

JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY**HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM**

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

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NAME OF PLACE: THE ROYALTY BUILDING

Main photo: view of main (Pritchard Street) façade. Top right: view of central section of the main façade. Bottom right: from left to right – *Cuthberts Building, Hilson House, The Royalty Building, and the Dunvegan Chambers.*

Previous/alternative name/s : *The Royalty Theatre; 1954 - The Royalty Bio-Café*

LOCATION: Street : Pritchard
Street number : 68
Stand Number : 671
Previous Stand Number: by 1976: 1671
Block number : AC
GIS reference :

ZONING: Current use/s :
Previous use/s : café and bioscope / kinema

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

Height :
Levels above street level : three (RAU Opname Historiese Geboue In Johannesburg).
Levels below street level :
On-site parking :

The building's plans record could not be found.

This building of relatively simplistic design, has an interesting façade, comprising *inter alia*, of finely proportioned recessed cottage pane windows with arched fanlights over (the centre fanlight has clearly been replaced); cornice, dentil insets to a central parapet wall; and a canopy with supporting Tuscan columns with dentil capitals, surmounted by a plastered brick balustrade (with alabaster columns) and cornice. Beneath the windows and below the parapet wall are exquisitely detailed moulded plaster forms.

An interesting detail to the three centre windows is the cable moulding; this is hardly visible from street level. The definition of cable moulding is as follows: "A Romanesque moulding imitating a twisted cord". (Fleming, J. *et al*: The Penguin Dictionary Of Architecture, Penguin Books, Middlesex, reprint 1976). The choice of the moulding is interesting, as *The Royalty* was originally designed as a theatre. With the cable moulding being associated with the Romans (well known for their arenas and entertainment), this was perhaps a homage paid to the Roman Empire.

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

Walls: reinforced concrete frame structure; plastered façade.

Roof: flat, concrete.

Windows: side hung steel casements and ventilators.

SITE FEATURES:**ALTERATIONS:****INTEGRITY:****INSCRIPTION:****ARCHITECT:**

J. C. Cook & Cowen.

BUILDER:**CONSTRUCTION DATE:**

Date on plans : 1930 (RAU Opname Historiese Geboue In Johannesburg).
Approval of plans :
Completion date :

BUILDING STYLE:

Edwardian.

BUILDING TYPE:

Originally designed as a theatre building.

ENVIRONMENT:

Here in Pritchard Street, between Joubert and Eloff Streets, is to be found one of the most interesting collections of buildings in the City, all designed by the well known architectural practice of J.C. Cook & Cowen. This collection, which clearly illustrates the diversified talents of J.C. Cook and Maurice Cowen, comprises of the *Dunvegan Chambers*, *The Royalty Building* (see AC-5), and the *Hilson House*

(see AC-6). The dominant member, no doubt, of this ensemble of buildings, is the *Dunvegan Chambers*, which notwithstanding the difference in scale, form and materials between this building and its neighbours to the east, continues to show valuable qualities of interconnectedness with the *Royalty Building*, and *Hilson House*. The effect of its dominancy, furthermore, tends to be countered by the imposing architecture of the *Cuthberts Building* on the southwestern corner of Pritchard and Eloff Streets.

The overpowering scale of the *Dunvegan Chambers* emphasizes the fragile appearance and delicate composition of the main design elements of *The Royalty*. The slightly more elaborate *Hilson House* tends to stand as a buffer against the 'overpowering' appearance of the richly decorated Edwardian *Cuthberts Building* (a Stucke & Banister design; see AC-7).

The June 1976 RAU Survey report recommended that the building should be demolished as the building...(had) very little in common with its immediate neighbours – it was suggested that the detail of the façade should be reflected in the new building to promote continuity in the street scene. This was later countered by a recommendation by the former NMC to include the existing building on the National Register (i.e. a specific form of formal protection status under the previous heritage legislation).

