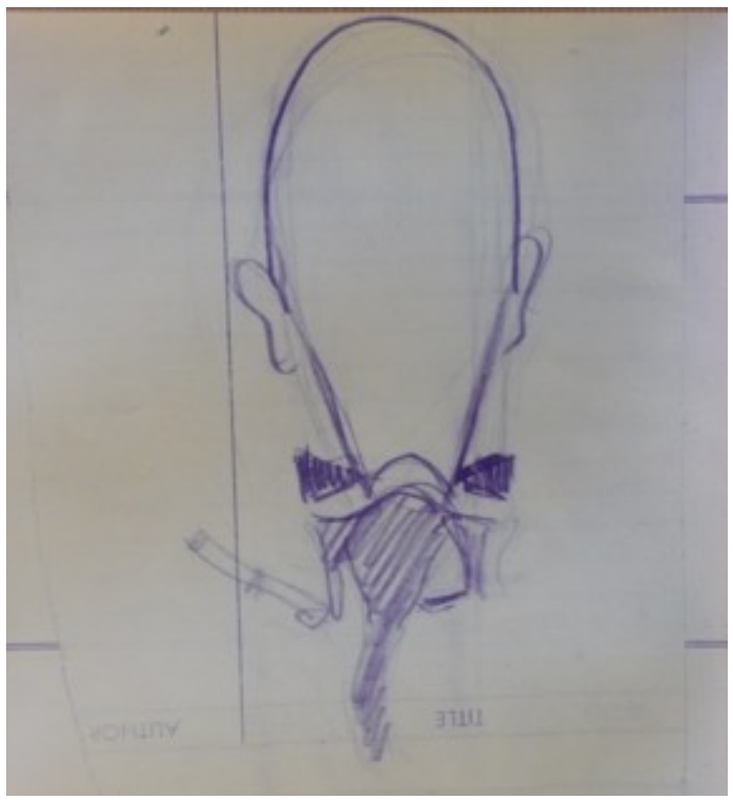
Tramp to Shanghai:

a young man's tale before the war

INTRODUCTION

Best Overend in his very fast 1926 Grand Prix, Type 37, Bugatti. Lord Somers Camp 1937.
Note the pig skin gloves.

Tommy Challen's cartoon of Best Overend in his Bugatti.
Bald head, bow tie and pig skin gloves.
Table Talk, February 1937



A dinner sketch of Best Overend, by Challen.
Mario's Restaurant, Melbourne. 1937.

Preface.

Modernism, as an architectural movement, arrived in Melbourne in the mid 1930's. Inculcated with its principles, a few years earlier in the London office of Wells Coates, Best Overend was part of the vanguard. By 1934 he was the Architectural Critic of The *Argus*. Enhancing public understanding with a weekly column entitled 'Architecture and Property', he also made a series of broadcasts for the ABC. Immediately before the War he was theArchitect in Charge of the Home and Building Exhibition in Melbourne. Later, on the basis of his scheme for the first public housing development at Fishermans Bend, he was appointed Deputy Chairman of the newly created Architects' Panel of the Victorian Housing Commission.

In 1937, at twenty eight, he interrupted his career. Although his knowledge of the sea scarcely extended beyond the occasional ride in a yacht, he became the Third Officer on the steamship 'Karoola'. The 7391 ton tramp's last voyage was to be island hopping through the Dutch East Indies collecting pig iron as ballast. On board, the crew were Chinese coolies, the Officers displaced White Russians, and the Captain a cunning Englishman who thought he might pocket the difference between employing a fully trained Third Watch Officer and an adventurous young man. Thumb nail sketches are made of the characters, the mutinous coolie crew and their Chinese customs. We also learn how an architectural training in geometry enables one to pick up the essentials of navigation. Throughout the voyage, the perceptive eye of an architect captures - in pictures and words - the ever changing colours and shapes of the tramp as it steams north. On reaching Osaka, the ship and its contents were junked for the Japanese war effort. Best Overend is then deported to Shanghai where he worked for an English architectural practice. His account of China is a record of everyday life; the women, the clubs, the cuisine, are the ether. Reflections are also made on the Chinese character. This he came to love. At night he was a savourer of the brothels and the bars in the International Settlement. When the Sino-Japanese hostilities erupted he joined the Shanghai International Police Force and kept the curfew. By day, apart from his architectural work, and the writing of first hand dispatches for the Melbourne *Herald* and *Sun*, he found time to help quell the odd rice riot. 'Tramp to Shanghai', is his tale of adventure before the War.

After Shanghai, Best Overend returned - via the Trans-Siberian Railway and London - to his architectural practice in Melbourne. An Architectural Postscript is the resolution to his story. This comprises a short biography, with illustrations of his work before and after the War. Themes touched on in the introduction are explored in more detail. These include the main elements of Modernism, and the reason for its decline.

A Young Man before the War.

As a young man before the war, Best Overend was well known to readers of The Melbourne *Argus* and the *Australian Home Beautiful*. In *Manuscripts*, a miscellany of art and letters, he published poetical works, line drawings and essays on the nature of Architecture. In September and October 1937, the Melbourne *Sun* and *Herald* headlined his dispatches on the outbreak of war in Shanghai. These were followed by a series of articles on his accounts of the conflict. More whimsically, in 1935, subscribers to a women's weekly, *Table Talk*, read of "Things I Dislike About Women": some small home truths from a mere male in search of perfection. These included "drooping dressing gown at breakfast", or the architectural observation that the female figure was "fundamentally unsuited to the bleakness of the tube". Evidently this fashion of the mid 1980's had a precursor in 1935. In subsequent issues, other ironical pieces appeared such us "Things Women Dislike About Us" and "Please Be Subtle!" – the latter being along the risqué lines of please adopt finesse when you flirt. For their own part, in "The Letters of Letty" – a regular column in *Table Talk* - the editors reported:

> "Once again having caught the bug of Wanderlust, Best Overend after spending a week at Lord Somers Camp, is off again, this time to visit Japan. As well as being an A.R.I.B.A. (Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects), he is an A.R.A.I.A., (the same for Australia), a quite brilliant effort for one so young. He is going to make a special study of Japanese Architecture and, after building something ultra modern he is going to look up China, Manchuria, Siberia and Soviet Russia. After that he will go to London for a month and then home to Australia, squash racquets and all his friends! By the way, he is an extremely superstitious young man and never drives his Bugatti without wearing white gloves. He says that they bring him good luck!"

A man of extraordinary consistency throughout his life, the pigskin gloves were worn to the end, even if they were not alas, behind the wheel of a Type 37, but a Ford Ute!

In 1934, he was the architectural critic for The *Argus*. His weekly column, "Architecture and Property", reviewed notable new buildings in Melbourne at the time - including MacRobertson Girls' High School, the Foy and Gibson's Corner Store, and the Chevron Hotel. Other articles discussed the bricks and mortar issues of house heating, the window, the flat roof. In 1933 his first broadcast for the ABC was a description of the new home of the BBC, Broadcast House, "one of the seven wonders of the world". This was followed, in 1934, by a broadcast series of eight talks similar in theme to some of his newspaper articles: reflections on the design of various rooms in the house, from the standpoint of Modernism; the social issue of state housing for the working class.

Throughout much of the 1930's, his domestic work was featured in the *Australian Home Beautiful.* In July 1934, the front cover ran Fred Armytage's modern home, complete with cantilevered entrance porch, and a sweeping reinforced concrete staircase, concealed by two story curved windows. After his return from Shanghai, in 1938, he wrote over three successive months, "Some Thoughts to the Source and Success of Modernism". These started with a description of "The Desirable House". This was a précis of some reflections found in the second part of his book. It culminated in some projections on "The House of 1960".

By 1941, just before his enlistment in the Royal Australian Air Force, *Lines,* the journal of the Victorian Architectural Students Society, and afterwards the *Australian Home Beautiful*, published the following verse and drawing by John Mockridge.

Adolesced, Manly chest, Prussian tressed, Youthful zest, Tailor's pest, Work obsessed, Few jobs messed, Orient's guest, Travelled West, Modernist Home to rest, Jobbing quest, Stood the test, Fortune blessed, Sit back, Rest, As you guessed, Overend, Best.

Best Overend's initial training in architecture was as an articled pupil. Before degrees from a University, technical training was achieved through diploma courses from such schools as the Gordon Institute of Technology at Geelong, or joining a practice. With night school at the Swinburne Technical College, studying building construction, and later a workshop at Melbourne University, he began his training in 1927 with H. Vivian Taylor, Architect and Reinforced Concrete Engineer. The indenture went as follows:

> "The Apprentice of his own free will and with consent of the Father, binds himself apprentice or pupil to the Architect to be taught and instructed in the profession of an Architect for the term of four years... and truly, honestly and diligently to serve the Architect at all times during the said term as a faithful apprentice ought to do".

Consideration for this training was a premium of two hundred pounds "paid to the Architect by the Father".

Reflecting on it fifty years later in an interview for the Royal Victorian Institute of Architect's Journal - he had just been awarded an M.B.E. for services to architecture - Best saw it in the following way:

> "When I started as an articled pupil... building comprised a few simple trades, the Architect was boss, and he strutted around the site under a bowler hat. There was no registration, he learned as an articled pupil and studied building construction at night. Later there was the evening architecture atelier, at Melbourne University, under Leighton Irwin".

In April 1931, Vivian Taylor wrote:

> "It affords me great pleasure to bear testimony to the excellent character and technical ability of Acheson Best Overend. He has been in my employ for a period of four years and four months, during which period he has served a four year term of pupillage. He has pursued his studies diligently and has developed into a capable draughtsman with a fair knowledge of Design and Structural Engineering, and a sound knowledge of Building Construction. He is quick and accurate on the drawing board and has considerable experience in supervision. His integrity is beyond reproach, and he has an engaging personality, exhibiting in particular a forceful initiative. He is leaving my office to pursue further his Architectural studies abroad, and I am confident that he will creditably acquit himself. "

With this Best left for London. For two years he worked with some of the leaders of the Modernist Movement in Britain - Raymond McGrath, Serge Chermayeff and Wells Coates. At night he studied for his Associateship of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Importantly, he was the chief personal assistant to the flamboyant Wells Coates in his interior design of Broadcasting House Studios for the BBC. Although his technical training at this time involved specific fields such as acoustics, the impact of Wells Coates' elaborate philosophical position on Modernism was far more significant. As a young man, he became a disciple. Certainly this verve was to slowly dissipate. At the end of his life he admitted:

> the heady inspiration and religious conviction of the Modernists of the twenties, fifty years ago, has disappeared as completely as most of the gentlemen involved, Gropius, Mendelsohn, McGrath, Wells Coates.. *R.V.I.A. Journal 1976.*

Upon arrival in London, his first position was with Raymond McGrath. From there his services - at four pounds a week and working from 9 in the morning to 10:30 at night - were quickly in demand.

> "Mr. McGrath was good enough to tell me that I need not fear lack of employment in London owing to my general knowledge of the more unusual aspects of architecture like concrete engineering, acoustic and theatre design for talkie installations. For this I have to thank Mr. Taylor who so kindly grounded me in this general type of work". (Letter to parents, London, 17th August 1931.)

McGrath himself lived in a thoroughly modern flat facing Regent Park. When Best dined there he had this to report to his parents.

> "He is an Australian who went to Cambridge and married an American heiress. She was there with her mother - a most delightful drawl - the Southern speech as they came from Dallas Texas. McGrath's been very decent to me and I hope I'll go back to his office. He wants me, so he tells me, even at the expense of sacrificing one of his Englishmen, but I reckon that would be crook. The man I'm with is alright - exaggerated Oxford accent, brought up in Japan, Ph.D., B. Sc, B.A., but I fear he is one of those pseudo-gentlemen. He's very charming of course, but I'm beginning to think it's a veneer". (Letter to parents, 20th July 1931.)

Over the ensuing months these perceptions of Wells Coates, his new boss, changed. Initial awe, then skepticism, finally evolved into admiration. Later in August he wrote:

> "I have no real friends here, though Coates certainly seems to becoming one, and a very charming one and I regard their English business as purely a phase in my career - and one out of which I am to get the utmost." (Letter, 31st August 1931). "McGrath and Coates are absolutely mad on the New Architecture and their very madness gives them terrific publicity and jerks them from the rut." (Letter, 17th August 1931).

Over the following year the vicissitude of a newly established architectural practice were conveyed back to his family in Melbourne. In September he remarked:

> "This afternoon, at 5pm, I had a most gratifying experience - another architect, a foreign chappie called Serge Chermayeff rang me up and asked if I was free, or was likely to have a few weeks to spare as he had a job for me. He is building a concrete house for himself,(1) and he wanted me for the concrete construction, drawing and calculations. His office adjoins McGrath, so that is how I know him. I promptly put him onto Wells Coates and had the pleasure of hearing him tell of the utter and absolute impossibility of the request ever receiving consideration, as he had worked for me for an extremely indefinite period ahead, and my absence would dislocate the whole office system. My egoism - already at no mere magnitude - swelled to such a degree that I found it difficult to face the dinner with advantage." (Letter, 29th September 1931)

Wells Coates opened his practice in London in February 1931.By October, the following year, the practice was expanding.

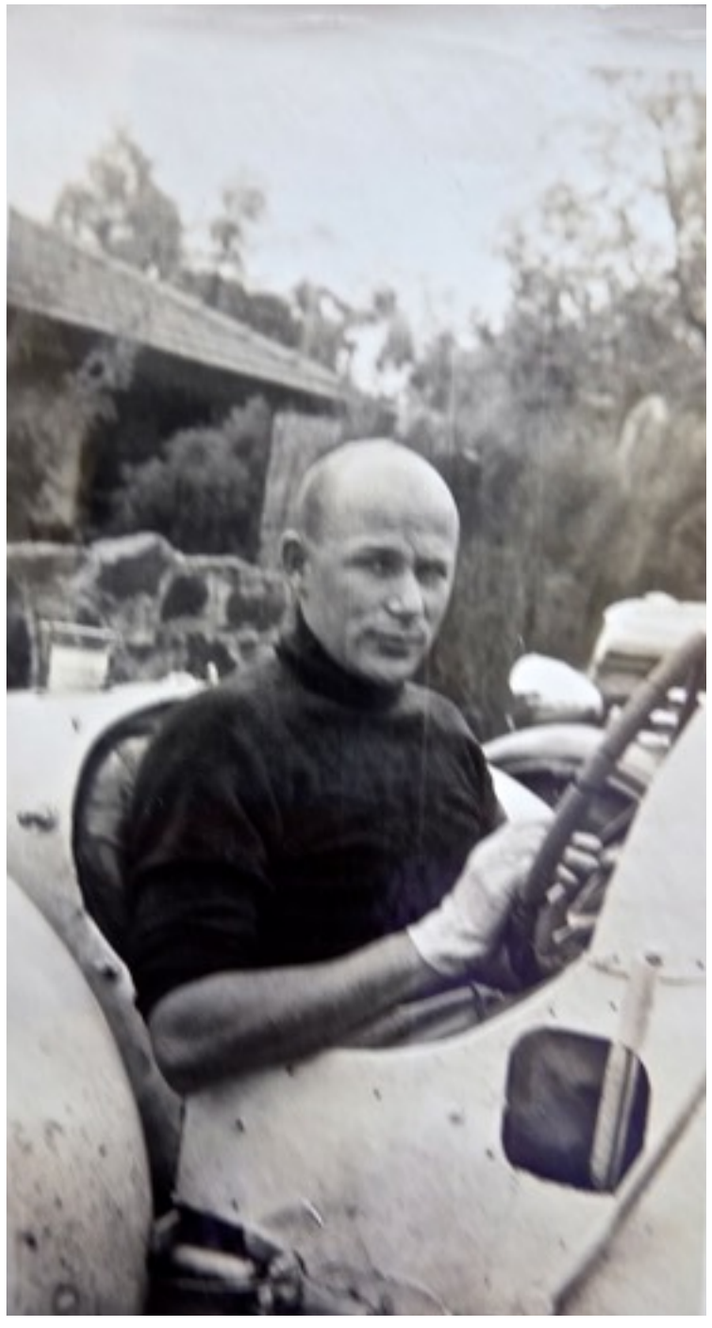
> "We are moving into larger offices next week as Wells Coates has taken into himself (doubtless for a heavy consideration) a partner in the person of one Playdell-Bouverie. He is a very decent chap, and is from a well known family of some ancestry over here. It has been an education to watch Wells Coates at work - with this coup he has climbed his last barrier to a successful practice - he has always been deficient in social standing - the inevitable result of a newcomer to London." (Letter, 27th September 1932)

Nine months earlier, however, at the beginning of 1932, the changing fortunes of architectural work had unpleasantly manifest themselves.

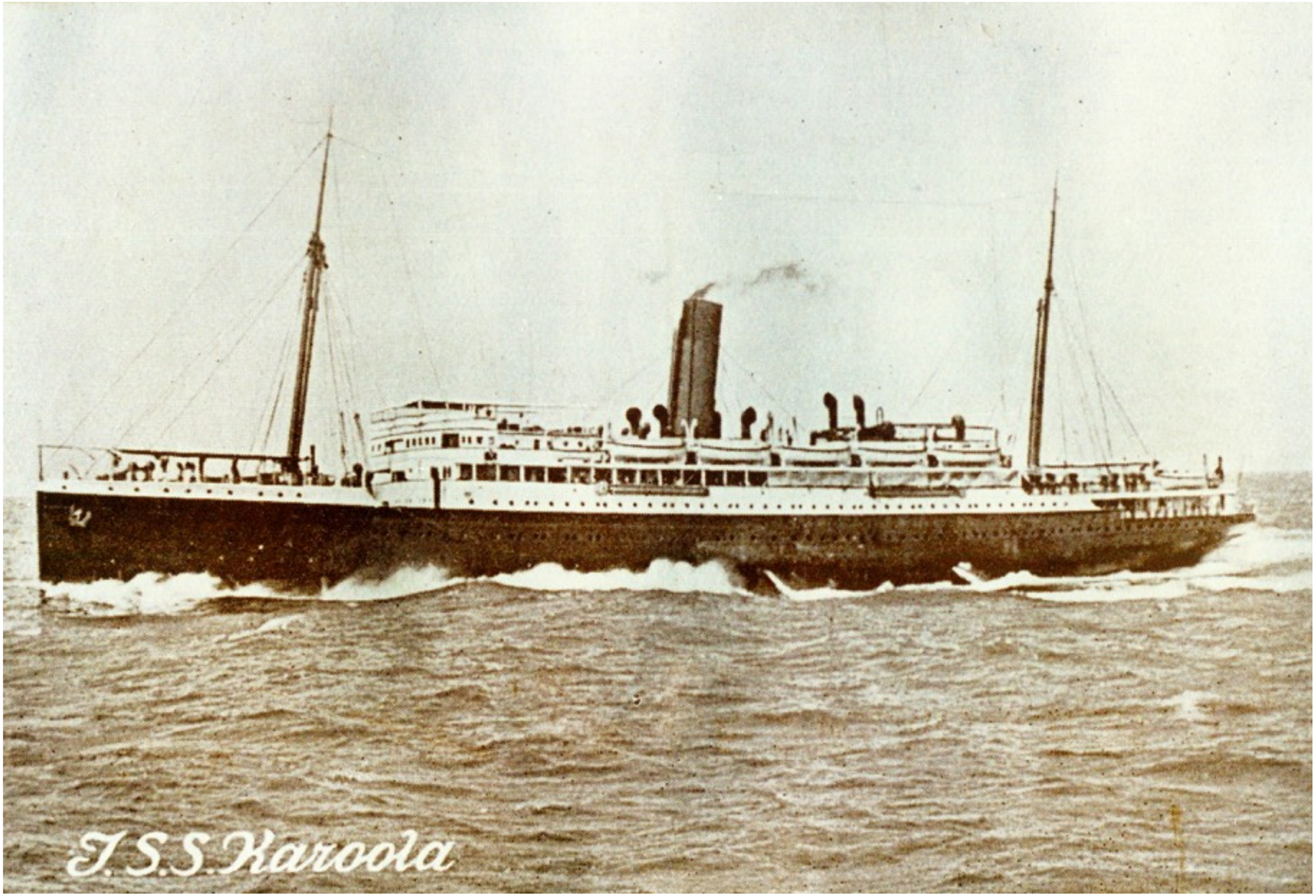
> ‘’ …a fortnight ago McGrath put off ten and Coates wants to pay me on credit - I was very definite on that point. I was prepared, at a pinch, to take a 25% cut in wages - I felt like telling him to put off a couple of his maids and let his wife do something, rather then economise on me - I do all his work for him in his office and he wants to kill the golden goose. However, last week we were commissioned to do a half dozen sketches for a company selling a metal veneered plywood. These I did in 46 hours of office time - two shillings an hour - say five pounds costs, gets fifty guineas. Fifty-two pounds ten shillings. And yet he wants to economise on me...." (Letter, 14th February 1932)

In the early 1930's the trek to London by ambitious young Australian architects numbered over fifty. Joining Best Overend were such notables as Keith Mackay, Geoffrey Mewton, Harold Bartlett, Brian Lewis, Selwyn Bates, and Sydney Ancher. Of course, not all became converts to Modernism. For most, their impetus to leave Australia was the Depression. For

those who also wished to find out first hand, the nature of Modernism, the movement got its pound of flesh. By 1934, when Best's cousin, Bob Eggleston, confronted Wells Coates for a pay rise - his remuneration then was three pounds ten pence a week - he was told it was he who should be paying the three pounds for the privilege of working for him! Although the brash young Australian's negotiating skills might have disappointed the rest of the drawing office, it was a measure of Wells Coates' charisma that his refusal was entirely accepted.



Best Overend in his Type 37,
Grand Prix, Bugatti, 1937.


T.S.S. Karoola

Tramp to Shanghai.

T.S.S. KAROOLA

Osaka, May 18th 1937

> "Although Mr. Overend has not been trained as an officer for the Mercantile Marine and has no B.O.T. certificate, his knowledge of his own profession stands him in great stead (for) the science of navigation. He has proved himself (a) Trustworthy, Sober and Capable officer. I have great pleasure in recommending him to anyone requiring the services of a junior watch keeping officer who would go far in the Nautical profession if taken up." (my elaboration)

P J Maley, Master.

T.S.S. "Karoola"

This was part of a brief punctuation in Best's work before the war. This book is his tale of adventure; first, as the Third Officer of a steam tramp destined for junking in Osaka, then as a hedonist in the bars of Shanghai, and finally as a policeman in the International Settlement as the Japanese began their advance.

On 13th March 1937, aged twenty seven, he left Sydney on the "Karoola". The tramp was part of the Mcllwraith, McEacharn's Line, which traversed from Geraldton in Western Australia to Brisbane in Queensland. When he boarded, it was to become 7,391 tons of scrap iron for Japanese munitions The crew were Chinese coolies, most of the officers White Russians and an Englishman from Shanghai. On its way it collected pig iron in South East Asian ports. From Probolinga, in Java, as the "Karoola" steamed northwards, he reflected about his adventures in the following way.

> "These last few years I seem to have spent simply unlearning everything I ever learnt and I don't think I'll be able to find an inhibition or belief left after this tour. The other peoples seem as right as we are and now a white man (the skipper) looks of peculiar colour and cast of countenance to me while all the Chinese have become individuals and try though I might, I can't find anything peculiar about them." (Letter to his father, 17th April 1937)

Arriving in Shanghai he was employed by the British Architectural firm, Lester, Johnson and Morriss.

> "The first day, after interviewing 12 firms without anything, one rang me at my hotel and made an offer of $500 for one month with options of a further two months employment if necessary. This is a fair salary and will permit me to have my own flat here overlooking the Bund and the river and the gardens of the British Embassy." (Letter to parents, 28th May 1937)

Including the coolies, chauffeurs and messengers, the architectural practice comprised 50 staff. Morriss, the last remaining partner, inherited his father's considerable wealth. They owned the North China Daily News and the Times of Shanghai. Lester, also a multi-millionaire, had died a bachelor, and his estate, which included hospitals and medical institutes, was administered by the office. Today, an enterprise of this scope would be termed a 'developer'. The breadth of their 'package-deal' was extraordinary. Involved in the purchase of land, the building, the financing and the collection of rents, they were really the estate agent, the lawyer, the banker and the architect.

Best Overend's most interesting work for this practice was the design and supervision of the working drawings of a thirty story building for the giant Japanese shipping Company N.Y.K. Sited on the Bund, 400 flats were to occupy the top twenty floors.

> "The projecting parabolic planes to the front facade are to be enclosed sunrooms glassed in, with a rather magnificent view up and down the Whangpoo and the Foochow rivers..." (Notations on a photograph sent by Best Overend to *The Herald* 18th August 1937)

At an estimated cost of five million pounds, its form in glass and anodized aluminium still appears modern today.

Whilst in Shanghai, he traveled a number of times to Tokyo - staying in Frank Lloyd

Wright's Imperial Hotel, "the most beautiful building in the world". Because Morriss and the other principal architect in the practice, a Mr Maugham, were both on extended holidays in England, he was given "an entirely free hand" on the N.Y.K. project. His sales spiel to Mr Yamamoto at the N.Y.K. head office took the following form:

> "What is usually termed Modern Architecture has been adopted as the most rational form of building for this firm of so progressive a nation as Japan. The older forms of building to be seen along the Bund have gone to the ancients of Greece and Rome for inspiration. We feel that the modern material, the modern method and the modern requirement dictate a newer contemporary form of building. And this is what we have had in mind in the design presented to the Directors. The building of 1937 should be at least as modern as the ship of 1937 -both are founded upon the same economic idea and adopt the best and most progressive ideas and materials the world can offer" (Agenda N.Y.C. report).

Owing to the Sino-Japanese war, however, he failed to secure the contract for Morriss, and the project was never commenced. Prior to his presentations in Tokyo he was offered a partnership in the practice.

> "Morriss offered me a thousand quid a year and a partnership here last night just before... he was going (to London). The thousand would be easy to take. The arrangement is made on the understanding that if he wants me within four months... he will cable me wherever I am for me to come back and for me to come on the above arrangements for say two or three months until I make up my mind. I couldn't settle down here, however, although it would be tempting to stay for say three years and make a small fortune while the going is good." (Letter to parents, 3rd August 1937)

On 2nd October 1937 he left Shanghai for London on the Trans-Siberian Railway. At 7.43am on the 19th October, he arrived in Berlin. From there he went onto the Paris Exposition. Returning to London, he worked for two months, again with Wells Coates, and later with Serge Chermayeff and Eric Mendlesohn. His main work was a chemical laboratory in Manchester for the British Dye-stuffs Corporation. But this stop in England was to be relatively short.

> "I'm really tired already of London... I'm doing little which is particularly new. But of course when I get back early in the year you must remember that I come back with all the latest ballyhoo because it is that which might bring in a little business. Actually I am learning an enormous amount in the matter of office running, Serge Chermayeff being a sort of Russian High Jew and Eric Mendlesohn a German Jew." (Letter to parents, 12th November 1937)

Early in December he met Morriss again, presumably rejected the Shanghai option, then later that month, at a New Year's Eve party, he was introduced to the hoteliers Mr. and Mrs. Fred Matear. In January and February 1938 he toured the great Hotels of London and New York with the Matears. Their task was to plagiarize the very latest features abroad, for the new Hotel Australia, in Collins Street, Melbourne. For Best it also provided a free voyage back to Australia plus a wage of six pounds a week. For his salary detailed sketches were made of kitchen fittings, rooms, and table condiments. Even interviews of prospective key staff, such as head waiters, were organized.

Back in Melbourne, in May 1938, a new interior was designed for Fred Matear's Fish Café, "The Red Hen".

> "And a very tasty job Best has done on it. The peagreen hull of a pleasureboat greets one at the entrance. Unrestrained curtains of Kenya red hang at the windows, spring greens dominate the colour scheme, and silver fish of the variety one might see during an attack of delirium tremens, sport unrestrainedly around the walls. Although Best says it himself, it is all very nice and appropriate." (*Truth*. 19th May 1938)

Seven months later he married the cafe's Manageress. Appropriately enough, the "Letters of Letty" reported it in Table Talk.

> "When Best Overend and Bernice Lawn get married tomorrow evening at the Burke Road Methodist Church, the ceremony will be a very quiet one. The young couple will be married by Best's father the Reverend H.A. Overend... Best is ., one of our most flourishing young architects and Bernice should make him a very charming wife." (*Table Talk*. 8th December 1938)

Nine months earlier, however, he sent his book - he could not decide between the titles "Go Wild Young Man" and "His Footstep Uncertain", no doubt because of his Methodist upbringing - to Victor Gollancz Ltd. In April, Norman Collins, the Deputy Chairman, wrote:

> "...after very careful consideration, we have decided that we cannot see our way clear to make an offer to you for your manuscript. I am pretty sure, however, that you will get it published by some other firm and what I would suggest is that you should put it into the hands of a first class literary agent. The agent whom I use for my own work is Mr A.D. Peters..."

Then again later in April, he wrote:

> "I think our letters must have crossed because according to our records, we turned the book down on March 19th. I am sorry that we had to do so as some parts of the book were, I thought, quite remarkably good."

Because the manuscript did require editing - a lot of paragraph-long sentences shortened, repetition eliminated, inessential material deleted and a little reorganization - the sort of thing sub-editors of The *Argus* no doubt inflicted on his articles - nothing much more was done with it after the war. There was, however, a repressed wish to have it published. As late as 1963, he wrote to his friend Robin Boyd. The polite refusal went:

> "Thanks so much for thinking I would be capable of doing a worthy job of editing. I don't know that I could. I've never done any. But I know what you mean when you say that you cannot do such a painful operation on your own baby. Anyway, I'd be more than interested to see your ms and I might be able to advise you what to do.."

What was required was, indeed, a Mr. Peters. The book's preface was particularly turgid and in the end I judged it unsalvageable. The problem was that one part of him - the more modest - saw the work as just a simple tale; the other part saw something more literary and socially profound. What he was trying to say, however, I discovered in a delightful letter to his father written from Shanghai. This is his preface.

Shanghai

17th September 1937

Dear Dad,

> "....I thought that I might tell you the real reason, whether I acknowledged it to myself or not, on this further trip around the world. I wished to write a book. That is the whole point. And everybody writes a book sooner or later and few are published. But I thought I might as well try. From the architectural point of view, the trip is merely publicity and that vanishes as the paper is used for the laundry fire, as well I know.
>
> It has been my desire to write of the life of the ordinary chap of 1937. It will probably be a book which you, in your capacity as spiritual leader of a community (2) (this is a difficult letter to write indeed), will deplore, but it will be an honest one, one which I will believe in because it will be one which will picture that which I have seen and experienced. You are sixty and I am nearly half your age so that there is little which we really need try and hide; but there is always that disparity of age and generation which makes it almost impossible for frankness and clarity. There is also the blood of my mother within me and that of her family as well as that of yours, and the combination is most often incalculable. But about this thing which may never be published, I have sent a lot of stuff down to the *Herald* about this war. I have been in the thick of it and if you have not had the fullest realisation of that, it is perhaps because I have corrected my own stuff so often that I have been tired of sending more to you, repeating oneself is tiring.

The trip so far has, because of this, been invaluable. I wanted to write of the brothel and the bar, of the life of the sailor and the soldier, particularly of their life in far countries; of the pictures which will form the cinema of his mind when he retires, justly, to the verandah of his property, to fill the odd hour of the afternoon. I wanted to write of the stress of not only nation against nation but class against class, and of the stresses within those classes themselves not only directly but rather by implication. Apart from Australia it is my opinion that few indeed will be permitted the pleasure of settled property and of what must be that undeniable pleasure of watching their children's children within that property, the word being used in the fullest sense of the word. Australia is definitely the best country which I have seen.

I am trying to portray, again indirectly by implication in the portraiture of events, what little I have seen in the wars and strifes extent. There can be little of that martyrdom of man of Winwoode Reade's as few have the imagination necessary to realise again in the fullest sense of the word, that essential martyrdom. There is no faith portrayed, because only the lucky few possess that comfort.

The subject is impossible to attain, of course, because I have neither the education nor the sensitiveness necessary. The only people who could have it would be those of eighty and they would have the realistic indifference of old age. After all, theirs is the verandah and theirs the garden. I am fortunate indeed in what you have given me, you and Mother, for I have a measure of independence, one perhaps terribly selfishly claimed; and what is more important, perhaps, I own nothing and have nothing except a profession which permits me this work and which both of you have given me. Again, if ever it is finished, there must be much which will displease you both, but there will always be the extreme probability that it will never see print. Perhaps half is roughed out; some fifty or seventy thousand words. Royce wrote to me last saying that he was worried that the *Herald*, while its editor stated that my work was accurate in prophecy and good in setout to the extreme, it was out of date when they received it, owing to what was to me unexpected cabled dope. He did not publish it and my time was wasted. But I have continued sending about a thousand words a weeks since, couched more in general terms , because it affords me an invaluable source of personal reference for what I wish more than anything to do. It also, I feel, gives me a further clarity of expression every thousand words I write. I thought that you would like to know all this, highfaluting though it all may be. Mother as all ladies, may read this, but please, please, consider it inviolate from even family eyes and do not dispense gratuitous information. Nothing may come of it all except a considerable amount of personal pleasure to me and I have found it inevitably as foolish a thing as may be to ever ever ever let anybody know what I project doing. Now I have practically finished this letter, it occurs to me that perhaps the reason why I have written is because Mother told me today in her ever welcome letter that she didn't wish me to become a wanderer. To be quite frank, I don't care at all what I become so long as I am able to obtain a roof of some sort and to do just what I wish. What I am doing now seems far from architecture, but that is limited, to me, and at twenty seven, I haven't yet decided what I wish to do. Please consider this letter a mutual honour.

Your loving son – BEST.

Bernice Lawn. Manager of The Red Hen,The Hotel Australia. A photo taken on the eve of her marriage to Best Overend in 1938.

