

**R**AVENSWOOD always wanted to be a real functioning town. It never happened.

In the 19th Century, the entire township area, just over Big Hill from Bendigo, was subdivided into suburban-sized house lots.

But the people never took them up and, to this day, properties sit on conglomerations of titles.

It's a wonder it did not become a brisk, self-contained town. It had everything going for it.

Major Thomas Mitchell passed through the picturesque granite landscape in 1837, naming the prominent features as he went.

The following year, the land was taken up, all 118,000 acres of it to form the great Alexander Number Two Run, which was soon renamed the Ravenswood Run, a monument to the popularity of the novels of Sir Walter Scott.

The start of the great red brick homestead was in 1857.

The marvellous and historically important homestead gave birth to the nearby township . . . and to Bendigo.

In the early 1850s, the Ravenswood overseer was a Mr Kennedy, and it was his wife who is credited with having first discovered gold in the Bendigo creek, near a hut used by one of the run's shepherds.

The homestead now has just 400 of those original acres left attached to it — but what a 400 acres!

It is difficult to imagine how a more sublime landscape could be concocted. It is a wonderful blend of rolling pastures, ancient gums, dramatic boulders, creeks and gullies.

Hawks ride the thermal currents over it, watchful for careless rabbits.

And in the middle, almost as if the land had been designed for just such a purpose, sits Ravenswood Homestead.

It is a Georgian-styled building, more commonly found in Tasmania or eastern New South Wales. Around it is gathered finely



**our town**

*with wayne gregson*

proportioned outbuildings and servants quarters, and its gardens ooze the English influences which dominated the thinking of the time.

For 20 years it has been the Beilharz family home.

The family had previously lived on some land at Mandurang but Edmund Beilharz said he was keen to move out when neighboring development began.

The homestead was not in such a serene setting when the Beilharz family bought it.

And after having lavished two decades of loving care on it, it is impossible to tell how much of the mood is created by the builders and how much is Beilharz.

**A**T first glance, Ravenswood Homestead is a village on its own, but Edmund says that's not so, and it is peculiar that it is not so.

"This is very much a house produced by gold. It is built for style and comfort.

"No work went on here apart from the servants.

"The shearing shed and all the rest of the normal farming buildings were built a long way away.

"There wasn't even a chook house here.

"It is markedly different from the great houses of the Western District, say, in which all sorts of work went on around the homestead and there were full villages."

The homestead is even substan-

tially divorced from the present community of Ravenswood.

You don't see any normal town buildings until you travel perhaps a kilometre down the tree-lined drive past the granite gate-house.

Then, you can just see the Ravenswood pub roof peeping over a hill.

Edmund Beilharz said that the homestead and the town never shared the sort of relationship found between English manor houses and their villages.

Out in the "real world" Ravenswood is perhaps best known throughout the state for

