



# The early development of hotels in Johannesburg ca 1928-1963

Jayne M. Rogerson  
School of Tourism & Hospitality, College of Business and Economics  
University of Johannesburg  
Bunting Road Campus, Johannesburg, South Africa  
Email: [Jayner@uj.ac.za](mailto:Jayner@uj.ac.za)

## Abstract

Hotels attract a range of writings which are drawn from different disciplinary perspectives. The largest volume of literature is contributed by hospitality management scholars, is contemporary in focus and examines questions around the strategic management and day-to-day operations of hotels. The aim in this paper is to address the limited focus on historical aspects of hotels and tourism development. The analysis builds from a number of different historical documentary sources to review the establishment and character of hotels in Johannesburg from the late 1920s to 1963. The starting date for the analysis is the introduction of legislation which creates firm linkages of the South African hotel industry to liquor interests; the end date is the closure of Johannesburg's most grand and iconic hotel. It is argued that historical research contributes a fresh dimension to hotel scholarship as well as providing a grounded understanding of the emergence and character of the local hotel industry.

**Key Words:** hotels; historical tourism; Johannesburg; grand hotels; South Africa

## Introduction

Hotels attract a range of scholarship which is drawn from diverse disciplinary perspectives. The largest volume of literature is contributed by researchers in the field of hospitality management (Timothy & Teye, 2009; Rogerson, 2013a). This is unsurprising as the fundamental role of a hotel is to supply hospitality services to paying guests (Bell, 2009). As a business operation the hotel represents an infrastructure of 'monetised hospitality' which engages in "a relationship of conditional welcoming which is mediated through financial exchange" (Fregonese & Ramadan, 2015: 794). Arguably "this hospitality can take different forms, all of them potentially profitable: overnight accommodation, food and drink, conference facilities and business services in larger hotels" (Fregonese & Ramadan, 2015: 794). In understanding the role of hotels in commercial hospitality service provision, researchers from hospitality studies concentrate their work mainly in terms of issues surrounding the strategic management and day-to-day operations of hotels (Timothy & Teye, 2009). Among themes that are under examination are those surrounding hotel marketing, human resources (including labour legislation), facilities, catering, budgeting, housekeeping, reservation and information systems, the application of new technologies, and the role of social media (see eg. Grobler & Diedericks, 2009; Kruger et al., 2010; Nicolaidis, 2018; Oji & Iwu, 2017; Vettori, 2018). The training and education of hospitality students is another vibrant focus for research by management scholars (eg. Ezeudji et al. 2017; Machingambi & Mhlanga, 2017).

In an influential review article Bell (2009: 19) argues that outside of hospitality studies the so-called 'research take-up' on hotels is more limited. One emerging sub-stream of research is around hotels and geopolitics. In an influential article Craggs (2012) portrays how the racial boundaries of public social life were constructed and politically contested in the hospitality spaces of colonial Zimbabwe. Fregonese & Ramadan (2015) put forward a research agenda



on hotels and geopolitics to further move the focus away from simply the study of hotels as 'neutral' spaces of leisure. They argue that hotel spaces including conference and meeting rooms, reception halls, lobbies and corridors, can be related to broader structures of security and insecurity, war and peace-making. Six alternative themes are put forth which include hotels as projections of soft power, targets for terrorism and political violence, strategic infrastructure in conflict, hosts for war reporters, providers of emergency hospitality and care, and, infrastructures for peace-building. The embroilment of hotels in violent conflicts in many parts of the world is a theme which is explored in recent work by James (2018). Overall, it is evident that this geopolitical agenda on hotels emerges out of two spatial dimensions of the relationship of hospitality, namely hotels' selective openness for welcome to visitors and their closure to the outside in terms of screening, monitoring and control of those who enter, and the flexible material infrastructure of hotels (Fragonese & Ramadan, 2015).

To date, the new agenda on hotels as geopolitical spaces has generated only a small volume of writings. Greater interest has arisen in terms of connecting the business of hotels to tourism development (Rogerson, 2011a, 2011b; 2013a). Hotels are 'assets' for the making of tourism destinations and often the focus of strategies of local boosterism (McNeill & McNamara, 2009; Cirer-Costa, 2012; McNeill & McNamara, 2012). Dieke (2010) stresses that the growth of the hotel sector – particularly in sub-Saharan Africa – represents an essential building block for enhancing tourism development and upgrading the potential of (especially) emerging tourism economies and regions in sub-Saharan Africa. In this light several studies recognise the significance of establishing a diversified accommodation sector, including of hotels, for improving the competitiveness of tourism destinations (Rogerson, 2010, 2012; 2013b, 2013c; Magombo et al. 2017). This said, the mainstream work addresses contemporary issues, often policy relevant concerns, around hotels and tourism development. Indeed, this pattern is reflective of broader publishing trends on tourism – particularly in Africa – which Walton (2017: 74) describes aptly as “overwhelmingly present-minded”.

