

# Melbourne as it was

For the first 22 years of the settlement's existence most houses were built close to the Yarra River. Melburnians collected their water from natural falls upstream of today's Queen's Bridge.

As the township grew, people had further to travel and private water delivery services began to pop up.

The quality of the water was often questionable and expensive.





# Realising a vision

By 1847 Melbourne has become a city. The city's water was commonly referred to as 'Yarra Soup' and its population was constantly at risk of contracting 'colonial fever' or typhoid.

The larger the settlement grew, the more the purity of the river water suffered. Sewage, drainage, discharges from tanneries and other industries all contributed to the unsavoury cocktail that was the city's drinking water.

In 1849 ex-convict James Blackburn arrived in Melbourne from Tasmania. Already an established engineer and architect of high regard, he proposed a version of the Yan Yean scheme in

late 1851. Sadly, he succumbed to colonial fever and died without seeing the scheme realised.



*James Blackburn*



# Eastern Hill Water Tower

Melbourne grew and grew, and so did its appetite for water. Melbourne was already a city of gardens, and unlike England there was hardly a cottage without a bathroom.

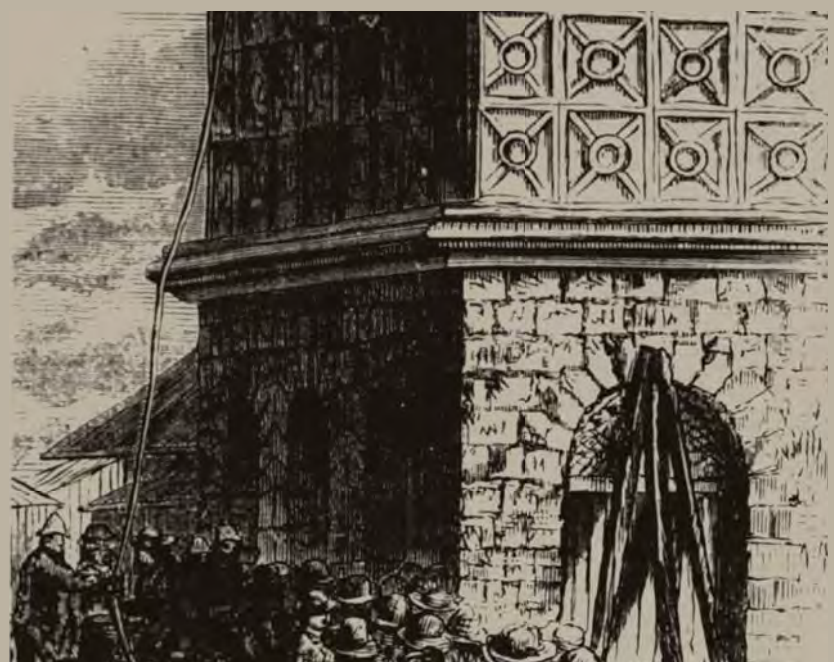
To improve water supply, a 1,000 gallon (4,700lt.) tank was built on Eastern Hill, just behind St Patricks cathedral on the corner of Victoria Parade and Gisborne Street.

The Eastern Hill Water tower was built of pre-cast iron panels assembled on an arched blue stone structure which raised its base 4 metres off the ground.

Water was pumped into the tower from the Yarra upstream. It made

collecting water simpler for water carters, but did little to improve the quality. Water was still expensive and mostly still tasted awful.

The Water Tower was disassembled in the early 1900s and re-erected at the Western Treatment Plant in the old township of Cocoroc, where it still stands.





# Building the Yan Yean

The dreaded 'colonial fever' claimed a lot of lives.

It had taken years to get the Yan Yean reservoir started, but on the 20th December 1853, governor Charles La Trobe turned the first sod.

A tent city of 1,000 workers and their families, most who had returned from the gold fields, was established.

Strikes supported the campaign for an 8-hour day in Victoria, and sly grog was common. The worker's tent city was a rough place, even after armed police were sent from Melbourne.





# Hooray! It's finished

When the Yan Yean Reservoir was finished there was a huge celebration. It was said to be the largest artificial reservoir in the world and was even featured in *The London Illustrated News*. Major General Edward Macarthur, representing the Governor, had the honour of 'turning on' Melbourne's new water supply.

It started at the valve house in the Carlton Gardens. The newspapers later wrote that 7,000 men, women, children, firemen and policemen, soldiers and sailors, volunteers and civilians packed the area. Then at

1 o'clock exactly the valve was opened and the water supply turned on. There was an artillery salute, speeches and a procession that marched through the city's streets to Flinders Street.





# Water, water everywhere, not a drop to drink – and the quality!

Within a year the honeymoon was over. Burst pipes left whole areas without water and, because it had taken so long to build Yan Yean, the settlement had already outgrown its capacity.

Yan Yean's water came from the Plenty River which like the Yarra had its own problems. Cart and stock crossings and sewage from rural towns polluted the river.

On hot summer days residents in Melbourne's affluent and geographically higher suburbs including Camberwell, Kew, and Surrey Hills could be without water from early morning until late at night because of poor water pressure.

The taps in workers cottages in the low lying areas like Collingwood and Burnley never ran dry. It's believed this caused the odd smile among the residents of Melbourne's more humble suburbs.



*The depiction of contemporary politicians as the dreaded 'animalcula' was one of many satirical attacks on Yan Yean Water that appeared in Melbourne Punch.*



# Solving the problem

The water quality problem was solved in the 1880s by bypassing the Plenty River and diverting water from across the Great Divide. Weirs were built on Wallaby Creek and Silvern Creek, which naturally flowed to the Goulburn River. The weirs diverted the river water to aqueducts that flowed to The Cascades and down into Jacks Creek.

Toorourrong Reservoir was built to settle this pure mountain water and a bluestone aqueduct called Clear Water Channel carried the water to Yan Yan. The Toorourrong Reservoir, Clear Water Channel, the Yan Yan outlet structures and the Cascades are still operational today.

