

# **Mrs Bradley's Melbourne**

**A Curious Person's Guide to the  
Sovereign City of the South**

**Robyn Annear**

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City that fosters our desires, that saw our dreams begun,  
There is a sun beyond your spires that's like no other sun.

– Furnley Maurice

Another name for this book could be *Melbourne Off the Top of My Head* since its contents, the extranea of years of reading and noticing, have lodged uninvited in my cerebrum and what you hold in your hand is an attempt to evict them.

A long-dead Melburnian, A.S. Kenyon – public servant, numismatist, ethnographer, and historian (a bloke, in other words, with a headful of stuff) – considered the cultivation of a *forgettery* at least essential as that of a robust memory. A forgettery, he explained, was ‘a place to consign unwanted memories to oblivion’.

This then is my Melbourne forgettery. Not only do I endow the contents to you, dear Reader, but I (half) attribute their telling to my *doppelgänger*, the titular Mrs Bradley. As muse, literary agent and long-running subterfuge, Mrs Bradley has served me but fitfully up till now. It is my hope that her role as authorial medium for this volume will at last justify her share of my (admittedly meagre) royalties.

We – Mrs Bradley and I – trust that, in exploring the Sovereign City of the South through these pages and beyond, your curiosity will be rewarded.

Robyn Annear

### *Note to readers*

The italicised text at the foot of most pages serves as a cross-reference, directing the reader to others of the book's entries linked by theme or the tenuous thread of whimsy to the one just read. Entries are arranged alphabetically.

## Balloon, hot-air

Australia's first crewed hot-air balloon ascent took place in Melbourne in the summer of 1858. Partially inflated at the gasworks (Docklands, today), the balloon was towed thence along Flinders Street to the Cremorne pleasure gardens at Richmond, where it was topped up. A leaky valve meant that only one of the two aeronauts could make the ascent. The balloon was launched approaching sunset and fell to earth with its 'somewhat bruised' pilot in the (present-day) vicinity of La Trobe University, Bundoora. The sidelined second aeronaut, 'Professor' Charles Brown, would later make a pioneering balloon flight in Sydney but, returning to the scene of his disappointment, was found drowned in the Yarra at Richmond in 1870.

The sight of a balloon aloft never lost its gala appeal to Melbourne's street-boys. The cry would go up: *'A bar-loon! A bar-loon!'*

*Cremorne Gardens  
Yarra River*

## Banana Alley

At the foot of Queen Street, vaulted stores beneath the railway viaduct built in the 1890s to connect Flinders Street and Spencer Street stations were used for storage by fruiterers with stalls at the nearby Western Market.

*ice*

*La Trobe's statue*

*Southern Cross station*

## Barry's statue, Sir Redmond

Sir Redmond died just 12 days after the hanging of Ned Kelly, over whose trial he presided. Upon Barry's pronouncing the sentence of death, the bushranger had rejoined with, 'I will see you there where I go.' For all that the judge had been a leading civic light, founder of august institutions, etc., etc., it would take almost five years to raise sufficient funds for a statue in his memory. Barry's rotund likeness in the State Library forecourt has, for most of its history, been crowned with a crust of guano – nature mimicking the cap/hood donned by death-sentencing judges. Not any more, though: an antenna-like prong discourages pigeons from roosting and crapping on Sir Redmond's head.

*Justice statue*  
*La Trobe's statue*  
*libraries*  
*Ned Kelly's horse*  
*pigeons*

## Bath-houses, Yarra

Pontoon-style bathing establishments were floated on the Yarra as early as 1844, shifting progressively up-river to escape the effluent of noxious industries. In 1859 the city council built riverside bathing houses using sheds recycled from the original Eastern Market. The bath-house locality, opposite the Botanic Gardens, became known as 'Baths Corner'.

*Yarra River*

## Batman's Hill

When the summit of the 'slight eminence' that was Batman's Hill was cut down to make way for the Spencer Street railyards in 1863-65, it was found to be honeycombed with wombat holes. The gravelly rubble was carted away by the drayload and (depending on whose story you believe) either deposited along the Yarra bank beside Flinders Street or spread over the swamp west of Spencer Street. And the displaced wombats? Where did they make their homes? On that score, the record is silent.

The hump-backed bridge, of recent date, that carries Collins Street over the railyards to Docklands amounts to a re-imagining of the long-gone hill.

*beautiful lies*  
*Blue Lake*  
*pigeons*

## Batman's portrait

At the time of Melbourne's centenary in 1934-35, there existed no authentic portrait of the city's preferred founding father, John Batman. For a commemorative portrait commissioned by the city council, Batman's features were based on those of his great-great-grandson, Leslie Batman Weire, employed as a junior clerk in the city treasurer's office. A good thing, too, since the features of the real Batman, during his shortlived Melbourne years, were eaten away by terminal syphilis.

A jolly lad with a lop-sided grin, Batman's descendant had his face transposed onto a pioneering figure in moleskins, red neckerchief and cabbage-tree hat, gazing far-sightedly over 1930s Melbourne from Eastern Hill to the sunset. The portrait is on display in his old workplace, the Melbourne Town Hall.

Doubtless, visitors laugh when they hear that the city was pioneered by someone called Batman. How much funnier would it be if the city had – as was seriously considered – been named Batmania in his honour?

*Captain Cook's cottage  
centenary of Melbourne  
Corporation Lane  
Falls, Yarra*

## Beautiful lies

*And what was the origin of this majestic city and its efflorescence of palatial town houses and country seats? Its first brick was laid and its first house built by a passing convict. Australian history is almost always picturesque... It does not read like history, but like the most beautiful lies. (Mark Twain, visiting 'majestic' Melbourne in 1895)*

Does throwing together a house of bricks sound like the work of a 'passing convict'? Twain probably had in mind William Buckley, the runaway convict who, at the time of Melbourne's settlement, had been 'passing' through the district for more than 30 years, in company with the indigenous Watha wurrung people. When white settlers crossed from Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) in 1835 to stake their claim on the land by the Yarra, the 'wild white man' came to live among them, 'a modern giant, standing 6 ft. 6 in. in Nature's stockings'.\* Legend has it that Buckley did indeed lay Melbourne's first brickwork, in the shape of a chimney for John Batman's house on the hill.

\*Call it two metres – although that self-proclaimed 'lover of truth', Johnny Fawkner, put Buckley's height at 6 feet 4½ inches.

*Batman's Hill  
Fawkner's claim as founder*

## Beer

*'The lanes are full of young men swallowing beer...'* ('To a Telegraph Pole', Furnley Maurice)

Melbourne boys too young to drink used to make a kind of beer out of the green seed cones of the drooping sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*), native to the city. The pulped seeds were mixed with water and sugar, then bottled and buried until fermented. One boy, grown old, remembered sheoak beer as 'a terrible decoction... sour and acrid', but relished nonetheless as contraband. The name 'sheoak' was adopted by publicans to mean beer that had 'gone off' in the cask.

*Bilkem (or Bilking) Square*  
*cocktails*  
*Corporation Lane*  
*Lang's Lane*  
*Romeo Lane*  
*Synagogue Lane*

## Bilkem (or Bilking) Square

It appeared on no map, but Bilkem Square was real enough: a warren of yards and shanties between Romeo Lane and Juliet Terrace, parallel rights-of-way that formed an F with Little Bourke Street, close by Parliament House.

*'From dusk until half-past eleven or so, the women go out on their predatory excursions. They haunt the wharves and lurk around the low public houses. If they succeed in catching a new arrival with money, he is brought up to the "Lane", and the night is spent in debauchery. For the most part, however, they confine themselves to "bilking" – that is, luring the men up alleys and rights-of-ways, obtaining their money, then leaving them.'*  
(*Colonial Monthly*, February 1869)

'Bilking' did not merely mean fee-for-favour, but referred to the practice of stealing (or having an accomplice steal) a john's wallet while he was preoccupied.

*Romeo Lane*

## Blue Lake

During Melbourne's first five or ten years (and for untold years before that) a shallow sheet of water known as the Blue Lake stretched north-west from Batman's Hill, encompassing the site of today's Docklands. Before long, though, grazing cattle trampled it into a morass, so that it merged with the West Melbourne swamp before disappearing altogether in the 1860s when it was filled up and buried under railyards and wasteground.

George Gordon McCrae, a boy in the early 1840s, would recall –

*'a real lake, blue, nearly oval, and full of the clearest salt water, though by no means deep. Fringed gaily all round with the purple mesembryanthemum [pigface] in full bloom, it seemed in the broad sunshine to be girdled by a belt of magenta fire.'*

*Batman's Hill  
pigface*

## Bun fight

Friday, 15 November 1850 was declared a public holiday, to celebrate the news that Victoria's separation from New South Wales – or, more particularly, Melbourne's separation from Sydney – had finally been given the nod. The Princes Bridge was officially opened the same day, following which the celebratory multitude headed off to the Separation sports or to refreshment tents set up in the botanic gardens, where sticky buns were distributed to 'children of all denominations'. The availability of free comestibles (and even grog) goes some way towards explaining the terrific turn-outs, in Victorian times, to events so unthrilling as bridge-openings and the laying of foundation stones. The main reason, of course, was the non-existence of TV.

*foundation stones*

## Burke & Wills monument

Almost as peripatetic and uncertain of its destination as the duo it commemorates, the Burke and Wills monument has changed location three times since its unveiling in 1865. Originally it stood high on the Eastern Hill, at the intersection of Collins and Russell streets, where it marked the starting point of Fergus Hume's bestselling 1886 crime novel, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*. In the opening pages, a drunken man hails a cab by the Burke and Wills monument and is found to be dead – murdered! – when his St Kilda-bound conveyance reaches Domain Road.

The advent of Collins Street cable trams in the same year Hume's book appeared meant the displacement of Burke and Wills, and the beginning of the end for hansom cabs. The monument's new home near Parliament House was uprooted 87 years later for construction of the underground rail station, whereupon Burke & Wills' bronze likenesses spent a few years in Carlton Gardens before shifting to the city square in 1979. In a cruel mockery of the explorers' parched and desolate deaths, water played at the foot of their statue during the early years of its city square sojourn. Their dignity restored, Burke and Wills now stand high, dry, and eternally pantalooned as Melbourne's premier monument to futility.

*Ghost ship of Wills Street*  
*Glacial boulder*

## Bicycle stable

After the future site of Flinders Street station was vacated by Melbourne's fish market in 1892, it was occupied for some years by vegetable stalls and a 'bicycle stable'.