On several occasions Walton (1997, 2009) expounds the case for expanding the amount and depth of historical investigations on tourism. For example, he states as follows: “every practitioner of tourism studies, however immediately contemporary their ostensible concerns, needs to come to terms with the ever-moving frontier of the past” (Walton, 2005: 115). In addition, it is observed that the “present cannot be understood without reference to what has gone before; nor can we attempt to predict or preempt the future without achieving some understanding of where we, and others, have come from, or how relevant interested parties understand and appreciate their versions of the past” (Walton, 2005: 115). In South Africa within the developing field of tourism historical studies there exist a number of valuable investigations which ground our understanding of particular aspects of the development of country's tourism industry. Of note are the existing contributions made by Bickford-Smith (2009), Brooks (2005), Carruthers (1989, 1995), Foster (2003), Grundlingh (2006), Pirie (2009, 2011, 2013), CM Rogerson (2011), JM Rogerson (2016, 2017), Sanders & Barben (2007), Teversham (2013), Van Eeden (2011, 2012, 2014) and Wolf (1991).

It is against this backdrop that the aim in this paper is to offer a modest contribution to the paucity of academic writings about the historical development of the hotel industry in South Africa as a whole and of the case of Johannesburg in particular. The specific focus is on examining the emergence and characteristics of the Johannesburg hotel sector during the period from the late 1920s to 1963. The starting point for this analysis is the period when the hotel industry in South Africa was firmly anchored to the interests of the liquor industry which shaped much of the character of many Johannesburg hotels during the study period. During 1928 under state legislation licensees of existing bars in South African urban areas were forced to provide a minimum of 10 rooms in order to retain a liquor license thereby ushering in an era during which for many hotels the provision of accommodation services became of secondary concern to profits accruing from the bar trade (Norval, 1936; Rogerson, 2011; Walker 1977). This said, as Norval (1936: 258) observes regarding the national state of hotels



in South Africa during the 1930s “the better-class hotels have developed quite independently of the breweries”. As will be shown this was so in the case of Johannesburg. The end date of this investigation is represented by the closure in 1963 of the city’s most grand and prestige hotel which was founded during the early heydays of the mining camp in the 1890s (see Van Onselen, 1982).

In terms of sources and methodology the research is based on archival work. Primary data sources excavated for this study are the historical papers collections held both at Johannesburg Public Library (Harold Strange Collection) and the University of the Witwatersrand (William Cullen Historical Papers), material from the collection of the South African Railways and Harbours; and, various business directories. The paper is structured in terms of three further sections of material. The next section turns to offer a brief international overview of extant historical research and debates on hotels. The second section gives the context to an analysis of the growth of hotels in Johannesburg from the late 1920s to the early 1960s. The third section of material provides information on certain of Johannesburg’s most famous hotels some of which became not only ‘spaces of hospitality’ but also ‘civic landmarks’ to borrow the terminology as applied in pioneer Australian hotel studies by McNeill & McNamara (2009).

### **International research trends on hotels and history**

According to James et al. (2017: 98) as a field of academic enquiry hotel history “is still in its infancy”. The existing international literature is mainly dominated by works relating to the historical development of hotels in the United States, Britain and Europe, especially Switzerland and Spain (Urtasun & Gutiérrez, 2006; Cirer-Costa, 2012; James et al., 2017; James, 2018). In terms of research in countries of the global North it is noted also that Australia recently has been the focus of some attention as regards hotel history (McNeill & McNamara, 2009, 2012). In addition, an emerging corpus of work – one which is of particular relevance to African researchers – concerns the debates around the growth of ‘colonial hotels’ particularly in Southeast Asia. Certainly, within international scholarship the historical development of hotels in Africa remains a major knowledge gap and most undeveloped in hotel history.

