

HERITAGE CONSERVATION PRACTICE NOTES



HERITAGE DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINE

2.2

ADVERTISING AND SIGNS ON HERITAGE BUILDINGS IN S.A.



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Cover photo: *Waymouth St. Adelaide, 17 August 1939*
(SSL : M B8751)

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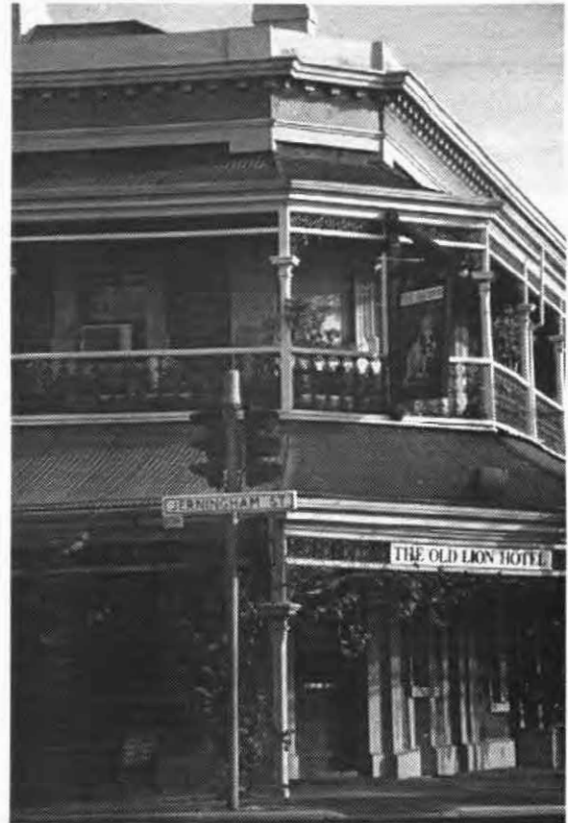
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INTRODUCTION

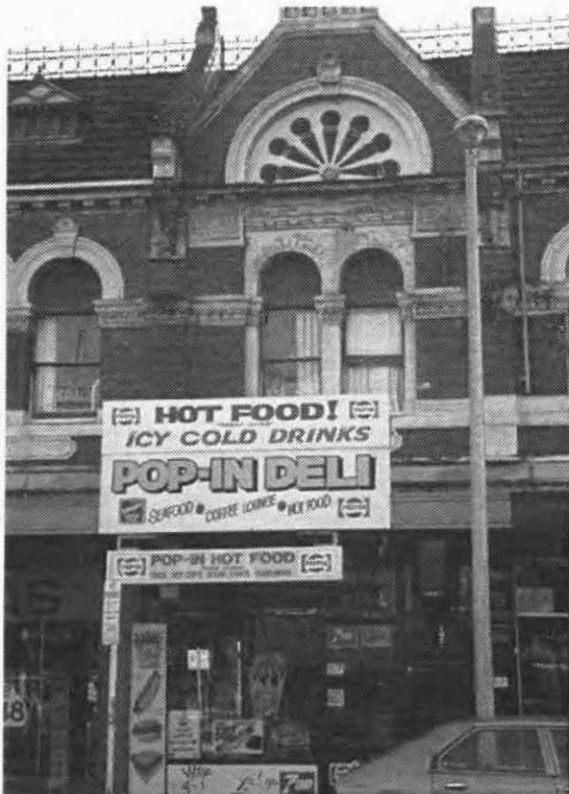
These guidelines have been prepared mainly to assist owners and managers of heritage properties to take an informed and sensitive approach when planning for new signs and advertising. These standards and guidelines are also appropriate to situations in which historic buildings, streetscapes or areas are involved.

Advertisements and signs fulfil an important commercial and social function, by identifying and promoting particular shops, services, products and events. Their design can either enhance or detract from the character of streetscapes and shopfronts.

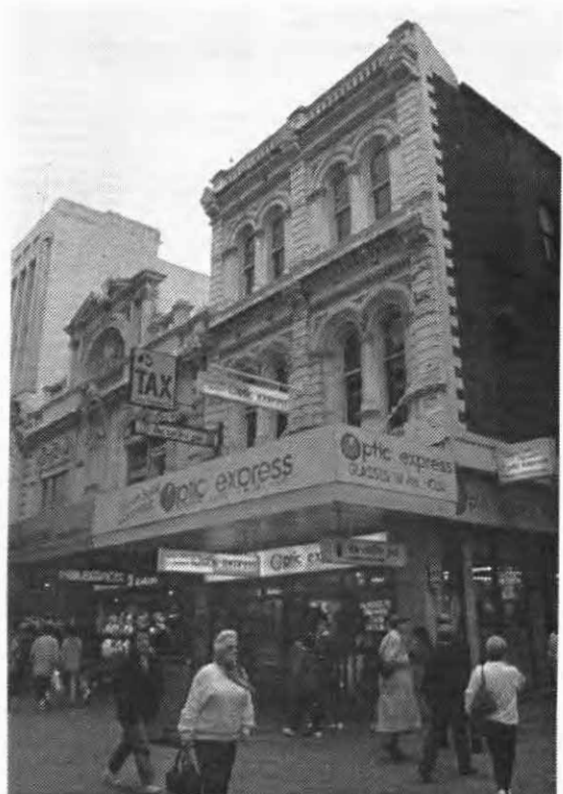
Unfortunately many of South Australia's towns and cities are disfigured by inappropriate, ugly signs, which, by crying for attention and competing with each other, ironically defeat their own purposes.



The new signage is sensitively designed and respects the building's character.



Too much information is confusing and generates clutter.



The signage does not respect the building's character and architectural features.



The signage does not respect the building's character and architectural features Hindley St. Adelaide (ACCHS)



The sign is definitely contemporary but the design is compatible with the building.

Signs which are not sensitive to the history and architecture of the building on which they are placed tend to be too obtrusive. They can degrade the attractiveness of that building.

New signs and advertising should not only be compatible with the character of the building but also aim to reflect the spirit of how signs were originally placed on that building particularly in terms of **scale**, **position** and **type** (applied, projecting, free standing etc.).

