

ONE OLD MELBOURNE TOWN

The day was brisk, the date 18 July, 1841, and the barque *England*, arriving in Hobson's Bay in the south-east corner of the continent hove to off the shore of a spot named Sandridge. Finally at peace after a voyage from Liverpool in which sixteen children and two adults had died of whooping cough, she dropped anchor and swung into the wind close to a settlement known to the few people on earth who had heard of it, as Melbourne.

The *England* was a convict transport, built thirty years before in the desperate war against Napoleon, but modified to accommodate bounty immigrants like those crowding the decks. Not that Britannia subscribed the bounty to get rid of them; the fifteen pounds per head paid to shipowners came from sales of Crown land in the new colony. Mostly poor and a burden on English parishes or Irish landlords, the immigrants included some Welsh and Scots of the two-legged variety pushed off their crofts to make way for the woolly four-legged sort in the latest series of Highland clearances. The newcomers, to put it bluntly, were refugees from European savagery and neglect - cheap labour shipped out to become shepherds and servants in this most recent of annexations to the Imperial Crown, the Port Phillip District of New South Wales. Who of them had most cause to celebrate is unclear - the English to have fled their factory hells, or the Irish and Scots their impoverished farms. But among the Irish, encouraged at the vision of a rough jetty and hotel bearing the sign *Liardets*, was the family Quinn, Catholics from the vicinity of Belfast, County Antrim.

Thus, in the morning of Victoria's brief history, at a spot shortly to be known as Port Melbourne beach, landed James and Mary Quinn and their six children from a ship's boat. Of these, our story takes note of the nine year old Ellen, destined to live to the year 1923 when bitumen and the T-model Ford - so said the prophets - were introducing a new golden age. By that conjunction of forces, that we, after the event, term fate, Ellen was to become central to deeds written no less indelibly in the mind of the young nation than on this page.

The first thing the immigrants saw ashore was a pile of champagne bottles and a canvas booth used for promoting land sales. It being Sunday when Liardet's horse omnibus was otherwise employed, they made their way by foot through tea-tree and wattle and erected tents where folk were cooking on open fires amid the tinkle of sheep-bells. To right and left in the bush sheep were enclosed for safety within rough timber hurdles.

The infant colony of New South Wales, based on Sydney, had been founded several decades before as a prison of sorts for Britain's social discards. On the one day as many as six corpses could be seen hanging from gibbets along the harbour front. Because of the French threat and in order to shift rebels of the dangerous Irish variety out of sight and sound, Van Diemen's Land had been annexed soon after. Early on, the colony had been sustained by whaling, cedar-getting and sandal-wooding, but soon the business-minded had hit upon wool as a staple export. The English mills could not get enough of it, and sheep were still arriving in the Port Phillip District from Van Diemen's land across the strait. A fine river could be seen through the trees, along with a scatter of small ships stopped from further progress upstream by a shallow waterfall. On the far bank were yards and sheds, a Customs House and the assorted structures of a growing town. The place had thrived from the start, and following the visit from Sydney of Governor Bourke, now had an administrator, Mr Charles Latrobe, and a town plan on the American pattern providing for a business district of one mile square. Mr Latrobe had brought with him a chalet, assembled and erected upstream already on a gentle rise named by his Swiss wife Jolimont. It served as social focus for the colony, while a brand new set of offices facing the river provided the administrative centre.

James Quinn, head of the family, started work at once. His job as porter took him from the quagmire on the northern bank to mix with the motley of Vandemonians and Sydneysiders whose sweat was rapidly transforming this

Australia Felix that Major Thomas Mitchell, the explorer, had described as ready and waiting for the use of civilised man. The first Vandemonians had barely landed when Mitchell - veteran of the Peninsular war and inventor of the canvas waterbag - had opened the route for overlanders driving stock from what was known as 'the Sydney side'.

Melbourne boasted an odd assortment of buildings - turf, slab, weatherboard, wattle and brick - mostly within the central area bounded by Flinders, Swanston, Lonsdale and William Streets. Some were one to an allotment, others two, some against the street alignment, others set well back - all made homely by an occasional tree still holding full sway. With a fall of rain a creek poured down Elizabeth Street and cut the town in two. Already there was a score of thriving establishments - especially in Collins Street - emporiums, insurance houses, shipping companies and banking chambers. In Swanston Street was a family hotel where the latest magazines and intelligence were available. It was conducted by John Fawkner, who - along with John Batman and his party - had been the first to cross the strait from Launceston. To the west around Batman's hill, were a mix of slaughter-houses and manufactories supplying candles and leather. Batman had gained a huge tract of land stretching to Geelong by trading blankets and other items with the Doutigalla tribe, but the deal had been disallowed by Governor Bourke. At the same time Bourke had advised London that the settlement must continue with the squatters to be charged ten pounds per year.

