





ROYAL MELBOURNE



Upstairs in the Melbourne town hall, the broad hallway leading to the council chamber is flanked with banners, each bearing the heraldic arms of a member of British royalty who has visited the city. It is no exaggeration to say, then, that the enduring significance of royalty – its symbols and traditions, its presence and its absence – lies near to the heart of the City of Melbourne.



QUEEN CITY OF THE SOUTH

Melbourne was founded in 1835, two years before Queen Victoria succeeded to the British throne, and at its centenary would be extolled as 'Queen City of the South'. The city's regal-sounding street-names, though – King, William, Queen, Elizabeth – are not the straightforward homage they appear. True, Victoria's predecessor William was King when the town's streets were named; but his queen was Adelaide, not Elizabeth.

In 1847, Dr Charles Perry arrived in Melbourne bearing Royal Letters Patent, signed and sealed by the Queen as head of the Church of England, proclaiming Melbourne a diocese, with Dr Perry its bishop and St James' its cathedral.¹ And since a cathedral demands a city, the same document raised the town to that status.

In truth, royal edict alone could not make Melbourne into a city. It was still an outpost port and pastoral centre in 1847, marking the southern extremity of the colony of New South Wales. But over the ensuing twenty years, Melbourne would become a city in more than just name.

The year 1851 brought, first, separation from New South Wales by the new colony of Victoria, with Melbourne its capital, followed by the discovery of gold in unrivalled plenty within 200 km of the city. Immigrants poured into Victoria and, fuelled by their gold, their ambition and energy, Melbourne soon ranked among the foremost cities of the British empire.

For, at the same period, Britain's great imperial century was gathering steam, extending the empire's reach and redoubling its glory. So too grew the pride of Victorians at being loyal Britons and a part of that empire. In fact, Melbourne's civic leaders stood in no doubt that their city counted as a jewel in Queen Victoria's empire. Less certain was that Queen Victoria knew of it. After all, the Queen City of the South lay a long way – 17,000 km – from the bosom of empire.



PREVIOUS PAGE

Girl with Union Jack at the royal parade, 1954 (cropped and manipulated). William Robertson. Black and white negative. City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection

OPPOSITE

Letter patent, 1847, Queen Victoria elevates the town of Melbourne to 'City' status. Paper, ink, textile and plaster. Anglican Diocese of Melbourne



Waiting for the Prince



OPPOSITE
'Waiting for the Prince'
– in anticipation of
foundation stone
ceremony, Melbourne
Town Hall, 1867
from: *A record of the
visit of H.R.H. The
Duke of Edinburgh to
Australia*, compiled
for the Trustees of
the Melbourne Public
Library by A.H. Tulk,
Melbourne: Govt.
Printer, 1868;
State Library of
Victoria

LEFT
HRH The Duke
of Edinburgh,
c.1867, Johnstone,
O'Shannessy and
Co., albumen silver
photographic print
on carte de visite
mount, 11 x 7 cm.
State Library of
Victoria

WAITING FOR THE PRINCE

Melbourne's sense of insecurity wrought by absence and distance received its first salve with a visit by the Queen's second son, Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, in 1867. Chief among his commitments was to lay the foundation

stone for the new Melbourne town hall, a mundane ceremony which nonetheless attracted a crowd of around 10,000. Returning to Melbourne in 1869, the Prince would cement his relationship with the city by setting in place a Corinthian capital on the town hall clock-tower – named in his honour Prince Alfred's Tower.

Once the gulf had been bridged, others of the Royal family made the journey to the empire's farthest reaches. Not frequently, nor regularly, but often enough that most Melburnians would be able to recall from their childhood the thrill of a Royal visit: fireworks, triumphal arches, the streets festooned, flags and crowds and the glimpse of a royal personage.

...in no part of the British Empire is more loyal and devoted attachment entertained towards the throne and person of our most gracious sovereign than in this city, the capital of the colony which is honoured with Her Majesty's name.

– Address to the royal visitors by the Mayor and the Corporation of Melbourne, 1881²

The year 1881 brought the Queen's eldest grandsons, Albert Victor and George, midshipmen in the Royal Navy. At fifteen, Prince George (the future King George V) was 'a merry, fair-haired sailor boy' whose 'impulsive doings' Melburnians would long remember. (He even tried on Ned Kelly's armour.)³ As Duke of Cornwall and York, he would return in 1901 to open the first Federal Parliament, making Melbourne capital city of Australia.⁴

Following the Federation visit there came, at last, official recognition of Melbourne's standing in the empire. In 1902, King Edward VII granted to Melbourne's mayor (together with Sydney's) the title of Lord Mayor, a privilege traditionally extended to only the most ancient and eminent of British cities.

The next royal visitor, in 1920, was the Prince of Wales – who, as King Edward VIII, would abdicate to marry a divorcée. Popularly known as 'the Digger Prince', his tour was Britain's gesture of thanks for Australia's role in the Great War (1914-18). Melbourne's Grand Hotel changed its name to the Hotel Windsor in honour of the handsome Prince.

Just seven years later came the Duke and Duchess of York (the future King George VI and Queen Elizabeth), leaving at home their baby daughter, Elizabeth. After them, in 1934, came Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester, to open Melbourne's centenary celebrations.