Across the extant body of international writings a number of key themes emerge. In terms of methodologies it is recorded that researchers have tapped a wide range of approaches to explore hotel history. These include micro-histories, hotel biographies and a supply and demand approach linked to innovation (Bowie, 2018; McNeill & McNamara, 2009). In Europe and North America much attention centres on the origins of modern hotels and the transformation of commercial hospitality from ‘inns’ to hotels (Bowie, 2016, 2018; James et al., 2017). In North America the growth of immigration and the openness towards adoption of technological innovations resulted from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards in the construction of large establishments with hundreds of guest rooms as well as expansive public spaces (Bowie, 2016). Hotels in the United States also pioneered the use of new building technologies described as ‘commercial architecture’ which was similar to that for banks or public buildings (Bowie, 2016). Another important innovation was that of the management system that became known as the American Plan which comprised “fixed daily tariffs for rooms and meals, the requirement for customers to register and pay for lodging and food upon arrival and pre-determined times for dining” (Bowie, 2016: 161). For the case of England Bowie (2018) traces a number of socio-technical innovations that gradually were adopted at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which resulted in the former 18<sup>th</sup> amateurish inn-keeping regime being replaced by more professional management. As compared to simple inns there occurred the emergence of a new socio-technical regime comprising larger establishments of modern hotels with contemporary technologies (Bowie, 2018).



A key driver for the proliferation of hotels in Britain – as in other parts of the world – was the expansion of railway travel. This was accompanied by the growth of the railway hotel which was a common feature of many urban centres (Bowie, 2016). The nexus of railways and the location of hotels became prominent. McNeill & McNamara (2009: 371) record that as railway companies “were particularly interested in providing locations for travellers to stay and relax, large hotels became a necessity within an increasingly distributed urban space economy”. Indeed, it could be observed that in certain respects “hotels are important metronomes of the commercial rhythms of cities” (McNeill & McNamara, 2012:150). From an historical perspective, in terms of geographical impact on cities it is evident that the development of hotels always has been critical particularly for the evolution of central business districts. For grand or luxury hotel developments in cities of the global North the period of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century is viewed as highly significant as it coincides with the maturing of industrial economies in Europe and North America (McNeill & McNamara, 2012). Indeed, hotels were now key nodes in an emerging world system of cities, including colonial territories in Asia and Africa.

The ‘colonial hotel’ is observed by several scholars as an important feature of the expansion of and expression of colonial power especially in Asia (Goh, 2010; James, 2018). In particular, during the period 1870 to 1930, which cover the years from the opening of the Suez Canal to the Great Depression, there occurs the diffusion and appearance of so termed ‘European’ hotels in the built landscapes of many colonial cities. Peleggi (2012) draws our attention to the growth of colonial hotels in Colombo and Singapore, which were the two major ports of call along navigational routes of the Indian Ocean. The construction of grand luxury hotels, such as Raffles (1887) in Singapore, “offered higher standards of comfort and the possibility for their patrons to relive the metropolitan lifestyle” in the colonies (Peleggi, 2012: 124). Other similar famous colonial hotels in Asia included The Grand Oriental Hotel (1875) and Galle Face Hotel (1864) in Colombo, Hotel Metropole (1901) in Hanoi, the Eastern & Oriental (1885) in Penang, The Taj Mahal Palace in Bombay (1903) and Hotel Continental (1880) in Saigon (Cebeci, no date; Peleggi, 2005). Such colonial hotels are viewed as, “sites of modernisation and modernity” (James et al., 2017: 93) and represented a major improvement on the pre-existing travellers lodgings which were available in the colonies. As discussed by James et al. (2017: 99) during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the hospitality industry of the Western colonies of Southeast Asia experienced a transformation as these grand modern hotels “offered standards of design, technology, comfort and entertainment on a par with those of metropolitan hotels”.

