



Done for ANZAPA by John Bangsund
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Jillong dreaming

Spirit said go to the Society of Editors' AGM: it's probably your last chance to attend a meeting for some time. Flesh said get an early night; there's a lot left to pack. I told Spirit to attend AGM while I rested Flesh; it came home late, high on good fellowship and half drunk, as I expected. Missed, said Spirit: eighteen AGMs in a row you've been to, this the first you've missed. I thought you were about to say that I was missed, I said, wondering about the accuracy of that eighteen in a row. Oh, I think you were mentioned - anything left to drink? There's a cask in the fridge, I said, the rest is in Geelong. And that's how it was. Three days later the fridge was in Geelong, and everything else. Moving was hell. It always is.

In 1836 a couple of squatters, John Cowie and David Stead, established a run west of Corio Bay, forty-odd miles south-west of the settlement that became Melbourne. The names Corio and Geelong seem to have been used interchangeably for the bay and the settlement; both are Anglicized versions of Aboriginal names for the place, and both could refer to cliffs or birds, but my private translation, entirely unsubstantiated, of 'Jillong, Coraiyo' is 'White men! There goes the neighborhood.'

Squatters didn't like Aborigines much: 'savages', they called them. One can only wonder what the Aborigines called them, these death-colored invaders. The squatters took over vast expanses of land to graze their strange beasts, and they guarded the land jealously, as if they owned it. From time to time the Aborigines came back to the district, to see the old places, to see what was left to eat, to see what their pallid neighbors were up to. The squatters and their employees, for their part, weren't at all happy about these neighborly visits. Incursions, they called them - incursions by 'threatening natives'. Cowie and Stead erected a rudimentary tower on a hill overlooking the area they had acquired, and from it they hung a bell. When threatening natives were sighted in the area, the bell was rung to alert everyone on the property. It must have made an awesome sound, that bell, in that tranquil, beautiful place. The settlers called the place Bell Post Hill.

Geelong developed as a port, a town and a centre of heavy industry, serving the graziers and farmers of the Western District ('Australia Felix', Major Mitchell had called it). In this century, oil companies built their refineries at Corio. The Ford Motor Company built its factory there. (The first ute in the world was built there: a utility vehicle with a passenger cabin and, over the rear wheels, an open cart. It was invented by a Ford engineer named Lewis Bandt, father of the composer Ros Bandt.) Geelong, naturally enough, seems very pro-Ford. There are plenty of Holdens around, but Fords outnumber them probably as nowhere else in Australia. Renaults are exotic and, fortunately, neutral.

(I write this on 14 July. Did I mention that we bought a Renault? I didn't. It's a 1981 Virage Estate, which sounds more like a wine of

dubious provenance than a Renault 12 station wagon, but it runs well. 'Virage' means nothing more romantic than 'turning, cornering; turn, bend, corner'; *un virage en épingle à cheveux* is not turning a corner and colliding with a horse, but a hairpin bend. I was rather hoping that 'virage' meant 'virago', but the French for 'virago' is, um, 'virago'. You can learn a lot from cars.)

Geelong is Victoria's biggest regional city. Its biggest industry, sad sign of the times we live in, is gambling: not even the automotive sector has a higher annual turnover. But its true industrial heart is north of the city, which is why some people passing through tend to think of Geelong as a nasty, noxious place. It isn't. The city is congenial, in places charming and elegant; from just about everywhere you can see church spires on the hill, and from just about everywhere there are views of the sea. Geelong itself is not exactly where Sally and I have moved to: we have moved to what the locals call an outer suburb, in peak hour a good ten-minute drive from Geelong Town Hall.

As Geelong's northern suburbs spread west from the Ford factory, the old squatters' bell may have been remembered in naming Bell Park (but the grazier John Calvert Bell, after whom Bell's Beach is named, had extensive holdings throughout the district). By the 1960s residential development had gone further west, right up Bell Post Hill, and that is where we are. Opposite the house is a park, in which there is a rudimentary tower topped by a stylized painted bell. It's probably not the original bell post, and may not be exactly where the bell post stood, but I haven't asked. There is a very old house on the other side of the park, and I haven't asked about that either. Next to the old house is a community centre, and a branch of the Geelong Regional Library, which could be handy. There will be time to investigate such things, after we've unpacked.

From our front porch we look out over the park to Corio Bay, and beyond to the Bellarine Peninsula. 'At night', the owner of our house said this afternoon, 'you can see the lights of Clifton Springs, and if that tree wasn't in the way, Portarlington.' It's true. You can. The experience doesn't compare with Jude Fawley's vision of Christminster, or even the night view over the water to Jay Gatsby's place, but in its way it's a pretty sight. Way beyond sight, thirty kilometres as the gull flies, on the south-east of the peninsula, is Queenscliff. I spent the first year of my life at Queenscliff, and am fairly confident that I could find the little cottage that my parents rented all those years ago. There's a bell there, too, as I recall, to be rung in the event of shipwreck. And there's a fort, built to protect Victoria from the Russians. It seems to have worked.

Adapted from my 'Threepenny Planet' column in the August 1996 Society of Editors Newsletter, a publication I have the great joy of no longer editing.