



THE DEVELOPMENT OF JEPPE – DOORNFONTEIN-ELLIS PARK

PRIOR TO THE LOWERING AND BUILDING OF THEN NEW JOHANNESBURG STATION

There is a note in **volume 6 July 1912 of the Railway and Harbour Magazine** referring to the occupation of the railway lines for the removal and replacement of Siemert road subway. On or about 1932 Eric Rosenthal (editor of the Star?) produced an article on the development of Johannesburg and the then new Johannesburg station and railways at the end of Eloff Street where access to the platforms was by means of pedestrian subways.

October 1932 another work that will become an established fact in the near future is the establishment of a halt for passenger trains and the construction of a pedestrian subway under the railway lines at a point between Jeppe and Doornfontein to serve the popular sports grounds at Ellis Park. Since the transfer of the rugby grounds from the Wanderers to Ellis Park a certain amount of inconvenience has been caused to the public attending the matches in getting to the new grounds.

May 1933 The pedestrian subway under construction between Doornfontein and Jeppe near the Ellis Park sports grounds, it is expected, be ready for use early in May, while it is hoped that the halt that is being constructed for use in conjunction with the subway will be ready for use for the rugby match between the OFS and Transvaal on 25th May.

September 1933. The Ellis Park Halt again proved a boon to travelers attending the recent rugby matches against the Wallabies. There was an attendance of 20.000 noted on the 12th August, and several thousands used the railway the most convenient form of getting to and departing from the ground. Within 15 minutes all travelers were cleared to their destination

July 1934. Capital and Betterment estimates. New bridges are provided for at Doornfontein where a relocated bridge at Nugget Street is contemplated and a pedestrian bridge at Sherwell Street.

August 1935 The recent decision after many years of investigation, discussion and careful consideration to lower the line between Jeppe and Ellis Park and George Goch has been received by the City Council of Johannesburg and the public with great satisfaction as the completion of the work contemplated will prove a boon to Johannesburg citizens and all persons whose business causes them to cross railway lines

in this vicinity. The lowering of the line will have the effect of eliminating a number of important level crossings which for years now have seriously retarded road traffic and which with the very great expansion of business in the last year or so has become a definite obstacle to the development of the city. The SAR will also reap the great advantage in the elimination of these level crossings and will at the same time be able to provide a new and suitable station at Jeppe.

September 1935. Preliminary arrangements are in hand for the lowering of Jeppe.

October 1935. There has been great activity in connection with the lowering of the line near Jeppe and the provision of a new station there. The necessary land has been acquired to permit the line being constructed in its new position and by the beginning of October a start will be made in the demolishing of the buildings which at present occupy the site.

December 1935. Staking out operations and preparations of the plans for the 5th railway line between Johannesburg and President were in hand.

May 1936 The design of the new station at Jeppe will be similar to Mayfair being elevated over the tracks the plans are in preparation. A work of interest now in hand is the widening of Twist Street Bridge by 21ft at the request of the City Council. The original bridge parapet was designed by the eminent architect and artist, sir Edwin Lutyens RA who also designed the Johannesburg Art Gallery.(the gallery was built facing South instead of North due to the North point on the plan being inserted as was the building to be built in the Northern hemisphere). The City Council specifically requested that the original design of the bridge (presumably the parapet or balustrading be accurately preserved when the widening of the bridge was undertaken. This wish will of course be observed and accurate details of the existing ornamentation etc have been taken so that the widening will be an exact replica of the present structure. Earthworks to carry the 5th line between Germiston and Johannesburg are being proceeded with and a contract has been let for the construction of the culverts and drains. Two contracts have been completed for the demolition of the houses with the lowering of the line at Jeppe. Earthworks, drainage, etc is progressing well and 60% of the retaining wall (upper Railway Road) has been built. Alterations to the municipal sewerage system at Jeppe was nearing completion.

September 1936. A start has been made on the small retaining wall at Ellis Park. The question of the lowering of the line through Jeppe is of course one that has received very much publicity from time to time. An undertaking of this nature requires, however, an enormous amount of preliminary work deviating cables, sewerage and stormwater drainage. The back of the alterations to these services has been broken. Negotiations are proceeding for the elimination of President Street level crossing and negotiations and enquiries are being made in connection of cutting out the level crossings where there is more than one line of railway particularly at busy level crossings.

