City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Place name: **Coles Store No.64 (Former)**	**Citation No:**
Other names: -	**2448**
	Citation map TBA

Address:	**160 Acland Street, St Kilda**	**Heritage Precinct:**	**Village Belle Commercial**
Category:	**Commercial: Shop**	**Heritage Overlay:**	<mark>**HO7**</mark>
Style:	**Interwar: Moderne**	**Graded as:**	**Significant**
Constructed:	**1937-38**	**Victorian Heritage Register:**	**No**
Designer:	**Harry A. Norris**		
Amendment:	**TBC**		
Comment:	**New citation**		

Significance

What is significant?

The former Coles Store No.64, designed by Harry A. Norris and constructed in 1937-38, at 160 Acland Street, St Kilda is significant. The Moderne-style facades and shopfronts and the interior to the extent of the original plaster cornice and ceiling vents contribute to the significance of the place.

Alterations and additions are not significant.

How is it significant?

The former Coles Store No.64 at 160 Acland Street, St Kilda is of local historic, representative, and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

The former Coles Store No.64 is of historic significance as rare surviving example of the once ubiquitous chain of variety stores established by G.J. Coles during the interwar period when it became a household name in retailing in Australia. While over 90 stores were established very few of them survive today. (Criterion B)

The former Coles Store No.64 is of representative significance as an interwar Coles variety store, designed by company architect Harry A. Norris. Typical of the stores it is in the Moderne style and is notable (perhaps unique) for the asymmetric massing of the elevation to Acland Street, and for having a second frontage with a symmetric façade to Barkly Street. The significance of the place is enhanced the retention of original features such as the shopfronts, and the interior ceiling decoration. (Criterion D)

The former Coles Store No.64 is of aesthetic significance as a fine example of a retail store in the Moderne style. Typical of the style, the facades have a strong horizontal emphasis, which on the Acland Street elevation is balanced by the vertical feature. It is notable for the asymmetric treatment of the Acland Street elevation with its distinctive gridded bay, and for the careful consideration of details such as the way the horizontal glazing bars of the windows align with the grid and incised speed lines in the main façade. (Criterion E)

Thematic context

Victoria's framework of historical themes

5. Building Victoria's industries and workforce: 5.6 Entertaining and socialising

Port Phillip thematic environmental history

6. Commerce, trade, and work: 6.2 Markets, shops, and retail

History

Village Belle Shopping Centre

The Village Belle commercial centre developed around, and took its name from, the Village Belle Hotel, which was established in Barkly Street opposite the Acland Street intersection in c.1855. In the nineteenth century Acland Street was a residential area and contained mansions in large grounds and substantial villas and terraced houses. Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century shops began to replace the nineteenth century residential buildings. For example, following the sale of Taroona, which occupied the largest property on the north side permits were issued for two rows of six shops each in 1918 and 1919.

Development at the south end of Acland Street near Barkly Street in the 1910s and in the 1920s spread to the north end near Carlisle Street. A major catalyst for change was the redevelopment of the former cable tram car sheds on the south side in 1926, which were replaced with 10 two-storey shops at nos. 95-105 and 107-115. The growing importance of the centre was marked in the following year with the formation of the Village Belle Traders Association, which held its first 'shopping week' to promote the area. Further development followed in the 1930s and many of the new buildings were architect-designed. This included the new Coles Store, designed in 1937 by Harry A. Norris and built as part of a major redevelopment of a former roller skating rink and theatre at the north corner of Barkly Street. By the end of the 1930s the retail transformation of Acland Street was almost complete.

The development of the centre was associated with population growth in the surrounding areas due to the boom in flat building in the 1920s and 1930s.

G.J. Coles & Co.

In 1914, following a visit to America and Britain to observe international retailing methods, George J. Coles, in partnership with two brothers, opened the first Coles variety store in Smith Street, Collingwood. Encouraged by their success, G.J. Coles and Co. P/L was established as a proprietary company in 1921. Between 1922 and 1927 (when the company went public) a further eight stores were established in Melbourne, including the first Bourke Street store. Each store was numbered in order of opening.

