

SUMMARY OF STATE HERITAGE PLACE

Entry in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with s14(1)(a) of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

NAME: Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store **PLACE NO.:** 26589

ADDRESS: Karna Country

112-118 Rundle Mall

Adelaide SA 5000

CT 5886/22 FP112182 A3; CT 5886/24 FP112182 A4; CT 6129/288 FP112189 A1; Charles Street Road Reserve and Rundle Mall Road Reserve awning attached to G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store, Hundred of Adelaide

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store demonstrates how city department stores transformed the way South Australian's shopped from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, playing a key role in the rise of mass consumption. Since c.1960, many city department stores have been demolished, making it an uncommon surviving example. Designed by Melbourne architect Harry Norris and completed in 1940, the Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store demonstrates a creative adaptation of available materials and technology of the period and was one of the first in South Australia to employ steel and reinforced concrete to support a non-loadbearing, wraparound façade that appeared to 'float' above ground-floor shopfronts. It is also an outstanding example of functionalist architecture in South Australia, demonstrating many key attributes of the style notably horizontal emphasis, rounded corners, wide-span ribbon windows, de-emphasised columns, metal window frames and faience facing.

RELEVANT CRITERIA (under section 16 of the Heritage Places Act 1993)

(a) it demonstrates important aspects of the evolution or pattern of the State's history

City department stores, such as the Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store, transformed the way that South Australians shopped during the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries and contributed substantially to the emergence of mass consumption in this state, fostering consumerism through mass branding and advertising, innovative approaches to merchandising and sales, impressive exteriors, lavish interior fitouts and amenities designed to keep shoppers inside the store for as long as possible. City department stores rose to their greatest levels of scale, sophistication and prestige prior to c.1960.

Many city department stores modernised or built new premises during the interwar period to remain up-to-date with technological and aesthetic advances. Purpose-built in 1940, the Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store demonstrates the role that department stores played in fostering mass consumption through its imposing exterior, considered to have been aesthetically advanced for its time, which remains highly intact and demonstrates high integrity.

(b) it has rare, uncommon or endangered qualities that are of cultural significance

The Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store on Rundle Mall is an uncommon example of the city department stores that once thrived in Adelaide and changed how South Australians shopped by bringing together a diverse range of mass-produced and inexpensive merchandise under one roof, organised into 'departments'. The development of city department stores is considered to have begun with Charles Birks and John Martin & Co. in 1878 and rose to their greatest levels of scale, sophistication and prestige during the twentieth century prior to the mid-1960s.

City department stores, such as the Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store, transformed the way South Australians shopped during the first half of the twentieth century and contributed substantially to the emergence of mass consumption in this state. They fostered consumerism through mass branding and advertising, innovative approaches to merchandising and sales, impressive exteriors, lavish interior fitouts and retail-adjacent attractions and amenities, designed to attract customers and, once inside, to keep them shopping for as long as possible.

Many notable stores have since been demolished or substantially altered including notable stores of state significance such as James Marshall's, later the Myer Emporium in Rundle Mall (demolished 1991), the John Martin's Rundle Mall store (demolished 1999) and Harris Scarfe's Rundle Mall store (demolished 2011).

None remain as department stores. Those that survive, such as the Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store, have been repurposed and substantially modified internally, and are under threat of redevelopment due to the prominent locations they occupy. Compared to other places with substantially the same association, the Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store demonstrates high integrity.

(e) it demonstrates a high degree of creative, aesthetic or technical accomplishment or is an outstanding representative of particular construction techniques or design characteristics

The Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store, designed in 1940 by Melbourne architect Harry Norris, demonstrates a creative adaptation of the available materials and technology of the period, employing steel and reinforced concrete to support an integrated, wraparound façade to the southern and western street elevations. This curtain wall was one of the first in South Australia to deliberately express its non-loadbearing nature by eschewing vertical façade elements. While previous non-loadbearing walls were disguised to resemble traditional loadbearing masonry, the Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide store dispensed with traditional features such as columns, pilasters, cornices and ashlar detailing, instead employing steel and reinforced concrete to achieve unusually wide spans. This approach is most evident in the ribbon window openings on the southern elevation, which contribute to the dominant horizontal emphasis of the exterior. As designed, the upper storeys of the store appeared to 'float' weightlessly above the glass ground-floor shopfronts.

The Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store is also an outstanding example of functionalist architecture in South Australia finely articulating many of the key attributes of the style, namely,

- asymmetrical massing,
- building located on a corner site, exploiting three-dimensional expression,
- steel and reinforced concrete employed to achieve wide spans,
- horizontal emphasis, reflecting the organisation of the building into horizontal floors,
- vertical contrasting elements, notably in the proportions of steel window frames,
- rounded corners,
- columns de-emphasised and placed behind glass on the southern elevation,
- long horizontal spandrels,
- ribbon windows in horizontal bands, employed to create a sense of weightlessness,
- large areas of glass,
- metal window frames,

- flat roof, concealed by a parapet
- cantilevered hood over third-floor windows,
- faience facing,
- deliberate avoidance of applied ornamentation,
- parallel line motif, employed to emphasise horizontality.

Externally, the former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store remains highly intact. Modifications such as the replacement of ground-floor shopfronts, replacement of awning cladding, removal of roof-mounted flagpoles and the removal and replacement of original signage have not compromised the integrity of the building's architectural expression, nor diminished its ability to illustrate the main attributes of functionalist architecture. Notably, the non-loadbearing, faience-clad façade and metal window frames remain substantially intact and demonstrate functionalist architecture to an outstanding degree.

