lyall-Watson's informative description of the building shortly after its completion, published in *The South African Architectural Record* (October 1938), remains of pertinent relevance to an understanding of the architectural importance of the building. See below.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN RESERVE BANK — JOHANNESBURG AGENCY

Gordon Leith & Partners—Architects

The completion of the new premises for the Johannesburg Agency of the South African Reserve Bank marks the fulfilment of another solution of a common, but by no means elementary architectural problem—a problem of combining, in one building, the utilities and requisites for the proper functioning of an essentially twentieth century business house, with the grace and dignity of a standard of architecture set by our predecessors—in short, a problem of providing a building of classical feeling combined with modern services.

In addition, the architects have, in this instance, been required to erect, on a site 70 feet by 100 feet in the heart of the city, a building of limited accommodation, but of size and proportion compatible with the existing adjacent structures. They have approached the problem with a broad and vigorous outlook and have left nothing to be desired in their treatment of an extremely difficult subject. With the introduction of a Classical facade with its colonnades, entablatures, etc., the restrictions in designs and layout are manifold, but the result notwithstanding is one of singular serenity and stability.

The elevations have been treated with a polished black granite plinth, superimposed by a string course and heavily rusticated dunted grey granite podium with semi-circular-headed fenestration, bearing pediments, architraves, sills and consoles reminiscent of the work of the masters of the Italian Renaissance, and with richly emblazoned iron grilles covering the window openings. The podium supports a 34 foot high freestone colonnade of fluted, coupled columns with carved capitals which provide striking relief to the simple flanking pavilions. Crowning the whole is a delicately detailed entablature and attic.

The centrally disposed entrance in Simmonds Street is framed in polished granite in a lofty arch forming a deep barrel vault, and supports a decorative "birds'-bath" motif above. An interesting iron grille in the background lends relief and richness to the severe treatment of the whole composition.

A glance at the ground floor plan will reveal the broad lines on which the building has been planned. The massive piers in the banking hall have been faced in marble to a height of 20 feet, panelled and entablatured. The dome is unique in that it has not directly followed the rules laid down by any of its prototypes. It is 51 feet in diameter and is constructed on eight main ribs springing from the piers at a height of twenty feet above the floor, and struck on true arcs, each from its own centre, and intersected, axially by 15 foot diameter barrel vaults, and diagonally by 15 foot diameter semi-domes, which by means of straight line intersections assume the form of semi-elliptical scollops, converging towards the centre, and eventually dying out as they approach the central eye-opening in the crown of the dome, which in turn is covered by a stilted regular domed bronze and glass canopy some 18 feet in diameter and with its crown nearly 50 feet above floor level. Altogether a majestic and inspiring conception.

Flanking the central banking hall to the east are agents' and sub-agents' rooms; to the south a circulation aisle giving access to the auxiliary staff accommodation on the west. To the north are lobbies connecting the lifts and stairs to the upper floors.

The basement and sub-basement are devoted, to the west, to sundry services, and the remainder to the extensive book room and treasury requirements of the bank. These latter are lofty apartments designed without any attempt to conceal the great protection they afford their deposits. The treasury proper is not a mere stronghold, but is also designed and fitted out to provide the directors comfortable accommodation for deliberating over, and examining the deposits, as it were, "on the spot." The staircases connecting the upper floors are worthy of comment in that they have been carefully designed and detailed so as to avoid the usual awkward twists in balustrades and unsightly intersections at the junctions of the soffites of landings and stairs. The stepped marble skirtings and wall linings reflect in their jointing the natural unit of staircase design—the risers—and are neatly treated at the junctions with the high gloss enamelled surface of the curved rising soffites above.

The first floor—18 feet in height—is devoted to the three secondary departments of the bank:—The clearing house, which is a transfer market for handling cheques among bankers; the counting house, where money transactions are counted; and the note department, where bank notes are counted, scheduled, indexed, renovated or destroyed. These three departments are for the convenience of representatives of commercial banks and are not available for the general public. Each department is overlooked by a long "supervision gallery" on a mezzanine floor, from where the movements of the entire staff may be scrutinised.

The second floor houses a large Board room with marble fireplace and macassar ebony panelled walls and some interesting wall mosaics. This floor and a second mezzanine floor also provides retiring rooms and cloakrooms for the staff.

