The following chapter deals with the context of the project site, both historical and stylistic.

CHAPTER

Classicist context of the Pretoria Magistrates Court.
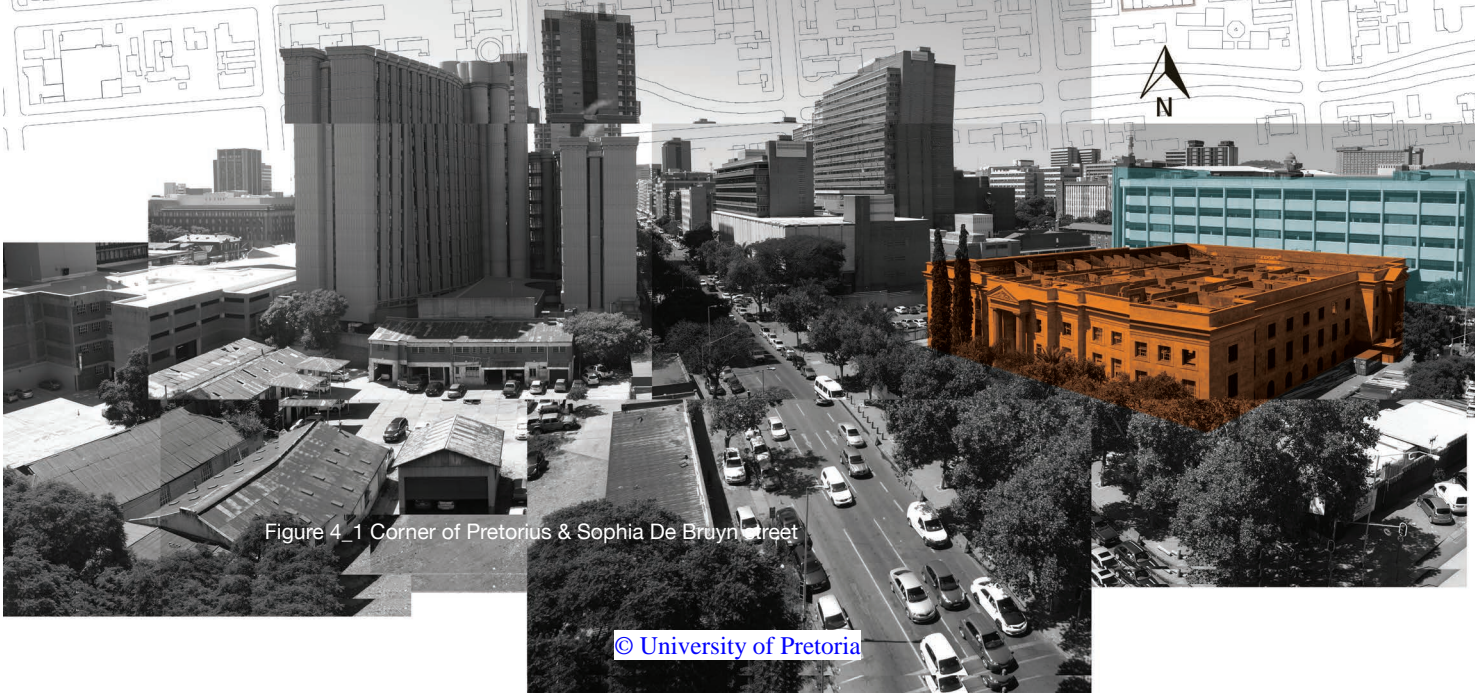
4.

Figure 4_1 Corner of Pretorius & Sophia De Bruyn street

Context of the Pretoria Magistrates Court

The Pretoria Magistrate's Court, designed by F.W. Mullins from the Public works Department, was completed in 1942 (Le Roux & Botes 1993:12). It is plausible to assume that the Magistrate's Court, as it stands today, shared the same space in the city as its predecessor or more likely completely replaced it on the exact same site.

A historical context of the court to be considered is the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism in 1948 and with them the rise of modernist architecture in South Africa. That will make the Pretoria Magistrate's Court (1942) one of the last revivalist buildings in Pretoria and the symbol of a passing era in South African politics.