SITE PLAN, PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION & ELEMENTS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Entry in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with s14(2)(a) of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store

PLACE NO.: 26589

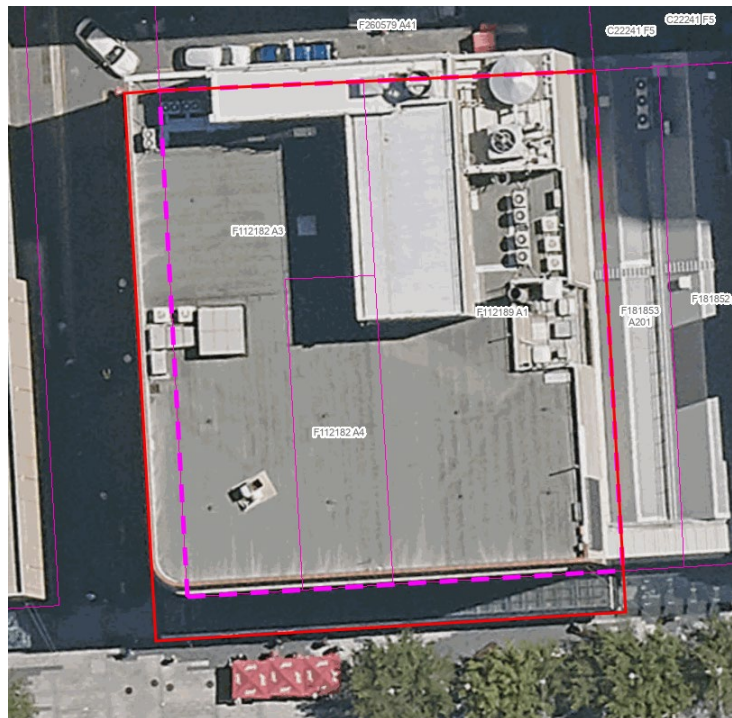
112-118 Rundle Mall, Adelaide

Elements of heritage significance:

- Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store,
- steel and reinforced concrete structural system, including oversized steel joists,
- Rundle and Charles Street elevations faced in Wunderlich Ceramic Facing,
- metal-framed windows,
- cantilevered awning structure,
- internal staircases.

Elements not considered to contribute to significance of place:


- post-1984 interior elements and services,
- awning cladding,
- cladding to northern elevation,
- shopfronts,
- signage.




Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store (CT 5886/22 A3 FP112182; CT 5886/24 A4 FP112182; CT 6129/288 A1 FP112189 Charles Street Road Reserve and Rundle Mall Road Reserve awning attached to Former G.J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store Hundred of Adelaide)

LEGEND

N ↑

 Parcel boundaries (Indicates extent of Listing)

 Existing State Heritage Place(s)

 Outline of Elements of Significance for State Heritage Place – Red outline is indicative of elements of significance, noting imperfect alignment of aerial imagery with parcel cadastre. The suspended awning attached to the southern and western elevations of the building overhangs the airspace, respectively of Rundle Mall and Charles Place.

Physical Description

The Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store is a steel and reinforced concrete-framed building with four above-ground stories and a basement. It stands on the northeastern corner of Rundle Mall and Charles Street. Two-storey shops adjoin the property on the eastern side and there is a laneway, previously known as Charles Place, on the northern side. The building's reinforced concrete stair and lift core, located at the northern end of the building, rises two storeys above the building's flat roof.

Exterior features include:

- steel cantilevered awning structure over Rundle and Charles Street footpaths (current cladding not significant fabric),
- seamless wraparound façade to Rundle and Charles Street elevations above awning, curved at northwestern corner,
- façade faced in mottled tan Wunderlich ceramic facing, with prominent horizontal rebates between courses, in beige,
- ribbon window openings spanning most of the width of the Rundle and Charles Street elevations at the first, second and third floor levels,
- ribbon window openings fitted with non-ferrous metal window frames, with vertical pivot sashes and fan sashes above,
- ribbon window openings broken by structural spandrels on Charles Street elevation,
- continuous cantilevered hood, clad in ivory Wunderlich Ceramic Facing, above third floor level ribbon windows, wrapping around corner,
- small rectangular window openings at upper ground floor level to Rundle and Charles Street elevations, above awning (current window coverings and vents not significant fabric),
- flush rendered eastern elevation,
- light court on eastern elevation,
- corrugated steel cladding to northern elevation (not significant fabric),
- deck profile steel to main flat roof (not significant fabric),
- post-2000 era shopfronts to Rundle and Charles Streets (not significant fabric),
- neon signage 'Rundle Central' on corner façade (not significant fabric).

Remaining internal features include:

- terrazzo staircases with welded steel balustrades, tiled walls and timber handrails in northwestern and northeastern corners,
- remnant terrazzo flooring to first floor,
- remnant fibrous plaster ceiling and wall decoration.

Elements of Significance:

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- metal-framed windows,
- cantilevered awning structure,
- internal staircases.

Elements not considered to contribute to significance of place include:

- post-1984 interior elements and services,
- awning cladding,
- cladding to northern elevation,
- shopfronts,
- signage.

HISTORY, CHRONOLOGY, SITE DETAILS & PHOTOGRAPHS

Other information held in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with s14(6) of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*.

History of the Place

Department Stores in South Australia¹

Across Australia, markets for food and goods were established in all colonial settlements soon after their establishment. By the 1840s, Adelaide had numerous stores, shops and warehouses focussed on Rundle, Hindley and Grenfell Streets. By 1862, Adelaide supported 822 shops, many of which specialised in certain types of goods, while fresh food and groceries were available from the East End and Central markets.²

Drapers, bootmakers, chemists, cabinetmakers, milliners, jewellers, fruiterers, grocers, butchers and bakers lined the streets of town and village centres. Non-perishable goods such as those required for the household, farm and garden were supplied by importers and merchants to smaller retailers from warehouses. Several of these were located in Adelaide, with others at Port Adelaide. Many importers would also sell retail merchandise from showrooms at the front of their warehouses.³

Shops became concentrated along main streets, such as Norwood Parade in Norwood, and Jetty Road in Glenelg, which became bustling hubs for local shoppers. For those living further away from towns, hawkers would visit, offering a range of goods from their carts. Later, shopping arcades, which enabled shoppers to remain out of the elements while making purchases from a variety of small retailers, became popular in Britain during the early nineteenth century. They were built as entrepreneurial endeavours and predominantly attracted middle-class consumers.⁴ In South Australia, Adelaide Arcade (SHP 10795) was designed by local architects Withall and Wells in 1885 and remains an early example of the type.⁵

Stores carrying a wide range of goods were often known as 'universal providers'. The transition from 'universal provider' to 'department store' occurred from the late nineteenth into the early twentieth century, and followed trends begun overseas in Britain, Europe and the United States of America (USA). The physical form of emerging department stores drew upon several existing building types, namely the warehouse, shopping arcade and exhibition building.⁶

Department stores sold a diverse range of merchandise, all housed under one roof and organised into distinct sections known as departments. This merchandise was typically mass-produced, which kept prices low. These two factors contributed substantially to the emergence of mass consumption by the early twentieth century and fostered a consumer ethos through 'mass advertising and branding, new

merchandising and sales methods, lavish interiors and attractive amenities.¹⁷ A key development in department store merchandising was the emergence of fixed and ticketed pricing instead of haggling, which had previously defined the selling transaction. The inspection of merchandise and the ability to examine products without the help of a sales assistant, and without pressure to purchase, was another innovation that department stores introduced.⁸