In several respects, these grand hotels can be considered as a microcosm of colonial society as a whole (Peleggi, 2012). Goh (2010: 177) interprets the Singapore Raffles Hotel as initially “a manifestation of the colonial domesticity of the British Empire, providing homely respite for white travellers”. Increasingly, however, Raffles Hotel becomes “the place of refuge from imperial networks for the weary white entrepreneur and sojourner on the high seas of commerce or exploration” (Goh, 2010: 179). Calcutta’s Great Eastern Hotel was styled by one writer as “a fortified citadel of comfort” (Peleggi, 2012). For James (2018) one often little understood dimension of the hotel as an institution is that it constitutes an arena for the negotiation of relations of political, cultural and economic power, in particular in colonial territories. Indeed, it is considered that the hotel played a critical role in contests surrounding colonial modernity (James et al., 2017). Cebeci (no date) stresses that colonial hotels, as sites of travel built by Westerners in Asia, must be understood as part of a larger European urbanization and modernization project in the colonies. Their appearance coincided also with the first major development in colonial cities of theatres, department stores, parks, racing clubs, restaurants as well as dance halls to satisfy the need for leisure sites of an increasing presence of colonial residents. For example, the shopping arcades of hotels offered the colonial elite access to imported luxury goods and modern consumer services, such as Thomas Cook & Sons travel agency (James et al., 2017). Overall, the colonial hotel was viewed as a ‘comfort zone’ for colonisers but also as an important ‘contact zone’ where



different social, ethnic and national groups interacted (Peleggi, 2012). Among others the work of Cebeci (no date) reveals that in these contact zones encounters with local cultures would alter the form, use, and symbolic value of colonial hotels in many ways.

The imposing architecture and design of these grand colonial hotels has attracted some scholarly concern (Cebeci, no date). Peleggi (2005) writes of the 'monumentality' of colonial hotels across South-East Asia and specifically Goh (2010) speaks in detail about the 'monumentality' of Raffles Hotel. It is argued that often the location of colonial hotels within colonial cities, built either by large open spaces with ceremonial lawns used for military parades or by passenger piers where travellers embarked, contributed to their imaging as monumental structures. Cebeci (no date: 5) states that in general "colonial hotels were built in a classicist style that was immediately legible to their European patrons". The design of these hotels incorporated all the latest technologies and innovations such as electricity, electric fans, modern kitchen appliances and elevators. In addition, as an adaptation to the warm climates of South and South East Asia the hotels introduced certain "design provisions to improve ventilation and more frequent utilization of outdoor spaces with European style gardens" (Cebeci, no date: 5). At Raffles Hotel a distinctive addition was the establishment of a Palm Court, which was similar to public gardens, and meant to represent the "reassuring familiarity of imperial rule balanced against a seductive oriental landscape, the imperial set against the local" (Peleggi, 2012: 130). As a social space the colonial hotel assumed a special role for local elites who required "an address that could host banquets, society events, trade fairs, and provide suitable accommodation for travelling business people" (McNeill & McNamara, 2012: 151).

Seemingly certain of the characteristics of colonial hotels in South-East Asia have parallels in the early development of hotels in South Africa. For example, Bickford-Smith (2009) and Gupta (2015) both draw attention to the grandeur, opulence and exclusivity of Cape Town's Mount Nelson Hotel as a component of the emergence of grand hotels as elite leisured port spaces. The next section turns to examine South Africa's major inland city, Johannesburg, which grew from a mining settlement built around gold from the mid-1880s (Van Onselen, 1982).

### **The early growth of hotels in Johannesburg**

The tourism sector was undeveloped in Johannesburg throughout the time period which is covered by this investigation, namely 1928 to 1963. The city authorities focussed squarely on marketing investment possibilities in other economic sectors with minimal attention given to tourism except for the operations of the Johannesburg Publicity Association which was founded in 1925. During the 1920s international tourism arrivals in Johannesburg were insignificant beyond from a small trickle of mainly American cruise passengers stopping over in the city from Cape Town and usually on route to see the wonders of Victoria Falls. As Wolf (1991) records these American visitors of the 1920s and 1930s found the rapidly expanding (and industrializing) city of Johannesburg far too similar to American cities in order to keep them interested. For many years, therefore, the development of the hotel industry in Johannesburg of necessity largely concentrated on the markets provided by domestic visitors and also a growth of regional visitors from surrounding colonial territories as well as from further north in Central and East Africa.

The earliest travel guides on Johannesburg for intending visitors were prepared in association with the South African Railways and Harbours, the major driver and marketer for tourism development in the country as a whole until the late 1940s (Foster, 2003). The guidebooks produced for Johannesburg in the 1930s emphasise the exhilarating climate of South Africa's 'sunshine city built on gold' (Johannesburg Publicity Association, 1931). A number of specific attractions of interest were identified for domestic travellers (South African Railways and



Harbours, 1933). These included suggested visits to Johannesburg City Hall, the public library, geological museum, the art gallery, the Union observatory, the municipal market, sporting attractions and city's wealth of theatre, music and cinema entertainments. Other marketed attractions were the annual Easter agricultural show, Christmas shopping and certain events such as the Empire Exhibition which was hosted in 1936. A 1936 national guidebook described Johannesburg as "Situated in the centre of the greatest and most remarkable goldfield in existence, this city is a marvellous example of rapid development, and deserves the description of an English writer who said "Johannesburg is a world phenomenon". Where little more than a quarter of a century ago stood the shacks of a mining settlement there is now an imposing city replete with every modern comfort....as a holiday resort there is much to commend in the city to those in search of sport and pleasure, motoring on good roads, and other interests..." (South African Railways, Airways and Harbours, 1936:103).

