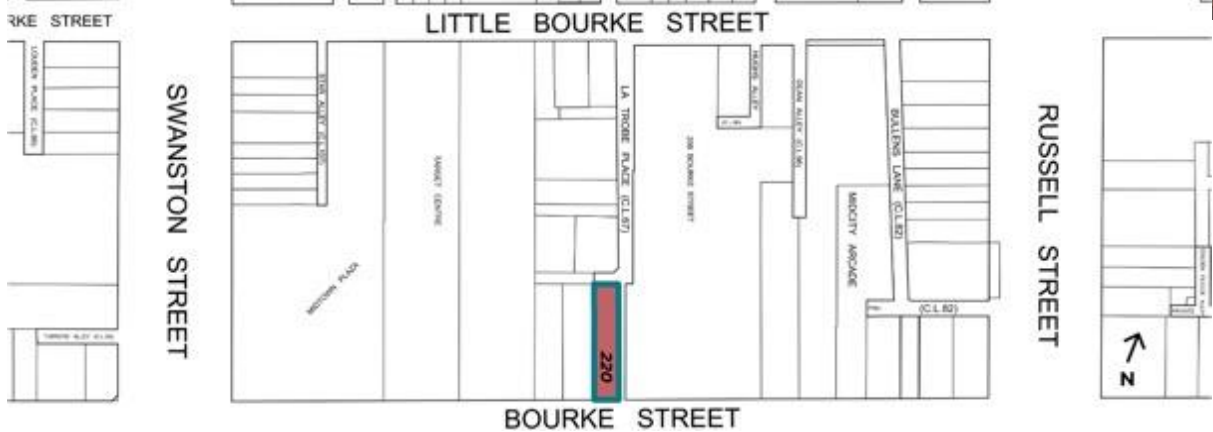


**SITE NAME** Former Palmer's Emporium  
**STREET ADDRESS** 220 Bourke Street Melbourne  
**PROPERTY ID** 101201



SURVEY DATE: October 2017

SURVEY BY: Context

<b>HERITAGE INVENTORY</b>	H7822-2187	<b>EXISTING HERITAGE OVERLAY</b>	No
<b>PLACE TYPE</b>	Individual Heritage Place	<b>PROPOSED CATEGORY</b>	Significant
<b>DESIGNER / ARCHITECT / ARTIST:</b>	Harry A Norris	<b>FORMER GRADE</b>	C
<b>DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:</b>	Interwar Period (c1919-c1940)	<b>BUILDER:</b>	Not known
		<b>DATE OF CREATION / MAJOR CONSTRUCTION:</b>	1937

**THEMES**

<b>ABORIGINAL THEMES</b>	<b>SUB-THEMES</b>
Research undertaken in preparing this citation did not indicate any associations with Aboriginal people or organisations.	Aboriginal Themes (Hoddle Grid Heritage Review, Stage 2 Volume 3 Aboriginal Heritage, March 2019) have therefore not been identified here
<b>HISTORIC THEMES</b>	<b>DOMINANT SUB-THEMES</b>
5 Building a Commercial City	5.4 Developing a retail centre
	<b>OTHER SUB-THEMES</b>
3 Shaping the Urban Landscape	3.2 Expressing an architectural style

**LAND USE**

<b>HISTORIC LAND USE</b>	
<b>Archaeological block no:</b> 30	<b>Inventory no:</b> Inventory not provided
<b>THEMATIC MAPPING AND LAND USE</b>	
1890s	Hotels and Lodgings
1920s	Retail
1960s	Retail

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an Individual Heritage Place.

**Extent of overlay:** Refer to map

**SUMMARY**

220 Bourke Street, a four-storey commercial building was designed by architect Harry A Norris in 1937. Built to accommodate a multilevel department store, the design embraces modern construction technology (reinforced concrete construction) and moderne styling to express a progressive and modern aesthetic.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Building a commercial city

#### *Developing a retail centre*

Department stores offered customers a wide range of goods, organised into 'departments', under the one roof. In Melbourne, department store Buckley and Nunn, which opened in 1854, established Bourke Street as the preferred retail strip. Russian immigrant Sidney Myer bought a block in Bourke Street in 1911, where he established his successful Myer emporium (Context 2012:43).

Chain department stores grew rapidly after 1920. With increasing car ownership and widespread distribution of shopping catalogues, by the 1920s department stores attracted shoppers from both the suburbs and rural areas.

