

**JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY**

**HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM**

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

JJ Bruwer ©  
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**NAME OF PLACE: TRUST BANK BUILDING**



Photograph: Catharina JM Bruwer.

Above: the *Trust Bank Building* standing tall amongst its small scaled neighbours. (CJMB)

Previous/alternative name/s :  
:  
:

**LOCATION:** Street : bounded by Fox, Von Brandis, Main and Eloff  
Street number :  
: (122, 124, 126, 128 Fox; 27, 29, 31, 33 Von Brandis;  
: 103, 105, 107, 109 Main; 50, 52, 54, 56 Eloff)  
Stand Number : 1117  
Previous Stand Number:  
Block number : BI  
Suburb : Marshallstown  
GIS reference :

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

**DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:**

Height : One hundred and forty meters  
Levels above street level :  
Levels below street level :  
On-site parking :  
As seen from the exterior, the building appears to be in a fair condition. (CJMB)

'From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia  
The Trust Bank Building is a skyscraper in the Central Business District of Johannesburg, South Africa. It was built in 1970 to a height of 140 metres. The building is the former head office of Trust Bank of South Africa, and as such has one of the largest bank vaults in South Africa. The building was recently sold in February 2003 for Rand 6.4 million (USD \$640.000), which may prompt the name to be changed to that of the new tenant.'  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust\\_Bank\\_Building](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust_Bank_Building))

**CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:**

Walls:  
  
Roof:  
  
Windows:

**SITE FEATURES:**

**ALTERATIONS:**

Colyn & Meiring. 1988.

**INTEGRITY:**

**INSCRIPTION:**

**ARCHITECT:**

Colyn & Meiring. 1969.

**BUILDER:**

**CONSTRUCTION DATE:**

Date on plans :  
Approval of plans :  
Completion date :

**BUILDING STYLE:**

Johannesburg Late Modernist. 1960s.

**BUILDING TYPE:**

This building was originally designed for Trust Bank and is currently a shop to street and office building. (CJMB)

**ENVIRONMENT:**

**CONDITION:**

This once proud building appears neglected. (CJMB)

**URGENT ACTION:**

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

**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	<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:**

Ownership: Trust Sentrum Johannesburg  
Document: T5866/1982  
Amount:

Ownership: Rycklof Beleggings (Pty) Ltd.  
Document: T10131/1994  
Amount: R33500 000.00

Ownership: Consec Inv No 30 CC.  
Document: T24706/2003  
Amount: R8379 000.00

Ownership: Kingsfield Finance (Pty) Ltd.  
Registration Date: 2005-05-11  
Document: T24703/2005  
Amount: R16750 000.00

Ownership: One Vision Inv 91 (Pty) Ltd.  
Registration Date: 2005-05-11  
Document: T24702/2005  
Amount: R16 480.00

Ownership: Razorbill Prop 370 (Pty) Ltd.  
Registration Date: 2005-05-11  
Document: T24704/2005  
Amount: R11 400.00

**PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:**

**HISTORY:**

THE GREAT TRUST BANK ROBBERY  
1971

In a daring raid on 28 April 1971, a security van containing over R240 000 was taken from outside the Commissioner Street branch of the Trust Bank in Johannesburg. At the time, it was the biggest bank robbery in South African history and one which the South African press was comparing to the biggest robberies of them all: the theft of over R7-million worth of German national gold reserves by American military personnel and German civilians in 1945, and the Great Train robbery in Britain, in 1963, which netted R5-million. But, what is perhaps even more amazing about the crime is that it was planned and

executed, not by professional thieves, but by two complete amateurs. Derek Whitehead and Willem Antonie van der Merwe, both aged thirty, were painting contractors who decided to rob a bank in order to solve their firm's financial difficulties. When the two robbers finally counted their loot, they were surprised to discover just how much money they had stolen.

In 1968, Whitehead and Van der Merwe became partners in a painting business. For over a year, the firm did well until about the middle of 1970, when things took a turn for the worse. At first, the idea of robbing a bank was simply a joke, but when things got to the stage where they couldn't pay their domestic accounts, it was no longer a laughing matter. "We were absolutely desperate," Whitehead would later admit.

At the beginning of 1971, the two men decided that their best option was to sell their houses in Johannesburg, buy ground on the Garden Route, and build holiday cottages together. With this plan in mind, Whitehead and Van der Merwe drove to Knysna to look at plots. It was while they were travelling to the coast that it suddenly occurred to them how easy it would be to break into some of the small town banks that they passed. The idea quickly took root and by the time the two men returned to Johannesburg, they had already made serious plans. In March of the same year, they acquired cutting equipment and tools and an accomplice by the name of Gilbert Mthembu and set out once more. This time their destination was Uniondale in the Cape Province.