New advertising does not have to be 'olde worlde' but should fit into the visual and historical context of the building. This



The East End market in Adelaide is an example of a well designed complex with well co-ordinated signage. (ACCHS) September, 1988



These turn of the century images show how a well co-ordinated, non-conflicting signage can be achieved.

King William St. Adelaide, July 1901 (SSL:M B2635)



Rundle St. Adelaide, November 1909 (SSL:M B3542)

requires an effort from the designer to look for documentary evidence and/or research the styles and types of signage relating to a particular period or type of building.

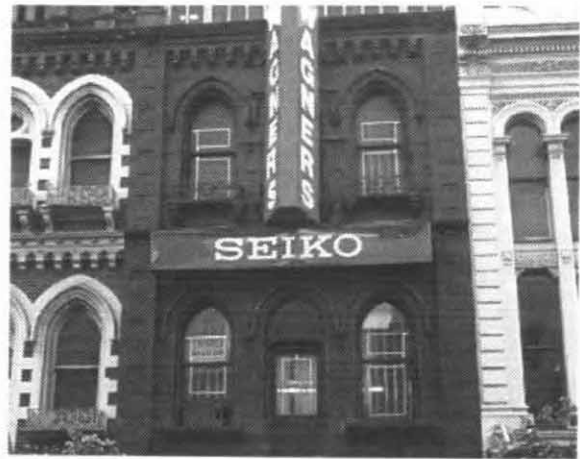
Signage on a building or complex of buildings should be well coordinated and its size, colour and design should relate to the building's architecture, general character and style.

I THE USE OF SIGNS

The use of signs and advertising on buildings has historically been an integral part of their presentation and function. Signs and advertising give interest and character to buildings, including heritage buildings. If sensitively planned and designed, signs will complement a building and form part of a unified whole. The incorrect use of signage, however, can severely compromise the character and unity of a building and its setting.

Early photos provide evidence that signage on commercial buildings was, at times, overcrowded or chaotic without necessarily being unpleasant. This was probably due to the limited range of materials and colours available at the time and the absence of fluorescent and neon lighting. These factors helped to avoid the aggressiveness of some more 'modern' signage.

Architectural features have been covered by insensitive signage.



The window in the middle is completely hidden by this large sign. The box sign below looks "stuck" onto the building.





Rundle St. Adelaide 1909 - 10 (SSL:M B3261)



Lots of signage but not unpleasant.
St Vincent St. Port Adelaide 1897 (SSL:M B41662)

II HISTORIC SIGNS AND ADVERTISING

Mid Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century

In this period signs and advertising in South Australia usually related to buildings of only one or two stories in height. These included shops, offices, banks, civic buildings and places of public entertainment such as hotels, cinemas and theatres. All of these building types had particular areas where advertising was commonly placed.

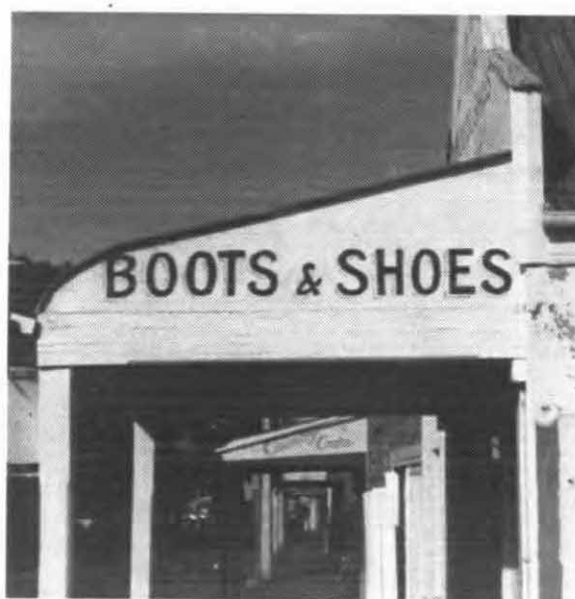
In commercial buildings, for example, signs and advertising were generally located on parapet walls, friezes, blind windows on chamfered corners, gable walls, verandah fascias, verandah ends and canvas blinds. Signs were sometimes painted on the roofs of commercial enterprises.

Signs were not usually placed on the decorative elements of a building such as architraves and pilasters or across rustication.

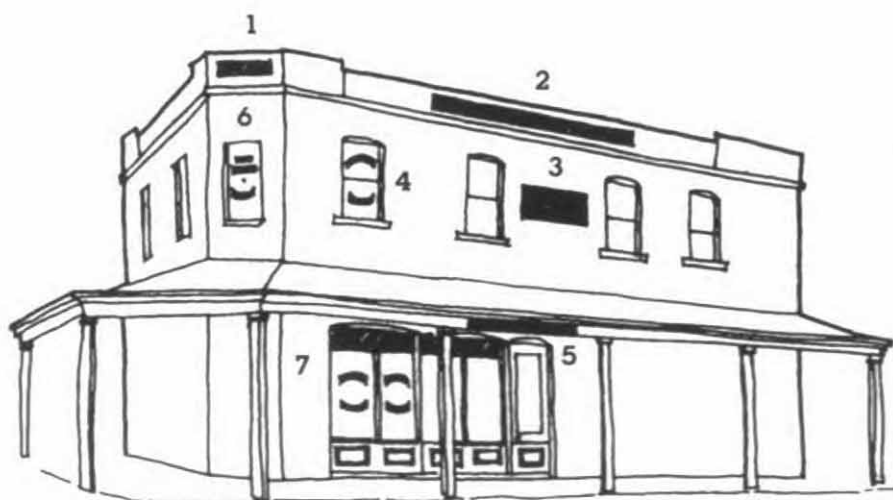
It was general practice in this period to use uniform, capital letters for signage. Lower case faces, or a mix of upper and lower case were not very commonly used on external signs. Signs were mostly painted. The most common lettering faces appear to have been variations of:



Signage on roof. Aldgate 1909 - 16 (SSL:M B4404)



Signs on end of verandahs are usually more appropriate than signs hanging below the verandah



1. Chamfered corner
2. Parapet
3. Building facade
4. Window
5. Verandah fascia
6. Blind window
7. Shop front



Port Elliot (SSL:M 23857)



Variety of locations and styles for signage in the 19th century. Saddleworth 1912 (SSL:M B11401)

Grotesque (also called Sans Serif or 'Gothic') which predominated, Egyptian or square Serif type and Ionic (fat Clarendon). These were probably chosen because they are the easiest type faces to paint with a brush.