What instantly struck the newcomer was the scarcity of womenfolk, old folk and the dark dress of Europe, not to mention a shortage of the military and naval uniforms so much a part of the Sydney scene. Assorted males sported an extraordinary variety of dress and sea-going rig. Straw hats and stovepipes distinguished the gentry and speculators arrived by coasting schooner, while the hoi-polloi favoured broad-brimmed felts or cabbage-tree hats woven from the native New South Wales cabbage-tree palm.

The main route to the bush was north up the Sydney road, which no doubt was why the Roman Catholic church, named for St Francis, was sited in Elizabeth Street. As the foundation stone of a permanent edifice was laid soon after the Quinns' arrival, it seems likely that members of the family attended the ceremony and heard talk of mass meetings at home and threats to imprison Daniel O'Connell, the Irish leader. No doubt too, with the eyes of those who knew the

wrongs done to Ireland, they noted the timber gibbet thrusting into the sky up Russell Street and a new brick gaol complete with treadmill taking shape near the barracks. Close by were triangles on which occasional offenders were given the lash. The settlement had been without crime for three or four years until brawls involving drunken shepherds on leave had led to the establishment of a gaol, police force and judiciary. Mostly time-expired convicts or ticket-of-leaves, given their freedom on condition they worked for a squatter, these bush bachelors had the habit of entrusting their wage cheques to publicans and spent their annual leave 'knocking' them over.

As for the squatters who dominated the new society, they were markedly different both to the men they employed and the officials who aped the English model. Jimmy Quinn likely enough had opportunity to see them at the Melbourne Club where they dickered over brandy and cigars with the Commissioners of Crown Lands. The heroes of the age, they were all for dropping the military trappings which held Sydney back, but at the same time favoured the return of transportation.

They could be seen on occasion riding into town to set out their demands for political rights and security of tenure for the lands they had taken. Like an army of buccaneers, whiskers on chest, wide black belts hitching moleskins, pistol on saddle and muzzle-loader on back, the squatters walked their horses riding three or four abreast under flying pennants to the skirl of a Highland piper at the head. They came from Gippsland, Corio Bay, the Goulburn Valley and points west and north, or from further out - the frontier of burned stockyards and stolen stock, where Aboriginal tribesmen were trying to hold onto what remained of their dreamings.

Soon after the arrival of the First Fleet, the Port Jackson governors had awarded land to anyone 'of good family'. With the aid of convicts nearing end of sentence, several score of these gentry had established herds within the Blue Mountains barrier. Iron-gangs under the guard of redcoats meanwhile established a system of roads, prisons and stockades. In this manner settlement had been confined for twenty-five years. Rising sheep numbers, however, forced the breaching of the mountain barrier, and then a succession of newchum gentry, all with a little capital, leapfrogged inland, squatting on one tribal water after another. The same process had followed in Van Diemen's Land with the result that, within two or three generations, a few hundred individuals had occupied pasturelands the size of France and Spain.

Land was not so easily come by for those outside the club, and that largely meant the Irish. At the same time the new country offered opportunities to anyone lucky enough to have the help of a woman. Thus it was that James Quinn, by saving his shillings, was able to rent a property up the Sydney road at Brunswick. He kept cows and cultivated part of the holding, carting timber between times. Butter in the hogshead was assured of a ready sale.

As the children became more useful, the Quinns were able to move to a larger property at Broadmeadows, and north again to a block at Wallan near the Great Dividing Range. Not far distant was a pass which offered overlanders their first sight of Melbourne and promised joys. It was called Pretty Sally. Like a sentinel beyond stood Kilmore, marking the spot where in 1837 the Launceston men had met the Sydneysiders following the wheeltracks of Major Mitchell's drays.

All around stretched squatting runs. The Kilmore estate itself, including several thousand hectares of volcanic soil, was quickly subdivided and sold or rented to small farmers. Irish by name and Irish by nature, Kilmore was the place where you stopped if you liked to hear the brogue. It was also where the bush began and Irish newchums met Irishmen of the older colonial school who had known the lash and learned the tricks of the trade.

