

2 GROWTH DIAGRAMS

coincided with the first rumblings of the world-wide depression. The thoughts of politicians turned to what they considered more realistic things than town planning with the unfortunate result that no legislation was ever passed to enable the recommendations of the commission to be put into effect. Nothing was done and a golden opportunity was lost.

Economic Depression

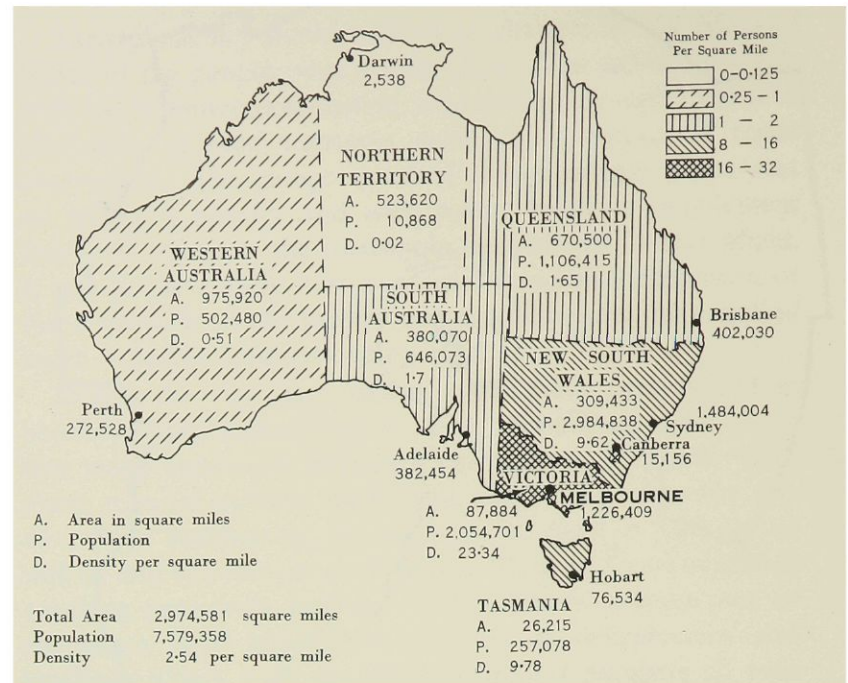
The economic depression is still only too well remembered for its pitiful unemployment, economic hardship and poverty. As elsewhere, it left its mark on Melbourne. The volume of building became negligible. Those who were prepared to take advantage of the surplus labour and low costs reaped a rich reward. Few individuals had the necessary capital to do this, but syndicates of various kinds were formed to build flats, apartment houses and maisonettes. Knowing that many houses were old and in disrepair and some unfit for habitation, the Government appointed a board to enquire and report on the abolition of slums. As a result of this report the State Housing Commission was established. In an attempt to relieve the widespread unemployment, the State Government provided funds for beautification schemes. One of the permanent works carried out at this time was the fine boulevard which follows the course of the Yarra River from Alexandra Avenue to Heidelberg.

Slowly the cycle turned, and by the late thirties prosperity and confidence were being restored. However, by the time the country was able to take stock, war was with it once again, and the work force was swung over to war production. Australia had to become more independent of overseas supplies with the result that many new industries were established. Goods which until now had been imported were made in local factories. There was little surplus for civil use or consumption, but the skill and experience being acquired were to be put to good peace-time use later.

During the war years building again came to a standstill. The birth rate which had reached an all-time low during the depression years, took a sharp turn upwards, and with the return of servicemen and women, this upward trend continued.

There was now an acute shortage of housing of all kinds. Materials were in such short supply that the Government was compelled to take action to control all building activities. Even the well-to-do had a housing problem for the first time. Previously the problem had always been to provide homes for the lower income groups, but now control was so severe that it was virtually impossible to build anything except homes of strictly limited size. Even the price which could be paid at auction was fixed by Government decree. For 20 years the rate of building had not kept up with the current demand, and now the position was aggravated by a steady flow of migrants from Britain and Europe.

Controls eventually were removed in 1949 and the value of properties soared to unprecedented heights. In spite of



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the ever-increasing wages, they were not sufficient to enable the mass of people to acquire the type of home they were accustomed to, or to which they felt they were entitled. The Housing Commission was forced to abandon the purpose of slum abolition for which it was created, and devote its energies to building low-cost houses for rent. This greatly eased the position, but today the stage has been reached when, although labour and material are more readily available, building costs are too high for most people.

Melbourne Today

This, then, is Melbourne as it enters the second half of the twentieth century. Not yet 120 years old, its population is approaching 1,500,000. Here live 16% of the total Australian population and 60% of all the people in the State of Victoria. Its port handles almost a quarter of Australia's annual shipping trade and a greater tonnage of overseas and interstate cargo than any other Australian port. Its airport handles more traffic than any other airport in the British Commonwealth. It is Australia's most heavily industrialised capital city, and the financial and administrative centre for many of Australia's largest commercial and industrial organisations. Its wealth and output per head of population are the highest in the continent.

Located on the only first-class port in Victoria capable of really large-scale commercial development, Melbourne is the focal centre for the network of roads and railways that spread throughout the most densely settled State in the Commonwealth, and reach north into the rich Riverina district of southern New South Wales. It is not only the principal commercial, industrial and administrative centre of Victoria, but is also the dominant market for most of its goods. The four largest centres outside Melbourne — Geelong, Ballarat,

Bendigo and the Latrobe Valley — are all located within a radius of 100 miles of Melbourne, and as such, tend to form a ring of provincial centres around the growing metropolis.

But the rapid and widespread development of the city and changing conditions have brought in their train many problems — lack of housing and some measure of overcrowding, insufficient hospitals and schools, an overtaxed public transport system, inadequate road communications, increasing congestion in the central business area, and the increased cost of providing public services over an ever-expanding area.

The city is growing and there is every indication that it will continue to grow. Its problems will not diminish, neither will their solution become easier. It is, however, more fortunate than most cities in that the provisions of nature and the foresight of the early administrators have encouraged the development of a gracious and dignified city, in which there exist many opportunities for civic improvement. If Melbourne is to maintain its position among the cities of the world, full advantage must be taken of these opportunities and a solution found for its many problems.



State Parliament House — the seat of government