Best Overend. Third Watch Officer, holding his telescope, aboard the “Karoola”. 1937

STEAMING

Coaling. Newcastle. View from the “Karoola”. Also in port, “Zealandia, “Tauda”, “Ace”.
All water colours by Best Overend. 1937.

CHAPTER 1

We hove to in the long jagged mounds of green water. I stood on the bridge, swaying slowly as I held on to the canvas dodgers. I watched the heavy waters from the Heads of Sydney Harbour and felt the salt spray on my lips. It was only then that I realized I was in for a grand thing.

I looked down as the pilot climbed over the side wall of the deep well deck, some three floors below, the inside a clay red and the upper edge and the outer ship wall a dull streaked black, wet with water. As he slowly disappeared down the clumsy wood-stepped rope ladder, I went over to the port bridge house and leaned through the window and watched him swinging, sometimes almost in the waves and sometimes high, the ship like a standing building with the sea falling away. The boat for him rose and fell, surged and crashed. The Captain shouted to the Chinese crew on the forecastle to let away slowly. The Chief officer stood by forw'd looking helpless. When English was shouted at him in the wind he grew confused. He was a White Russian, and only able to gesture uselessly.

The crew slackened the rope off slowly. The pilot shouted and cursed up at us. He was a big and an old man, growing tired, as he hung there banging on the ship's side. Twice the smaller boat climbed up under him with the water, twice he tried to step into her. But each time the water drew away, and he clung back hurriedly on to his ladder. The third time he jumped heavily and clumsily, and fell in between the seats. His bag was let down on its line, caught by one of the two rowers, and suddenly everything was let go. The smaller boat fell away aft, and everyone was very relieved.

I was glad, because I had watched the standing cliffs of the Heads, close on each side, grow bigger and bigger as we slid down the rollers. With seemingly no way on, the land jumped and jerked as we appeared to drift on to the broken rocks standing away from their sea shelf. The skipper waved finally to the pilot and walked to each telegraph and rang for full speed.

We slowly straightened out, passed through, and went north. There, outside, the waves took us aft half sideways. We had a sickening slide down and a slow climb up, but all the time the shore, seemingly close with the white water of the breaking rollers under the cliffs, passed. I was ordered down below with two of the Chinese crew to see that all port-holes were closed and locked. This was my first duty as Third Watch Officer on a ship that was now owned and manned by Chinese.

It had never been entirely clear to me why I had left a comfortable office for a year until I went down the companion. However, as I collected my two Chinese, both grinning as they stood waiting with the big monkey porthole wrenches in their hands, I realised that I had not wanted to settle into suburbia. Apart from a fairly sure fortune, this amounted to nothing but business worries and business pleasures, and the few occasional architectural delights a commercial practice holds. It had been too soon for that. I lowered myself down the companion leading to the main deck and went aft, swinging drunken along the boards running straight in their tarred lines with the ship. Maybe in two or three years I thought. Maybe, when I was thirty, I would go back and settle down.

Below, the ship was a medley of swinging, banging doors. In the long seried darkness of about four hundred cabins, I grew tired of the work, as we slowly headed aft and forward, deck by deck, checking over each cabin for swinging doors, running taps, lights, and portholes. The beds were unmade. And the ship, some seven odd thousand tons of her, was as empty as only an empty ship on the high seas can be. In the clanking darkness of the lowest third class cabins, packed in the long slope of the stern, the water in the aft tanks swung to and fro. The rudder steamed and rattled above as its shaft jerked in the collars with the waves, and already there was six inches of cold sea water along the corridors and in the cabins. It was a miniature flood as it ran across with the roll of the ship.

The two Chinese were willing. We checked and locked everything to which we had to attend. I was glad that I had been on the ship for a day before and had grown accustomed to her plan and section, for I didn't lose my way or miss anything. We left the water surging

down below because we could do nothing about it. Later, I grew accustomed to going about the ship by myself. It was my first duty after leaving a port to search the ship alone, with a torch, for stowaways. After several ports I became less afraid at what I might find in the long wavering black passages and the banging water-ridden darkness below.

The ship, my new mistress, had been a big coastal vessel, grown old in service and hungry for coal. With new ships coming along and the high prices for scrap iron, she had been sold to a Chinese firm, to break or to use along the China coast. The Chinese crew had come aboard the day before, and when I joined her it was with a thrill as I had watched her grow large from my launch. I had even climbed aboard with the beginnings of proprietorial feelings, a pride which grew as I lived with her through the tropics and through their hot lazy harbours. It was always a pleasure to get back to her.

There were hundreds of cabins, first, second, and third class lounges, bars, dining rooms, drawing rooms, music rooms, a swimming pool, a hospital, a surgery, acres of white decks - all completely equipped. There were passenger notices chalked on all the deck sports boards. But there was not a soul on board, except a crew of about forty Chinese. The usual was two hundred and fifty white men. Indeed, if some people were to be believed, there were still no souls on board because the crew were coolies anyway.

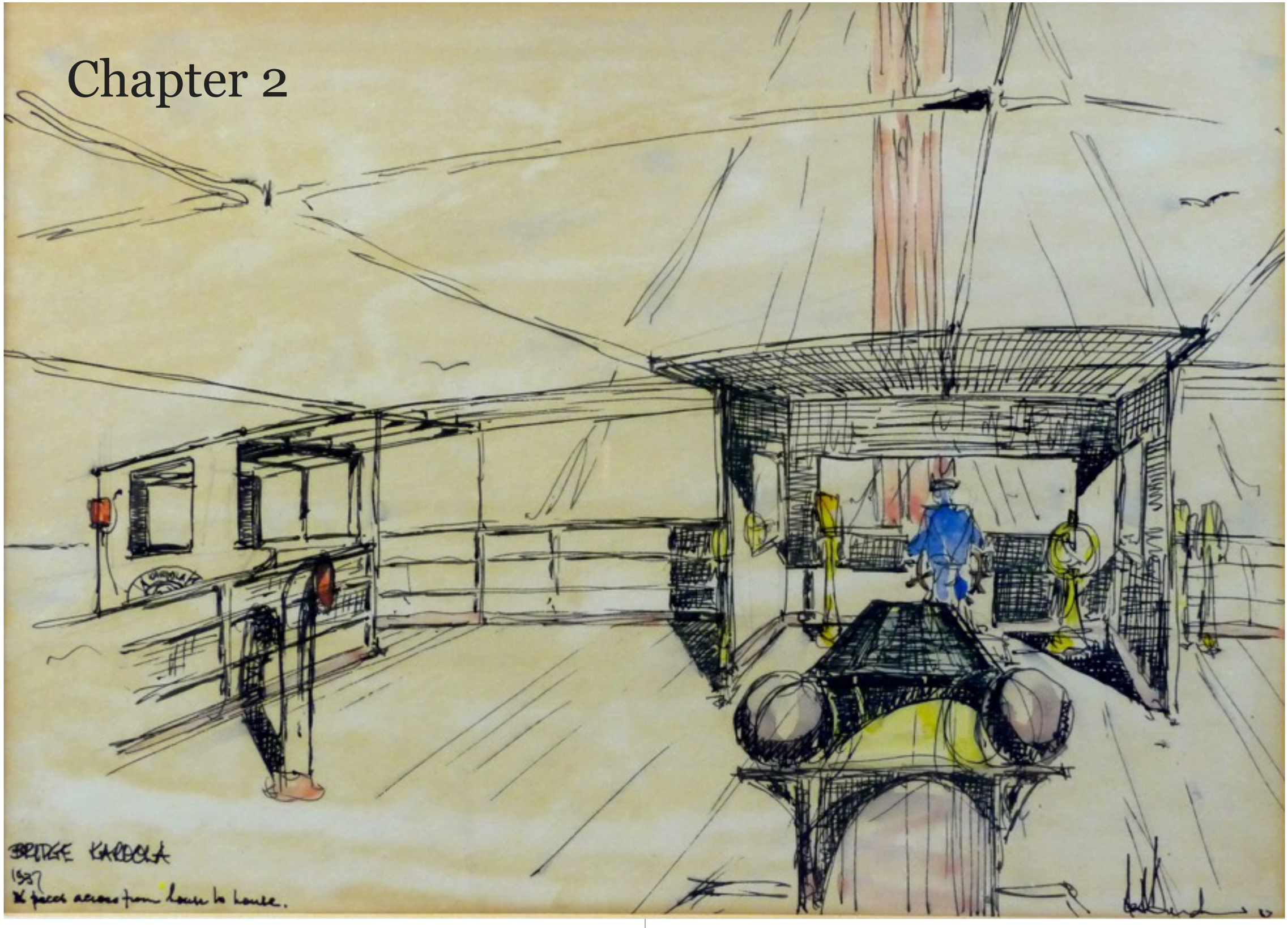
Beside the Chinese, there was an old White Russian as Chief Officer. He was a Baron, commander of a destroyer flotilla during the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. Later, during the Great War, he commanded a flotilla in the Baltic. He had also commanded the destroyer escorting the Czar upon his annual yachting trip to Finland. Old in the service of the sea, and as broken as only a White Russian can be, his wages for this trip were to keep his family in Shanghai for a year. There, like the other thirty thousand of his kind, he had nothing but a name. Speaking only a little English, he had no country and no passport; and nobody wanted him. He had paid fifteen Shanghai dollars for a small piece of paper, issued by the Chinese government, which stated that he might be permitted to land in Shanghai at any time until it was seen fit to cancel this priceless concession to humanity. That is all he had. And it was no more of a good thing than any other concession of the Chinese government. It was certainly inconceivable to anyone enjoying the ultimate freedom of a British Passport.

There was another on board, as Chief Engineer. Volatile and melancholic, with enormous black moustache, he was dreadfully proud of his engine room, and always fighting with his Chinese engineers. The Chinese firemen and trimmers were always taking their shovels to him. Nobody understood what he said but the Chief Officer, and as few understood the Chief Officer, there was always plenty of trouble.

The Second Officer was an upper class Chinese named Chiang. He was a Chinese gentleman, with all the charm and all the deficiencies of his class. The Captain was a China Coast English skipper, employed by the Chinese company to bring the ship to China.

Chief Officer of the “Karoola”. Baron, the Commander, Alexander Von Fiettinghoff Schell.

Chapter 2



The Bridge of the “Karoola”. Thirty six paces across, from house to house.

CHAPTER 2

As we slipped and slid northward, an enormous Chinese flag flapped aft over the mail room. If it was found the ship was cheap enough to run on coolie labour, it would go onto the China coast. If it wasn't, it was to be broken up in China where labour is cheap. In any case, before going to Shanghai, we were to sail for Sourabaya to collect scrap iron for Japan. If broken up in China, her plates were to be made into swords and ploughshares, her copper and brass into peasant household utensils, and her paneling into walking sticks for tourists anxious to obtain a genuine Chinese antique.

The day before we sailed from Sydney, there arose three serious malfunctions. The steering gear refused to move through its telemotor gear, the refrigerator engine sheered a connection, and the ash shoot blower from the gangway, near the boilers, would only cough up clean water. There was 65 tons of coal a day to handle at the low and economic speed at which we were to travel. But with the ash shoot not functioning, we were bound for trouble with the crew. This ash, mixed with water, is normally pumped up and discharged over the side. The work of the firemen would be doubled if, instead of being impelled by a powerful sea pump, the ash had to be manhandled to the decks fifty feet above and pushed over the side. According to her log books, the ship used 95 tons of coal a day at normal speed; but we were to travel at eleven knots instead of the more usual seventeen.

Later in the day we came into Newcastle, picked up a pilot in the pale green swell outside, and arrived at the coaling berth with the dusk. During the day, the deck hands had rigged the sheet iron coal shoots leading from the upper decks to the bunkers, so that for two days the ship resounded as each truck of eight and a half tons of coal was lifted from the railway siding below and up ended over the upper shoot decks.

The crew went up town in a body that night, clean and like frisky dogs in their fresh blue overalls. They had heard of a Chinese woman there, and were bent upon paying a personal call. A day or so after, we left with a harbour pilot. He ran us aground to the windward side of the channel, and for the first time you could see what tension there is on the bridge of a ship. To the passengers below, moving in and out of port would be slow and sure. On the bridge it is as nerve-racking as driving a racing car. Once ten thousand tons begins to move even slightly in a wrong direction, there is little that will hold her except half a dozen tugs.

Below, the Chief, the Chinese Second, myself and the wireless operator - a young Russian-Chinese-Jew, if there can be such a thing - ate in the empty First Class Saloon. The space and the service and the food seemed good at first. Later, everything was to fall away. Above, the upper decks were packed high with mountains of coal. We were to take aboard no more coal until China, and the bunkers would not hold all that we required. The deck staff were to give us trouble about that. As the ship rolled with the bunkers slowly emptying, the coal fell seventy feet down the iron tubes to an inferno.

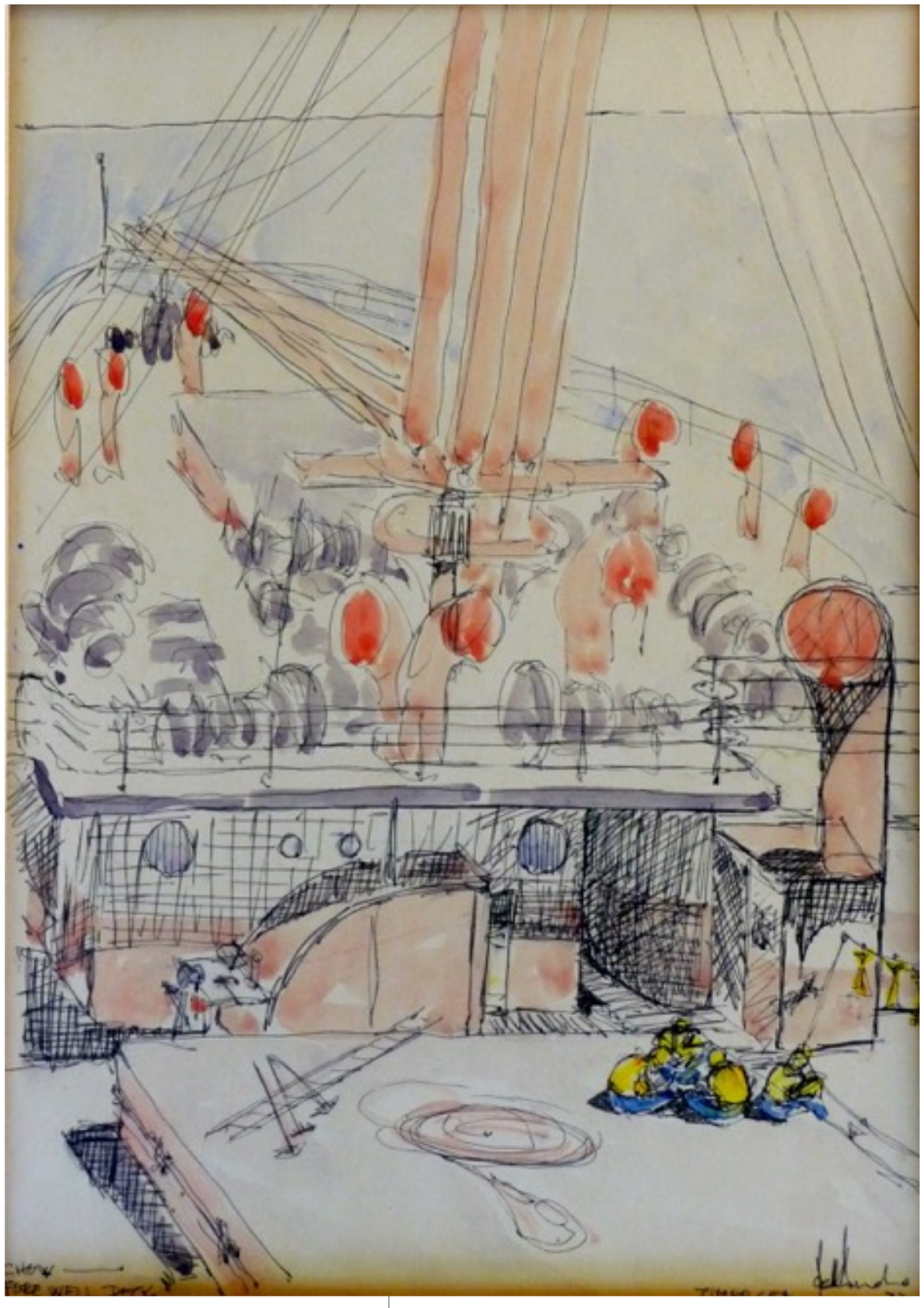
Having had no experience whatsoever, my duty commenced at eight in the morning on the bridge and terminated there at four in the afternoon. There was one hour free for lunch. The deck was hard for the first few weeks, and as any seaman will tell you, one does not rest on the bridge of a ship. But every day I attained the youth's ambition - complete charge of a liner upon the high seas. I paced the bridge, regretting the absence of the passengers, for the seven hours each day. It was precisely twenty six paces across. One passed the quartermaster at the wheel between the thirteenth and the fourteenth, with just a small swing at the tenth each way to clear the actual wheel house. With eagle eye I scanned the horizon.

But one of the good things is the impersonal ship. She swings, she sways, and gives to the waves. The sun also swings as the davit shadows move across the white boards. You go to sleep watching them, although you feel that the sand and misty black pattern on the left should be watched in case it comes too near. There are still wrecks on the South Eastern coast; too firmly bitten into the intimate shore to be worth salvaging. That might be good because their metal would only be used for some bloody war. Better to leave them to interested tourists, to warn them to attend boat-drill, and to rust away.

The wreck sits low and calm in the breaking waters. Through the glasses she stands in a startling red rust, and she sits in the sand bed against the sea shore where she has laughed so often at man's attempt to shift her. With the last laugh, she smiles still. No one goes near her now. The beaches and shores are quite clean. The two smaller wooden ketches were driven ashore by the winds from the southwest. They still look as terrified in their skeletons as they must have appeared under bearing sails, heading toward that bitter shore, leaning and driving and tearing under spendthrift waves of spray. Black fragments they are now, standing stiff, flinching in white waters. Both skippers had tried to beach their craft. Only one succeeded. Both gallantly drove straight for beaches, isolated by miles of rocks and headlands. The luckier, diving on to wider sand, cut thickly into the khaki curve. But the other, trying a narrower opening, cut open his ship upon standing rocks.

Third Watch Officer Best Overend, Chief Officer Schell, Chief Engineer Koroteff

Chapter 3



Chow. Fore Well Deck. Timor Sea.

CHAPTER 3

It was at about this time that we passed the red bones of the last ship sold as scrap. She lay along the beach of Southern Queensland, under the hot sun and in the yellow sand. As she had been towed an on-shore wind had carried her away into the sand and the shore. The crew, of two or three Chinese, assigned to the towrope had been unable even to let down the anchor. The tug had as little chance of holding her from the shore as a seven horse power Morris Minor might have in towing, forward, a reverse moving London bus. The ship had dragged on to the shore, and although nobody had been lost, there had been a Marine enquiry. Because it had been a Chinese Company, and only Chinese seamen involved, nothing was done.

She lay there still, and was a warning to me at least. As I stalked, in as dignified a manner as I was able, across the back of the Chinese quartermaster at the wheel, I recalled that only one out of the last five ships from Australia had actually reached China. I remembered also, as I watched the wind make ancient green and white lace from the water, that an earlier ship I had intended to catch had sunk outside the reef. There, the American skipper and his wife had to take their revolvers to the Chinese crew to man the pumps. But even that had been no good, and they had finally to take to the old ship's life boats and wait , tossing, very much alone, until they had been picked up. I was thankful that my old firm had not permitted me to join that ship.

During the long hot hours, there was perennial interest in watching the life of the Chinese crew upon the fore-well deck. There, some three decks below the bridge, the toilet of the firemen and trimmers were performed in public. The washing of sleep from eyes and head and body before going on, and the washing of the grey which covered their bodies as they came off, and before they took their food. Sometimes, when the food was already laid out on the deck-hatch canvas, they did not wait for their washing. Most often though they sluiced themselves down before donning a clean singlet and black silk trousers, cut slightly wide and short, before taking up the chopsticks.

The crew's galley formed the centre aft portion of the forecastle, and from the chimney when the wind was forward, or the ship's speed sufficient, the odorous smoke came back in brown stinking wisps to the bridge. Usually, however, it was possible to avoid it. The height of the bridge, with a sufficiently steady breeze, took it to one side or the other. There, below, in the forewell deck, forgathered the celestial stokers. They hissed and sang and chattered as they settled on the hatch for their chow. It was possible to discern them under the coal dust. In the scuppers, one was being most obviously sick, in a loud and entirely normal manner. There he bent, under the fish drying in the sun on the rope that also supported the blue trousers. These were river Chinese from the Yang-Tse-Kiang, and they did not like the sea. They squatted around a little wooden bucket full of rice. There was usually a bowl of yellow giblets, a bowl of fish soup, and another of some bright meat. They shovelled the rice into their own bowls, then held them close to their mouths as they further shovelled it in with chopsticks. They could never get away from this stoking business. Like professional men, they always took their office home.

Our ‘boy’ then approached to advise that chow had been prepared and was waiting in the Saloon. He was an old man and had no nose at all. But he tried to be bright and he had a charming smile. I was seldom in a hurry to go below, for the broken refrigerator made our meat look and smell tired. Very cleverly, the fish had become multi-coloured too; and it shone in the dark. The Chief Officer always pointed that out. Not twenty five years before, notices were put up over wholesale foodstuffs known to be bad, with the declaration: "Fit for Sailors". Our boy cooked marvellous bread.

The food for the crew came forward in sacks, or in open baskets, and the chunks of meat and fish were cleaned in salt and water on the forewell deck. When the fish was to be eaten, it was cut in half and cleaned, each surface worked with salt, and spread on the deck filthy with hawked Chinese saliva and ship oil. After, the portions were tied on a line from the

fore-castle to the starboard bulwark. The half fish swung in the breeze and the fishy shadows swung across the decks as they would in the idle dreams of any self-respecting cat. Sometimes, the smell came up to the bridge. That the fish and the meat had been cleaned on the deck, mixed with spittle, oil and the dirt from the engine room sandals made little difference. Upon this deck teeth were also cleaned, with the saliva spat down upon it. The constant hawking and spitting of the Chinese seemed to give the necessary seasoning. It is an odd fact, no one can clean their throat with such feeling of loud and conscious pleasure as do the Chinese.

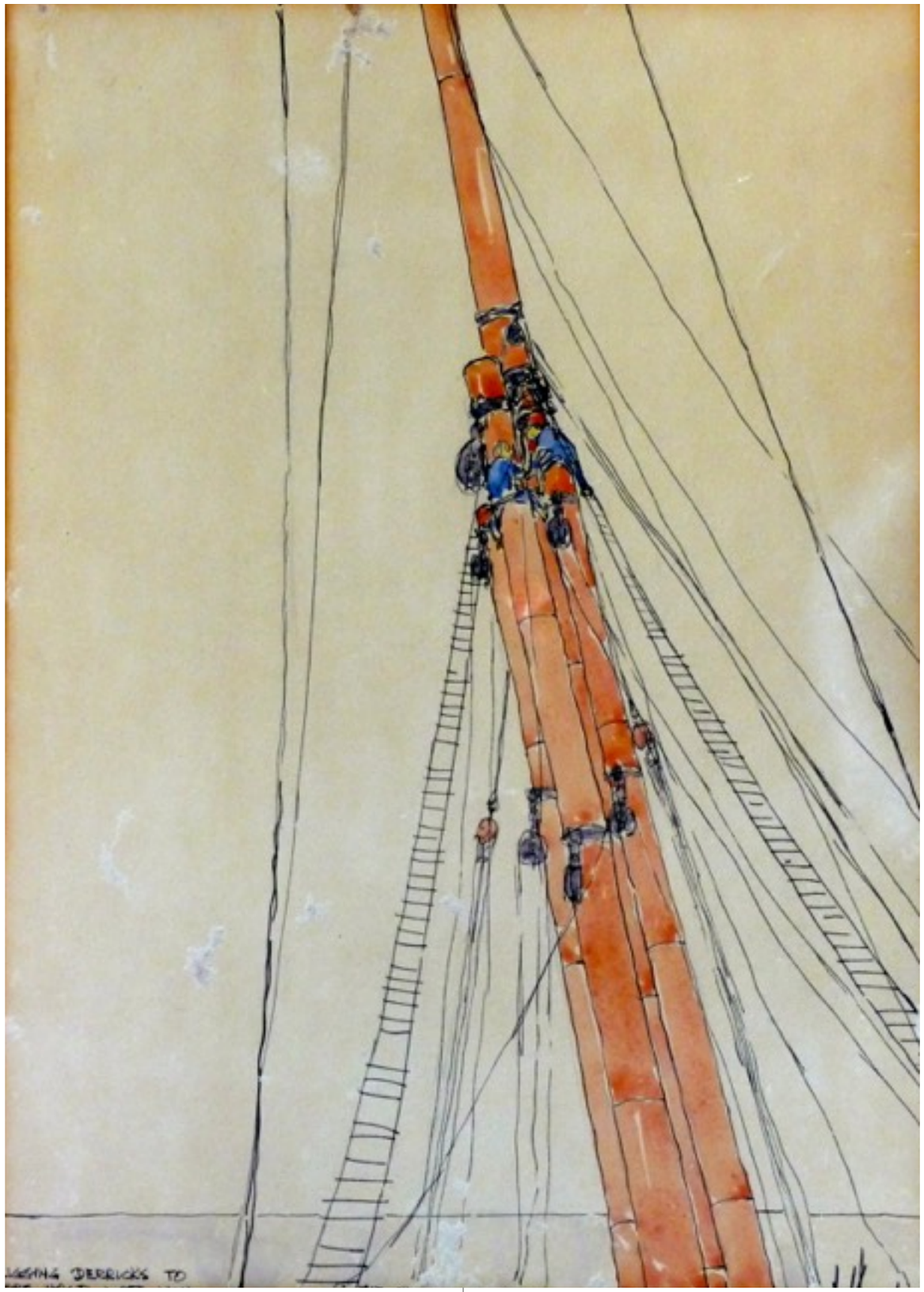
For the first few days there were live fowls on board for the crew. They had a distinctive manner in which they kill these unfortunates. The head of the nice fat bird is first bent back and tucked under its own neck. The throat is then slit with a sharp knife and the blood is caught as it runs out with the life. All the time the bird is strangely silent under its own feathers. The blood is a delicacy to be used later as a seasoning and as colouring. When the blood runs slowly, and then stops except for drops, the bird, its heart fading with the blood stream, is plunged into a basin of boiling water and the feathers plucked immediately in handfuls.

Despite all this, it was lonely on the bridge. Only occasionally did the Quartermaster speak, usually to answer, parrot fashion, as is the way with the sea, my orders concerning the alterations of course or my admonitions concerning the erratic course he was holding. Naturally all quartermasters complain about the manner in which the ship holds her course. Every ship, which they control, is worse than any before. I checked our course many times. The larger main compass stood up by itself on the platform in the centre of the bridge. I had shouted forward when the quartermaster had been half a point off. Thinking to show him how easy it was for a white man, I took the wheel myself and had swung her hard over to pick up the lost half point. She had taken her time coming round. First you thought that the rudder was too small and the wheel too easy for a ship this size. But then she came, faster and faster, and no matter how you had swung her over the other way, she had not stopped swinging until you were two points off in the other direction. You felt a fool. Once ten thousand tons starts swinging there is little which will hold it. Your course aft is like a white snake, and you hope that nobody will come up until it has faded.

And in this vigil you see the sun start up on your right hand and you watch it sweep slowly low to your left. The land marches by on one side, while to the other there are only waves and a line which never changes. Forward there are shadows, ever coming to you, but as they come they are land and trees and rocks and white beaches crested in black-green, shining in the sun. But to the ship they are always shadows, for with them lurks the Ship-Death. They fall back as the waves to the bow, fade again to shadows, then nothing.

Wireless Operator - ‘Sparks’ - Jacob Z Rabinovhitch.
“...in the more glorious portions of his uniform...
utilizing those portions even more glorious of...others.”

Chapter 4



Rigging derricks to the fore hold. Off Java.

CHAPTER 4

With the reef on one side, the land came in close as we went North. The growth was sunburnt. The cliffs stood up in rusty gold against the vivid greeness. It was better than the Mediterranean. Even better than the Inland Sea of Japan - and that is saying a great deal. We passed many lovely small islands where it would be a pleasure for a man to settle down for the rest of his days. Ensconced, in a white columned villa, with shaded patios, extending high above the cliffs and the blue waters below. Surrounded, by a garden, a few sheep, the fish. There would be rough shooting over his own hillsides, and green watered valleys, swimming in the shoals, and, as ships, the world would occasionally go by. It is a place fore-doomed for the great white yachts, the beautiful mad women and the fountains of wine.

It was much hotter later, even though there was always the bright breeze. The pitch melted and squashed out between the boards and stuck to your sandals. With rigged bridge awnings it was better, but that meant you were confined by the shadows between the two bridge houses and the central wheelhouse. The windows to these side houses were always lifted up and within. With the water on one side, the clean salted table in the middle, and the bows on the other, the final perspective was the life boats, their canvas-tops, the red funnels and black smoke away aft. All looked grand as the waves went away from the ship at each side. Often the water was stained with some sort of growth, it soughed with the slight swell, and its line broke as we passed through. It looked like a lovely Sienna lace, but away from its proper place, it stank.

The Chief Engineer invited me one day to visit him in his engine room after lunch. It is easy to see why they are always proud men in their own setting. Onto the steep steel ladders with my seaman's gloves on for the side slide down. You are always able to tell a seaman as he passes sideways down a companion. One arm before, and the other behind, ready for either a direct fall or a slip. In the great gouts of steamy heat, the colossal pulsing steel swung in its endlessly silent circles. There was a rhythmic and silent noise with these masses. Although little direct sound, you felt it should have been deafening. And you always found yourself shouting. Walking down between the boilers filled with steam, it was like a direct blow upon you face. In the actual firing room the ventilators kept everything cool, except for the radiation from the red-black iron of the boiler fronts. Here the heat comes out, like a flame, when the doors are opened to insert more coal. Then the repaired and cranky ash shoot grumbled and steamed to itself. When a load of ash went in, it was like the plop of one of those pneumatic cash register systems used in a shop. As you leaned out of the bridge house looking down, it was always those shoots spurting dirty grey water and staining the white foam. I used to watch this jet for a long time, waiting for one lump to shoot out further than all the others. About thirty feet seemed the maximum. When all is clear forward, and the quartermaster seems to be holding her better, it is silly things like that which makes the time pass.

After the engine room, the bridge was open and clean and there was only a faint hiss as the waters divided. Dragonflies come aboard with the offshore wind. There is nothing quite as busy and lonely as one of these. Outside, through the glasses, you could see the pirating Japanese luggers, with four small boats, out after trochus shells. These are made into pearl buttons. Because trochus shell buttons have a discoloured back, whereas those of the pearl have not, you are always able to tell them from the genuine article. There are wrecks every now and then between the Barrier Reef and the land. The reef stands straight up from the sea floor, like a submerged city building, and it is quite safe to go within three feet of it where it is awash. Of course, if you have a swing on, or if the wind is blowing, it is dangerous. A mile is as near as I would care, even on a calm day.

We were far less than that where the channel narrows. Our Barrier Pilot told me big ships have scraped their side paint off along this reef, and got away with no more damage than that. Extending for a thousand miles and more, you never tired watching. Just below water level there are a myriad of reflections and colours from the sun overhead. Only occasionally are there houses along the actual coast, and when you pass the people flash mirrors. If you are generous you give them a few blasts on the whistle. It seems little enough, and it wakes

up the officers off watch sleeping down below. It is also a dangerous thing to do unless you have the Old Man's permission, as he sleeps just below the bridge and listens to your movements up above.

We had our first trouble about here, with the refrigerator finally failing and our meat and other food stuffs started to stink. There was nothing to do but to try and salt it. Although there seemed plenty of salt water, there was not enough salt to rub it down. So it very quickly shone shot with coloured lights. In any dress material it would be admired. It was also then that it was discovered that the Chief Engineer, in trying out the various cocks in his engine room, had inadvertently pumped out our main tank of fresh water and had substituted it for sea water. He was always in trouble, of some sort, and when the whistle valve refused to function he spent several days fooling with that. He was of sufficient stupidity to refuse any of his Chinese engineers help. This they naturally resented. Ultimately, his whole crew refused his orders. Without the Chinese engineers to back him up, and to instruct the men, he had to do everything himself except the actual firing and the watches. Because he was always down below his engineers lost face with the trimmers, the firemen and the greasers. This made for an unhappy ship.

It was hot under the sun where he worked. His two main engineers pretended to help with the whistle, but it was against the hot funnels. It was often an uneasy feeling when he came up to the officers' quarters. Crazed with complaints, he poured out his woes to his compatriot, the Chief Officer. He would do nothing in case it counted against him if he failed. In the end, all that was done was that we cut off the washing water to the crew, and made them carry it for cooking and drinking purposes to the galley. He was also instructed to use a mixture of salt and fresh water for his boilers. This broke his heart.

One morning, in the hot blackness before the dawn, we dropped our Barrier Reef pilot. He had spent the preceding two days and nights without sleep on the bridge. He even had his meals served there. We were just off Thursday Island. It must have been just plain tiredness that gave them the names, Monday through to Sunday. All the reefs between the coast and the Great Barrier Reef are also named by the letters of the alphabet. Surely politicians, in search of posterity, cannot neglect them much longer. As we passed the Carpentaria Light Ship I tested my newly acquired knowledge of the 45 degree ‘bearing for distance off”. Checked with a watch, the log, and the known speed of the ship, you take a bearing of an object when it comes into line 45 degrees off your known course. From the time and the speed you can calculate the distance. All this, with only an ordinary knowledge of school geometry. How simple navigation seems to a beginner. It is the same when you check your position with respect to land masses, such as mountains, and projecting points marked on the chart. Their bearings are taken from the main compass on the bridge through glasses. Three or four of these bearings are plotted down on the chart. Two bearings will give you your position, another one or two will verify the others. With triangulation you are always sure. These are taken every half or quarter of an hour, as the case may require, by the officer of the watch. When they are marked on the chart, and connected with a line, you can see where the wind or the tide is taking you from your fixed course. The quartermaster can then be instructed. The time and the immediate course are marked with chalk on a board before the man at the wheel. Whenever there is any change, it is noted in the log book.

