

**JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY**

**HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM**

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

**NAME OF PLACE: Gardees Arcade**



**Previous/alternative name/s :**

**LOCATION:** Street : Pritchard  
Street number : 2  
Stand number : 766  
Street : President  
Street number : 4  
Stand number : 755 (previously 481)  
Block number : 0

**ZONING:** Current use/s : General  
Previous use/s :

**DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:**

**CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:**

Walls : reinforced-concrete structures.

Roof : reinforced-concrete.

Windows: aluminium frame shop fronts.

**SITE FEATURES:**

**ALTERATIONS:**

**INTEGRITY:**

**INSCRIPTION:**

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:**

FRB Consulting Architects

**CONSTRUCTION DATE:**

On plan :  
Completed : 1990

**BUILDING STYLE:**

**BUILDING TYPE:**

In April 1987, Flo Bird of the former NMC expressed the following opinion: "Fruit Arcade: The entrance portal is an Anglo addition, but it works very well. Shop fronts, steel ceilings, canvass awnings create the character."

**ENVIRONMENT:**

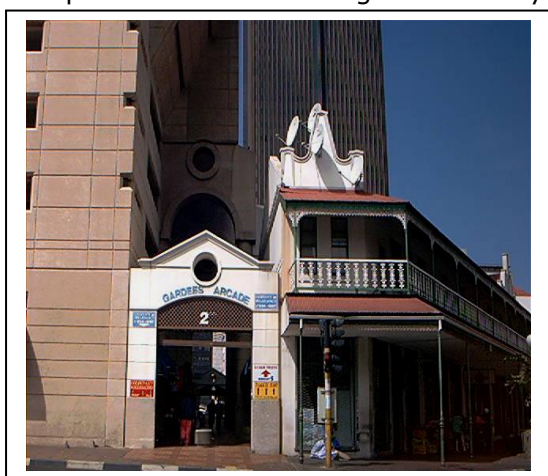
**CONDITION:**

Good.

**URGENT ACTION:**

**SAHRA RECORD REGARDING ALTERATIONS, RENOVATIONS, RESTORATION:**

1987 - NMC demolition permits dd. 3 December 1987 (i.r.o. Erven 754, 755, 756, 765, 766 and the outbuildings on 767 and 756) and record of the conditions that the developer were expected to meet: "The attached permit for demolition of the above buildings is subject to acceptance of the following condition by the owner of the properties concerned:



- 1. Fruit Alley a) This will be re-located west of shops; the same type of trading and the original shop frontages and quality of space between. b) The alley shall be open to the sky but the new office block east of the alley will be permitted to project discreetly off the alley. c) The entrance to the alley shall be emphasized by way of a suitable archway.
- 2. The new residential buildings a) These shall have the essential architectural character of the building on Stand 767. b) The new residential section on Stand 757 shall not interfere with the architectural and historic integrity[sic.] of Saxonia Buildings.
- 3. The owner shall grant consent to the full proclamation of the buildings on Stand 767 & 757 as National Monuments.
- 4. The shop fronts to all

trading facilities shall be restored to their original character. 5. In the event of any one or more of these properties being sold the above undertakings shall be included in the condition of sale as binding on the new owner/owners."

Refer to comprehensive applications made during 1988-90 by RFB Consulting Architects to the NMC in regard to the proposed restoration / refurbishment of the existing buildings on Stand Nos. 757, 758 and 767, including the proposed construction of a new retail and residential building on Stand No. 756, as well as a new shopping mall on Stand Nos. 754 and 765. The NMC's architect Mr W. Martinson assisted closely with various aspects of the development of the applications.

In 1993 the NMC agreed to the installation of shade awnings at the shops in the Arcade: "...the awnings would be made of canvas and as the Committee valued the individuality of the shops, the tenants should be allowed to choose their own colours and be allowed to put their names on the canvas."

**PROTECTION STATUS:** (under National Heritage Resources Act, 1999)

General protection:	Section 34(1) structure/s	<input type="checkbox"/>
Formal protection:	provincial heritage site	<input type="checkbox"/>
	national heritage site	<input type="checkbox"/>
	provisional protection	<input type="checkbox"/>

heritage area   
listed in provincial heritage  
resources register

Relevant Gazette Notice:

Gazette description:

**FORMER PROTECTION STATUS:** (under National Monuments Act, 1969)

**NOTES:**

**DEEDS INFORMATION:**

Original ownership:

By 1912: Victoria Land Co. Ltd

T54283/1988 Mine Officials Pension Fund  
T54283/1988 Mine Employees Pension Fund  
VA3817/2001 Mine Officials Pension Fund  
B33520/2001 Growthpoint Prop Trust  
T51164/2001 Growthpoint Prop Ltd

**PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:**

By 1912, there appears to have been a single storey brick and iron building at 2 and 4 Pritchard Street, i.e. the northern entrance to the present Arcade (Stand No. 766) and the section of the Ernst & Young building (Stand No. 765) facing Pritchard Street, respectively. This building was an "Eating House" for blacks.