In 1928 Coles opened the first interstate store in Sydney and began to remodel some of the older stores. In the following year they commenced construction on their flagship store in Bourke Street, Melbourne on the site of the former Coles Book Arcade. The new stores and remodels were designed by the company architect, Harry A. Norris, who in 1928 went on a tour of America to obtain the latest ideas in mechanical ventilation, café equipment and store fittings (Colesandco Vol. 1 No.1, January 1928).

By the start of World War II there were 86 stores nationally. After World War II, the company continued to grow, acquiring several competitors (for example, Selfridges, Penneys, Dickins) and constructing a large distribution centre at Port Melbourne. In 1959, Coles had 300 stores operating throughout Australia, and in 1962 the first of the 'New World' supermarkets was opened in Frankston (Golden Jubilee Report).

Coles Store No.64

In the nineteenth century the triangular block at the north corner of Acland and Barkly streets and bounded by Belford Street to the north was occupied by two mansion estates: Taroona and Oakwood. In 1912 the Elite Roller Skating rink was built on the corner at the intersection of Acland and Barkly Streets. It was converted to a picture theatre in 1915 before becoming a motor garage and then a market.

In 1937 plans were announced for the redevelopment of the site, which was to include a large store for G.J. Coles & Co. Ltd, a 'modern market', 20 retail shops and 'residential chambers', all to be built at an estimated cost of over £70,000. Demolition commenced in late 1937 and the complex was completed by 1938. Apart from the Coles Store, which was designed by Harry A. Norris, the other buildings were designed by A.G. Hedley, architect of Collins Street (*Herald*, 6 August 1937, p.14 'Big building plan for St Kilda').

The building of the new Coles Store No.64 at St Kilda was reported in the October 1937 edition of the Colesanco Staff Magazine, and the article included an architectural render (Figure 1). By December of that year the building was well advanced, and it was opened in January 1938.
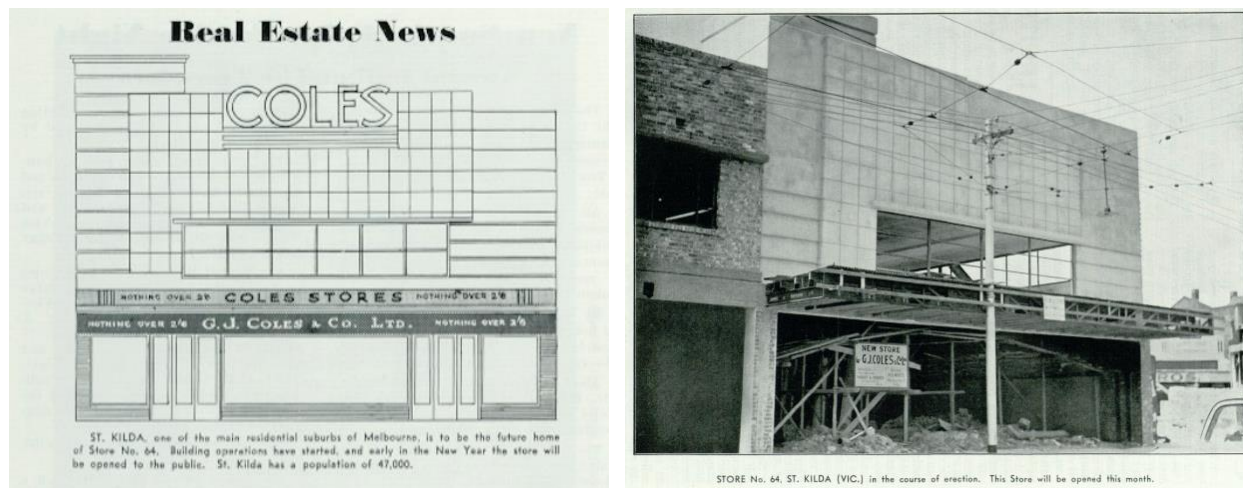

Figure 1: At left, elevation of St Kilda Store No.64; At right, the store under construction. Below, the Acland Street elevation of the store soon after opening (Source: Colesanco Staff Magazine, October 1937, January 1938).