My uniform on duty was a pair of grey slacks and sandals. Nothing else. Many times I compared this pitiful regalia with the authority, which so naturally a uniform gives when directing men. But this was a Chinese ship, with a Chinese crew, and those with the loudest voice had the authority.

The fan whirrs and hisses as you lie, full length, on the day bed. The sweat grows cold on your body, and the whiskey and water, which the boy brings, is warm. Above is the bridge, shining under the sun, and your feet still throb and burn from its’ clumsy wooden kiss. Away on the left, to the leaden line, lie the waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria. A kingfisher flashes in blue as he sinks and sighs to the rigging. As he shoots and darts across the deck you can see his bewilderment, and as he sits you can see his relief. In the forewell deck is a dragonfly, arrived from God knows where. He shoots in a silly sort of way, from place to place, and

you can see he's not sure what the hell. And its twenty six drunken paces from bridge house to bridge house. On the thirteenth you stop short to see it's N.83.W. The Chinese helmsman shifts uncomfortably on his feet as you look over his shoulder. In your silence he sees authority, and he knows that woe will betide him if he's off his course or day-dreaming. Any sailor can sleep on his feet. Below, as you lean and gasp out the windows that line the side bridge houses, the lead green waves rise up and slap the black iron plates of the ship. They are pushed back, flip-flop, into dumpers or suddenly dash from under the bow into shoots. Fish sometimes come and surf there. They usually appear at three. If you wish, you throw biscuits from your saucer into the sliding water fifty feet below. The wave comes up aft quite quietly, like a hunter over a hill. The ship lifts slightly and her bow dips and her mast swing sideways. The wave bunches on each side as she lunges forward. As it bunches, it parts under the stern, and the ship settles down and she lifts forward to greet the clouds. The divided waves come up along the length of the ship and rise hungrily to the scuppers. But as it comes to the bow, the waves from the prow break it and spread it out into a lace of white foam. Then the ash spurts out its filthy insult; as the ship passes the foam is stained a ragged grey. And all the while the water clings and drags along the black plates for the full length of the ship, and you can see and feel its reluctance to let you pass. As you're lying on your sweat-wet sheets, trying to find your Sleep-God, the sun comes through the sickly awning and the pitch bubbles slowly and silently between the boards. Your leather sandals, they sometimes stick and sometimes slide. They never have that hollow wooden click of the fireman.

These firemen go past as the short shift changes. They sit in the shade in the forewell deck; they hiss and sing as they talk and squabble over their chow. Four of them squat around the wooden rice bucket. They are dirty-naked in the shiny black oil covered trousers. Their yellow shoulders are held together with greyish sweat rags. Strangely delicate is the manner with which they poke and probe into the two small dishes of savouries or fish stew. And the china spoons, for the meat soup in the large bowl, clatter musically in that swimming grease. The meal is essentially communal, for even the chopsticks are left in the sun on the hatch to dry for the next shift. You can even watch their bellies grow.

The cook-boy squats in his flapping blue pants as he chops the red grey meat for the next shift. He was cutting open the big colonial salmon this morning. The flesh was black. He rubbed the flaps into the salt on the deck on which his bare feet now stick. With grey singlets flapping from the same line, these now hang above their fish shadows. Tied to a string, they stink and sway with the ship. The piston of the refrigerator broke yesterday noon. Today, on our table, there were no brown bottles of cold water. We tried each meat with care. It is lucky that the ancient unbearded sparrow leg can make good bread and there is plenty of rice left in the hold. In Sourabaya, or maybe Probolinga, I shall buy a memorable meal. Within seven days, in my cabin shall stand a case of fresh fruit. For who knows what the China Sea will sweep into the Java Sea south of Borneo.

To know and live with a ship is 'architectonic'; it is the beginning and the end of design. The colours accentuate this effect. Blinding black and jet white. Pale cigar brown ventilators with vermilion maws; and here and there the celestial gleam of brass and glass. And it is while you pondered these things that you remembered that Sparks had produced a message from Darwin. A plane is missing. For fifteen minutes your glasses carefully scan the fifty square miles encircling the bridge. What a break it would be to pick it up.

HARD APORT THERE QUARTERMASTER, AND YOU MISTER FULL ASTERN WITH THAT PORT ENGINE. BOS'N WHERE ARE YOU? WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER MY WHISTLE. QUICKER BLAST YOU MAN! AND LOWER AWAY THAT PORT GIG AND STAND BY TO CAST OFF! QUARTERMASTER, ONE LONG BLAST ON THE SIREN AND GO CALL THE CAPTAIN IF HE CAN'T FOR CHRIST'S SAKE HEAR ME NOW!

It's only a daydream. If only that gleam hadn't been another wave along the horizon.

Chapter 5

Native Craft off Probolinggo.

CHAPTER 5

Now with the deck coal down in the bunkers, the crew made sport off Timor with the fast hoses. The splashing of water was good and clean and the wet decks fresh to your feet. Ordinarily they washed the decks just after dawn, and if some other work was done after that time, the decks had to go dry and unclean until the next day. It is a peculiarity of the Chinese that they have a time and a way for everything.

It was here that the skipper first caught out the Chief Engineer with his coal consumption figures. His chit for water and coal came up to the bridge every day at noon. This was entered in the log book, along with the distance, as taken by the log, the distance by measurement at the noon sun, the temperature, the barometer reading, and the ships actual position in longitude and latitude. Coupled to this were various comments regarding the weather, and the average speed worked out for the previous twenty four hours. In a separate column was recorded the actual time run when the clock was altered. The average speed, and distance of the day's run, were of intense interest to the whole ship. The Chief engineer always wanted to know from me, by chit, as officer of the watch, what these figures were in order that he might check and recheck the revolutions of his two screws. But he was simple, his additions and subtractions - whereby he showed the amount of coal used, the progressive daily totals, and the amount left - seldom agreed with his actual measurements. Although there was always trouble over this, it mattered little. It was merely an irritant and an example of the skipper's authority. The chief could not alter his coal consumption.

The skipper first rebuked him publicly, before the deck staff, after the refrigerator had been dead for three days. He first noticed it when he saw coal consumption remaining the same. It was uncomfortable listening to the skipper roar at him. Here was this old, crazed man; nothing he said could be understood unless you listened very carefully and asked him not to shout so very loudly and quickly. Only the Chief Officer could, of course, understand and translate, but he had early fallen out with the skipper, as Chief Officers often do.The flying fish in these waters travel for tremendous distances. Lifting forward off the bows and out of the waves, skimming on the tip of a wave, rising and falling into the wind. With a flip of their tails they can change direction even to an angle of ninety degrees. The older and bigger ones were cunning. They never went with the ship, but soon slipped off sideways and away. The trouble with the crew intensified near Timor. The Chief Engineer had again been threatened with the shovels of the rebellious trimmers. The Chinese had thrown coal at the old man as he gibbered at them. Stuttering with fright, he had come up and shouted at the skipper, then refused to go below. The crew were aware the skipper could leave them all in Sourabaya and send for another, but with this he would lose face in Shanghai. Both sides knew that if the crew were sent back in disgrace, perhaps with part of their guarantee money taken from them, then their only redress would be to round up a gang of the more loathsome beggars and place these about the main doors of the company building. In this way, every passer-by would know they had been treating their men harshly.

This is the hold the Chinese have over their employers. It is more complete than that of any gangster or trade union. They like to work for you, and if you conform to their ways, all will be well. In the same manner that China has always absorbed its conquerors, the Chinese method is dignified for both sides. There are always loopholes left for everyone to save face. You do not fire a man in China, you just ask the rest of the firm if they are agreeable to attend a dinner. It is afterwards that he sends in his resignation. And as you don't fire, you also don't hire. The rest of them will find you a suitable man. If you try to put on a new office boy by yourself, they will make his life a misery and in the end he will go himself. Employee rule becomes very congenial after a while. In the older western firms the staff are, very often, remembered individually, and considerably, in the will of the proprietor. Such brotherhood makes it remarkably pleasant to run a business, even if it is not always to your advantage. Come what may, your staff are with you for life. It is the same for a Chinese crew on a ship. Seldom will they take direct action to strike or kill those in authority; but

neither can those in authority easily rein in any trouble.

Beneath perpendicular foliage, great gold cliffs, and in a mist of impossible peaks, we depart Timor. Through the glasses to the north there were other islands now, with palm trees nodding over grass huts and sands. The mountain of Kissa came out of the sea one morning, baldheaded, like so many other tropical beauties. Through all this the ship was a dignified delight. The colours impressed themselves with continual pleasure. The clay red became, under the sun, a tobacco brown. - as in a good cigar - the side of the ship, an even more blinding black. This is against the sparkling jet white of the upper works. The mouths of the ventilators burst open scarlet flowers beside the golden brass work. This a useless tradition, soon to be replaced, I suppose, by stainless steel.

In the Lombok Strait we received a radio message from our Chinese owners. Alter course from Sourabaya to Probolingo. There we were to receive further orders from their agent and to load scrap iron for Japan. Probolingo turned out to be south east of Sourabaya. There appeared to be no harbour, and the Sailing Directions gave very little indication except that we would lie off the land at a roadstead.

To the north east of Java, the currents are strong and the sea seems of no mind at all. It weaves and winds in a most amazing way. There are always palm trees, and other odd land things, floating within its movements. Here and there flocks of birds feed in masses, resting on stray logs covered along the top with white droppings. You know that they haven't seen land for a long time and that there is some circular motion to the currents. We pass the volcano Komba, smoking in the sun. Under enormous clouds, the weather went grey and hot and the barometer dropped in a most alarming manner. Reflected in the heavy black velvet water was the peak of Sangeang, rising a sheer six thousand feet. The clouds piled still higher in shapes very much faked. With villainous faces, the Chinese boys, in blue pyjamas, started rigging the heavy booms from the foremast, dropping the heavy wood masses and the heavy steel wire ropes haphazardly upon their fellows below. They were a casual lot.

Chiang was very busy that morning telling me of the collisions which occur off the China coast if the watch officer sleeps. For even slow ships, there is only a half hour warning before they might hit. At night on the bridge, that seems no time at all when you are brooding over what you have done and what you should have done. Every sailor believes, most obstinately, the fallacy that ships attract one another. Our position at the time was north of Sumbawa, south of Borneo and east of Bali in the Java Sea. With a whale blowing off under one of these clouded peaks, it was difficult to place the ship. By the time you had picked up the various peaks from the chart they had clouded over again. Afloat two miles above the sea floor, the whale seemed more at home than we. The flying fish were a perfect foil to the ship and the whale. These took off as though they all must win the Schneider Cup. From the bridge, fifty feet from the water line, it appeared that you were watching that race from an aeroplane. They accelerated before actually taking to the air. They seemed to travel at about twenty knots and cover a distance of two hundred yards before they disappeared with a plop like a small bomb.

In this other worldly place, the mountain names sang, clear and stark in the morning, as they lifted in their heights. Agung, pearl of Bali, an eleven thousand foot tower only five miles off the coast. Rinjani, thirteen thousand feet and eight miles off. As the barometer dropped it came on to blow and we heeled over and swung on shore for all our weight and size. The mountains faded into ghosts behind the torn clouds. This was the Shemmall, a powerful local windstorm, and it whipped and tore the heat out of the ship.

At night, looking aft, the waters and the ship were eerie in their loneliness. The rails looked flimsy, when you were there alone, and you could understand that a sailor could go a little crazy. How easy to jump over, slowly disappear with the ship as you shouted yourself quiet. The ship frightened me aft unless I whistled and pretended to be very busy, seeing that all the doors were locked and the ports closed. We were to be in port soon and we did not wish for stowaways.

After your bath, you fumble out along the black empty decks and stumble down the iron

companion into the 'forewell deck. Some Chinese snore and smell on the hatch. The fish also stink as you clamber up on the foc's'le deck, where all the steam winches sleep among the anchors. Under your feet the deck is black and moist now with the night air. As you stand in the high prow the breeze veils round your flesh and you feel cool and good and bare; and you lean over the way, as the bow below breaks in the black golden path towards the moon. Here you can think about your women; and easily see why a sailor is so material and sentimental. He has that time so necessary to weave conscious dreams into realities. Behind you can see the white facade of the bridge standing stiff with authority, high in the heaven, a symbol, emphasized in salt, the monarchy of the ship.

The fan hums, your overalls hang, still wet grey with sweat. Above, the crunch of the second mate means the wind is following, and the tiny black smuts are falling on the deck. The water from the dawn hoses will wash that away. When you go up fresh from your shower, the wet boards will gleam another welcome and your body will lift with the ship and your spirit will rise with the morning .

Best Overend and Second Officer Chiang. “Chiang and I in dirty grey bags, sandals and nothing else.”

Chapter 6

Off Sourabaya.

CHAPTER 6

Probolingo turned out to be just a green headland. After we had dropped anchor, I went ashore with Sparks in a native craft. It was a triangular sail on a log, with a smaller log as outrigger. The upturned ends looked like Turkish slippers. Ashore, the banks, but one, were shut for lunch. An attractive native girl phoned through to the hotel and lent us our carriage fare and credit for drinks. The language was an amalgam of Dutch-Malayan-Javanese. Civil prisoners kept the streets and tracks between the tall palm trees clean. You entered the tiny carriages from the back; the driver whipped the small, impudent, pony as you tinkled off with the little bells ringing. The Dutch beer was superbly cold. It was apparent that the invaders had brought something.

This hot and lazy place was a district of sugar, tobacco and spices. We had called for the old worn-out machinery of the plantations. These climbed and leaned against the enormous mountain peak which rose sheer from the town. Later, the bank manager refused to cash my travellers cheques. After a little flattery, he gave me fifty percent, and promised to send the balance, if they were good, to our agent in Sourabaya.

There was a large prosperous Chinese quarter. Their children did not speak Chinese, and had no wish to visit the country of their forefathers. They were charming people, entirely unspoiled by tourists. It is always easy if you pretend indifference and helplessness concerning money. The amount you are consciously robbed pays handsome dividends in courtesy and good will on either side. You should always try to remember that. The native shopping centre was lined with their shops. Everything lay open to the road. The hairdressing establishment had the only recognisable name: "COIFFEURS". Each was usually approached through swinging bar doors, which gave a certain privacy. Despite this delicacy, the entire floating population gathers to watch! Cigarettes and perfumes were supplied free to all clients.

No sooner had the anchor been dropped in the dawn light, than the ship was surrounded by tugs dragging huge native barges. These swarmed with dignified Javanese, who rushed on board and immediately began to cook poor quality rice, flavoured by perhaps one tiny fish. Whilst conducting their more personal sanitary affairs over the side, they drank water and smoked cigarettes wrapped dextrously in a leaf. It seemed poor enough food, and Sparks always bundled up his table scraps to exchange for tobacco or bananas. When we went ashore, he was always annoyed because the natives shouted rudely about his colour, he dearly wanted to be white.

The tug crews immediately dropped fishing lines and waited silently. With the native winchmen squatting in their coloured pyjamas at the steam controls, the hatches of their brown barges were opened to disclose the most incredible amount of utter rubbish. In wire nets, ton after ton of this stuff was swung aboard, and clanged down into the ship's bowels.

Feeling refreshed with a hair cut and food, we came on board late in the afternoon. There was a great noise of shouting and of banging winches as the rusty bundles poured down into the holds. Old axles and cartwheels, old motor horns, bike sprockets, chains, mill cog wheels, hair tongs, knives, kitchen utensils, empty tins. The natives had been bundling this rubbish together for months; small boys reaping small fortunes from the town rubbish heaps. War pays handsomely at first. The Japanese officials were suave, obsequious and most ferociously efficient. It was apparent that they meant to have and to hold these southern countries as soon as possible. Of the iron, I watched it later fall as manna from their planes in Shanghai.

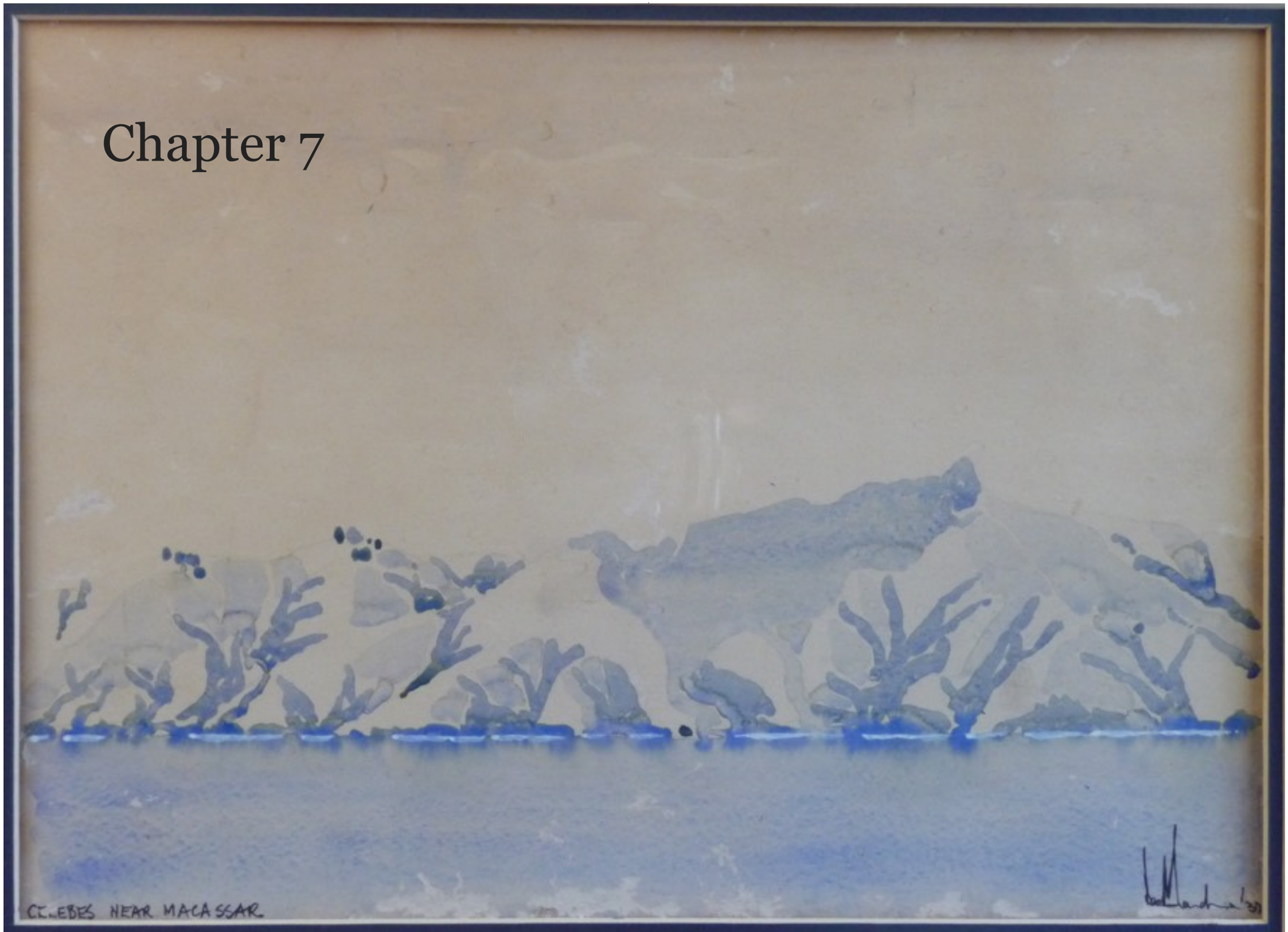
With the evening breeze, the native fishermen came in with whole families crowded on their frail logs. For three days we stayed at this place. After the weeks of rotten food we took aboard great masses of ice wrapped in sawdust, in plaited baskets, and gouts of meat wrapped in palm leaves. The crew were so pleased that, unbidden, they actually helped carry it on. The native winch drivers were paid a guilder a day for their work, others received half that sum. They all carried coloured handkerchiefs in which was wrapped their lunch

and their tobacco. They wore nothing at all, except a clout cloth; and they shaded their squatting seats at the hot black winches with palm leaves. Stoic when hurt, a man with two broken fingers waited patiently and quietly while the surgeon's room was opened and his hand dressed. His faith was touching.

Because we were flying the Chinese flag, no sooner had we dropped anchor, a submarine appeared. It made a careful inspection before disappearing; a Japanese ship came the second day. For their own part, the Dutch wanted these northern nations to know that they were always ready. Every day, a flight of seaplanes came in, circled us, and left again. Although it seemed purposeless, it was not. It gave those taxpayers present something to see for their money. Holland's colonial possessions were seldom appreciated. With a population of over 61 million, it included Java, Sumatra, Melacca, Dutch Borneo, the Celebes, Dutch Timor and a number of other islands - an area that would extend from the Caspian Sea to Ireland, and from Stockholm to Rome. With such incredible riches, one can scarcely blame the Dutch for not publicising their wealth.

Looking up to the Bridge of the “Karoola”.

Chapter 7



Celebes near Macassar.

CHAPTER 7

In the evening of the third day our agent gave us further orders. The following morning we pulled up anchor at 3 a.m. It was a dream trip to Pasoerean. We had to get there before daylight in order that the shore lights might guide us to the town. Rubber, coffee, quinine, tea, sugar and spices formed the more usual exports, orchestrated by some five hundred Europeans and fifty thousand natives. After our tumbling around, the night lifted to the sharp and melodious voices in the breaking dawn. We dropped anchors with the usual rusty roar and there was nothing but a green wall of mangroves to be seen. It seemed an odd way to move a large vessel. Anchored two miles out to sea, I went ashore along with the agent. He came out in a launch to tell us what he wanted and what we were to expect. The creek formed a bar during certain tides and we had to wait for this to clear before the barges crept out to pour more scrap iron into the holds. The movement of the tides meant that the whole town could be cut off by this wide sand bank. At high tide, trees grew out of the sea, with sticks between them showing the latest channel for the small fishing boats. Inside, the creek was like an overgrown country lane. Where it was wide enough, the native craft, painted with every colour and pattern possible, lined the banks. Interestingly, they were exact replicas of the vessel in which Columbus first braved the Atlantic. What the natives had added was the colour and their own triangles.

I got ashore at eight in the morning, passed the long lines of steel warehouses, darkened, and filled with hot spices, and spent a pleasant morning laboriously conversing with the hotel proprietor. On his clean tiled, cane-chaired verandah, we drank ice-cold Dutch beer. You can't have too much of that; a fresh bottle was always an adventure. He spoke no English. I spoke no Dutch. Therefore, we spoke in Chinese, Russian, Malayan, French and German - five words of each! He told me that he had a half-caste wife and ten children. He disliked the tensions of Europe, and he said that Dutch wives, while excellent, tidy and clean, were nothing compared to the native. These worked much harder, and were seldom sick. A Dutch wife in this country was a liability. His hotel was magnificent. An internal courtyard was centred with an enormous banyan tree. The rooms were separate structures arranged around this atrium, kept clean by perpetual sweeping. The low Dutch beds lay behind trails of ghostly mosquito netting.

The Japanese were paying sixty three shillings, Sterling, for the barge loads of scrap. The days passed peacefully for the crew; but there were constant casualties among the natives: broken heads, broken fingers, broken arms. One native nearly had the top of his head severed by a falling piece of metal. The cargo was hauled into the hull of the ship in open weave steel baskets. Working down below, he had been slow in clearing the earlier slings. As we tended him, Chiang remarked that his plight was reminiscent of the most expensive dish in Cantonese cuisine - the brain of the white monkey. With shaved head, the animal is brought live to the table. From a silver jug, boiling water is poured over its head, as it is picked open with a specially designed silver hooked hammer. The brain is then eaten with silver spoons, as it quivers in the shell of the skull. Although it might have been apt, I was glad that the native did not understand what he was saying.

Chiang's voice always trembled when he spoke of Japan and China and of his work in the Chinese navy. He said that the Chinese Government had a long term agreement with Italy. It would supply free armament, provided China took certain steps in stamping out Communism. This she did, by the customary manner of immediately shooting the usual suspects. It was typical of China. A proclamation is issued stating that on such and such a day all flies will be killed throughout the land. The following day, a proclamation will again be issued stating that all the flies have been killed and that no more disease need be expected. By this means everybody saved face, even the flies. Nobody expects to exterminate the flies, or the communists, but it is a grand gesture.

In the lazy hours on board, as the natives worked, the old Chief Officer reflected on his past. He was very angry at the stupidity of the English and the Germans for blocking the Suez Canal against the passage of the Russian warships in 1905. He was also critical of their supplying arms to Japan in this war and of the necessity for Russia to station troops along

her eastern boundary when she needed them so desperately in the west. He had been captured by the Japanese from his flotilla of destroyers and had spent a year in a Japanese prison on one of her northern islands. During the Great War, he lost his ship in the Baltic, escaped the Revolutionaries, only to be captured by the British in the Caspian Sea and sent to Basra. After his release, he had organised a theatrical troupe with some of his exiled countrymen. They toured the East from the Black Sea to China, being particularly successful in Calcutta. He was a confirmed Royalist, and after the Revolution must have made trouble wherever he went. He still dreamed, with the rest of his generation, that he might go back to his estate on the Baltic shore.

Loading went on day and night. The agent was in dread that one of the sudden swells would come up. One late afternoon it did. In the shallow tropical water off shore the waves rose astonishingly steeply, and the barges crashed like a troupe of drunken elephants against the side of the ship. All work had to be suspended while they were towed off and tethered, off our stern, in a long line to ride it out.

After the swell had died down sufficiently the loading recommenced. Sparks set up a shop for his old clothes. Many of the natives came to inspect, but few bought. His maxim was to make two hundred per cent profit or don't sell. That is why the Chinese do not like long trips. They prefer the shorter runs along the China coast. There they buy and sell at the different ports. Two umbrellas bought in Canton could be sold in Shanghai. The selling of their food is also interesting. The cook has a natural right to all the unused food. This precept applies to the rice left stuck to the bottom and sides of the pots. Naturally the cook makes it his business that there is plenty of this. If they are not too greedy, the crew do not mind. With natives who eat poorly, such as the Javanese, these scraps can be bartered and very handsome profits made. Many mysterious bundles were received in sampans at every port.

Best Overend. On the side of the Bridge.

Chapter 8

Side of the Bridge. Equatorial Macassar.

CHAPTER 8

Chiang joined me on the bridge, where I was standing idly watching the derricks at work. He leaned over with me and said, in his mellow Chinese voice, "Plenty trouble now". Elaborating, he remarked that the Quartermaster, whilst looking through the windows on A deck into the first class suites, had suddenly realized the electric fans where missing. As we spoke, there was a scuffle as someone came hastening up the companion behind us. The tall Chinese carpenter waited for our attention. He was white, worried, and shaking. When Chiang asked him in Chinese what was the matter, he said that he had discovered all the electric fans missing in the first class cabins. To this, Chiang enquired what he was doing in the first class areas in the first place. His reply was that he was just making sure that the fans were there. We took him down with us. As we went from cabin to cabin, all that remained were the screw holes.

From the grease mixed with the dust marks, it appeared to us to have been an engineer's job. The jittery carpenter kept up a running cackle as we silently counted those missing. According to Chiang, they were worth anything up to thirty dollars each. "They were going to take these tonight?" Chiang accusingly asked the paling carpenter. He refused to reply, and just stood there with his eyes down. Chiang continued, ‘‘unless these are put back tonight, I will lock the cabins and have finger prints taken at Sourabaya.’’ As we passed through the various corridors leading aft, we could trace the entry by means of candle marks along the floors leading through the second saloons to the after deck. We went forward, and followed another track that branched and led through the first class galley. There the ancient sparrow, who cooked for the officers, calmly stated, as though speaking with his ancestors: "Chinese engineers, they say no electric fans on board when we leave Australia. They say me no say they come here". He was plucking a fowl, his face turned away from us as we walked through, single file. The tracks continued through the first class servery into the storage passage and then dived up a steep greasy companion leading to the crew’s passage. This led down the port side of the ship for its full length, giving them access to the engine room, engineer's quarters and the aft decks. On that dirty trodden way the tracks were lost. Various Chinese looked out from their quarters as we passed up toward the companions to the Skipper’s cabin. His response was that he'd jail the lot at Sourabaya unless they were all back tomorrow. They weren’t, and search the ship how we might, question whom we wanted, we never got to the bottom of it. When it died down, everyone got their cut, except the white man.

At last we left Pasoerean, off the Sourabaya entrance channel we collected a Dutch pilot, then steamed slowly, for four or five hours against the strong tide. Scraping the bottom all the way to the harbour, the sand churned in great swirls, aft, as the ship momentarily expected to stick. We were now some four miles inland and lay three hundred yards off the entrance to the creek leading to the city. As we anchored, there was considerable naval and aerial activity. In the naval basins, the men of war came and departed as the planes took off and landed in the wider water channels. I took a sampan ashore that afternoon. These come to the companion and shout and wait for hours. They always ask for absurd sums. When you are ready to go ashore, you tell them no, then turn to go inboard again, whereupon they come down to the correct fare. To everyone, except Sparks, this was half a guilder. He could always get anywhere half price. On board there was a rhythmic creak as the bamboo oars swung in their twisted circles. If there was a breeze, up would go the triangular sail and she would heel over and go along with a rush, the long prow, like a swordfish, diving and spraying the waves. It was always good to feel her go over after the larger dignity of the ship. You felt freer so close to the water, and more intimate with the life of the sea.

The city was reached along an asphalt arterial road through the tropical fields. Some of the fat tiny Japanese taxis had three wheels, others four. The architecture of the official buildings was Dutch, but everything else was a riot of all possible styles; a mixture of the maddest of modern fashions combined with the squalor of the decayed classical. Every trick of the Classicist and the Modernist was to be seen in exotic exaggeration. Here was a place which every young Architect should see as a disciplinary measure. It might have taught him the

ludicrous side of passion. Up town the large cafes were open to the street. They had good orchestras and opera singers - not selfishly reserved for the patrons alone - good food, good Dutch beer, and Bols gin.

Sparks joined me later. He had traded a small monkey for a shirt from one of the natives along the sea front. When I got back on board later, I discovered Chiang had bought two green parrots with red curved beaks. All they did was to set up a mournful squawk, squawk, squawk. It finally got on everybody's nerves. Sparks also bought a dozen tiny coloured birds in a bamboo cage. He fed these religiously for several days. But their number seemed to grow less and less, until there were only two. He left them on the lifeboat cover outside his quarters on the boat deck. The two that were finally left were terribly frightened; they never sang as they watched their friends picked off by rats, one by one. Of course it may have been the hungry crew. Everybody wanted to own something. With so many animals aboard there was a grave possibility that we would have a food shortage at sea. All the engineers bought the green parrots with the red noses. Each of the crew bought smaller and smaller birds, as their relative buying power fell, till everyone had something except the skipper and myself.

The prize of the lot was an enormous white parrot. Chiang had bought it for the princely sum of ten guilders. That was a proper bird. When he decided that he would exercise his lungs a little we needed no whistle to warn vessels in our vicinity; he had a high pressure boiler in him which was force fed and lifted the portholes off their hinges. He was cheerful about it all, and cut open the fingers of all the curious passers-by with nonchalant impunity. We had a short name for him. It is unprintable. He knew what it was. In the early mornings and in the short dusk of the tropical twilight, just after the sun went down, he used to regale the ship, those aft as well as forward, and also the trimmers down below who heard him through the funnels, with long stories of his prowess with women. His feathers would fluff up as he thought of himself, and he would execute mighty dives of flight through the air. Like the man on the flying trapeze - chained to an iron triangle swinging from the awning superstructure - he let off with a gay abandon the short sharp bursts which loosened the plates of the ship's side. But everybody respected him and loved him and tried to feed him and pet him in his quieter moments. He was an old warrior and a grand investment, and he learned very quickly all the filthier words in Chinese and English. He already knew them in Dutch, Malayan and in his own language. His health and powers were always a source of conversation, and his humour of a sufficiently indifferent and powerful kind that it was even a pleasure to be wakened by him. It meant that he was well and flourishing. Nothing got him down except blowing in his face. He was still trying to cut away with his beak the solid half inch of iron to which he was tethered when he finally got off the ship in Japan. In the hands of a grinning quartermaster, he stopping only to hurl his enormous insults to everyone about him, particularly the Japanese police launch alongside; they were not amused, we were.

The Sourabaya seafront is unique, a throwback to the older more roistering days of the sea. Or perhaps it might have been that I saw it through the eyes of a common seaman, not the averted eyes of a tourist. From about nine in the evening to four in the morning this seafront is a line of warm noises, mirth and drunkenness. Down the soft side-ways, into the moon and darkness, are the houses of the women who minister to men. As you go along the main street crowded with sailors, beggars, natives and harlots, more often than not walking on the roadway off the crowded footpath, you pass dance place after dance place, orchestra and piano playing at a crazy rhythmic pace. Half drunken sailors, staggering a dance. A film set of the Roaring Twenties. After drab days at sea, the sailor’s sampan is a carriage to heaven. One mile of glorious vice. Often these places open sideways into each other, bars in each where you can have the Dutch beer, or the slow sparkle of Bols gin. If you mix the beer and the gin you can get a glow that lifts you right into the Middle Air. Then, only an occasional snifter will keep you floating. The gin is drunk neat. Because it is cheap, Dutch sailors - from their navy and from their merchant vessels - can put it down as though it is water.

