

JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

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

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NAME OF PLACE: SHAKESPEARE HOUSE



Top left: corner Commissioner and Loveday Streets. Top right: Commissioner Street (i.e. main) elevation. Bottom left: view of section of bricked-up shop fronts and main entrance. Bottom centre: view of rounded pavement hood with the neighbouring *New Kempsey Building* in the middle background.

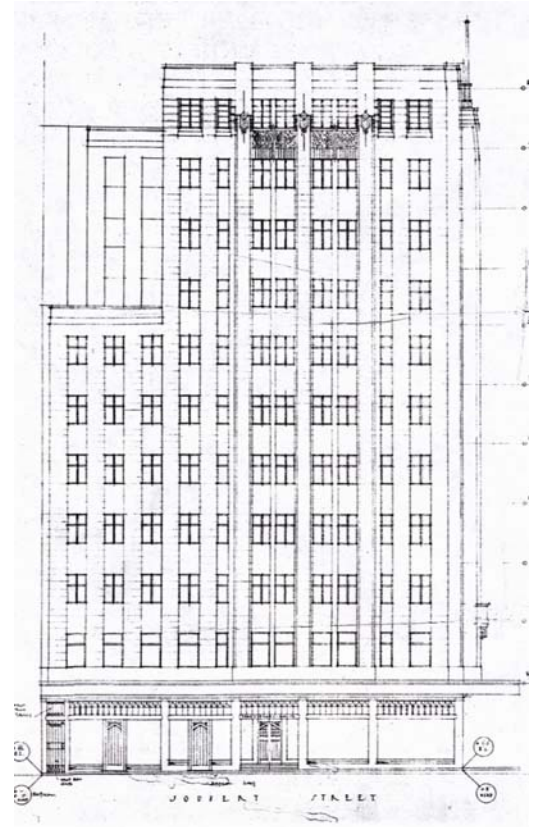
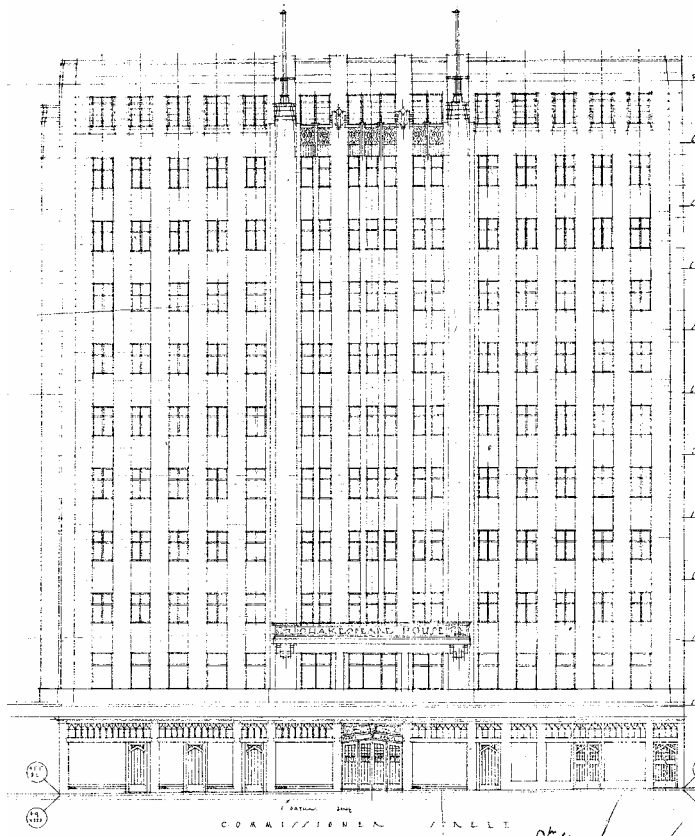
Previous/alternative name/s :

LOCATION: Street : Commissioner
 Street number : 116
 : [114, 116 Commissioner, 17 Joubert]
 Stand Number : 274, 275
 Previous Stand Number:
 Block number : BF
 Suburb : Marshallstown
 GIS reference :

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

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

Height	:	125' 5½" to parapet wall.
Levels above street level	:	eleven
Levels below street level	:	
On-site parking	:	



One of the most striking features of the main (Commissioner Street) façade is the central projecting tripartite section, affording the building with a distinctive three-dimensional vertical appearance. The set of flag posts surmounting the capitals of the pilasters flanking the protruding vertical bands, gives further expression to this tripartite composition. The strong vertical bands are further accentuated by the recessing of the fenestration and associated horizontal bands. The visual affect of this, is a dynamically contrasting interplay between shade and light manifested in the street elevations of the building.

