

City Centre Walk: A nostalgic adventure

Architect **Kirk White** will accompany us on this visit to an area that once played an important role in our lives in Durban – whether it was for the doctor, dentist, optician, shopping, restaurants, cinemas or theatres. Though suburban malls have taken over, the city centre continues to thrive with a new life – some of the grand old commercial buildings having been converted to accommodation for the next generation. It is time for us to re-discover a number of Art Deco and other significant buildings in the city.



1a

Esplanade from 12th floor of the Royal Parking Garage



1b

The Royal Hotel Grill Room



2a

Nedbank Building 303 Anton Lembede (Smith) Street – currently hidden by vegetation: This cube-like building, deemed “one of the most charming modern buildings of the world” by the renowned South African-born, late British architect-planner, Lord Holford, is the only one in Durban by Norman Eaton.



2b

The Nedbank building is distinguished by the travertine podium to the pavement, water fountains and vegetation, its diminutive scale, the suspended filigree screen shielding the interior from the inclement effects of the sun, and a roof garden (which is currently deserted)



3

Club Place



4a

Salisbury House and Arcade – Anton Lembede (Smith) Street. Built in 1925 by architects Ing and Jackson to a Baroque Revival design. The middle wing at one time consisted of bedrooms, believed to have been accommodation used as a staging post (a place where stops are regularly made on long journeys). One had to cross an arcaded bridge to reach the bathrooms in the third wing. In 1984 the original lightwells were opened up to the arcade. In 1986 Southern Life Association Limited were awarded a conservation award for their restoration and refurbishment of Salisbury House and Arcade (*Alison Chadwick*).



4b

Salisbury House



5

Old Reserve Bank building on the corner of Smith Street and Devonshire place.



6

No.2 Devonshire Place – “Master of the High Court”

7a



Driveway passing under Devonshire Court

7b



Rear of Devonshire Court: One unique feature of Devonshire Court is a tunnel for motor vehicles under the south side of the building, which leads through to Devonshire Place.

7c



Devonshire Court: Constructed in 1938, the building was designed by William Barboure, who also helped design the 1934 Surrey Mansions together with WE Langton.

8



Quadrant House – AA Ritchie McKinlay 1929-1934: Berea Style. Formerly a residence for Merchant Navy cadets. Richly decorated in Spanish and sub-tropical Deco. Prominent central bay with a shell motif. Hierarchical play of hipped pavilion roofs. Series of Spanish frames to the windows and veranda openings. Restoration has been sympathetic. *(Radford)*



9

HoMii building in Joe Slovo (Field) Street. This company is involved in re-developing inner-city buildings for residential accommodation – eg. the old Payne Brothers and Stuttafords buildings.



10

Interesting building on the corner of Joe Slovo (Field) and Pixley Kaseme (West) Streets. Was the old Stuttafords – now Markhams. Arched lower level, tall windows above, overlapping top floors.



11a

Anstey's Building: Street-Wilson and Paton, 1922. It had an impressive staircase that branched into two halves on the way up. Basement was a motor show-room.



11b

Anstey's sketch



13

Left 13: Clicks: Commercial building with highly original curved cornice supported on bold cantilever brackets and zig-zag patterning in dark blue tiles below.



12a

Right 12a: Chester House – Pixley Kaseme (West) Street.- Cowin, Powers & Ellis, 1935. Multi storey commercial building with curved geometry and full height vertical engaged pilasters.



12b

Plaque on Chester House



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398 West (Dt Pixley Kaseme) Street: Pixley House (Old Payne Brothers): WS Payne & EO Payne, 1937-1939. This building was originally "Payne Brothers", becoming Prefcor House when the Payne Brothers store closed. It has now been modified for inner city residential accommodation (HoMii). The elevations are heavily modulated with multiple squared vertical elements, visually broken up by vertical lines.

This goliath 12 storey building took almost two years to build, and was completed in mid-1939. 300 miles of steel rods make up the reinforced frame of the building and its foundations are deep and sure at 23ft below ground, in some places designed to carry up to 15 storeys. The design reflects a strong American skyscraper mould with emphasised verticality by columns, pilasters and ziggurat steps up top. It was advertised as an "ideal quarters for professional men", yet one of the very first occupants of this building was a Miss N. Martins, who rented office suite 701. She offered lessons in shorthand writing, typewriting, bookkeeping, English and Arithmetic. A new feature which was built into its lower levels' shopping centre was an escalator, at that time considered the largest in the southern hemisphere.



15

"RJ Relay Jeans" Regent House, 408 West Street



16

Bales Building: Moffat & Hirst (1936). Nine storey apartment building with ground floor commercial use. Verging on 'Style Moderne'. Has two full height fluted colonnettes and curved corners. Capped by a horizontal slab with curved corners.



17

460 West Street: Sign says "Jamieson's Building 1925 AD"



18

"Pep" Building. Looks like an old cinema but the old Roxy bio-café was in fact located nearby at 456 "opposite Colombo Tea & Coffee Shop".



19

Reddy's Bakery: 97 Dr Yusuf Dadoo (Grey) Street



20

Lakhani Chambers, Dr Yusuf Dadoo (Grey) Street



21

Colombo Tea & Coffee (now Nandos): Rupert George Stead (1939)



22

McIntosh House 455-457 West Street: Geoffrey Eustace Le Sueur (1936)



23

"Fashion Express" 320 Pixley Kaseme (West) Street. John Orr's occupied the sites to the left and right of this small building



24

"Edgars" 375 Pixley Kaseme (West) Street. It was the "The Hub" at one time.