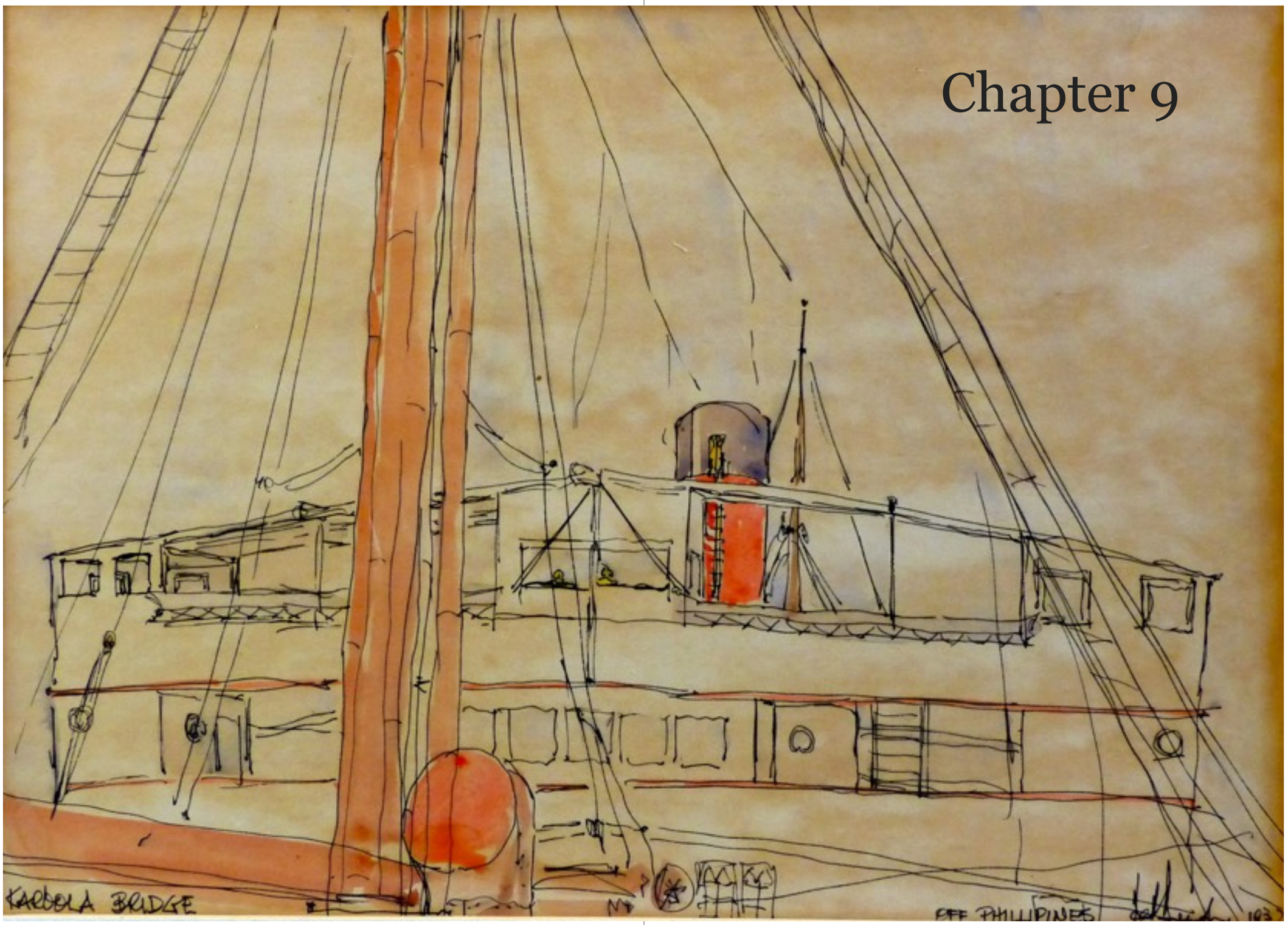
The white dancing girls are tragic in every respect. They have come to this place from

Shanghai, through Singapore, from better places, and thence to this seafront. Sorrow is in their deep black eyes. You are meat and drink. There is no shame in the way in which they ask for these. The native dancing girls, by contrast, are of form divine. Smiling white teeth, tiny high shoes. They are cunning, soft, lazy and smooth, and have high pointed breasts beneath their snow white velvet gowns. If you are not careful, or if you have had too much to drink, you are easy money. Like the halfcastes - the smoke eyed ones, with smooth brown gold skins, and a lovely droop in their breasts - they are murder to seamen.

This splendid, sometime vile, life is where seamen can find sanity; a thing to smooth their eyes for further nights, a thing to take away that strength that they may die a little while. Afterwards you go to the waterfront and to your sampan; the creaking bamboo oar, the coconut rope, the rushing outrigger splitting the waves into your face. At your ship is a quartermaster, at the companion, to help pay off the sampan, and to help you up in solicitude to your room.

Chief Officer on the Promenade Deck.

Chapter 9



“Karoola” Bridge. Off the Philippines.

CHAPTER 9

Our two anchor chains began to wind one with the other on the tide rips. Spaced a hundred yards or so apart, we hung like a weight swinging from a stretched line. As we swung we took up plenty of room. Indeed, we nearly crashed into a Japanese deep-sea fishing trawler as it swung quicker than we and came under our stern. As the rip changed abruptly, and came at us from another way, our weight took some time to move round. Lesser ships swung much quicker, so that they were facing and swinging the opposite way to us very quickly; and what had appeared considerable shipping room became nothing but a jumping space between the vessels.

I went ashore with Sparks on the last night. He had books to exchange with the Sparks of a Blue Funnel boat, and I to have my last Dutch beer. He did not look me up until twelve. He had a small dusky girl with him. He took her on board, and woke me up at four in the morning to help him smuggle the little thing ashore. She looked very pleased with herself, there could be no doubt that Sparks had been telling her what a fine ship he had and how much he enjoyed being Captain. She paid for her own sampan home.

That morning, Chiang came up to me to say that a cable had been received confirming that the ship had been sold to the Japanese. We were to proceed, with the scrape iron, to Osaka. As the chief Chinese official aboard, he would not take her into Shanghai; there would be no post for him on the largest passenger ship ever owned by the Chinese. The Chinese flag hung loosely from the aft mast. When we left Sourabaya, it was taken inboard and stowed away.

Because the ship was now to be being paid off in Osaka, we only took aboard provisions for twelve days. This proved a considerable annoyance to the Chief Engineer as he had to average twelve knots to get there in this time. Sparks was also extremely worried and kept reminding us the typhoon season was just commencing in the Sea of Japan. He had previously been struck by one and had run out of food. His weather reports were very prompt during this part of the trip. Everyday he kept on pointing out how close each typhoon was; they seemed to be following our northeast course. As they crossed, it was interesting to map their position, projected tracks and approximate speeds. It was fortunate we had the wind behind us.

When I came aboard in Sourabaya, for the last time, the old ship was well down. We had increased our draft some seven feet and had a pile of loose steel on the aft lower deck to keep her level. This stuff was well tied down with wire ropes and chocks. But it meant that we were to roll more than a little; a small amount of steel goes a long way when well up. The extra seven feet was a lot to drag around. Two tugs made very heavy weather of this maneuver, and we misjudged the time it would take to swing. When the tide changed it found us only half way around. The tugs whistled hoarsely for the third. She came bustling over from the wharf, and took another line. Swinging again, we just missed a smaller Japanese ship with our stern. From the bridge, this ship simply disappeared; we waited for the crash. But Chiang, as Second, was aft and had telephoned to say we would get clear. The Japanese might have let out a little more line and slid back. But they weren't going to do that for a Chinese ship. The winch grunted and whistled as it took up the anchor and chains. The Chief Engineer rang on the bell to let us know how many fathoms were still out on each chain. With the skillful juggling of the three tugs, and the ship's engines half ahead, we got clear. There was naturally a tremendous amount of profanity from the bridge as we spoke with the tugs. Our superior height always gave an advantage. Leaning over with the enormous megaphone, we shouted down at them. When they shouted their insults back, you just disappeared, leaving your final word and orders. We rang for full speed. By the early evening we were through the heads and out into the Java Sea, heading north between Celebes and Borneo.

Tremendous fights started down below the next morning. The cook had been giving the crew three pounds of meat per person per day instead of the regulation two. Now it had run

out and they wanted to know what he was going to do about it. For most of the day the bos'n kept sharpening his knife at the grindstone against the carpenter's bench in the forewell deck. This was just outside the galley, and the cook kept coming out to hurl insults in Chinese. He made great play with his chopper. It was a heavy nasty weapon and he was the bigger man. Actually, they had all been very well fed. In addition to meat, they had received two pounds of rice and one pound of vegetables per day.

An enormous number of filled sacks had gone off at Sourabaya, and it was clear that they had been selling what they had saved. Other things were disappearing too. I had caught them in the act as I came round the bows one day in my sampan. There a smaller sampan, clinging to the steep steel under the overhang, was taking on board a considerable quantity of new rope from a porthole right up forward in the crew's quarters. Naturally I picked it up, but, with the porthole thirty feet above, I neither saw nor found the members of the crew. Doubtless they were casually watching what I was doing, for they had ample time to get away and look busy somewhere else. The skipper was not at all perturbed when it was reported. He had been a wise man when he had taken over the ship; he had refused to sign any inventory for the delivery.

It was the skipper's practice to write to the agents and give them to Sparks to type. After being bawled out several times for incorrect spelling and arrangement of sentences, he began coming to me with the script. The letters were frank to say the least. It was apparent that the skipper thought no one was any good. It was fortunate that the company had enlisted his aid to bring the ship up; with anyone else it would never have reached as far as it had. The crew was definitely the scrapings from the Shanghai waterfront and the officers a remarkably poor lot. Although there was talk in the officer's quarters, nothing was done.

We steamed north to the equator. Celebes lay on our right; to our left you could imagine the coast of Borneo. In this enclosed sea, full of floating palms and debris, there were also thousands of sea snakes twisting and twining their way through the water. They would turn sideways, with a flashing twist of white belly as they passed. They looked vicious, and I was pleased to be on board. Magazine photos and pictorial representations of food took on an appearance of delight and urgency. The way we discussed the various foods portrayed would have delighted the heart of any advertising man. At table, it was the staple of conversation. We all dreamed of oysters toasted with a cheese sauce and other intoxicating dishes. The merits of different cultures always meant an animated conversation. At out table, the food grew increasingly foul as the ice, which we had taken aboard, melted. Two firemen became sick, then a third, a trimmer, went off with cramps. This started the skipper on the war path, with indiscriminate doses of castor oil. At Sourabaya we had taken aboard a lot of bananas. But after several days of fritters, plain fries, soufflés, boiled, and even just plain bananas in black green skins, you tire. You discover banana in any form will make you ill. We dreamed of the food of Osaka. Civilization is a remarkably thin veneer; it would be interesting to meet a starving philosopher.

The lonely work on the bridge was a relief after the crowded life of Sourabaya. Near the Equator the surface of the sea became strange and varied. Currents and cross currents, ever fighting their silent war, created varying depths and cross reefs. Celebes was to the starboard beam. Riding five or six miles off that coastline the current came down from the north. Careful checks had to be made every quarter of an hour for our immediate position. The tropical sea was seldom blue, usually a silver grey to match the sky, or brown and translucent green. In actual fact the sea is very seldom blue anywhere.

Navigation coasting is fascinating. Your eyes grow as tired as your arms holding the glasses, but you feel that you cannot afford to miss anything. There is a dream lighthouse in this region. The North Watchman, or Tuguan, is a solid mass of tropical foliage tipped at the summit with a white house. Encircling are bronze hornlike reefs, with native craft fishing off the tiny silver beaches. They were marionettes through the glasses. We alter course momentarily to avoid hitting two lazy whales on holiday. Finding your position is a game. You take the chart, a mass of fine lines and figures, pick out three or four peaks in the distance, take their bearings, find the massed contours on the chart, and plot the angles with

a soft pencil. Where they all intersect is your position. Only the third line will prove the position, and you carefully mark the chart with this soft pencil and print the time and the log. All these positions should lie along your marked course. Of course they never do. There is always the swinging of the ship, the Chinese quartermaster, the set of the currents through which you pass or your own plain carelessness.

The short tropical storms walk across the water with skirts dragging at the waves. When they reach the ship you get into the shelter of the wheelhouse, or one of the bridge houses, and the smoke lies flat on the vessel and on the water. If the rain is dense enough you give two warning blasts every two minutes to let them know you are on your way. After, in the sun, the ship steams all over, then becomes white and gleaming. For a few minutes the water seems as blue as that of a passionate blonde's eyes. Later it gradually turns into the silver grey of the sky.

In the Straits of Macassar, a relieving officer took over whilst I was at lunch. He omitted the bearing at the hour I came back on. With a reef projecting four or five miles off the hundred fathom shore line, and a strong breeze into which we began to plough, I suddenly saw and checked our position. Mistakenly, I reckoned we only passed four or five hundred yards off, so swung her over at right angles from our correct course. With the wind, the current and her new heavy load, she took a long time to come round and head away from the reef. I jumped between the bridge and the chart room, below, very nervously. Not all the ship's positions are left on the chart for the skipper to inspect after his afternoon sleep.

I usually had the parrot up for company in one of the wheelhouses. But in the heat of the day he would just stand there. Only seldom did he answer to his own name. He just swung there as if to escape the heat. We would stand together looking from side to side. He picking ever and anon at his feathers. I picked at my sunburn or at my leather sandals. The deck was hot with the direct sun. He was thinking of his green forest delights and I of the fleshpots on shore. With neither of us was there the suggestion of the dilettante or self denial. For when you try an exquisite thing within reach once or twice, it becomes a great tearing want, a desire impossible to fulfill. Actually this intensity did not worry us because it was good and warm, and with plenty of cigarettes - cheap in the East - you could easily forget your ever present hunger.

Early one morning we came to Mindanao and the Saragani Islands. Because of the currents, we had struck nineteen miles off our course in the mist of the night. Having skirted them to take up our fresh course for Japan, we had left the Equator behind and it was to grow progressively cooler. The islands looked enchanting in the early mist, with cultivated patches clinging with foliation to the upper volcanic peaks. The sea off this land was a seething mass of porpoises. As we left this animal field, six frisked in our bow wave as personal escorts. Later, when Mars was like a Chinese lantern on the horizon, Chiang told me how the Chinese think they can smell the advent of bad weather and how their fishermen know by the taste of the seawater when to seek shelter.

We took our final course, N25E, for Osaka. The crew expected China. An uneasy feeling grew through the ship. The bos'n had now collected a most fearsome number of knives and had spent all his spare time sharpening these down below. After an infernal row, with much running out, gesturing and menacing, the smaller, uglier, quartermaster reported: "Plenty trouble bos'n man, chow go sleep all gone". This meant that the bos'n and cook had again withheld a portion of the crew's food, hidden it to sell at the next port, then had it stolen by the firemen whilst they were asleep. After all their altercations, these two had apparently entered into an unholy alliance. The statement was consistent with the noise. The bos'n, the cook and his chopper were prominent, trading insults across the hatch to the grinning firemen. But when they had been admonished and sent about their business, the bos'n had come up to Chiang, on the bridge, and had made a simple request. Would he commend him to the ship's company as a diligent, useful man, well worth another berth. It was amazing in its effrontery. Very Chinese, very bland.

Sparks had also grown very worried that his boy was trying to poison him. He was extremely unpopular with the coloured crew. At table, Sparks always thought that his water

was poisoned, and in front of the boy insisted on my changing glasses with him after his had been poured. I will say this for the boy. He was a match in his own language for Sparks. But it all only made the ship grow more and more uncomfortable. Seamen get on each other's nerves after weeks at sea. For all the little work the skipper usually does, it is only he who ties the ship together. It is the concentrated authority and command, and the hold he has over the future careers of those under him. An adverse report can work wonders against a man in a crowded profession. For Sparks, it was the worry about ground glass, or perhaps ground bamboo. We always comforted him by stating the symptoms never appear for a month or so. The tiny slivers have to properly work through the system and well into the walls of the intestines. By that time his next boy would have tried something different.

The chief difference between myself and the crew was my fantasy of a typhoon. Scanning the barometer every hour or so for a sudden fall, one finally came at us from the south. All I really wanted was to see the old ship shudder and dive into it, climb and sink under me, and smash down as the bow disappears into a smothering welter of foam. In the end we only caught the tail. It came at us like a wall. The barometer slid quietly down its glass tube, the temperature fell and it was necessary to wear clothes - an overcoat with overalls. The rain was belted flat with the sea, but like jabbing spears over the canvas dodgers along the bridge rail. Not slanting spears, but hard driven and slightly upward into your eyes. As it zoomed over the forward faces of the super structures, the bridge deck was dry for eight feet behind the rail. The glass of the wheelhouse, and the side houses, were a sheet of water. This was held in position, and constantly added to, by the wind.

As we came into our last port, the Chinese crew swarmed the rigging like monkeys. They knew they were nearing home. It was probably only the cooler weather after the inertia of the tropics. Sparks had his photo taken in the more glorious portions of his uniform. He also utilized those portions even more glorious of the other officers. It was an astonishingly naive piece of vanity. As an inverse to this, Chiang and I, in dirty grey bags, sandals and nothing else, had ours taken in an equally naive way leaning together on the compass. I liked that man.

Chiang was either waxing happily or in sorrow as he spoke of his family. He had left his wife in sickness four months before. He was always anxious, and this anxiety became stronger as it became colder each night on the bridge. She was always trying to keep him at home. Inevitably, when he was to go to sea again, he told her to wake him at five in the morning so he might catch his boat. Invariably, she woke him at seven to say "Boat all gone no good going". Then he always said the real time was nine. She wept. He was thirty two, and had four boys. I was always slightly jealous to hear that.

Lean and hungry Third Watch Officer.

Chapter 10

From the “Karoola” bridge, looking aft. Off the Philippines.

CHAPTER 10

East of Formosa, the cyclonic depression moved towards us from the South-West. The ship gradually began to grow youthful again, and to swing wildly and dive deeply before coming through the breath-taking, then breath-giving, skyward leap. Again I watched the barometer closely, hoping for a genuine typhoon. It held up normally. I was the only sorry one aboard. Inexperience makes fools of anyone. The swell came up aft on our quarter, and with the steering hard, the Chinese quartermasters at the helm were always glad to get off watch. With the swing of the ship through the rudder they were always complaining about their hands. It seemed little to complain about when you took the wheel for a few minutes.

Sparks was always very busy planning my future movements. If you did that, people could not trick you. Everyone was tricking Sparks. Because he was always on the look out, it was irresistible not to try. Of course, this always made it worse. He also liked to tell stories such as The Parable of God the Baker. School children in Japan are instructed his first product, the black man, was too burnt. His second was the white man, but he was half-baked. The third, the yellow man, was perfection, and to whom He has given the world to rule.

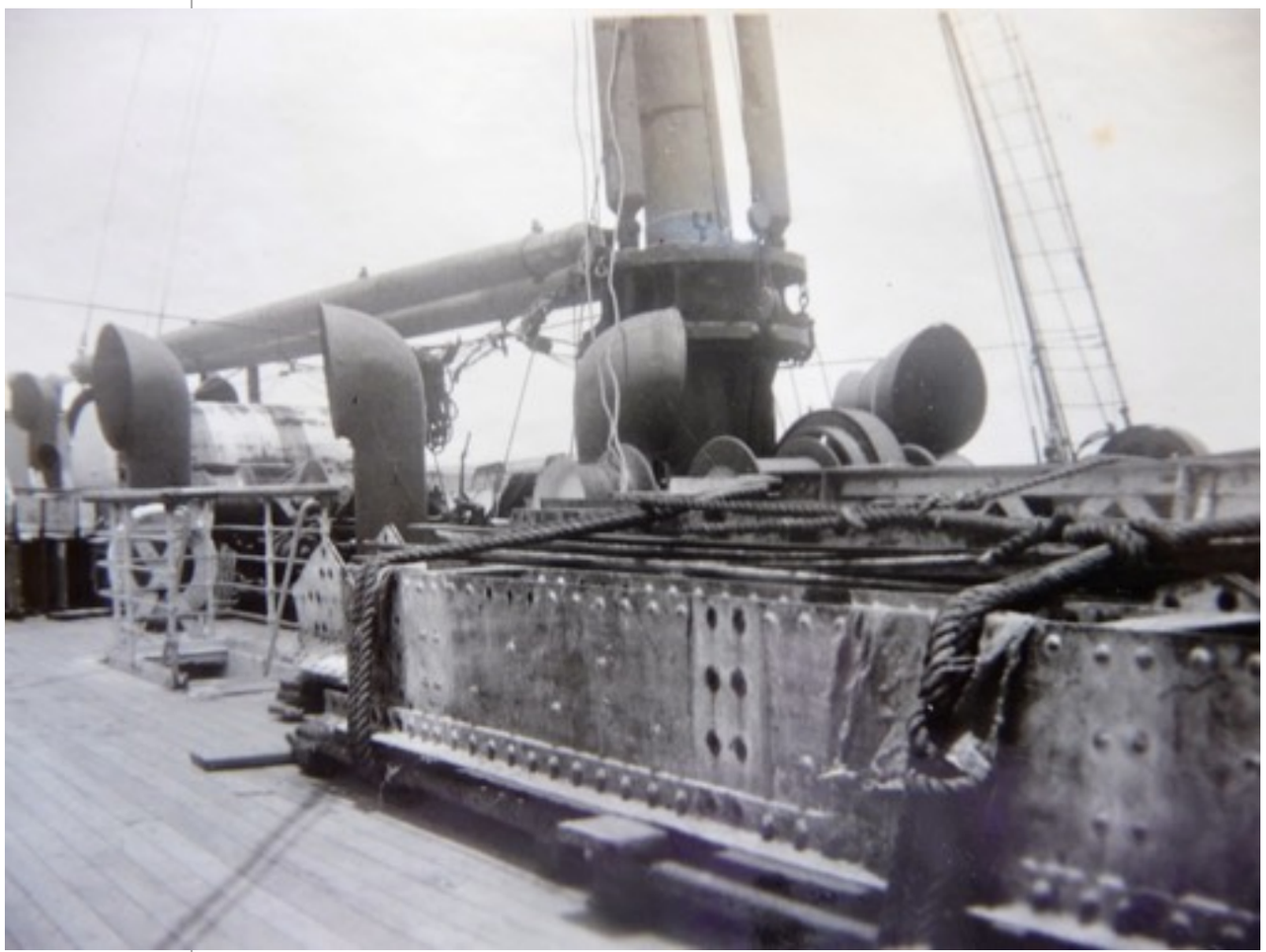
As we moved into the Eastern waters, Chiang made eloquent observations on the waiting game England was playing in the East. According to Chiang, She was satisfied with the balance of power so long as Japan, China and Russia were attentive. Communism would have difficulty taking root in China because of a deep seated opportunism and nepotism. Indeed, when someone is shot for being a communist, it is always the poor coolie. This is a form of Chinese humour. Everybody saves face except the ignorant messenger, and he won't be worrying anyway. The distinctive feature of Chinese affairs of state is that personal profit always has precedence. Whomever attains power always consolidates his own, and his relations personal economic position. This lack of an 'objective national outlook' will be the major consideration should ever East meet West.

On the bridge, the method of measuring the larger waves was by looking forward and aft, then checking the relative depths of the fore post and the aft flag pole under the level horizon. Below, the whole ship seemed on a soft couch. Our weight smashing hard into the heavy water, but it was as if into a rubber buffer. The ship was one, the bridge looked down in equipoise between the extremes, and you rode it like a circus rider standing on a slow galloping horse. Often the aft post dived terrifyingly fast. Yet because the ship was one, the post appeared always in relation to the moving funnels, the receding deck structures, the disappearing boats on their chocks and the smoke painted masts, rigging and crows nests. In all this, the serials hummed stiff and taut.

As the trouble with the deck Chinese grew more intense, it was the policy of the Russian Chief Officer to give them nothing to do. As they were his direct charge, trouble with them meant trouble for him. And trouble for him was no joke. Although this slackness lost him face with the crew, being so close to our signing off port, he was prepared for the inconvenience. There he could start afresh. Now that we were getting closer to the end of our voyage, the various factions began putting matters on paper. The Chief Engineer laboriously wrote a report on the mutiny in his engine room. He intended putting this directly into the hands of the Company. Not for him the risk of giving it to the skipper, with its possible shelving or the substitution of the skippers own side of the story. It was naturally presented to me to check after the Chief Officer - a fellow countryman - had gone over it. It was a disagreeable task as the trip was one of pleasure for me. Why should I partake of trouble that did not much concern me? The skipper also had a very full report, brought by Sparks for my checking. His concerned the affairs of everyone on board. I was flattered to read that I was “a prominent Australian yachtsman whom he had been fortunate in picking up in Sydney”! Any number of other officers offered themselves, but all required their fares back to Australia. This was the first time that I realised I had an official position. And two months wages, which I evidently had agreed to accept, was news to me. I made a mental note that they would be mine, come what may. The Chief Officer, on the other hand, was

busy compiling a list of the skipper's delinquencies. He also intended handing a report directly to the Company. It all seemed childish and slightly ridiculous, but it was all deadly serious. Their future careers were, to varying degrees, in jeopardy. The Chief had listed various items under the heading: Purloined Goods - beds, lamps, tapestries off the walls of the main lounge, etc.Yet all these I happened to know had been a gratuity to the skipper from the agents. That be as it may, the Chief still insisted on placing them on record.

In the afternoon the typhoon blew itself out, and we came into Japanese waters five miles off Okino Oagri Island. Through the water haze - which is the child of a typhoon wake - the government buildings, barracks, radio stations, power stations, and what appeared to be two half made aerodromes lying north and south, all stood large through the glasses. Having faithfully served the Empire and Australia for thirty years, as an interstate liner, and in war as a troopship, The Steam Ship Karoola passed into the southern outpost of another Empire. They did not welcome us. Their wireless station refused to answer our insistent signals. This was not surprising, it was typical of their stupid attitude to the Chinese. Later we ran into heavy rain squalls which led to the annoyance of whistle blasts every two minutes to warn other traffic. After an hour or so you get tired of dragging at the sodden whistle line.



Fore Deck.

Chapter 11

The Bridge and lower decks. The Pacific Ocean.

CHAPTER 11

In the morning, and during the whole of the next day, there was constant friction, and sometimes fighting, between the firemen, engineers and the deck staff. Because we were in Japanese fishing waters the skipper ordered that a man be placed on the focs'cle head as a lookout. This was the catalyst. Late that afternoon, when the squalls had brought in visibility to a hundred yards or so, the trouble started. The refusal to obey direct orders is mutiny. This is a heinous offence on the high sea, as the lives of all on board, plus other vessels, are endangered. Receiving the instruction from the skipper, the Chief Officer first gave the order. Because of his previous laxness, the crew took no notice. It must have been humiliating. With this disobedience, Chiang received the order again in the early evening. There was hell to play on the bridge. He called the bos'n; the flow of Chinese between these two was amazing. Each exchange seemed to cap the last until the roof lifted. No man went forward, and the deck crew gathered in a little knot below, in the forewell deck, to hear the latest bulletin from above. Attracted by the row, and knowing what was going on, I came up and stood beside Chiang and the bos'n, more in sorrow than in anger. At least that is how I tried to appear. My handcuffs were bulging out of my overalls and I held my twelve inch coal chisel. I had slept with it for the past week or so. It was cold in my hand.

After their evening meal the engineers, with their cohorts the firemen and trimmers, stood interested bystanders to the exchanges on the Bridge above. The skipper climbed laboriously up because the ventilators of his cabin also drew from the bridge all the orders, and conversations, as well as fresh air. The bos'n finally went below shouting as he went. Chiang seemed almost in tears. Leaning over, and paying no attention to what the skipper said, he looked and then talked to his fellow countrymen. It was apparent that he was trying to reason with them, but they weren't having a bar of it. The engineers shouted and gesticulated up at him. After a while the skipper intervened again. Taking Chiang by the shoulder, and in a pleasant manner, he told Chiang to tell them that if they refused he would have them jailed; if they obeyed all past sins would be forgiven. Chiang leaned over to give the ultimatum, there was only further shouting. The deck staff came out of the shadows nervously as though they did not wish to be seen. The bos'n stood with his arms up flung, in the full glare of the deck lights, and shouted hoarsely at us. He seemed completely crackers then. Chiang spoke no word in English now, except to acknowledge the skipper's orders. Every now and then he stepped back from the rail, as though accumulating more confidence out of the sight of his countrymen. All the time the bos'n stood there shouting, enjoining his crew to hold off the engineers whatever happened.

Gradually the trouble transferred itself from being an exchange between the Bridge and the deck, to one across the hatch. Even Chiang seemed out of it then, and I began to feel really frightened. The skipper ordered Chiang below to talk quietly with them. He went in an extremely unwilling manner. We waited on the superior place, above, and heard him speak from the chart room deck. Presently, Chiang came up to the bridge again and spoke directly to the skipper for the first time: "They refuse to take any orders Captain. They say they work too hard. They say they will not do it". "Go down and tell them I'll jail the lot of them in Osaka if there's any more trouble". Then he suddenly bellowed over the bridge, "Hey you, bos'n. Get your men up there for'd when you're told". There was a constant muttering under the shadow of the forecastle. The bos'n stepped forward into the lighted well deck again and shouted up at us an unintelligible outpouring of Chinese filth. As he gestured in the moonlight there was the glint of the knife he had been sharpening for six weeks on the grindstone. He subsided and stepped back into his jabbering crowd. The Skipper suddenly turned to Chiang: "Go on, get down with you". Chiang made a gesture of helplessness as he went down the companion. He leaned over the chart room bridge again and shouted to the crew. Even then, they were two decks below him. Quietly I stood with the Skipper. The handcuffs were heavy in my white overalls. Then I turned and said "I wish I could talk Chinese," He answered with a flood of curses which swept into the wind and away. I went down to the chartroom deck and asked Chiang what they were shouting about, and why couldn't he do something. His voice broke under his breath: "They are coolies, coolies,

coolies, coolies". I gathered this was an epithet.

The parrot screeched suddenly behind us, where he was swinging with the ship and with himself. He held a piece of apple in one claw, clinging with the other to his perch. He dropped the apple fragment, and hitched himself with his beak up to his triangle of iron piping. His chain rattled as he screeched again. Under the port rail, the one now bucking into the weather, stood the group of engineers. Some looked up at us, others looked across the white dull grey canvas of the well deck hatch. There seemed a breathing space. Within their forecastle, they had been shouting and brawling all day with the firemen and the trimmers. But now the engine room crowd had allied themselves with Chiang, the Chinese leader of the deck staff. This tipped the balance of power to our side. As we stood above them, the bos'n and crew now shouted together. They wanted us to come down and fight. Fortunately no attempt was made onto the companions leading from their forewell deck to the deck below the charthouse. In any case, these would have been easy to hold. They were narrow iron-tunneled stairs, one on each side of the ship, and if they tried to get to the main bridge, we could have stopped them, assuming the neutrality of the engineers in any actual fight. Then the two tunnel stairs leading to the boat deck - of which the forward part was the chart room and captain's deck - could have been held by one man determined to hit anything within reach. However, between this chart room deck and the upper one - the last - anyone could have climbed. For the upper bridge deck extended back over the boat decks almost to the funnels, and it would have been easy to climb round its perimeter.

The parrot was correct. After much discussion, the engineers shouted up to Chiang. Might they go over the hatch and kill the sailors and the bos'n and throw them over board? All they needed was for Chiang to give them the authority. Chiang, not surprisingly, did nothing. Again the Captain shouted to Chiang to give the order. "For Christ's sake, can't you do something?" I said to Chiang. "He's a crazy-man. The bos'n is a crazy-man", he replied. I went back up the companion to the main bridge. The skipper and I were silent as the shouting and gesturing slowly died away beneath us. "Can't we do anything about it?" I said to the Captain. He said nothing and then went down below.

The fishing vessels took their chances throughout the theatrics. We did not actually strike a Japanese ship and the trouble blew over by the time we steamed into Osaka. According to the Chief, it was mutiny on the high seas and the crew would be jailed in Japan. Chiang said nothing at all. He had lost his chance and his ship all at the same time. Everybody was relieved that we had arrived without bloodshed. The various reports were submitted and it was not until I reached Shanghai that I was able to see their actual effect.

The crew spent the last two days making up into parcels the tools and the various utensils they intended to take ashore. By now they realised where we were heading and what was to happen. There was a feeling right through the ship that as it now belonged to the Japanese, everyone might as well clean up. They would have been more circumspect had the ship gone direct to the Chinese owners and their own homeport. One of the quartermasters was the only one to actually make a mistake. He confiscated one of the ship's dividers from the chart room, but hurriedly replaced them with a garbled explanation when he later came on duty.

It was amazing to me that we did not run ashore on one of the many islands during that night. This was because the skipper usually marked the time when they were likely to be about and would make a point of being on deck. With his powerful night glasses his eyes were usually those that first made them out in the faint light from the stars. At four p.m. we sighted shore again. Through the haze there was a line of men-of-war off the lighthouse, which stood high on its bluff. During the night we steamed up the land and sea funnel which leads to Osaka. On occasions this geography lifts and intensifies the various tidal waves that afflict Japan. In the early dawn we dropped anchor outside the moles and waited for the pilot to take us in. At 8.45 a.m. we rang off engines. I found it a pleasure to swing them over and listen for the answering tinkle. It was probably to be the last revolution those engines were to turn. I felt sorry for their death.

For two days we lay unloading our scrap iron and waiting to be sent off ship. The docility of the crew, now that the Japanese were overrunning the vessel, was amazing - a willingness explained by the harbour police always being about and the Skippers discretion in advancing wages. In the main, the Japanese were punctilious and courteous. The exceptions were those representing the owners. They were always about and a bloody nuisance. The officer's quarters were no more sacred to them than those of the crew. They asked for cigarettes, drinks, books and "mementos" upon every possible occasion. At first you were flattered with their attentions, but after a while you saw they never gave you anything and were only anxious to prise something out for themselves.

'Sparks' seated at the door of the radio room.

'Sparks'

Chapter 12

“Karoola”. Funnel, vents and whistle. Timor.