For Johannesburg the period of the Second World War (1939-1945) was favourable in terms of expanding tourism growth for it resulted in flows of visitors to the city which were redirected from other parts of colonial Africa including Belgian Congo, Kenya and Tanganyika. These "new tourists" were colonial expatriates working in these territories who could not travel to Europe because of wartime hostilities and instead travelled to South Africa including visits to Johannesburg. During the late 1940s and 1950s at a time of an increase in long haul international tourism the Johannesburg Publicity Association was marketing a number of other leisure attractions in terms of where to go and what to see for visitors (Johannesburg Publicity Association, 1949). For domestic audiences much attention was given to the attractions of the city's Zoological gardens, parks, nightlife and shopping. But, with a focus directed more at potential markets of international visitors the city guidebooks highlighted also the possibilities of visits to diamond cutting factories, mine visits, including underground tours and the possibilities to enjoy so-termed "Native dances". These were explained as follows: "tribal dancing is a feature of the life of the Native mineworker on the gold mines surrounding Johannesburg" (City of Johannesburg, 1951: 136). The marketing of Johannesburg for tourism development was, however, a challenge. In one magazine devoted to travel in Africa which appeared in 1952 it was proclaimed whilst "Johannesburg is one of the world's great cities" that "Johannesburg is not a beautiful city" (Anon., 1952: 19). Nevertheless, it was stressed that "Johannesburg tries to make up for its lack of natural attractions by making the visitor's stay as pleasant and diverting as it can. It offers all variety of entertainment –the theatre, the ballet, music, art, cinema, music hall, indoor and outdoor sports" (Anon, 1952: 19). The impact of seeking to brand the 'city of gold' as the 'city of comfort and cabaret' is unclear, however. By the early 1960s visitor guides to Johannesburg were little changed in focus with a continued emphasis given to encouraging tourists to enjoy its civic buildings, the zoo, scenic view spots, mine and factory visits, the observatory, and the attractions of 'native dancing'.

It is against this backcloth of the nature of tourism development in Johannesburg that discussion turns to review the early development of hotels in the city. At the outset it must be appreciated that no official figures are available to record the growth over time of hotel establishments in Johannesburg. The 1920-21 *Illustrated South African Hotel Guide for Travellers and Tourists* listed 67 hotels in the city mostly situated in the central area and surrounding suburbs (The Union Publishing Agency, 1921). Another source of information on numbers and character of hotels in Johannesburg is the national survey of hotels in South Africa which was conducted by Norval (1936). For 1935 this survey found a total of 76 licensed hotels in Johannesburg and noted that most of the city's cohort of hotels "have been in existence for the past 30 to 40 years" (Norval, 1936: 249). This points to a burst of hotel openings in Johannesburg occurring in the late 1890s and early 1900s. The use of business directories is well-established in hotel history research (Bowie, 2018). They allow the development of a profile of hotel numbers in Johannesburg across the study period through undertaking a count of annual hotel listings. The hotel listings for various years appearing in the *United Transvaal Directory* and subsequent the *Rand-Pretoria Directory* provided the basis



for Table 1 which gives an overview of numbers of listed hotel establishments in Johannesburg from 1933 to 1960.

**Table 1: Overview of Hotels in Johannesburg 1933-1960**

Year	1933	1936	1941	1945	1950	1955	1960
Number of Hotels	80	85	101	94	84	93	103

Source: United Transvaal Directory 1933-1945; Rand Pretoria Directory 1950-1960

In analysing Table 1 and reviewing the nature of hotels in Johannesburg a number of points must be noted. The listings of hotels until 1950 include the category of residential hotels which are establishments geared to accommodating long-term residents as opposed to tourists. After 1950 the numbers in Table 1 reflect only the group of licensed hotels (which would hold liquor licences) which explains the downturn in hotel numbers over the period 1941 to 1950; the private residential hotels geared to longer-term stays are no longer included. Second, the broad picture that emerges is of a mainly stagnant hotel economy with only a small number of new hotel openings particularly post-1950. The limited establishment of new hotels reflects the generally poor state of the hotel industry in South Africa as a whole during the 1940s and 1950s (Crocker, 1950; Rogerson, 2011). This said, a number of Johannesburg hotels were engaged in marketing to prospective tourists and long-stay residents to the city.