Shades applied to the lettering were commonly used to make the letters appear to be raised from their background. Letters were usually shaded downwards at a 45° angle.

A B C D E F G

Sans Serif Capitals

A B C D E F G

Egyptian

A B C D E F G

Clarendon

Less common letter types of the same period were: Italics (lettering on an angle), Tuscan, and Old English (used at times by Chemists and Newspapers).

A B C D E F G

Italics

A B C D E F G

Tuscan

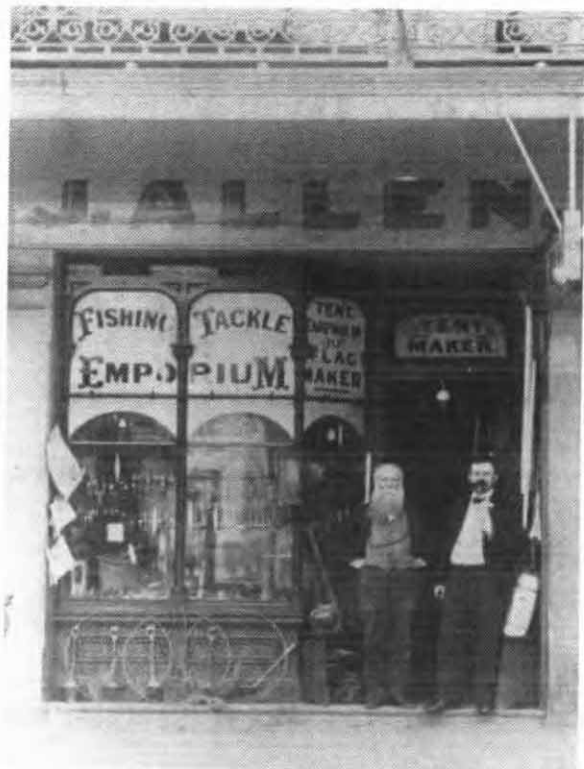
A B C D E F G

Old English

Most signs had dark letters on a light background. Signs were usually painted and sometimes illuminated by a hanging or concealed light.



*Sign painted on wall.
(Photo from the City of Unley Museum)*



*Shop signage with shaded lettering and window advertising.
Leigh St. Adelaide December 1895 (SSL:M B30182)*

In the early twentieth century with the spreading use of electricity signs which used incandescent light bulbs, appeared on buildings.

Between the Wars

After the First World War widespread radical changes occurred. In architecture the modern movement created an altogether different language, mostly through the International and Art Deco

styles. These styles introduced new architectural designs and decorative elements, with signage and advertising to match.

ABCDEFGFG

Broadway

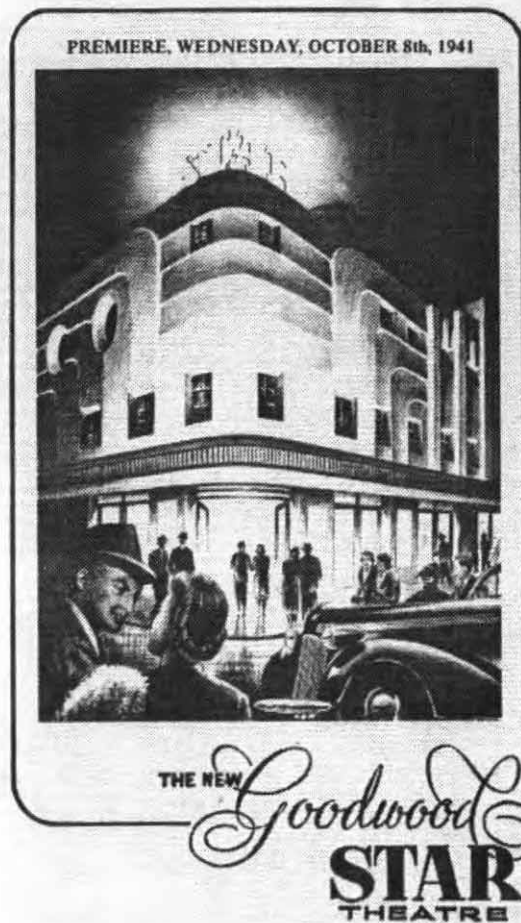


Inter-War Art Deco in Australia frequently appeared in commercial and residential interiors and on shopfronts. Many cinemas, milk bars and ballrooms of the 1920s until the early 40s drew heavily on the style and helped to make



Grenfell St. December 1933 (SSL:M B6398)

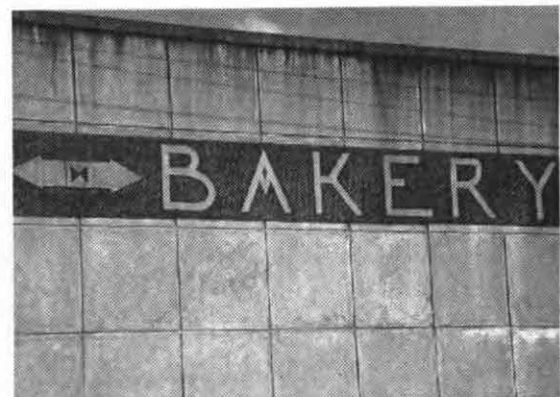
it popular. Eye-catching materials and finishes such as chromium-plated steel, plywood faced with exotic veneers and Vitrolite (coloured opaque glass) were commonly used.



Pamphlet for the opening of the Star Theatre in Adelaide



Art Deco stall at the Adelaide Railway Station.



Art Deco signage incorporated in the design of the wall.