## Cabbages

During the latter part of the 19th century, there was disagreement among Melbourne pioneers regarding almost every aspect of the settlement's founding years. Sides were taken as to whether John Batman or Johnny Fawkner was the city's *real* founder. Dozens claimed that *their* ancestor had bought the land adjoining the GPO in an early land sale or – more often – won it in from a sailor in a card game. Even the distinction of having raised Melbourne's first crop of cabbages became a cause for controversy.

All agreed that the most dedicated early cabbage-grower was the Reverend Thompson of St James' Church. Mocked as 'the great cabbage-compeller', he devoted his entire garden at the corner of William and Bourke streets to the cultivation of that unglamorous vegetable. But the *first*... Veteran journalist Edmund Finn ('Garryowen') reckoned it was a man named Liddy, while others accorded the honour to the green-thumbed Minifie, who had 'splendid' cabbages growing in a plot off Little Collins Street – call it the lobby of the Stamford Plaza Hotel – in 1841. Johnny Fawkner's diary tells a different story, recording in detail the multifarious garden – Savoy cabbages included – sown by him and his servants on the south side of the Yarra at the end of spring, 1835.

## Cafeterias

*'The juggernauting trams and the prolonged  
Crash of the Cafeterias at noon...'*

'Melbourne and Memory' by Furnley Maurice was winner of the Melbourne Centenary Poetry Prize in 1935. It was the heyday of the city's department stores – Coles, Woolworths, Manton's, Myer's, Buckley & Nunn's, Ball & Welch – *and* their cafeterias. Coles No. 1 store in Bourke Street had the Queen of Melbourne's cafeterias, and Maurice's '*Crash of the Cafeterias at noon*' perfectly captured the ambience. All those stainless steel teapots and milkshake tumblers, trays clattering along the servery, the practised clangour of the cafeteria ladies.

'Furnley Maurice' was the penname of Frank Wilmot, a longtime employee of Cole's Book Arcade and the inaugural manager of Melbourne University Press.

*trams*

## Captain Cook's cottage

Philanthropist Sir Russell Grimwade presented Captain Cook's cottage as a gift to mark Melbourne's centenary, in 1934-35 – a well-meant gesture which provoked a good deal of controversy. Although the cottage, transplanted from the village of Great Ayton in Yorkshire, had been home to Cook's parents in their old age, it was doubtful that their navigator son ever slept a night there. He was thought to have set buckle-shoed foot in it just once, on his return from 'discovering' Australia in 1770.

Sir Russell's gift was intended to nestle 'unobtrusively' between two Moreton Bay figs in front of the State Library in Swanston Street, 'where it could be protected from souvenir hunters at night'. But leading artists and architects objected to 'a whole pile of rubbish cluttering up the lawn', 'the dreadful incongruity' of 'this squalid little building' bound to diminish the Library's imposing façade. Opposition reached such a pitch that a site in Fitzroy Gardens was settled on instead.

As the cottage was being reassembled, a rival 'Captain Cook's cottage' – one with a greater claim to authenticity – came on the market in England and the New South Wales government determined to secure it for Sydney. The 'war of the cottages' grew snarlier still with a proposal to relocate from Parramatta to Melbourne a cottage claimed as the birthplace of John Batman. While the antecedents of the one-roomed timber dwelling were murky, it was generally conceded that 'the possibility of John Batman having been born in that cottage is greater than that Captain Cook ever lived in the Cook cottage'.

*Batman's portrait*  
*centenary of Melbourne*  
*Fairies' Tree*  
*Fitzroy Gardens*  
*La Trobe's cottage*  
*Miss Burton's cottage*

## Cats

‘The bona-fide founders of the present great metropolis’, wrote the journalist and Melbourne chronicler Edmund Finn, were ‘five men, a woman, and the woman’s cat’. This was the party sent out from Launceston aboard Fawkner’s *Enterprize* in August 1835 with the instruction to ‘Go on, lads, and look for water!’ The woman was 18-year-old Mary Gilbert, wife of Fawkner’s blacksmith. And the cat, said Finn, was her ‘pet or familiar’.

In 1852, an enterprising Bendigo storekeeper had a hundred cats rounded up in Melbourne – by hook or by crook, or whatever it took – and sent off by dray to the goldfields. Cats were in great demand at the diggings, not just as companions and mouse-catchers, but as ‘feline seasoners’ for the sausage trade.

*Falls, Yarra*

*Fawkner’s claim as founder*

## Centenary of Melbourne, 1934–35

Just three years out from the city's centenary, the Melbourne *Argus* outlined a 'bold' program of events proposed by the city council, including an Olympic Games and a world jamboree of Scouts. LORD MAYOR'S OPTIMISM was the headline.

*cafeterias*

*Captain Cook's cottage*

## Chinese New Year

In celebration of Chinese New Year, the streets around Melbourne's Chinatown are barricaded and revellers treated to traditional entertainments including the spectacle of the lion dancers terrorising business establishments up and down the precinct. At CNY 2009 I was caught up in the hullabaloo. Having nipped into my usual takeaway, I was about to leave with a bag of dumplings when a cranky-looking lion lobbed up at the door. The proprietors laid out offerings of joss envelopes, oranges, lettuce and a bottle of water, over which the lion hunched and twitched a while. Then, rearing up, it spat out a half-eaten orange, hitting me in my meagre bosom, dead over the heart. (How many mortals know the fearsome velocity of a ceremonial lion's spit?) On the authority of [www.spatonbyalion.com](http://www.spatonbyalion.com) an orange eaten by the beast symbolises gold, with the spat-out skin broadcasting wealth and good fortune. Doubtless presaging even greater luck, my sandals were filled with springwater and I was half-deafened by firecrackers before the lion lunged onward to its next victim. I scraped the orange pith from my blouse and, grumbling, ate my clammy-cold dumplings. Had I only guessed how I'd just been blessed, I'd have made a beeline for Crown casino instead of feeding my spare change into the State Library photocopier, for negligible return.

*Banana Alley  
tiger, escaped*

## Cocktails

Patrons at the opening of the New American Bar at Cremorne Gardens, Richmond, in November 1858 could choose from champagne, mint juleps, slings, snowstorms, spiders, cobblers, egg-nog, milk punch, and such ruinous-sounding farragos as a boxiana, brandy smash, chain lightning, or cannonade.

*beer*

*Cremorne Gardens*

## Cogwheel, flying

Twelve men were killed during construction of the Equitable Building in the early 1890s, at the Collins–Elizabeth street corner. Built to last as long as the pyramids, it had a superstructure of massive granite blocks. In the process of hoisting one into position a steam-engine blew up, killing its driver and spraying engine parts all over the city. William Ellis, a plasterer unconnected with the Equitable Building, had just collected his week's wages in Flinders Lane. Turning the corner into Elizabeth Street, 200 metres from the explosion, he was felled by an iron cogwheel that dropped from the sky, half-severing one of his arms and perforating his liver. He died next day.

The Equitable Building did not last as long as the pyramids, but was demolished in 1960. It is possible, if not likely, that one of the granite blocks now stuck in concrete outside the Melbourne Museum in Carlton, as a memorial to the defunct building, may be the very same that (indirectly) slayed unlucky William Ellis.

*Elizabeth Street*

## Cole's Book Arcade

E.W. Cole's vast and eccentric emporium in Bourke Street (1883–1929) advertised itself as the biggest bookshop in the world.

Cole started off selling books from a barrow at the Eastern Market in 1865. From there, he graduated to a shop at the top end of Bourke Street, before opening his legendary Book Arcade. On the gala opening day, Melbourne Cup Day, 1883, the first book sold was a household edition of Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*.

From his earliest days with a barrow, Cole hung up a sign: READ FOR AS LONG AS YOU LIKE. NOBODY ASKED TO BUY. He considered himself as much an educator as a businessman. In fact, recalled one customer, 'He had the uncommercial spirit of the true bookseller' – in spite (or because) of which, Cole made a fortune. He was an epic advertiser and a man with no end of tubs to thump. The Book Arcade's publishing arm issued the classic *Cole's Funny Picture Book*, besides countless pamphlets essaying causes close to the proprietor's heart. Among his passions were: temperance, a world federation ('One government, one language, one religion by 2000 AD'), the observance of Wednesday as a day of recreation, the advancement of Albury as Australia's capital city, opposition to the White Australia policy, comparative religion, aeronautics, and Darwinism (he kept a cage of monkeys at the Book Arcade, recording observations of their similarities to humankind).

Echoes of Cole and his Book Arcade are to be found in Peter Carey's novel, *Illywacker*.

*cafeterias*  
*Dwight's bookshop*  
*libraries*

## Corporation Lane, a lament for

Off Flinders Lane, east of Russell Street, Corporation Lane had a perfectly serviceable name. It was a name that meant something: this had been the access-way to the yard of the Corporation, or city council. Here, in an age before fluorescent vests and leaf-blowers, were kept the road-rollers, the mowing machines, MEN AT WORK signs, wheelbarrows, ladders, shovels for leaning on. Earlier still, when the lane was unnamed, it had led to a bottle-o's yard.

In 2004, it was someone's (or, more likely, several someones') idea of cool to re-brand Corporation Lane as AC/DC Lane. No matter that Acker/Dacker are Sydney lads; hadn't they cruised up Swanston Street on a tray-truck in their 1975 video-clip for 'It's a Long Way to the Top'? Justification enough to erase the prosaic Corporation Lane.

Pah. Why wasn't one of the fresh-made streets of Docklands dubbed AC/DC Promenade? Given the lengths to which civic leaders are prepared to go in the cause of international tourism, cashing-in, cashing-up, and a corporatised notion of cool, is it too late rename our fair city Batmania?

Buildings and landmarks rise and fall; can't a city's streets be allowed to remain as a constant? Names attach to places, places attach to names, and collective, cumulative memory attaches to both. *Vale*, Corporation Lane.

*Batman's portrait*

*beer*

*Bilkem (or Bilking) Square*

*Flinders Lane*

*Langs Lane*

*letter*

*Romeo Lane*

*Synagogue Lane*

## Cremorne Gardens

At the height of Victoria's gold rushes, in 1853, the Cremorne Gardens opened on drained swampland beside the Yarra at Richmond. Modelled on the famous pleasure gardens of the same name in London, Cremorne was a popular resort on summer evenings. Diversions included fireworks, a dance rotunda and theatre, tightrope walkers and 'flying trapezians', a menagerie, and elephant rides.