The settlers had a saying that every new bun-in-the-oven was better than ten pounds in the bank. Four more children were born to the Quinns - William, Mary, Margaret and Grace. Before long, Patrick and John, the elder boys, were able to take bullock teams in hand and expand the carting side of the business.

Around 1849, Quinn came to know John Kelly, a fellow countryman post-splitting on Merri Creek. Red Kelly, as he was called for his reddish hair, had not long completed a seven year sentence across the strait. Born in County Tipperary, he had worked as a ranger on Lord Ormonde's Killarney estate until transported for stealing two pigs. The pig, known variously as His Lordship (because the landlord was English), or Georgie (after George IV), was bought at market as a piglet, then fattened and sold and therefore commonly called 'the gentleman who pays the rent'. Eight out of every ten Irish convicts were transported for larceny of an animal.

Red had made the voyage to the Derwent in the barque *Prince Regent* and done time with the bushranger William Westwood, hanged with ten other convicts on Norfolk Island for organising a mutiny. Like Red himself, Westwood had been a harmless short-sentence man before absconding from a sheep run south of Sydney.

According to tradition Red was run-of-the-mill Irish, but generous to a fault. He could sign his name, but it is doubtful if he could write much - hardly surprising since whatever common schools Ireland had were conducted clandestinely under hedgerows.

Hard though the toil might be, the horizons in the new country were expanding, and the one-time convict - especially if he was young - soon had more to look forward to than the solace of a pipe and dog. Since the rapidly expanding economy offered ample opportunity to all, transportation was no longer the punishment intended by the British authorities. This was especially true in Port Phillip District, which - from the very start - resolutely opposed transportation, preferring free enterprise and the wage system.

When Red, aged thirty, paid court to Ellen, by now a petite seventeen year old, Quinn opposed the match, possibly because Red seemed unlikely to make much of a mark in the world. The Quinns were down to earth folk, no more religious than necessary, but passionately Irish, keen on horseflesh and coursing dogs. They were dealt a blow that year by the drowning of Patrick Quinn who had taken a bullock wagon to Echuca, a place of many pubs and entrepot for the Riverina wool trade.

According to laws discovered by the ancient Greeks and elaborated by Isaac Newton, every force has its equal and opposite. Dame Progress, no matter what the party gown, prefers to enter by the back door. Thus did the infant Melbourne find its beginnings in Launceston and roundly embrace the vision of the explorer Mitchell. By that same law of opposites, Ellen Quinn shortly defied her father and eloped to marry Red Kelly in St Francis Church. The date was Monday, 18 November, 1850, and the celebrant Father Gerald Ward, barely arrived from the emerald isle. Since the English Parliament had just passed a bill establishing Port Phillip District as a colony in its own right, named for the Queen herself, Melbourne happened to be in a celebratory mood.

Thus Ellen - like the infant Melbourne - was able to pioneer a freedom almost unknown in the old world, and Red to win himself a young and lively bride when the plainest spinster was plagued by a dozen suitors. All her life Ellen Kelly spoke well of Red; moreover her eldest son, whom this story concerns, was always proud of him. The young couple found accommodation at Mercer Vale, soon after to be called Beveridge after a Scots family who kept the local inn. Red erected a hut in the Irish style close to the Sydney road, and here the couple shifted. With axe and adze Red earned a living putting up sheds and yards or simply knocking up hurdles for stock.

## T W O   T H E   R O A R I N G   F I T T I E S

During Victoria's initial fifteen years, settlers both free and tied continued to arrive, and by 1850 the population south of the Murray exceeded 70,000, two thirds of them male. Workers in the wool industry for the most part, they looked forward to years of labour and perhaps to owning a small property. In the meantime they made the best of things, and when loneliness became too hard to bear, drowned their sorrows in spirits or sleep. Who could have foreseen that this land of big sheep runs was in for radical change?

As far back as 1814, and again in 1823 and 1825, gold had been found near Bathurst in New South Wales, but each time news of the event was suppressed by the authorities. In 1839, the Polish explorer Count Strzelecki made a find over the Blue Mountains near Hartley. Two years later when the Rev. W.B. Clarke produced a sample from the same area, Governor Gipps said, "Put it away Mr Clarke, or we shall both have our throats cut." What effect would easy-to-win riches have on the iron-gangs bridging the gullies on the Bathurst road, not to mention the redcoats guarding them? Finds were soon made south of the Murray - on the Ovens River (1845) and the Pyrenees (1848).