In a final value judgement, Le Roux & Botes (1993:12) states that the value of the building is in its official status as a court. This opinion is also reflected by Engelbrecht et al (1955) when reflecting on the stylistic preference of the Department of Public Works of that time. In recognition of the predominantly Classical-Renaissance preference, they hold up examples such as the Main Post Office and Central Government Building constructed during that era while concluding:

'Die Magistraatsgebou is minder geslaagd.'

CLASSICIST ARCHITECTURE

As the study by Mulcahy (2011) demonstrates, the height of court design was during the 19th century and it is the position of this dissertation that many of the principles established during that time still remain in place. Furthermore, it is clear that the aesthetical considerations of the 19th century development had a profound influence on the design of the Pretoria Magistrate's Court.

Therefore, the purpose of this brief discussion of classical principles in architecture will aim to adequately equip this dissertation with the language to analyse the elements of the Pretoria Magistrate's Court in order to develop a design response.

Classical comes from the latin word *'classici'*, a term which distinguishes the highest social order as opposed to *'proletarii'* which is the lowest. Thus the classical strives for ultimate order in the cult of purity and rejects any element which would be deemed as polluted or unworthy. Classical architecture in its essence is acontextual, preoccupied with creating a perfect world within a world. This endeavour is not purely an academical practice, but consciously striving to influence. As Tzonis & Lefaivre (1986:5) states :

'The work should affect the minds of the audience for the sake of public good. It should edify wisely, consult and comment judiciously, defend and praise, rouse consciousness, and criticize.'

This act of worldmaking can thus be seen as highly political and intentionally influential.

This separate world, a representation of perfection and order, communicates through a set of elements which forms the basis of its language. According to Tzonis & Lefaivre (1986:6) this language comprises of three elements: *taxis, genera* and *symmetry*.

The *taxis* relate to the division and orderly arrangement of parts, either in a grid or in a tripartheid division. *Taxis* establish a rhythm between elements and establish hierarchy in the perception of these elements. Through *taxis* the classical principle to establish the hierarchy of parts

within parts is achieved, always relating to one another no matter the scale (Tzonis & Lefaivre 1986; Chitham 1985).

The next element is the *genera*. *Genera* refer to the column orders of which the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian are the most common. The *genera* thus signify the individual parts that populate the *taxis*. They are symbols of divine order and relate to the proportions of the human body. Each type of *genera* communicates a different symbolic notion, for example the Doric order represents the masculine strength and power, while the Corinthian relates to the feminine (Adam 1990; Tzonis & Lefaivre 1986; Chitham 1985).

Figure 4_1 Western facade

The last principle in the order of classical architecture is *symmetry*. Where *taxis* refer to the arrangement of parts and genera to the parts themselves, *symmetry* becomes the relation between those parts. *Symmetry* can be established either through rhythm or figure, overt or subtle, in the use of various methods (Adam 1990; Tzonis & Lefaivre 1986; Chitham 1985).

ANALYSIS

Having discussed the basic poetic principles of classical architecture, the following analysis aims to inform intervention in the Pretoria Magistrate's Court. The analysis will be conducted on a purely visual basis since the site was inaccessible for measurement. The intervention will aim to address the inherent dissonance that was instilled by past discourses and attempt to re-instil contemporary values.

Le Roux & Botes (1993) describe it as a three-story building with courtrooms arranged around internal courtyards. The façade is designed in a neo-classical style, comprising of a raised plinth, defined by rounded windows, and a cornice defining the gable wall. The windows on the northern façade are symmetrically arranged around the portico, keeping to a simple taxis and rhythm. This creates a strongly balanced façade towards Pretorius Street.

The western façade echoes this design, keeping to the already established rhythm of the windows, but without the *symmetry*. The portico here is moved further south due to pragmatic considerations. These

two façades are clad in marble. At a later stage, the windows on this façade were covered with a steel louvre system in order to mitigate the effects of the western sun on the corresponding spaces (Le Roux & Botes 1993:12).