The early advertising of Johannesburg hotels to prospective visitors is instructive. For example, in 1940 the Booyens Hotel proclaimed its offer of “hot and cold water in every room. Rosi-doze mattresses. Hairdresser on the premises. Early morning breakfast”. For the Broadway Hotel in Rosettenville its attractions were: “A comfy home for a happy holiday. A modern hotel for comfort service and cleanliness. Excellent cuisine. On tram and bus. 5 minutes from centre of town. Large airy rooms. Spacious lounges on each floor. Automatic lift. Roof gardens. Terms moderate”. The residential hotels also engaged in marketing their attractions. The Fairhaven Residential Hotel stated as follows: “For select accommodation in ideal surroundings, stay at one of Johannesburg’s largest and most popular private hotels. Delightful lounges. Extensive gardens. Excellent cuisine (vegetarians catered for). Tennis. Table tennis. Lock up garages. Near Ellis Park Rugby and Tennis Grounds and Swimming Baths”. In addition, the Shotley Residential described itself as “possibly Johannesburg’s best known residential hotel” which was distinguished “not only for comfort and accessibility but for its very reasonable tariff. New building comprising rooms and suites fitted with hot and cold water and electric fires. Lifts to all floors. Parking garage in basement”.

As has been explained elsewhere a number of structural and economic factors account for the weak state of the overall Johannesburg hotel industry. These included the tied house system and reliance on profits from liquor sales, low fixed hotel accommodation tariffs, and the introduction of price controls all of which were exacerbated by poor standards of service and in many cases lack of professional management particularly for the lower class and small hotels that dominated the hotel economy (Rogerson, 2011). In addition, demand factors were significant as with only few exceptions – those of the city’s top-end hotels – the market served by the majority of Johannesburg hotels was the domestic visitor. Overall, the national survey report on hotels was scathing about the state of the city’s hotel stock. It observed that despite Johannesburg having world class shops, theatres and motor cars, the majority of city hotels do not cater for the wealthy residents and visitors that use these facilities but rather they “cater for the requirements of visitors, less fortunately situated, from other parts of the country and to a very limited extent for those of visitors from overseas” (Norval, 1936: 227).



A growth of hotel numbers is observed as occurring in Johannesburg following the establishment of the apartheid government. In 1955 the building of two so-styled 'continental hotels' – the Waldorf and the Marlborough – was announced for completion in 1957. Such new constructions are explained by demand factors in terms of the improved flow of international tourists (*The South African Hotel Review*, 1955). Another contributory factor to the growth in the number of small hotels was the direct impact of apartheid legislation which resulted in the establishment of a number of "non-White" hotels. One example was the opening in Fordsburg of the Planet Hotel, described in press reports as "like a touch of the Orient" and "one of the leading hotels for non-Whites in the country" (*The Star*, 17 July 1964). In terms of location apart from a handful of hotels which were established in nearby suburbs the mass of early hotels in Johannesburg remained situated in the inner city of Johannesburg or its immediate surrounds.

As no grading system of hotels existed throughout this period the hotel numbers in Table 1 cannot be differentiated on quality standards. What is known, however, is that many complaints were made about the unsatisfactory state of many of Johannesburg's hotels in terms of poor facilities, service standards and management. The 1928 liquor legislation forged a fundamental change in the character of South African hotels – which would endure until the mid-1960s - such that the major business focus was upon liquor-sales rather than the supply of quality accommodation services. The introduction of this legislation is a basis for understanding the high proportion of small hotels in Johannesburg, especially in the city centre, which offer the "bare ten rooms" as required by the legislation in order simply to secure the license for liquor sales. The dismal state of hotel buildings and provision of accommodation was of limited concern as most early Johannesburg hotels in reality were little more than thinly disguised bars (Rogerson, 2011).