The resident elephant would also perform the stunt of catching silver coins in his trunk (*'The sagacious pachyderm would not accept coppers'*) and presenting them to his Bengali handler, Rango Semni. In 1854, a boy was drowned in a deep lagoon adjoining the gardens and his body lost in the murk. At Semni's urging, the Cremorne elephant plunged in and dived repeatedly, a heavy stone curled in his trunk to keep him down, until he succeeded in bringing up the boy's body. Semni was charged, the following year, with 'allowing his elephant to go at large and damage government property' after his free-spirited charge trampled a stable at the government camp, downriver from Cremorne.

The lily ponds at the pleasure gardens were stocked with the very first goldfish seen in Australia. Of the 500 imported only nine survived the voyage; but they and their progeny flourished at Cremorne.

*balloon, hot-air  
tiger, escaped*

## Cricket catapult

Cricket in Melbourne took a technological leap forward in 1859 with the installation at the MCG of a 'catapulta' for batting practice. Operated on the crossbow principle, it had a lever to control speed of delivery but negligible means of taking aim, so that the catapulted balls were as likely to land the batsman a blow to the spleen or temple – or to fell wildlife grazing near by – as they were to strike willow.

*hats*

## Crinolines

The mayor of St Kilda, James Turner, missed out on the fun of the Duke of Edinburgh's visit to Melbourne in 1867 – missed out on all future fun, in fact – through an accident with a lady's skirt. Out walking, Turner caught his foot in the steel hoops of a passing pedestrienne's swaying crinoline. He broke a leg, infection set in, and a fortnight later he was dead.

The course of colonial science was temporarily set back by the crinoline. The massed hoops worn by a party of lady visitors to the Flagstaff Hill observatory in 1860 disturbed the magnetic readings, possibly contributing (it has been speculated) to the fatal disarray of the Burke & Wills exploring expedition which would rely for direction on a combination of magnetic observations, phrenology, and camel-nav.

*Burke & Wills monument*  
*hatpins*  
*phrenologists*

## Date palms

Pioneer Melbourne medico, Dr Godfrey Howitt, in the early 1840s attempted to establish an orchard of date palms in his garden at the Paris end of Collins Street. Though the palms failed to flourish, the doctor had at the Spring Street corner a vast and splendid garden, traces of which would survive up until the 1950s – that decade of forgetting.

*Eastern Hill*

## Diamonds

An admirer of the actress Maggie Moore, a favourite at the Theatre Royal, gave her a set of diamond jewellery 'easily worth £500'. Generous soul that she was, Maggie lent them, wrapped in tissue paper, to a friend for a fancy dress ball. Returning them, her friend left the paper-wrapped package on Maggie's hotel dressing table among discarded curl papers and a maid threw them out. A search of the rubbish tip near Princes Bridge – behind where the rowing-club boatsheds now stand – proved fruitless.

*Fitzroy Gardens  
gold in Melbourne streets*

## Dogs

Of Melbourne in the 1840s, one pioneer recalled: 'Every family had a dog, and some had a dog for every one of their children.' And for every one of *those* dogs, there were perhaps two without owners, so that Melburnians daily faced 'the danger of being torn down and perhaps devoured alive, to appease the craving appetites of the numerous half-starved and savage dogs which infest the town'.

The first Dog Act came into effect when Melbourne was scarcely yet a town, and campaigns to eradicate strays practically constituted a form of sport. Police and citizenry would be offered a reward for every dog killed. The result? A slaughtering spree. The dead-dog tally for 1848 was 1200 – that in a city with a population of under 30,000.

Initially, those claiming a reward were required to furnish the entire corpse; later, an amputated tail was considered proof enough. As a result, an unequal proportion of Melbourne's *live* canine population sported a blunt knob at the end of their spine.

*frogs, bogus proliferation of*

## Dwight's bookshop

Timothy Dwight, at the top of Bourke Street, kept Melbourne's best secondhand bookshop of the 1860s. His stock came from the liquidated colonial libraries of well-read citizens returning Home once the heat went out of the gold rushes.

In 1869, Dwight sold a consignment formerly the property of R.H. Horne, poet and contributor to Dickens' *Household Words*. A journalist on the Melbourne *Age* spied in the 'fourpenny box' on the footpath a copy of Robert Browning's *Pauline*, inscribed by the author to his friend Horne. But, returning in his lunch-hour with fourpence, he found the book gone – and kicked himself ever after.

Horne's epic poem *Orion* had been a literary sensation of the 1840s. But though it ran to ten editions, it hadn't made him rich. In 1852 he joined the gold rush to Victoria, where top-shelf testimonials secured him such positions as commander of the gold escort, mining registrar, magistrate, and commissioner of the Yan Yean water supply. In his spare time, Horne was a wine-grower, taught swimming, and performed in the orchestra at the Duke of Edinburgh Theatre (a block downhill from Dwight's) playing that exotic new instrument, the guitar. After a rough-and-ready, bohemian life in the colonies, he returned to his native London, only to be knocked down by a cart and killed.

E.W. Cole established his first book arcade in Dwight's old premises.

*Cole's Book Arcade*  
*libraries*  
*water supply*

## Eastern Hill

In Collins Street, the slope of the Eastern Hill was originally much steeper than it is today. Major earthworks in 1849 greatly reduced the gradient between Swanston and Russell streets. Only the Baptist Church – with steps leading to its entrance high above the street – remains to show the original level of the hill.

A girl who attended school at the top end of Collins Street in the 1840s would in old age recall of the walk downhill to Swanston Street, ‘how slippery the clay roadway was on a wet day’. There were, of course, no footpaths.

## Elizabeth Street

The gully that shaped the course of Elizabeth Street – central Melbourne’s boggiest thoroughfare – originated in Carlton, emptying into the Yarra. Elizabeth Street continues to be flood-scoured right up to the present day.

William Kelly caught the scene after a downpour in 1853:

*‘...the current was so impetuous that it made one giddy to gaze at it as it roared past, empty cases, coffee tins, old hats, sardine boxes, discarded clothes, tattered mats, warehouse abomination hoarded since the previous flood, careering frantically on its bosom.’*

The torrent was at its most ‘impetuous’ up around Bourke Street, the post-office corner, where men, carts, even bullocks were swept away – or else stuck fast in the quagmire left by the flood. Below Collins Street. Elizabeth was a chain of semi-permanent waterholes, dubbed Lakes Cashmore, Enscoe and Townend in honour of those shopkeepers blessed with water-frontages.

Less well-known is Elizabeth Street’s reputation as a street of fire. Over the course of several days in 1891, flames were seen issuing from sewer gratings near the river end of the street. Dismissed at first as sewer gas ignited by a smoker’s spark, the flames grew fiercer until they snarled out of gratings as far along as Little Collins, and the road surface at the Flinders Street intersection began to bulge and smoke and give off heat. The cause of the fire turned out to be a broken underground gas pipe, a problem that – complete with flaming grates and bulging roadway – would recur in Elizabeth Street at ten-year intervals well into the 20th century.

*cogwheel, flying  
frogs  
water supply*

## Escalator

*'If the pages of the Arabian Nights opened and the magic carpet floated into Collins Street, Melbourne could not watch with greater awe.'* The feature attraction of the Manchester Unity building on the day it opened in September 1932 was its escalator, the city's first. It took about half a minute to convey passengers from arcade to first floor, a distance of less than 14 metres. But Melburnians were entranced by the 'magic stairway'.

The *Herald's* reporter-on-the-spot identified four stages in 'the Democratic and Modern Game of Escalating':

- (1) The Shy Stage: The aspiring Escalatee strokes chin, watches, and wonders if he'll risk it.*
- (2) The Venturesome Stage: The aspiring Escalatee tightens knot of tie, steps forward, and plants foot on rising stair.*
- (3) The Confident Stage: The aspiring Escalatee, half-way up without accident, squares shoulders and tells himself it's good.*
- (4) The Seasoned Stage: The Escalatee – a mere aspirant no longer – steps off at the top, decides it's good fun, and hurries down the stationary stairway to take another ride.'*

That's right: there was (and is) no 'down' escalator in the Manchester Unity. Melbourne just wasn't ready for it.

*lift (elevator)*

## Fairies' Tree

Inspired by the carved and painted Elfin Oak in London's Kensington Gardens, Bendigo-born sculptor Ola Cohn had the idea of creating something similar for the children of Melbourne. In the Fitzroy Gardens, not far from the kiosk, stood an ancient redgum hollowed out by fire. (A cigarette butt had started it, carried by a magpie to its nest in the upper branches.) Partly grown over with ivy, the tree's trunk – scored and whorled and pocked and blistered – offered great promise to a sculptor blessed with Cohn's imagination. Her work began in the depth of the Depression, May 1931, and was completed three years later in time for Melbourne's centenary. Swarms of bees and mosquitoes, vandals, and quizzing idlers prolonged the task and made it irksome. (In a poem dated 1933, Cohn prayed only for *'tools and light and air to breathe/ With no tormenting company round about...'*)

The fairies share their tree with all kinds of native wildlife: lyrebird, kookaburra, koala, emu, pelican, possum, rosella, kangaroo, and frilled-neck lizard, besides the fearsome bunyip and Cohn's own creation, the Evil Sorcerer spider.

*Captain Cook's cottage  
centenary of Melbourne  
Fitzroy Gardens*

## Falls, Yarra

Queen's Bridge crosses the Yarra on a diagonal at the foot of Market Street, A footway today, it was built as a rail-bridge in 1890. Some at that time thought it ought to be called Falls Bridge, since its iron beams overshadowed the old course of the rocky falls that gave the Yarra its name and determined the site of Melbourne.

When Johnny Fawkner's *Enterprize* edged its way up the river, dodging snags, in 1835, its progress was halted at this point by a ragged ledge of rock across the full width of the river. It was this ledge – the Falls – that fixed 'the place for a village'. It not only made for a natural disembarkation point, but formed a barrier between brackish water downstream and fresh water up-. Seeking the indigenous name of the river, the newcomers heard it as *Yarra Yarra* – the Aboriginal term for rapids: the Falls. The river itself was *Birrarung*.

Early Melburnians used the Falls as a crossing-place. Fishing from the Falls in 1845, John Batman's only son lost his footing and drowned. (Years later, a grandson of Batman's would be awarded for life-saving at Sandringham.)