The eastern façade has always been considered with less importance. It was constructed with facebrick and left

Figure 4_2 North-western corner

Figure 4_3 Aerial photo analysis of first floor
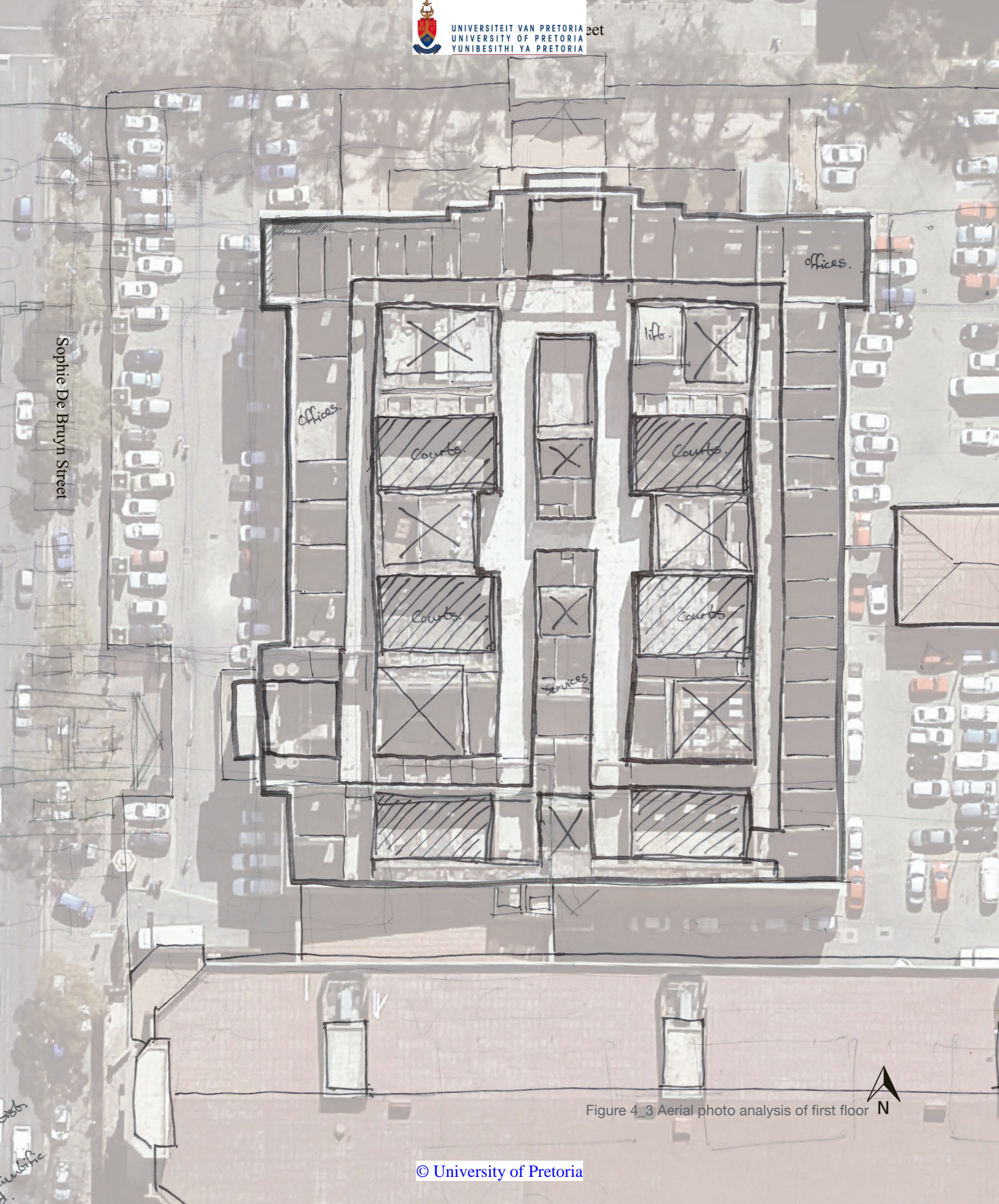
Sophie De Bruyn Street

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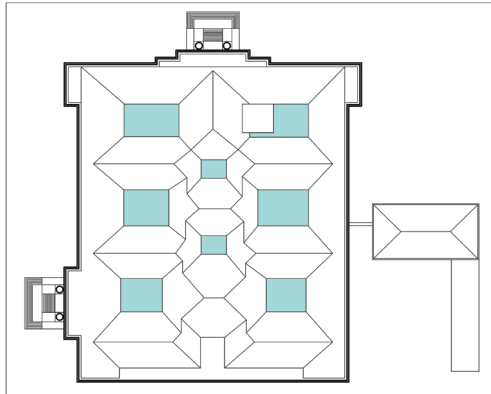
roof plan before2010