Department stores emerged in South Australia in the late nineteenth century following trends begun overseas in Europe and the USA. Most of the state's department stores began as draperies, such as John Martin's and Charles Moore's; import businesses such as Craven's; or ironmongers and hardware specialists such as Harris Scarfe.⁹

In Adelaide, Rundle Street between King William and Pultney Streets developed into the city's premier shopping street during the late nineteenth century. During the twentieth century, it became home to most of the city's large department stores.¹⁰

As elsewhere, the interiors of South Australian department stores typically comprised large, open spaces fitted out by interior designers, decorators and display experts. Attractions and amenities offered by South Australian department stores and designed to supplement the retail experience included cafeterias or restaurants, live music, fashion parades, beauty salons and even fun fairs. All were designed to lure customers into the store and once inside, to keep them there for as long as possible.¹¹ Amenities such as cafeterias encouraged socialising as well as shopping within department stores, leading customers to spend more time in the retail environment and in turn, to spend more money in-store.¹²

During the interwar period, Australian businesses increasingly looked to the USA for its innovations in advertising, architecture and design, technology merchandising, industrial relations, and other commercial practices. Technological innovations introduced during this time included pneumatic tube transport systems, flying fox change dispensers, escalators and lifts, for effectively moving people, money, stock around the store. Mechanical air-conditioning systems were also introduced.

Many older department stores were substantially expanded and/or modernised during the interwar period. For example, Harris Scarfe, located between Rundle Street, Grenfell Street and Gawler Place, constructed new buildings in 1923 and 1929 and modernised existing buildings in 1937 and 1939;¹³ Miller Anderson constructed a large new five-storey extension in 1922;¹⁴ and John Martins substantially rebuilt and modernised its 1885-1889-built 'Big Store' in 1934-1935, resulting in an imposing structure with an impressive new Art Deco-style façade to Rundle Street.¹⁵

The beginning of the postwar period marked a turning point for department stores. After the Second World War, the Town Planning Committee proposed a five-tier hierarchy of shopping centres for the Adelaide metropolitan area. The tiers comprised the central (city) shopping area, major suburban centres, secondary centres, minor centres and local centres. The major suburban centres included those at Elizabeth,

Kilkenny, Marion, Modbury, Noarlunga and West Lakes. The development of suburban shopping centres was facilitated by the rapid growth of private motor vehicle ownership in the postwar period, and each centre was surrounded by carparking.¹⁶

Most of the new department stores opened in South Australia after the Second World War served as anchor tenancies in suburban shopping centres, and often there was more than one in each centre. This new approach marked departures both in terms of the location of stores, away from the city centre, and in terms the physical form of stores. Previously, the owners of department stores typically owned the land on which stores were built, and the architecture of purpose-built stores could be tailored to the precise needs of the business. Afterwards, stores rented premises within a pre-existing external envelope, with ramifications for both their built forms and business models. Notably, some amenities such as cafeterias were no longer located in-store. Meanwhile, South Australia's first supermarkets opened from 1953 and were commonplace in the suburbs by the early 1960s,¹⁷ with implications for the range of merchandise offered by department stores. Viewed more broadly, the long postwar economic boom completely transformed consumerism in South Australia.

Large city department stores were unable to compete with the development of suburban shopping centres and supermarkets and began a slow decline from the early 1960s.¹⁸ To counter the loss of shoppers from the city centre, Rundle Street between King William and Pultney Streets was developed into a paved pedestrian mall, opening on 1 September 1976.¹⁹ The opening of Rundle Mall consolidated the dominance of retail trading in the immediate locality and it remains the focus of the city centre's retail precinct.

Nevertheless, most of the large early twentieth-century department stores closed during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Notably, G. J. Coles & Company's Adelaide Store closed in 1984 (see below); David Jones and John Martins, both owned by David Jones were consolidated in 1998, with John Martin's ceasing trading and a new David Jones store built on the old John Martin's site; while Harris Scarfe closed in 2011 to enable the store to be demolished in 2012 and a new retail complex, including a Harris Scarfe store, to be erected on the site. Harris Scarfe has since ceased to trade in the city. Meanwhile, the Myer Emporium, previously the James Marshall department store, was demolished to make way for the new Myer Centre, incorporating a Myer department store, which opened in 1991.²⁰

Establishment of G. J. Coles & Company Pty Ltd

G. J. Coles & Company Pty Ltd was founded by George James Coles (later Sir, b. 1885 – d. 1977), a son of storekeeper George Coles. In 1910, Coles bought his father's shop at St James in country Victoria. Later he travelled to Britain and the USA and was impressed by the 'five and dime stores' commonplace in the latter country. In 1914, with his brothers James (Jim) Scourer (b. 1888 – d. 1916) and Arthur William (later Sir, b. 1892 – 1982), Coles opened a variety store in Smith Street, Collingwood, a suburb of Melbourne, employing some of the ideas he encountered overseas.²¹ Notably, Coles

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Provisionally entered by the South Australian Heritage Council on 11 December 2025

Confirmed by the South Australian Heritage Council on 30 April 2026

focussed on the sale of inexpensive goods, advertising 'nothing over 2/- in this store' on his Collingwood shopfront. This policy was later revised to 'nothing over 2/6d.'²²

Coles' innovative approach to retail proved highly successful and the brothers' business prospered. In 1919, Coles opened a much larger store in Collingwood and in 1921, G. J. Coles & Company Pty Ltd was established (hereafter G. J. Coles & Company). In 1924, the company opened its first city store in Bourke Street, Melbourne, and by 1927, owned 9 stores in Victoria. During that year, the company was floated on the Melbourne Stock Exchange and in 1928, the company's first interstate store was opened in Pitt Street, Sydney. G. J. Coles & Company expanded rapidly during the 1930s, despite the Great Depression, and Coles stores existed in all Australian states by 1933. In September 1939, J. G. Coles & Company operated 86 stores nationally.²³ Throughout the interwar period, J. G. Coles & Company sought to facilitate a strong company culture among its staff through various means including provision of staff amenities and recreational facilities, a calendar of social events, and publication of a monthly staff magazine, *COLESANCO*.²⁴