### **Johannesburg's luxury hotels**

Some discussion is merited on the group of Johannesburg's elite hotels which were comparable in terms of standards to the best in the world and in function with the classic colonial hotels of Asia. One report in 1952 applauded Johannesburg's leading hotels most of which "take their place among the caravanserais of the world and are as familiar to the traveller as the Savoy in London, the Waldorf Astoria in New York, the Taj of Bombay and Raffles of Singapore" (Anon, 1952: 19). Special note is always given to the Johannesburg's iconic Carlton Hotel, which opened in 1906.

The first Carlton Hotel was conceived in 1895 by the renowned mining magnate Barney Barnato as a huge, world-class luxury hotel including a theatre. The hotel had six-storeys and a telephone in every room. It hosted many celebrities, including King George VI, Queen Elizabeth, and the young Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret in 1947 (Soul Safari, 2013).

In 1940 this was advertised as 'Africa's Greatest Hotel' – standing at the "crossroads of Africa" visitors from overseas often express surprise at the inexpensive charges of the Carlton for accommodation equal to that of the great hotels de-luxe of Europe and America – 400 rooms with private bathrooms and every room has a telephone, Carlton restaurant and Carlton Grill, superb Carlton Palm Court, cabarets in the Carlton Ballroom" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1938). In 1952 it was described that "The stately Carlton on the busiest corner in the Commonwealth. In its foyer met travellers from New York and farmers from the vast lands of South West Africa; industrial tycoons rub shoulders with internationally known theatre stars" (Anon. 1952: 20). Likewise, Cole (1988: 14) avers that "The most famous of all earlier hotels was the original Carlton could be described as the forerunner of the modern five star hotel. It



was described as South Africa's first luxury hotel which was to remain until its demolition some 50 years later the rendezvous of discriminating people". When the Carlton was first established Cole (1988) recorded that the entire white staff of 128 men and 58 women were recruited in London and the chef from the Hyde Park Hotel in London with all staff, furniture and fittings brought out from England in a chartered Union Castle liner.



**Image 1.** The Original Carlton Hotel

Source: <http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/review/review-meet-me-carlton>

The luxury and grandeur of the Carlton Hotel was evident. Rosenthal (1972: 32) stated that "Taste is the keynote of the decorative scheme, as comfort is the motive of the building's design". On the first floor the visitor lingers long in delight in the daily-furnished Palm Court, a veritable bower of beauty, wherein our womenfolk may take their afternoon tea amidst congenial and appropriate surroundings. Furthermore, it was continued that the "bedroom appointments are irreproachable, and in the essential matters of size, lighting and ventilation the rooms comply with absolutely every requirement" (Rosenthal, 1972: 32). The Carlton Hotel Guide spoke of "noble rotunda, 32 feet in diameter" with its marble folly and Ionic columns and fine moulded ceiling. Then there was the grand staircase, the spacious Palm Court, ballroom and the drawing room decorated in the "delicate Adam's style (Cole, 1988). There was nothing garish and extravagant and the furniture is most beautiful and graceful" In the basement were the Turkish baths and lounges, massage and hot rooms as well as the plunge and needle baths. The London Star evening paper carried a lengthy report "The building itself is magnificent. All the glories of the place cannot be described. Its profusely decorated ceilings; the Grill Room panelled in Dantzic oak, the Smoke Room in which the panels are pig skin; the Ball Room with its colour scheme of shades of green and its galleries for spectators and musicians – all are insignificant items in this Palace of Luxury. But one feature must be specially mentioned – the Palm Court. Here the style is Louis XVI, the colours are white and



gold, there are mirrors which ingeniously heighten the effect and there are the most imposing palms (Rosenthal, 1972: 33)

Accordingly, with such luxuriously appointed rooms and special services, the Carlton was comparable to other grand hotels such as Raffles in Singapore or Shepheard's in Cairo. Its status meant that the Carlton accommodated an impressive list of visiting dignitaries. The giants of stage and screen – Ivor Novello, Danny Kaye, Joan Crawford, Margot Fonteyn, stayed there as well as numerous musicians and wealthy Americans such as Nelson Rockefeller “to whom the Carlton seemed like a breath of home” (Rosenthal, 1972:140). In addition, it was claimed that The Carlton probably could boast of accommodating more royal guests than any hotel in South Africa. The Prince of Wales later Edward VIII danced the night away in the ballroom when he visited the country in 1925 and his brother, Prince George Duke of Kent stayed there in 1934.