Department stores elevated 'fashion, drapery and furnishings to a level of luxury and range which differentiated it from the everyday or rural emporium'. According to the 1948 retail census, in Victoria the 130 shops defined as department stores accounted for 10.3 per cent of retail sales. In money terms, the stores sold 30.3 per cent of drapery, clothing and soft furnishings; 18.1 per cent of hardware, ironmongery and crockery; and 15.4 per cent of furniture and floor coverings (Young and Spearritt 2008).

#### *Building a manufacturing capacity*

As Melbourne developed through the nineteenth century, so did its manufacturing industry. Flinders Lane became an important area for clothing manufacturers, while Chinese cabinetmakers were concentrated at the east end of town. Food-processing plants were established in north and west Melbourne where factories tended to be small and specialised. Large factories, built in the later nineteenth century and early twentieth century, were mostly constructed outside the City of Melbourne, where land was more easily obtainable (Context 2012:44).

From the 1930s, like the rest of Australia, an increasing proportion of the city's workforce took up jobs in manufacturing, an industry that led Australia's recovery from the economic depression of the late 1920s-early 1930s, when, the *Encyclopedia of Melbourne* notes, a

*steep rise in tariffs, devaluation of the Australian pound, falling wages and electricity costs all made local producers far more competitive internationally. Textiles benefited first, then the metals industries and engineering took over as pacemakers* (Dingle 2008).

After World War Two, Australia's manufacturing output increased 6 per cent per year between 1949 and 1967, and between 1947 and 1966, 155,221 new manufacturing jobs were created in Melbourne, roughly one-third of which went to women (Dingle 2008). Large numbers of women found employment as machinists in clothing and foot-ware factories (Context 2012:72).

### Shaping the urban landscape

#### *Expressing an architectural style*

Commercial buildings in the 1920s were mainly of the commercial palazzo style, as exemplified by Harry Norris's Nicholas Building in Swanston Street (1925). It was divided into a base, shaft and

cornice, much like a Renaissance palazzo. The scale, however, was greatly enlarged, with the shaft stretching up to 10 storeys.

Other styles were more closely associated with the modern movement and expressed a more dynamic and streamlined aesthetic. Emphasis was placed on the horizontal or vertical composition of a building to accentuate certain qualities of the building. In styles such as the commercial gothic style and the jazz moderne, vertical fins and ribs were used to accentuate the increased height of buildings. Landmark examples include, respectively, Marcus Barlow's Manchester Unity Building (1929-32) and the Tompkins Bros' Myer Emporium in Bourke Street (1933). (Context 2012:19-20). The moderne style typically expressed the horizontal plane with continuous bands of steel framed windows and masonry spandrels running across the full width of a façade, and often returning around a curved corner. A landmark example is Harry A Norris' Mitchell House at 352-362 Lonsdale Street (1937).

## SITE HISTORY

220 Bourke Street forms part of Crown Allotment 4 and 5, Block 22. In the 1880s, the VRC Hotel existed on the land before its conversion to retail purposes (*Age* 18 April 1937:14). Before its demolition in 1937, the two-storey brick building on the site was occupied by H E Swain, boot retailer (*Age* 18 April 1937:14).

In April-May 1937, S Brilliant Knitting Works Pty Ltd became the new proprietor of 220 Bourke Street (*Age* 23 May 1940:11). A four-storey retail premise was erected to replace the old building. Named 'Palmer's Emporium', the new drapery business was established by Isa Rose Pty Ltd, manufacturers, in co-operation with Joshua and Cyprus Herbert Glovers, wool merchants. Palmer's Emporium was granted an initial five-year lease of the building by proprietor S Brilliant Knitting Works Pty Ltd (*Argus* 12 October 1937:8; *Age* 24 May 1940:11).

The building was initially planned as an eight-storey store with a basement, which was to be constructed in two stages, with the first including four floors and the basement (*Argus* 29 May 1937:20). The work was undertaken by Hansen & Yuncken Pty Ltd to a design by Harry A Norris, who implemented the reinforced concrete method to enable the construction of the proposed eight-level building:

*The architects have adopted the modern horizontal treatment for the façade. This has allowed windows to be provided on each floor for the full width of the building. On the ground floor there will be deep, arcaded show windows* (*Argus* 12 April 1937:9).

The first stage of the construction commenced on 1 June 1937 and was completed by November the same year (*Argus* 12 April 1937:9).

Palmer's Emporium, however, broke the lease after less than two years from the opening of the building. In August 1938, the company went into voluntary liquidation and vacated the premises later that year (*Age* 24 May 1940:11). The break of the lease caused a legal dispute between the proprietor and the tenant companies. As a result, the original plan for the additional four storeys was never carried out.