*Batman's portrait, John  
Yarra River*

## Fawkner's claim as founder

*'I fully believe that my claim will be established even after my death, when envy towards me may die out. I maintain, and shall whilst life lasts, that I am the true founder of Victoria; and that if I had been frightened and left when Batman ordered me off, the colony would have been chiefly known as a colony of squatter princes of wool and lords of beef, mutton and tallow. (THIS CONTROVERSY MUST NOW CEASE—Ed.)'*

The controversy over 'who was founder?' did not, as the editor of the *Argus* wished, cease in October 1868 – although John Pascoe Fawkner, writer of the above, would himself shortly cease to breathe and self-aggrandise (which amounted, with him, to the same thing).

Fawkner was a pain in the arse, true, and his role in the initial founding of Melbourne was as a claim-jumper, determined to cheat John Batman of his prize. But he would outlive Batman by 30 years: decades during which Melbourne and Victoria's progress from outlaw settlement to golden pride of the Antipodes had Fawkner's fingerprints – now shoving, now grasping – all over it.

Perhaps Fawkner's soundest claim as Melbourne founder lay not in his eye-bleeding rants, but in the plain statement – rare among British-born colonists of his era – that *'This is my home. England is not to me home.'*

*Batman's portrait  
centenary of Melbourne*

## Fitzroy Gardens

During Melbourne's first decades, a deep gully ran down to the Yarra through the bush that covered the future Treasury and Fitzroy gardens (bush of which the Fairies' Tree is a remnant). For travellers between Richmond and Melbourne, a narrow plank was laid across the gully as a crossing. Its proximity to the growing town made the gully an ideal rubbish-tip, a function it served until the public gardens were laid out – and the gulch filled in – in the 1850s.

*Captain Cook's cottage*  
*diamonds*  
*Fairies' Tree*

## Flinders Lane

Flinders Lane – originally Little Flinders Street – was Melbourne’s principal street of commerce and fashion during the earliest years of the town. When the streets were first marked on a map, most of the existing buildings turned out to be in Flinders Lane and at the first sale of town land, allotments in Flinders Lane fetched the highest prices. Its appeal was that it was near the river – the centre of attraction in those times – but not near enough for inundation. In the 1850s, a Yankee merchant compared it with New York’s Wall Street. That things had changed fifty years later is apparent when a proud Melburnian could disparage Sydney’s main thoroughfares by likening them to Flinders Lane.

## Fortune tellers

Melbourne police in 1932 mounted a blitz on fortune-telling in city cafés, a sideline that had flourished as the Depression bit deep. ‘AFTERNOON TEA 1/- WITH CUP READING FREE’ read a typical signboard outside a Bourke Street café.

The police MO was to send plain-clothes female officers to a café in pairs. Having taken their orders for ice cream (in August!) or ‘pineapple specials’, the waitress would ask whether they wanted ‘readings’, then send over the resident clairvoyant. At Black’s Café, ‘Madame Valda’ (really Valda Wingrove, married, of Church Street, North Richmond) offered a choice of palm-reading or crystal-gazing, her facility in which she had picked up from books after her husband lost his job. Peering at the palm of Policewoman Martin Madame Valda observed: *‘You have a very sensitive hand. You would make a good nurse, and could manage money or a business. You are easily hurt, however, and will travel more by land than water. You will live into your 70s, and if you are not married you will be. Do you know anyone named Arthur?’* To Policewoman Smith she revealed: *‘You are very sympathetic. You will have an operation, but not for some time. You will meet someone who has an aeroplane, and will go exploring and suffer from headaches.’*

Fortune-telling was classed as fraud (*‘the policewomen were imposed upon’*), but café-owners defended it as harmless entertainment and a stimulus to trade. ‘Entertainment, indeed!’ thundered the judge in the case of a Tivoli Café palmist. *‘You mean the delusion of poor, unfortunate customers.’* But ‘Nobody,’ insisted Madame Valda’s counsel, *‘would believe the rubbish they were told. They received their “reading” as a joke, and received their money’s worth in amusement.’*

*cafeterias*  
*phrenologists*  
*ghost house*

## Foundation stones

*'A crowd, a mob, what can it be?  
An accident, I fear;  
And wildly through the throng I pushed.  
But see – the Duke is here!  
I saw – I saw our Sovereign's child  
In Smith street, Collingwood;  
Laying the foundation stone  
For the working classes' good.'*

'Lines on Laying the Foundation-stone, Smith street, Collingwood' by 'One of the Working Classes' appeared in the *Collingwood Advertiser* after the Duke of Edinburgh did the honours for the local mechanics' institute.

The Duke's most notable effort in that line during his 1867 visit was to wave a ceremonial trowel over the foundation stone of the Melbourne Town Hall, to the acclaim of an immense, be-hatted, bun-eating mob. (Not even the Beatles, dispensing ceremonial waves on the same spot a century later, would pull so big a crowd.) Curiously, for all the pomp, the Town Hall's foundation stone was not inscribed to mark the deed of the 'Sovereign's child'. Fifty years later, a photograph taken on the occasion would be minutely studied in order to figure out which of the massive blocks of stone that formed the building's foundation was *the* foundation stone, beamed over and blessed by royalty. Experts identified it as the stone at the very corner and – better late than never – a gilt inscription was carved in its Collins Street face.

It was the practice (still is) to place a time-capsule under a structure's foundation stone – traditionally a bottle stuffed with newspapers, fresh-minted coins, and a commemorative scroll. In the 1880s, when the old Princes Bridge was pulled down and its foundation stone lifted, the bottle was found to have been rifled of its coins – a not-uncommon occurrence. After a stone-laying ceremony, building workers would wait for the dignitaries to clear off to their champagne lunch, then raise the stone with a crowbar, shake the coins from the bottle, and shout themselves a liquid lunch.

*bun fight*

## Fountains

There used to be a fountain at the intersection of Collins and Swanston streets. Erected in celebration of the Yan Yean water supply in 1859, the Victoria fountain was a beacon to street-urchins, stray dogs, and thirsty beasts of burden. But it proved such an obstruction to traffic that it was removed after just five years to Carlton Gardens, where it would be demolished in 1879 to make way for the Exhibition Buildings.

Up in Spring Street, on a grassy triangle south of Parliament House, is an elaborate fountain carved out of stone by William Stanford, a Pentridge prisoner in the 1860s. All kinds of legend attached to Stanford and his fountain. One account told how, as a hapless young gold-seeker, he had *twice* found himself convicted of crimes he didn't commit: first horse-stealing, then armed robbery. Despondent, the prisoner sought to raise his spirits by carving into the bluestone prison walls using knives purloined from the kitchen. He was routinely punished for vandalism until a high-ranked prison-visitor saw his work and, impressed, suggested that Stanford's hobby be encouraged. Charles Summers – sculptor of the Burke and Wills monument – was reputedly enlisted to instruct Stanford, and the prison governor offered his son as model for the figure of a boy that surmounts the fountain.

*Burke & Wills monument  
water supply*

## Frogs, bogus proliferation of

In the *Encyclopedia of Melbourne* (page 293), I read: ‘*Sixteen species of frog... can be found within 50 m of the Melbourne General Post Office*’! Astounded, I looked again – it said *50 km*. Just imagine, though: sixteen species of frog croaking to rival Nick Cave in Bernard’s Magic Shop and the subterranean toilets in Elizabeth Street, jumping the queue for Myer’s Christmas windows and competing in volume and long-windedness with the pan-pipers in the Mall. But the mess on the tram tracks doesn’t bear thinking about.

*Elizabeth Street*

## Gasworks

Melbourne's first gasworks was down by the riverfront at what is now Docklands. Just before Christmas 1855 Victoria's governor, Sir Charles Hotham, lit the retort and declared the gasworks open. Free buns notwithstanding, the crowd was thin for once, owing to torrential rain and the governor's poor standing among the bun-eating classes. In the aftermath of the Eureka Stockade, a year earlier, he had been widely condemned as a tyrant with gold-diggers' blood on his hands. Fed up, Sir Charles had submitted his resignation and would sail for home in the New Year. But he was dead before the New Year came, from a chill he'd caught that dirty day at the gasworks.

*balloon, hot-air*

## Ghost house

When the three-storey house at 25-27 Rathdowne Street, Carlton, sold at auction in 1949, it came with a reputation as ‘the ghost house’. The nature of the manifestations that earned it the title is as shrouded as a phantom. (*‘People nearby say the house could tell many tales of strange happenings there years ago,’* is as close as the *Herald* got to spelling it out.) The house’s reputation doubtless owed a good deal to the occupancy, during the ‘crime-ridden’ 1920s, of the phrenologist and (though she denied it) fortune-teller, Madame Ghurka. She did her phrenologising at a shop in the Eastern Arcade, Bourke Street – downstairs from the wine-shop of Colin Ross, who in 1922 was hanged for the murder of 12-year-old Alma Tirtschke. (Ross would be granted a long-posthumous pardon in 2008.) A prominent but unreliable witness for the prosecution, Madame Ghurka allowed her Rathdowne Street boarding-house to be used as a ‘safe house’ for Crown witnesses during the Ross murder trial.

Born in Russia, Madame Ghurka (real name Julia Gibson) displayed an boundless talent for tall stories – not least about herself. She claimed to have been a bomb-throwing revolutionary in her youth, later spying for the British in the guise of a circus performer. In spite of her dodgy reputation, the *Herald*’s description of her in its ‘ghost house’ story as *‘the notorious fortune-teller’* won her a defamation pay-out of £1000.

*fortune tellers*  
*phrenologists*

## Ghost ship of Wills Street

Just before eleven one morning at the end of March, I saw a ghost ship high on a west-facing wall in Wills Street. Its uncanny square-rigged sails were formed by reflected sunlight from windows in a building opposite. Mid- to late morning, depending on the season, plant yourself in La Trobe Street downhill from William and cast your gaze up and northwards.

Flagstaff Hill, adjacent, was in former times the city's vantage point for shipping. Nowadays, for a comparable nautical thrill, you have to turn your back on the Bay.

*Burke & Wills monument*

## Glacial boulder

Looking like a giant grey jellybean or auk's egg on stilts is the Royal Society of Victoria's centenary monument (1859-1959) in Exhibition Street, adjacent to RSV headquarters. In fact, it's a smooth-worn glacial boulder, brought from Antarctica and mounted on legs *'to commemorate the completion of one hundred years of endeavour by the Society in its work for the advancement of science'*. That hundred year's work had commenced with the doomed Victorian Exploring Expedition, led by Burke and Wills.