The beginnings of Gardee's Arcade can be traced back to 1922. On 24 January 1922, plans were passed by the City Council for the proposed development of a "New Fruit Market and Bldgs" on the site of the present-day Arcade, i.e. on Stand Nos. 755 and 766 and that of the Ernst & Young building (Stand Nos. 754 and 765). The architect for this was J.F. Kroll. This development was commissioned by the *Victoria Land Co. Ltd.* and its estimated cost was given as £100.

It appears that the development was completed in June 1922 and comprised the following: (1) a new elongated single storey brick and iron building (on the western portions of Stand Nos. 755 and 766) consisting of various shops, extending from Pritchard to President Streets (2) to the east of this building and leaving sufficient space for an alley (arcade), was constructed an elongated building (on the eastern portions of Stand Nos. 754 and 765) of similar design; the latter building (double storey on Stand No. 765 / single storey on Stand No. 754) similarly extended across the entire block, between Pritchard and President Streets; the top floor of the building consisted of living quarters, and the ground floor of shops and offices.

In 1951, the architect F.C. Meeser attended to various alterations and additions to the sections of the Fruit Market buildings at 4 Pritchard and 37 President Streets. The Director of the

Victoria Land Company at this stage was Mr Jassub Ebrahim. It is interesting to note that Meeser prolifically worked on other retail premises in this area of Johannesburg.

In 1956, an additional storey was added to the existing single storey section of the Fruit Market building at 39 President Street. During the following year, the architect Philip Epstein attended to various minor alterations to the same retail section. A few years later during 1963, the shop fronts of the Fruit Market buildings (facing the alley as well as the streets) were drastically altered with the installation of large display windows, canopies, and steel roller shutters. The architect for this was again Philip Epstein.

## **HISTORY:**

The true meaning and historical context of the Arcade lies within the following description of Diagonal Street and what it was like more than four decades ago. "Diagonal Street teemed with life and colour, noises and smells. One could buy silks, saris, samoosas or African muti. Whiffs of spices or incense wafted out here and there from shops displaying bowls of curry mixtures in vivid reds and yellows. From one shop would blare the reedy passion of an Indian song; from another the beat of an African pop hit. It was chiefly a black shopping area: the biggest retail fruit and vegetable market for Africans and a kind of semi-open air department store for cut-rate clothing, dresses, textiles, toiletries, scarves, knick-knacks of all kinds...On the balconies above the shops children played and lines of colourful laundry flapped. As in Pageview, many of Diagonal Street's traders lived on the premises. It was no doubt this fact which spurred the Government's decision to declare it a white group area. Since the mid-1960s, with the threat of eventual eviction looming, the size and character of the quarter has been steadily eroded by a combination of politics and 'progress'." (Benjamin)

The origins of this richly flavoured corner of Johannesburg go back to the city's infancy. Originally, there was a kind of no-man's-land just west of Diagonal Street which did not seem to bother the officialdom. Here, there curiously was no strict enforcement of the old Transvaal Republic's Law 3 of 1885 – which restricted the property rights of 'the coloured native races of Asia...'. Indians were left to find what accommodation they could – either in Pageview (the 'Malay Location' – or in fringe areas, such as at Diagonal Street and its environs. The result of this was that Diagonal Street became a racially mixed area.

"Further laws however, such as the Gold Law of 1908 and the Asiatic Land Tenure and Trading Amendment Act of 1919, imposed new restrictions on Indians. Yet again, little if anything was done to enforce them: trading licences continued to be issued, and no alternative areas were offered. From the beginning therefore, many Indians effectively owned 'white' property through nominees. Business knew no real boundaries. And as the town centre, meanwhile, shifted eastwards across towards Rissik and Eloff Streets, the Asians of Diagonal Street were left undisturbed." (Benjamin)

Then came the lengthy enquiry between 1934 and 1937 by a commission headed by Judge Richard Feetham. In its report, it was recommended that the existing position in Diagonal Street, among other parts, should be legalised. This was done through a new Land Tenure Act in 1936. At last, Indian landlords could invest in their premises of trading. The area started to take on a more prosperous look. But this was not to be forever. The draconian measures following from the Group Areas Act in 1950 stripped Indians of their rights. "Thus 'progress' was helped to cast its long shadow over Diagonal Street. The worst was to come when the Diagonal Street proper was declared a white area by a Group Areas proclamation of 3 December 1970. The future couldn't have been more uncertain and cloudy for the traders and their families in the Diagonal Street precinct. "Landlords stopped spending money on any but essential maintenance; rebuilding was in any case forbidden and the quarter became progressively more shabby." Who could have blamed the traders for this! (Benjamin)

