

JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

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

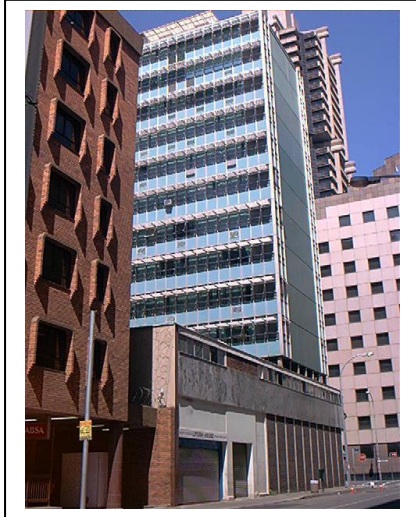
NAME OF PLACE: Litorn House



Previous/alternative name/s : African Guarantee Building
(also AGI Building)
: Thusanong (meaning Place of Help)

LOCATION: Street : Commissioner
Street number : 69, 71
Stand number : 4777 (previously 212-214)
Block number : D

ZONING: Current use/s : Business one
Previous use/s : Office building



DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

Twelve storeys; one basement level for parking.

"The African Guarantee high-rise is a curtain-wall building with natural anodised aluminium sub-framing and – like Lever House – tinted-green glass spandrel panels. On the north elevation the glass wall is protected from sun penetration by projecting horizontal aluminium sun-hoods – a detail possibly of Marcel Breuer provenance. This is a building that possesses the elegance, perfect proportions and joie de vivre of a new technology under control – and the delicacy of touch characteristic of Monty Sack. Again, as on the Colonial Bank Building, there is the use of a rich natural veined and figured material: planar marble surfaces, on this occasion in sharp-angled green onyx. On the west-walls of the main slab block, green mosaic panels (divided with deep horizontal shadow-lines at floor levels) are chromatically graded from dark green upwards to light green at top-floor level. This design intervention by a watercolorist-architect is quite brilliant in the context of mechanistic architecture." (Chipkin)

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

Walls : reinforced concrete framework, clad with green coloured metal panelling.

Roof : flat, concrete.

Windows: steel frame, aluminium.

SITE FEATURES:

ALTERATIONS:

Installation of internal partitions.

Architect : M. Sack

Plans passed : 1960

Internal alterations to ground floor: reference to "European Banking Hall" and a separate "Native Banking Hall".

Architect : M. Sack

Plans passed : 1965

Internal alterations to ground floor and first floor (for the tenant, i.e. the Netherlands Bank of South Africa).

Architect : Guy Andrews and Crawford Architects

Plans passed : 1970

Internal alterations to ground floor and shop fronts.

Architect : Ian Gelb

Plans passed : 1976

Internal alterations to first floor (change rooms).

Architect : Irvine-Smith, Joubert & Lennard
Plans passed : 1976

Internal alterations at ground floor (new strong room / existing banking hall).

Architect : Irvine-Smith, Joubert & Lennard
Plans passed : 1977

Internal alterations to ground floor (Tenant: '*Bread and Butter*').

Architect : Ian Gelb
Plans passed : 1981

Alterations to free-standing double storey building on north-western corner of site.

Architect : G. Packman
Plans passed : 1992

Alterations to ground floor section facing Fraser Street.

Architect : J.G.C. Van Deutekom
Plans passed : 1994

INTEGRITY:

Changes to the building since its construction have been to the interior only; the original fabric of the building therefore, has remained largely intact.

INSCRIPTION:

ARCHITECT/BUILDER:

Architect: M. Sack
Structural engineers : Ove-Arup & Partners

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

Plans passed : 1958
Completed : 1959

BUILDING STYLE:

Johannesburg Modular Regionalism.

BUILDING TYPE:

Bank and office building.

ENVIRONMENT:

The building stands in conflict (especially because of its green colour) with that of the other buildings in its area and this has a disruptive affect on the view from Market Square. (RAU Report, June 1976). There are obviously different interpretations that could be given to this.



CONDITIONS:

Good.

URGENT ACTION:

SAHRA RECORD REGARDING ALTERATIONS, RENOVATIONS, RESTORATION:

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

- General protection: Section 34(1) structure/s
- Formal protection: provincial heritage site
- national heritage site
- provisional protection
- 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 1958: African Life Assurance Society.

1976: Mine Employees Pension Fund (Transfer from Litorn House [Proprietary] Ltd to Mine Employees' Pension Fund: Deed of Transfer No. 13001 dd. 2 October 1967.

I-3250/1977LG Heathgate Pty Ltd
K1185/1994S
B33472/2001 Growthpoint Prop Trust
T51096/2001 Growthpoint Prop Trust

PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:

In 1887, Benjamin M. Woollan bought land at the north-west corner of Simmonds and Commissioner Streets, where he erected a building for a Stock Exchange which he proposed forming. Woollan was an enterprising man...He called a meeting of mining men and an Exchange was duly established...the building (a one-storey building) was officially opened on 16 January 1888, by J.W. Sauer, who became Minister of Railways in the first Union Cabinet. Woollan's Stock Exchange...was too small within a year after the first stocks were quoted, and another 'new' Exchange was built on the site of the old one. It occupied the whole southern section of the block in Commissioner Street from Simmonds to Fraser Streets. It was officially opened on 10 February 1890. This also only lasted ten years when this building also became too small...the hall of this building was subsequently used for various other purposes.

HISTORY:

At the time of the submission of the building plans in 1958 for approval: "I return herewith the paper copies of the plan of the proposed building...which are not in order insofar as this Department is concerned in that the Native quarters are not situated on the roof of the main building as required in terms of Section 22 of the Town Planning Scheme." (Letter from City Engineer to responsible architect dated 15 April 1958). Provision was thereupon made for a "Staff Common Room" on the roof of the proposed new building.



GENERAL NOTES:

Monty Sack - the Architect: "In Johannesburg, the most accomplished interpretation of the new building technology associated with curtain-wall corporate America was to be found in the work of Monty Sack. Sack was the architect chosen to project the second-generation image of the Schlesinger Organisation, an insurance, banking and property empire owning some of the 'finest blue-chip sites in the country.' ...In Monty Sack the Schlesinger executives found the perfect instrument for their drive to modernity: second-generation Schlesinger modernity. Sack confirms that in the 1950s and 1960s he was strongly influenced by developments in North America, particularly by 'functionalist buildings expressing mechanical systems on the façade.' He visited New York in 1957 and returned home with ideas which came to fruition in his subsequent work. The first fruits of the American visit were the near-contemporaries built in the same historic city block: the Colonial Bank Building (1958-9) in Market Street (at the corner of Simmonds), a neighbour to the face brick Volkskas building: and the African Guarantee Building (1960) at the corner of Commissioner and Fraser Streets - the first precast-clad building on a podium. The two buildings, though quite different in appearance, nevertheless reflected a single design intelligence - the same sense of proportion and elegance, the same restraint in the use of materials." (Chipkin)

The building currently houses the Department of Social Services and Population Development, Gauteng Provincial Government.

SOURCES:

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

Chipkin, C.M.: Johannesburg Style; Architecture & Society, 1880s - 1960s, David Philip, 1993

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

City Engineering Department, Stand No. 4777, Township Johannesburg (Planning Department), City of Johannesburg

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