The potential of new signage designs was broadened by the availability of newly discovered materials and technologies such as neon lighting tubes (1915-1930 Claude Neon franchises in the British Commonwealth). Lettering was often stylised.

GALLIA

PLAZA Carlton

Cable

Gill traffic



THERE IS
MORE TO IT
THAN JUST
NEON

The cover of an early Claude Neon advertising brochure.

iii



*Ozone Theatre Unley.
(Photo from the City of Unley Museum)*

CORPORATE LOGOS AND BRAND ADVERTISING

Companies nowadays frequently adopt their own styles or 'corporate image' to allow ease of recognition to customers.

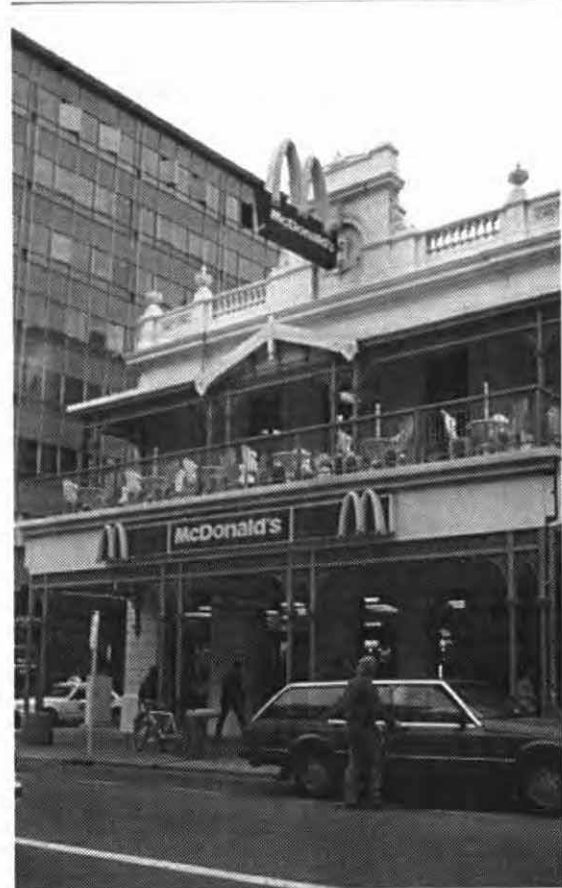
Generally '**corporate signage strategies**', which seek to impose a pre-standardized format onto individual buildings, **are not suitable for heritage buildings and may often ruin their presentation.**

Instead of corporate signage, individually styled signs, which attempt to complement the colours, scale and design of the building, should be developed.

At times a satisfactory compromise can be achieved.



Corporate signage compatible with the building and its architectural features.



This corporate signage looks 'stuck on' and does not consider the building and its features.

IV TYPES OF SIGNS AND ADVERTISEMENTS

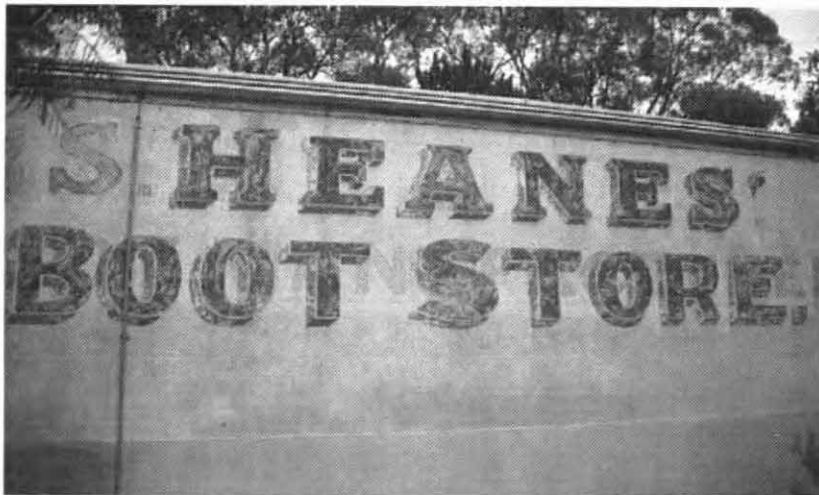
Signs can be *temporary*, such as construction signs, real estate signs and event signs (announcing a temporary event such as opening, closing or sale), or *permanent*.

Existing signs which are of heritage significance in their own right should be retained or restored. Many signs dating from around the turn of the century still exist and may be restored. They contribute character and distinction to the business, the building and the street.

New signs, (such as business signs, parking signs, awning and canopy signs, banners, plaques, and others) may either replace obsolete signs or be added to the building.



*A particularly original example of 19th century advertising
Sampson Butcher Shop, Ellen St. Pt. Pirie*

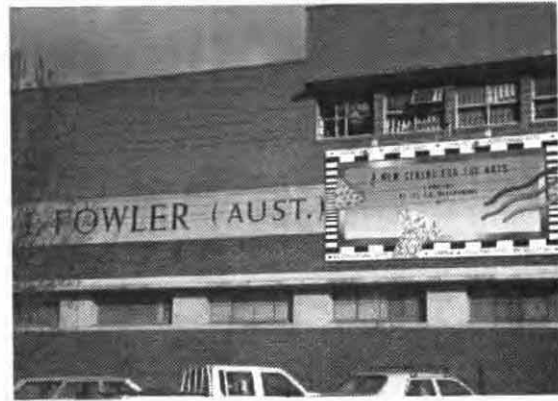


*Old signs give character to a building. Keep signs such as these without
trying to make them look "brand new" through restoration.*

Applied signs

These are signs which are located flush on areas of wall. They can be painted either onto thin metal or timber panels or directly onto a suitable wall surface, but should not be so large or conspicuous as to dominate or detract from the appearance of the building.

Sometimes applied individual lettering in an appropriate colour and type face is a good solution.



New and old style signage and advertising can be designed to coexist happily.



Signs and advertising to this small corner shop are suitable to the character of the building.



These painted signs are in harmony with the buildings.