By 1848, when Prince von Metternich, chief architect of the Holy Alliance, was at his wit's end to hold the lid on capitalism in Europe, the New South Wales establishment was equally at odds to conceal gold discovery in many parts of the

colony. But neither in the old world nor the new could the tide be halted. In February, 1851, when Edward Hargraves - a "forty-niner" returned from a gold strike on the Sierra Nevada, near San Francisco - announced a large field at Bathurst, Victorians packed their bags and crossed the Murray. Melbourne took fright as a result and offered two hundred pounds reward for a find in Victoria.

Within weeks, strikes greatly eclipsing those in New South Wales were made at Clunes, Burnbank, Buninyong, Ballarat, Mt Alexander and a score of other spots, and soon the news had spread the far side of sundown. Clerks and labourers picked up their coats and walked off the job. Crews tied up their ships, placed a caretaker in charge and took to the road. The Masters and Servants Act was pitched out the window. Panic spread among the squattocracy as shepherds and servants disappeared, wages and prices soared. It was shearing time. Streams of men pushing wheelbarrows and driving carts and canvas-tilted bullock drays packed with bags of flour, bedding, pots, tin dishes, buckets, iron kettles, picks, shovels and tools of all descriptions, struck in from the seaboard to the El Dorados of Ballarat, Bendigo, Creswick, Clunes, Talbot, Castlemaine and the Ovens diggings. New South Wales lost one quarter of its population, Van Diemen's Land lost one third, thousands crossed the border from South Australia. Bushrangers became so active on the Mt Alexander road that the military had to be summoned from Van Diemen's Land. The old order of privilege based on poverty, the lash and the noose was dealt a blow from which it would never recover. Governor Latrobe wrote in October that year:

Within three weeks, Melbourne and Geelong have been almost emptied of many classes of inhabitants. In some of the suburbs not a man is left, and the women for protection group together to keep house ... It really becomes a question of how the more sober operations of society, and even the functions of government, may be carried out.

As clipper ships driven by the gales of the high latitudes took the news to America and Europe, came the first wash of the immigrant flood, which, within ten years, was to lift the Victorian population to more than half a million. Came adventurers, gamblers, Californian wildcatters, Chinese by the thousands, the impoverished and oppressed of a score of European countries. Following failure of the Irish potato crop in 1847, and while exports of foodstuffs continued unabated under the guns of the English troops, one out of every four Irish died of starvation. Revolt rumbled, guns barked behind hedgerows, shillelaghs struck

out in the night, with the result that the colonial safety valve was turned full cock and tens of thousands were ferried out of the Emerald Isle. Poorer and less literate than their English and Scottish equivalents, yet with a characteristic determination forged in oppression, the Irish soon comprised more than half the population of the diggings.

The new Australia began to take shape between decks before the transports cleared the English Channel. With an energy seldom surpassed in history, peasants, scholars, ships' captains, alcoholics, bankrupts, London pickpockets, Polish, German and Irish rebels - people of all sorts, clad in fustian, red and blue Crimean shirts, jumpers in flaming colours, oddments of uniform and genteel dress - toiled and sang along the creeks among the eucalypts. Townships of 10,000 tents sprang up overnight to wax and wane on the golden tide. In Melbourne, wharves, warehouses and shops imitating London's Bond Street shot up. Diggers were known to light their pipes with banknotes. The town became a playground for diggers on a bender - a place of paradox where men of birth worked as menials, and roughnecks drunk on champagne drove through the streets, caressed by the hands of overnight mistresses. At the same time, many whom fortune had driven to some trivial offence were hauled off to the lock-up handcuffed to a police stirrup-iron - past wealth and fashion, the gold coaches from the interior and bullock waggons groaning with imports bound for the hinterland.

The authorities tried to force labour back onto the runs from the start. Following the New South Wales example, Governor Latrobe introduced a licence fee of 30 shillings a month, but as this often exceeded earnings, the diggers evaded payment, passing licences from hand to hand and joining each rush to a new strike. When the Turon diggers in New South Wales held a protest, a company of redcoats was enough to silence them, but in Victoria there were 50,000 diggers within easy marching distance of Melbourne and collection of fees was no easy matter. The police devoted two days of each week to searching the camps. Anyone who could not produce his piece of paper was hauled off to the commandant's tent and chained to a log. The question was asked: who gave themselves the right to imprison others without trial? If it came to cases, not a few diggers were equal to their betters. Society was in the melting pot, and soon the cry coined in the English Reform Bill agitation, "No taxation without representation!" rang out along the clearings. A riot occurred on the Ovens

diggings and there was another at Castlemaine. Latrobe reduced the fee to 20s. Bendigo became the centre of reform, supported by miners on a new Heathcote strike and sent Latrobe a petition requesting a reduction of fee to 10s and an end to arrests “as the diggers have uniformly developed a love of law and order”. Meetings of protest at Mt Alexander demanded no fee at all.