During the Second World War King George of Greece who was given asylum in South Africa booked in at the Carlton as did the Shah of Persia who came out following a revolt in his country. Prince Bernard of the Netherlands was a guest during his visit to South Africa in the 1950s. After the war when the world was at peace again and celebrities were still coming to the Carlton in 1947 it achieved the culminating honour in its long history – as headquarters to the British Royal Family during their visit to South Africa. The whole fifth floor was reserved for the guests and King George VI, Queen Elizabeth with their two young daughters, Princess Elizabeth and Princes Margaret. There was never a more impressive banquet in the old hotel than that given in their honour by General J. J. Pienaar, Administrator of the Transvaal (Rosenthal, 1972: 139).

The Carlton was not alone in terms of the category of quality hotels in Johannesburg. For example, during the 1950s The Orange Grove a short distance from the city centre, was commended for serving “a Continental cuisine second to none and dancing to a first class band in the Coconut Grove makes this hostelry popular with residents and tourists alike” (Anon, 1952: 21). Another recommendation was as follows: “High on the Berea overlooking the lights of Johannesburg is one of the city's gayer spots – the Hotel Sheraton where excellent accommodation accompanies the attractions of the lively Copacabana where nightly the best cabaret stars of the Union entertain discerning dancers” (Anon, 1952: 22). Beyond these hotels in terms of luxury the major competitor to the Carlton was the Langham Hotel (Cole, 1988).

The 29 roomed Langham Hotel opened its doors in 1896. It “became one of the best-known hotels in the country and numbered the Aga Khan and screen star Tyrone Power among its distinguished guests” (Cole, 1988: 14) For Benjamin (1979: 23) The Langham “stood for something rather special in the social fabric of Johannesburg. It had grace, charm and solid old-world comfort, and a certain family air which remained even after its original gabled frontage was augmented by a new six-storey section in the thirties”. Overall, The Langham was expensive, discreet, smaller and viewed as “less flashy than the Carlton” (Benjamin, 1979: 23). It was observed that for several decades “the hotel continued to be a popular venue for titled Englishmen” In addition, famous theatrical personalities, such as Lily Langtry, frequently stayed there when visiting Johannesburg (Cole, 1988). The wife of the manager described the Langham as “the epitome of good taste” capturing the hotel's appeal as “as stately but conservative” (Cole, 1988: 14). Indeed, because of its stately and gracious atmosphere The Langham was a popular venue for Johannesburg society weddings and as a result of it being conservative the “wives and daughters of wealthy farmers stayed there during their shopping expeditions to Johannesburg” (Cole, 1988: 14).



**Image 2.** The Langham Hotel

Source: <http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/files/langham-hotel-lost-johannesburgjpg>

## Conclusion

The objective in this paper is to open up research concerning the history of hotels in Africa as a whole and South Africa more specifically. Existing literature on hotels in South Africa largely overlooks historical issues and can be characterised as ‘present-minded’ as Walton (2009) describes for tourism scholarship as a whole. The analysis presented here of early hotel development in Johannesburg draws upon a range of archival source material. Arguably, the conduct of historical research contributes a fresh dimension to hotel scholarship as well as providing a grounded understanding of the emergence and character of the local hotel industry. During the time period examined here certain continuities in the Johannesburg hotel economy. In terms of continuity the key themes are the economics of the industry with the dominance of the hotel economy by liquor interests and the corresponding subordination of the supply of accommodation services to the profits from alcohol sales.

Ultimately it was the lack of profits that lead to the demise and closure of Johannesburg’s iconic Carlton Hotel (Rosenthal, 1972). By the early 1960s with rapidly climbing land prices in central Johannesburg the returns from the hotel trade were insufficient such that in 1962 it was announced that the hotel would be demolished and replaced by a 20 storey skyscraper. In a fond tribute to the hotel at its closure a columnist in the *Rand Daily Mail* wrote that “the demise of the Carlton that we know was as inevitable as night. Designed and built soon after the turn of the century, it belonged, in every sense to a more spacious age. It is now out of step with what we call modern living – wide corridors, lofty ceilings, space wasted at almost every turn, on a stand which is probably now the most costly in South Africa”.

According to Rosenthal (1972) before it finally shut the owners of the Carlton agreed to one last tremendous ‘splurge’ which took place on 8 November 1963 in the interest of a favourite



Johannesburg charity, the Hope Home for Crippled Children. On 31 December 1963 The Carlton closed its doors leaving the Langham as the top and grandest hotel still in operation in Johannesburg (Walker, 1977).

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