CHAPTER 12

The delicacy and finesse of the Japanese is nowhere more reflected than in its architecture. This extended even to the design of their cigarette cartons. The goods sold in the shops were lovely and delicate, but fell to pieces once you took them away and used them. Nothing is robust. Clattering musically on their wooden sandals, the girls were as gay and charming as birds of paradise. Few whites were to be seen. In Cherry Blossom Street - Osaka proper - Sparks and I visited them at home. The places were exquisite and the girl's dainty and lovely, meddled only by the constant surveillance of police. We were never left out of sight for a moment. The delicate paper and carved wooden screens served as foils to the hideous western photos of the girls. One selects from photos, removes one's shoes, then steps into a minor hall. This is the equivalent of a harem, with the girls floating and swinging in their draped kimonos beside toy-like tables lacquered in black and gold.

There is usually some gaiety at a tiny bar, as the mistress joins you with your choice clinging to your hand. After, there is more gaiety upstairs. Here there are tiny rooms and tiny balconies with tiny gardens. Behind the sliding screens are mat floors, a thin Japanese futon and hard Japanese pillows. All the blankets are bagged in a sheet covering. With only one composite thing to throw off, you are either too hot or too cold. A clean kimono is always provided from the draws of one of the tiny furniture units. These are opened as you sit on the floor. The dressing table is twelve inches high with a toy-like mirror. All the doors slide noiselessly and tinkling music emanates from somewhere.

If the women seem doll-like, when you deal with the police, or see the daring of their new buildings, you realize that here is an efficient, ambitious and brave people. You sit on one of the fretwork overhanging balconies. You eat the nothingness of Japanese food and drink their quite admirable beer. The lanterns of bright paper glide at night. Incense is never enough, though, to completely overcome the odorous canals. The girls behind the bar sing in unison. They are clad in their multi coloured kimonos, with their obi clasped behind like baby bags. There is always a girl for every customer. When you leave them tips, they come clattering after you and return the money with such a charming bow and smile that you wish that it had been ten times the amount. They always refuse to take it and ask you to come again. This was not a place patronised by tourists and the big liners. Where the girls wore the gay folded obi on their backs, it meant that they too were prepared to play their part for the State and bear children. While the geisha girls also wear the obi, they may be distinguished by the fact that they hold up the hem of their kimono by one hand as they walk the street. In daylight they always seemed rather self-conscious. With their necks covered by rice powder, they didn't look particularly attractive.

The national food is like seaweed cooked in water flavoured with chestnuts. Because we wanted solid food, after the weeks of foul, their restaurants found no favour. In the cinemas, with the clashing of swords, the incense takes the place of air conditioning. America will give them that, as surely as it has filled their streets with their latest cars. Once you have listened to Japanese music in Japan - and only there is it natural – you retain a memory you can never recapture. The lavatory accommodation is entirely communal. This naturalness appears to you often as ludicrous as it does embarrassing. There are aluminium, glass and tile buildings, in the modern manner, side by side with those of paper-kindling. When a fire next starts in Osaka, there will be a holocaust. In their domestic architecture they lack the solidity of the Chinese. It is only when the Japanese adopt the western style that he is absurd. In strict morning dress, meeting solemnly, and shaking hands together in the grand halls of the New Osaka Hotel, this is a seriousness that appears dangerous. It is my belief that in coming centuries the ultimate accord between the two yellow peoples - Japan and China – will also determine the future of the West.

On board, we discussed the matter of tipping. In the more Westernised places, or where the tourist go, tips are taken. But nowhere is the custom more deeply ingrained than in China. Watch a long line of prisoners being executed by one single sweeping fall of the great steel. If the fellow with the sword misses, taking off just a chip or so, perhaps repeating the performance twice, then you know that the person kneeling failed to give the executioner his

tip for ensuring a good quick job. It is when tipping becomes crystallised to this extent that you might call a country ‘tip-ridden’. China is such a country. It is called ‘squeeze’, or ‘cumsha’. In the places of pleasure in Japan, as in China, the maid always waits for her tip at the door as you enter. In China it is mostly a coolie boy. In Osaka, as in the Oshewara district of Tokyo, the actual cost is only two yen when you boil them down and convince them that you are not the usual tourist. But when I met Myecho - and this was another time, another tale - along the evening beaches of the south, in her tiny house perched high above the moon, it was eleven yen. That is a lot of money in Japan.

It was good to be anchored again within four hundred yards of the shore. However, after a few days the presence and constant supervision by the officials became irksome. They were very hostile towards the Russians. While the Soviet Embassy, its large staff and diplomatic exchanges between the powers, gave the Communists a measure of security, this was not extended to the White Russians on board. They were treated like rats, or homeless dogs. Never could they forget that all they have in this wide world is access to Shanghai, with that small piece of paper.

The Japanese junks fascinated me. Their lattice sails, sliding up into position then down and stowed, were very much like the older type of Venetian blinds. These have become fashionable with modern architects. Although there were plenty of these about, the astonishing thing was the number of other vessels of all sizes - from the tiny fishing launch to the largest passenger liner - using raw oil for fuel. The whole of Japan was covered with a light blue haze caused by the constant emission from these products. An enormous amount of fuel, of poor combustion, is wasted in Japan. There are also large facilities along the shores pouring their message of industry. On a clear day, the combination of this smoke of industry with the blue haze is an exquisite opalescent veil. Along the sea front there is always just that suggestion of breeze that prevents it becoming a nuisance to shipping. And through it all, as the dawn rises, the tall close peaks of the mountains show themselves in crazy gilded lines.

It was a sad day when Chiang left the ship. He was the only link between the white man and the Chinese. We all felt that we needed this because we were in a hostile land - a feeling that grows on you as you come to know the Japanese. Chiang went off with the parrot swinging in one hand. He had received word that his wife was very ill, after childbirth, and that the child, as it came into this world, had died. He was broken-hearted. The Chinese love their families more than anything else. Their belief and trust in their wives is whole-hearted; they never like to sign on for more than two weeks or so. It was pathetic to see the whole of the crew lining the rails of their floating prison. They were also sorry to see that parrot go. It was the one personality on board. Thereafter, the ship was empty. Chiang was a marvellous Chinese gentleman; but he always avoided trouble. They are all like that. They pass tremendous resolutions, plan enormous revolutions, then forget them. Apart from their anti-Japanese feelings, collective pertinacity is not theirs.

The City of Los Angeles - an American liner - lay alongside us. A white ship stained with rust, her twenty thousand tons was also for the breakers yard. She seemed modern, but was probably too expensive to run. It is always a pathetic thing to see a ship about to be broken. The days are past when they lasted for generations. The ancient barges into which we were unloading housed an entire Japanese family. All modern conveniences were laid alongside in the shape of a box slung over the side. Bathing was done on the deck. The women worked with the men, babies slung upon their backs. On the barges aft - on the tiny private deck about the rudder - there was always a tiny shrub or twisted dwarf tree. When people lowered themselves through the small hatch, their shoes were left on deck in order that the mats or carpets below might not be soiled. Everything in Japan is clean. On their ships the crew lay a carpet of canvas along the decks of the forecastle before permitting the wire mooring ropes to lie upon it.

As we swung with the tide and the wind, the scavenger craft, pirates everyone, followed. Each had a diver plus one other to manipulate the hand pumping mechanism. The diver spent each day searching the sea bottom for the bits of scrap metal that fell from our slings.

The product for a whole day might only be a few odd tin cans, but it seemed sufficient. Other one-man boats were also there. Dragging a sea rake, he stopped every now and then from his sculling to drag it up, to scrape off the entangled weed and the prize, perhaps a small piece of metal wire. From this microscopic national economy even their harbour floors must be clean.

I had about fourteen days waiting in Osaka. The last seven were rendered miserable by the constant surveillance of men in uniform. Finally I was hounded from police station to police station, then under armed escort to Kobe. There I was able to embark on one of the American Dollar Line ships. I felt a free man. We had all been worried by the lack of privacy, even in the officer's quarters. It came to a head one day when I became conscious, as I was typing a letter in my cabin, that two people were reading over my shoulder. They were Japanese officials. I stopped immediately, with them leaving the cabin ejaculating "reporter!" Immediately returning with more officials, they demanded to see what I was doing. Rather than comply, I foolishly tore the page up and threw it out of the porthole. I was promptly informed that while I was in Japan I must neither type nor write anything. They had been around before asking for 'souvenirs' and 'mementos'. They had even tried to take away watercolours and sketches I had made of the old ship. Now they took the typewriter, and instructed me to pack all my belongings as they were required ashore for "custom inspection". Everything was taken, everything, except the suit which I wore. Four days later I was finally able to collect them between police stations. A very complete examination had been made judging from the disorder of my books and papers. There is little finesse in anything they do, and it was only after considerable argument that I was permitted to keep a pair of handcuffs from the ship. I was confoundedly glad to leave their lovely shores.

When we were informed we were to be shipped back to Shanghai, we were fortunate that the old Chief Officer insisted on seeing our tickets. When finally produced, they turned out to be the usual Japanese 'mistake'; coolie class tickets for a Japanese half-passenger half-cargo ship. Anyone who has been to the East and seen these vessels will realise what that would have meant. Despite voluble and continuous protests from every official aboard the ship, we refused to budge until we had seen the Harbour Master. It was only after two days of interminable argument with him - an effeminate type of the taller Japanese class - that the Japanese company were forced to send us on a white ship. The third class was no stigma to the three White Russians. Being permanent merchantmen they had their rights. As a Third Officer, I also enjoyed these.

The crew left before us on tug-drawn barges. They were not permitted to defile Japanese shores. Shipped round to Kobe, they were then taken to China by a Japanese cargo vessel. They could expect little else. They looked very subdued as they slid away from the comparative safety of their ship and her officers. But we were glad to leave. The food sent on board by the company had been unbearable. And it was a pleasure to leave the damnable smiling deceit, the cadging and close-fisted-ness of these men in uniform. They were all a product of efficiency, poverty and cold heartedness.

The funicular railway was a stairway to heaven. After the interminable Chinese, Russian, and Japanese, I heard American voices. Steaming through the lovely inland sea of Japan, a personal change had come about; an intense nationalism had been born within me. I was from that generation who were children during the Great War. We were inoculated with the Great War tiredness that so permeated all things of the twenties and early thirties. Now I found in my more unfortunate contacts with different colours and creeds almost a rabid feeling for my race and country. I had left an ardent pacifist, thinking that all was well with our League of Nations, and I had found it only an ideal. It appears that travel narrows, as well as broadens, the mind.

CHINA

The Bund, Shanghai. The proposed 30 story NYK building superimposed on the Greco-Roman Streetscape.
According to Best Overend, “The building of 1937 should be at least as modern as the ship of 1937”

CHAPTER 13

When you arrive, you fall in love with China . The first thing you see is the yellow river swept clean of all floating rubbish by the scavenger boats. It is so clean that even the seagulls leave. There is nothing , even for them. When you wake there is the rising and falling chant of the coolies unloading. Together they chant HAY HO, HO HAY, HAY HAY, HO HAY. In the little Shanghai streets, there is a mixture of smells; the girls, in their long slit Manchu gowns, slide past so sleek and so slim; the cookshops concoct the most peculiar things to eat amid the feet of the passersby; and the men wear nothing but pyjama trousers, cut a little short by western standards. It was disappointing to see so few pigtails. Evidently, in these enlightened times, only a few ignorant countrymen wear them anyway.

You settle very quickly. If you have a flat, everything is commodious and your boy takes charge of your things. All you have to do is to shave yourself, and perhaps you don't even do that if you like Chinese barbers. With the older established whites, those whose families have been in China for generations, there is a wholly English life led in English houses, English gardens and with Chinese servants. The smell, everywhere, however, is typically Chinese. This is a land that has been fertilized for countless ages by human ordure; and it is unmistakable. For the first few months, the formal white-clad tennis parties and outdoor teas are almost unbearable, but you forget it after a while and when you go away you almost miss the atmosphere.

The Chinese policeman on his beat is very slow and lazy. There is none of the officiousness of the Japanese. The country is infinitely old and humorous, and the policeman blandly smiles as the daughters of joy pass and ply their wares. He gets ten per cent and perhaps more personal favours. It is always good for a girl to seem to know at least one policeman. She is, thereby, protected from the attention of street loafers. Racketeering is as old an art in China as are their records, and these go back for many thousands of years. The enormous Sikhs - police assisting and separating the white administrative police from the Chinese police - have large brown liquid filled eyes. With their beards and turbans they look peculiar as they go hand in hand like children. Their belief is that Christ will next come to this earth through the union of a Sikh and a small boy, and they all wish to be Joseph. The force of the International Settlement comprises some five hundred Sikhs, three thousand Chinese police and three hundred whites.

For the first few days you don't dine because you can always have something at the bars. These abound, and serve steak to chili con carne, or whatever you wish. Later, when you become friends with the Chinese owner, he will always wish for you to dine with him if you like Chinese food. Later still, he will become so hospitable that it is difficult to enter his bar. Insisting on entertaining you, instead of you spending money, is surely not the way to do business. In his interest, you stay away a little. And there can be nothing quite so charmingly affectionate as the Chinese girls. Their slimly beautiful carriage and perfect bloom put any western woman, no matter how perfectly groomed, to utter shame. And they know it. The white women look expensive and useless, without being beautiful. They all look class conscious, and race conscious, because the Chinese girls beat them at their own game. All the white's drink too much - enough to kill mere mortals - for they have little to do and hitherto they have been well paid for what they did. They all get stomach ulcers, or some social disease, and have to go home on long leave and die of sheer boredom.

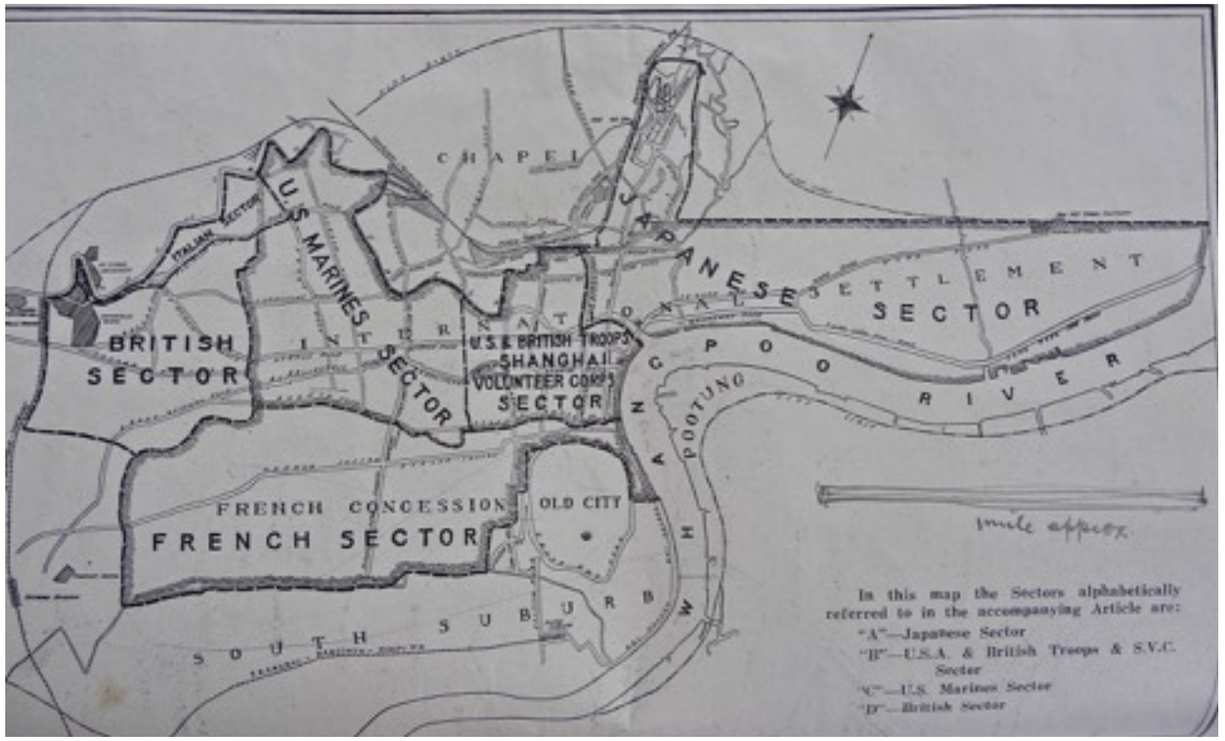
When all of the flags are flying half-mast in Shanghai, and it seems almost every second day, you know that it is some National Humiliation Day. For generations they have commemorated some defeat. The police stand by when the humiliation concerns the Settlement Authorities. At certain times, notably in 1927, strong measures were necessary to preserve law and order in the Concession. But, no matter who the conqueror, it will always be China for the Chinese.

Where is any city quite so gay throughout the whole night as Shanghai? It is the Russian, the French and the English dance ‘hostesses' who are hard and want drinks and extra money and try to clean a man out. They will take any man. The Chinese won't, even if the Japanese-Koreans will, under the direction of their Russian mistresses. If they part-love you,

and know you, and have talked with you, they will look after you all night even if you don't want them or have no money. It is this spontaneous affection and charm that so endears them to you. Every male loves flattery of this sort. Life in the bars is wholesome and good. Because you know you can do whatever disgusting evil you wish, such freedom give you balance. With the lack of restrictions you just sit and talk. And in the dying night you go home in a whispering rickshaw and it is good and comfortable and the air fresh.

I shopped one afternoon with a well known Chinese cinema actress, and our progress was that of royalty For Shanghai, her home was typically Chinese. That is to say, it was not wholly Chinese. The entrance hall-lounge was filled with formal and heavily ornamented chairs and tables placed round the wall in strict rotation. The walls were covered with silver shields and pagodas with tinkling bells, each marked with the chop or mark of the manufacturer. In older days these were as valuable as cash, as the maker was always glad to give you money for a temporary loan. They would advance almost 95 per cent of its value. It was not precisely pawning, silver was once a finite substance in China. We visited silk and artificial jewelry shops. The silk was excellent and expensive, the jewelry excellent and cheap. There is nothing there now except burnt fragments and black smoked dust. Then it was brilliant, crowded and spectacular.

It is difficult to find precisely what religion the Chinese affect. Your Chinese friends never speak of it, and there seems little public worship of any kind. There were few Buddhist monasteries. I should imagine, though, they will be a people easy to sell insurance. What small steps they take toward religion are to the propitiation of gods. Who knows what spirits might be about in the Middle or Upper Air and who knows where they might carry your messages. This may not have been of the older China, where the belief in ancestors was so grand and strong a thing. In the enlightened towns, however, it had become a form of realism. The gods are reviled and rebuked if the harvest is poor. If, on the other hand, it is good, then candles will burn and little red flags flutter in the breeze.



Shanghai. The International Settlement on the Whangpoo River.
The Shanghai Volunteer Corps Sector is in the middle.
Chapei is to the North West, Pootung across the River to the East.
The Japanese Sector is too the North East of the European Powers.
(source. *Oriental Affairs*. Vol. 8 No 4. October 1937.)

Chapter 14

Finely rendered perspective of the NYK Line project. Client. Nipon Yusen Kaisha, of Tokyo. Architects. Lester, Johnson and Morriss, of Shanghai.

CHAPTER 14

It was that sort of day when your old wounds ache, when, as you lie in a chair, all your old troubles come over like a dull cloud and you are afraid of the future. It doesn't matter a tinker's curse that in your travels you have done something rather amusing and done it by yourself. What matters is that you are thousands of miles away from home and you are very much alone. There is a drab mist over the affair and everything has lost that savour you expected from the Strange East. When you think very earnestly, trying to pin down the bird of trouble into something finite so that it may be slain and forgotten, you realise that what is actually the matter is that you have a Saturday afternoon to fill, and that you are accustomed to having that period very busily engaged. Here you are away from your office, your own drawing board, and there is no incentive to do anything at all. Therefore you do nothing, and you feel as you deserve. It is also early in the morning when you wake with the sun. You feel the fool everyone told you, for confidence comes with the dinner and the night. You feel in the morning the size and the indifference of the world. Your heart grows cold and you wonder just why you started these foolish things. Was it an egotistical gesture, or were you just once more to brave new worlds with nothing?

Along the Soo Chow Creek there is an unfresh smell. The coloured men spit great gouts along the roadways and across the bridges. The dust swirls up into your nostrils, and you hold your mouth tightly closed, trying to breathe when you are momentarily away from passing people. The yellow men and women lean on their long bamboo poles, stuck into the mud, walking back along their barges, as they nose slowly upstream. They carry great balks of timber, sacks of cement and other building materials. Then they come down with the current, loaded with country products to be sold in the Hongkew market. In this market, the other day, a Japanese soldier raped a fourteen year old Chinese child. When a white policeman came up with his revolver to put an end to the business, four other Japanese soldiers appeared and held their bayonets against the white man's back. The public rape went on. Nothing could be done about it. Although officially international, the territory was controlled by the little yellow people and their military men.

Just below the Garden Bridge, and the grounds of the British Consulate, the Soo Chow Creek runs away into the yellow flood of the Whangpoo. This river sometimes comes down quite quickly, so that you can see a 20,000 ton liner swing almost helplessly in midstream. Then the sampans sweep down very quickly as the boatmen push out and start their twirling sweep. The white grey warships lie just off the Bund, which follows the river. The banks and offices are only separated from these warships by the rickshaws, the old trams, the quickly moving cars and the few yards of yellow water. The Chinese scavenger boats are fond of the warships. These have the habit of saving all their rubbish, for the last few days at sea, in order that they are able to discharge into Shanghai waters for the scavenger men to squabble over. Nothing is wasted in China; even the ragged bits of bamboo floating down provide, when mushed, something for the town chickens. Sometimes, if you think back, the main thing that you remember about China is the inevitable fowl and its product the egg; not forgetting the blown up body of the fox terrier lying in the terrible indignity of death. Later, of course, in the water beside the British Consulate, there were the bodies of men and women floating and swollen beside the dog. Other times it will be the smell, which the wind sometimes brings, even in the early morning; or else the song of the carriers as they swing down the road with a load of great stones, or plaited baskets of green food, on their shoulders. Round the market in Hongkew these are the first things that you will hear in the very early morning.

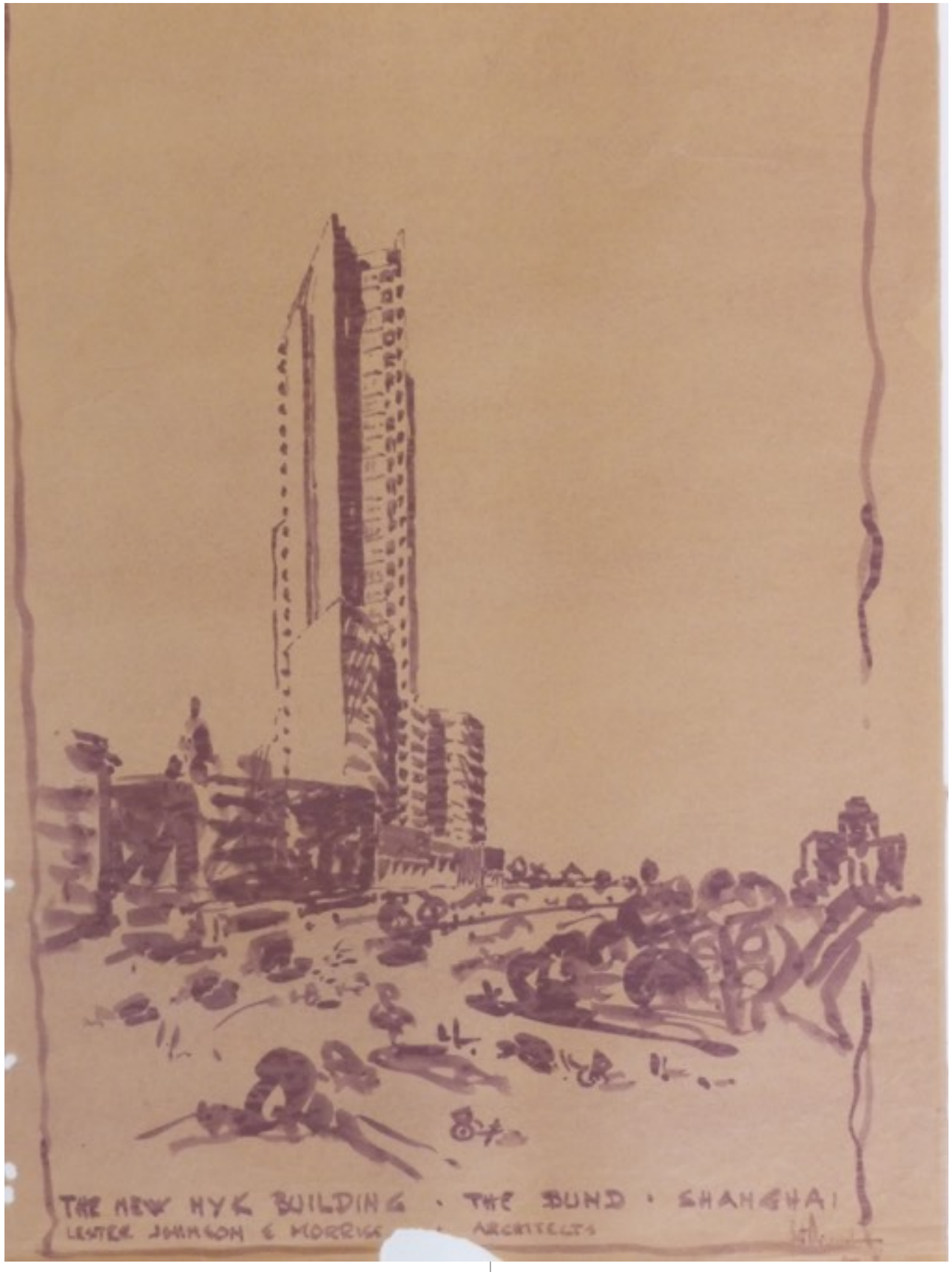
Down at the back of the market was the Union Bar. There, Mah Lih would lean her smooth slim body against yours as you sat on a high stool and threw the dice from the leather glass along the counter for the next drink. These were cheap and very cold. With a wide smile, Chan slid the two onto the counter. When he smiled you felt that he thought of nothing but the smile. But sometimes, you saw him from behind the tiny tree against the wall, he seemed to be waiting for something. Business was slack. The district was out of bounds for the American sailors because they were always having, what the officials call, 'incidents',

with the Japanese patrols. After all the trouble in Chapei, when it was razed for the first time by Japanese gunfire, the white man lost face. They just sat around as the Nippon beat up the Chinese. Afterwards, the Japanese patrolmen stood in the middle of the footpath, with fixed bayonets, and when you tried to pass they forced you into the gutter. If you protested you would be taken to their station. Your Consul would merely complain. The Japanese would just laugh. This was before Hongkew was razed the second time. Now you can't even cross the bridge into the district. The Union Bar seemed far away from all that. You took a rickshaw the few hundred yards from Hongkew and you knew that there would be no trouble. All the drunks knew the white police station opposite the Union. They would get very short shift from police quietly drinking and having a good time. And while Mah Lih was being very familiar with you, Sah Lih was learning how to say "You buy me now". Someone had rashly promised her a dress and seemed to have forgotten about it. Then, going home to bed, there would be no trouble with traffic or parking regulations. You didn't have to make conversation with your wife, or to take to supper the girl you had taken to the theatre.

Often you went up to the Russian quarter for Saguska. This was an assortment of tiny dishes, like hors d'oeuvres, which you ate as you took their ice-cold crystal vodka. Tossing back your head, you drained the tiny glass in one gulp, then immediately ate before you had more. There was a remarkably warm feeling in your stomach. The savories were very savory indeed, and their variety pleasing. Then there was tea in tall glasses with silver holders and handles. Some had a sweet jam instead of the more usual sugar. We ate it with a spoon in between sips. This was a safe exploration, like reading a travel book in front of a fire in your own home on a wet night. After you felt that you had enough Saguska you went over and sat at the proper table for soup, fish, the meat and sweets. Wine was served with all these courses. Sometimes they sung their strange songs or had gypsies in to weep and cry over their wild violins. They are all a hopeless people, even when working. Out of work, and most of them are, they are even worse. If only they could get work for three months, assuming their young girls worked in the night clubs and cabarets, they would be able to manage for almost a year.

Some nights you went west a little to the house of Hakome to have Sukiyaki. There you left your rickshaw out in a little walled lane. You were met in the hall by the Japanese or Korean hostess. She took you by the hand and led you upstairs. There, you removed your shoes and your jacket and lay like a Roman on the floor of smooth soft rattan with your back against the cushions. Your own girl talked and perhaps played with you, while, on the tiny communal table they placed a shining pan over a small gas jet and rubbed into it a lump of white chicken fat. Next a little sugar melted, and sliced onions added. Then tender pale green bamboo shoots, sliced across like carrots in an Irish stew. Finally, a sort of yolky spaghetti, along with some green spring onions, was placed. When all this was sizzling shreds of beef were placed on top with soya bean sauce. This was a liquid like watered coffee and marmite. The whole dish bubbled and the ingredients slowly subsided below the bulwarks of the pan. There was also added somewhere shredded cabbage leaves. You burnt your tongue every time. It was impossible to wait for it to cool before eating. And while all this was going on your girl tore the wrapper from your chopsticks and broke them apart to show that the wood hadn't been used before. She beat an egg into your bowl and you all ate from the sizzling dish and washed it down with draughts of cold Japanese Asahi beer. As everyone must know by now, the chopsticks can only be mastered when it is thoroughly understood that the lower unit is kept perfectly rigid and the upper swings down to clench each piece. All Chinese consider it grand manners, however, to hold the bowl to their mouths and simply push the rice in

Chapter 15



Preliminary Perspective of the NYK building, designed and drawn by Best Overend. He was a great admirer of the drawings of the Polish artist, Feliks Topolski, who emigrated to London in the early thirties.

CHAPTER 15

After a few months of Shanghai I felt that "Hard Class", over the Trans-Siberian Railway, would be good for me. Excesses were breeding the usual liver. As I glanced over my menu, Foo hovered behind me anxiously. There was to be hors d'oeuvre varies, supreme of halibut Joinville, a creamed fish, lamb cutlets with new green peas, corned ox tongue in aspic-nieva, all followed by roast snipe sur canade with stuffed marrow (very tiny like a young cucumber), spinach sauté, new potatoes with parsley, finished with mousse of fresh strawberries, petits fours, coffee and Dutch cheese. I decided, dreamily imagining Hard Class once again, to build up a few memories upon half a litre of Antinori Chianti. This might wash down, in an extraordinarily pleasant fashion, the colossal meal. Hard Class could restore the balance later. For now, the appearance of the snipe conjured my imagination. The tiny brown mangled remnant breathed of the warm green celestial marshes. The three inch burnt blackness of the slender beak seemed to gasp a frenzied futility. The sturdy brown flesh, so cunningly woven together and distorted for easy handling, complimented the green of the spinach. The carnations on the table took the rosy hue of the wine, so affectionately clad in its woven straw mantle.

Outside the windows of the dining room there were Chinese neon signs - meaningless to the western eye except in their abstract pattern - flipping on and off. The Soo Chow Creek was filled with slowly moving craft, and there were more craft lying in horizontal tiers beside the Garden Bridge. They were alive with Chinese families, all of whom could have been kept in considerable comfort, for a week, by the cost of the wine alone of my enormous meal. And this passing power of money could no better be exemplified than by the attitude of Foo, my table boy, in whose charge the whole of my meal lay. His jealousy of the wine waiter finally drove that man away. A prerogative in pouring the wine was insufficient to overcome the boy's strong sense of personal loyalty. Not that my occasional tips matched this loyalty in any degree; a smile apparently did more than is usually thought.

Somewhere down Nth Szechuan Road, in Chinese territory, Bim and I went to this massage place. It was after the usual Sunday Shanghai Brandy Breakfast. Up a lane, there were the predictable Turkish bath signs. But when the double doors were opened, there burst a sight that will be difficult to forget. It is seldom one sees perhaps thirty girls of all shapes and sizes. From the crowd, we selected our individual attendants and went to adjacent cubicles. Over the top we were able to discuss what stage of negotiation we had reached.