Coles in South Australia

On 2 November 1931, G. J. Coles & Company announced it would extend its chain of stores to South Australia.²⁵ The first South Australian Coles store, known internally as Store No. 23, was located in Rundle House, 116 – 118 Rundle Street, Adelaide, which was a relatively new, modern building completed in 1928. G. J. Coles & Company nevertheless spent around £11,000 refitting Rundle House, including a new interior, electrical and ventilation plant and a cafeteria on the third floor.²⁶ The first Adelaide Coles store was officially opened on 3 March 1932, employing '150 girls and 20 men'.²⁷ In 1937, another South Australian G. J. Coles & Company store was opened in a remodelled building in St Vincent Street, Port Adelaide,²⁸ and a new store was built in Mount Gambier during 1939.²⁹

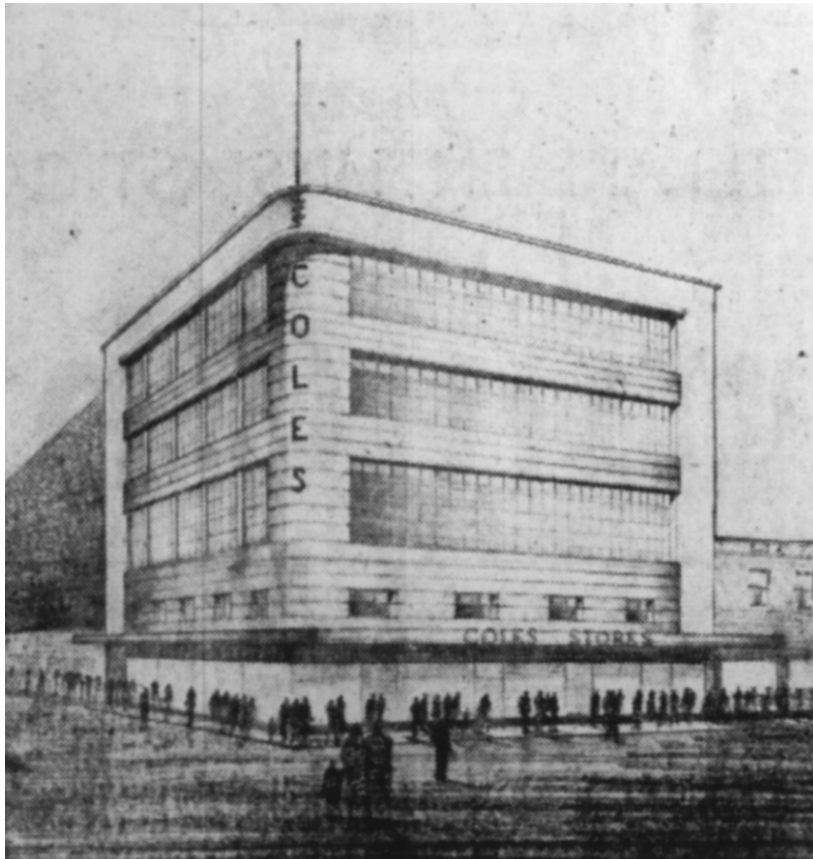
G. J. Coles & Company's new Adelaide Store

In November 1936, Woolworths Ltd, which operated price-limited variety stores similar to those of G. J. Coles & Company, opened its first South Australian store in a modern, purpose-built building at 82-84 Rundle Street.³⁰ The establishment of a key market rival nearby Coles' Adelaide store likely spurred G. J. Coles & Company to consider rebuilding its Adelaide premises, perhaps in order to appear more progressive than Woolworths.

In June 1939, G. J. Coles & Company paid £155,000 for two properties in Rundle Street, namely its own leasehold premises at Rundle House and the adjoining Central Chambers, on the corner of Charles Street. At the time, the sale was one of the largest real estate transactions ever recorded in Adelaide.³¹ On 15 December, G. J. Coles & Company announced plans to build a new four-storey store on its newly-acquired site.³² Demolition began on 7 January 1940, with construction of the new store scheduled to begin on 1 March and completion expected by Christmas that year.³³

During construction of the new store, temporary premises existed at 86 Rundle Street, Adelaide.³⁴

G. J. Coles & Company commissioned Melbourne architectural firm, the Office of Harry A. Norris, Architects, to design the new Adelaide store. Harry Albert Norris (b. 1888 – d. 1966)³⁵ was an innovative Victorian architect who played a key role in introducing the Art Deco and streamlined architectural styles into Australia during the early 1930s, having been informed by regular visits to the USA.³⁶ Norris' firm appears to have handled most of G. J. Coles & Company's architectural work from the mid-1920s onwards,³⁷ including the large Bourke Street, Melbourne, Coles store, completed in March 1930.³⁸ The Bourke Street store was one of the earliest Art Deco-style buildings to be designed and completed in Australia,³⁹ and much of Norris' subsequent work for G. J. Coles and Co, including the Adelaide store, was designed in a modern idiom.⁴⁰ Norris specifically visited the USA in 1929 to investigate chain store architecture for G. J. Coles & Company.⁴¹



Perspective rendering of the proposed G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store

Source: 'New Building For G. J. Coles, Ltd.' in *Advertiser* 15 December 1939 p. 24

Norris designed the Adelaide store with four stories and a basement. The basement and ground floor comprised open retail space, with fixed serving counters arranged around the perimeter and as islands in rows across the floors. The first floor contained a 'modern, hygienic'⁴² cafeteria, including a soda fountain, accommodating 280;⁴³ a 'Ladies' Lounge' fitted with telephones;⁴⁴ and staff facilities for women, including a

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large dining room and lounge on a similar scale to the public café, separate locker rooms for retail and café staff,⁴⁵ and a sickbay.⁴⁶ The second floor contained the manager's and state offices; separate staff facilities for men; a climate-controlled confectionary storeroom; and stock storage. The third floor, with an area of 14,300 square feet, was devoted entirely to stock storage.⁴⁷

The structural steel and reinforced concrete structure of the store, designed by Melbourne structural engineer Clive S. Steele, was engineered to support two additional stories if necessary, allowing for future expansion.⁴⁸ To this end, the store's reinforced concrete stair and lift core continued upwards a full two storeys above the third floor. An associated structure on the roof, rising to a similar height, comprised a large air conditioning, cooling and purifying plant. It supplied 40,000 cubic feet of cleansed air to the lower floors every minute.⁴⁹ The remainder of the roof had a bituminous felt surface and was laid out with 'garden seats' for staff recreation.⁵⁰ Circulation between floors was facilitated by three stairwells, a large passenger elevator, and the first two-way escalators to be installed in South Australia, located between the ground floor and basement, which could be reversed to cater for 'peak rushes'.⁵¹

