

# Chapter 1

## THE BOARD'S TASK

WHEN, in 1949, Parliament placed on the Board the responsibility for preparing a planning scheme for the Melbourne metropolitan area, the question immediately arose as to what exactly was required of the Board in the performance of this task. Many people believed, perhaps somewhat vaguely, that the growth of the city had produced, and was continuing to produce, problems the solution of which lay outside the province of any single existing civic authority. To use a medical metaphor, the city, though apparently in reasonable bodily health, had shown certain disturbing symptoms, and there was no physician available whom the patient could consult for a thorough overhaul. The role of the Board may be likened to that of the doctor who is called in to diagnose the trouble and to prescribe suitable remedies. Its task is to study those symptoms which suggest that all is not as well with our city as it should be, that its growth is not as healthy as we had imagined it to be. Then, after a careful and scientific diagnosis, and having ascertained the causes of the troubles, its final duty is to suggest suitable remedies.

Before considering the case in detail, let us take a brief glance at Melbourne as it is to-day, at the assets which have been created, at the problems which have manifested themselves, and at the principles which might be followed in finding a solution to these problems.

### THE NEED FOR PLANNING

Compared with cities of the Old World, Melbourne is comparatively youthful. Yet in a period of less than 120 years it has grown from a small settlement to a great city of nearly one and a half million inhabitants. Although the site originally selected by Batman for the village which so rapidly grew into the city had little scenic beauty, the natural advantages of the river and the bayside, and the gently undulating terrain inland had much to recommend them.

To compensate for what it lacked by comparison, for example, with Sydney and Hobart, Melbourne was fortunate that among its early citizens were men of vision among whom was surveyor Robert Hoddle. To him is due the conception of the original city, a rectangular plan cut by broad streets with narrow alternating lanes, and surrounded by large areas of parklands. Such a plan held out hope of an order and convenience in direct contrast to the cities of the Old World,

where the growth of centuries, with each age inevitably leaving its mark, has often produced the picturesque and the grand, but not always the practical and the convenient.

Melbourne today has many varied and far-reaching functions. It is the capital of Victoria and therefore the administrative centre of the State. Here are still located also many Federal Departments. Commercially and culturally the city has Commonwealth-wide influence, and as a manufacturing centre it compares in weight of industrial employment with many great industrial cities of the world. By its geographic situation it is a vital link in the distribution of trade and materials throughout the country.

Aesthetically, Melbourne is a gracious city. Its centre is characterised by broad streets, well tended spacious parks encompass the centre, and further out are many pleasing residential suburbs. To the south stretching away to the Mornington Peninsula is the attractive bayside, and to the east, within easy reach of its citizens, the wooded Dandenong Ranges.

With all this wealth, industry and amenity, the question may well be asked why was it necessary for the Government to have placed on the Board the task of preparing a planning scheme for the city. The answer is two-fold. Firstly, because the city's growth has been so rapid and its functions have become so varied that the convenience envisaged in the original plan has not been fully realised. Secondly, in every sphere of life there comes a time when a thorough stock-taking is advantageous, when a summing up of the situation is necessary to find out what is efficient and what is not, and where faults can be remedied. That the time has now come, in fact is overdue, for Melbourne to have such an overhaul is obvious to most people. For this reason the Board has had town planning added to its other responsibilities.

Town Planning is not new. All through the ages, architects, engineers and surveyors have combined to produce cities which still delight the eye and which have a convenience adequate for the particular civilisation for which they were designed. However, during the last 100 years three important factors have made city growth far more complex. The development of steam power and the enormous industrial expansion which resulted have not only changed the appearance, but also the essential character of



many towns. The internal combustion engine has altered the whole conception of the movement of people and goods. A lively social conscience has arisen which has demanded better living, working, recreational and cultural facilities for the people. The effect of these three fundamental changes has meant an entirely fresh approach to the study of the city. It is not only a physical problem, but a social one as well.

How does all this affect Melbourne? Let us take one example, industry, which has had a great influence on the development of the city. Without at this stage probing into causes or effects, it must be obvious to everyone that there is such a great industrial concentration in the older inner areas that many manufacturers are looking elsewhere to expand and build new factories. The question arises, where are they to go? So far no one really knows, no indication or guidance has ever been given. Thus the selection of a factory site becomes largely a hit-or-miss effort in that wherever land is available, it must be snapped up and developed. Whether or not it is an entirely suitable location is often overlooked.

Surely everyone must realise by now that a factory is not an isolated phenomenon. It is an essential cog in the machinery of civic development. It relies on electric power, it must draw on raw material, it should be convenient to labour, it will produce traffic problems, it may generate

unpleasant odours and, the effects of its production will touch many aspects of city organisation. A co-ordinated approach is essential if the most satisfactory results are to be obtained.

What is true of industry is equally true of other community activities, such as housing, commerce, recreation, education and the like. Each has an influence on the growth of the city and on each other. Furthermore, the city cannot be viewed alone. It is dependent on the State of which it forms an integral part, geographically, socially and politically. On the resources of the State depends the development and growth of the city.

Melbourne owes much to the fact that for many years it grew according to a premeditated plan. Hoddle's original spacious conception is still reflected in the dignity of the city centre. With the acceptance of his plan for the inner city area, Hoddle then planned for suburban expansion. However, as the years passed, the city began to spread even beyond this planned suburban area, and gradually the outskirts of the city penetrated further and further into the countryside.

Unfortunately, the need for proper control and regulation of this new growth was not appreciated by those in authority and no attempt was made until 1922 to bring order into the city's expansion. In that year, largely as the result of the initiative of the late Alderman Frank Stapley, the

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