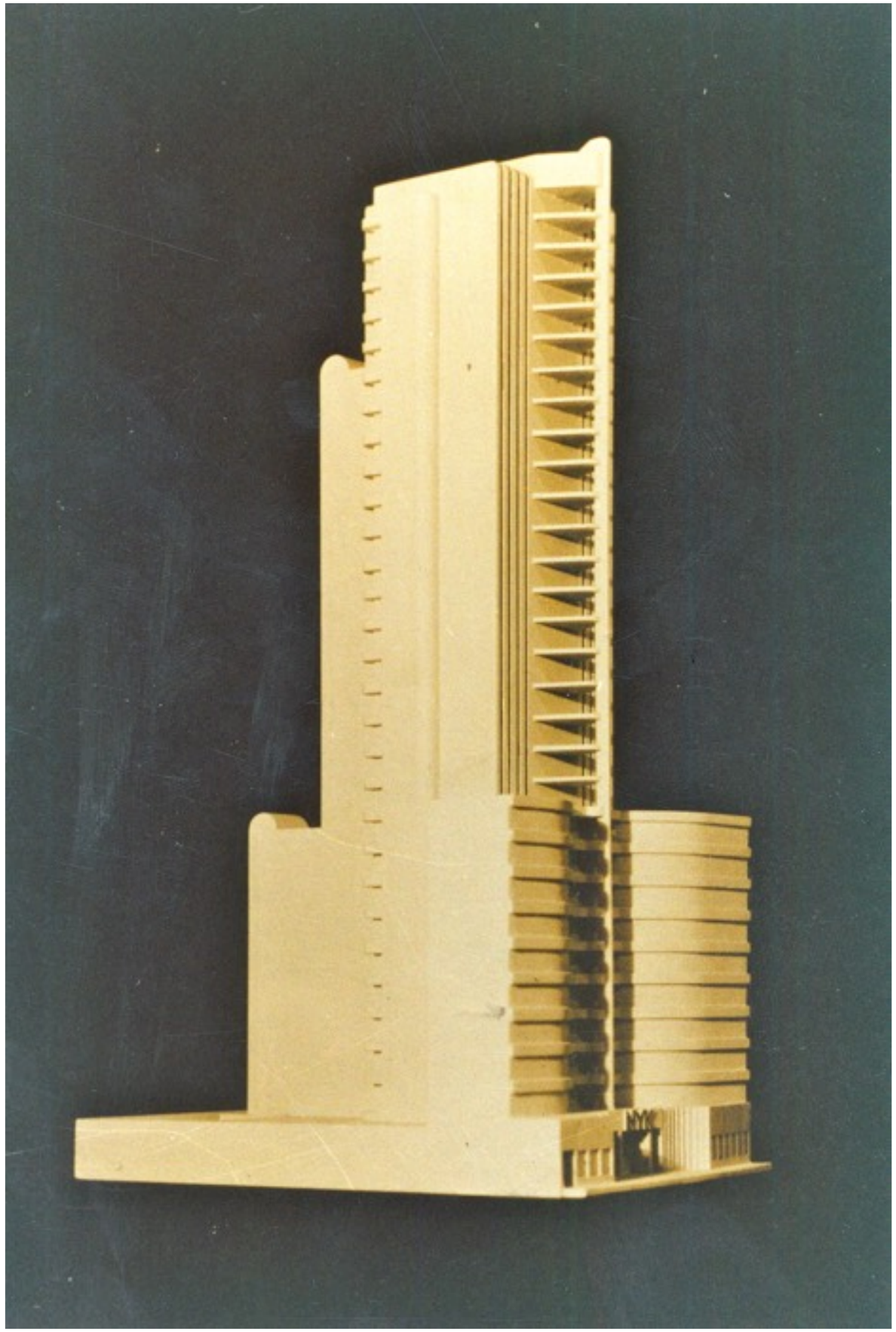
Extraordinary Shanghai. Sweating rickshaw coolies, stinking in the sun, soaked in the rain, dying without hope. In halcyon days, they could even serve the wealthy as a personal substitute for execution. Condemned by some high displeasure, the wealthy man could take one of these coolie ‘animals’, give him one night of paradise - of wine, of food, and his pick of the concubines – in exchange for his place in the final garden of Execution. This one night of complete joy was worth a lifetime of work. Then, in the Chinese manner, everyone was satisfied. The court, that someone had paid the penalty; the police, that someone had died; the coolie, that he had lived but once. After the execution, official photos are taken to ensure that the correct man has died. This is merely insurance. The Chinese are fond of all forms of insurance.

Then there are the great bearded Sikhs - policemen, watchmen or commissionaires. Leaning across the desk, with the pleading eyes of a child: "Sahib, I want leave tonight". When you tell him that he can't have it, in a deep voice he explains, "Sahib, my friend go to India tonight and I must see him". You let him go, telling him that he must not come in drunk, to which he indignantly replies, "Sahib, me no drink". Later, he is helped into the station as tight as a lord. But they are faithful and true gentlemen. Unlike in India, they feed well here. Food is the centre of their life and they hate like poison the rationing quartermaster. So here, in Shanghai, they put on weight. It is only when they go on long leave that they come back like lathes. In Shanghai they are the money lenders of the district. Strange may be their accountancy, for they lend their money to the Chinese at terrible rates of interest. They all go home rich. Where else, but in Shanghai, could the profession of money lender and policeman go hand in hand?

Last night, at the Swan, down in one Chinese area, there was a party of Americans sitting at one of the tables. The people you are going to deride are usually Americans, even though a more chivalrous race I do not know. They were drunk. Not maudlin, but uneducated drunk. There was a woman with them, and she was berating the men. Not one, but all of them. She moved from one to another and after quite a long time of her "lousies" and "swines" and "call yourself men," one got up and started to pull her around. You couldn't call it a fight. They were too drunk to do anything except aim blows. With a swing, one beer mug broke the glass top of the table. Another swing, and one went through the glass door. After a while one of the men, who had been sitting, rose up and said very loudly that no man was going to fight his wife. He promptly took her by the arms and embraced her. But all he was trying to do was to push her outside, through the broken doors. He broke another table as they went. After he came back, he was very affectionate to the man from whose fighting clutches he had taken his wife. You could see him saying, "you know old man how it is". For a while, there was peaceful drinking before the woman came back. She had tired of sitting in a rickshaw berating the humorous blank face of the coolie.

I went to Tokyo some time after this. It was the last country I expected, or indeed wanted, to see again after the trouble I had experienced on the "Karoola". I travelled the same route I had used when deported from that country as an undesirable. This time my luggage was prominently labeled, 'ARCHITECT', and being on Japanese business selling a large scheme to the NYK Shipping Line, I was guaranteed an easier journey.

Chapter 16



CHAPTER 16

The ship was the usual small express liner operating between Shanghai, Nagasaki, and Kobe. Two, the "Shanghai Maru" and the "Nagasaki Maru", did this trip twice each week. By tradition, the name "Maru" is always used for ships in Japan that are of sufficient size to require at least a sail for propulsion. Mine was a very active ship indeed, pitching and sliding into the rollers of the Yellow Sea in an extremely youthful manner. Her speed of about twenty knots assisted this movement. Allegedly powered by surplus English destroyer engines, these two ships from Scotland were credited with 34 knots on trial.

The manager of a Shanghai Printing Works was my cabin mate. His Japanese wife and family occupied the adjacent cabin. He had booked for his long service leave in America seven months earlier. On his way he was to spend some weeks fishing in Japan. There was something on his mind always. Where East and West join there can be success in many ways, but in later years there can be problems. Most Eastern wives are lovelier than western; they are more submissive, and are always charming and affectionate and grateful, and they are always capable managers. Their whole training is for marriage. But there is that something, somewhere, all the time different. Different thoughts, different characteristics.

A Parsi Indian dined with me. He was full of all the woes of his country and of the Indian Constitution and the manner in which England managed Indian affairs. He was scarcely grateful that this control permitted him to securely run his cotton business and take advantage of trade with Japan. Loyalty there was, yes; but when it came to payment in any kind, just blankness. His one ambition for India was that the Indians be permitted full financial control. And it was apparent from his expression whom he expected that to advantage.

At Nagasaki, reputed the second best harbour in the world, seven ships were on the Mitsubishi slips and more being refitted in the docks. Matted curtains hid them from photographers who might, by some incredible method, circumvent the Japanese signs everywhere: "FORTIFIED ZONE: PHOTOGRAPHING etc ARE PROHIBITED HERE". There were notices also inside the cabin: "While in port please do not place your shoes outside the CABIN. They are liable to be lost." Along this coastline roam grey ships of war, escorting, like wandering dogs, ships into and out of port.

Our ship was most desperately clean. Though several friendly cockroaches clambered in and out of the basin, only scurrying for the cracks when one unexpectedly turned on the light. Even the deck hands wore gloves when handling the ropes and deck gear. And, to protect the admittedly white decks, lengths of carpets were spread as the wire hawsers were dragged out for mooring. As one entered the ship, slippers waited for every passenger, and one was asked to use these in order that the linoleum, carpet and deck might not become damaged by hard heels. Their ships are coaled at every port by small baskets, passed by hand with incredible rapidity. Some of the coolies were women. I estimated that a basket went in almost every second, each holding perhaps half a cubic foot. Four sets of coolies were in operation, two from the wharf and two from adjacent barges.

As usual, the passport, customs, and other petty officials were unique in their rudeness. No other nation has quite the same knack in rendering you helpless with indignation. Protest is worse than useless for you are NOT WANTED. And, what the hell. In their verbal cross-examinations they will go back fifteen years in their requests for personal history, all carefully checked with the voluminous dossiers which one is required to hand in duplicate to the ships officers.

The night train from Kobe to Tokyo gives a rough ride. At Sannomiya, where you board, the train waits for 30 seconds. My careful booking by wireless from the ship had a humorous result. My fellow sleeping berth passenger was an Indian woman of some considerable cast, judging by her numerous and agitated retinue. As I had already gone to bed, it was with considerable asperity that I informed the conductor of my feeling as I moved to another carriage. He understood not a word I said, as he hissed and smiled and

bowed. It is usual to find a member of some other sex sharing the same sleeping compartment, although they are more careful now that they understand more the foreigner's minor manners.

Under the Sannomiya station, at a tiny crowded Japanese cinema, I saw the Coronation, in colour and in English. All other shows were in their own language, or some other foreign tongue, with Japanese characters marked along the film in terse picture-grams. There seemed little enthusiasm at anything except Disney's Mickey Mouse. Then there was a subdued hum of approval. It is rude for the Japanese to show emotion. All that is permitted is a rather horrible and most noticeable hissing sound, used as a sign of pleasure, embarrassment or respect, no one is sure which. In the morning, I found the loveliest building in the world: Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel of Tokyo. In the afternoon, I played golf at a Japanese club accompanied, in the pouring rain, by the polite Secretary. Apparently he joined me because the Imperial Hotel had sent me to his club. The Japanese caddies were marvelous and the course fairly interesting. Yet I missed my Chinese boys and their happy smiles. I stuck to the oriental luxury of the morning papers with orange juice precisely one hour before I ever intended to stir. It was just for the pleasure of lying in half consciousness thinking what I would see if I but rolled over.

That evening I went to the Japanese theatre opposite the hotel. There was the peculiar smell of crowded Japanese. It was a packed house with a stage at least twice the width of a western one. There were side wings that extended half way down the aisles. These formed stages for scenes of different localities. An incredible number of choruses could take place at the one time. With one intermission, the show lasted four hours - 6.00 to 10.00 pm. One scene was a miming parody of a western wedding, complete with morning suits and camellias. The mumbled responses of the bride and bridegroom amused the audience immensely. The actors and actresses seemed half formalised Japanese dolls to the eyes of a crude foreigner.

It was natural that the next evening was spent in the Oshewara, or red light district. It was all rather like that of Osaka, even to the plots of irises and gladioli in the centre of the roadways. Some places looked perfectly charming, with the suggestion of bamboo gardens, paper houses and lanterns swinging above little pools. Some miles south of Tokyo, near Kamakura, sits the statue of Buddha. There, in the deep shadow of the entrance gate, the priests have placed a request to foreigners to revere the ground that, for generations upon untold generations, worshippers have come to bow in reverence. Diabutsu itself is of metal, worn and beautifully mellowed to a dripping green bronze. Seated, with knees outspread and unfolded hands, the god looks down upon the bowing throng. Old ladies and old gentlemen murmur prayers, rising only to throw some copper into the receptacle that surround the base. Incense weaves slowly upward. The worshippers wash at a fountain before they approach the god. Young children are taught reverence and bend their childish figures with their elders. The common feeling is that the moulded face spells inscrutability, but there is an odd sense of smugness, feminine in nature, which is peculiarly out of keeping with the worship. The lips are those of a small minded egotist (3) , and at the rear, all illusion is lost by the wide flung iron shutters which disclose sightseers climbing within to see the view.

A little further on, heralded in startling neon signs, was VIRGINWOOD. Inside was arranged as a complete ship. Even the boys dressed as sailors. As a guest entered, a ship's bell rang loudly, and through a microphone was broadcast a description of the person entering. It was in Japanese, so the foreigner never quite knew what amused the geisha girls so much. There was the usual sake, and the affectionate girls sat with you administering to every immediate want. In Oshewara, some of the houses hang little red bags telling that virgins were in stock. Although this lent distinction to any house, only the wealthy merchants could afford the luxury. In Shanghai, by contrast, it is possible to obtain one for $150, with her undivided services for ten days. Usually these girls come from the country districts and are sold to the town housekeeper for two years. Their parents receive two to

three hundred yen. A different name is naturally adopted, so that recognition after is rendered more difficult. When the girls go back, theirs is a honourable return. Soon after they are happily married. Indeed, they are considered eminently desirable as a wife.

Down through Yokahama, after eighteen miles of terrifying traffic and in the half light of evening, I walked along a beach. After calling at the cafes labelled HOME and MON REPOS, I came upon one lovely place overlooking the sea beyond the pebbled beach. There it was that I met, Myecho, danced with her and fell beside the sea, with the moon flinging silver showers across the matted floor. The noise of the waves filtered across the tiny garden between the house and the little moonlit beach. At that place, Eurasians looked and danced and giggled like the girls one sees at private dances in respectable suburbs in any town. As charmingly dressed as any debutante, they are slightly more modest in manner. Myecho was lovely in every way.

Before I left Tokyo I had several lazy days at The Imperial Hotel. Waiting for instructions, I spent these lounging in the sun and shade of the inner courts, upon the flagstones bordering the trout pools, watching the fish and thinking mostly of nothing. It was a period of gestation. I would lie and wonder when it would all be over. I thought I would be happy to settle down somewhere in Melbourne, for I could conceive of no other place where I am quite so much at home or where I would rather live and work. The standard house has no attraction whatsoever. The matter of making money was becoming even of less importance. I wished only to have sufficient architectural work to prove interesting. I had early on discovered that no particular type is necessary. There can be as much intrinsic interest in a cowshed as there is in a large house. It was, I thought, primarily a question of quality and chastity.

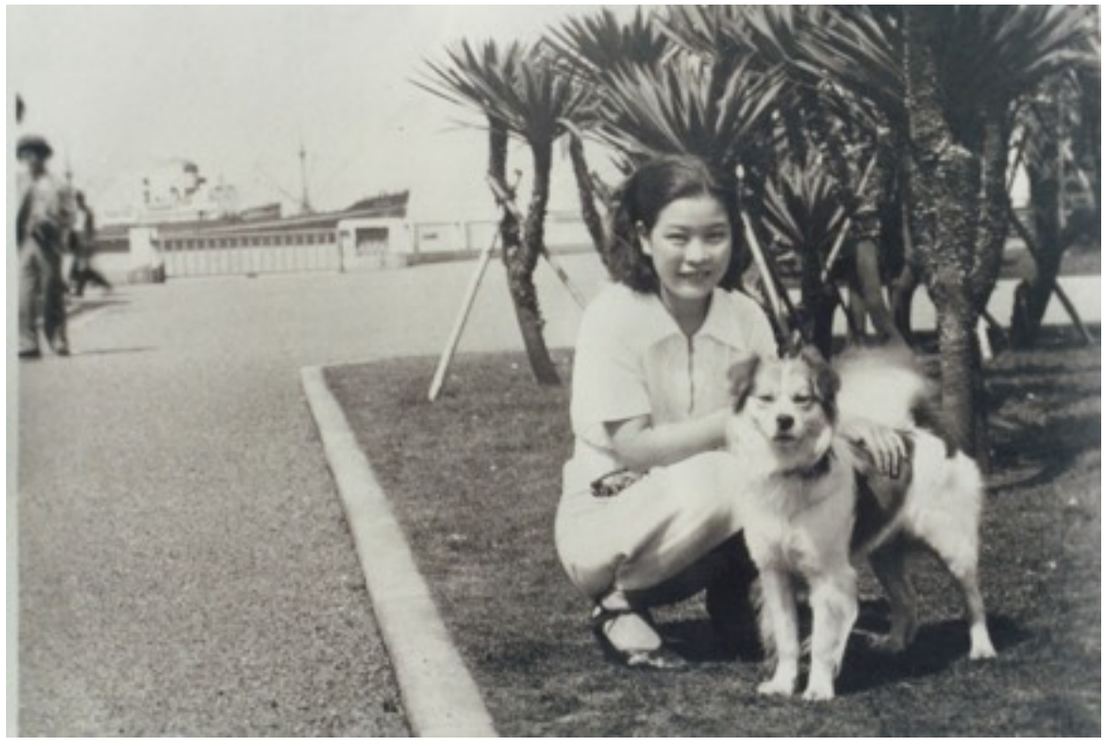
The place where I would be content to settle should be facing the sea, and with a frontage down some rocks to the water. Then there must be some cliffs; and there must be desperately torn country with rough gullies, creeks and mountain crags, even though their scale small. And the boundaries of the property out of sight. The only place that completely fulfills these requirements, however, seems to be near Sydney. West, somewhere along the road from Bulli Pass. Down the East side of Port Phillip Bay there is nothing. Down the West there is nothing till well past the bay at Cape Otway. All that is too far out of town. The only thing seems the division of life between the usual town flat, of which I am heartily tired, and this country place.

And on that mythical site I would build slowly a house. More a colossal room facing the sea, with glass walls that would slide away to a wide patio, shaded for half its width by an overhanging, near flat roof. Then there would be odd cubicles that would be the sleeping quarters, plenty of shower rooms, and plenty of sanitary units. The kitchen would be a passage and the dining room merely an extension of the living space, separated on occasions by a sliding curtain. The floors throughout would be of large soft coloured tiles, matching those of the patio, with plenty of large thick rugs and skins scattered across their flatness. All colours would be dull and drab. There would be one huge fireplace and bookshelves would form walls where necessary. The external appearance of the house would be a combination of concrete and bricks. There would be no painting at all. The steel windows, being metal sprayed and left natural in zinc, would weather indefinitely. There would be no air-conditioning or central heating. There would be little except the views and the garden. This garden would grow slowly into the house, and it would be a natural thing, so unlike the average garden as to be difficult to describe. Only native shrubs will preside there, flowers will not be cultivated but they will appear, in a purely fortuitous manner, from season to season. There would be many rocks and trees of all sorts. There would be no lawn in the accepted sense, and paths would also appear fortuitously. I would have the Imperial Hotel in mind always, with its incredible variety of natural things. There would have to be fruit trees and vines of grape and passion fruit, but they would not be cultivated. There would be lemon trees and orange trees and those of apple, peach, pear, and apricot; there would be canes of raspberries and blackberries, and patches of strawberries. None of these would be in an orchard, but rather all over the place like a mad woman's breakfast (4)

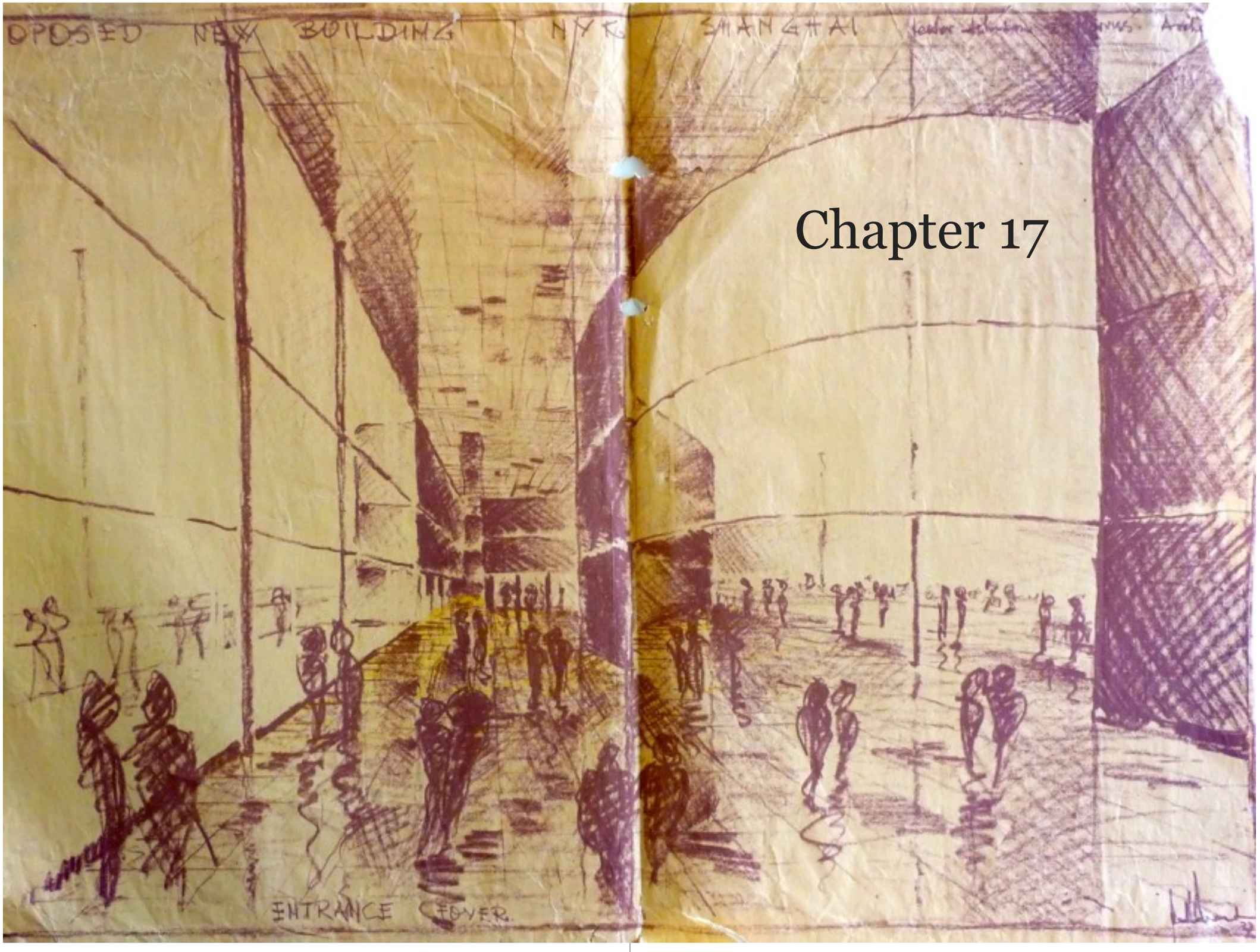
Perhaps one site could be found around the river valley beyond Heidelberg. But there would only be the river, without the cleanliness of the sea. There are thousands of sites along the coast of Queensland. Many of the islands off the Barrier Reef would be perfect except that proximity to the office. Along the coast between Mornington and Dromana there may be a place like this. But there again, one feature is missing - the small mountain range (5)

The Japanese directors would come to no immediate decision. They knew the war with China was due; I didn't. The train called the Fuji, travels from Tokyo to Kobe. From three in the afternoon to twelve in the evening, it is a joy. Punctual, as Japanese trains are, little booklets are issued to each traveller with the time marked pictorially to the minute, and with a brief description of what to expect from the train window. The sacred mountain, Fuji, was shy that afternoon. From the comfortable armchairs and wide glass windows of the observation car, at the rear of the train, only the slopes were visible under a soft heavy crown of clouds. The tunnel opening faded away for some twelve minutes, or five miles. It is allegedly straight, but a slight turn moved the speck of white light out of sight just before distance robbed the eye of the ray. The Japanese are rightly proud of this train. It dives in and out of tunnels, and tiny beaches dip deep into the hills over the tunnels. The rice fields pattern the small flats and climb in level shelves over the smaller hills. It was just before the Tanna Tunnel that we had the extra engine push behind the observation car. The close black panting hotness dominated the glassed car. It seemed the very breathing dragon the peasants believed it to be. Uncanny, in the dusk it slid away when the slopes subsided. Along the track were flat vines, not in a series of rows climbing fenced battens, but as a level field of green. The pear, peach, and vines contrasted with the green tea plants and there were persimmons, strawberries, and mandarins.

The Japanese towns seem unaffiliated with this country. It is said in Japan that the cherry blossom is the emblem of dying knighthood, but there is little of this dying to be seen in the average inhabitant of the main towns. The atmosphere is very Western indeed.



Myecho. At the Osaka docks.



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Interior design of the entrance foyer. NYK building. Conceptual scheme and drawings by Best Overend.

CHAPTER 17

On my return,the great Yellow River welcomed the ship miles before the land became visible. The sea lost itself in the great yellow flood, and the waves were only white when they broke against the ship's side. The chanting of the coolies, as they carried their loads, was as enchanting and as distinctive as before. The three notes balancing one on the other in unexpected breaks, all with a fascinating monotony and strange gladness.

The Englishman and myself went to visit Mah Lih at the Union. Lightly flowed the wit, the dice were clean and Sah Lih as beautiful as any Japanese. Mah Lih was glad to see me back and most of the drinks seemed on the house. After two or three hours we took rickshaws to Jock's, in Nth Szechuan Road, going down between the great iron gates separating the Chinese city from the International Settlement. There we had more, much more, and Daisy seemed very lovely too. Her clever eyes missed nothing. I told her I was to have her the following night and not to bother about me; find someone more worth her while. She wouldn't leave, so that cemented the arrangement. I didn't go upstairs, but the Englishman did with Bessie, a rather masculine Chinese full of fire and life. They all adopted awful English names. She it was, who always took the part of the male when two, or perhaps three, girls danced together in front of the tall mirrors between the windows looking down on the garish roadway. Dancing with only that magnificent wickedness that woman can; clenching together, rocking backward and forward and from side to side until one broke off jerking. Then the others threw her down on the floor to strip her. That happened some time every evening. Perhaps they did it because they were bored, or perhaps to try and arouse the boys at the bar. The participants and their sisters loved it, and there was a strange atmosphere of good wholesome fun that was murderously incongruous when you really came to think about it.

As I had promised, the next evening I went to see Daisy, that girl with the eyes that so intelligently surveyed her particular world. She had a body as slim and as terrible as a marching army with banners, and in the cool dusk of her room, and in the wide depth of her smile, there was death; one of those lovely deaths only known to carefree travellers. That morning, Ambrose was complaining of the strong control his number one boy was gaining over his affairs. After his general complaint that he felt foul, his boy stated blandly: "Master, you drink too much". At that moment, and for the past few weeks, I had been terribly in love with Daisy. To anyone else the name applied more to savouring the cow yard than of lavender sheets. But Daisy was a delicate and fawnlike combination of lightning upon a spring evening, and a green reed in a morning pool. That she had, beside me, at least seventy lovers a month was as nothing, for she appeared to wait for me alone. Daisy earned a lot for a Chinese girl, two hundred dollars a month. Her manager took two out of the five dollars charged. Her wide bed was covered with a film flex of bamboo sheets. When it is as hot as only a Shanghai hot season could be, a hard feather bed would have been unbearable. The one fault of this form of sheet was the possible damage to incautious knees. There is a vulgar Shanghai expression for a man who limps during these few months.

Some nights when Shanghai was wet, and when it rained it was wet, there seemed nothing to do. The Chinese boys walk in the rain with large umbrellas. Wearing a pair of underpants and a singlet, they seemed quite clean and sweet. This they are not. Have you ever been behind a sweating coolie in the fairly light garlic laden breeze in a rickshaw? It was on these nights that all the tiny bars down in Hongkew were deserted. The beggars came in and pestered you with their fortune telling and their tiny girls who were suffering from consumption. They told you that all foreigners are plenty rich and they have more money than they know what to do with. And it is on these wet nights that the bar boys forget their stern resolutions to keep the bars free from these hangers on. You can't blame them. Behind the clean brown bar it was dry and there was a comfortable smell of happy humanity that permitted the milk of human kindness to seep out just to that small extent. And it was on those nights that all your friends seemed to be suffering from the night before, or the week before. You went from bar to bar, and from place to place, looking for that little Nippon girl to whom the gods had given the right sort of smile and the right sort of body and the right

sort of room to laugh at the rain. It was her place that the beer was cold and the glasses were long and there seemed plenty to talk about and plenty to do.

The wet canvas cover to the rickshaw swung against your legs and you cursed. That meant your pants would have to be pressed again in the morning, and your shirt would most certainly not last another hour. The brown yellow river swirled past as thick as ever. It was only occasionally that the rain in the summer lifted it to the Bund. Then, in the spring, there is always danger. Yes, she will sleep with you and she will marry someone, in due course, and become the best sort of wife. She will then forget her past. Her husband will be proud to have a beauty for a wife and she will never pretend to be his equal. No matter how poor they will be, there will always be someone poorer to act as maid. And her life will be spent for his pleasure and comfort. At the wedding the guests will drink and will say in their own language "a son soon please". This will happen. Why insure for your old age; you will always be welcome in your son's house.

If you come to China, beware of your boy. If you begin to bandy words with him, as man to man, he will still call you Master and will look after you body and soul. But he will criticise your underwear and your wardrobe. He won't have your clothes repaired because he wants you to give them to him. He will probably wear all your things while they are at the laundry. He will bring the paper in with the morning, and ask you how the war is going, and he will tell you, with plenty of pantomime, how he has taken his family out of Chapei in case the Japanese guns start again. He will tell you how strong the Chinese are. He will tell you that it is his considered opinion that the Japs are frightened. Why behave as though they want to fight everybody? The white man doesn't show fight because he knows that he can beat everybody. He doesn't have to try. It is then you realise what suave and natural diplomats these people make. This doesn't stop him from being extra sweet towards the end of the month when cumshaw is anticipated. He will hurry to place the small chair in front of the armchair when you get in for your gin and lime at night. When the Master relaxes he will think what a good boy he has.

In the shadow of the steep girders of Garden Bridge lurk the beggar boys. With ragged smiles, ragged flesh and rags, they prey with wile upon the passer by. They rush out into the traffic, hail you with a "Hih Master", and take hold of the rickshaw prongs in front of your boy to help him up the slope to the peak of the bridge. This one for cash, and they didn't mind delayed payment, one bit, if you passed regularly. The coolies pay no attention. I'm sure they get their share, for their stand lay just the other side of the bridge. From that vantage point they shouted and yelled to attract your attention as your legs appeared in view above the steps of the hotel lobby. As you climbed on board they all shouted and yelled again, passing their comments upon your identity and probable ancestors to the lucky puller. The beggar boys are an organized gang – they carry a Thompson Submachine Gun – and woe betide the rickshaw man who tries to get your custom after they had looked after you for some months. The thirty dollars you paid out each month, for the privilege of an armchair to and fro the office each day, was theirs. It would have been cheaper to have your own boy and car - half the cost - but you would have lost the fun of exchanging comments and curses with the different boys. There was also the element of chance as to how fast your man was going to be. That was always one complaint they were never able to understand. As you began to get under the skin of these people, began to understand their swearing and gutter talk - so filthy and vulgar that only millenniums of culture could have brought it to such a pitch of perfection - you realised it was the loudest man who won the argument. With invective, shouted into each other’s eyeballs, the louder and hotter the shouting the more face lost by the one with the least voice.

Your office boy – forty years of age and with four wives - wanted to do things for you because you were who you were, and he liked you that way. And in this zest for service, the number one would show his superiority before the crowds of other office boys - down to the hordes of coolies - by hovering round as you signed your letters. He would open your new ones. He would permit no other person to lick yours shut. For in this business of the Master's well being there was security, and that tremendous thing ‘face’. And if you called and he

was not there or busy elsewhere and you spoke to say, number two, and gave an order to him, number one would come bustling in later to ask for the order all over again. He would show unmistakably that you might have had the common decency to wait for him.

The service in the English clubs was a pleasant thing, and the bar was a pleasant sight. Along its length lounged, and I use the word advisedly, the members. Very polished people, their white silk suits stood well cut and clean against the dark woodwork. This is an apparition of The Bar in Paradise. Go wild young man, as you should have done. Go to the East, and erect a memory or two for the days when you have settled down in that small suburban residence with the white hollyhocks and the neat lawns, or are all hollyhocks red? You would have drunk a lot of beer there. It was very light, cool and long. And there were at least forty bars to visit every Saturday, for a month of Sundays, without visiting one more than once. That meant if you had one in each place, which you would have done, you still had a clear head and happiness and hunger on Sunday morning, even if your brain may have seemed slightly fuzzy until after you had shaved. As for the spirit, it was taken only in the very best of places. There was such a thing as Hongkew whiskey. It was a poisonous fluid, bottled with excellent labels. Gin was a drug that the hardest head would sway after two neat. Even one would give you a horrible taste for the next day. Johnnie Walker Black Label with the soldered top - poured only one way - was filled, infernally, drop by drop. That took one full day a bottle. It was a big salary for a patient coolie.

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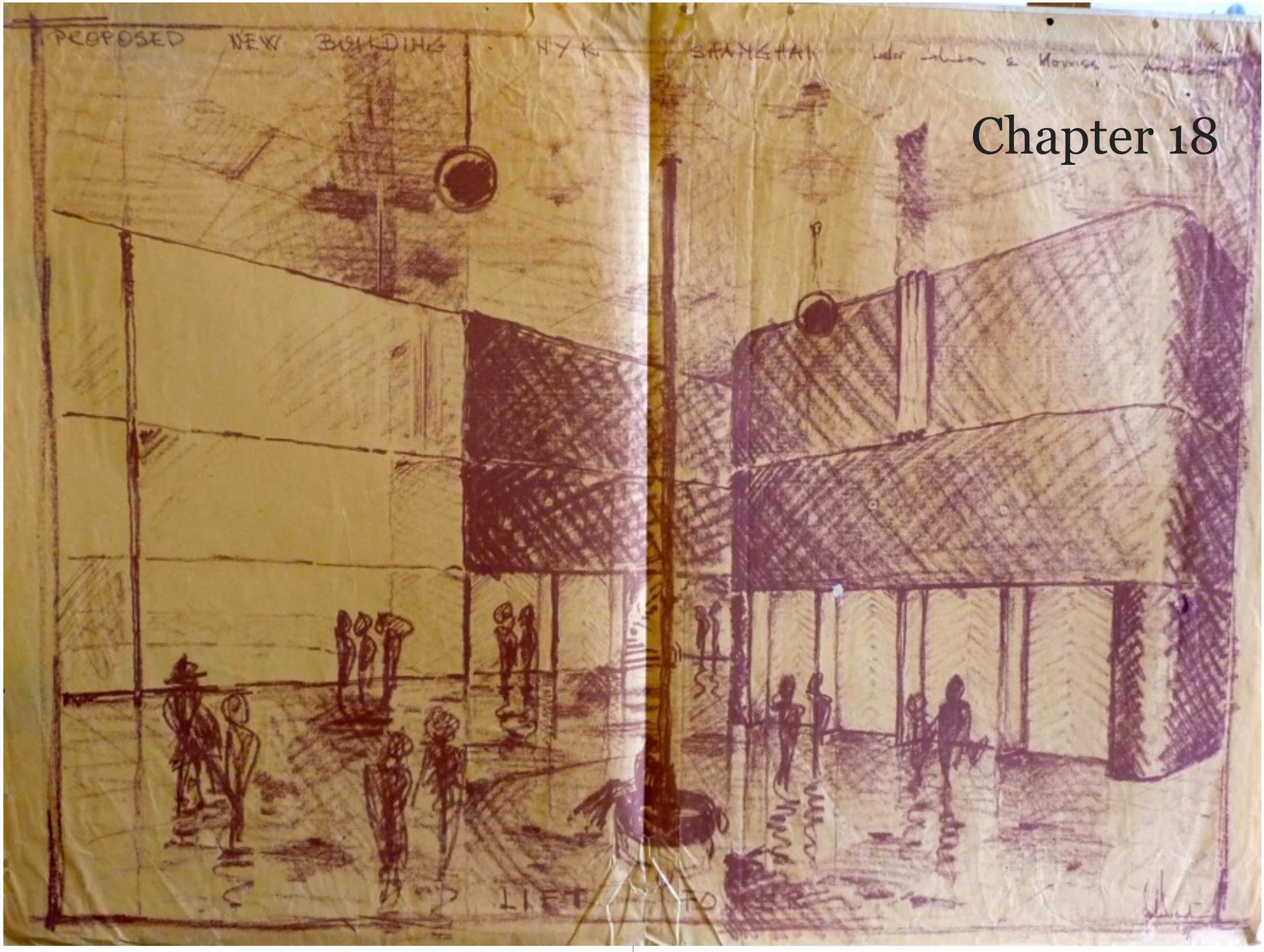


Lift Foyer. NYK. Rough conceptual drawing by Best Overend.