Around dawn, the three of them smashed a window at the back of the Uniondale branch of the Volkskas Bank and entered the building. Then, realizing that it would soon be daylight and that the locals would be up and about, they reluctantly abandoned the attempt and set out for Knysna.

The next day, they considered a renewed attempt but couldn't pluck up sufficient courage to break in and decided to head back to the Transvaal. En route they stopped at Aberdeen and attempted to rob the Volkskas Bank there. While Whitehead kept watch at the front, van der merwe and Mthembu entered the bank through a back window. Fifteen minutes later they were back at the car. As it turned out, the safe was made of carbon steel and was resistant to cutting torches.

Back in Johannesburg, the Trust Bank repossessed the cars Whitehead and van der Merwe were using, and the two men finally decided to close down their business. Ironically, it was while van der Merwe was discussing the situation with a bank official at the Hilibrow branch of the Trust Bank that the idea of stealing a security van first occurred to him. He saw some money being brought in and was amazed at the security firm's negligence in that its vehicle was left unattended outside the bank for over fifteen minutes.

For some days after that van der Merwe followed the security van. "We noticed that the van regularly called at the Fox Street branch after being at the Reserve Bank," Whitehead explained. "We knew that if we obtained keys to the van it would be simple to drive off with it as it was left unguarded in front of the bank."

The problem was how to obtain the keys to the vehicle, but this proved much easier to solve than either of them expected. After giving the matter some thought, the two men decided to cause the van to break down, follow it to the garage where it was sent to be repaired, and try to obtain duplicates there.

On the night of 25 April, they went to the Trust Bank building where the van was parked, unguarded, and poured two gallons of oil into the petrol tank. They followed the van the next day, but the oil apparently had no effect. That night they returned to the Trust Bank building. This time they added water to the fuel. "The following day we followed the van," Whitehead explained. "It broke down as a result of the water and it was taken to a local garage for repair." At first they tried to get imprints of the keys, but were not successful. Van der Merwe then managed to steal the keys, which were kept in the van at the garage, have copies made, and return the originals with no-one any the wiser.

It was of this advanced stage of the operation that Whitehead decided to tell his wife of their plans, as they needed a third vehicle in case the security van was intercepted. "I suspected something was in the air when Derek told me not to worry because they had a plan to get some money," Jeanette Whitehead admitted, "but I never expected it was going to be unlawful."

A blazing row followed, but Whitehead was determined to go through with the plan. In the end, his wife agreed to drive their car a fawn Mercedes behind the security company's van.

Her job was to remain nearby throughout the operation in case the two men required a getaway car. Van der Merwe and Whitehead had false number plates made for the Mercedes and hired a Volkswagen kombi from a local garage. The kombi was to transport the money transferred from the security van.

On Tuesday, 27 April 1971, they set out early in the morning to carry out the robbery. Derek Whitehead drove the kombi, while Jeanette Whitehead and van der Merwe followed in the Mercedes. On this occasion, however, the security personnel only stayed inside the bank a few moments and the plan had to be aborted. They tried again the next day. At the second attempt, the whole operation went off as smooth as clockwork: van der Merwe stepped out of the Mercedes, strolled over to the security van, let himself in and drove off.

On a patch of open ground a few blocks away from the bank, the money was swiftly transferred to the kombi. Mr A. Smith, an alert employee at an adjacent warehouse, witnessed the whole scene. "I immediately became suspicious when I saw a red kombi and a fawn coloured Mercedes driving around

the security van," Mr Smith said. "And I managed to get a good look at the woman who was driving the Mercedes. She was a white woman in a red pill-box hat."

After abandoning the security truck, the three robbers drove to Parktown where they loaded the money into van der Merwe's car and abandoned the kombi in the northern suburbs. Later that evening, they dumped the money boxes in the Vaal River near Vanderbjl Park. Whitehead packed the money into a space above the ceiling of his caravan and set off for Knysna with his wife and four children. They arrived in Knysna on Saturday, 1 May, and booked into the Brenton-on-Lake Hotel. Three days later, they were joined by Van der Merwe and his wife, Marlene. The couples immediately split up again. The Whiteheads moved to Brenton-on-Lake holiday resort, and the van der Merwe's booked in at the Leisure Isle Hotel. On Sunday, 9 May, Tony and Marlene van der Merwe headed for Bloemfontein to visit Marlene's parents

At the time of the robbery, the police had little or nothing to go on. Furthermore, the raid had been carried out with so much speed and precision, that they believed they were dealing with a team of professional bank robbers. The fact that the robbers had been able to drive the van away with a set of duplicate keys was seen as highly significant and indicated an 'inside job'. However, the more they questioned the employees of the security firm, the more the police became convinced that they were not involved.