Many years later, it was suddenly reported in The Star ("JCI plans to demolish Indian shops"), of 18 March 1987 that the Johannesburg City Council's planning department had been approached by Johannesburg Consolidated Investments (JCI) with a view to the proposed demolition of the city's most famous street scene. "The Victorian shops on Diagonal Street between Pritchard and President Streets, with their balconies, filigree iron work and the colourful Cairo-style fruit market date back to 1896. The street was recently renovated and fitted with Victorian streetlamps by Anglo American at a cost of R800 000. The public is unlikely to take the news sitting down. The shopkeepers, whose shops are a tourist attraction, were appalled when they heard the news yesterday." It was reported that the Argus company had sold its Diagonal Street property behind The Star building to JCI for R3,7 million. "The block of flats and line of shops opposite the glass tower of Barnib House will be demolished and JCI will build an office block on the site, subject to planning permission being granted."

This was followed by a report in The Star of 21 March 1987 ("Battle for Diagonal Street 'national monument' looms: Traders to fight back") from which it became clear that JCI could expect to meet some serious opposition: "Indian market traders in Johannesburg's Diagonal Street have united in a bid to frustrate efforts to force them out the shops they have run for more than half a century. The 40 tenants in the mainly fruit and vegetable market have appointed attorneys to investigate ways of preventing..." Johannesburg Consolidated Investments from putting up an office block on the site. "Shops premises on Diagonal Street were recently renovated by Anglo American at a cost of R800 000. The shops became a tourist attraction in their setting opposite the blue glass Barnib House, one of the most avant garde buildings in the city."

In The Star (dd. 26 March 1987) in the 'Letters To The Editor Column', various members of the public objected to the plans by JCI. Rob Allington stated as follows: "Every civic-minded individual and organisation recognises ...(the Diagonal Street area) to be an irreplaceable national treasure historically and architecturally. JCI blandly asserts that 'any new building which takes the place of the old property can only be for the better'. Better for whom? This brings to mind the similar case of 'betterment' which resulted in the end of the Colloseum." J.G. Collett also objected vehemently to the proposed new JCI development: "Diagonal Street is an important part of our city. It is as much part of this country as we are. I saw the street for the first time four years ago and have loved it ever since. It has the spirit that only street scenes here could have – vibrant coloured clothes hanging around doors and fruit and vegetables."

Then on 30 March 1987, it was reported in The Star that Johannesburg's oldest street scene – Diagonal Street's turn-of-the-century Indian shops – would not be demolished after all! "The developers of the site which extends across all seven stands behind The Star ...have decided to develop only the area behind the shops. Even the alleyway market will be spared. The decaying interiors will be restored."

In The Star of 31 March 1987 ("Diagonal Street lesson"), it was consequently reported that conservation had won the day: "Diagonal Street is all sorts of things to Johannesburg: it has, for a start, the only surviving Victorian street scene in town and the area uniquely spans the whole architectural and human cultural mix of this city. Yet we nearly lost its last surviving 19<sup>th</sup> century remnant. But for an official who discovered he was obliged to inform the National Monuments Council (because the buildings were more than 50 years old) the last intact block of Diagonal Street might well have been demolished before the public could react."

By this stage, detailed discussions were already taking place between the developer (i.e. Johannesburg Consolidated Investment – JCI) and the NMC. The latter eventually indicated that the two buildings on Diagonal Street (i.e. the Nathanson's Building and the Carmel Building) needed to be retained but agreed to the re-positioning of the adjacent Fruit Arcade. The NMC had also been approached by a number of tenants who had lived in this area for many years. "They seemed to be a settled community, small traders totally dependent on their daily trade in the small shops." NMC agreed to the demolition of the eastern building, alongside The

Star Building. "The intrinsic merit of the buildings is therefore not great. It is the shopping character and the relationship to President and Kort Streets and the rest of Diagonal Street that makes this exceptionally valuable." (Flo Bird, NMC April 1987)

In a letter dd. 17 September 1987 to the NMC's Chairman, Mrs Flo Bird explained the NMC's position as follows: "The final proposal is that the two most important buildings be retained intact, the fruit arcade be re-erected further west on the same alignment and with additional space to accommodate the tenants from the Thirties building (i.e. on Stand No. 755), and that on the old site of the fruit alley and the Thirties building the new JCI office block be erected.

