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## JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

### HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

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

**NAME OF PLACE:** Union Castle Building

**Previous/alternative name/s :**

**LOCATION:** Street : Commissioner  
 Street number : 93  
 Stand number : 177, 178, 5020  
 Block number : G

**ZONING:** Current use/s :  
 Previous use/s : shops and offices

**DESCRIPTION:**

One basement level; ground floor; seven storeys and main roof. Included on original plan was a book lift.

The plaster panels represent Industry; an Epstein-like heroic figure controlling the oceans; and Tropical imports. (Chipkin)

Van Der Waal refers as follows to the near universal application of vertical lines in the designs of office buildings during the 1930s: "In most of the office buildings the windows were grouped in the traditional tripartite fashion with a wider middle section and narrower corner sections. Examples were...Union Castle Building (1937-9)...and Old Mutual Building (1938-9)...In later years architects would gradually abandon this tripartite grouping...in the Union Castle Building the built-up vertical strips directed the eye across the eaves."

**CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:**

Walls : plastered brick, in two colours ; ground level in terra cotta and higher levels in a lighter colour with rose-coloured decorative panelling.

Roof : flat, concrete.

Windows: steel frame.

### **SITE FEATURES:**

### **ALTERATIONS:**

Alterations to second floor, new doors and partitions, toilets altered.

Architect : T.N. Duncan & Partners

Plans passed : 29 August 1955

Minor alterations to fourth floor.

Architect : T.N. Duncan & Partners

Plans passed : 9 June 1955

New screens and door in basement.

Architect : T.N. Duncan & Partners

Plan date : 16 May 1955

Plans passed : 19 July 1956

Interior re-modelling of existing shop premises (on corner part of site).

Architect : T.N. Duncan & Partners

Plan date : May 1959

Plans passed : 26 May 1959

A new counter and removal of wall on the seventh floor.

Architect : T.N. Duncan & Partners

Plans passed : 14 July 1962

Major alterations to interior on ground floor. Two existing upholstered corner seat removed by owner, partitions removed. New breeze block walls six inches wide built to full height, both sides plastered and painted. New dwarf window backs. One door permanently closed and changes to ladies rest room.

Architect : T.N. Duncan & E.L. Gill

Plan date : 28 March 1963

Plans passed : 11 March 1963

Certain existing walls demolished and doors to new positions on the seventh floor.

Architect : Duncan, Gill & Basil Powell

Plan date : 20 July 1964

Plans passed : 6 October 1964

New clothing shop on Loveday Street. Removal of panelling and counter, six inch thick breeze brick partition wall built, plastered both sides and painted, new skirtings to match existing.

Architect : Duncan, Gill & Basil Powell

Plan date : 16 September 1964

Plans passed : 12 October 1964

Removal of certain existing interior walls and adding of new partitions on the seventh floor.

Architect : Duncan, Gill & Adendorff

Plan date : 6 May 1969

Plans passed : 28 July 1969

Demolished certain existing walls and adding of new partitions and glass on third floor.

Architect : Duncan, Gill & Adendorff  
Plan date : 2 April 1970  
Plans passed : 5 June 1970

Alterations to toilets on first floor (Loveday Street).

Architect : Duncan, Gill & Adendorff  
Plan date : 3 September 1970  
Plans passed : 9 November 1970

Major alterations to ground floor and basement. This includes existing shop front, bulkhead and lift removed. New brick walls and partitions, sink and basin added in new shop. New air conditioner installed in basement, part of staircase removed and certain walls demolished, new partitions added.

Architect : Duncan, Gill & Adendorff  
Plan date : 25 September 1970  
Plans passed : 9 November 1970

Change rooms, cold room and storeroom and new partitions added to ground floor. Door removed and bricked up.