The police then broadened the scale of their inquiries to encompass anyone who was even remotely connected to the crime. They soon realized that duplicate keys had been obtained while the van was at the garage. Slowly, a picture emerged. After almost two weeks of intensive investigation, a tenuous link connected van der Merwe to the crime and the police wanted to question him. However, when they called at his house, they found it locked. Neighbors believed he had gone to Bloemfontein with his wife to visit his in-laws.

By this time the police had established that van der Merwe and Whitehead were in serious financial difficulties; that van der Merwe resembled the man seen driving the security van; and that his Mercedes was similar to the one used in the robbery. Mr Smith had seen a fawn Mercedes when the money was transferred. On 10 May, the Brixton Murder and Robbery Squad asked the Orange Free State police to be on the lookout for Whitehead's Mercedes.

On Thursday, 13 May, van der Merwe was spotted at a Bloemfontein roadblock. He was tailed to the house where he was staying and later arrested. Shortly afterwards, he made a full confession. That evening, a police van with a police dog and handler from Knysna quietly drew up next to the Whitehead's caravan and spent the night on guard.

The Whiteheads were arrested.'

(<http://www.africacrime-mystery.co.za/books/fsac/chp17.htm>)

Below:



**GENERAL NOTES:**

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

Sunday Times -

'Five Joburg landmarks, including the Kine Centre and the Trust Bank Building, went for a song mostly to emerging businesses in a whirlwind auction this week.

By Michael Schmidt

FIVE Joburg landmarks, including the Kine Centre and the Trust Bank Building, went for a song mostly to emerging businesses in a whirlwind auction this week.

The auctioning off on Wednesday of the Gauteng buildings by Sanlam had been hailed as an opportunity for smaller investors to buy into an anticipated downtown property boom.

The Kine Centre was clinched by an eight-member consortium from Pretoria led by Nazeer Noormohamed, for R11-million, in fierce competition with a Sri Lankan tea magnate.

The consortium also snapped up the five-storey former Sanlam Building in central Roodepoort for R1.25-million, and the old OK Bazaars building in Vanderbijlpark for R1.4-million.

The Sri Lankan also forced an unnamed Zimbabwean businessman acting on behalf of a Joburg-based group to up his price of R6.4-million for the 31-storey Trust Bank Building to R7-million.

The businessman was upbeat about his acquisition after the auction. Joburgs property sector is every bit as good as Londons, he said.

The 10-storey Geldenhuys Building in Braamfontein went to a bidder for R3-million, while the 14-storey Randburg Metro building was sold for R2.5-million.

The Kine Centre was valued at R200-million, and the Trust Bank Building at R180-million.'

Sunday Times

(<http://www.eprop.co.za/news/article.aspx?idArticle=1460>)

'Trust Bank Building

- The Trust Bank Centre was sold in Feb 2003 for R6.4million (US\$640 000).

- This building was the Head Office of the now merged Trust Bank of South Africa and has one of the largest bank vaults in South Africa.

- Even though the Trust Bank no longer exists the building is such an institution the name remains in place but that might change now that the building has been sold.'

(<http://www.emporis.com/en/wm/bu/?id=103536>)

PREVIOUS TENANT/S:



**MARAIS, Jan S., B.** Com (cum laude), D. Com. (h.c.), F.I.A.C., F.C.M.A.; Founder, Chair. and Chief Exec. Officer (Exec. / Active Chair.) of The Trust Bank of Africa Limited; Chair. The Trust Accepting Bank, The Trust Finance Corp., The Trust Building Society, The Trust Bank Growth Fund, The Trust Prop. Corp. Group, Trust Hotels, The S.A. Metropolitan Life Assurance Co. Ltd., The Trust Express group and several others; Dir. of all the major companies in the Federale Group: Federale Volksbeleggings Beperk, Federale Investments Corporation Limited and Federale Industries Limited, Federale Management Corporation Limited; Dir. The Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa Limited (I.D.C.), Industrial Selections Limited, Goodyear Tyre & Rubber Co.; The Leyland Motor Corporation; Member Advisory Board of Bureau of Economic Research of University of Stell.; Nat. Chair. Board of Trustees Univ. S.A. Foundation; and Mem. Brd. of Univ. of S.A. representing the Convocation, Mem. Brd. of Patrons of the Univ. of Potchef.; Trustee, Dep. Pres. and Mem. Exec. of the South Africa Foundation, Mem. National Film Brd., Mem. Gov. Advisory Comm. on Tourism; Past Chair. and past President Handelsinstituut; Patron of Community Chest of the W. Cape; Patron of the S.A. Coloured Advancement Trust; Member Board of Trustees of the S.A. Nature Foundation, elected "Businessman of the Year" by the Financial Mail in 1964; recently awarded the following distinctions: The Harvard "Business Statesman" Award; "Top Business Men" Award by The Sunday Times Business News; Hon. Life Fellowship (its highest honour) by the Institute of Administration and Commerce of S.A.; "Marketing Man of the Year" by the Institute of Marketing Management; He received an Honorary Doctorate in Economic Science at the University of Potchefstroom on Oct. 4th, 1969; Founded The Trust Bank in 1954/55 and brought about a profound change to whole banking scene which is today followed practically all over the world. Frequently described as the man who "jarred the establishment" and changed the "face of banking". Widely travelled and has been



CURRENT TENANT/S:  
1973 Who's Who...

around the world many times. Great believer in research, study and training and achievement of the ultimate in efficiency. b. 23rd April, 1919, Fraserburg, Cape; Educ.: Fraserburg High Sch., Univ. of Stell.; m. 1950. Peggy de Kock of Jhb, 1 d., Carla; Clubs: Van Donck, Heerengracht Hotel, C.T.; Add.: The Trust Bank, Trust Bank Centre, Heerengracht, C.T.

**ABSA GROUP ARCHIVES**

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Postal: Group Communications, ABSA Group, P.O. Box 7735, Johannesburg, 2000  
Telephone: (011) 350-4167  
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By 2006:

**Property**

Key : 4,051  
Name : TRUST BANK BUILDING JHB  
Major Type : Offices  
Sub Type : Office  
Grade : X  
Mandate : To Let  
Street Address : CNR MAIN & ELOFF STREETS  
Suburb : JOHANNESBURG  
Suburb Profile : JOHANNESBURG (Subscribers Only)

Province : Gauteng  
Total Gross Lettable Area : 18,216 m2  
Total Available Gross Lettable Area : 25 m2  
Parking Details : 0 bays available  
Description : CNR MAIN & ELOFF STREETS

Date Updated : 07 Feb 2006  
Building Views : 1,001 views

Unit  
Unit / Space Key : 35,954  
Unit Name : 1ST BASEMENT  
Rentable Area : 25 m2  
Asking Gross Rental : R 0.04 / m2 per month  
Sub Type : Parking  
Mandate Type : To Let  
Available From : 2006/02/07 03:28:05 PM  
Vacant : True  
Unit Views : 800  
Date Updated : 07 Feb 2006

Units  
Space SubType  
Rentable Area Asking Gross Rental

1ST BASEMENT  
Parking 25.00m/2 R0.04 m/2  
(<http://www.eprop.co.za/property/propertydetails.aspx?idBuilding=4051>)

#### **SOURCES:**

##### Published Sources

The Rand-Pretoria Directory 1954 (Comprising Complete Alphabetical And Trades Directories of Johannesburg, Pretoria And Reef Towns), Cape Times Limited, Cape Town, 1954.

##### Unpublished Sources

Plans records of surveyed buildings, Marshallstown and City of Johannesburg: Archives, Building Control, Development Management, City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality.  
Rand Township Registry Johannesburg.

##### Internet sources

<http://www.eprop.co.za/property/propertydetails.aspx?idBuilding=4051>  
<http://www.emporis.com/en/wm/bu/?id=103536>  
<http://www.eprop.co.za/news/article.aspx?idArticle=1460>  
<http://www.africacrime-mystery.co.za/books/fsac/chp17.htm>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust\\_Bank\\_Building](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust_Bank_Building)  
[http://www.national.archives.gov.za/dir\\_entries\\_pg1.htm](http://www.national.archives.gov.za/dir_entries_pg1.htm)

#### **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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And Catharina JM Bruwer.

Photographs (unless otherwise indicated) by Johann J Bruwer and Alezea Bruwer.