The first and second floors, with their mezzanines, are arranged round a central court containing the glass eye of the banking hall dome, the upper part of which court is colonnaded on three sides by 14 slender square columns faced in marble with exquisitely detailed caps, and a light cornice in rough texture coloured plaster.

By virtue of its very character, this building will no doubt invoke criticisms from contemporaries and future generations, but, whatever the critics postulate, there can be no doubt that the architects have at any rate created a monument worthy of, and reflecting for the time to come, the stability and security of the institution it houses.

D. LYALL-WATSON.

SITE FEATURES:

ALTERATIONS:

The plans record of this building could not be located. Known changes, however, that have been carried out to the building, are as follows (dates of these changes are not known):

The installation of a doorway between the upper section of the Basement of the *S.A. Reserve Bank Building* and the Ground Floor of *SARB House*. The connection of the First Floor of the *S.A. Reserve Bank Building* with the neighbouring *Clegg House* through an entrance next to the east Lobby. The replacement of the glass canopy of the dome with a slab ceilings. The installation of suspended ceilings in the central Banking Hall. The enclosing of the loggias flanking the Inner Court with retrofitted windows and steel louvers.

The building, now known as *Matlotlo House*, is currently being refurbished as it is proposed to be used by the Treasury Department of the Gauteng Provincial Government. This work has been authorised under current heritage legislation.

INTEGRITY:

Various changes carried out to the interior of the building have aesthetically, diminished the qualities of many of its internal spaces and associated design elements. These changes, however, are considered to be largely reversible and their overall effect on the integrity of the original design is

therefore not of major concern.

INSCRIPTION:

ARCHITECT:

Gordon Leith & Associates.

BUILDER:

John Barrow (Pty) Limited.

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

Date on plans : original plans removed
Approval of plans : 19 October 1934
Completion date : by 18 February 1938

BUILDING STYLE:

Art Deco - Stripped Neo Classical; 1930s.

"Architectural Merit: "As this was the original (sic.) Reserve Bank Building, the building was extensively detailed with rich materials." (Johannesburg Building, Space & Urban Feature Classification, 1998: Inner City).

RAU June 1976 Survey: Beaux Arts. (RAU Opname Historiese Geboue In Johannesburg).

BUILDING TYPE:

Bank building.

ENVIRONMENT:

The *S.A. Reserve Bank Building* has all the qualities of a landmark building. It has generally come to strengthen the character of the streetscape in its immediate area, even complementing the character of buildings such as the *Peoples Bank Building* (northwestern corner of Commissioner and Simmonds Streets). Together with other valuable buildings in the area, such as *Rand Water Board Building* – another Leith design - the *third Corner House*, the *first National Bank Building*, the *Barclays Bank Building*, as well as the *third Rand Club* and *Victory House* to the east in Commissioner Street, the *S.A. Reserve Bank Building* forms part of one of the City's most valuable collections of building stock.

CONDITION:

Good. The building is currently being renovated for use by the Department of Finance of the Gauteng Provincial Government.

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)

NOTES:

DEEDS INFORMATION:

Original ownership: South African Reserve Bank.

PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:

GOLDFIELDS CONSOLIDATED BUILDING:

The *Goldfields Consolidated Building*, completed during 1893, originally occupied this site.

"Like the earlier bank buildings, for instance the *National Bank* [see Pre-History: E-2], the first financial offices were also less articulated and embellished than those built in the 1890s. The economic downturn of the years 1889-90 was apparently followed by a period of 'cautious optimism', which only in 1894-5 gave way to self-confidence. An example of the subdued mood was the *Goldfields Consolidated Building* (1893), 81 Fox Street, in which the palazzo and ornamentation were executed in brick only." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

HISTORY:

"The South African Reserve Bank - Leadership In The Banking And Currency Field. At the end of the First World War the financial position of the Union was characterized by a number of unsatisfactory features, some of which had existed for many years while other had originated during the war or had at least been intensified by the strains and stresses of that period. Among these factors may be mentioned the lack of uniformity in the note issue and the possibility of an over-issue of notes under the laws of certain Provinces; the existence abroad of a premium on gold which led to a considerable and illegal drain of gold from the country at a time when the commercial banks were under an obligation to redeem their notes in gold; and fears based on past experience, that the inflation which had resulted from the war and had continued in the immediate post-war boom would be followed by an undue restriction of credit once the cyclical movement turned downwards. These and other considerations all pointed to the need for a central bank which could assume leadership and responsibility in the banking and currency field. The Currency and Banking Act of 1920, therefore include provisions for the establishment of the South African Reserve Bank, and the institution commenced operations in July 1921. The statutes of the Bank have been amended in several important respects since that time with a view to giving the institution more scope and flexibility in meeting the needs of a developing country under changing world economic conditions, and in 1944 the laws governing the operation of the Bank were consolidated in the South African Reserve Bank Act of that year. Constitutionally, however, there have been no changes of a basic nature. The Bank is still a privately-owned institution with, at present, just under one thousand stockholders, some fifty per cent of whom hold less than £500 stock each. A limit of £5,000 exists to the amount of stock which may be held by any single stockholder, and dividends on the stock are restricted to a maximum of ten per cent per annum, the balance of the net profits being allocated in a small part to the Bank's general reserve fund and in the main to the Government. The organisation is controlled by a Board of eleven directors, five of whom (including the Governor and the Deputy Governor) are appointed by the Government and the remaining six by the stockholders from among persons representative of commerce finance, agriculture and other industries. All directors must be Union nationals residents in the Union. The Bank is thus a purely South African institution which is a factor of some significance in a country where the greater part of the banking business is conducted by banks whose Head Offices are abroad. Furthermore, the form of constitution which the Bank was given, in practice, enabled a successful combination to be effected between State control over monetary policy on the one hand and the advantages of a privately-owned central bank on the other. The Bank was accorded by its statutes the sole right of note issue which thus ensured uniformity in the circulation, and the commercial banks were obliged to maintain reserve balances with the Bank equivalent to ten per cent of their time liabilities. As in other countries, the commercial banks soon discovered the advantages of maintaining their free cash balances with the central bank as well. Not only did this procedure facilitate the settlement of inter-bank clearing balances but it enabled the commercial banks to make more efficient use of their resources as a result of the rediscount and advance facilities which could be obtained from the central bank. At an early stage of its career, therefore, the Bank had assumed the recognised central banking functions of responsibility for the note issue, custodian of the cash reserves of the commercial banking systems and central clearing institution and was, of course, from

the start prepared to act as lender of last resort by way of loan facilities against commercial, agricultural and Treasury bills and Government stocks. The assumption of these functions contributed to the bank becoming the custodian of the country's gold reserves, and its position was strengthened in this respect by arrangements concluded in 1925 whereby the Bank purchased the gold output and attended to its disposal. This arrangement enabled the Bank, in addition, to assume the leading role in the exchange market of the Union in that gold occupied a predominant place among the country's exports. The Bank has, from an early stage, determined the exchange rates for sterling and its control of these rates has assisted it in influencing the rates quoted by the commercial banks for other currencies, their requirements of which are obtained through London. With the development of trade and financial relationships with the United States, Canada and Switzerland, the Bank has come to quote directly for the currencies of these countries as well, thus ensuring the public of fine rates in the circumstances obtaining at any time. When the need arose, the Bank also entered the forward exchange market in these currencies. Another recognised central banking function was assumed in 1927 when the Bank took over the Government's accounts from the commercial banks and thus became the Government's banker. The Provincial account, and those of certain quasi-Government organisations were subsequently also transferred to the Bank. In the conduct of these varied activities, the Bank naturally became intimately acquainted with economic conditions in the Union and developed close contacts with a number of the leading foreign countries. Almost automatically, therefore, the Bank became the Government's consultant in matters falling within the Bank's field of activity, and was able to act as the Government's agent in a large number of matters where it could appropriately serve in this capacity. As instances may be mentioned the administration of the exchange control system in the Union on behalf of the Treasury; the repatriation of Union Government stocks from overseas during the war years; acting as agent for the Government in its operations with the International Monetary Fund, in connection with certain loans granted to the Government by banks in the United States and Switzerland. As illustrative of the Bank's growth during the thirty-five years it has been in operation, it may be mentioned that its assets at the end of January, 1956, totalled £1890,300,000, including gold and foreign exchange to an amount of £120,900,00 and advances, investments and discounts totalling £62,800,00. As against these assets its liabilities in respect of notes in circulation amounted to £106,000,000 and deposits to £66,900,00. The Bank has a total of eight branches situated in Pretoria (where the Head Office is also located), Bloemfontein, Cape Town, Durban, East London, Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg and Port Elizabeth." (Stark, F. [Ed.]: Seventy Golden Years...).