Fascia signs

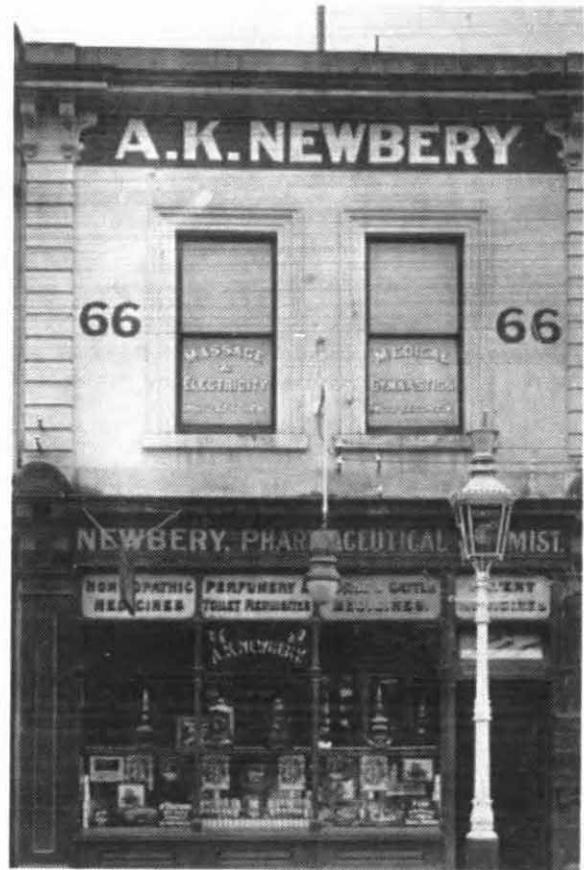
New fascia signs should be incorporated as an integral part of the building and should not have the appearance of a subsequent addition.

- ☞ Bulky or box-like fascia signs are not acceptable.

Each fascia sign should be designed for and confined to its own building, and should not be extended across two or more adjoining properties which would probably be of different design, height and level.

Signs painted on windows

Where there is no fascia, or where a fascia sign is undesirable, lettering painted on a display window can be a practical option. The layout of text should be dictated by the shape and proportions of the glazing sheet. An arch of lettering is a pleasing traditional method. The tradition of gold leaf lettering to advertise upper floor businesses can be an appropriate and effective technique.



*Advertising painted on windows is very effective. Note the light hanging from the wall above the display window.
Rundle St. Adelaide, 1910 (SSLM B22134)*

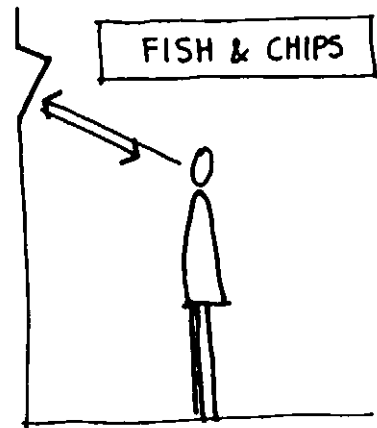
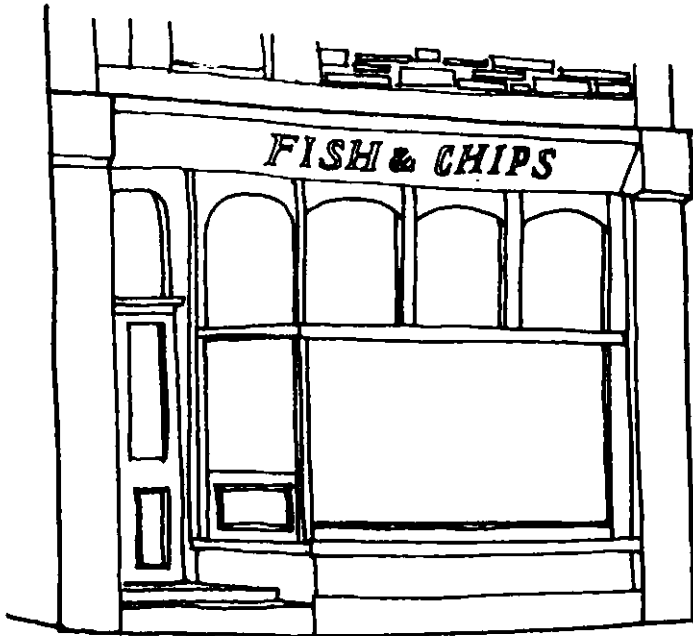


Modern style writing works effectively on this traditional shop front. (Port Adelaide)

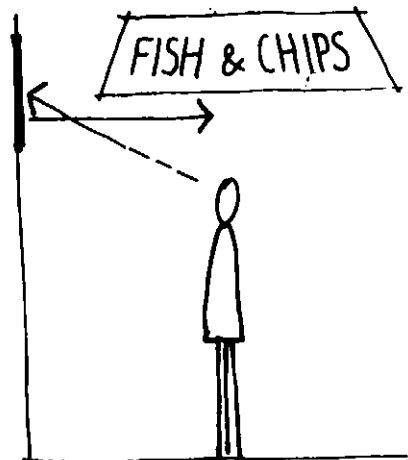
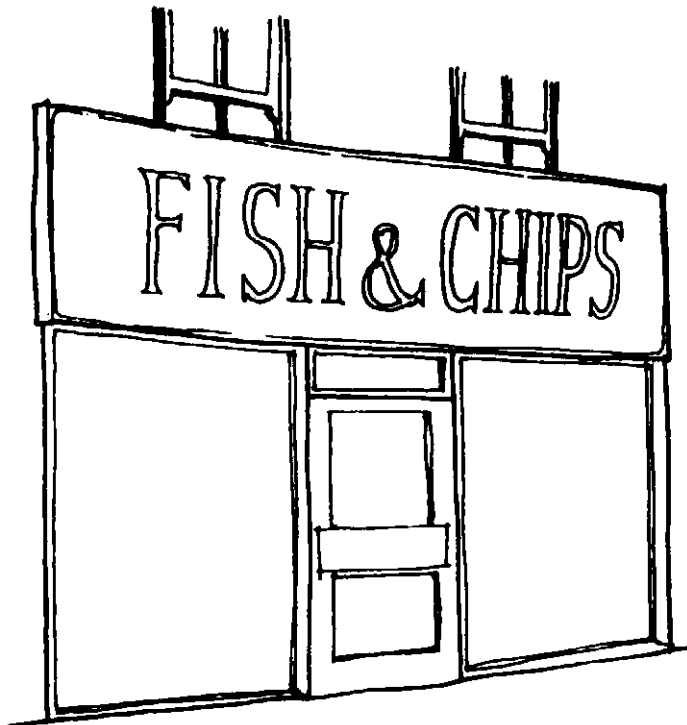
A permanent sign on the inside of a glass window should never exceed 30% of the total glass area of the window and should not be illuminated (although in some cases the use of coloured neon tubes may be acceptable).