"While the theatres and cinemas north of the shopping district were all low-rise buildings, those east of the office area were much larger and also more sensational. These 'entertainment palaces' obviously felt at home in the vicinity of the tall office blocks which arose in this area, especially in Commissioner Street, which became known as the 'Great White Way' because of these buildings. In fact, the theatre buildings were so well identified with the environment that parts of them were fitted out as office accommodation. Nevertheless, they could be readily identified in the street aspect by their modelled and richly ornamented facades and large illuminated signboards." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

CONDITION:

The building might have been in a seriously neglected condition in June 1976, but there has clearly been a reversal of this state of affairs, as the façade of the building now appears to be in a relatively fair condition. Cosmetic maintenance work is required especially to the canopy.

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: J. Penn

By 1976: J. Penn Property Pty Ltd, P.A. Mrs Q Kaminer, 305 Eiffel Court, Yeoville, 2198.

PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:

PADDON & BROCK BUILDING:

The site of the current building was previously occupied by the eastern aspect of the *Paddon & Brock Building*.

"There was also a marked difference between shops built before 1895 and those that came after. The first shops constructed after the economic depression of 1889-90 were of simple design and modest in scale and ornamentation. Examples were: *Juta Building* (1892), 43 Pritchard Street [see Pre-History: V-1]; *Kimberley House* (1892), 44 Pritchard Street [R-1]; the first *Thorne & Stuttford Building* (1893), 58, 60 Pritchard Street [see Pre-History: T-2]; *Duffus Bros Building* (1893), 70 Pritchard Street; *Henwood Building* [see Pre-History: AE-1] and *Paddon & Brock Building* (1893) [see Pre-History: AC-3], 56 Joubert Street and 68 Pritchard Street. The first four were built in the style of the period before 1890 – a free and folksy interpretation of classicist building forms. By contrast, *Duffus Bros* and *Paddon & Brock Buildings* in particular were cast in a new style, the picturesque Neo-Queen Anne, as revealed mainly by the prominent gables and colourful variations between red-brick wall surfaces and pale plaster accents. The interruption of the street wall's roof silhouette by gables gave the buildings an individual colour and aspect, so that these 'gable buildings broke away from the homogeneity which was such an important feature of building styles prior to 1890. The commercial buildings erected between 1894 and 1899 underscored this differentiation still further, thereby reinforcing the identity of the shopping district." It is interesting to note that the *Duffus Bros* and *Paddon & Brock Buildings* erected during the same year were neighbours. (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

HISTORY:

In modern times "One had grown accustomed to identifying a theatre building immediately." This, Van Der Waal explains as follows: "Prior to 1900 a theatre was concealed behind a distinctive theatre front, but after 1902 the theatre space was integrated with the surrounding support rooms to such an extent that the structure was no longer readily identifiable as a theatre from the outside. The older theatre buildings had a tall front gable in the classicist style and the entrance was distinctive. Later theatres were distinguished from commercial buildings only by large billboards announcing current and future attractions. During this period Johannesburg's theatres did not develop a distinctive identity of their own. This is probably partly explained by the fact that theatres then began to provide for cinema shows as well, and that there was still some uncertainty about the future of these film shows. In addition, it would appear that, for financial reasons, the owners decided to include shops on the ground floor of their buildings and flats in the upper storeys. The most significant theatre building of this period was the five-storey *Orpheum Theatre* (1912), 160/2 Jeppe Street ...The *Orpheum* was the second theatre (after the *Bijou* of 1910) to be built in this area where the *Plaza* [at 150, 152 Jeppe Street] would also be erected in 1930. [*The Royalty* - erected during 1930 at 68 Pritchard Street also falls in this category and is longer used as a theatre.] Thus there emerged a second concentration of theatres after those in Commissioner Street – on the boundary between the commercial district and residential area and close to a number of club buildings. After 1910 this area must have been particularly lively during the evenings. Like *The Orpheum*, the *Empire* [*Empire Place of Varieties* (1905-6), 135/7 Commissioner Street] provided a focal point in its environment, in which several well-known theatres, such as the *Colosseum* and *His Majesty's* were destined to arise later. During this period several existing buildings were converted into theatres. An example is the *Goldreich Building* (1893), 118 Commissioner Street, which was used as the post office while the Rissik Street Post Office [I-1] was being constructed. In 1903 it was converted into the first *His Majesty's Theatre* with seating for 1 100 patrons. In 1912 similar extensions and alterations converted the *YMCA Building* (1894), 71 Pritchard Street, into the *Vaudette Theatre*. This process of conversion was taken a step further in the case of the *Palladium Theatre*, 69, 71/3/5 Commissioner Street. In 1912 the interior of the empty Exchange Building was converted into a theatre while the exterior was altered to such an extent that it was no longer recognisable...With the exception of two, theatres did not play a significant role in the cityscape of Johannesburg during this period, but the relatively large number (seven) of new theatres was a pointer to the rather lively social activities of the city centre. The theatres were a popular form of relaxation where residents sought respite from the tensions brought on by feverish business activities. The fact that the theatres were located so close to the financial and business districts would seem to indicate that the former were regarded as a perfect foil for the latter. Compared with the hierarchical and insulated formalism of the banking and office buildings, the theatres represented a democratic and integrated approach to architecture." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