Harry A. Norris

Harry A. Norris (1888-1967) was articled to Ward & Carleton Architects of Melbourne between 1906 and 1911 and by 1920 had established his own rapidly growing practice in Collins Street. One of his first major projects, the Northcote Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall (1922), was designed in the Beaux Arts style, which exerted a strong influence in architectural circles in Victoria at the time (Goad & Willis).

Not long after establishing his own practice, Norris gained two important clients for whom he completed repeated commissions for several decades: retailer G.J. Coles & Co., and pharmaceutical manufacturers George and Alfred Nicholas. In 1928-29, G.J. Coles & Co. sent Norris to the United States of America to investigate chain store architecture. Norris, along with other Melbourne architects of the time, viewed North America as a template for architectural advancement. He participated in further tours of the United States in 1934, 1936 and 1937, studying commercial and industrial architecture. Norris went on to be a local pioneer of department stores and automotive showrooms. He designed and altered many stores for Coles in Melbourne and suburbs, as well as rural centres in Victoria and interstate Coles stores in New South Wales and South Australia (Goad & Willis).

Norris was also employed by the Nicholas family on a variety of projects including the speculative office and retail building known as the Nicholas Building (1925-26), the rural retreat Burnham Beeches (1930-33) in the Dandenong Ranges and the Vice Chancellors House at the University of Melbourne (1937). By the 1930s Norris had become a leading designer of modern, large scale commercial and retail buildings in Melbourne.

Notable buildings designed by Norris in the Moderne style included Foy and Gibson's Store (1935) on Bourke Street, Melford Motors (1937 and 1955 additions) on Elizabeth Street, Mitchell House (1936-7) on Elizabeth Street and the Capitol Bakery (1937) in South Yarra. During WWII Norris assisted in a national building and housing program and was advisory architect to the War Damage Commission.

Norris continued to practice after the war, but with limited output. In 1954, Norris renamed his firm the Office of Harry A. Norris. Three years later, the name of the firm changed again to Harry A & Frank L Norris after his youngest brother, Frank Leonard Norris (1903-1976) was elevated to partnership.

References

Colesandco Staff Journals

G.J. Coles & Coy Ltd, 'Golden Jubilee Report 1914-1964' (Records of Coles Myer held by SLV)

Goad, Phillip & Willis, Julie (eds.), *The encyclopedia of Australian architecture*, CUP, Port Melbourne 2012

Port Phillip Thematic Environmental History (TEH) Version 1, July 2020

St. Kilda Council building permits (BP): 9712, 16 June 1937 (Market, Coles store, shops); 9861, 4 February 1938 (installation of two neon signs)

Description

The former Coles Store No.64 is an interwar commercial building in the Moderne style. Unusually, it has two frontages with different facades to each.

The Acland Street elevation is asymmetrically massed and detailed with a taller feature at left that extends above the parapet. Projecting slightly forward of the front wall and placed off centre is a shallow bay with a grid pattern that has an off-centre cut out (that originally contained the Coles sign) and a metal framed horizontal window that extends to the edge of the bay at right and has a shallow flat hood. The windows have horizontal glazing bars that align with the lines of the grid pattern and the incised 'speed lines' to the main wall either side. The shopfront is symmetrical with two entrances and retains the original metal windows with curved corners, black tiles to the stallboards, and patterned terrazzo floors to the ingos. The soffit to the awning appears to be original. Above the awning is a metal sculpture work by local artist, Greg Irvine.