This roll-call of royal visits makes them sound commonplace. But don't be misled: the pitch of excitement every time – borne out by eyewitness report and burnished memory alike – was such as if a deity had dropped to earth. Melbourne even went all-out when it came to celebrating royalty at a distance, on such occasions as Queen Victoria's golden and diamond jubilees and the coronations of her successors. City-wide 'illuminations', banquets, balls, parades, and carnivals – all were staple expressions of royal-veneration at this outpost of the empire.

Eight royal visits, six princes; but Melbourne had yet to see a king or queen. In 1949 that was set to change. Plans for a visit that year by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, with their younger daughter Princess Margaret, were well-advanced when the King's ill-health caused the visit to be cancelled. Instead, it was proposed to send Princess Elizabeth, heiress to the throne, and her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh. Invitations to the City of Melbourne's royal ball were already in the post when the death of the King, in February 1952, called a halt to the visit. Princess Elizabeth was now Queen.



OPPOSITE

TOP

Lord Mayoral robe with fox fur trim, c.1910, 'Tailored especially for the Myer Store for Men, Melbourne and Adelaide'. Textile and fur. City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection

BOTTOM

Rough colour sketch for an invitation for a Ball at the Melbourne Town Hall, May 1949. Pencil, ink and wash on paper. City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection

'THE' ROYAL VISIT

The royal visit of 1954, then, was *the* royal visit: the first by a reigning monarch. No one who lived through it could ever forget the city's embrace of – saturation in – royal fervour for ten glorious days in the late summer of 1954.

For months beforehand, Melburnians had been drilled as to the proper manner in which to receive the Queen: not to stand on tram roofs, the correct gloves to wear, and the use of tinned pineapple to produce meals befitting a royal occasion. The first stop on the Queen's Australian tour was Sydney, and that city's gaffes and excesses (gleefully reported in the Melbourne press) showed the way not to behave: staring, jostling, trampling, throwing things at the royal car, calling out *You beaut!* or *Good on you, Phill* – all were decidedly un-Melburnian.

*This sort of thing couldn't possibly happen in Victoria... For one thing, Melbourne is not nearly so temperamental as Sydney, nor as brash, and I believe it has a higher sense of protocol.*⁵

*Cr Solly, Lord Mayor of Melbourne, said: 'With our wide streets and easy-going nature, it is most unlikely that the congestion will be as acute as in Sydney.'*⁶

The City of Melbourne oversaw the lavish decoration of the city's streets (every street had its own Decorations Committee) and a procession that was precursor of the annual Moomba festival. The crowd that massed in Swanston Street as the Lord Mayor received the Queen during her five-minute stop at the town hall was every bit as eager as that which had witnessed Prince Alfred laying the foundation stone 87 years earlier. *I believe,* wrote one commentator as the royal visit wound up, *'that it has achieved its purpose – to make the Crown a tangible object.'*⁷

OVERLEAF

LEFT

The Town Hall illuminated, 1901, Robert S Brain Silver gelatin photograph on mount, 29 x 23 cm State Library of Victoria

OVERLEAF

RIGHT

An unholy scrum – boys fight over a periscope at the royal parade, 1954. William Robertson. Black and white negative. City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection

OPPOSITE

HM Queen Elizabeth and HRH Prince Philip enroute to Parliament House, 1954. William Robertson. Silver gelatin photograph City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection



But just around the corner were TV and the 'sixties. The changes wrought by those cultural tsunamis, together with the wilting of the British empire and the increased frequency of royal visits – more than a dozen since 1954 by the Queen herself and still more by others of the royal family – have served, perhaps, to make the Crown *too* tangible an object.

The otherworldly aspect of royalty, which gave their antipodean visits the once-in-a-lifetime glamour and strangeness of a 'man on the moon' experience, has diminished. Nowadays Melburnians tend to regard royal visitors as respected dignitaries and sometime-celebrities, haloed with the antique glow of dynasty.

But at the heart of the City of Melbourne, the age-old symbols endure, signifying the status and privileges endowed by royal favour. And not only symbols: the foundation stone stands solid still, and Prince Alfred's Tower soaring above it.

- 1 St James', at the corner of William and Collins streets, was supplanted as Melbourne's Anglican cathedral by St Paul's in 1891. Fifteen years later, the old cathedral was relocated, stone by stone, to West Melbourne where it still stands.
- 2 *The Cruise of HMS Bacchante, 1879-1882, compiled from the private journals, letters, and note-books of Prince Albert Victor and Prince George of Wales*, with additions by John N. Dalton, vol. 1 – The West and the South, Macmillan and Co., London, 1886
- 3 *ibid*; *Argus*, 21 June 1941
- 4 Melbourne was Australia's capital until 1927, when federal parliament relocated to its permanent home, Canberra.
- 5 *Argus*, 7 February, 1954
- 6 *Sun News-Pictorial*, 9 February 1954
- 7 *Sun News-Pictorial*, 11 February 1954





OPPOSITE
The Right Hon. the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress (Councillor and Mrs R.H. Solly) meet Her Majesty and His Royal Highness, 1954. William Robertson. Silver gelatin photograph. City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection

RIGHT
HM Queen Elizabeth II departing the Royal Ball at the Exhibition Building, 1954. William Robertson. Silver gelatin photograph. City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection



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ABOVE
Coats of arms,
City of Melbourne,
1970.

FRONT COVER
Crowd farewells
Royals (crop)
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage
Collection