See table below for relevant assessment surveying form numbers and status of theatre buildings

mentioned in this form. The *Goldreich Building*, which included the *first His Majesty's Theatre* was refurbished and the building was there after known as the *His Majesty's Theatre*. The *Starlite Cinema* in President Street was demolished for the sole purpose of becoming a parking garage!

Name:	Assessment surveying form number and / or previous name:	Status of building
<i>Bijou</i>	Pre-History: AS-1	Demolished
<i>Colosseum</i>		Demolished
<i>Carlton Theatre</i>	Pre-History: AA-1	Demolished
<i>Empire Palace of Varieties</i>	Pre-History: BA-1, <i>Globe Theatre</i>	Demolished
<i>Gaiety Theatre</i>	Pre-History: A-1	Demolished
<i>Goldreich Building</i>	Pre-History: BG-1	Refurbished as theatre
[Second] <i>His Majesty's</i>	BG-1	Converted to a store
<i>Orpheum Theatre</i>	Pre-History: AF-2	Demolished
<i>Palladium Theatre</i>	Pre-History: D-4	Demolished
<i>Plaza Theatre</i>	Pre-History: AG-4	Demolished
<i>Standard Theatre</i>	Pre-History: I-2	Demolished
<i>Starlite Cinema</i>	Pre-History: M-2	Demolished
<i>The Royalty</i>	This assessment surveying form	Use as theatre discontinued
<i>Vaudette Theatre</i>	Pre-History: AD-5, <i>YMCA Building</i>	Demolished

There is a song 'Video killed the radio star' – I think the Boomtown Rats recorded it –which is an apt description of the demise of a large number of cinemas in South Africa. The video machine is connected to the television set and the arrival of television in South Africa during 1976 started a downhill period for the cinema and theatre industry. I remember going to the theatre as least once a month and to the cinemas once a week. The television changed that for a while and a large number of South Africans remained glued to their television sets during the evenings. It is also interesting to note that at least three of the above mentioned theatres (*Carlton Theatre*, *Gaiety Theatre* and the *Palladium Theatre*), were in one way or another, connected to the I.W. Schlesinger organisation. The disappearance of these buildings left a void in the City's night life. Another factor is the demolition of a large number of residential buildings in the Inner City. This started a vicious circle – the number of Inner City residents was systematically reduced – leaving many of the City's theatres and cinemas standing empty and abandoned, such as in the case of *The Royalty Building*. (Catharina J M Bruwer).

"As in the pioneering days," according to Van Der Waal, "theatre buildings had a more important role than church buildings in the architectural development of Johannesburg from 1920 to 1940, during which period four enormous theatres and cinemas were built in the city centre. This would seem to indicate that after 1920 the interest and taste in entertainment shifted to new and experimental social activities, including spectacular shows. It is probably also explained by the acknowledged need for entertainment in times of stress, such as those of the world-wide depression and the searing drought in the South African countryside around 1930 [the year *The Royalty* was constructed.]. The development of talking pictures, which were shown in Johannesburg for the first time in 1929...gave conventional theatre an important partner. Both created a rich new fantasy world and these buildings reflected the attraction of the unusual. Moreover, these developments were also a reflection of a more democratic tendency, in that an effort was made to entertain the masses, just as the infant broadcasting system was doing at the time. Previously, when British imperialism with its autocratic approach held sway, entertainment of the masses was considered unimportant. The excitement created by the theatres and cinemas made the city centre a very lively place every night – not only by drawing large numbers of people and vehicles into the streets but by enlivening the area with large illuminated bill-boards." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

