

UMBILO ROAD: City Gateway - Industrial, Commercial & Residential



Arthur Gammage will be drawing on his background in Urban Planning & Design as he guides us on a kaleidoscope view of establishments past and present along this busy thoroughfare. Amongst a range of Art Deco style buildings there is a little of everything. The area has evolved whilst becoming a less important entrance to the city since the freeways took over.

Gerald Buttigieg has provided additional notes about the area in the **1950's & 1960's**. These are quoted in italics in the list. Gerald introduces his background as follows:

"We lived in this area during my pre-teen and teenage years so I got to know it fairly well. I have used a 1957 and 1965 Directory as a guide what the buildings were during my time."

It is an interesting area with a varied mix. The immediate main residential area was Moore Road as there were numerous blocks of flats in Moore Road and the small roads leading off it. There was only one petrol station in the area diagonally opposite the Argyle Hotel (now Origin Night Club).

A memory I recall of the area was that an American singer Johnny (Cry) Ray visited Durban for a concert round about 1955. He arrived late afternoon and travelled into Durban via Umbilo Road travelling from the airport in a big American Convertible. Umbilo Road was lined by residents from all the nearby flats. I accompanied my Mom to see him pass by."

<p>1</p>	<p>Glenariff, 96 Umbilo Road</p> <p>This sturdy building Dennis Claude might have called "blood & bandage" style. The chamfered recessed façade between bay windows – or were those balconies? – results in a pleasing street elevation. The brick bonding is interesting with cross-bricks every sixth course.</p> <p><i>"12 flats. Last time I saw this building it was run down but see it has been revived."</i></p>	
<p>2</p>	<p>Crown Building 93/5 Umbilo Road</p> <p>Architect A A Ritchie-McKinlay, Mediterranean (Berea) style for B. Lurie in 1929. The cantilevered slab over the sidewalk is unusual.</p> <p><i>"A strange building but rather attractive. Flats upstairs and shops below. All the windows were wooden in style with the architecture. The aluminium replacements are unattractive. Looks in bad shape."</i></p>	

3 **Origin Night Club, 9 Clark Road**

Originally the "Argyle Hotel", it had a popular beerhall style bar on the bottom floor. Later this became "The Winston", an alternative bar run for 25 years by Belinda Baney, which started off countless garage bands in such genres as Rock, Punk, Goth and Death Metal. Another bar, "Dusk-till-Dawn" briefly coexisted with the Winston. Presently the Origin Night Club occupies the upper floors. The building has been owned by the Hoption family who have lived above their caterers' supply store next door but one. Records for this site show "alterations to Durban Hygienic Laundry" in 1922 by Arthur G Cross for W Grant. This may refer to the old shed at the back.



"Much changed exterior. It used to have ARGYLE HOTEL lettering on the frontage. The hotel had a largish lounge and on Friday and Saturday nights the music and dancing was very popular."

4 **Classic House, 116 Umbilo Road**

Quaint shop building with an Art Deco pediment. The large warehouse at the back was once the Goth club "Burn".

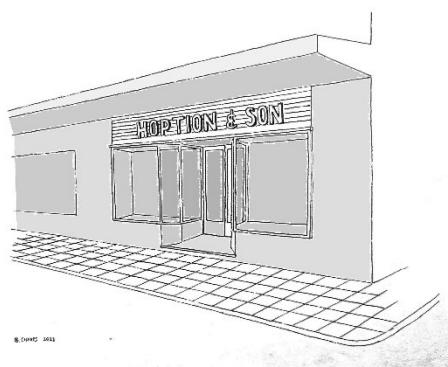
"If I remember correctly this was an obscure building with small shops at street level. One was run by an Afrikaans lady who made koeksusters. I remember buying from her. The 1957 Directory listed the property as Omega Koeksuster Bakery!!"





5 **Hoption & Son, 118 Umbilo Road**


Architect unknown; plans were submitted for the shop front by Cole & Clarke in 1956. The building is not Art Deco but quite historic. It seems the business has stopped operating and the sign is fading. In recent times the shop was run by Mrs Hoption and her 3 sons, Trevor, Brian and Richard, as a bulk supplier to the catering industry. It was founded way back by their great grandfather as a grocery shop. The Hoptions lived in the flats above, and at one time owned the Origin Night Club building two doors down (see above).