Projecting signs

Signs or advertising which are located at right angles to a building's facade are projecting signs. They are either hanging or cantilevered.

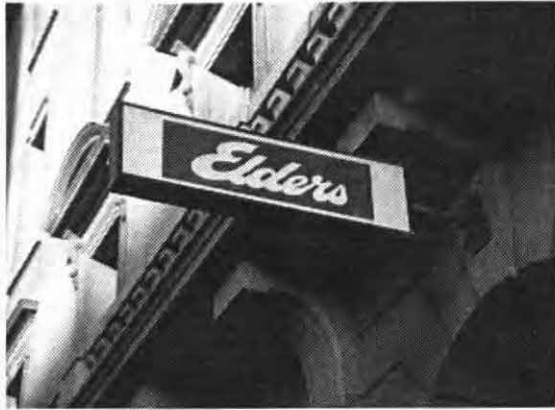


The design of the shop window draws attention to the door and invites entry. The angled fascia is read easily by people walking on the footpath.



A flat fascia is less easy to read because of the distortion caused by the perspective.

Signs were seldom suspended below the verandah or cantilevered from the facade of old buildings. These types of signs should therefore not be used on early buildings unless there are no other options, or unless there is evidence of such a sign in the early history of the building.



Obrusive internally illuminated projecting sign. It interferes with the architecture of the building.

If possible, internally illuminated projecting signs should be avoided on early buildings. Hanging signs, suspended from wall brackets and illuminated by discreet spotlights, are more appropriate.

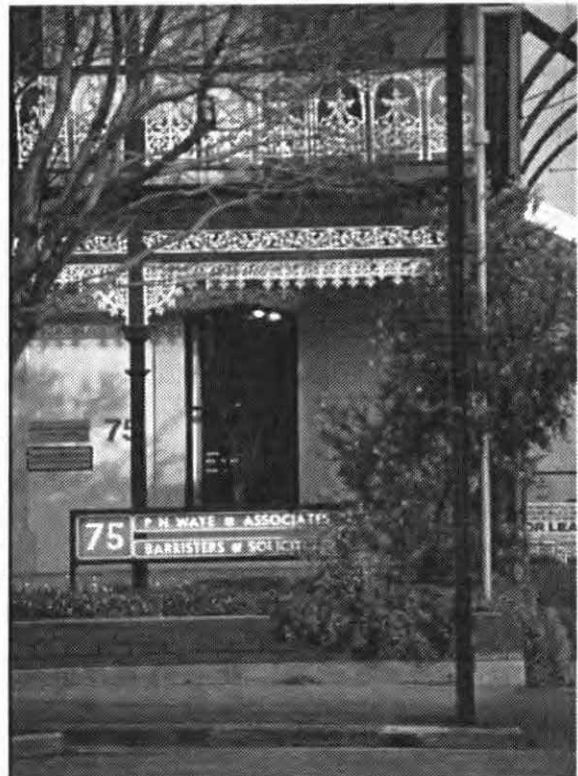


Example of wall-mounted traditional sign-note surface-mounted lights to illuminate sign.

Free-standing signs

These are display boards, directional signs and any other signs which are structurally separate from the building.

Signs were not usually placed on residential buildings (apart from the name of the house occasionally). This feature should be respected as much as possible and where new uses require signs, a small sign fixed on the fence (preferably not higher than the fence) or free standing (at eye level or lower) are better options.



Free standing sign designed to "fit in" with the building behind.



Unobtrusive sign on a fence. (Photo by Allied Metal Printers and Engravers)

Neon signs

These should mostly be used on more modern buildings.

Box-type signs are the most commonly used today and can very easily deface and dominate a heritage building. The use of neon signs needs careful consideration in terms of graphics, size, scale, materials, colour and location. They should not be used in a State Heritage Area unless on a modern building.

Coloured tube neon signs, if well designed, are less obtrusive than the box type and may at times be appropriate.

V SIGNAGE AND THE STREETScape

- ☞ To maximise the effectiveness of signs and the building's architecture every sign should be an integral and noticeable part of its building, and each building should be a good 'neighbour' within its setting.
- ☞ The building and its signage should form an overall image, each supporting the other and helping to draw the attention of passers-by.
- ☞ A well-maintained historic building can stand out in its environment and draw attention more than any signage.

Signs should be a concern to all neighbouring businesses. A harmonious and uncluttered row of shops with legible, well designed signs, is much more attractive than a 'hotch potch' of signs that confuse the shopper rather than draw attention.

Coordinating the size and shape of signage on individual buildings will help to create a feeling of continuity along the street.

A marked improvement to the street front can be achieved without sacrificing the effectiveness of individual signs.

VI GENERAL LOCATION

- ☞ Commercial buildings were often designed to incorporate advertising. Research on physical and documentary evidence will identify the areas where advertising was originally positioned. A range of suggestions for the placement of new signs can be selected on the basis of this historical evidence.

VII SCALE AND DESIGN

As a general rule **signage should be consistent with the style and age of a building.** Trends in buildings of different times and styles should therefore be researched and identified.