CHAPTER 18

Summer, midday. From The Shanghai Club bar we overlook a battleship moving in the current on her mooring. The ordure boats passed as the sampans tipped and swung violently in the little waves, pushed aside by the customs boat. Every now and then there might be that burst of crackers as a crowd send off, in Oriental style, some potentate. The Dollar Line Tenders call beside the Customs jetty. It is usually just after lunch that the tenders leave the jetties along the Bund, with the jolting jerking explosions of hundreds of large cannon crackers. The Central Government had passed the stage of executing recalcitrant generals. They sent them on a world cruise so that when they came back they are nothing. The crackers are strung under the iron roofs of the jetty and as one explodes it starts its neighbour. As background, there is a continuous mat of sound made from the smaller three inch bungers. The noise gives pleasure, occasionally it really startles, and the smell is the colour of the East.

A wedding, or a funeral, was also an occasion for this form of rejoicing. The small boy on the cymbals, with the larger one on the drums, not a wit exceeded in residual pleasure the elderly gentlemen with the enormous brass gong. These brass things had a note which literally burst within the brain and kept on bursting until it faded slowly away. They loved it, we loved it, everybody was happy. On the other hand, Japanese singing was quiet and was usually of the single note wondering and weaving in a manner that gradually one began to love and expect.

In the dawn, the huge fish lorries came thundering down Broadway with their exhaust sirens screeching. These burst like a shell, and in the slow morning mind, they approached with the whining of a bomb. When they had gone, the coolies began shuffling along to the Hongkew market singing their song of three notes. The variations and breaks that a good man can put into this musical panorama determine his popularity as the leader of the carriers. The loads are swung on a bamboo pole, concave side up, and cut with the grace of an aeroplane propeller. As the rhythms slide with the coolie, the load sprang and lifted and resting on his shoulder, just that period necessary for the carrying of weights over long distances.

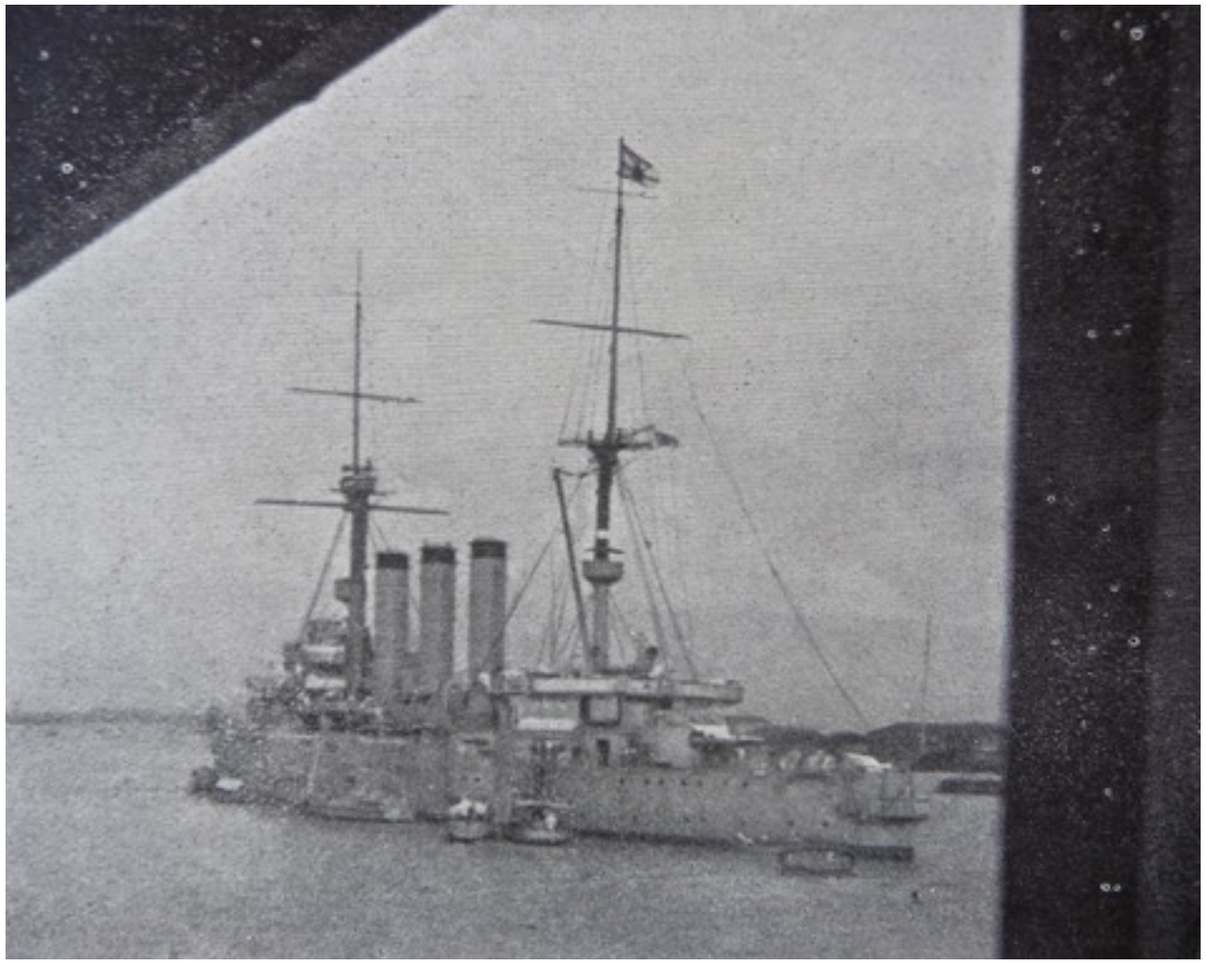
It is after really strenuous exercise that there is a complete enjoyment of cold lager. If it is possible to rid the whole system of all residual alcohol - and that is achieved by constant exercise with sufficient sweat to clean inside and out - you recapture the sweet tobacco of memorable drinks. There was that long lager after squash; you played for an hour without finally settling the victor. There was that first bottle in the tropics of Pasoreoan. Exquisite, after six weeks aboard a blazing bath of iron on it's way to the breaking yards at Osaka. After the grey tropical sea, you imbibe long and cool within the clean white walls and the fresh cut greenery.

In Shanghai there were women so fair, bravely fragile, and so beautiful that it hurt you to watch. It was better to become furtive with your glances. If you held them they burnt so within you that the worship was as ancient as that for the God of Fire. But as God had meant them to be, they flicked and faded so quickly you could forgive them all their vanities. Their enjoyment was a precious thing. That of the critic faced with something great. It was a privilege, and you would be foolish, indeed, if you took more. This you only learned with time.

Down the end of a lane, off Nth Szechuan Road, at a massage place called the Gate of Hope, the capable Japanese girl, Ilaru, told me that there seemed little reason why we shouldn't come to some private business arrangement. It was during the time when I was getting dressed, and she was sitting on the hard white bed drinking the last of my beer. She had a wide mouth and spoke excellent English. She was very affectionate and capable in every way. Her body had that delicacy and slenderness of the Japanese, yet somehow allied with a boyish breadth and flatness of fine shoulders. She said that she wanted a man twice a week. I felt rather non-committal, as everyone does, after a detailed massage. In any case, it was a mistake in most ways to tie yourself down, even though for the first few weeks it was very pleasant to be able to know precisely where you would finish up, and to know how pleased she would be to see you. Later, it becomes a drag of the worst sort. You become

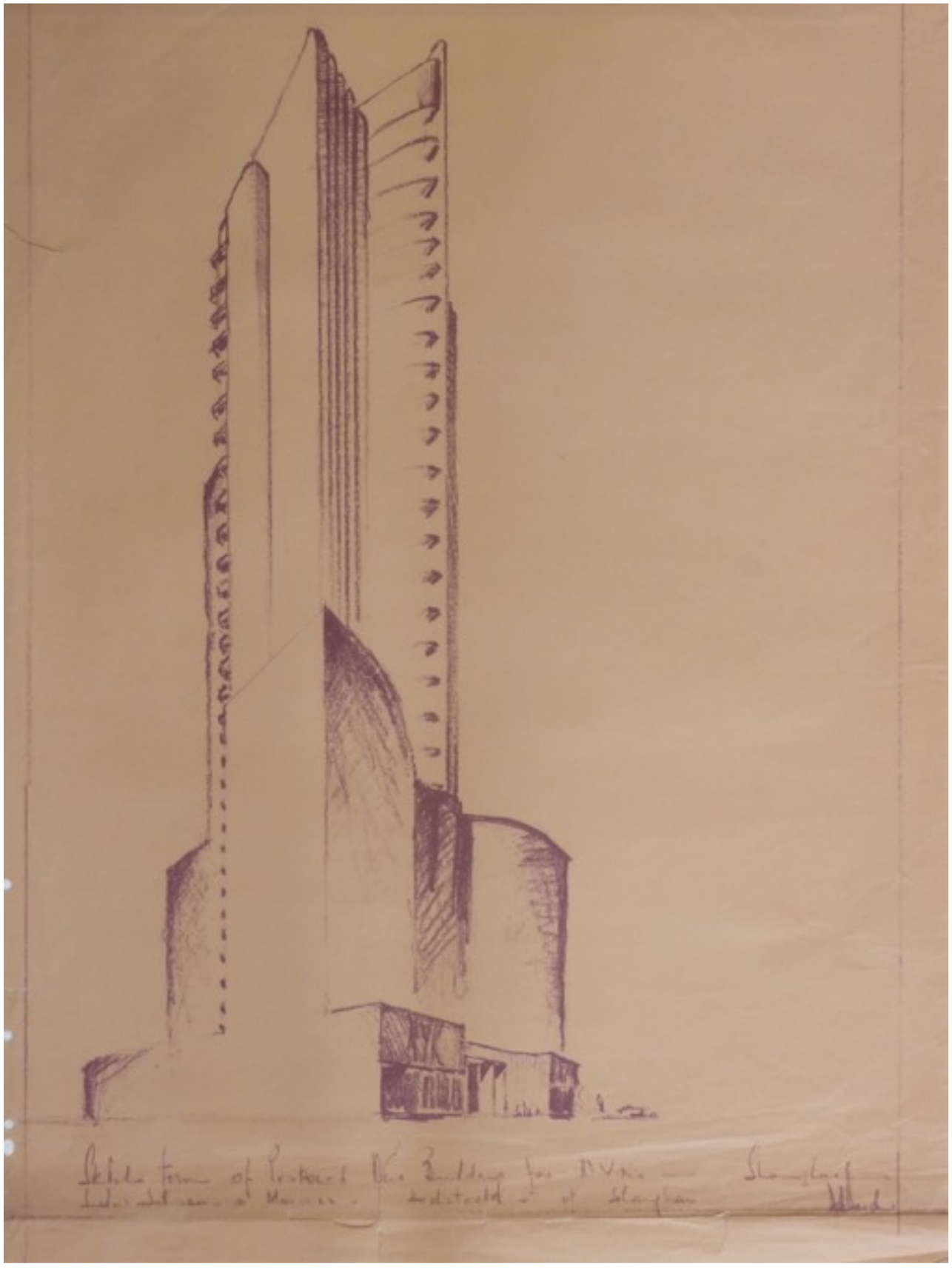
used to her, and she would probably conceive a genuine affection for you. She would send you presents of cigarette cases and kimonos and shirts to a material value in excess of that which you could spare her every month. Then she would probably lose her job, with the little independence she felt with a steady fellow. She would talk in a rude way to the manager, and might even stop away for a day to show this independence. No one would stand for that. Out she would go. You had to either help her find another place, or go to her too often; and she would tell you how lonely she was during the afternoons without the job.

She would not want to go back to Japan. You found that very few Japanese women did. There, whatever happens, they are beasts and slaves and their husband is the representative of God. They have to bow in every way to his wish. While a Chinese will sometimes be seen out with his wife, even though he would rather take out his prize canary in its carved cage for everyone to admire, the Japanese will not. His wife remains home. She produces precisely ninety-nine babies every minute for the nation's warlords and her Emperor. And if they are not sons, then, what does she think she is doing? How does she think they will live when they are old? Inter-twined with ancestor worship, Japanese youth will work and slave all their life to carry generations of relatives in the one house. It is only now that he is beginning to rebel against the inevitable. Naturally it is his first thought to have a son, to take over this burden as soon as possible. Until this fundamental form of family life is broken there will continue to be ninety-nine babies every minute. And Japan will remain in the vicious circle of unpopularity and the necessity for increasing economic penetration into foreign territories. That is, until someone stands up to her and breaks her run of victories. She remains unconquered and unappeased, as any traveller will tell you.



The Japanese Flagship, the Battleship ‘Idzumo’.
It was captured from the Russians in the 1905 War.
(source. *Oriental Affairs* Vol. 8 No 4.October 1937)

Chapter 19



CHAPTER 19

Of the salt of the earth are the members of the Shanghai International Police. They don't know it, and I hope they never do. Their strength lies in their isolation, their terrible scorn of the white and social Shanghai, their clubs and bars scattered over the Concession, and the manner in which the Shanghailander affect to treat them. Each is a commander of men - of the dark handsome Sikhs or the humorously lazy Chinese with their fans. They know Shanghai in a manner that is impossible to emulate. Their districts and patrols penetrate into every corner, every slum and lane, and their kindly and firm dignity is amazing to watch. Pity the white women affecting superiority should she be left in Shanghai when the Force is on holiday. A few of the boys are killed. There was young Slater, for instance. He was shot through the head with a Mauser bullet when he had baled up four armed robbers at the top of a flight of stairs. There were others. The breaking of flesh and bones is common. Their red riot vans are still, perhaps, the main deterrent to mob violence. Drawn from every nation, most are between 25 and 35. They leave, after five, eight or ten years service. Some take up rubber or tea plantations, others go to the Yukon for gold, or to South America for farming. Only a few go home. They lack but one thing: the careful cultivation of tradition, that peculiar attribute of the Senior Service. This is the fault of their leading men, it has nothing to do with the cosmopolitan nature of its membership. It has to be remembered that Shanghai itself is of all peoples. The lack of diplomatic backing, often with a consequential humiliation, renders their dignity all the more creditable. Their life and close association with the common Chinese people give them a broadness of outlook. This common bond is an unrealised strength.

I don't think that the people of Shanghai, however, are proud of them. They don't know them. They can't know them. But I think that this would little worry the boys. One remarkable thing about the Shanghai Police Force is the masculinity of its members. This is not always in bodies of men who are thrown upon their own resources. Their living quarters combine all amenities that fill a young man's leisure - the bars, the clubs, the tennis, the billiards and other oddments such as libraries. They must, and do, remain a little aloof from the rest of the Shanghailanders. It is this silent presence, incidentally, which is the strongest part of police methods the world over. As every entrant is taught, they are primarily a preventative force. Their presence alone should have a salutary effect. Illegal gatherings can be dispersed, without noise and without an order, by a uniformed member. When he has the respect of the inhabitants, it is only necessary for this uniformed man to walk towards, or stand on the outskirts of a gathering, for the whole to melt in the most extraordinary manner. The quality of aloofness always commands an unwilling respect. Being on call twenty-four hours a day makes segregation desirable and always assures companionship. And it might almost be said that drunkenness is unknown in these canteens. Certainly there is dicing for drinks - they drink hard and often - notwithstanding the various notices disallowing it. Their allowance for drinks is on a graduated scale according to rank, and worked on a monthly book. It is seldom, if ever, that a man is the worse for liquor. The journalists will know all this, for they are always with them in their bars. I trust that one day someone will write properly of their history.

The anniversary of the incorporation of Greater Shanghai is a time of great local excitement. The Chinese celebrated with their various lantern processions through the Settlement. In the Chinese Territory, where the imposing Municipal Chambers were built, the usual Mayoral Parade and reception are held. When the Japanese heard of this, they freely rumoured that the Chinese were to quietly kill some prominent Japanese resident. Naturally there was a concentration of Japanese troops in the area. To start another incident the Japanese sent two hundred ronins, or Korean loafers, to the Municipal reception. Actually the Chinese acted with promptness. Unexpectedly they arrested half of these people before their object was realised. The Japanese then turned up in force with twelve army trucks loaded with armed troops and circled the Municipal Square as a flagrant gesture of insolence. Again, the Chinese scored, for immediately arrived twelve Chinese armoured cars, complete with machine guns and troops. Each parked between a Japanese Army truck. Honour was

satisfied.

This was the day after the Japanese had sunk a Soviet gunboat on the Amur, and had forced, by diplomatic measure, the Soviet troops to evacuate the Amur Islands. After continual friction, bickering and actual fighting, the Japanese staged 'night manoeuvres' around the Chinese fort on the Marco Polo Bridge outside Peiping. Of course there were ample apologies, as mere politeness required. And it was during this evening, as we were sitting in the cocktail bar on the third floor of the Park Hotel overlooking the Racecourse and Shanghai, that the two million dollar godowns went up in flames. It commenced at eight, as we were sipping the Brandy Special with olive. The red glare seemed just across the Racecourse. The windows were rattling in the gentle evening breeze, and it looked as if the Shanghailanders were in for another grand dress-circle play. It seemed an omen, the shooting flames foretold of shell fire. Events were moving slowly and majestically to war, and we were the audience. Belligerent and confident, in the afternoon the Japanese demonstrated their force with troop-loaded army trucks. One soldier swung his loaded rifle at the head of my rickshaw coolie. The coolie ducked, for his head, if not his life. The troops on the truck were amused. We waited at the side of the Bund, in the International Settlement, for the Little Yellow Prussians to pass. And we were angry at them. It was some weeks before we saw actual fighting and killing.

Sah Lih received ten dollars, or about twelve shillings, every month. For this she had to arrive fresh and charming at the bar at five o'clock every afternoon, smile to every customer, be affectionate, talk, play dice, and generally sport with them until two in the morning. This happened every night of the week, Sunday included. She received in addition to her wage, her evening meal, probably worth thirty cents. That she only sold herself occasionally - and that, only to very old friends - was to her credit. Her gowns, smart fragile Chinese costumes, cost her two dollars each; and there were clumsy people who knocked over glasses of beer. Every now and then some new man would buy her a drink and she would have the standard port wine. It might have been port wine. For this he would be charged perhaps one dollar, and Sah Lih would receive a commission of thirty cents. This gesture might have augmented her monthly income to quite a degree, for all men are generous in a bar. Had not the proprietor made it know that he frowned on the custom, sensitive men might think that they had to do it, or unscrupulous girls might make a business out of it.

Before, she had worked at a Chinese chocolate factory. There she had received twenty-five dollars a month. However, in the factory there were no commissions and the foreman did not wish to pay for special privileges from the girls. It seemed, therefore, better for Sah Lih at the bar. At least she had one full meal a day. Now and then, when we were flush, we gave her two dollars to buy herself a dress. But she usually bought us a carnation each with a portion of it the moment our backs were turned. The flower girls were the old bar girls who had outlived their attractiveness and had to go from bar to bar selling little posies. Many of the girls would rather have a flower than a drink. The flower girls were the gossip carriers of the city. They carried the rumours, telling how each girl was getting on at each bar. The flower girls were usually lovely people - very quiet and wise. It was always difficult to see them come and go, for they stood near the door, in the shadows, in case the proprietor should think that they were worrying the boys. They stood until you saw them and beckoned them over.

They never pestered you. This was unlike the whining half white fortune tellers, who stood at your elbow if the boss was out and there was only a boy behind the bar. They talked to the air about their starving sick children, the wealth of the gentleman drinking and that the cost of the drink would provide his whole family with food for a day. While he whined he didn't look at you and you didn't look at him. You began to feel that you hated him because, what he said was all very true, if only he had a wife who was ailing and a little daughter in the hospital. So in the end you threw him twenty cents, without looking, and he fawned away to the next bar. It would be unwise to bawl him out, for he would be well in with the ronins and the loafers, who were ganged into territories. If late one night you were drunk, or asleep, in the rickshaw it might be just too bad what sort of accident happened. That is why it is illegal

for a rickshaw man to be seen with a man sleeping in his carriage. He must wake him up or tip him out.

The night beggar men always left a nasty taste in your mouth. But over the bridge during the day, up the slopes on either side, gathered the smaller boy beggars under one master. They rushed out upon the unwary white man being pulled in his rickshaw and pretended to assist the poor coolie with prodigious labour. It was all a monstrous fraud. You knew it and they knew it; but you smiled together at the joke and then they ran alongside hoping to embarrass you into giving them a copper or two. Murder was committed if any rival gang came along to muscle in on their bridge; the same if some gang of loafers tried to horn in on another territory.

It was the hot weather sickness that got you down along that Yellow River. It came up behind you and you woke one morning wondering what the devil was the matter. You felt so bad tempered and weary. You thought over the night before, and then over the few days before that, for some excess. And you couldn't think of anything in particular. Then you got up and tried to forget about it all. That night at dinner with the boys you were on edge and you felt jittery, even though you had wined and dined. It would be late that night, when you were trying to sleep, that you suddenly got the pain and you rushed for the bathroom and stayed for hours. If you left you only had to go back in a tremendous hurry. That kept on for a week or two. You got steadily weaker. It didn't seem to matter what steps you took, you couldn't regain confidence. You couldn't go out for dinner. It was advisable to eat in your own quarters. You tried dry toast and dried fruit. You tried aperients and gave up all alcohol. You had a thirst that seemed impossible to quench; you were even frightened to try to quench it with iced water. You still sweated, and what fluid you took poured out of your body. Your throat was dry like dead wood. Then one morning you woke with an astounding feeling of quiet confidence. When you got up you only felt weak all over, but that passed in two or three days, even though it was on the first few days that you celebrated your recovery. That was what a shot of a germ rather like dysentery would do. You would ask God to spare you that disease, all the time knowing that it was the constant neat brandy, and nothing else, which presented you with your life.

It can be hot in Shanghai; hot as only Shanghai can be. As it is said so often, it is not the heat it is the humidity. Actually, with the silver at ninety-five, the humidity is usually at the same level. The sweat remained upon you and did not dry. It is useless trying a watercolour, the washes won't dry even in twenty four hours. It means three shirts a day if you want to appear reasonably immaculate. The silk shirts of Shanghai are excellent. One bought a dozen or so of them. The custom was for your initials to be worked on the left breast, or on the left sleeve, either under a pagoda or on top of a sampan.

In these summer months Shanghai wives went, if they were wise, with the navy, to Weihaiwei, or to Tsingtao, or to Peking, or over the sea to Japan. This was a reprieve from the stench of summer, the pervading smell from the Whangpo, and a city teeming with four million people. On some nights the whole of China sleeps out, and the pavements, particularly the corners, were packed with sleeping forms. The Bund became a sleeping mass. The married whites try to find their youth at the air-conditioned cabarets, if they can afford them, and if they can't, there are the many bars. After a while you find that beer is the best drink to permit that necessary run of saliva. This enabled you to at least nibble at the peanuts freshly swept off their inner sunburnt skin by belting a pack of them wrapped in a towel on the bar counter.

These are the nights when China smells really as rich as she is. Even with the heat and unpleasantness you can never be uninterested in the Chinese child. There you have The-Child-The-God-In-One. His brown eyes look through you and you can see him smile within and there is not a flicker, only a little brown face and the still brown eyes and the thin black hair, so smooth over the bald head. Devastatingly unlike the pulling, wailing white child, they are unique. About them is the sense that man might still prove above the animal.

WAR

Roof top pose. Best Overend in the uniform of the Shanghai International Police Force, complete with baton and drawn .45 Mauser. The eight story building , on the Bund, was having a new flat roof installed by his employer, the Architectural practice, Lester, Johnson and Morriss.

CHAPTER 20

Japan made the first move on the conquest of China, and the ultimate domination of Asia. She also had in sight French Indo-China, the Dutch East Indies and India. This idea was flaunted by all the Japanese papers in China, let alone those in Japan. Japan wanted to fight then, because a recent tiff with Moscow, over the Amur River, had disclosed for the first time a Russian policy of conciliation - long thought of in these countries as the prerogative of the English. Conciliation is considered a weakness by Oriental people. Suddenly, Japan felt that Russia would not trouble her unduly along that frontier. There might be isolated clashes, yes, but those more in the spirit of sport than of national consequence. Japan wanted to fight then, because she knew that the nations of the Continent were concerned over the conflict in Spain - the maze of non-intervention pacts and the scrapping between communism and the various forms of fascism. She hoped that the Powers would pass over a small thing near Peiping. Her guess was good. Japan wanted to fight then, because for the second time in the history of her western imperialistic phase there was an integration of forces within her government. The army, the navy, the economists, the politicians and the industrialists had all been drawn together. Under the Premier, Prince Konoye, this was for the glory and protection of Japan and the defence of her Emperor. And Japan wanted to fight then, because she knew damn well that if she didn't, the harder it would be for her to retain any sphere of influence in China.

China sat along her yellow rivers and waited - some four hundred and fifty million people - more patient because of the yoke of the many invader pirates. But her younger bloods were almost hysterical. There were many societies for National Advancement and National Salvation, and there were many National Humiliation Days. China was reputed to maintain the largest standing army in the world, some two and a half million men. Although most of these were unarmed coolies, bugles blew in the school compounds around the cities, children drilled, young men paraded, and the great yellow country was slowly heaving and yeasting into a settled control. If only Japan had left her to rise alone, a little while longer. Chiang Kai-Chek - the welder, her 'deliverer' - had been having quite a lot of birthdays. Upon each anniversary, each of these enthusiastic societies presented him with a bomber, or a gun, or a pursuit plane. The boys in China were anxious to try these things out and were restive under the Japanese domination. They were becoming rather cocky. I had been to Japan a couple of times immediately before her decision to dominate China. Perhaps the most striking thing that permeated that lovely and delicate country was a tremendous regimentation. In an altercation with China it was that element which would determine the result. It might have been compared to the relative force of the one million ardent Fascists in Italy being able to dominate and sway the destinies of the forty million other residents. Ardent men will always control the indifferent. And Japan was a country controlled by men; for their ladies are as sweet and simple and affectionate as their country in cherry blossom time.

China has nowhere near this regimentation. Her people seemed agreed only on the desirability of national salvation, cumshaw, and a dislike of all things Japanese. My boy's voice - and he was a very pleasant and happy old bird usually - embodied a trembling ardour and an implacable loathing when he spoke of the Japanese: 'very bad men, always makee trouble'. The Japanese considered that they were the only people able to control China and the Chinese. This was anomalous when one compared the operation of the Japanese police force to others in the settlement. They did it in a manner neither admired nor emulated by white officials. The baton and the parade of armoured cars was the sword. How the coolies scattered.

The pregnant Orient was in travail. There was a modern idealism of progress and there was the imperialism of the nineties. The older and more peaceful philosophies seemed shouted down. The Chinese imperative was to promote their Humiliation Days by broadcasted threats to prominent Japanese residents. If China actually won, after enjoying this fooling with Japan, we all thought it would be amusing to see what would happen to the white man in China. Japan, as the world knows, fought and won in Peiping. She took, then, among

other things, the province of Hopei. It was aggression, it was imperialism, it was a bold policy and it was successful. This, also, the world knows. Now Hopei is a province of considerable value. The regions of wealth are Peiping, Tientsin and Paoting, all traditional Chinese cities with no fewer than 32 million people within 59,000 square miles. Naturally China was loath to lose the place. Most observers considered that the main reason for the Japanese aggression lay in the fact that Hopei contains almost unlimited resources in coal and iron. Japan would sell her soul for both these products. It was essential for her armament programme. As usual, effect came before cause. Her military junta acted before her diplomats had been able to find sufficient reason to convince themselves, let alone convince the rest of the world. The province is as large as England and Wales and lies beside the Yellow Sea. It extends almost to the Oriental Rhine, the Yellow River, and was perhaps one of the most important provinces in China. Since time immemorial, its fertility and favourable climate has supported a large population. Malthus would be able to explain just why. The density of population is 523 per square mile, compared to 347 in Japan, and just 2 in Australia. One could readily see why the change of status was of significance to China. Add to the large iron resources, mines producing gold, copper, lead , salt, and a half million tons of coal. Efficient Japan will obtain more.

Forget for one moment this mining activity. Hopei is primarily agricultural. Crops include wheat, millet and kaoliang (a Chinese sorghum). Livestock include mules and ponies, donkeys and water buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs, and the inevitable fowl. Some billions of eggs are exported annually from China. Most are sent to England for re-export to America as English Home Products. The controlling council had been frequently manhandled by Japan, although it was nominally under the jurisdiction of Nanking. Japan wanted to "overhaul" it, with a view to a complete severance from Nanking, Chian Kai-check and China. Tientsin went, of course, with Peiping and Hopei. Tientsin, with a population of two million, was the third largest treaty port in China. The four concessions were owned by England, Italy, France and Japan. Peiping, complete with the central Forbidden City - the former residence of Emperors, surrounded with concentric circles in the form of the Imperial City, the Tartar City and the Chinese City - was as famous as China herself. Here lay the Temple of Heaven, the Three Seas, the Temple of Confucius, the Lama Temple, and the Imperial Palace. All these things, indubitably Chinese, were lost to Japan.

But this annexation for 'political stabilisation' may yet prove dangerously fluid and hardly a means for economic co-operation. Waving their olive branch of tanks and military lorries, Japan will have to call loud and long before the Chinese will do more than profess friendliness. Her thoughts and deeds will be harder to control. There are still fortunes to be made in China. With growth in rail and road, there will be a tremendous surge of internal development as four hundred million customers begin to think about buying. Say what you will, this is one virgin economic territory left. In any case, if Japan wins, as it seems, you will find that it will be the Chinese, not the Japanese, who will sell them to the Chinese. From Australia to Vladivostok and from Tibet to America it is the Chinese who sell the beans, the tinned beef and the shirts, not the nationals and not the Japanese. But this, to an economist, is only a superficial point.

One of the most interesting things about this particular generation is the fact that we own nothing. We may go where we wish and we can do what we want and there is no one to say nay. More particularly, there is nothing that can tie us down to any one place. Gone are the days when there were family fortunes. There are a few, they are isolated, and there are too many peculiar moves in the world of things for anyone with an imagination to start building them up. We know now that it may be gone tomorrow, so what the hell. There is also the loss of family continuity - the breakdown of the discipline of marriage. In many ways we think freedom a good thing. We can think this now, we can certainly talk; but we have also sold our birthright, and the birthright of the sons we were to have had. Maybe, every now and then, we may think there is something in capitalism after all. There seems little in nationalism and little in socialism.

Chapter 21

CHAPTER 21

The 1937 play, "Celestial Fanfare", opened to a capacity house. This was a theatre of war, fascinating, mesmeric on it's audiences. It was also a free and magnificent show, and only a carping critic would complain of the relatively few casualties in the stalls. Shanghai is built along the banks of the Whangpoo, a river about 200 yards wide. The Bund follows this river, and along this magnificent boulevard are the main buildings of the business area. On this theatrical stage the river takes a sweep almost at right angles at the northern end, opposite the British Consulate. Here the Foochow Creek, crossed by the Garden Bridge, separates the Settlement districts of Hongkew, Wayside, and Yanzepoo from the International Settlement. At the southern end lies the French Concession, and moored opposite the warships of the Outside Powers. From the Garden Bridge, down to the confluence of the Whampoo and the tremendous Yangsee Kiang, the might of the Third Naval Arm of Japan is anchored. This is an almost an unbroken array – an armada of some eighty warships. These block exit and entrance, and protect the rear of the Japanese occupation of Hongkew, Wayside and Yangzepoo. The opposite bank to the Bund, a projecting point of land owing to the sweep of the Whampoo, was the Chinese territory of Pootung. This river front was lined with junks, or ship-building yards. Within, was an area of godowns or river warehouses. Beyond, was countryside, all smelly in the sun. Chinese batteries and machine gun nests scattered Pootung at that time. This was the stage. The fifth most important port of the world.