*Burke & Wills monument  
pillar of stone*

## Gold in Melbourne streets

Gold-struck Melburnians of the 1850s saw the ‘yellow girl’ everywhere. There were ‘rushes’ in Swanston, Lonsdale, William and Bourke streets in the city proper, as well as at Emerald Hill (South Melbourne), Richmond Hill, Prahran, St Kilda, and Collingwood. None lasted more than a day, since gold-digging was forbidden within any existing town. Some of the discoveries must have been sparked by gold dust spilt from a digger’s pocket, some by avaricious publicans (digging for gold was thirsty work), some – who can say? – might even have been genuine. Diggers down from the goldfields recognised auriferous-looking ground in Melbourne street cuttings, footpaths and parklands. But there were fluke finds, too, like a half-ounce nugget dug up by two girls who were playing marbles in their yard at the top end of Lonsdale Street. A pretty bit of china had caught their attention and, digging it out with a stick, they found the nugget underneath.

Flagstaff Hill weathered several outbreaks of gold-fever, one of them – doubly *verboten*, no gold-digging being allowed on Sundays – infecting worshippers at St Mary’s, West Melbourne, putting an early halt to mass. Anywhere with a Hill in its name seems to have been fair odds, the hills in and around the city apparently being capped with the remnants of ancient gold-bearing gravel. Only at Collingwood Flat, in Hoddle Street (in later years, when the law had changed) did an urban gold mine get going in earnest – but with no great success.

*diamonds*

## Hatpins

In the years leading up to the First World War, Melburnians lived in constant fear of being maimed – in the streets, on trams and trains, even in their own homes. Women's fashion dictated big-crowned hats over blousy coiffures, the one fixed to the other by a hatpin up to one foot (30 cm) in length. Invariably, an inch or two of the pointy end protruded – and therein lay the menace.

One man had his eyelid skewered by a wayward hatpin at Spencer Street station. Another was 'violently harpooned in the nose' at the railway station turnstiles. A little girl was blinded when a lady visitor bent to kiss her, and at a football match a child carried in its mother's arms was gashed from mouth to ear by her hatpin. *'The law forbids officers wearing spurs in the streets,'* wrote an indignant correspondent to the *Argus*, *'yet allows women to wear unguarded swords in their hats.'*

Not for long. All over the Western world, governments passed a flurry of laws 'to counteract the growing evil'. Melbourne got its hatpin by-law (no. 127) in 1913, requiring women to wear 'protectors' on their hatpin-points. Little metal knobs, hatpin protectors came in packets of twelve that the law required hat-wearers to carry at all times. Plainclothes police roamed the city streets in search of unprotected hatpins. Mae Hussey, a nurse, was the first to be charged, viz.: *'that while walking along Flinders street, defendant did wear a hatpin in such a manner that the same might have inflicted injury by coming in contact with any person on such street'*. On a busy afternoon in Chapel Street, Prahran, six women were apprehended – one, Mrs Phoebe Evans, later fainting in court when a fine of two shillings and sixpence was imposed.

Melbourne City Council by-law no. 127 was rescinded in 1989.

*hats*

## Hats

When the Paddington Hotel was demolished in 1912 to make way for one of the city's first motor garages, a dozen silk belltopper hats were found inside the ceiling. The wrecker's men made a game of kicking them up and down Little Collins Street, and that night sent them in the cart to the tip. Only years later, via the front-bar circuit, did a story emerge that might explain the presence of twelve hats in the ceiling. In the 1870s a visiting English cricket team had lodged at the Paddington. Someone had taken the Englishmen's hats from their hooks in the hall and hidden them in the ceiling – more as a come-uppance, it would seem, than a prank, since the hats were never returned to their owners. And why? Only lately did I read of how, during an English cricket tour of similar vintage, the visiting team drew opprobrium by insisting they wear their top hats while fielding. It wasn't just a matter of etiquette or heatstroke; as a flying shot approached, one of the English fieldsman used his hat to scoop the ball out of the air, and called it a catch. The abduction of the team's belltoppers seems, under the circumstances, rather a mild form of rebuke.

*cricket catapult*

*hatpins*

*Homicide*

## *Homicide*

The blond-brick façade of the old Russell Street police headquarters was made familiar to TV viewers all over Australia in the 1960s and '70s, as backdrop to the opening credits of *Homicide*. An early model Falcon would execute a U-turn to the kerb and, unhindered by seatbelts, from all four doors would emerge Jack Fagen, Leonard Teale, Norman Yemm and their fedora'd brethren. Teale in particular had authority stamped all over him, never more so than when issuing his trademark command: '*Take it down to Forensics, Pete.*' Pete was never seen, except as a Pelaco-clad forearm from off-screen right.

When spunky young George Mallaby joined the cast of *Homicide* in 1967, he was instructed to buy himself a hat. Being of the post-JFK generation, however, he contrived to exempt himself from hat-wearing by buying the stupidest one he could find. Alas, the wardrobe-mistress loved it and Mallaby was stuck with his ridiculous pork-pie, a size too small, needing only leiderhosen to pass for one of the Von Trapp Family Singers.

*hats*

## Honeymooners

At New Year 1864, a newlywed couple from Castlemaine took lodgings at a Queen Street boarding-house calling itself the Hotel de France. Built in a hurry during gold-rush times, the structure was less pretentious than its name; in fact, its foundations showed every sign of impermanence. At 2.20 a.m. on Sunday, 4 January, the front wall of the unsteady erection collapsed and the honeymooners found themselves catapulted, bed and all, into the middle of Queen Street. Amazingly, no one was injured.

## Hotels, 1878

According to *Massina's Guide to Melbourne* for 1878, Melbourne had a dedicated hotel for almost every class, creed and category of visitor. Asche's Union Club Hotel in Collins Street East was the Melbourne headquarters of 'the wool kings of the Western District'. Garton's in Swanston Street was the meeting-place for members of the dramatic and musical profession. Clement's, also in Swanston Street, was the rendezvous of cricketers. The Clarence, at the corner of Collins and Elizabeth, was 'the house of call' for builders and contractors. In Bourke Street, there was the Albion for 'sporting gentlemen, quartz-claim holders, &c.', the Victoria for bookmakers and members of the turf fraternity, and the Duke de la Victoria for equestrian and circus people. Ballarat visitors (along with 'politicians of anti-Conservative principles') favoured Stutt's Hotel, Bendigonians the Saracen's Head, Geelong-ites Hockin's, Tasmanians the Post Office Hotel, Germans the Alexandra, Londoners the John Bull Tavern, and Scotchmen (no surprise) the Highland Chief.

## Humbug Reach

Before Coode Canal was dug in the 1880s to straighten the Yarra's entrance, ships approached Melbourne via a loop of river curving around towards Footscray across the flats. One stretch of the wriggling river, where tea tree grew so thick along the banks that ships' sails were cheated of the wind, was known as Humbug Reach.

Coode's Canal shortened the journey from Queen's Bridge to the Bay by 2 km. Once the canal was flowing, the old river course silted up and soon could be made out only as a thread of lush growth meandering through the swampy West Melbourne flats (roughly what we call Docklands). The formation of Victoria Dock at the end of the 1880s cut the old Humbug Reach away.

## Ice

At the approach of summer 1855, an ice-house was built at the foot of Queen Street, in preparation for the arrival of the ship *Alert* from Boston with 573 tons of sawdust-packed river ice – some of it from the neighbourhood of Thoreau's Walden Pond. Once landed, the ice sold at sixpence a pound (450g). The ice-house would stand for ten years, storing imported ice, until it was made redundant by an enterprise that produced ice locally.

*Banana Alley*  
*snow*

## Justice statue

The figure of Justice surmounting the entrance to the law courts in William Street is unconventional in that she is not blindfolded. It was the opinion of Sir Redmond Barry – Chief Justice when the courts were built – that justice ought *never* be blind.

*Barry's statue*

## Knitting

Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, founder of Melbourne's botanic gardens, had a muffler knitted for him by Lady Loch when her husband, Sir Henry, was Governor of Victoria. So greatly did von Mueller treasure Lady Loch's handiwork that he kept the muffler with him always, tucking it under his arm when not wearing it – and even directing that it be buried with him.

## Langs Lane

Along this narrow-gutted laneway – off Bourke Street, a short distance from Spencer – the actor Colin Friels piloted a cut-in-half-lengthwise Honda Z in the 1986 movie *Malcolm*. (No car was more deserving of lateral bi-section.) A likewise slender passage, Corrs Lane, leads off Lonsdale Street, just east of Russell.

Lanes like these – and others slightly broader, such as Little Lonsdale near Swanston Street, and the former Synagogue Lane – give the alert pedestrian their best sense of the topography that underlies the city. The narrower the aperture the better for reading the tilt of the land.

*beer*

*Synagogue Lane*

## La Trobe's statue

Victoria's first governor, Charles Joseph La Trobe, was described contemporaneously in the *Herald* as having a smile that 'could ripen a banana'. Try it. His statue stands on the State Library lawn and a green banana can be had for a dollar from a nearby street-vendor.

By all accounts a gentle soul, in his statue La Trobe wears a ceremonial sword – it goes with the gilt brocade and buttons, the bicorn and cockade. In life, his sword afforded La Trobe some trouble. The occasion was of one of the infant town's innumerable sod-turnings or stone-layings, and La Trobe was stood on a crowded dais when a town councillor tripped over his dangling sword. The councillor, to steady himself, grabbed the Governor's arm, La Trobe clutched at the mayor, and all three men and the reprehensible sword keeled backwards off the dais, through a curtain, and into the bun-filled refreshment tent behind.

*Barry's statue*

*Banana Alley*

*bun fight*

*foundation stones*

*La Trobe's cottage*

## La Trobe's cottage

La Trobe's Government House was a pre-fabricated timber cottage which he brought with him from England in 1839 and had erected on his own land at Jolimont.\* Victoria's next governor was treated to a much grander residence at Toorak, and La Trobe's cottage was all but forgotten. By 1914 its former grounds were the site of Bedggood's boot factory and the cottage itself was relegated to an outbuilding. At talk of demolition, a mild public controversy arose. To a suggestion that La Trobe's cottage be relocated to one of Melbourne's public gardens for use as a toolshed or 'rest-house', a correspondent to the *Argus* countered that Bedggood's should instead be moved ( '*Surely other sites can be had for factories*' ) and the old Government House grounds reinstated as a bowling green and pleasure-gardens.