This sign was designed as part of the building (1950's)

The design of new signage and advertising should be carried out in ways that will:

- **define and enhance rather than conceal or destroy any architectural feature or detail.** It is important to integrate the sign with the architecture so that the interesting details (such as arches, columns and decorative panels) which give the building its character are not obscured or disturbed.
- **reflect and complement the character of the building it is attached to and respect its geometry.** The building's individuality and subtlety should be respected.
- **respect the scale of the building(s) to which it relates, including adjoining buildings.** This is



1911

(SSL:M B10294)



1967

(SSL:M B17610)



1992

Caledonian Hotel North Adelaide

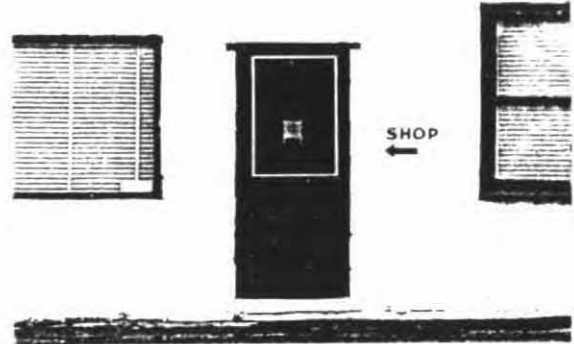


Sky signs, such as this, are very obtrusive and detract from the character of the building.

particularly important in State Heritage Areas. Generally the top of the sign should not extend above the lowest point of the roof.

- **be removable without leaving any permanent damage to the building fabric.**

☞ When designing new signage reconsider the existing signage and rationalise or eliminate what is inappropriate.



Simple and plain can be effective. (photo by Tipping, R. 1982 Signs of Australia, Penguin Books)

When designing a new sign keep these points in mind:

- do not extend the sign to a point where the original frontage is obscured.
- smaller signs can be easier to read if they are of clean and simple design. **Legibility and effectiveness do not depend on size alone.**
- **a sign should always be thought of as part of the building and not as an unrelated object attached to it.**
- plan to re-expose architectural features and to patch or restore original materials which have been damaged by overlays of other signs.



West Terrace Hotel Adelaide 1888 - 93 SSL:M B9768)

A useful rule is to 'line up' the sign or fit it into some defined architectural element such as a recess, a 'frame' or 'band'.

- Choose the size of the letters carefully: the size of the letters should be in proportion to both the sign and the building.

VIII LETTERING

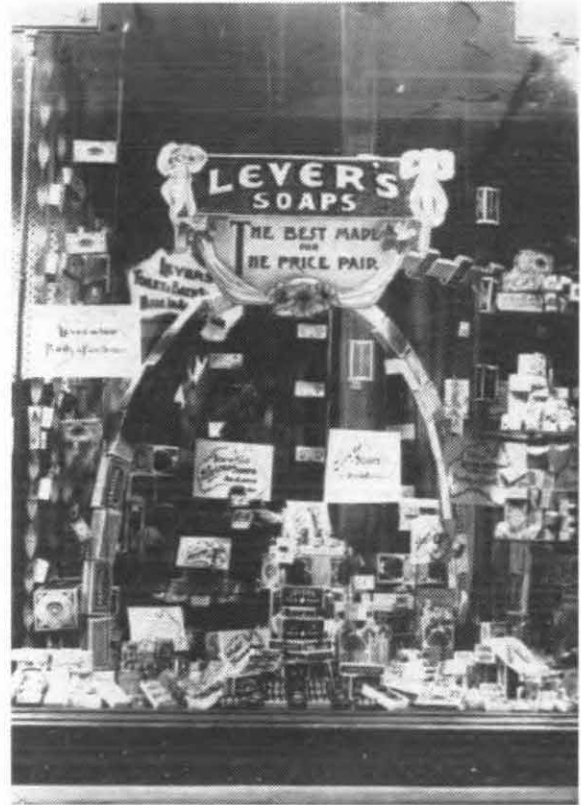
Lettering should generally be simple, clear, and complementary to the architectural style of the building. The lettering can be either a suitable period typeface or a simple contemporary one.

Reasonably sized individually attached letters cause the least interruption to the continuity of the building's architecture. This kind of sign is particularly useful when the height available is limited. It allows larger letters to be used than would be possible on a solid backed sign.

LETT LETT

General rules:

- If the original lettering can be deciphered on the building this face should be used.
- Choose a style of lettering which is appropriate to the business and the building. Make sure the letters (whatever style is chosen) are clearly legible.



Moore's Department Store 1914 - 18 (SSL:M B46935)

Window displays.



Norths Fruit and Veg shop, Unley c1950 (Photo from the City of Unley Museum)

IX COLOURS

Colours frequently used for signage in the last century were: light stone, light brown, rich brown, Brunswick green, ochre, yellow ochre and dark blue. (These colours are available in most *Heritage* colours ranges).

☞ General rules:

- If paint scrapings can determine the colours of old original signs these should be preferred.
- Do not use too many colours on one sign. A simple combination of two contrasting colours is usually the most effective.
- The colour effect of the sign should be related to that of the building to which it belongs.
- Bright and gaudy coloured signs should not be used on early buildings.

X MATERIALS

The choice of materials is governed by the need for compatibility with the colours and textures of a particular building and of those in its immediate neighbourhood.

Painted wood and flat metal panels were often used in the last century.

☞ General rules:

- Materials which were in use at the time of construction of the building should be preferred.
- Avoid materials such as reflective and opalescent paints.

Handpainted individual metal letters with the paint applied to give a flat matt appearance, and gilded cut-out plastic letters which can provide a similar effect to the original, can at times be used.



Nile Street Port Adelaide 1928 (SSL:M B6858)

XI CLUTTER

Advertisements and signs can be useful, interesting and attractive when thoughtfully designed. A common mistake is the use of too many signs and advertisements. Such clutter detracts from shop fronts and streetscapes, and bombards the public with too much information which is either ignored or causes confusion.

Clutter should always be avoided.



Self-defeating competition

XII STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

The erection of any sign or advertising on a building listed on the Register of State Heritage Items or located in a State Heritage Area is at present subject in South Australia to the provisions of Sections 47 and 48 of the **Planning Act, 1982**. In the City of Adelaide, any such proposal is subject to Section 24 of the **City of Adelaide Development Control Act, 1976**.