To carry the floors, Norris employed larger-than-usual steel joists, which were concealed in the ceilings. These joists were supported mid-span by only four internal columns.⁵² This approach maximised the sense of openness experienced by customers visiting the basement, ground and first floors; improved internal circulation; and allowed a less restrictive arrangement of spaces than was typical for multi-storey buildings of the time.⁵³ Norris had previously employed a similar solution when designing the Bourke Street, Melbourne store.⁵⁴ With a total floor area of 54,000 square feet,⁵⁵ the new Rundle Street building approximately doubled the size of Coles' previous Adelaide premises.⁵⁶

Norris designed a seamless, curved, 'functionalist' façade for the Rundle and Charles Street elevations.⁵⁷ The non-loadbearing external walls of the store were executed in reinforced concrete and faced in mottled tan Wunderlich Ceramic Facing, a faience tile product, with prominent horizontal rebates between courses, in beige.⁵⁸ The tiles were secured to grout backing by copper cramps, turned up and down into slots on the edges of the blocks. At the first, second and third floor levels, Norris provided long window openings extending most of the length of both façade elevations, unbroken by structural support on the southern elevation, and containing metal window frames. Above the third-floor windows, he provided a continuous cantilevered hood, clad in ivory Wunderlich Ceramic Facing, and above the footpath, a cantilevered awning clad in streamlined pressed metal. These dominant horizontal elements made a bold statement of modernity on Rundle Street, especially when compared with surrounding buildings in earlier styles, including the vertically-dominant Art Deco façade of the John Martin & Company Limited department store on the opposite side of Charles Street, completed in 1935.

On the corner, large neon-lined porcelain letters spelled the name 'COLES'. Another vertical neon sign was located on the eastern end of the Rundle Street elevation. At street level, Norris provided four entrances from Rundle Street, with artificially illuminated island display cases, along with a single entrance on Charles Street, flanked by shallow show windows.⁵⁹

Norris' façade for the G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store was one of the first South Australian examples of a non-loadbearing curtain wall deliberately expressed as such by eschewing the use of vertical façade elements. Until that time, most had been disguised to resemble traditional, load-bearing masonry with features such as columns, pilasters and cornices.

Table 1: Notable subcontractors and suppliers associated with the construction of the G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store⁶⁰

- Forwood, Down & Co Limited; structural steel
- Wunderlich Ltd, Adelaide; 'Terra Cotta' faience façade, manufacturer
- Clarkson Limited, Adelaide; plate glass and shop fronts
- A. E. Atherton & Sons Pty Ltd, Melbourne, heating and air conditioning engineers, plumbers and coppersmiths; mechanical ventilation system, sterilizing kitchen and cafeteria equipment
- Wormald Bros Pty Ltd, Adelaide; fire protection supply and installation
- Malcolm Moore Ltd, Melbourne and Sydney, in association with J. & E. Hall Ltd, Dartford, England, and local representatives Power Plant Ltd, Currie Street; escalator manufacture and installation
- Waygood-Otis (Aust.) Pty Ltd; lift installation
- Oliver J. Nilsen, Electrical Engineers, Gawler Place; electrical installation
- Mosaic Terrazzo & Granolithic Specialty Flooring Co, Parkside; terrazzo, paving and staircases, walling and divisional slabs to lavatories
- Hallweld Limited, Norwood; balustrade to stairs
- Alan W. Dexter Decorating Co, Toorak, Victoria; painting and decorating

Built at a cost of £80,000,⁶¹ the G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store opened on 14 November 1940. 'Thousands' reportedly arrived before opening time, crowds blocked Charles Street, and when the store filled to capacity, queued shoppers were 'admitted in small relays.'⁶² At the time of opening, the store housed 21 departments selling a wide range of inexpensive goods including food, clothing, appliances, homewares, stationary, garden supplies and toys.⁶³

Table 2: G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store: departments at time of opening⁶⁴

Basement

- drapery
- women's and children's clothing
- haberdashery
- wool
- hosiery
- crockery and glassware
- hardware
- electrical goods
- toys

Ground Floor

- confectionary
- men's requisites
- hosiery and fashion goods
- jewellery and fancy goods
- toilets
- men's and boy's wear
- garden
- stationary
- music
- cakes
- delicatessen
- groceries



G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store shortly after opening, c.1940.

Source: Ramsay's Standard Catalogue Service Pty Ltd, *Ramsay's Catalogue 1941*

Postwar and afterwards

In 1959, the original shopfronts fronting Rundle and Charles Streets were replaced.⁶⁵ In August 1984, G. J. Coles & Company announced the closure of its Adelaide store, due to ageing facilities and the high cost of operating in the city centre. The company considered that the retail role of its Adelaide store was 'more than adequately covered' by numerous suburban K Mart and Coles New World Supermarkets and Coles Variety stores which existed by that time, as well as a new proposed Super K Mart store to be located at Port Adelaide.⁶⁶ Closure of the Adelaide store occurred in January 1985.

The interiors of the Adelaide store were subsequently refitted for other purposes. In 1985, the second floor was converted for use as a youth centre for the South Australian

Health Commission. In 1988, Pride Business College converted the third floor for teaching purposes, and in 1999, the College expanded onto the first floor, which it converted to classrooms and offices.⁶⁷ During these conversions, most of the original interiors were lost, with the exception of some stairwells and the basement ceiling.

Additional external changes have included removal of roof-mounted flagpoles, the removal of original external signage, and the replacement of the original awning cladding. Notably, the faience façade and metal window frames remain substantially intact. The Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store was Local Heritage listed on 27 March 2013. In September 2025, the basement was undergoing refitting for retail use, the first floor was vacant, and the second and third floors contained c.2000s office fitouts.