Eighteen years later, the cottage still stood in the factory yard, but in a condition greatly diminished. '*The rule of "findings are keepings" seems to have made Victoria's first Government House a happy hunting-ground for all kinds of curio-seeking vandals,*' lamented the *Argus*. The cedar bookshelves that lined La Trobe's favourite room had been jemmied out, the great cooking range from the kitchen sold for scrap, the lead salvaged from the roof, the front door key stolen, and the antique door lock removed (horror of horrors) to the Mitchell Library in Sydney.

Rescued from complete demolition at the time of Melbourne's centenary, the surviving portion of La Trobe's cottage was re-sited and restored in 1963 on parkland close by the Botanic Gardens.

\*The man who nailed the pieces together was carpenter George Beaver, later a town councillor and resident of Synagogue Lane.

*Captain Cook's cottage*  
*La Trobe's statue*  
*Miss Burton's cottage*  
*Synagogue Lane*

## Letter

A curious story attaches itself to a right-of-way that branched off Flinders Lane practically opposite the former Corporation Lane. Nameless for many years, it was christened Haskin Lane in the 1930s and then disappeared in the 'eighties, crushed underfoot by 101 Collins Street. But that's not the story.

The story goes that in September 1893 a letter was found in the right-of-way, a letter of antique appearance: folded parchment, a postmark pre-dating postage stamps, wax seal unbroken. There was a detective stationed at Melbourne's GPO and the letter found its way to him. It turned out to have originated in London on 7 September 1752. And therein – putting aside the manner of its discovery – lay the letter's curiousness. *There was no 7 September* in London in 1752, that being the month and year in which England 'lost' eleven days – 3–13 September – in switching to the Gregorian calendar. Those eleven days were simply omitted, un-lived: folk went to bed on 2 September and woke up on the 14th. Melbourne's post-office detective could neither explain the letter's existence nor facilitate its delivery, so he added it to his album of 'postal curiosities' – available for viewing at the National Archives.

*Corporation Lane*  
*Private detective*

## Libraries

At his hotel in Market Street – Melbourne’s first depot of rest and refreshment – the teetotal Johnny Fawkner in 1838 established a library of books and periodicals, promising (in Fawkner’s handwritten newspaper, the *Melbourne Advertiser*) ‘Mental Recreation of a High Order’ –

*‘There are provided 7 English & 5 Colonial Newspapers... A very choise Siliction of Books including Novels Poetry Theology Philosophy Chemistry &c. N.B. A late Encyclopidia’*

Lodgers had free use of Fawkner’s library, others paid a fee.

In the 1840s, the barrister (and future Chief Justice) Redmond Barry kept a library in the back kitchen of his cottage in Bourke Street. Well-stocked with English periodicals and warmed by a good fire in winter, Barry’s library was open to decent working men of the neighbourhood. Barry would shortly be a founder of the Melbourne Public Library – now the State Library of Victoria.

After the State Library’s lending branch closed in 1971, central Melbourne was without a public lending library until 2004, when the City Library opened in Flinders Lane. Popular with city dwellers and workers, it was soon the busiest public lending library in Victoria.

*Barry’s statue*

*Cole’s Book Arcade*

*Dwight’s bookshop*

*Fawkner’s claim as founder*

*La Trobe’s statue*

## Lift (elevator)

At the end of the 1880s, Melbourne's skyline took a sudden leap upwards. The advent of lifts meant taller buildings, since tenants were happy to occupy upper floors once they and their customers didn't have to climb stairs. Loftiest of all, the twelve-storey Australian Building in Elizabeth Street, was served by a hydraulic lift, powered by high-pressure water at the tug of a rope. On the day that lift was to be christened, a dozen dignitaries – among them the premier (and future prime minister), Alfred Deakin – took their seats in the cedar-panelled lift-car. The building's architect, Henry Kemp, was there too. This is his account:

*'What went wrong was never known – whether there was some defect in the valves or whether the driver became over-excited – but as the rope was pulled, the cage shot up like a rocket. No one could count the floors. Fortunately the safety springs brought the flight upwards to a not too violent conclusion, the lift recoiling a mere ten or twelve feet. The passengers scrambled out on the eleventh floor, and it was noticed that the lift was not so crowded going down!*

*What a sensation in the city of that day if suddenly had emerged from its highest building a rocket with a dripping tail 100 feet long, topped by a crushed lift cage, from which dropped at intervals into the Yarra or on the railway buildings some of its best known citizens!'*

*Elizabeth Street  
escalator  
water supply*

## Melba, Nellie

To mark the death of the Melbourne-born diva in 1931, a street in Brussels was named Avenue Nelli Melbalaan.

## 'Melbourne's mother'

Launceston has sometimes been referred to as 'Melbourne's mother' – reason being, that the town (now city) on Tasmania's north coast was home and port of embarkation for Melbourne's founders, Batman and Fawkner, and many settlers who followed them.

*Batman's portrait*  
*Fawkner as founder*

## Meteorite

In about 1875, a meteorite fell in Victoria Street, North Melbourne, with a crash that disrupted classes at the common school in Errol Street.

## Miss Burton's cottage

*'But Whelan wrecked the years of strange content  
When old Miss Burton's blue-stone cottage went.'*

The poems of Furnley Maurice took a few swipes at the patron saint of Melbourne demolishers, Whelan the Wrecker – this one from 'Melbourne and Memory'.

Bluestone, the steely-grey basalt quarried some distance from the town, imbued many of Melbourne's early buildings with a deceptive air of permanence. Certainly, the few that remain seem built to last the ages, weighed down with the bluestone gravitas.

Where *was* old Miss Burton's bluestone cottage, whose demolition plunged Melburnians into discontent? My guess is that it stood in the former Synagogue Lane, alongside the 'veterinary forge' (horse-shoeing works) of Burton & Broatch, which yielded its place in the 1920s to an electrical sub-station.

With Melbourne's centenary approaching, a search was mounted in 1934 for the city's oldest building. Miss Burton's, had it still been standing, may well have ranked among the front-runners. In the event, the honour went to a pair of cottages built in 1844 at the bottom end of Exhibition Street. Quite a fuss was made of them. But the sentimentality was short-lived: they were pulled down in 1941 – by Whelan's, of course. Furnley Maurice died the following year.

*beer*

*cafeterias*

*Captain Cook's cottage*

*Ned Kelly's horse*

*La Trobe's cottage*

*Sawdust Café*

*Synagogue Lane*

*telegraph pole*

## Morgue

Beneath Federation Square is the site of Melbourne's original morgue (1854–83). Set like a catacomb into the bank of the old Princes Bridge approach, its location in such a populous part of town was criticised from the outset as 'indelicate', 'horrible', and 'needlessly offensive to the feelings of citizens'.

*Yarra River*

## Native foods

The Acclimatisation Society was formed for the purpose of introducing exotic species of plants and animals to Victoria, in the name of economics, science, sport, and familiarity. The introduction of rabbits and blackberries must count among the Society's best work.

Yet it cannot be said that the acclimatisationists weren't willing to give native foods a try. At a dinner in 1861, the Society invited guests 'to test the edible qualities of our native fauna on a scale never before attempted'. The epic bill of fare included *les bandicoots rotis*, *le wallaby au jus*, *le wombat au lievre*, *les cabillands de la Murray* (Murray cod), *le cygne noir roti* (black swan), and *les oiseaux wattle* (wattle birds).

*Cremorne Gardens  
tiger, escaped*

## Ned Kelly's horse

The carriage of the Melbourne theatrical luminary, George Coppin, was for years drawn by two horses commandeered by police after the annihilation of the Kelly gang at Glenrowan in June 1880. Ned's own favourite mount, Mirth, and Joe Byrne's Music were sold out of the Benalla pound six weeks later. Nor were their days of stunt-riding over: legend has it that they appeared on stage at Coppin's Theatre Royal when equine-themed productions called for horsemen to ride in through the back of the theatre, downstage to the footlights, and off through the wings. Only once did a horse and rider end up in the orchestra pit.

## Noah's Ark

In 1853 Melbourne was stuffed beyond capacity with a flood of gold-rush immigrants that just kept on arriving. To capitalise on the bed-shortage, a vast, galvanised iron lodging-house was built in North Melbourne. The dining hall was surrounded, on the ground floor and at balcony level, by small sleeping cubicles, each with its own door and window. It was called the Australian Club House, but was universally known as Noah's Ark. (Nowadays I dare say it'd be dubbed 'the Titanic'.) In later years it served as a sailor's home, then a private school known as the Old Club House. The Metropolitan Meat Market was built on the site in 1874.

## Old Treasury

Returned soldiers, protesting rough treatment of their comrades by baton-happy police on Peace Day, 1919, demanded redress from the Premier, Harry Lawson. Dissatisfied with his response, hundreds of them invaded the Old Treasury building, where a Cabinet meeting was in progress. Windows and doors were smashed, coal trodden into the carpet, drawers rifled, papers shredded, pictures torn from the walls, and the Premier himself struck over the head with an ink-stand.

*‘The blood from his head spurting out and ran down his neck. In an instant his collar was saturated with blood. Mr Lawson put his hand to his head and looking at his blood-stained fingers, asked, “Is this what you are going to do with me?”*  
*“No digger did that,” said several returned men. “We don’t stand for that sort of thing.”’ (Age, 22 July 1919)*

And, forming a cordon, they escorted the Premier to safety. Ex-servicemen would win their redress four years later, when many volunteered as ‘special constables’ during the police strike of 1923. On that occasion, Premier Lawson would refuse to reinstate the striking police, instead giving their jobs – and their batons – to the strike-breaking ‘specials’.

*Parliament House gun-slits*

## Paper bags

Melbourne had nine paper bag manufacturers in 1893, five of them in the city proper.  
Who makes our paper bags now?

## 'Paris of the Pacific'

British press baron Lord Northcliffe, visiting in 1921, dubbed Melbourne 'The Paris of the Pacific'.

## Parliament Hill gun-slits

Almost hidden by pillars on either side of the entrance to Melbourne's Parliament House are two horizontal slits – reputedly gun-slits for picking off troublemakers in the street below.

In the early days of Victoria's parliament, the Eastern Market, a short way down Bourke Street, was the venue for protest meetings which more than once spilled uphill to Parliament House. When contentious land legislation – *'The squatter or the common man? Unlock the land!'* – was before Parliament in 1860, a rowdy mob rushed the House, breaking windows and jostling parliamentarians. Determined that their deliberations should not be influenced by the threat of violence, Parliament swiftly passed a bill that outlawed gatherings within a one-mile radius. Only many years later, when Parliament House finally acquired its lofty façade, were gun-slits incorporated in the design.

