

6.3.12. Rand Water Board.



Erf Number:	4508 (previously 739, 741, 874 and 875).
Name:	(Old) Rand Water Board.
Architect:	Gordon Leith and Partners.
Previous Names:	Custom House (collective name) and Leith Building.
Approved / Existing Plans:	None.
Date of Construction:	1939
Architectural Style / Aesthetics :	Art Deco / Stripped Down Neo Classical.
Historical Use:	Office.
Current Use:	Vacant.
Intended Use:	Office.
Rarity or Technical interest:	Good example of Art Deco / Neo Classical within Johannesburg.
Relationship to setting and place:	Relationship to setting and place: Excellent relationship between Rand Water Board and neighbouring Customs House Building in terms of scale and height relationships - excellent relationship between harmonious use of materials and architectural elements between buildings.

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Relationship to historical aspects:	Forms a built document of the development of Johannesburg between the 1st and 2nd world wars.
Social Importance:	n/a.
Modifications:	Limited.
Integrity of current Structure:	Fair.
Known lost aspects or changes made:	The interiors have been stripped and vandalised.
Scientific or Research Potential:	Excellent example of Stripped Down Classicism Architecture within Johannesburg. Excellent example of the work of a major South African architect. Quality of materials and craftsmanship is to be noted.
Other:	Certain interior rooms retain historical finishes and fixtures. These should be retained and restored. The original building cost was estimated at £ 67 000.00. During 1980 and again in 1991 the national Monuments Council recommended that the building be declared a National Monument. The recommendation notes "Gordon Leith's work at the Rand Water Board (1939) in Fraser Street was able to surmount the contradictory forces operating within his architectural consciousness and convert these disparate elements into a cohesive statement outside the particularism of the new classicism". Polished red granite blocks with splay-cut arises and deep joints: arched windows with water griffin keystones; a black granite plinth with bulging consoles and equally bulging wrought-iron grilles beaten into curvilinear shapes: a beautifully modulated face-brick superstructure with bull-nosed ends to receive the window surrounds; the overall dignity and human scale: these are the elements that bring together the Italian Renaissance, the modernising classicism Leith acquired from his pre-war tour, the clean Swedish forms and optimism. Leith himself was critical of this building but I regard it as a major statement of street architecture, unsurpassed in the Johannesburg townscape." - Chipkin, C. (1993), page 137.
Protection:	Yes - structure is more than 60 years old and protected in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act.
2002 - 2015 Historical information:	Demolition proposed for 2002 Kopnong project. Granted by SAHRA. Appealed by public in 2005. Appeal upheld.
Significance:	Forms part of a cohesive collection of buildings of a similar height along Fraser Street, connecting with the buildings lining the southern edge of Beyers Naude Square. The building housed the headquarters of the Rand Water Board and the gravitas of the building echoes how depended on water we are.
Section 3.3 of NHRA:	a; d; e; f; g & h.
Grading:	Culturally Significant - grade to be confirmed following full heritage study.
Current Condition - Exterior:	Fair (upper levels); poor (ground levels).
Current Condition - Interior:	The building is currently vacant and the majority has been gutted, however, the significance of the architectural form of the building is still in tact, and uncompromised. The exterior facades of the building exhibit fine craftsmanship in terms of masonry / detailing. Various culturally significant features remain internally, such as important public spaces, timber detailing, marble work and remnants of a finely crafted architecture. Despite its poor condition the building exhibits high cultural significance and provenance.
Recommendations - Exterior:	The exterior warrants conservation. The fine stripped neoclassical facades should be retained and restored. The original bronze window frames should be refabricated and reinstated. No increase in height is permissible.

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Recommendations - Interior:	Various culturally significant features remain internally, such as important public spaces, timber detailing, marble work and remnants of a finely crafted architecture. Despite the extensive damage to the interiors, these would warrant full restoration.
NHRA Applications:	An application as per Section 34.1 of the NHRA is required.
Recommendations - Overall:	The building would warrant declaration as a provincial heritage resource. The building requires a full survey identifying all remaining historical fabric. The remaining fabric should be restored and incorporated into the future proposed design and use of the building. The building requires a full reconstruction - see definition in Section 3.6. of this document.

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Designed in 1939 by the highly regarded architect Gordon Leith in the stripped down Neo Classical style, Rand Water Board is widely considered one of Johannesburg's most architecturally exceptional buildings.

Originally a four-storey building, Rand Water Board comprised the following; a basement for parking and records rooms, as well as a sub-basement boiler room space. The ground floor hosted an entrance lobby, as well as public spaces and offices, with three additional floors of office accommodation above. Two additional floors of office space were added to the structure in 1965 by John Fassler and M.D. Howie.

Aspects which Johan Bruwer noted as being of merit in his 2002-2009 Heritage Assessment for the City of Johannesburg include:

“Ground floor - the marble floor and marble lining in the lobby and the entrance hall; the latter leading into a spacious board room with a committee room at its rear; the wood block floors in the remaining spaces, e.g. offices, as well as the panelled walls of the offices, board room as well as the committee room. First to third floors – the terrazzo floors with marble margins as well as the black brick (with marble surrounds) walls at the lift lobby on each floor; the panelled walls and wood block floors in the offices.”⁵⁶

“Gordon Leith’s work at the Rand Water Board (1939) in Fraser Street was able to surmount the contradictory forces operating within his architectural consciousness

56. Bruwer, J. J. (2009), Rand Water Board (C-3).

and convert these disparate elements into a cohesive statement outside the particularism of the new classicism. Polished red granite blocks with splay-cut arrises and deep joints: arched windows with water griffin keystones; a black granite plinth with bulging consoles and equally bulging wrought-iron grilles beaten into curvilinear shapes: a beautifully modulated facebrick superstructure with bull-nosed ends to receive the window surrounds; the overall dignity and human scale: these are the elements that bring together the Italian Renaissance, the modernising classicism Leith acquired from his pre-war tour, the clean Swedish forms and optimism. Leith himself was critical of this building but I regard it as a major statement of street architecture, unsurpassed in the Johannesburg townscape.”⁵⁷

57. Chipkin, C. M. (1993), page 137.



Contemporary image - facade.