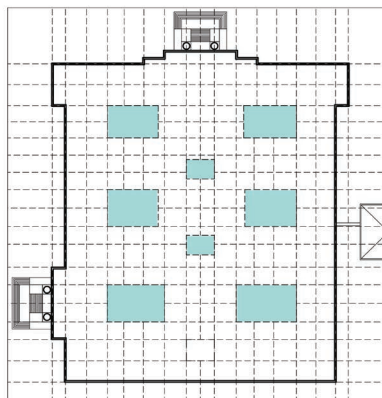Figure 4_4 Roofplan and courtyards

This figure shows the original roof plan of the Pretoria Magistrates Court as well as the existing courtyards.
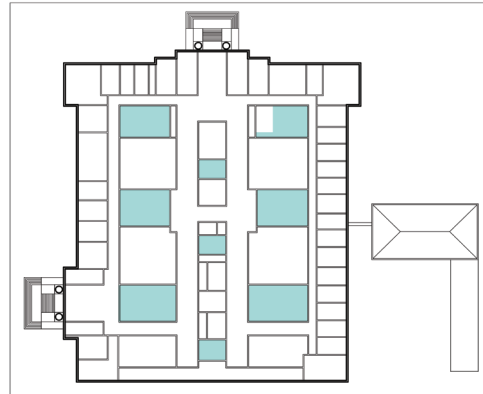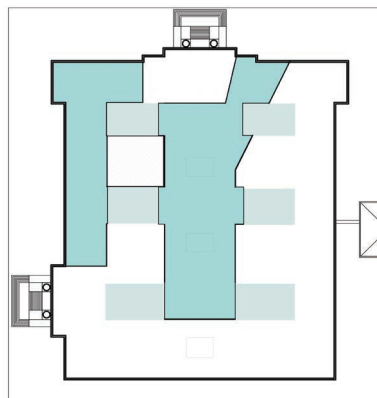

second floor plan

Figure 4_5 First floor plan

The top figure shows the assumed floor plan, after analysis of the aerial photos.

assumed structural grid

Figure 4_6 Structural grid

Here the assumed structural grid of the existing building, based on window and wall positions as well as the internal courtyards.