During construction the Indian shopkeepers will be housed in temporary stalls in Diagonal Street, which the City will close along one side to traffic. Temporary accommodation for the flat dwellers they will find themselves, but JCI will pay R250 per month to each tenant. JCI have now applied for the demolition permit, for the Thirties building and the arcade..."

According to a report in Business Day dd. 21 February 1990 ("Diagonal St gets a new face"), Diagonal Street will regain some of its history with the reopening of Gardee's Arcade and its colourful fruit and vegetable shops. In addition, the Victorian shops and first floor flats on Diagonal Street across from First National House are to be revamped. Work on this project will begin in March. The Mine Employees' and Mine Officials' pension funds, which own the new Ernst & Young office building and Gardee's Arcade, have appointed Ampros to administer both the old and the new space. The arcade, between Pritchard and President street, and the adjacent Ernst & Young House have been developed by JCI Properties and are now nearing completion. JCI will also be responsible for the refurbishment."

In the Financial Mail of 13 April 1990 ("More Than Skin Deep"), it was reported that work had started on a R1 million programme to upgrade the historic market stalls in Diagonal Street to their 'original Victorian splendour'. It involved the proposed refurbishment of about 12 shops and a similar number of flats above. The project formed part of a R52 million redevelopment scheme, which was to include the construction of the Ernst & Young House, and the replacement of the fruit stalls in Gardee's Arcade (on the west side of the new office building) between President and Pritchard Streets."

According to a report in The Star dd. 15 May 1990 ("Re-development retains traditional Indian trading site"), the "colourful Traders' Alley", between Pritchard and President Streets had been given a new lease of life. "The re-development provides for the incorporation of residential accommodation for the Indian families and the restoration of Traders' Alley to maintain its traditional characteristics of urban scale and flavour. Occupancy by the entire Indian trading community has been retained and one-month leases have been replaced by five year leases."

In a subsequent letter dd. 10 July 1990 to Mr Murray Hofmeyr, Chairman of JCI, Mrs Bird expressed her satisfaction with what had been achieved: "This is a belated 'thank you' for the very enjoyable celebration which marked the opening of Ernst & Young House and of the Traders Alley in May this year. It was a very special occasion in Johannesburg's 'coming of age' when retaining the old was not seen as a stumbling block to progress. I feel that JCI deserves the thanks of all our citizens for having taken on this very complex conservation of buildings, activities and a community..."

## **GENERAL NOTES:**

Reporter Sally Dewar in The Sunday Star - 'Timeout' of 10 April 1988, reported as follows on her visit to the Diagonal Street precinct: "It is vibrant and alive, and colourful, peopled by a hotchpotch of many races, religions and cultures to whom Diagonal Street is a way of life:

nothing special, just a few rows of shops that they and their fathers have always patronised for their daily needs...I spent some time there. I wondered down Diagonal Street...then back along Kort Street, dodging the stacks of tin trunks and pyramids of saucepans spilling out from doors of overstocked shops, stepping round neat piles of fruit on wooden trestles...In most of these little shops which sell just about everything, the precaution is with health. In the northern suburbs they have their health shops; here they have all the traditional remedies of the black culture, with a smattering of the old Afrikaans, and a little of the Oriental thrown in too...Over all hangs an aura of incense, which is sold in most shops and burns in many... Kitchenware comes high on the list, from small gadgets to great sets of enamelled or aluminium saucepans...I felt a flutter of anticipation as I walked into the cool depths of a shop stocked from floor to ceiling with bolts of cotton cloth – mostly African prints...I pass time in a wholesale and retail merchant's shop, in which the scene must be familiar to travellers from Hong Kong, Cairo...or Mombassa – wherever Asians ply their trade."

### **SOURCES:**

NMC File 9/2/228/5/5: Diagonal Street Conservation Area, Johannesburg (included in this file are numerous coloured photographs of the old Saxonia and Hanson Building, and the Arcade, i.e. former Fruit Alley)

NMC File 9/2/228/21: Saxonia and Hanson Building, Diagonal Street, Johannesburg

NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/111 Diagonal Street Conservation Area, Johannesburg

NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/98: Diagonal Street

City Engineering Department, Stand Nos. 754, 755, 765 and 766, Township Johannesburg (Planning Department), City of Johannesburg

The Star: 18, 21, 26, 30 and 31 March 1987

The Saturday Star: 10 April 1988

Business Day: 21 February 1990

Financial Mail: 13 April 1990

Interviews: Messrs J.M. Patel (Gardees Arcade) and H. Hassan (Carmel Building)

Registrar of Deeds, Johannesburg

### **RECORDED BY:**

Johann J and Catharina JM Bruwer.

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