Latrobe did his best to control the situation but soon became discredited and resigned to make way for Sir Charles Hotham, a distinguished British naval commander knighted for service on the African coast. Newly married and given a warm welcome on the goldfields, Hotham saw men in tents without a vote and spotted the root of the problem. He wrote: “Where the soldier will fail, the interest of the wife and child will prevail”. But when ugly incidents occurred and official protection was given for a murderer, Hotham took the wrong advice. In December 1854, diggers on the Eureka claim at Ballarat hoisted the Flag of Stars and declared The Republic of Victoria, so he marched the 99th Regiment to the spot and took them by surprise. When thirty diggers were killed a growl of anger swept the country. Thirteen of the ringleaders who appeared on charges of high treason were found not guilty amid scenes of public rejoicing, and the colony’s sole lawmaker, the Legislative Council, had no alternative but to make reforms. The Miner’s Right, price 20s a year, replaced the monthly fee, giving holders the right to operate wherever they liked and thus becoming an instrument for opening up the bush, while a new constitution provided for an additional elective chamber. Before the singing of Auld Lang Syne that year, the unfortunate Hotham, aged forty-nine and with a highly developed sense of duty, was dead of a cerebral haemorrhage brought on by humiliation. The Sydney road before gold had been little more than a bush track linking sheep runs and river crossings, the traffic comprising bullock wagons hauling stores up country, or wool to Williamstown and Geelong. The Quinns merged with the mainstream. They felled trees and burned off, established pasture and followed the teams like the rest. They had no need to join the rush for gold. Overnight, as gold-seekers by the thousands descended on central Victoria, sheep and cattle from the Riverina poured over the Murray at Echuca to feed them. Kilmore and district meanwhile became the focus of a roaring trade and the Quinns joined in the general game of catch and grab in the unfenced ranges. The police were no problem. They could be found drinking and gambling nightly until all hours. They could supply a bed for a price, or for nothing at all if you could show them a creek and the colours of gold. So it was, with enhanced prices all round and a thriving cattle

trade, that Jimmy Quinn was able to buy 284 hectares of Crown land and build a substantial stone and timber dwelling at Wallan.

Respectability, so to speak, had caught up with the Irish. Mrs Quinn, in particular, was kindness itself, renowned far and wide for her hospitality, not only to friends and relatives but - in accord with the spirit of the time - to complete strangers off the road. Kate and Jane meanwhile had married brothers, Jack and Tom Lloyd, and so the clan soon included a brace of tallish young Australians who spoke a tongue decidedly different to the brogue of their parents.

Down the road, Red Kelly had written home to Tipperary telling his young brother James about Australia Felix, the rich southern land where people demanded a vote, a rifle and a farm. Beveridge had grown vastly. Opposite the Kelly’s hut was the Inverloch Castle Hotel, a regular coach stop for Cobb & Co. With its extensive stables, feed loft and spelling paddocks for upwards of fifty animals, it could be seen for miles. Bullock wagons, passenger coaches and gold coaches with their uniformed escorts lumbered down to Melbourne, or up to the Goulburn Valley and the Ovens. Cavalcades of horsemen trotted by - bushmen, shearers, diggers, squatters, troopers and strings of Chinese wearing pigtailed and bearing baskets suspended from timber yokes - all bound one way or another. How many travellers called in for fodder or water, or to swap experiences over a kettle of tea? What tales were told of gold nuggets, of the potato famine, of the exodus to New York, of the revolution in Germany or battles on the diggings, of treeless plains on the overland and lush valleys in the Great Divide where 10,000 head of cattle might tread?

In the early fifties when the rushes were at their height, Red too yielded briefly to the gold fever, joining a stampede to Deep Creek nearby. The birth of a baby girl whom they named Anne enabled the couple to recover from the death of Mary-Jane, their first-born. Then in January, 1855, within weeks of Eureka - to the sound of the cracking of whips and the concourse of men and animals - was born Edward Kelly, Ellen’s first son, whom history remembers.