

THE TOWN AT PORT PHILLIP

They came from the south, across 150 miles of shallow sea. They were escaping from the north of Tasmania; not from the law but from hard, cold, mountainous authority and country. They were attracted by the tales of warmer, flatter, softer land around the big bay on the south of the mainland. Drawn by greed and idealism they sailed their fragile boats around the silent bay and found a passable river at its head. This was 1835, two years before Queen Victoria came to the throne. There were two leaders, heading rival teams: little John Pascoe Fawkner and big John Batman. Both were by-products of the convict system, both the sons of convicts. Neither of them had any love for the arrogant legal and social establishment, but they loved the only land they knew and they had the faith in it which it badly needed at the time. Six miles up the river later called the Yarra Yarra they made their huts, selecting rising land on the north bank. John Batman, who had the unorthodox notion that aborigines were people, exchanged with four native chiefs a number of blankets and civilized trinkets for a great area of land. John Pascoe Fawkner, who preferred the urban life, opened a hotel though he had no liquor and started a newspaper though he had no printing machine, but pasted a manuscript on the window. Some of the Fawkner party pressed inland to rolling, open, yellow country, avoiding the wooded land to the east. Samuel Jackson helped his brother William build a hut of pisé and wattle-and-daub. George Evans built one of stone. Of all the early houses, Evans's is the only one still in existence. It is called Holly Green and stands by Jackson's Creek, beyond Sunbury. Very soon Governor Sir Richard Bourke in Sydney heard of these un-governed private enterprising ruffians and he sent Captain William

Lonsdale to be a resident Police Magistrate and, as surveyor, a free settler newly arrived from England by the name of Robert Russell. Russell was the last person one would have expected to meet here in the primeval bush. In London he had been apprenticed to the distinguished architect, John Nash. He painted romantic little oils and water-colours, very capably and sensitively in the Turner manner. He once wrote a novel, and he lived here by himself in a hut on the south side of the river, rather remote, occupying his evenings carving cameos in shell. He was Melbourne's first professional man.

By day Russell traversed the hills each side of the river and set it all down on a map, houses and buildings already built included, and had this ready when Governor Bourke arrived from Sydney in 1837. Bourke brought with him Robert Hoddle, the man to be later the first Surveyor-General. They met in a tent and bent over Robert Russell's map, and out of the conference came a simple rectangular grid of roads, eight blocks by three, which Russell later drew carefully on his original drawing. That was the basis of Melbourne. It was the plan of what is now known as the Golden Mile, for its length measures just over a mile on the ground. It is the central city, 'downtown' to an American, just 'town' to most Melburnians who live up to ten or more miles away from it in the great uneven ring of suburbs.

The plan was neat and logical. The rectangle had one side practically on the north bank of the river and roughly parallel to it, which gave the main streets an orientation about east-northeast. Each big block was made just ten chains square and each of the streets between them measured one chain and a half in width. A creek ran from the north into the river, and this was the centre of the grid with four blocks on either side. It became, in due course, Elizabeth Street.

It was a bold plan, not approaching in imagination or foresight Colonel Light's plan for Adelaide of the same year, but at least done with good scale and a determination not to let this new colonial centre fall into bent shapes like Sydney, which had refused to accept the rigid discipline of gridiron plans which successive early governors had tried to impose. The primitive gridiron marked out on Russell's map was soon embellished. Hoddle planned good escapes from it: potentially magnificent boulevards three chains wide. To break up the ten chain blocks into more manageable size intermediate lanes only half a chain wide were cut through the middle of them, running longitudinally, or roughly