Chronology

| Year | Event |
|------|--|
| 1885 | Birth of George James Coles (later Sir). |
| 1888 | Birth of Harry Albert Norris. |
| 1910 | George James Coles buys his father's shop at St James in country Victoria. |
| 1914 | George James Coles opens a variety store in Smith Street, Collingwood, Melbourne with his brothers James and Arthur. |
| 1919 | Coles opens a much larger store in Collingwood, Melbourne. |
| 1921 | G. J. Coles & Company Pty Ltd is established. |
| 1924 | G. J. Coles & Company opens its first city store in Bourke Street, Melbourne. |
| 1927 | G. J. Coles & Company owns 9 stores in Victoria. G. J. Coles & Company is floated on the Melbourne Stock Exchange. |
| 1928 | Rundle House at 116 – 118 Rundle Street is completed. G. J. Coles & Company's first store outside Victoria is opened in Pitt Street, Sydney. |
| 1929 | Harry Norris visits the USA specifically to investigate chain store architecture for G. J. Coles & Company. |
| 1930 | March: G. J. Coles & Company's large Bourke Street, Melbourne store is completed. |
| 1931 | 2 November: G. J. Coles & Company announces the extension of its chain of stores to South Australia. |
| 1932 | G. J. Coles & Company spends around £11,000 refitting Rundle House with a new interior. 3 March: the first Adelaide Coles store is officially opened. |
| 1933 | G. J. Coles & Company stores exist in all Australian states. |

- 1935 John Martin & Company Limited's renovated Rundle Street department store is completed.
- 1936 5 November, Woolworths (SA) Limited opens an Adelaide store in Rundle Street.
- 1937 G. J. Coles & Company opens a store in a remodelled building in St Vincent Street, Port Adelaide.
- 1939** 17 March, G. J. Coles & Company opens a store in Commercial Street, Mount Gambier.⁶⁸
- June: G. J. Coles & Company pays £155,000 for two properties at 112 – 118 Rundle Street, including Rundle House and neighbouring Central Chambers.**
- September: G. J. Coles & Company operates 86 stores nationally.
- 30 November: the Office of Harry A. Norris calls tenders for the purchase, demolition and removal of 110 Rundle Street, 112-118 Rundle Street, and 34 Charles Street, Adelaide, due at noon on 6 December.⁶⁹**
- 15 December: G. J. Coles & Company announces plans to build a new four-storey store on its newly acquired land, replacing the existing Rundle House and Central Chambers buildings.**
- G. J. Coles & Company temporarily relocates its Adelaide store to 86 Rundle Street.
- 1940** **7 January: G. J. Coles & Company begins demolishing Rundle House and Central Chambers.**
- 29 February, Harry A. Norris calls tenders for erection of the new G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store, due at 4pm on 12 March.⁷⁰**
- 1 March: G. J. Coles & Company is scheduled to begin building its new Adelaide store.**
- 21 March, Harry. A. Norris announces Fricker Bros. as the successful tenderers for building G. J. Coles & Company's new Adelaide store.⁷¹**
- 14 November: G. J. Coles & Company's Adelaide Store opens.**
- 1953 South Australia's first supermarket is Stop and Shop Limited on Anzac Highway at Morphettville (now demolished).
- c.1960 Original shopfronts fronting Rundle and Charles Streets are replaced.**
- Supermarkets are commonplace in South Australia.
- City department stores begin a slow decline.
- 1962 G. J. Coles & Company opens its first New World Supermarket.
- 1966 Death of Harry Albert Norris.
- 1969 G. J. Coles & Company acquires K Mart stores.
- 1976 1 September: Rundle Mall is opened by the Premier, Don Dunstan.

- 1984 August: G. J. Coles & Company announces the closure of its Adelaide store.**
- 1985 January: G. J. Coles & Company's Adelaide Store closes.**
- 1985 The second floor of the Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store is converted for use as a youth centre for the South Australian Health Commission.**
- G. J. Coles & Company acquires Myer Emporium Ltd to become Australia's largest retailer, Coles Myer Ltd.
- 1986 Super K Mart, owned by G. J. Coles & Company and developed at a cost of \$9 million, opens at Port Adelaide.
- 1988 Pride Business College converts the third floor of the Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store for teaching purposes.**
- 1998 The John Martins and original David Jones Rundle Mall department stores close.
- 1999 Pride Business College expands onto the first floor of the Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store, refitting the space as classrooms and offices.**
- John Martins Rundle Mall department store is demolished to enable construction of a new David Jones store.
- c.2000 Northern elevation clad with corrugated steel to prevent water ingress to wall.
- 2011 Harris Scarfe Rundle Mall closes.
- 2012 Harris Scarfe Rundle Mall is demolished and replaced with a new store.
- 2013 27 March: the Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store receives Local Heritage Listing.**
- 2020 January, Harris Scarfe's new Rundle Mall store closes. Harris Scarfe retains a suburban presence.

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PRG 1712/1/47 SLSA

BRG 305/69/3/1 SLSA

SITE DETAILS

Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store

PLACE NO.: 26589

112-118 Rundle Mall, Adelaide

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| FORMER NAME: | G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store | |
| DESCRIPTION OF PLACE: | Steel and reinforced concrete former department store comprising four stories, basement and cantilevered awning. | |
| HISTORIC THEME/S | <p>4. Building Settlements, Towns and Cities</p> <p>4.7 Marking significant phases in development of SA's settlements, towns and cities (including key town planning initiatives and architectural styles)</p> <p>5. Developing South Australia's economies</p> <p>5.1 Developing South Australia's economy</p> <p>5.9 Supporting workers and workplaces</p> <p>6. Developing Social and Cultural Life (Supporting and building communities)</p> <p>6.5 Participating in sport, leisure and recreation (including eating, drinking and holidays)</p> | |
| DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: | 1940 | |
| REGISTER STATUS: | <p>Nominated: 20 March 2024</p> <p>Provisional Entry: 11 December 2025</p> <p>Confirmed: 30 April 2026</p> | |
| LOCAL HERITAGE STATUS: | Authorised 27 March 2013 | |
| CURRENT USE: | Retail and offices, 1984 – present | |
| PREVIOUS USE(S): | Department store, 1940 – 1984 | |
| ARCHITECT: | Office of Harry A. Norris, Melbourne, 1939 – 1940 | |
| BUILDER: | Fricker Bros., Builders and Contractors, Adelaide, 1940 | |
| LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: | City of Adelaide | |
| LOCATION: | Address: | 112-118 Rundle Mall, Adelaide SA 5000 |
| LAND DESCRIPTION: | Title | CT 5886/22 FP112182 A3; CT 5886/24 |
| | Reference: | FP112182 A4; CT 6129/288 FP112189 A1 |

OFFICIAL

Charles Street Road Reserve and
Rundle Mall Road Reserve awning
attached to G. J. Coles & Company
Adelaide Store.

Hundred: Adelaide

PHOTOS

Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store
112-118 Rundle Mall, Adelaide

PLACE NO.: 26589



Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store, 1952, showing original shopfronts.