Architect : Andrew Zenon  
Plan date : February 1971  
Plans passed : 28 June 1971

#### **INTEGRITY:**

In 1989, the NMC was approached by Old Mutual Properties regarding the buildings on this city block. The former's position was as follows: "...the facades of Union Castle, Security, Investments and St. Andrews should be retained, but that the interiors could be radically altered, and possibly gutted...When the survey commissioned by the Johannesburg City Council was made in 1975/76 the R.A.U. proposed the retention of the entire block as a group of fine Art Deco buildings...They (i.e. the buildings facing Commissioner Street) are good quality examples of that period of architecture and reflect the growth and development of the City as it emerged from the Depression. Unfortunately the shopfronts have already been altered so that at street level the conservation interest is greatly reduced." (NMC - Teak Investments (Pty) Ltd, 16 Aug '89)

This should be read together with the following, as stated in a NMC letter dd. 7 August 1989: "INQUIRY REGARDING CONSERVATION MERITS...SECURITY, ST. ANDREWS, INVESTMENT, UNION CASTLE. These few buildings were identified by the R.A.U. report as one half of a block of Art Deco buildings...Of the few, Union Castle Buildings is the best aesthetically...None of the buildings has external(sic.) features that are of exceptional value, and therefore considerable changes could be made to the interiors to improve their use for offices."

The display sign on the corner of the building as well as the display sign covering the canopy facing, detracts from the appreciation of the building; it does not respect the architectural features and the visual qualities of the building, the same applies to the painted windows on the first floor.

**INSCRIPTION:****ARCHITECT/BUILDER:**

J.A. Moffat & Harvey  
(Chipkin incorrectly gives architects as J.A. Moffat & T.N. Duncan)

**CONSTRUCTION DATE:**

Plans passed : 28 February 1938  
Completed : 24 February 1939

Application for verandah was passed. The following was noted on the application form dd. 1937: "City of Johannesburg: To remove the said verandah without payment of compensation in the event of the street being widened under the Town planning scheme."

**BUILDING STYLE:**

Particularly successful treatment of materials and design, finding expression in the Art Deco idiom.

**BUILDING TYPE:**

Shops and office building.

**ENVIRONMENT:**

The situation more than 10 years ago was as follows: South of the four buildings concerned in Commissioner Street, were buildings such as the Surrey, Triangle, Provincial, A.C.A. and Aegis. Of these, Triangle and Provincial were considered the most valuable. They were both older and of a much smaller scale (indicative of an earlier stage of development) than the Union Castle Building, the Security Building, the Investment Building and St Andrews Building. Surrey House was seen as a good Art Deco building, but less significance in terms of rarity, than Triangle or Provincial.

**CONDITION:**

It was recommended in 1976 that the window frames should be painted the same colour than the window frames of the lower level, i.e. bronze. (RAU Report, June 1976)

**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: The Union Castle Mail Steamship Co. Ltd

By 1964: Messrs Cayzer, Irvine (SA)(PTY) Ltd

By 1969: Landa Investment (Pty) Ltd

Stand Nos. 177 and 178 (previously 895)

T32520/1990 Ownmeds Pty Ltd

B39033/1990

Stand No. 5020 (previously Ptn 1 of 177)

I-3250/1977LG Heathgate Pty Ltd

T32520/1990 Ownmeds Pty Ltd

B39033/1990

**PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:**

**HISTORY:**

## **GENERAL NOTES:**

The estimated cost of the building was £50 337 and the drainage £600. Accommodation for two 'Europeans' and 16 'Non-Europeans' was approved. At the time of its completion the building was valued at £40 000.

One of the main problems with respect to the building has throughout been its lack of 'in-house' parking. The following was stated in this regard in a letter dd. 8 November 1989 to the NMC: "As you are possibly aware this building has been on the market for a number of years, however the absence of any parking continues to be a major stumbling block in finding a purchaser."

## **SOURCES:**

Opname Historiese Geboue In Johannesburg, Second Report June 1976, Inner City, RAU

Photograph (coloured) of corner section and Commissioner and Loveday Streets elevations ca. 1988 : NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/124

NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/A : Johannesburg – General, Vol. III

NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/105: Union Castle, Security, Investment and St Andrews Building, Commissioner Street 93 – 99, Johannesburg

Chipkin C.M. : Johannesburg Style architecture & Society 1880s – 1960s, David Philip Publishers, 1993 (included in this publication are quality pictures of the plaster panels)

City Engineering Department, Stand Nos. 177/178/5020, Township Johannesburg (Planning Dept., City of Johannesburg)

Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis, The buildings of Johannesburg 1886-1940, Chris Van Rensburg Publications, 1987

Registrar of Deeds, Johannesburg

## **RECORDED BY:**

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Photographs by Chris JH Coxen (unless otherwise indicated).

## **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