The entablature with prominent ornamental brackets, cornice and frieze, fabricated with cream Brizolit Plaster and the name of the building in cement lettering, graciously anchors the core tripartite elements and provides further balance to the interface between the lower section of the building and the ornamented top floor sections of the building.

The Ground Floor embellishments included polished black terrazzo blocks to the plinth and polished cream terrazzo blocks between and over the shop fronts, and leaded glass fanlights to large glazed composite doors. The Main Entrance in Commissioner Street comprised a set of composite double doors, surmounted by an ornamental frieze.

In describing the *His Majesty's Building*: BG-1 (also designed by the architects J.C. Cook & Cowen), Chipkin stresses the importance of the aspect of architectural connectedness between this building and the *Shakespeare House*: "It contributes to the street wall (both as extension and as element of change) by picking up the modular treatment of Shakespeare House with its own clear-cut statement of modular accommodation in the Rockefeller Center manner, thus adding its own share to a consistent metropolitan milieu." (Chipkin, C.M.: *Johannesburg Style*; *Architecture & Society*...).

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

Walls: reinforced concrete with hard brick infill; plastered brick to exterior.

Roof: flat; reinforced concrete slab with asphalt damp course.

Windows: steel frame; vertical pivot-hung as well as side-hung casements.

SITE FEATURES:

ALTERATIONS:

Alterations to Sixth Floor for Pollard & Lewin: Application for Approval of Plans form missing; date on plan February 1952.

Alterations: approved 1 August 1956; estimated cost – building £850; drainage £25; architect NI Fink (address: 2nd Floor, 20th Century Building, President Street).

Alterations and deviation: approved 13 February 1957; estimated cost – building £475; drainage £50; Author – S. Nestadt, Diploma Civil Engineer.

Alterations: approved 26 November 1958; Author unknown.

Alterations: approved 15 March 1962; estimated cost – building R100; architects J.C. Cook & Cowen.

Alterations to Basement and Ground Floor for Katz & Lourie: approved 27 April 1973.

Alterations: approved 16 June 1980; estimated cost – building R1 500; Author unknown.

Internal alterations: approved 9 December 1981; estimated cost – building R8 000; architect Associated Design & Planning Group.

Alterations: approved 1 July 1985; estimated cost – building R6 000; architect T Jarom.

As no plans had been submitted and no heritage authorisations obtained with regard to the bricking-up of the shop fronts, it is difficult to access the degree of intactness of the original shop fronts.

INTEGRITY:

This once magnificent building has been partially defaced but the integrity of its important external design features, have remained intact. The enclosure of its shop fronts is of concern. See ALTERATIONS. Due to its neglected condition, a visual appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of this landmark building remains difficult.

INSCRIPTION:

ARCHITECT:

J.C. Cook & Cowen.

BUILDER:

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

Date on plans :
Approval of plans : 25 November 1936
Completion date : 20 January 1938

Right: Advertisement *The Star* 27 July 1936.

**NOTICE IN REGARD TO
HIGH BUILDINGS**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that ONE MONTH after the date hereof application will be made to the City Council of Johannesburg for permission to erect a Building on Stands Nos. 274-5, Marshalls Township, corner of Commissioner and Joubert Streets, Johannesburg, exceeding 100 feet in height. Any owner of adjoining property may inspect the plans of such proposed building at the offices of the Architects, J. C. Cook & Cowen, 33 National Mutual Buildings, Rissik Street, Johannesburg, between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Should any such owner have any objection to the height of the proposed building he shall lodge the same with the City Engineer within one month of the date hereof

**SHAKESPEARE HOUSE (PTY.),
LTD. 5712**

BUILDING STYLE:

Art Deco - Exhibition Style, 1930s.