"The Hoptions who were Chinese were general food merchants and ships chandlers. They were operating on these premises in 1938."



<p>6</p>	<p>Luxor, 144 Umbilo Road</p> <p>Shops and flats by W Barboure for H Arby in 1940. Symmetric building with shops at the pavement level, and an upper floor residence with verandah (now enclosed) supported over the pavement. Minor Art Deco features include supporting columns rising to a stepped pediment at the skyline.</p> <p><i>"This building was the premises of McNaughton Walter (Pty) Ltd. They were suppliers of Automotive Paints especially spray paint, thinners, additives, tints etc. Completely new façade; the old one had an upstairs verandah with the sales outlet downstairs. I seem to recall there were pillars in front which have been added to."</i></p>	
<p>7</p>	<p>Arby Court, 146 Umbilo Road</p> <p>Symmetric two-storey building with two shops at ground level and residences above. Protruding middle section on upper floor bounded on sides by fins rising to stepped skyline. Upper windows have narrow "eyeshade" and windowsill strings.</p> <p><i>"Downstairs was Penguin Fish and Chips Shop."</i></p>	
<p>8</p>	<p>Ko-Gae, 150 Umbilo Road</p> <p>Architect unknown, drawing for S Godfrey "1903" (date error?). Symmetric two-storey building with three shops at ground level and residences above. Stepped pediment decorated with a series of horizontal strings. Full-width "eyeshades" on both levels.</p> <p><i>"Godfreys Bldg"</i></p>	
<p>9</p>	<p>IOSA Print, 152 Umbilo Road (1 Davenport Rd)</p> <p>Chick & Bartholomew, 1926, for W I Gatenby. It is a curious curved building with shops below and residences on the upper floor. A hung eave follows the curve, covering the pavement. The style is Berea / Spanish, with arched windows and balcony openings supported by exuberant scrolls. It is likely that the generous curved form was to accommodate the branch of the old tramline from Umbilo Road up into Davenport (Helen Joseph) Road, en route to the McDonald Road terminus, which is in International Style.</p> <p><i>"This building down stairs was divided into shops with big glass frontages. L.A. Ball the Chemists were on the right with a Men's Hairdresser next to it. I used to have my hair cut there. In my time the Glenwood trolley buses turned here to go up Davenport Road. The route was to Bulwer Road, into Bath Road, right into McDonald Road and up to the terminus under a big tree."</i></p>	 

<p>10</p>	<p>Durban Team Cars, 143 Umbilo Road Streamline Moderne style two-storey industrial building with a corner entrance. Curved facebrick façade has a string of windows.</p> <p><i>"Premises of W Killerby. Show room and workshop service centre. Killerbys were agents for BSA Matchless Suzuki and Jawa Motorcycles. Also Villiers engines and Lambretta Scooters."</i></p>	
<p>11</p>	<p>93 Canada Road Streamline Moderne style single-storey industrial building. Compound curved and square corner feature. A 1927 plan shows "New verandah for house by T Read and Hirst", though this likely applies to a previous building.</p> <p><i>"I think you have the wrong building pictured. That looks like the Irish Linen Spinning and Weaving Company Lincot Textiles which was at 153 Gale Street. 93 Canada Road was Crown Steam Laundry and Dry Cleaners."</i></p>	
<p>12</p>	<p>ALI Supermarket, 144 Gale Street A G Frolich, 1934 "Block of Flats for I Erlich". Three-floor corner building. Shops at pavement level and apartments above. A panel rises to the skyline above the disused corner entrance. Step cantilevers support a flat canopy around the corner.</p> <p><i>"Industria Building; Industria Supply Store at street level."</i></p>	
<p>13</p>	<p>Comet Undies CC, 132 Gale Street Streamline Moderne style two-storey industrial building. Entrance is on a flat side and is highlighted by a vertical flat panel rising above the skyline. The architect was Clement Fridjhon in 1945/46.</p> <p><i>"This was the factory premises for Cole and Clarke Shopfitters, large business in the 1950s."</i></p>	