At the completion of the first stage, the shops featured highly modern fittings and furniture. The original natural oak and chromium plate interior fittings were sold by public auctions after the

company's liquidation. The items comprised display tables, counters, cabinets and wall panels, as well as Axminster brand carpets and electric cash registers (*Age* 30 September 1939:2).

Later, the four-storey building on the subject site became tenanted by shoe manufacturers and retailers, including Smartset Shoes and the Public Benefit Bootery, later 'PB Shoes', with the latter business remaining at the premises for approximately 30 years till the mid-1980s (*Argus* 8 February 1947:38; *Age* 3 October 1985:18). PB Shoes had its own eight-storey building at 323-325 Bourke Street opposite the Myer department store between 1924 and the 1950s, until relocating to the subject property. The brand was known for offering an affordable price range for their products.

In the 1990s, the building was occupied by Minotaur, bookshop and toyshop (*Age* 11 September 1991:67; *Age* 7 September 1997:74).

In 2000, the building at 220 Bourke Street was sold by auction. At this point, it comprised three retail areas in the basement, ground and first floors, and had office space in the upper levels (*Age* 15 April 2000:105). After the sale, the ground floor was refurbished with new shopfront and side display windows (*Age* 2 September 2000:94). Today, it houses two residential properties on the top two levels, two shops and one food and drink outlet (CoMMaps).

#### *Harry A Norris, architect*

Harry Albert Norris (1888-1967) was born in Hawthorn, a son of a bootmaker. He was articled to architects Ward & Carleton between 1906 and 1911, a Melbourne firm that undertook modest domestic, commercial and industrial commissions. In 1910, he won second prize in the Royal Victorian Institute of Architecture student competition (Gurr and Willis 2012:502-3).

Norris commenced his solo practice in c1915, and by 1920, he was established in an office in Collins Street. His early works included domestic and commercial projects, with a significant number of motor garages, factories and bakeries. His younger brother Frank Leonard Norris (1903-1976), who gained a Diploma in Architecture from the University of Melbourne, also joined the practice (Gurr and Willis 2012:502-3).

Harry Norris also participated in a number of business ventures with Alfred M Nicholas. A M Nicholas played a key role in Victoria's Motoring industry and, with his pharmacist brother George, he ran the highly successful Nicholas Pty Ltd, which was associated with the development and marketing of 'Aspro' in Australia. The close relationship between Norris and Nicholas resulted in a number of substantial architectural commissions, including the Nicholas Building, Swanston Street (1925-6), and two Nicholas residences: 'Carn Brea', Hawthorn (rebuilt in 1928) and 'Burnham Beeches', Sherbrooke (1930-3). In addition, Norris was appointed as the architect of the St Kilda Road campus of Wesley College, substantially rebuilt in 1933-39, following a bequest from Alfred and George Nicholas (Gurr and Willis 2012:502-3).

Norris also had a long relationship with G J Coles, who sent him to the United States in 1929 to investigate chain store architecture. Norris was responsible for designing and altering many Coles stores across Victoria from c1927, and in Sydney from c1938 (Gurr and Willis 2012:502-3).

Norris regularly travelled overseas, particularly in the United States, in 1934, 1936 and 1937 to observe overseas architectural trends (Gurr and Willis 2012:502-3).

Completing a number of influential examples in the key styles of the era, Norris became one of Victoria's most prolific commercial architects in the 1920s and 1930s. Victoria Gurr and Julie Willis's entry for Norris in the *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture* sums up his architectural achievements as follows:

*From the mid-1920s onwards, Norris was enthralled by the possibilities of faience and showed himself to be remarkably adept at employing a wide range of stylistic approaches. From the cobalt-blue Spanish Baroque of Majorca House, Flinders Lane, Melbourne (1931) to the blush pink of the remodelled façade of the G.J. Coles Store, Bourke Street, Melbourne (1929) with its Jazz-Hispanic detailing, he demonstrated the possibilities of colour and modelling with faience to great effect. He was an early exponent of the Moderne, such as at Block Court, Collins Street, Melbourne (1929) and with the streamlined façade of Melford Motors showroom, Elizabeth Street, Melbourne (1937), which reached a high point with Mitchell House, Elizabeth Street, Melbourne (1938). The design for the Vice-Chancellor's House at the University of Melbourne (1937) showed a similar concern for materials and style, being a gentle Georgian Revival house given a modish twist by the use of Roman bricks that emphasised horizontality. His Mission to Seamen, Port Melbourne (1937, [since] demolished) was a confident essay in Dudokian modernism (Gurr and Willis 2012:502-3).*

Norris retired on his 75th birthday, dying six months later (Gurr and Willis:502-3).