The Barkly Street elevation is symmetrical. Here the gridded feature extends above the parapet and has a central cut-out that once contained the Coles sign. The window extends the full width of the gridded bay and is divided into four bays by half-circular pilasters with incised lines that align with the horizontal glazing bars of the two inner windows. The outer windows are of a different design and include inward opening hoppers on the left side. The shopfront on this side retains what appears to be original metal framing, but the entry door has been partially enclosed. The awning soffit appears to be original.

Internally, there is original decorative plaster ceiling decoration including coved cornices with incised detailing and decorative vents.

The building is in good condition and has good integrity. The most significant external change has been the removal of the original Coles signage from the parapets to both Acland Street and Barkly Street. The are some alterations to the shopfronts to Acland and Barkly Street, including the replacement of original curved glass with faceted glass.

Comparative analysis

While the 'flagship' Coles Store at 299-307 Bourke Street, Melbourne survives, most of the interwar suburban Coles variety stores have been demolished or altered beyond recognition. Store No.1 in Smith Street was recently demolished, and the façade rebuilt, but in a different location. In Port Phillip, there was a Coles Store in Clarendon Street, but it was established within an existing Victorian era shop and the façade has since been altered.

The design of this Coles store also appears unique amongst the stores of the period. Most were in the Moderne style with symmetrical façade elevations (Figure 2). St Kilda Store No.64 is distinguished by the asymmetrical massing of the façade, and for having two frontages, with a secondary façade in the Moderne style (with a symmetrical form) to Barkly Street. Overall, the store has a high degree of integrity which includes the original shopfronts to Acland Street, and the original decorative plaster ceiling details.
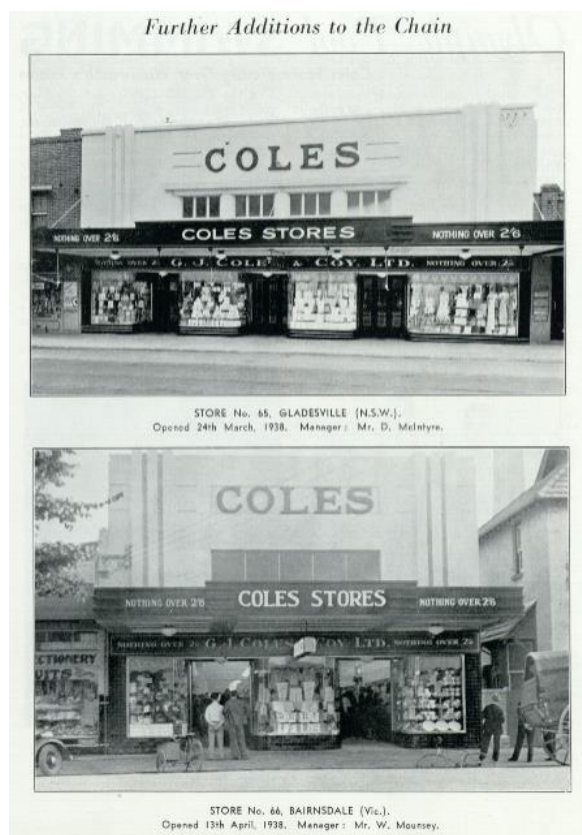

Figure 2: Typical examples of 1930s Coles stores with symmetrical facades (Source: Colesanco December 1937)

Assessment

This place has been assessed in accordance with the processes and guidelines outlined in the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for Places of Cultural Heritage Significance* (The Burra Charter) 2013, using the Hercon criteria.

Recommendations

2022: Remove from the HO7 precinct heritage overlay and include within an individual HO with interior controls.

1998: Include in the schedule to the Heritage Overlay Table in the Port Phillip Planning Scheme.

Primary source

City of Port Phillip, *HO7 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2: Review of existing heritage citations (Part 2)*, 2022

Other studies

Andrew Ward & Associates, *City of Port Phillip Heritage Review*, 1998

Other images

Barkly Street elevation and shopfront

Original shopfronts to Acland, showing (at right) terrazzo floor to the ingos (covered by mat in left image)