25

"Greenacres" 413-423 Pixley Kaseme (West) Street. William Emery Roberts, 1900.



26

Old Adams Bookshop 341 West Street



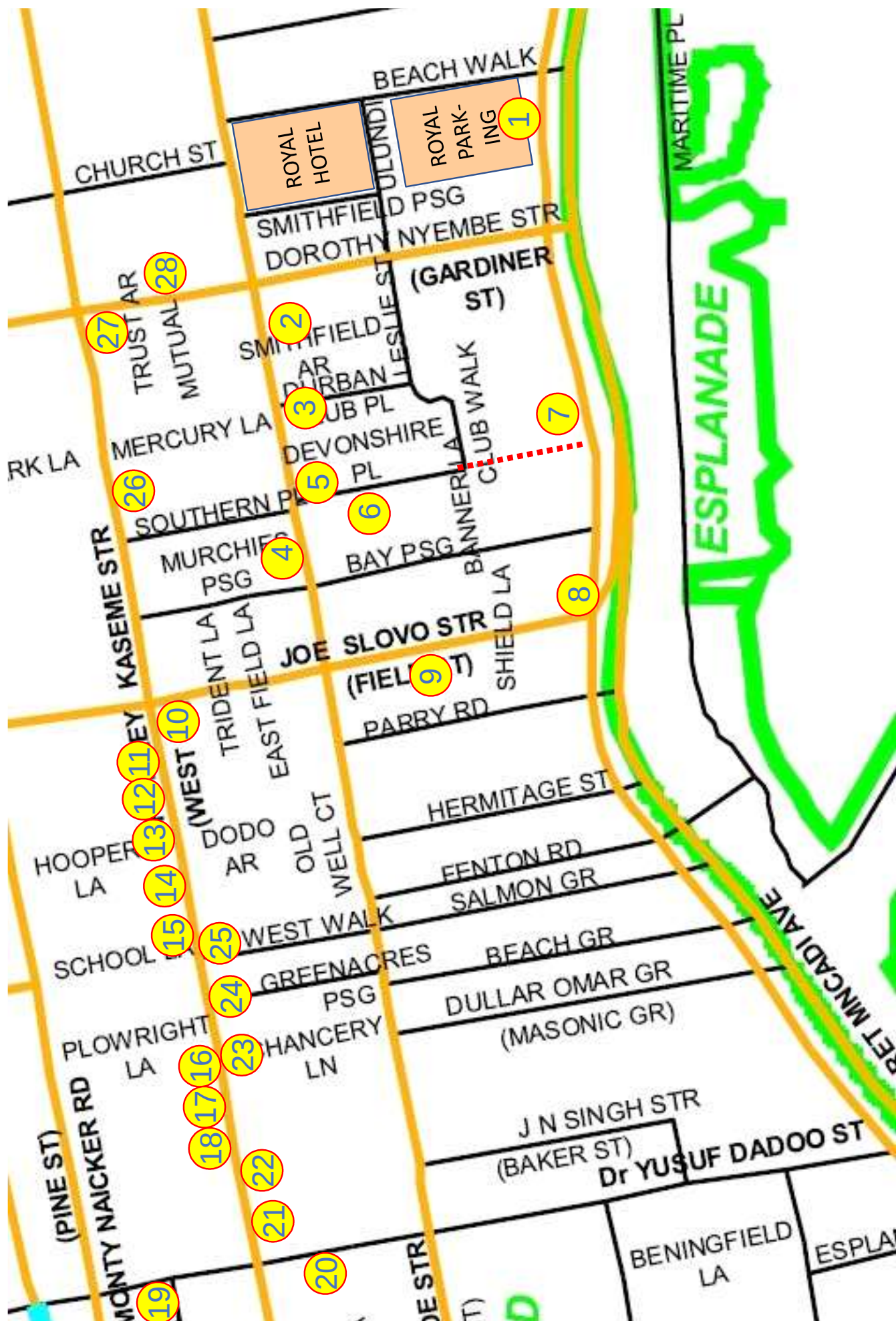
27

Corner of Gardener and West Streets where Westgard House once stood - Kallenbach, Kennedy & Furner, 1939



28

"Cenotaph, Farewell Square - H L Gordon Pilkington, 1921. The Durban War Memorial, which was unveiled in 1926, is the result of an architectural competition won by the firm of Eagle, Pilkington & McQueen, Cape Town. The work was at first not appreciated by the Durban public who found the bright colours 'disturbing' on such an emotional memorial." (Dennis Claude)



Investec Bank, 325 Smith Street, Durban

Architects in Association: Stafford Associate Architects cc and Koseff Van der Walt Architects

The former Reserve Bank (1935-39), of impressive Roman classical design, has not only been restored but has been significantly enlarged with a major roof addition and a rear wing.

Because of the rich granite and sandstone of which the original building was constructed and because of the resolution of the classical composition, additions had to be discreet and subtle. The roof addition is set back from the street and is concealed from passers-by.

Likewise, the rear addition, in a muted modern character, recedes self-deprecatingly from the streetline as a thin planar object behind the solid mass of the Bank. Even more ingenious was the three-storey addition above, which threatened to block the natural light that filtered through oculi into the domes of the banking space. At a considerable loss of space, the upper stories were composed around an atrium, skylit at the top, to bring sunlight into the domes of the banking hall below.

Both client and architect are to be congratulated, the former for willingly sacrificing valuable space, and the architect for deferring to the character of the existing building.