The new **Development Act**, which is currently being drafted, will involve changes to the existing Acts and will replace both the **Planning Act, 1982** and the **City of Adelaide Development Control Act, 1976**. Contact the State Heritage Branch, Department of



Jumble of signs. Avoid the proliferation of signs and advertisements.

Environment and Planning or your local Council's heritage adviser for specific assistance concerning the new **Development Act**, once it has been enacted.

The State Heritage Branch of the Department of Environment and Planning or the local Councils' heritage advisers provide a free professional advisory service on all matters related to heritage listed buildings, including signage.

At present a planning application must be made on Council's standard form with the prescribed fee and two copies of the following details:

- elevation and plan showing location of the sign.
- details of materials, size, lettering type and colours of the sign.
- details on the method of construction and support.

Planning approval must be obtained before any sign or advertising is erected.

GLOSSARY

Arris: a sharp edge of a brick, plaster or other building element.

Art Deco: The fashionable jazz age style concurrent with International Modern in the 1920s and 1930s. The name derives from a Paris exhibition of decorative and industrial art in 1925. The words are an abbreviation of the French words *Arts décoratifs* = decorative arts.

Art Deco celebrated the exciting, dynamic aspects of the machine age, and spoke directly to the emotions by the use of vivid decorative elements which served no particular function. It made abundant use of stylisation.

Cantilever: a horizontal projection without external bracing which appears to be self supporting.

Chamfer: an arris between two perpendicular surfaces cut off symmetrically, that is, at 45°.

Fascia board: A board set on edge, fixed to the rafter ends, wall plate or wall, to carry the gutter under the eave.

Frieze: In the classic *orders*, the middle division of the entablature (which consists of architrave, frieze and cornice) between the architrave and cornice; usually decorated but may be plain. Also a panel of decoration under the edge of a verandah.

Gable: The triangular part of the end wall of a building with a sloping roof. A

gable may be of any material: weatherboards, brick, stone, etc.

Gable wall: A wall crowned by a gable.

International modern or International style: A term coined in America in the 1930s to refer to the new architectural style which developed after 1920. The style is generally characterised by asymmetrical composition, unrelenting cubic general shapes, an absence of mouldings, large windows, often in horizontal bands, and a predilection for white rendering.

Parapet: A low wall, guarding the edge of a roof, bridge, balcony etc. That part of a house wall which extends above the roof.

Pilaster: a shallow pier or rectangular column projecting only slightly from a wall and, in classical architecture, conforming with one of the orders.

Rustication: Masonry cut in massive blocks (sometimes in its crude, quarry-dressed state) separated from each other by deep joints, employed to give a rich and bold texture to an exterior wall and normally reserved for the lower part of it.

Sans Serif or Sanserif: without serifs (T).

Serif: Cross-line finishing off a stroke of a letter (T). It was necessary in the Roman lettering when the words were engraved. The serif was the starting point of the chisel work.



FURTHER READING

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We gratefully acknowledge the
permission of Elizabeth Vines to use
material from her *Port Adelaide sign*

guidelines November 1991, and the
permission of the Art Deco Society of
Western Australia to reproduce their
logo.

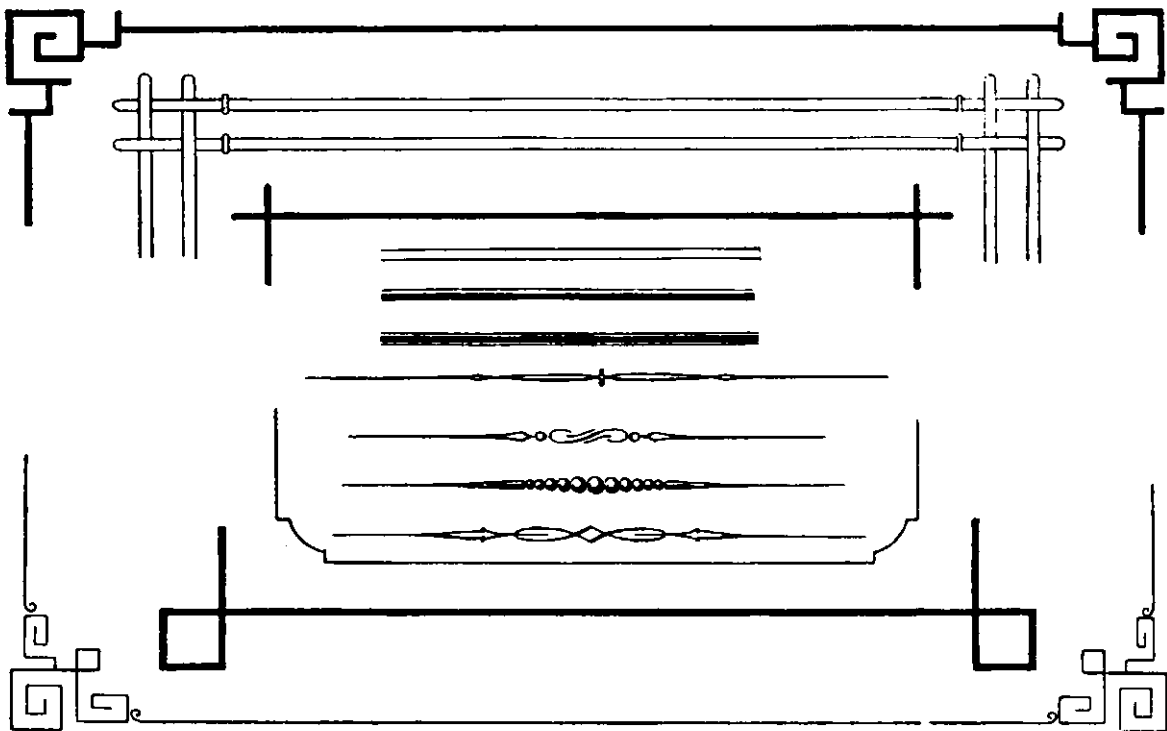
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