<p>14</p>	<p>63 Umbilo Road</p> <p>c 1920. Brian Kearney's description in the 1984 building list book: "Gabled warehouse of the Union period with colonnade over pavement under hipped, tiled roof, in Vernacular style, crisp detailing." The colonnade is now missing and the gabled front very tatty.</p> <p><i>"This building was next to Royal and Regent Dairies. Never really knew what business was carried on there but do remember that it was a kind of general store. One thing they sold was used tennis balls and when our "street cricket" ball was lost we would go down and buy another one from the lady at the shop. 1957 Directory lists it as International Machinery and Oils."</i></p>	
<p>15</p>	<p>Doves, 129 Moore Road</p> <p>"Italianate Style" according to East Coast Architects who did the recent alterations for NUMSA. Previous 1984 alterations by Mikula & Johnson were for Wynberg Tea Room.</p> <p><i>"Churchill Mansions on the corner of Moore and Umbilo Rd was originally a hotel (non-licensed) and later became Mansions. Building renovated c2000. I saw they had the roof off, probably for borer. Down stairs on the corner was the Wynberg Tea Room, an evening gathering place for young locals as it had a pinball machine and Gold Medal Books. These were raunchy books for their day. Diagonally opposite corner was the area chemist. Other corners Modern Gowns and Umbilo Bottle Store."</i></p>	
<p>16</p>	<p>Sad Sacks, 95 Moore Road</p> <p>Brick apartment building with shops at ground level. Portholes, framed windows, and protruding round stairwell. Probably dates from the 1950's.</p> <p><i>"Moorcombe Flats, with 18 units. Was always a neat and well kept building. The corner was occupied by Modern Gowns a well-known haberdashery, wool and material shop. The entrance to the block in Moore Road was opposite the ABC Bakery and Mazuri Supply Store. In later years the shop downsized and Sad Sacks took over the shop space in Moore Road side."</i></p>	
<p>17</p>	<p>Makan Brothers, 45 Umbilo Road</p> <p>The architect was WJ Cornelius, 1936. Small single-storey shop with an impressive Art Deco edifice extending over the pavement.</p> <p><i>"Indian shoe repairer and shoe sales. Building is unchanged from what I remember but a bit run down. The building to the left is new."</i></p>	

<p>18</p>	<p>Choice Beds, 44 Umbilo Road</p> <p>Symmetrical 3-floor apartment building with shops on the ground floor. A fluted double entrance has a curved canopy and two broad pilasters rising to the skyline. In his 1984 Listing, Brian Kearney remarks on the curved entrance canopy and Art Deco doors. The building was owned by S. Sorour.</p>	
<p>19</p>	<p>Escombe Court, 29 Umbilo Road</p> <p>Architect W. Barboure, 1937. There was a conversion of flats to shops by Paton Taylor in 1951. This handsome Art Deco façade has benefited from a recent paint job. This building and a second connected at its back are now used for student accommodation. Recent renovations were done by Francis Architects for Mr Hansa, well known conservator and previous recipient of a DADS merit award.</p> <p><i>“The 1938 Directory stated as building in progress. 13 flats. I remember this building well as my school friend lived on the ground floor at No.3. Originally there was a Nedbank Branch at street level. In the early 50s there used to be rent controlled flats. I think Escombe Court was one of them. Owners had to apply to the Rental Board for permission to up the rents. Because of this, old small blocks of flats were not always well maintained.”</i></p>	
<p>20</p>	<p>Garvock, 14 Umbilo Road</p> <p>Architect Geoffrey le Sueur, 1930. Originally named Dougall’s Buildings. The contractors were Dougall & Munro, who also worked on the original Old Mutual and the Customs & Excise buildings. Garvock is an impressive symmetrical apartment building with shops at ground level. There are multiple flat pilasters giving a buttress-like appearance at the corners. Together with intermediate fins, these rise to a skyline cornice which is patterned with Egyptian leaf moulds.</p> <p><i>“Quite an imposing block of flats for the area. Downstairs at street level was a piano repairer / sales / tuning, H Roberts . Also a mower repair shop, seem to remember the name Mowers Incorporated, owned by a Mr Short. Mowers, 2 stroke 4 stroke motors and motorized garden equipment repaired. There were a lot of small shops along this stretch of Umbilo road heading towards Berea Road.”</i></p>	