## SITE DESCRIPTION

The building at 220 Bourke Street is a four-level commercial building with a basement. It sits on a long and narrow parcel on the corner of Bourke Street and La Trobe Place. The building form fits the site with a curve at the La Trobe Place corner.

Originally built to accommodate a multilevel department store, the design embraced modern construction technology (reinforced concrete construction) and moderne styling to express a progressive and modern aesthetic. The strong horizontal orientation of the façade allows for bands of windows to wrap around each level of the building, creating light open retail spaces.

The building displays key characteristics of the interwar moderne style. The asymmetrical façade has a vertical pier running up the western side of the building. The fluted pier runs the full height of the upper façade and steps over the parapet. By contrast, the remainder of the upper façade has a strong horizontal character, defined by incised spandrels and generous steel framed windows with small panes that run the full width of the façade and curve around the building edge to return down the laneway. A parapet has the same incised character as the spandrels. The overall effect is of a streamlined modern building.

The ground floor façade has been significantly altered. Originally described as having 'arcaded show windows', this feature no longer exists. A replacement shopfront and side display windows were installed after 2000.

## INTEGRITY

The distinctive form of the building, which curves around the corner, remains. The upper façade, including steel framed windows, retains a high level of integrity. At ground level the building has been altered with a contemporary shopfront and side windows installed after 2000.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

A range of interwar styles were used on commercial buildings to emphasise a modern or progressive aesthetic and 220 Bourke Street exhibits moderne styling. 220 Bourke Street was originally planned to be eight storeys and was built with a reinforced concrete structure that would accommodate the proposed height.

The subject building is one of several moderne buildings in the central city. The following examples are drawn chiefly from the Central City Heritage Review 2011, being of a similar style and construction date. The images and descriptions below are provided by CoM Maps unless stated otherwise.

Selected examples of Melbourne's moderne commercial buildings from the interwar period include:

*Yule House, 309-311 Little Collins Street, 1932 (VHR H2233; HO703, Significant in HO502 The Block Precinct)*

A five-storey commercial building designed by Oakley and Parkes in the moderne style with steel framed windows, and horizontal banding in terra-cotta faience tiles. It retains its metal framed display windows, signage and some original finishes. Built in 1932 it is amongst the first commercial buildings in the moderne style and is also intact.



Figure 8. 309-311 Little Collins Street constructed in 1932

*Mitchell House, 352-362 Lonsdale Street, 1937 (VHR H2232; HO715)*

This seven-storey rendered brick office building with ground level retail was also designed by architect Harry A Norris in the moderne style. The ground level was originally a motorcar showroom. It retains original signage and interior finishes and is considered to be an outstanding example of the moderne style and of Norris' work.



Figure 9. 352-362 Lonsdale Street constructed in 1937

*Presgrave Building, 273-279 Little Collins Street, 1938 (Significant in HO502 Block Arcade Precinct)*

A six-storey cement rendered office building with shops at street level and foyer. Designed by Marcus Barlow in the moderne style and built in 1938. The upper floors were refurbished and converted to hotel accommodation in 2000. It is less intact than either Yule House or Mitchell House.



Figure 10. 352-362 Lonsdale Street constructed in 1937.



*McPherson's Building, 546-566 Collins Street, 1935 (VHR H0942; HO614)*

A five-storey reinforced concrete office building with basement parking and ground level retail. Designed by Stewart Calder in association with Reid & Pearson in the International style and built as offices and showrooms for McPherson's Proprietary Limited in 1935. It is a seminal example built two years after Yule House and featuring horizontal banding, large areas of horizontal glazing and concrete construction with terra cotta faience tiling.



Figure 11. 546-566 Collins Street constructed in 1935.

Of the examples above, three are of State significance (Mitchell House, Yule House and McPherson's buildings) as a result of their early date of construction within the 1930s, seminal design and/or high degree of integrity. The radical styling, large areas of glass and concrete construction of these buildings in the 1930s transformed how commercial buildings were designed and built. 220 Bourke Street demonstrates a very similar engagement with radical new design of the 1930s, is highly intact above the ground floor and was built the following year after Norris's Mitchell House which it follows quite closely in its use of reinforced concrete without applied decorative cladding. The moderne style was relatively short-lived and there are limited examples remaining, although its influence on modernism is seen in many later examples.

**ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA**

✓	<p><b>CRITERION A</b> Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).</p>
	<p><b>CRITERION B</b> Possession of uncommon rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).</p>
	<p><b>CRITERION C</b> Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history (research potential).</p>
✓	<p><b>CRITERION D</b> Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).</p>
✓	<p><b>CRITERION E</b> Importance of exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).</p>
	<p><b>CRITERION F</b> Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance)</p>
	<p><b>CRITERION G</b> Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).</p>
	<p><b>CRITERION H</b> Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).</p>

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Melbourne Planning Scheme as an Individual Heritage Place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Melbourne Planning Scheme:

**MELBOURNE PLANNING SCHEME**

EXTERNAL PAINT CONTROLS	No
INTERNAL ALTERATION CONTROLS	No
TREE CONTROLS	No
OUTBUILDINGS OR FENCES (Which are not exempt under Clause 43.01-3)	No
TO BE INCLUDED ON THE VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER	No
PROHIBITED USES MAY BE PERMITTED	No
ABORIGINAL HERITAGE PLACE	No

**OTHER**

N/A

## REFERENCES

*Age*, as cited.

*Argus*, as cited.

Context 2012, *Thematic History: A History of the City of Melbourne's Urban Environment*, prepared for the City of Melbourne.

City of Melbourne Interactive Maps (CoMMaps) 2017, <http://maps.melbourne.vic.gov.au/>, accessed 13 April 2018.

Dingle, Tony 2008, 'Manufacturing', in *eMelbourne*, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/>, accessed 13 January 2018.

Gurr, V & Willis, J 'Norris, Harry A' in Goad, Philip & Willis, Julie (eds.) 2012, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Young, John and Spearritt, Peter 2008, 'Retailing', in *eMelbourne*, School of Historical & Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/>, accessed 3 February 2018.

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**PREVIOUS STUDIES**

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**Central Activities District  
Conservation Study 1985**      Ungraded

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**Central City Heritage  
Study 1993**      C

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**Review of Heritage  
overlay listings in the  
CBD 2002**      Ungraded

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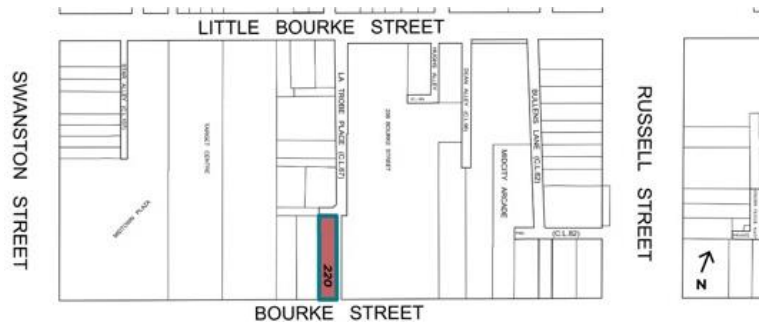
**Central City Heritage  
Review 2011**      Ungraded

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

**Heritage Place:** Former Palmer’s Emporium

**PS ref no:** Interim HO1243



**What is significant?**

Former Palmer’s Emporium at 220 Bourke Street, a four-level commercial building designed by architect Harry A Norris and completed in 1937.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- The building’s original external form, materials and detailing;
- The building’s high level of integrity to its original design;
- Streamlined modern style façade defined by incised spandrels, parapet and horizontal bands of steel framed windows that run the full width of the façade and curve around the building edge; and
- Asymmetrical façade with a vertical pier running up the western side of the building.

More recent alterations including the ground floor shopfronts installed after 2000 are not significant.

**How it is significant?**

Former Palmer’s Emporium at 220 Bourke Street is of local historic, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Melbourne.

**Why it is significant?**

220 Bourke Street is historically significant for its demonstration of the development of department stores, particularly after the economic depression of the 1930s. Built in 1937 as Palmer’s Emporium drapery business, the building is also significant for its long term use by shoe manufacturers and retailers Smartset Shoes and the Public Benefit Bootery, later ‘PB Shoes’ from the late 1940s, representing part of the City of Melbourne’s extensive clothing and footwear manufacturing history. (Criterion A)

220 Bourke Street is one of several commercial buildings from the interwar period designed by innovative architects of the period including Harry A Norris, Oakden and Parkes, Marcus Barlow and Stewart Calder. 220 Bourke Street combines reinforced concrete construction with moderne styling to express a progressive and modern aesthetic. (Criterion D)

220 Bourke Street is aesthetically significant for its adoption of the moderne style of the interwar period with the overall effect being a streamlined modern building. This is clearly evident and expressed in the physical fabric above the ground floor level, including the horizontal banding to the windows and their curved profile at the corner, the use of steel-framed windows and the bands of the concrete structure with incised spandrels that further emphasize its horizontal lines. (Criterion E)

**Primary source**

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Hoddle Grid Heritage Review (Context & GJM Heritage, 2020)