Source: B 12333 SL5A

Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store
112-118 Rundle Mall, Adelaide

PLACE NO.: 26589



Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store, 1977, note replacement shopfronts.

Source: Adelaide City Council Archives 1258ITEM0013 [06.01]

Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store
112-118 Rundle Mall, Adelaide

PLACE NO.: 26589



Cafeteria interior, c.1941.

Source: Building 24 February 1941 pp. 26-28

Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store
112-118 Rundle Mall, Adelaide

PLACE NO.: 26589

All images in this section are from DEW Files and were taken on 1 September 2025, unless otherwise indicated.



Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store, southwestern corner.



Southwestern corner.

Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store
112-118 Rundle Mall, Adelaide

PLACE NO.: 26589



Southern elevation, note wide spans of ribbon window openings with structural columns behind (columns boxed out with non-original fabric).



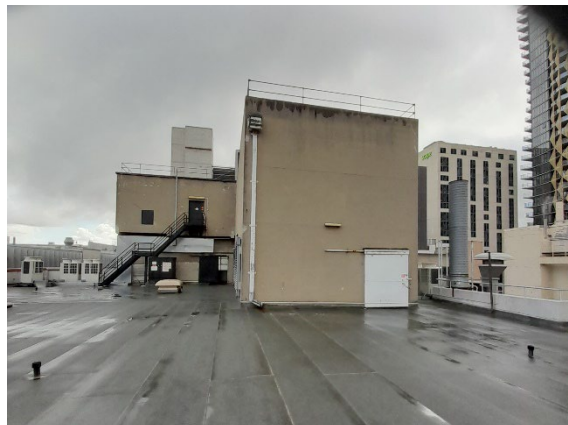
Eastern elevation, note structural columns passing through window openings.

Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store
112-118 Rundle Mall, Adelaide

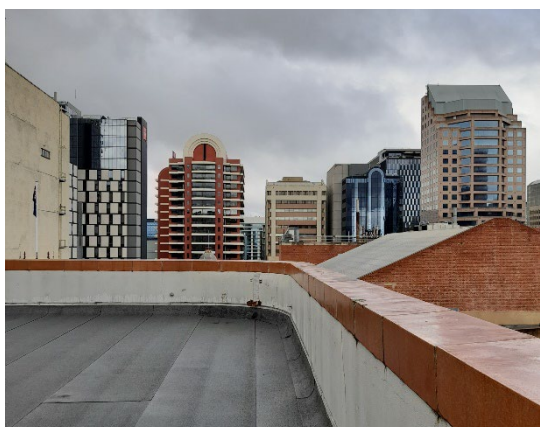
PLACE NO.: 26589



Northern elevation, showing c.2000 cladding.



Original reinforced concrete roof structures.



Roof showing rear of parapet looking south.



Faience capping tile detail.



Original window frame hinge hardware.



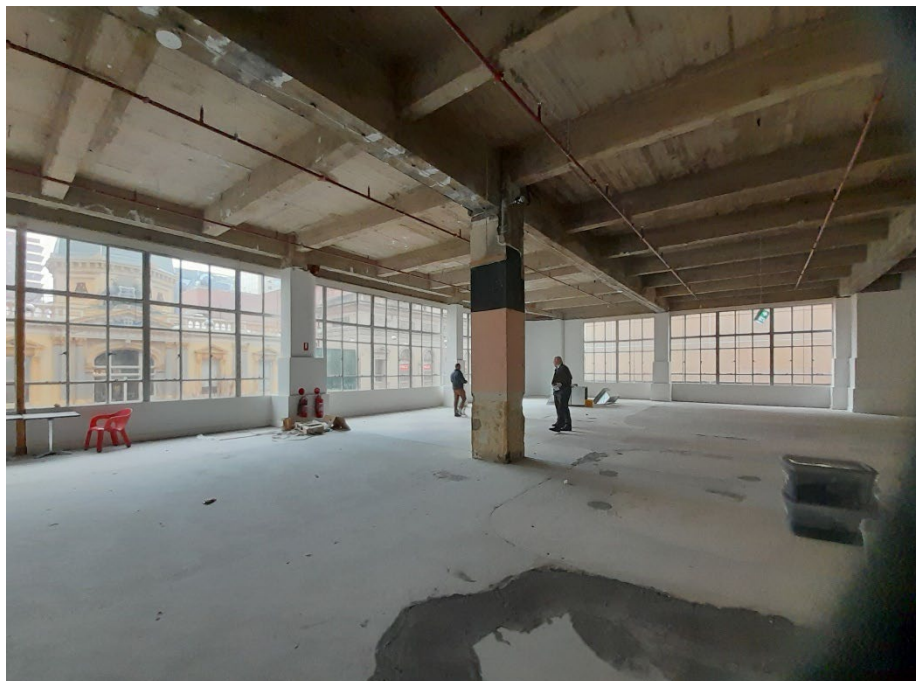
Original non-ferrous metal window frames.

Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store
112-118 Rundle Mall, Adelaide

PLACE NO.: 26589



First floor interior (former cafeteria) looking south.



First floor interior (former cafeteria) looking southwest.

Former G. J. Coles & Company Adelaide Store
112-118 Rundle Mall, Adelaide

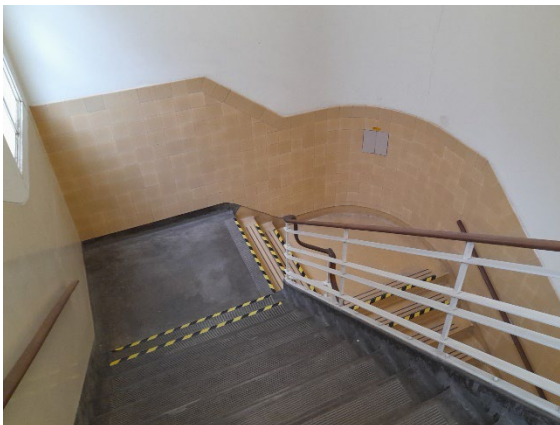
PLACE NO.: 26589



Remnant terrazzo to first floor.



Remnant fibrous plaster ceiling coving to first floor.



Western stairwell showing transition from concrete treads and landing to terrazzo section to lower floors.



Western stairwell balustrade and terrazzo treads and landing.



Remnant fibrous plaster decoration in western stairwell at basement level.



Original tiles and signage in eastern stairwell.