demolition plan

Figure 4_7 Areas of intervention

The top diagram shows the area's of intervention and the preservation of built fabric. This approach is discussed more thoroughly in the design chapter.
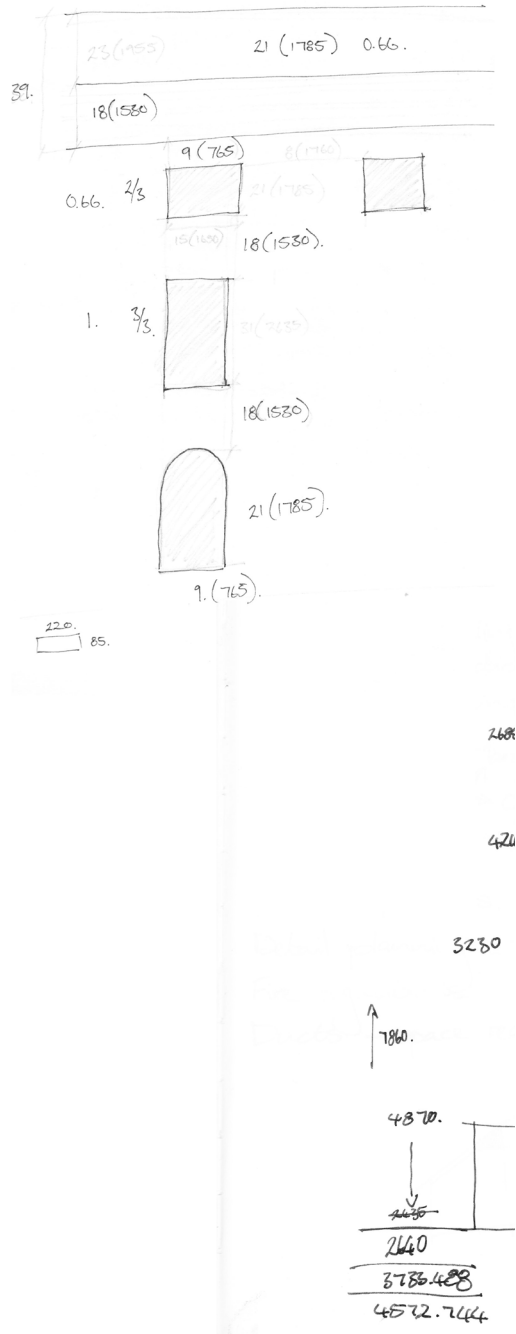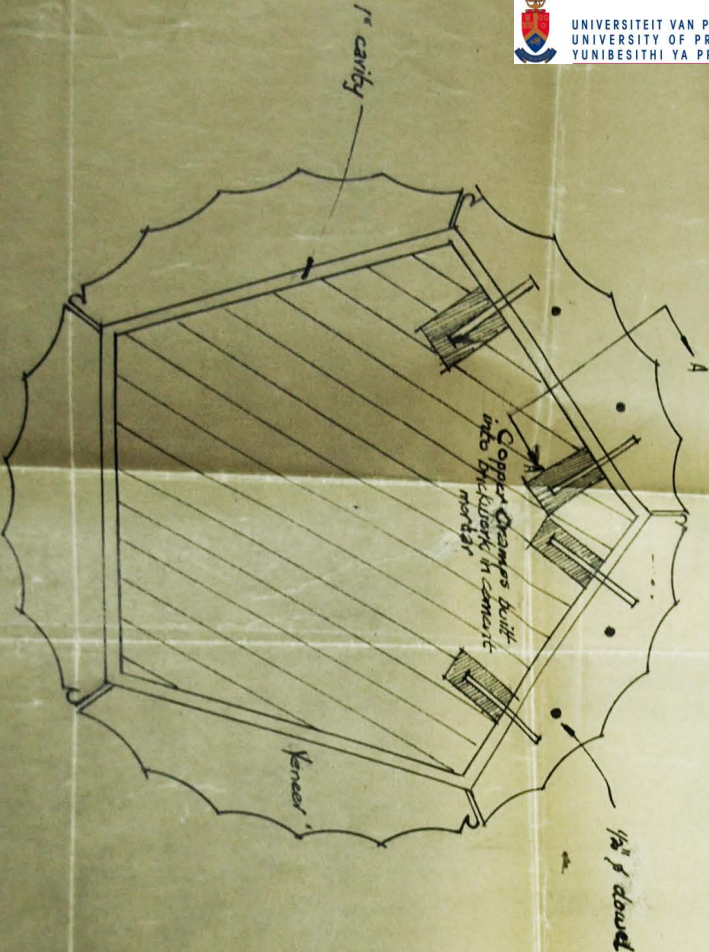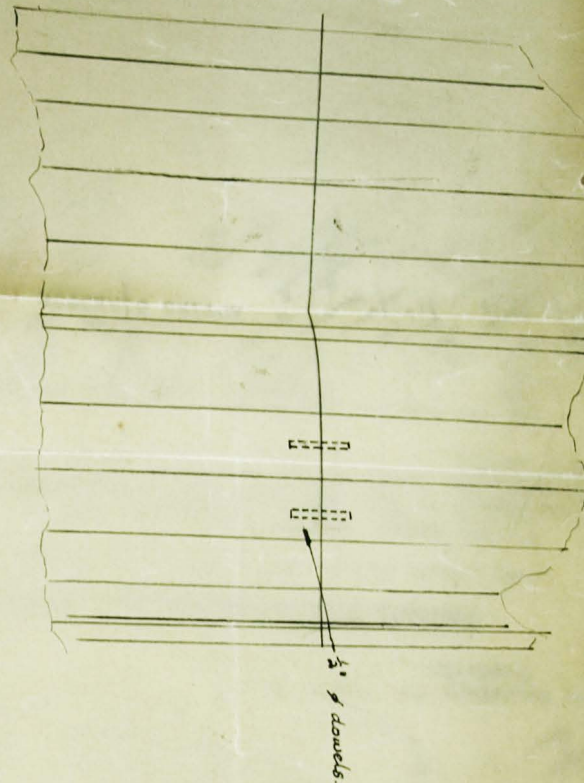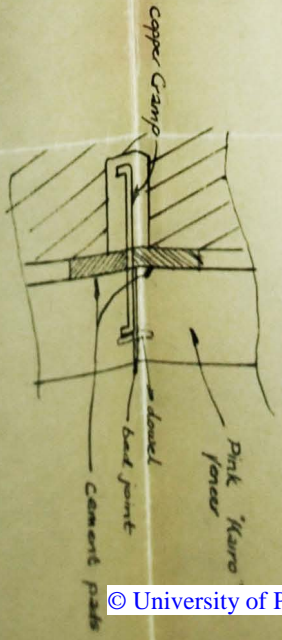
Figure 4_8 Facade analysis sketch

Western elevation

Northern elevation

Eastern elevation

Figure 4_9 Facade analysis

P 4/57

PRETORIA MAGISTRATE'S COURT..