Inside the building, the slits are positioned at eye-level on a stairwell landing. Their edges are chamfered, splaying out to maximise the angling of a rifle – or the inflow of fresh air. You see, the alternative explanation of the 'gun-slits' is that they served as ventilation for urinals on the stair-landings. In a sprawling 19th-century building with no surfeit of water-closets, stairwell urinals would have been a standard (if malodorous) fixture and a godsend to caught-short parliamentarians.

*Old Treasury*

## Pellegrini's

Besides being one of the city's pioneer espresso bars, Pellegrini's presents to an unaccompanied woman the ultimate test of confidence and cleavage. Not only has she to shoulder the suit-flannel scrum and catch the eye of a haughty Latin, there are those mirror-lined walls...

## Phrenologists

The pseudo-science of phrenology treated the shape of the skull as a window to a person's character. Melbourne's first phrenologist set up shop in 1853. 'Professor' Philemon Sonier was rumoured to be an exiled nobleman in disguise, which did no harm to business. Besides offering readings, he exhibited at his Phrenological Museum models of famous skulls – from monarchs to murderers – illustrating the world of difference a few bumps could make. In 1858, the Phrenological Museum merged with Mrs Williams' Waxworks, the two proprietors merging in marriage soon after.

There were, in contrast to Professor Sonier's freak-show approach, such jobbing phrenologists as Joseph Doubleday, who read heads as a sideline to hairdressing. Reading heads was legal where reading palms or tea-leaves wasn't, which is why the 'notorious fortune-teller' Madame Ghurka used phrenology as a front for her divination boutique in the Eastern Arcade. But that phrenology was acknowledged as more entertainment than science is evident from the locale in which its practitioners invariably hung their shingles: the theatrical and sideshow quarter of Bourke Street east.

*fortune tellers*  
*ghost house*

## Picasso's *Weeping Woman*

When Picasso's painting *Weeping Woman* was discovered missing from its frame at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1986, responsibility was claimed by the hitherto-and-since-unheard-of Australian Cultural Terrorists. A ransom, of art prizes totalling \$25,000, was demanded but never paid. After two weeks and a tip-off, the Picasso was found in a locker no. 227 at Spencer Street (now Southern Cross) railway station. Ten years later, the old lockers – 227 included – were replaced by electronic ones whose use, entailing instructions from a talking parrot, resulted in an unsatisfactory exchange of correspondence between me and the Minister for Transport.

*Batman's hill*  
*Southern Cross station*

## Pigeons

Beside the Yarra, near the aquarium, lies Batman Park – cutely named, since the riverbank here was partly formed from refuse quarried away from Batman’s Hill. Dominating the park is what looks like a cross between a silo and a cheese-grater – actually a pigeon loft to which the ‘flying rats’ have been lured (or exiled) from pigeon-intolerant sites across the central city. Until recent times, the Melbourne Town Hall, St Paul’s Cathedral, and the GPO were tenanted by thousands of winged freeloaders and encrusted with their crap. The introduction of spikes and netting and a ban on pigeon-feeding in said locales have had some success in redirecting the vermin to Batman Park. Affixed to the loft is the city council’s manifesto on pigeon-management – enthralling to seed-toting fanciers perhaps, but striking the rest of us as a mite fanciful.

*Barry’s statue  
Batman’s Hill  
foundation stones*

## Pigface

*'And all the way from Caulfield station to town  
The encroaching pigface pours  
Its molten magenta down the sides of cuttings.'* ('Upon a Row of Old Boots and Shoes in  
a Pawnbroker's Window', Furnley Maurice)

Where has all the pigface gone? The vivid-flowered succulent is everywhere in accounts of Melbourne from its earliest days up to the mid-20th century. The Blue Lake at the west end of town was wreathed around with it. In Dr Godfrey Howitt's Collins Street garden of 1853 were *'beds of mesembryanthemum... brilliant with florescence'*.

Perhaps the pigeons ate it all.

*Blue Lake  
date palms  
pigeons*

## Pillar of stone

A pillar of sandstone standing at the south-eastern corner of the Exhibition Buildings bears a plaque with the following explanation:

*'This pillar of stone quarried from Stawell  
was placed here at the insistence of  
The Hon. John Woods, MP  
(born Liverpool, England, Nov' 5th 1822,  
died Brighton, Victoria, April 2nd 1892;  
Engineer, politician & inventor, Commissioner  
International Exhibition 1880, Exhibition Trustees 1881–1892)  
to express his indignation at the choice of New South Wales stone for Parliament House  
& to show the enduring qualities of the local stone.'*

*Insistence and indignation.* You've got to admire the man. A similar pillar stands over the Hon. Wood's grave – also at his insistence, presumably.

*fountains  
glacial boulder*

## Poncho cloaks

Poncho cloak were all the rage in the dirty winter of 1855. Every fellow of gentlemanly mien seems to have had one, making a nightmare of cloakroom arrangements at large public gatherings. In the days following a ball or concert at the Exhibition Building,\* the 'Lost & Found' column of the *Argus* would brim with plaintive calls for 'the gentleman who took by mistake' the wrong poncho cloak. Mr Gledhill, accountant of Queen Street, lost a black bearskin poncho, '(a little torn under small ticket pocket)'. 'H' of Russell Street left in the pocket of *his* lost poncho a Meerschaum pipe carved with his initials. At the Patriotic Ball a cloakroom cock-up saw a swag of poncho cloaks 'taken by mistake', including a reversible one with, in the pocket, a covetable pair of lavender-coloured gloves.

\*Melbourne's original Exhibition Building – a would-be Crystal Palace in William Street.

## Private detective

Chief among private detectives in 19th-century Melbourne was Otto Berliner. As one of the original officers of Victoria's detective police force, Berliner was posted to the goldfields where he earned a reputation as 'something more than the ordinary thief-catcher'. A master of disguise, he foiled forgers, tracked murderers, and out-foxed rogues of all complexions. The press and judiciary praised his sagacity, intelligence and zeal, but – likely through an *excess* of zeal where self-promotion was concerned – Berliner eventually fell out with his superiors and left the force. On the first day of 1866 he launched his Private Inquiry Office in Elizabeth Street and, just as before, his name was rarely out of the newspapers. As a private detective, the 'enterprising and efficient' Berliner was chiefly occupied with the lucrative business of finding missing friends, next of kin, and legatees, although he and his officers did not balk at spicy 'matrimonial' cases, for which prurient press coverage was assured.

For a man of reputed 'rare tact and discretion', Otto Berliner sure knew how to get noticed. Doubtless though, like a magician or pickpocket, he was a master of the diversionary tactic.

*letter*

## Romeo Lane

A police report of 1869 attributed ‘respectability’ to just three of the twenty occupants of Romeo Lane. So bad was the lane’s reputation that in 1876 property-owners applied to the city council for a name change, a proposal condemned by the *Daily Telegraph* as ‘bare faced mock modesty’, considering the applicants had no scruples about taking rent from the outcasts who sullied the lane.

*‘Romeo lane, and one or two of the other rights of way immediately adjacent, are social cesspits, the moral impurities of which flow out into the leading street of the city. Persons passing up and down Bourke street must submit to have their eyes and ears outraged by actions and language of the vilest specimens of womanhood to be found in Melbourne. It is no unusual sight to see half-drunk and half-naked women parading the upper end of Bourke street at all times of the day... The question, therefore, is not whether their now well known haunts should be disguised under new names, but whether the property-owners should not be called upon to clear the character of their tenants. When they have cleared out the vile dens they own or tolerate, it will be time enough to ask that the name by which the infamy of the place is known shall be changed to one of good repute. Romeo lane by any other name would smell as foul.’*

The name did change, though – to Crossley Street – and the neighbouring Juliet Terrace, which had shared the descent into squalor, became Liverpool Street. The new names were undistinguished, forgettable – perfect. I mean... Romeo and Juliet? They’d been *asking* for trouble.

*Bilkem (or Bilking) Square  
Corporation Lane  
Synagogue Lane*

## Royalty, misleading tributes to

It would be easy to interpret the north-south streetnames of Melbourne's central grid as honouring King William and Queen Elizabeth. But it's not so straightforward as that. William Street, certainly, was named in March 1837 for the reigning monarch (shortly to be succeeded by Queen Victoria) and Queen Street for his consort. But was Elizabeth Street meant to pay tribute to the Virgin Queen or to the wife of Sir Richard Bourke, Governor of New South Wales? And King Street? True, it *may* have referred to King William – but then, why wasn't Queen followed by Adelaide Street? Or was King Street, as some have claimed, named for Captain Philip Gidley King, whose term as NSW governor had ended *31 years earlier*?

Honestly, can you believe these things weren't written down at the time? What was there, an ink shortage?

## St James' Old Cathedral

Built of Geelong bluestone with a pepperpot tower, St James' was Melbourne's Anglican cathedral until St Paul's usurped it in 1891. St James' stood at the William and Collins streets corner, the original heart of Melbourne. But its west-end congregation dwindled and the church itself crumbled to the point where, in 1913, it faced demolition. In the event, each stone of the building was numbered and St James' was re-erected, with modifications, a mile away in Batman Street, West Melbourne. To the dissatisfaction of Church authorities, St James' foundation stone and time capsule, laid by Governor La Trobe on practically his first day in the job in 1839, went undiscovered – or, at any rate, unrelinquished – by the demolishers. It was jobs such as the St James' demolition that would prompt an employee of that Irish-Catholic firm, Whelan the Wrecker, to write home to Ireland: *'At home we wreck Protestant churches for nothing; here, they pay you to do it.'*

Cross Flagstaff Gardens from the city side and the old octagonal bell-tower of St James' pokes above the hill to greet you.

*La Trobe's statue*

*Miss Burton's cottage*

## Sawdust Cafe

Early in the twentieth century, the Sawdust Café was the resort of Melbourne bohemians – artists, writers and free-thinking wildcards – between the hours of midnight and dawn. The proprietor, known only as Tom, ran a menu limited to steak, onions and tomatoes, cooked on a grill. But the café's chief attraction was its being open at all.

The Sawdust was companion to the legendary Fasoli's café, where bohemians would congregate up until the midnight hour. Originally in Lonsdale Street, Fasoli's was relocated by Mrs Maggia, daughter of the founding Fasoli, to King Street whence it seems to have been but a short clip or stagger to the Sawdust Café. *Seems to have been* because no record exists of the latter's exact location. Whether the sawdust was actual or metaphorical – whether, say, the premises were a picture-framer's by day – no one still living can attest.