GENERAL NOTES:

Estimated cost of building	:
Estimated cost of drainage	:
Accommodation approved	:
Valuation at completion	:
Occupied	:

The fact that the plans record of the building could not be found, is explained by the following note (dated 8 February 1982) attached to the plans file for Stand Nos. 25, 26, 35 and 36, Township Marshallstown (Planning Department), City of Johannesburg:

"THIS PROJECT FOR THE RESERVE BANK HAS A HIGH SECURITY RATING: Consequently [sic.] the plans must not circulate with the file, and must always be in the possession of the architects – who are sworn to secrecy & security. THEREFORE WHEN THE FILE REACHES YOUR DEPT. FOR EXAMINATION PLEASE PHONE: (Mrs) Jean Searle. 838-6651 (Mallows, Louw, Hoffe & Ptnrs.) Who will then make a time to bring the plans to you, remain with you whilst they are being examined by you & then, upon completion, of your examination, take them away again. Your comments may be either dealt with immediately or handed to Mrs. Searle. Building Surveyor."

COMMISSIONER AND SIMMONDS STREETS:

"The names of the streets in Marshallstown revealed how quickly the story of the beginning of Johannesburg was forgotten even by the people living in it. It was only on February 1, 1890, that a writer in *The Star* asked: 'Who was Simmonds that he should have been immortalized by having his name given to the thoroughfare that will soon be of world-wide repute?...Was there ever such a man?' After a lapse of only forty months there were people on the Rand who had never heard the name of the draughtsman who laid out the first of Johannesburg's many townships...Among the prospectors and speculators in Ferreira's camp was a man named Samuel Fox who had lost a leg in the Secocoeni War. He leased a strip of ground at the side of the camp on which to run horses. It was realized, however, that the land could be put to much more profitable use, and on September 20 [1886], a week before the farm Turffontein was proclaimed, Henry Brown Marshall, a storekeeper from

Heidenlberg, R. R. Hollins from Pretoria and Sam Fox sat down in Edgson's temporary hotel and decided to establish a private township and offer plots to the public. At first they thought of laying out the township in Natal camp (later Jeppestown) because of the ample supply of water in Natal Spruit. Difficulties arose, however, and they resolved to mark it out on Sam Fox's ground. A man named Simmonds, who was a draughtsman, was engaged to draw the plans, and the township was named Marshallstown. Streets were named after Marshal, Fox and Simmonds, while one roadway was called Commissioner Street because Captain Von Brandis, who was acting as Mining Commissioner, had a tent at the side of the proposed thoroughfare." (Neame, L.E.: City Built On Gold).

According to Leyds the township Marshallstown was laid out approximately three weeks before Johannesburg's first stands was surveyed, and subsequently the Government had Marshallstown resurveyed by De Villiers who kept the street names as allocated by Simmonds. The first northern boundary was Pritchard Street with the rest proclaimed as diggings; this boundary was later extended to Bree Street.

"Whether the establishment of these two private townships" that is Marshallstown and Ferreirstown "on ground that was proclaimed as a public digging was legal, was uncertain. Ultimately they were both incorporated in the Government township of Johannesburg on condition that part of the proceeds of the sale of plots went to the State." (Neame, L.E.: City Built On Gold).

CURRENT TENANT:

Vacant.

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:

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

















24 8 2003



25 8 2003





25 1 2004



25 1 2004





25 1 2004

25 1 2004



25 1 2004

To Let
Call: 020 7463 1234
Fax: 020 7463 1235
Email: info@lettings.com

MEDICAL CENTRE





25 1 2004



25 1 2004



25 1 2004



25 1 2004



25 1 2004

25 1 2004



25 1 2004



25 1 2004