The Royalty Building's survival might possibly have something to do with its location. "Theatre and cinema buildings", according to Van Der Waal, "occurred in two groups in the city centre. One was in Jeppe and Bree Street, and the other in Commissioner Street. The *Bijou Theatre*...just north of the shopping district and near the *Orpheum*, was rebuilt in 1931 and given a new façade while the interior was also refurbished. The interior and exterior decoration was reminiscent of Oriental architectural styles. Nearby the Plaza Cinema...was built in a bolder, more experimental form. The modernist design by Kallenbach, Kennedy & Furner must in fact have come as something of a shock to most Johannesburgers. Whereas the buildings in the Edwardian and Traditional styles still articulated the building mass by moulding the façade and interrupting the roof-line, the *Plaza* was a simple block with a broad roof overhang." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...). For a full description of the *Plaza Theatre* refer to Pre-History: AG-4.

"The *Metro Theatre* was built in 1932 at 221 Bree Street, not far from the *Bijou* and *Plaza*. Like these two theatres and the *Orpheum*, the *Metro* was also of limited size. In this way these buildings fitted with their environment where, prior to the building expansion which came after 1933, all other buildings were also relatively low. While the other theatres consisted of a single cuboid, the form of the *Metro* was broken up into severe block increasing in height towards the street corner. As in the case of the *Plaza*, pilaster-like strips in panels were used to create the illusion of a temple front. The building was designed by Thomas W Lamb, the New York architect of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, who directed that R40 000 be spent on air-conditioning...This provides an interesting sidelight on architectural development in Johannesburg during that time." (Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis...).

GENERAL NOTES:

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

During 1976 the building was still in use as a Café and bioscope / kinema.

In a letter dated 25 May 1992 to J Hugo, Director: City Planning, City of Johannesburg, Flo Bird, then Chairperson of the Transvaal Plans Committee of the former NMC, stated as follows: "...We have been asked to approve the demolition of yet another block of flats in the CDB. This is Mansfield House (101 President Street), on the north-east corner of President and Joubert Streets. The developer has purchased the entire block (the city block bounded by President, Eloff, Pritchard and Joubert Streets), having been warned in advance of the historical importance of a number of buildings on it. These include Cutherts (see AC-7), Penlan (see AC-2), Hilson (see AC-6), The Royalty, Dunvegan Chambers (see AC-4) and possibly Ranath House (see AC-8)...When that assessment was made some years ago, Mansfield was not considered of great significance. It is a good substantial building, with relatively modest Art Deco facades, designed by the same architects as Hilson, the (sic.) Royalty and Dunvegan ie (J.C.) Cook and Cowen, but less lavishly – presumably because it was done in the Depression (during the early 1930s). A case can be made to some extent for its conservation in terms of the National Monuments Act, but it is not of such outstanding significance as to be worth retaining if that is the only contribution it makes. The NMC has always tried to work with the City Council in terms of planning policies, because it is our belief that conservation is most successful where it is integrated into planning. According to numerous press statements the Council is deeply concerned with increasing the residential component of the CDB. We understand it is fundamental to all proposals for revitalising the City Centre. If this is the case, is the City Council opposed to the demolition of Mansfield House? Is there a plan which deals with maintaining or increasing the residential stock in this sector? And if there are plans for this what incentives are being offered to landlords and/or developers? The redevelopment of the block as outlined by the developers exclude any residential component. It is proposed to erect two stories of retail space, with a floor of offices above. They are prepared to retain the facades and a certain module of the original building behind (at least up to the pitch of the roof where applicable) in respect of Hilson, the (sic.) Royalty, Ranath and Penlan. Cuthberts will be retained intact since it is already a fully declared National Monument. But is it proposed to remove Dunvegan Chambers, as well as the two newer buildings, Fine Arts (see AC-3) and Franwell."

PREVIOUS TENANTS:

By 1954: Royalty Bio-Café, Crawford (Pty) Ltd.

By 1976: Royalty Bio-Café, Dodo's.

CURRENT TENANT/S:

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:

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Unless otherwise indicated photographs by Catharina JM Bruwer.

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THE ROYALTY











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