Contemporary image - facade.



Contemporary image - interior of Ground Floor.



Contemporary image - interior of Ground Floor.



Contemporary image - doors to lift lobby.



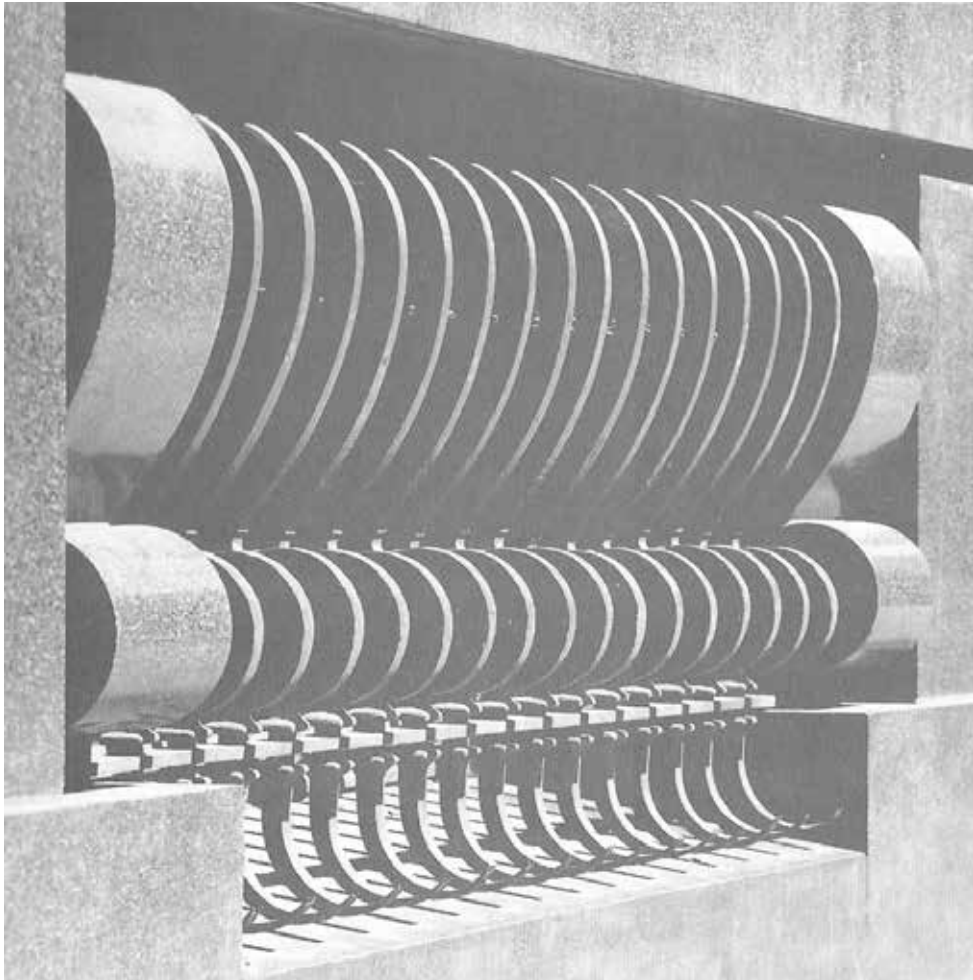
Contemporary image - interior panelling on upper floor.



Contemporary image - interior / outer area of chamber room.



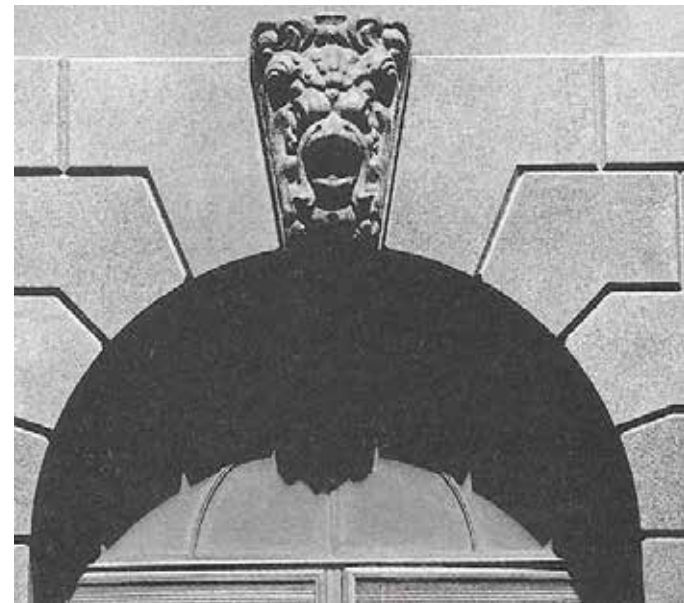
Contemporary image - interior panelling on upper floor.



Detail on facade - Chipkin, C. M. (1993), page 139.



Detail of keystone - Chipkin, C. M. (1993), page 139.



Arch in facade - Chipkin, C. M. (1993), page 136.