

Hanrahan

22 January I walked into the Northcote Town Hall, scene of my turbulent youth, with something approaching timidity and something backing away from horrid irony, and strode or maybe slunk up to the reception counter in the Electricity Supply Department, where stood an older, thinner form of a man I once knew, who nodded civilly at me, and I said 'G'day, Nigel' as if I'd last seen him yesterday, not twenty-three years ago, and he grinned and said 'Johnny-boy! How are ya!' as if it had been maybe five years. And we got down to talking about who was dead, who turning 70 next week, who had made good, who been left behind, and remember the day when? and how long since? and really, that long? and unbelievable, ain't it? Continuity thus established and time put in its place, eventually Nigel asked me what he could do for me, and I said 'Sign me up for electricity, if you'll take a cheque.' 'Sure. What address, mate?' '144 Fulham Road.' Nigel gave me an odd, amused look, as if almost he'd known all along that I never learnt anything in that job, and said 'See that dirty big sign over there, the one with the streets on it, what does it say alongside Fulham Road, eh?' '148,' I said. 'Right. That's where we start, so you're on the wrong tram, sport: you're in Heidelberg.' 'Bloody hell,' I said.

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But I'm not in Heidelberg at all. Alphington is part of Fairfield, which in turn is part of the city of Northcote, but for some reason I must buy electricity from the city of Heidelberg, which is unfortunate, because Heidelberg charges more for everything. It has to. It has an area of about 12½ square miles and a population of about 70,000. Northcote has a slightly smaller population in about half the area. In my search for more information to bore you with (I have an idea that Alphington was once part of Heidelberg) I have just discovered that in 1961 Heidelberg was ten times the size of Northcote and had nearly twice its population. This is dull. Australia's Harry Warner Jr I am not. What I really wanted to get round to telling you is that Sally and I took my mother to see the new place, and on the way I asked her whether she could remember where in Fairfield I was born. 'Just over there,' she said - and blow me down, not only is the building still standing, in the main street of Fairfield, but it's still a private hospital called Maristowe. It has taken nearly 41 years, but I've come full circle at last, and am living half a mile from where I was born. Wow, sensawunda, and like that.

Hanrahan is published exclusively for FLAP. The first three issues have also been in ANZAPA. If you are not in FLAP and interested in seeing more (or in any of the apas listed and interested in seeing anything I have published since mid-1977), please get in touch.