"Architectural Merit: This Art Deco building faces demolition currently, and is bricked (sic.) up and empty currently (sic.). The building is one of the style of Art Deco buildings from Johannesburg." (Johannesburg Building, Space & Urban Feature Classification, 1998: Inner City).

BUILDING TYPE:

Shops to street and office building.

ENVIRONMENT:

A sense of utter desolation and abandonment surrounds this whole city block. The open wounds left by the demolition of once proud buildings signifies an irreplaceable loss; the bricked-up windows and broken window panes - exposed unfinished lateral walls - façades that were never proposed to make an imprint on the quality of streetscapes, shrouding the city block into a crevice of total depression. (Catharina JM Bruwer).

As seen from the following description by Chipkin, the *Shakespeare House* and its neighbour in Commissioner Street, the *C.N.A. Building*, stand in perfect harmony, the distinctive characteristic of verticality in the composition of their main facades, being the combining factor. Putting it differently, there is an uncontested element of harmonised interconnectivity between these two buildings.

"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 superblock [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 way for yet another skyscraper. The *CNA Building* and *Shakespeare House* with their unbecoming exposed lateral walls have been abandoned...and are no longer as appealing to the eye as they 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:

Neglected, bricked-up and secure. This building qualifies for inclusion in the list of conservation valuable buildings in the Inner City, facing demolition by neglect.

URGENT ACTION:

Refer CONDITION.

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:

The former NMC proposed to declare the building as a National Monument but without success.

DEEDS INFORMATION:

Original ownership: Messrs. Coles and Goldfoot, P.O. Box 739, Johannesburg.
By 1962: Shakespeare House Co. (Pty) Ltd.

PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:

HIGH COURT BUILDING:

The three-storey Neo-Queen Anne *High Court Building*, built of brick and sandstone and completed during 1904, stood at 116 Commissioner Street, 15 and 17 Joubert Street, and 113 and 115 Fox Street. The architects McIntosh & Moffat designed this building.

HISTORY:

By 1956, the pioneer firm L. K. Jacobs & Co. (Pty.) Ltd. occupied offices in the building. In an advertisement (right) appearing in Stark, F. [Ed.]: *Seventy Golden Years...*, the following was stated: "We were there...with the pioneers when Johannesburg sprang from the red dust of the Transvaal. L. K. Jacobs & Co. had been established in Kimberley in 1883 and had moved to Barberton in 1884 before coming to Johannesburg in 1886. We have been here ever since and are proud to have taken part in the history of these turbulent 70 years. Whatever the future may hold, we shall continue to serve the public as we have done in the past – with our best...Real Estate & Insurance Agents. Property Salesmen. Township Consultants."



GENERAL NOTES:

Estimated cost of building	: £75 000
Estimated cost of drainage	: £1 000
Accommodation approved	: two 'European' and nine 'Natives'
Valuation at completion	: £10 000 (Phase One 18 February 1937)
	: £70 000

Occupied : vacant

PREVIOUS TENANTS:

- By 1952: 6th Floor - Pollard & Lewin.
- BY 1954: Shakespeare Restaurant and the Shakespeare Bar; LK Jacobs & Co. (Pty) Ltd; Goldfields Confectionery and Wolmans Leather Goods; Hotel Association of the Transvaal; S Silberman, Government Sworn Appraisers.
- Room 53: Capital Building Society.
- Rooms 108/8: Industrial Council for the Laundry, Dry Cleaning & Dyeing Trade of Transvaal.
- Room 186: Witwatersrand Cambrian Society (i.e. of Wales).
- Room 172: Transvaal Education Department, Witwatersrand Central School Board.
- Room 89: Witwatersrand Retail Master Butchers Association.
- Room 106, 108: Transvaal Laundry & Dry Cleaning Workers Sick Benefit Fund.
- Room 113, 115, 117: Transvaal Licensed Victualler's Benevolent Fund, the Licensed Victualler's Association has been in existence since 9th January 1888, see Pre-History: V-2 for more information.
- Room 196: Transvaal National Sporting Club.
- By 1963: Room 176 - 192 Ninth Floor, Witwatersrand Hebrew Benevolent Association (see History: AM-2 and Pre-History: P-1).
- By 1973: Katz & Lourie.

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.

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