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- ¹ This section is largely adapted from Julie Collins, *Department Store Architecture*
- ² Julie Collins, *Department Store Architecture in South Australia* p. 6
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- ⁴ Nicole J. Davis ‘“One of the sights of the colony”: Australia’s nineteenth-century arcades’ in *History of Retailing and Consumption: Histories of Australian Retailing* Vol 9 Issue 3 (2023); Margaret Anne MacKeith, *History and Conservation of Shopping Arcades, Volume 1* (September 1983) Edinburgh UK: Heriot-Watt University, Department of Architecture; Nicholas Alexander and Anne Marie Doherty, ‘Interinstitutional Shaping of Retail Innovation: The Nineteenth Century Retail Arcade’ in *Business History* Volume 44 Issue 6 (2024)
- ⁵ Julie Collins, *Department Store Architecture in South Australia* p. 6
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- ⁷ Vicki Howard, ‘History of department stores: introduction’ in *History of Retailing and Consumption* Vol. 7 (2021)
- ⁸ Julie Collins, *Department Store Architecture in South Australia* p. 13
- ⁹ Julie Collins, *Department Store Architecture in South Australia* p. 12
- ¹⁰ Julie Collins, *Department Store Architecture in South Australia* p. 19
- ¹¹ Julie Collins, *Department Store Architecture in South Australia* p. 8
- ¹² Julie Collins, *Department Store Architecture in South Australia* p. 16
- ¹³ Julie Collins, *Department Store Architecture in South Australia* p. 39
- ¹⁴ Julie Collins, *Department Store Architecture in South Australia* p. 34
- ¹⁵ Julie Collins, *Department Store Architecture in South Australia* pp. 19-21
- ¹⁶ Louise Bird, *Neighbourhood Shops: park and shop centres in metropolitan Adelaide, 1955-1985* (2018) Adelaide SA: School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Australia p. 24
- ¹⁷ South Australia’s first supermarket, Stop and Shop Limited on Anzac Highway at Morphettville, opened in 1953; <https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/BRG+305/69/3/1>
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- ²¹ Diane Sydenham, ‘Sir George James Coles (1885–1977)’ in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/coles-sir-george-james-9788>
- ²² Coles Myer Ltd – Company Profile, Reference for Business www.referenceforbusiness.com
- ²³ Diane Sydenham, ‘Sir George James Coles (1885–1977)’ in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*
- ²⁴ Such facilities and activities were based upon what historian of political economy Christopher Wright calls ‘welfarism’, a business strategy which become widespread in Australia during the 1920s. Welfarism emerged in response to an increasingly powerful labour movement. Wright notes that welfarism ‘sought to gain the loyalty of the workforce through demonstrations of employer benevolence’. Towards this end, employers offered things like the ‘provision of superior amenities, encouragement of social and recreational activities, profit-sharing schemes, sickness and accident benefits, or company provided services and housing’. Some employers adopted the strategy believing that a ‘contented and healthy workforce ... was also a more productive one’, while others thought it would ‘disseminate managerial values amongst the workforce’ and assist ‘in the promotion of a unitarist workplace culture’. Christopher Wright, *The Management of Labour: A History of Australian Employers* (1995) Melbourne: Oxford University Press p.21.
- ²⁵ ‘New Store for Rundle Street, Melbourne Company to Open in March, Local Employees’ in *News* 2 November 1931 p. 1
- ²⁶ ‘£12,000 to be Spent Here, Christmas Work for Many Men’ in *News* 2 December 1931 p. 1
- ²⁷ ‘10,000 Apply for 170 Jobs’ in *News* 18 February 1932 p. 7

- 28 'Coles Stores Expansion, New Links Decided for Big Chain' in *Sun News-Pictorial* (Melbourne) 9 August 1937 p. 30
- 29 'G. J. Coles Store Takes Shape. Rapid Progress Made.' in *Border Watch* 21 January 1939 p. 3
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- 32 'Big City Land Sale, £155,000 Paid For Two Properties' in *Advertiser* 27 June 1939 p. 18
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- 48 'Adelaide's New Modern Store, G. J. Coles & Co. Ltd.' in *Building* 24 February 1941 pp. 25-28
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- 51 'Coles' Big Streamlined 250,000 Store Will Open on Thursday, Has New Amenities For Shopping Comfort in Adelaide' in *News* 12 November 1940 p. 8
- 52 'Coles' Big Streamlined 250,000 Store Will Open on Thursday, Has New Amenities For Shopping Comfort in Adelaide' in *News* 12 November 1940 p. 8
- 53 'Coles' Big Streamlined 250,000 Store Will Open on Thursday, Has New Amenities For Shopping Comfort in Adelaide' in *News* 12 November 1940 p. 8
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- 55 'Coles' Big Streamlined 250,000 Store Will Open on Thursday, Has New Amenities For Shopping Comfort in Adelaide' in *News* 12 November 1940 p. 8
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- 57 'Coles' Big Streamlined 250,000 Store Will Open on Thursday, Has New Amenities For Shopping Comfort in Adelaide' in *News* 12 November 1940 p. 8
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⁶¹ '£80,000 for New Retail Store at Adelaide, G. J. Coles Building' in *Herald* (Melbourne) 17 January 1940 p. 12

⁶² 'Thousands at Opening of New Coles Store' in *News* 14 November 1940 p. 12; 'Traffic Blocked by Crowds at New City Store' in *News* 14 November 1940 p. 8

⁶³ 'Announcing Coles new Super Store 112-118 Rundle Street, Opens Thursday Nov. 14th' in *News* 12 November 1940 p. 7

⁶⁴ 'Announcing Coles new Super Store 112-118 Rundle Street, Opens Thursday Nov. 14th' in *News* 12 November 1940 p. 7; the meaning of 'men's requisites' is unclear.

⁶⁵ PRG 1712/1/47 SLSA

⁶⁶ 'Coles will close its Rundle Mall store' in *Advertiser* 11 August 1984 p. 3; Port Adelaide Super K Mart ultimately opened in 1986; Brian Samuels, *The Port Adelaide Centre: Past and Present* (1987) Port Adelaide SA: Port Centre Project Office p. 29

⁶⁷ Donovan & Associates, 'City of Adelaide Heritage Survey' (2008)

⁶⁸ COLESANCO Vol XI No. 55 (April 1939) p. 6

⁶⁹ 'Tenders Called' in *Builder* 30 November 1939 p. 11

⁷⁰ 'Tenders Called' in *Builder* 29 February 1940 p. 11

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