COLUMNS

1" cavity

Copper Cramps built into the brickwork in cement mortar

Veneer

½" ∅ dowel

¼" ∅ dowels.

A

SECTION A-A

Copper Cramp

Pink "Kiaro" joner

dowel

bed joint

Cement pad

unfinished in order to save on construction cost. Regardless, a unique feature is to be found here in the decoration of the main doorway. The window proportions and composition remain constant in all façades, where the ground floor window is 1.4142 of the size of the top window. This corresponds to the popular 18th century window proportions as stated by Chitham (1985:134).

The portico comprises of a plinth, which is traversed by a flight of stairs and is communicated throughout the rest of the building by rounded windows. The plinth defines the basement which is used to lift

Figure 4_10 Column Detail, South African National Archives, D.P.W 5/448, Part 4

Figure 4_11 Portico on the northern facade

ground floor above ground level (Chitham 1985:124).

The *genera* used are Doric and have a simple rounded and understated capital and base. The column construction is brickwork in structure with Pink Cairo marble fixed with copper cramps, with a fluted surface. The decorated pediment is set upon a cornice stepping down to a frieze and architrave, that flows into one another with subtle distinction. This arrangement is wrapped around the building, defining the gable wall.

The detail that defines the entrance on the eastern façade comprises of a window that is stepped up in position with relation to the

similar windows in its rhythm. It is adorned by a cornice raised above the window by a frieze, and the detail continues downwards with moulding surrounding a crest bearing the date of completion. This entrance detail is terminated encircling a rounded window directly over the door.

Although the Pretoria Magistrate's Court is a very simple example of the revivalist style of its period, it still holds dear to its neo-classical routes and to the judicial discourse that shaped it. The way it relates to the urban condition around it enforces the acontextual nature of the classical discourse and isolates the courts not only in interior spaces but also within its site.

Therefore it is the opinion of this dissertation that the court spaces and the building itself have become irrelevant in the 21st century and its changing engagement with the legal system and punitive justice. The building in its essence does not allow for a democratic appropriation of public space or civil engagement and instead enforces a perception of intimidation and exclusion. This is inappropriate for a civil court which in its essence exists to give fair justice in a quick, affordable and accessible manner.
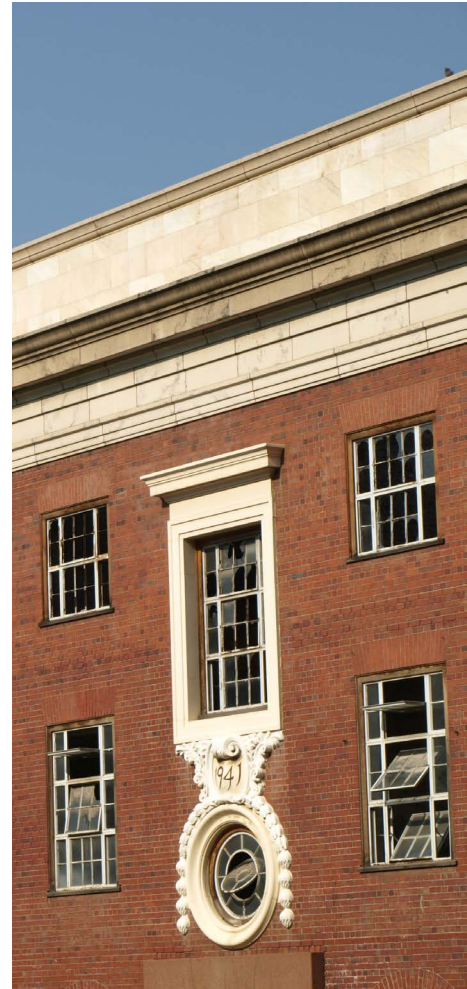

Figure 4_12 Marble detail on the eastern facade