October 1936. Upper Railway Road retaining wall is complete so also the retaining wall at Ellis Park. Services alterations East of Marshall Street 60% complete. The cutting West of Commissioner Street and the filling in behind the retaining wall 85% complete. The new bridge at Nuggett Street being built departmentally across four lines is far advanced as well as the widening of Twist Street bridge. (Eric Rosenthal is the Publicity Manager for the Empire Exhibition).

November 1936. Due to hard rock the lowering of the formation at Jeppe is slowing down the progress. A start has been made in excavating a gullet between Commissioner and Main Streets with the idea of tunneling under Commissioner Street for drainage and the removal of spoil. Work on the dumping site is well in hand.

December 1936. A temporary footbridge is being erected for access to Jeppe Station. Colour light signaling has been introduced on the section of line Springs to Randfontein. Jeppe lowering is taking shape.

January 1937. The erection of the temporary footbridge at Crown Street for completion in February has commenced. The temporary footbridge at Jules Street is in the course of being erected. The lowering of Jeppe looks like the result of an earthquake.

February-March 1937. The widening of Twist Street Bridge at the cost of the Council is complete and opened to traffic. The new bridge at Nuggett Street also at the cost of the City Council is complete and was opened to traffic at the one end by Mr W.J.K. Skillicorn Assistant General Manager SAR and at the other end by the Mayor of Johannesburg Councillor D.W. Macay. Each of the gentlemen was presented with gold plated scissors for the purpose of cutting the green and gold ribbons stretched across each end of the bridge. Mr E.H. Wauch a former City Engineer was responsible for the original idea of a bridge at this point. The bridge was designed by the late Mr A. Reynolds Bridge Engineer of the SAR and the building was supervised by Mr John Bullen District Engineer and Mr Harry Birrell System Engineer. The cost of the bridge was 13,600 pounds (R27,200,00). The opening of this bridge resulted in the closing of the level crossings at End and Sherwell Streets.

May 1937. In the case of Jeppe lowering two level crossings Commissioner and Marshall Streets and the subway at Main Street the sites of many accidents will be done away with and road crossings of the lines being effected by means of bridges. The lowering of the line through Jeppe - a tremendous job - is being carried out on a deviation North of the existing line but not as difficult as the lowering of Mayfair, on the same location, under traffic conditions by 20 ft.

June 1937 to September 1937. Steelwork for the footbridges at Crown and Hannau Streets are being erected. Plate laying on the new location has commenced. The construction of the bridges at Commissioner and Jules streets has commenced.

November 1937.The old Main Street subway has been demolished.

January 1938. Jeppe Station has been designed on a “bridge” with a span of 106ft between abutments and 150ft wide straddling the tracks. The new passenger platforms are being constructed. The bridge giving access to Jeppe station has been brought into use and the “bridge “for the station buildings is progressing well.

July 1938.Earlier tenders were called for the construction of the station buildings and the contract was awarded in September 1937. In November 1937 all platform walls were complete.

December 1938. The lowering of Jeppe is complete and open for use of the lower section but the opening was postponed to January 1939 for the Voortrekker Centenary Celebrations when the Commissioner Street Bridge was also opened to traffic together with the deviated railway tracks. Temporary tram tracks were laid across Main Street Bridge at surface level and the filling in of the subway could commence. At midnight on the 7th January the notorious and dangerous Jeppe subway avoided by most motorists was closed to traffic and an immediate start was made with the bridging of the railway tracks. Pending the bridging of the gap and the connecting of the tramway tracks tram passengers from the Eastern suburbs were required to change trams at this point and cross to the other side to connect with the tram there by means of overhead bridges or underground subway. At a total cost of 412.691 the new Jeppe was complete except for the colourlight signaling. The level crossings eliminated were those at Jeppe, Marshall, Commissioner and Hanau Streets.

March 1940.The brick shelters at Doornfontein are complete and the only outstanding works are the erection of the new footbridge at Davies Street and the replacement of the temporary span in the footbridge at Sherwell Street.

June 1940.Doornfontein Halt complete.

The Second World War September 1939 to May 1945 halted any further development on the Witwatersrand and the lowering of the tracks through Johannesburg Station by 14ft (4.27m) and the expropriation of the Wanderers sports fields and other properties and the building of the new Johannesburg station was only commenced after cessation of hostilities.

The Wanderers sports fields were relocated in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg either side of Corlett Drive.

Compiled by P.H.Louw.