I am half-inclined conflate the Sawdust Café with Miss Burton's cottage. Not for any good reason, mind you; just a hunch.

*Miss Burton's cottage*  
*Pellegrini's*

## Skating

There was a roller-skating rink on the flat roof of the Palace Hotel, Bourke Street, in 1889 – seven storeys up.

## Snow

Central Melbourne experienced its only snowstorm on 31 August 1849, when the town awoke to find itself blanketed in white.

*ice*

## Southern Cross station

Regular train travellers found a familiar euphony in the name of the revived Spencer Street station in 2006. *Southern Crustacean* rolled saltily off the tongue, causing the unbeloved structure to be nicknamed ‘The Crab Shack’ – or, among architecturally-attuned commuters, ‘The Scalloped Prawn’, in consideration of its wavy roof.

*Batman’s Hill*

*Blue Lake*

*Humbug Reach*

*Picasso’s Weeping Woman*

## Swanston Street in infamy

His umpteenth alias came to Frederick Deeming when he lodged at the Cathedral Hotel, Swanston Street, after the burial of his murdered wife under the hearth on Christmas Eve 1891 made their cottage at suburban Windsor unliveable. Checking into the hotel as Harry Lawson, Deeming left as Baron Swanston and proceeded by ship to Sydney, affiancing himself to another woman on the voyage. Following the discovery of his wife's body, investigations in England turned up the bodies of Deeming's first wife and four children under the floor of his former home in Yorkshire. Still masquerading as Baron Swanston, the murderer was apprehended on the Western Australian goldfields and returned to Melbourne where he was tried and hanged in short order. Deeming has been linked to other crimes, among them (at his own suggestion) the gruesome deeds of Jack the Ripper.

*Homicide*  
*Old Treasury*

## Synagogue Lane

As the name suggests, the laneway ran alongside Melbourne's first synagogue, built on Bourke Street in 1847. An 1869 report in the *Colonial Monthly* condemned Synagogue Lane as housing *'the offscourings of the prisons and hulks'* –

*'The blackest sheep of all the flock make their home here. It is dangerous to pass through the place in daylight, unattended, and open robberies have been committed at noonday. The miserable lanes, and filthy courts and houses, are the last stronghold of ruffianism... Life there is like a hideous night-mare. It is a phantasmagoria of horrors, ever changing and shifting. The gutters are choked with filth, the walls blackened with slime. Drains assert their presence by almost palpable stenches. Children, whose faces more resemble those of monkeys than human beings, scramble about in every variety of foulness. Infants, whose emaciated bodies are covered with running and evil-smelling sores, root among the heaps of rags and dirt that front the dwellings, while their mothers smoke, drink and curse on the doorsteps.'*

In a fit of civic cleansing preparatory to the 1880 International Exhibition, the name changed to Bourke Lane, and later to Little Queen Street. Today, in a rare acknowledgement of displacement, its street sign reads: LT QUEEN STREET (FORMERLY SYNAGOGUE LANE).

*beer*

*Bilkem (or Bilking) Square*

*La Trobe's cottage*

*Miss Burton's cottage*

*Romeo Lane*

## Telegraph pole in a city street

*I saw you in your slender whiteness there;  
I put my hand upon your painted side;  
You quivered in a sudden mountain air  
And I was back to where your friends abide.  
The brown ferns sway,  
And your long rustling fingers of soft green...* ('To a Telegraph Pole', Furnley Maurice)

Think of that: an old timber power pole in a city street (if you can find one) is a not-quite-living link to the charred mountain ash forests to the east of Melbourne. Gives you a shiver, doesn't it?

*Fairies' tree*

## Tiger, escaped

An escaped tiger prowled the city early one Saturday in 1859. Ever since his arrival from Singapore for exhibition at Wombwell's Zoological Exhibition in Bourke Street, he had roared and railed ceaselessly against his confinement. His enclosure at last proving unequal to his displeasure, the tiger burst out into Little Bourke Street whence '*Cries of alarm,*' said the *Argus*, '*very soon gave tidings of the animal's whereabouts.*' He had entered the rear of a Chinese store, first playing havoc with the stock of groceries, then climbing the stairs to the living quarters. He mauled the shoulder of a sleeping man (imagine *that* awakening!) before leaping through a window into a locked room where he was recaptured. His exhibitors were upbraided for '*so gross a want of precaution*' but, the injured man being Chinese, no charges were laid.

*cats*

*Chinese New Year*

*Cremorne Gardens*

*Ned Kelly's horse*

## Trams

'Street railways' for Melbourne were first proposed in 1860 by an American syndicate. The innovation had recently been introduced in Europe by George Train, who had been a merchant in Melbourne and one of the founders of the Cobb & Co. coach line. Importing horse-drawn omnibuses from New York in 1869, American Francis Clapp continued to campaign for the introduction of tramways. In 1877 he obtained a Victorian patent for San Francisco-style cable trams and his omnibus company that year had 'Tramway' added to its name. At long last the government gave in to Clapp's lobbying, and construction of Melbourne's first tramway – to Richmond – began in 1885.

Forty-two years later, the Richmond tramline would be electrified. The last 3d. ticket sold on the cable tram's final journey – around midnight on 30 June 1927 – can be found pasted in a scrapbook at the State Library of Victoria.

In 1937, Percy Tewksbury, proprietor of the classy Oriental Hotel in Collins Street and a self-described *cosmopolite*, urged Melbourne to '*get rid of its dreadul electric trams*'. Having just returned from a world tour, Tewksbury was able to report the trend that was leaving Melbourne for dead –

*'England, the United States, Austria, Germany and France are scrapping tram services, filling in the tramlines with concrete and using trolley buses. Even provincial cities such as Portsmouth and Manchester are following this lead. It is about time citizens of Melbourne got together and stopped the ridiculous waste of money installing new electric tram services, which will have to be scrapped eventually.'*

*libraries*

## Variety, diminishing

In a single block of Bourke Street, picked at random from the Sands & McDougall directory for 1863, here's a sample of Melbourne retail and commercial life.

Starting at Russell Street and heading uphill, on the south (river) side of Bourke Street, there were: an upholsterer; a lampmaker and tinsmith; an oil and colour man; a hairdresser; a bookseller; a confectioner; a bootmaker; a glass and earthenware importer; a tailor; an optician; an accountant and bookkeeper and his wife, a staymaker; a fishmonger; a paperhanging (i.e., wallpaper) warehouse; an importer of kerosene, oil, etc.; a sewing machine agent; the Cock Inn; another confectioner (the Pantheon of Melona); an umbrella, fishing and cricket tackle maker; a theatre and music hall; and the Eastern Market (fruit, vegetables, poultry, hay, and seed nursery).

Compare that array with the same block in 2009: men's shoes; men's clothing; reflexology/Chinese medicine/guru centre; a computer retailer; a stationer's; a bank; a post office; apartments; leather goods; more men's clothing; a Korean BBQ restaurant; another restaurant and bar; a hairdresser; more apartments (under construction); the Southern Cross towers. But look: set into the hoarding in front of the western tower is the foundation stone plaque from the Eastern Market, which formerly stood on this site. The stone was laid in 1878 by the mayor of Melbourne, John Pigdon.

*foundation stones*  
*pigeons*

## Visitor attractions, 1878

On the recommendation of *Massina's Guide to Melbourne*, sightseers of 1878 trooped around city churches, banks and government offices, admiring ferrucle and pinnarch. Once the eyes had had their fill of architecture and civic amenity, there were spice and moral improvement to be had by visiting Pentridge prison – ‘*Admission on all days, excepting Saturday and Sunday, on obtaining an order from the Penal Department, King Street*’ – or the police courts, where ‘*Much amusement may be gained by attending these courts, but especially on a Monday, when numbers of “poor backsliders”, who have been “run in” on the previous two days, are called upon to part with certain small sums for indiscreet tippling and breaches of the peace.*’

And all for free. Wow, what a city.

*fountains*

## Water supply

It was only natural, Elizabeth Street being so flood-prone, that the city's original waterworks should have been situated at the foot of that street. Filtered Yarra water (a tautology, since *yarra* was Melbourne slang for water) was stored in tanks there and delivered by horse-drawn tankers. With the gold-fuelled growth of the 1850s, the city quickly outgrew its meagre water supply and the Yan Yean scheme was embarked upon, piping water from the Plenty River, 30 km to the north. The ceremonial turning of the tap was performed at the old waterworks site on the last day of 1857, the first spurt of Yan Yean water drenching a carriageful of lady spectators – unwelcome only insofar as it unstiffened their starchy bits, the day being a scorcher. Then the jets were turned upwards, spraying 20 metres into the air and showering the entire gathering, buns and all. A new slang term entered the Melbourne vernacular that day: *yan yean* for water-tap. And a bottleful of the wet stuff was captured and sent Home packed in sawdust to C.J. La Trobe who, as Governor, had turned the first sod of the reservoir in 1853.

*bun fight*  
*Dwight's bookshop*  
*Elizabeth Street*  
*Falls, Yarra*  
*fountains*  
*La Trobe's statue*

## Yarra River

*'Oh! Yarra stream, thy waters deep –  
Thy turbid flowing tide,  
Many a secret sad doth keep,  
Many a crime doth hide,  
Beneath thy drumlie, \* midnight wave,  
The young, the old have found a grave.'* ('Yarra River', Elizabeth Hardwicke)  
\* muddy

*'Frequently ill-fated victims are  
Dragged out of the Yarra stream  
And borne to the morgue for an inquest,  
Life's span is only a dream.'* ('The Yarra', Joseph Tishler – reputedly Australia's worst poet)

Here then was a likely reason for the 'indelicate' siting of Melbourne's morgue: its proximity to the Yarra, whence bodies of the unhap and unfortunate were fished daily, or oftener. The foiled balloonist was one. Cricketer Dick Wardill, Australia's first star batsman, was another. His 1873 suicide note read: *'I have gone to the Yarra. It is best for all.'* Women were the commonest victims, self-drowning in the Yarra offering an alternative to abortion. The body of a woman found floating in July 1855 *'had on her person'* five shillings and sixpence in a cloth purse, a gold ring on her finger, a straw bonnet, and – the final indignity – a *'dress of snuff-coloured stuff'*.

*balloon, hot air  
Cremorne Gardens  
cricket catapult  
Falls, Yarra  
hats  
morgue*