A gunfire engagement between the two forces always brought a nervous crowd to the streets entering the Bund. The boulevard was then closed to the public for their own sake. My office, a seat in the stalls on the second floor of a Japanese Bank building, had a grand view of the show. It was next door, but two, to the Palace and Cathay Hotels partially demolished by bombing with an enormous loss of life. Things usually opened with a spatter of machine guns from the Pootung shore. The bullets, rattling along the gunboats and warships, reached the wharves and Japanese buildings in Hongkew. You could see but little of the preliminaries. The Japanese ships lying along the wharf, opposite the Japanese Consulate building, soon spotted the position of the machine gun nest. With no warning there were suddenly enormous blinding flashes, and ear splitting sharp BANGS. This marked naval guns in action. They were firing at point blank range, about 250 yards. Fire, fury and destruction reigned for fifteen minutes, with the other destroyers and cruisers opening fire on the same spot from their close order downstream. Flashes marked, so to speak, the spots before the sound came. It seemed a miracle that the warships of America, Britain and France were not hit. Quickly, the flimsy buildings climbed in smoke and flame. It spread widely, sending gigantic volumes of smoke into the blue morning sky. With the slackening of fire, two Japanese patrol boats, with men crouched clearly behind the armoured machine gun deck emplacements, crept up under cover of the derelict ships tied off Pootung. Cautiously they began to investigate. The only sound was the roar of the fires. Suddenly, the shore machine guns, from what seemed like the middle of the fire, opened up again, but this time on the Japanese patrol boat. These sounded absurd after the large calibre naval guns. To the battleships they were as annoying as mosquitoes, well deserving the heavy hand. So, the enormous barrage, at point blank range, commenced again. Like bursting pomegranates, the larger more robust brick buildings behind broke open and burst into flame. Their precious contents now destroyed, it seemed impossible for anything to survive.

The first comic touch in this play was provided by the Japanese holing a high water tank. Standing amidst the flames, it was first hit near the top and then at the bottom, as though they were determined to empty the thing. Later, a different sort of sound impinged upon the observer's ear. The Chinese had apparently brought up a big gun, or battery, within half a mile of the river. Because this was carried out overnight the Japanese spotter planes had missed it. The gun began by shelling the Japanese warships, the spouts and explosions wandering casually over the water. Some actually came close to their target. Then, at this juncture, a new actor walked on stage. A large Japanese transport ship came into view round

the bend of the river. It was travelling at full speed. She seemed surprised at her reception, and dropped anchor with superlative coolness between the Japanese consulate and the one warship firing most rounds into Pootung. Because this point of the river was wider than the rest, most ships went there to turn. The transport proceeded to swing as quickly as I have ever seen ten thousand tons swing upon one anchor. Being under temporary cover from this craft, the Chinese machine guns started up again, with the shells landing really very close to the ship. But innocent as the transport ship appeared, no sooner had she turned she dropped ports fore and aft and opened up with large quickfirers. This further intensified the tremendous rolling thunder. She seemed hit lower down as she rested against the wharf.

With this screen removed the Japanese war vessels poured forth broadside after broadside, and the glass in the office window perceptibly hummed between the rattles. The Chinese shells climbed higher and higher until they found the Japanese Consulate building. The Chinese observer must have been in direct contact with his gunners, because they stayed there and began pounding the building. Great gouts and curtains of brick dust burst from the four storey walls, and up from the red tiled roof, as the shells fell and exploded. Here, for it was a Play you must remember, the comic waddled in. A tiny Blue Funnel tugboat, bearing a full cargo of sailors, together with coolies and minor baggage, was up for the day from the outlying ships. In common with the other English river boats, age and smoke made her flag entirely indistinguishable. But she steamed quite slowly and stolidly between the combatants, apparently blowing her whistle in the admonitory manner of a reproving old lady. I say apparently, because there were jets of white steam at her funnel. Naturally, the noise was drowned. Only could a hard boiled British skipper of the China coast do that and get away with it. Together with the other impertinence of the Chinese guns, this seemed incredible to the Japanese. Under the very muzzles of her naval guns was a Chinese battery precariously, if not efficiently, damaging their huge Consulate Building and their main wharf. Then the spoilsports, the planes, came over. The show had already lasted for two hours. Flying low, they dive bombed in an effort to locate the Chinese. To no avail, these people had already packed up under their bamboos for the day. They had no desire to disclose their position.

Foreign Minister Hirota placed various surveys before the Japanese Diet. They represented the official attitude on the Sino-Japanese war. The movements of Japanese troops was necessary for the "protection of nationals" and as a corrective to "Anti-Japanese feelings". The lack of control of subordinates within the Chinese army was also cited as the cause of various "incidents". But to no army could this later charge have been better levelled than to the Japanese themselves. Their leaders in the North - as well as those in the Southern and Central areas of China - had been extremely provocative. When all was said and done, it had to be realized that China belonged to the Chinese people. One got heartily tired of the importance placed on ‘‘incidents’’. As an instance, the alleged disappearance of the Japanese sailor in Hongkew, Shanghai, on the evening of 24th July, caused international comment. It even penetrated into the discussions of the situation in the House of Commons. In the course of my nefarious activities - which comprised the natural night life of Shanghai - I happened to be within a few yards of the ‘‘incident’’. The first realisation came with the clattering roar of a rather unusual number of armoured cars and motor-cycle machine-gun units. The Japanese drove frantically, they scattered the coolies, and they spread generous gestures of goodwill with their batons. One expects to see them two or three times an hour in that district 'protecting their nationals', and soothing 'anti-Japanese' feelings. But the constant roar of their passing was more aggravating than usual. This, combined with the activities of the Japanese Naval Landing Party and Artillery Units, stationed in Hongkew, held up all the traffic while vehicles were searched. It seemed scarcely diplomatic. And it was never established that the missing sailor actually existed. That is, until he finally appeared, several days later after having suffered from the effects of no more than an oriental wog. In the vernacular papers, the Chinese reporters placed the affair in a rather ribald nutshell. They called the northern war, the missing witness, and the missing sailor the father, the son, and the holy ghost. It didn't require the assassination of an Arch-Duke to start a war in China.

Chiang Kai-shek, and the Chinese government, were driven to a point from which they were unable to effectively maintain a policy of detachment. No matter how local they appeared to be, the affairs in the North seriously jeopardised their political existence. They had to take some step to try to make a nation. This was difficult, because the Chinese person is so ridiculously an individual. Any form of regimentation crazes him. And how can a war nowadays be run without an utter denial of the self. In contrast, the Japanese soldiers are soft-spoken, country people, deeply spiritual, and with a reverence to their flag. For them, individuality is the Emperor. Reverence for their superiors bind them into a unit against which the Chinese individualist must fail.

The coolies started moving long before the fighting started. Fearing another Chapei, the exodus from the Chinese city to the Foreign Settlement continued for weeks. It was amusing in one way. When our pioneers asked for territory in their own right, that piece of mud, Shanghai, was presented as a sort of superior Celestial joke. Now it was to this piece of mud that the Celestial looked for protection. The average Chinese probably appreciated the humour as much as anyone. In the offices there was excitement amongst the Chinese. Crudely printed Broadsheets, in red and black, sold hourly for one cent - about a sixth of a penny - and kept them informed of the progress in the North. At every street corner great bursts of 'red devil' crackers mingled with the booming of really big bungers. They put tremendous heart into the population. They also served to spread the news of minor victories. It was a form of wireless, spreading at 1100 feet a second, that is to say the speed of sound. As soon as one corner - usually a newspaper office - commenced with a large one tossed from the editorial window, the next took it up, and so the infernal refrain travelled in to the heart of the country. The amount of gunpowder so joyously expended must have been considerable. And this much at least may be said; it is the only manner in which that material may be used with the fullest of spiritual proprieties. It seemed really great fun, and quite the proper way to run a war


THE SUN, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER

SHANGHAI'S F

SKELETON AT WHEEL OF MOTOR CAR

Graphic Story By Young Man From Australia

SHELLS ACROSS ROOF

MELBOURNE, Saturday.

"SHELLS are screaming across the roof; fr
the sky. I thought I had seen
cool stores were burnt at Vi
left Melbourne, but th

SATURDAY, The Herald SEPTEMBER 11, 1937

War In Shanghai

A picture of the foreigner's life in Shanghai is drawn in this series of notes by Mr Best Overend, a young Melbourne architect who has been working in Shanghai for some time. The notes, sent by air mail, were written a few days after the bombing of the Palace and Cathay Hotels. This is the first of two articles.

By Best Overend
(No. 1)

THROUGH your bedroom window in the morning you can see the Japanese aeroplanes come down through the blue sky like wasps, and in a few seconds the sound of the dive reaches a high intense whine, finishing with a slowing drone as the zoom ends; and then there is a tremendous thud, roar and cr-r-r-rump, as the bomb or aerial torpedo explodes, and the

Barricades In Shanghai

STEELHELMETED JAPANESE bluejackets crouch ... The street was a shambles outside ...

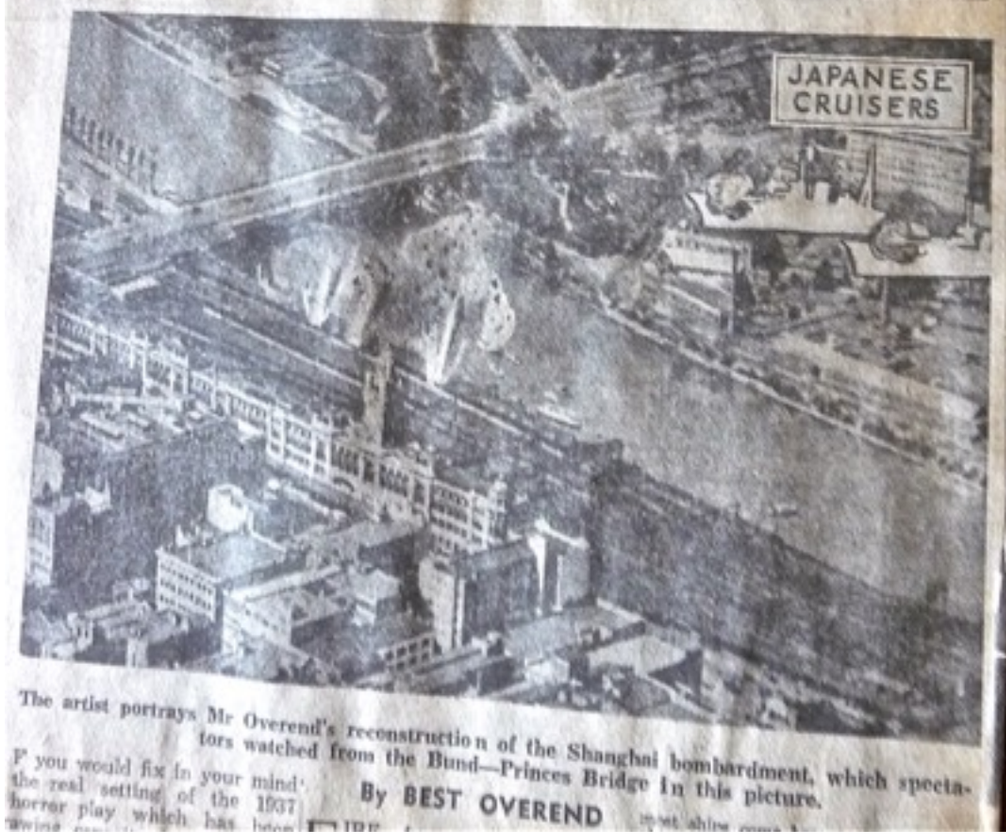
14 Shanghai Today

BOMBARDMENT, SEEN FROM THE "STALLS"

Australian Vividly Describes Shattering Of Shanghai

The point-blank bombardment of Shanghai is described with startling clarity by Mr Best Overend, a young Melbourne architect, who has been in the Chinese city since the beginning of the war.

He pictures the destruction as seen by spectators in the "stalls," a few hundred yards from the Japanese naval guns and their target.



The artist portrays Mr Overend's reconstruction of the Shanghai bombardment, which spectators watched from the Bund—Princes Bridge in this picture.

IF you would fix in your mind the real setting of the 1937 horror play which has ...

By BEST OVEREND

PLEASE RETURN

BEST OVERLAND 361 Collins St. Melbourne C1.

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Secret

MEMORIAL

Concerning Manchuria, Mongolia, China. U. S. A. & the World

Submitted by

GENERAL TANAKA

(The then Premier of Japan)

to

The Japanese Emperor

in

1927

田中併吞滿蒙奏摺

中國評論週報社印行

上海北京路五十號

11TH EDITION

Published By

THE CHINA CRITIC

50 PEKING ROAD

SHANGHAI, CHINA

5,000 (18-6-32)

IN CASE OF A PROLONGED WAR WITH JAPAN

English Version in Pamphlet Form

@ $3.00 per 100 copies.

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Obtainable from the

CHINA CRITIC PUBLISHING CO.,

50 Peking Road,

Shanghai, China.

EDITION

SPECIAL BRANCH
2 NOV. 1936
SHANGHAI MUNICIPAL POLICE

Chapter 22

CHAPTER 22

While Japan had been presenting to the world her control of North China as an inevitable and accomplished fact, Prince Konoye had been explaining to the Japanese Diet that the "punitive expedition", far from having as an object territorial aggrandisement, was designed to assure Chinese "co-operation in contributing to the development of Oriental Culture". To an unbiased observer it seemed unfair that the whole of this burden should be thrown upon the Japanese. Beside this device for advancing the cause of Japan in China, the aims of China herself seemed extremely banal and naive. She had simply said that she couldn't comply with the impossible conditions and demands laid down for the "assimilation of culture", but must venture to defend her own sovereign rights. This blindness to ‘culture’ was labeled in Tokyo as just another instance of the "insincerity" of the Chinese. But Japan never sold her military operations to the plurality of her common peoples, other than as the mere sending of a "punitive expedition" designed to prevent Japan from being excluded completely from China. This was publicised as the "protection of nationals" and the soothing and quelling of "anti-Japanese feelings and elements". To this was added a delightful bon-homie, punctilious courtesy and deep regard for the comfort and well-being of others - all so much true of Japan – was now to be regimented by her military caste. Japan’s natural dignity, fortitude and self-possession was capitalised by a gang of national fanatics. These are hard words, but it must be realised that the Japanese military machine had still the birthmarks of early Germany, having been modelled strictly upon the Imperial Hohenzollerin Government Army. It is amusing to contemplate a Japanese Hitler. The annexation of the Northern Chinese provinces also had precedent, for the activities of Japan in 1931 were carried on in the same manner. The "Peace and Order Committees", created in that year to give regional self-government after the Mukden incident, were recommenced in precisely the same manner as the "Peace Maintenance Commissions" of 1937. They differed only in name.

Even if you are already a vassal state, this is still a world of war, and only a crazy fool living in a smug suburb can expect anything else. For Australia, this means our suburbs are the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. It is a matter of wonderment to the rest of the world when we will realise this and try to have some small means of defence. It is not enough to commemorate Anzac Day and its gallant memories. Life belongs to the future not the past. We have been in peace long enough to forget the significance of just being permitted to live. These observations are borne upon all observers in the Orient of 1937. At the moment Australia's defences are a pretty grim joke. There is something amusing about the Negus bowling around and asking everyone to do something for the poor Christians in Abyssinia. It will be only Singapore that will stop Mr. Lyons or Mr.Menzies, or whoever is left in the tents of Canberra, directing the movements of broken-down Government launches off Darwin. Will they also go cap in hand asking for food?

England, at last, woke again to the fact that might is right. She was still talking softly and soothingly and turning the other cheek whilst trying to manage, by report, other people in Palestine. The Japanese, however, didn't pretend and didn't bother much about commissions, even though they did lie a little more than the usual diplomats who have, after all, to hold down a job. No, she is quite blandly walking into China, and she is going to take it, bite by bite, unless there can be a strength which usually goes behind the calmness in Chiang Kai -Shek. He is unusual for a Chinese person. These are a more vivacious, more rowdy, more acting, shouting people. Nothing but a bustle of childishness can satisfy them. Only their children are quiet and wise and elderly. Japan is going to walk down slowly and blandly; and she will do a better job than England ever did in her economic administration. She uses the baton with a sort of indifferent pleasure and disregard. This will happen within our lifetime. The situation in Europe, with its constant impending wars and conferences and non-intervention pacts, will employ most militants. For America, she will again draw aside her horrified skirt and grow 28 inch instead of 18 inch guns along her Pacific shore. The name is almost ironical. But if there is any country with nothing to fear it is America.

Then here will grow a mighty combine. China will become as productive and as profitable

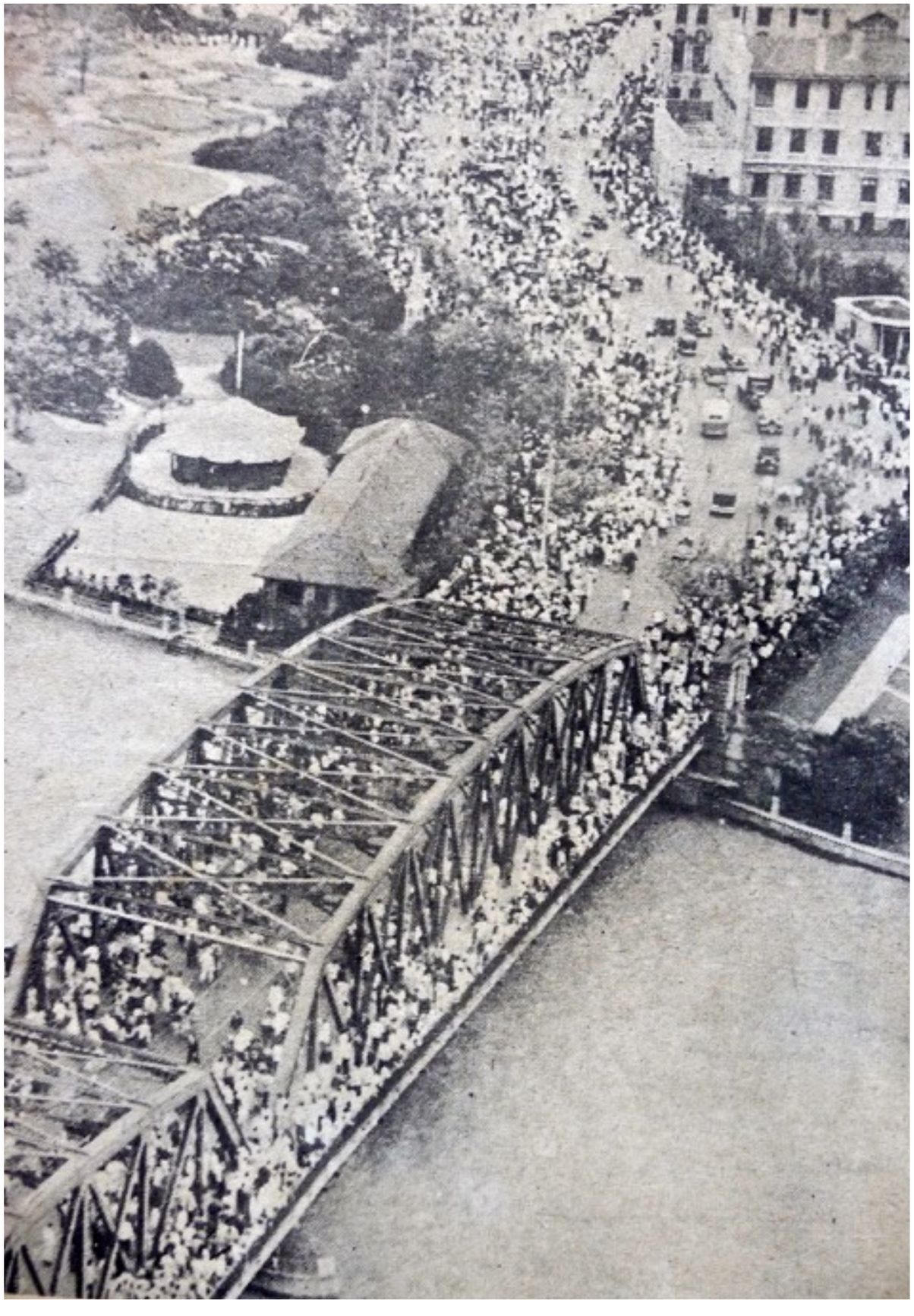
as Manchukuo has become within the last thirty years. Who knows where the Orient will finish. Japan doesn't like the term FAR EAST. It implies that it is not the centre of the world. This will all probably happen, unless someone fights Japan soon. At the moment, no one has any more interest than trying out a few tanks or new aeroplanes for their own war. And, of course, no one can afford it, except our prudent and prudish American cousins. Everybody seemed rather sore about America in the East. They will probably be leaving the Philippines to someone else very soon, and won't go out there again. And as to the British Empire, we have Singapore. What Australia needs is a really efficient air force to keep peace below Singapore. If there ever was a ripe maiden waiting for her rape it's Australia.

Commentators have stated that Japan was going to find the economic situation difficult; that the arrangements of her internal economy would not permit a prolonged war. One seems to remember the wide broadcasting of similar views with reference to the Great War and its probable duration. Or take the Italian-Abyssinian war, where Italy was so poor, her credit so weak, that daily she was expected to find the burden too great. It must appear to anyone but an economist, having a detailed knowledge of balanced budgets and national monetary reform, that money is very much a fictitious commodity. A perfectly regimented country, which Italy may have been and which Japan most certainly is, can so develop and control her internal economy that the commodities of war and commerce are found within. Japan has been quite able to finance this war. Her overseas shipments of gold, for immediate credits in both England and America, vindicate this viewpoint. (6) She had nothing to lose except internal "labour troubles". Roosevelt must long, in his madder moments, for something like this. It was generally recognised that there was imminent trouble in the closing phases of the Harashi Government and that this new government, and this new war, came at an opportune moment.

The one thing that was unexpected was the actual war with China, though this is still officially to start. Most observers considered Japan would spend at least a few more years in consolidation before starting on any further external adventures. But, as usual, those who were in the know, knew nothing. Eastern prophecy is a fluid affair. The internal trouble must have been a little more dangerous than was realised. And it was said that the Amur River affair was an eastern diplomatic move for testing the liaison between China and Russia. If nothing else, it succeeded in giving the Japanese extreme confidence. The Chinese response, or at least publicised moves by Chinese firms, was large purchases of ships from the United States. Notwithstanding its alleged policy of having nothing to do with belligerents, America was happy to off load 1918 technology. There is always something to be gained by not actually declaring war until the last moment. The amusing thing was that the buyers were filling these ships in America with record quantities of scrap iron for Japanese ports -up to ten thousand tons per ship. The actual number of ships exceeded double figures. What probably happened was that English buyers purchased the ships and their cargo. The scrap then was sold to Japanese mills, and on route a certain amount of juggling transferred the actual ownership of the ships to the Japanese. In any case, they didn't arrive in China. It is also significant to note that several large shipping companies in Japan publicly cancelled new orders owing to the "high price of construction".

England, as one might expect, held herself strictly impartial in the diplomatic sphere, and we earned again the standard epithet "the perfidious albion". There seems solid foundation everywhere for the saying, even if the albion has sufficient commercial acumen to capitalise upon the scorn heaped on the "ageing British Lion" with her "worn out Claws"

Chapter 23



The outlook from Best Overend's flat.

'Refugees Streaming over the Garden Bridge.'
(source. *The Shanghai Evening Post & Mercury*. Vol. 1 No 1 September 1937.)

CHAPTER 23

In Shanghai the situation became increasingly grave. It was a moot point whether, in event of local hostilities, there would be a physical boundary between the fighting areas and the International Settlement. Japan used quite a portion of this latter territory as a war base during the trouble of 1932, and it became increasingly evident she would use it in considerably greater proportions in 1937. It was unreasonable, therefore, to expect the Chinese armed forces not to treat the area as a target. That China exercised this courtesy in 1932 was beside the point. Chinese shells had to land on Chinese soil, so why not the Foreign Concessions? They didn't expect much help from foreigners anyway.

For three weeks the stream of refugees from Chapei became a river. Before your eyes, two million people on the move. They headed up river, up creek, up canal, as well as into the International Settlement. Tugs pulled or guided through the massed junks. These were lines of floating carriages stuffed with refugees on shelves at twenty four inch vertical centres. There were no decks as we know them. A stream of rickshaws formed the more usual mode of transport, all piled high with pots and pans and plaited grass baskets bursting with the most intimate of family possessions. Out through the interstices of these masses appeared the twinkling legs of the runner, the worried face of the women, the very elderly, and the subdued refined face of the infant at breast. The word 'coolie' has as its origin, KU, meaning heavy, and LI meaning distance. This coolie invasion to the interior was natural. The coastal towns would naturally feel the force of the efficient Japanese bombers first. If it was possible to get far enough inland, by the time the conquering people pushed their sphere of influence to the refuge, they might well be content to conciliate. If there was conscious reasoning, this was the cause of the exodus.

The most ominous reading was always the statements made by the Japanese Diet. On August 6th, 1937, the Japanese Foreign Minister, Hirota, said: "It is hard to discover a ray of hope for a satisfactory settlement, but I believe our army is proceeding with the view to affecting a fundamental solution of Sino-Japanese relations in North China". This was magnificent. Take it how you might, you still got the banana. His comments on Communism in China were confusing in the extreme. Certainly China has had her brand of this activity. But in almost every case, as I have been informed by the police actively engaged in its suppression, the Chinese method was to shoot the poor unfortunate coolie. Invariably his forehead was blown out with the heavy Mauser bullet in the nape of the neck. They run the messages, they do the dirty work and they carry what are to them truly Greek pamphlets. One thing is sure, they do not know what a Communist is let alone the precepts of Communism. So where was the immediate menace to Japan? The intense individualism of China will always prevent the spread of communism. It is difficult to imagine that nation actually volunteering in masses for abstract service. For now, temporary retirement to hospitals alarmingly increased among Chinese generals. Moreover, it was sincerely believed by a lot of Chinese people that the activities of the large Sword Corps, who fought almost naked, practised blood curdling yells, and depended upon rolling along the ground for their tricky advances, had a remarkable immunity from machine gun bullets and the activities of tanks. There were also the seven thousand American volunteers. It was alleged that many were competent aviators. It was also hoped that they would bring their own planes, supplies and wages. It is hard and foolish to be sarcastic about this most lovable people. But war is hard and the issues were clear cut. Either kill or be killed. The half-baked vaporing's of semi-westernised University students, cultural leaders and loafers, were to be no more efficacious than Canute crying to the sea. Only a fast pursuit plane, properly armed and with a brilliant pilot, would pull down a bomber. Even then the odds were with the bomber.

Anxiety was cumulative in Shanghai. One of the most terrifying of all spectacles was that of an entire district on the move. Along the side streets leading to the wharves was a constant stream of all types of motor transport, from the limousine to the truck. They were stuffed with Japanese evacuating to the ships held over from sailing to Japan because of "the

proximity of typhoons". Tracked down at the weather bureau, one small typhoon was stated to be within six hundred miles. If it came within striking distance of the shipping lane, it would take about three days for it to reach Shanghai. Japanese bars were hurriedly closed, all Japanese women of joy regimented into vans guarded with one Japanese male. They all headed to the wharves. The Union Bar, our haunt for many moons, closed its doors at ten o'clock. With that last call we had a Singapore gin sling. Hongkew was alive with plain clothes Japanese police, walking two by two, covering the district. As the little armed marines came round one corner, warning all Japanese shops, I left the Union round the other.

Have you ever seen a deserted city? Use a time machine and come to Hongkew that night. See the trucks loading outside every shop taking away the stock. The tenants will leave soon after. I got back to my flat just in time to receive a phone call from Bim's special political branch. Ringing from the deserted Union, his "squad-double" told me of the invasion of the bar by two Nippon marines. I rang Lai - and I was damn lucky to find him - to tell him to keep clear, to wipe off his losses and to stick around where he was. They left within the hour. I went down with Bim, secure in his presence. It was funny to see the bar deserted. Two kittens climbed over the beer barrels and fooled with the ice. The children cried as they left them. We watched, for an hour or so, from the two foot wide verandah on the first floor, while I tried to pick up Lai again by telephone. The automatic exchange reported it out of order, but we all knew what that meant. Alex, complete in uniform and tin hat, had left before everybody else. 'Shanghai Volunteer Corps directed to report for duty in 30 minutes'. After, Bim and I went down Nth Szechuan Road together and stood at the boundary in the middle of a crowd of Chinese, police and S.V.C. People watched the deserted and dark roadway. Keeping in the shadows, for fear of snipers, the Japanese marines doubled across the road. The blockhouses were manned and the whole district was infested with Japanese specials, with armlets and clubs, operating in groups. We walked for two hours in the dark Chinese roadways. Always there were Japanese marines in full war kit waiting with horizontal fixed bayonets. You got off the footpath to pass. Back at the Garden Bridge were two armoured cars and the S.V.C. On the way we called at the Union - evacuated completely of course - so we selected one leather dice box as souvenir. Bim and I cleaned out the remaining whisky. Everything else went within an hour of leaving, stripped except for oddments in bottles. It was blown to glory in the morning.

At twelve midnight, the alleged zero hour, we were at the Nth Szechuan Road boundary, just inside the gates sitting on shop stallboards. Nothing happened except squads of Japanese marines running across the roadway, official cars coming through without lights, and police on motorcycles shouting orders. There were no Chinese troops visible of course. Trucks of marines were passing. This fighting business, we decided, was a serious affair. Although Tokyo naturally took strong exception, the shooting affray at the Hungao aerodrome that same evening was simply explained. An officer and driver, both in Japanese uniform, and in an official car, were driving to the Chinese aerodrome. Any other foreign resident in Shanghai would never have dreamt of doing it, even in daylight. It was a colossal effrontery, or a conscious attempt to see what would happen on a Settlement Road. Or had they been selected for the honour of being the match for the tinder? As the Japanese premier said: "Japan has been known to be victimised".

Twenty eight Japanese warships came into Shanghai that last day. A display of strength is most often followed by duress. From them, a constant stream of fully armed and equipped marines streamed. They took the place of the refugees, and with them came load after load of ammunition and military supplies, machine guns, lumber, parts of bridges and pontoons. They took the place of the household furniture removed by the refugees. It appeared that the campaign had already been arranged. We remembered Lord Lytton's utterance that the starting point for Far Eastern peace was the state of Manchukua: "a really independent state in Manchuria, guaranteed not by the pressure of a Japanese army, but by the wishes of the inhabitants and an international treaty is the basis on which a permanent settlement in the Far East must be founded". It seemed ironic. If his work had not been so well known, it

would have seemed a political joke. The Japanese were starting in Shanghai. They had occupied Peiping and Tientsin for some weeks. They controlled Manchukua for some years. We sought not to deceive ourselves.

It was refreshing to read in the paper the following morning - a morning fraught with heavy danger - of the tender and glorious Miss Kuo Yu-Min. Reportedly a charming young woman, a native of the storm-centre of Hopei, and an ardent national Salvationist, she offered herself in a five dollar lottery as a desirable "wife". She barred no-one, but hoped that her future husband would have "National Salvation Thoughts". The money was to help China in the conflict

Best Overend. Architect, Shanghai 1937

Chapter 24

Three young Architects,and life long friends. Bob Eggelston, Bill Hanson and Best Overend. Melbourne 1936.

CHAPTER 24

With the commencement of conflict, I had no time to take notes. However, for the first time, I took a carbon copy of a personal letter that I was writing. Naturally it never left Shanghai owing to the dislocation of mails. Immersed in the turmoil it captures that first fine careless rapture.

Shanghai: 13th August 1937.

Dear Robert (7)

It's bust open this afternoon here and where I am typing this letter which may or may not reach you it is like sitting in the stalls of the Capitol watching a March of Time. I jumped into the fire when I got here and I can't say with truth that I'm windy, glad, or just indifferent. I can imagine that the Herald headlines will say Shelling of Shanghai or aren't you interested in a war. In any case they're out there now and the windows are rattling with sharp dull thuds and every now and then there's a really big flash and you wait for about five seconds and then you hear it. There is a tremendous fire raging about a mile away where they seem to be landing and it looks about 400 yards from the window. It's a trifle large to describe. Every now and then there is a big one and that is probably when a bridge is blown up by either one or the other of them up the creek a bit or to prevent the fires from spreading. The only trouble is that I haven't anyone yet to have a drink with, but Bim will be down soon and we will probably sally forth. I'm a little depressed now as we had a really big night last night going over the district now the area in question. He is in a sort of intelligence political branch business and that means bowling round to all the bars in the low haunts which are only that low when they are in Shanghai. The one thing which made it serious was the closing of our "Hongkew Club" the Union Bar. The district was evacuated suddenly in one hour: truck after truck after cab after cab after car after car and rickshaws milling past the swinging doors roaring round the corner filled with armed Jap marines going one way and with Jap women and children the other. We stood (I quaking) on the pavement with the proprietor (Chinese friend of mine) with our glasses in our hands and watched and waited while all my friends living in the place tore it up inside packed collected the children howling everywhere and rushed off into the other half of the International settlement. We finished what was left in the bar and there were a lot of bottles with just little enough not to take away and we broached the other keg left but we didn't have time to finish that of course so we had to leave it for the marines. The place was a wreck and the whole thing a sort of serious scenario and a kitten walked along the shelves knocking over the bottles and the phone went for Bim to make a sort of sortie and we closed the place and cursed a lot and I took as my souvenir the leather box and dice. We left just as the little yellow fellows with tin hats and long bloody bayonets were coming along digging into every house for sharpshooters and clearing out their nationals because it was supposed to start at twelve and it was already eleven. We walked the other way to where the Chinese bloke had quietly parked a car for his getaway and he went, taking the bar boys. Then we went down to where it was to start, the boundary and Chinese gates, walking as there were no other means of locomotion. I felt alright with the whisky and Singapore slings and anyway I was with an official with a gun which wouldn't have been much use. We stepped off the pavements every few yards and walked in the gutter because the infernally long bayonets of the Japs protruded right across from every door and alley and it doesn't do to insult their flag and Emperor by even touching them even though they're not in Chinese territory precisely. (The fires outside are getting bigger but there are fewer shells falling). I thought for certainly the first time what a bally serious business this killing is. They all looked as if they really meant it and the officers had their fingers on the bally triggers of their mausers and it doesn't take much to pull when you're on edge. We went down North Szetchuen Road where the bright places are to the gates which I mentioned and sat on the stallboards of the shop on one corner and watched and waited. The thing looked serious because the Shanghai Volunteer Corps, and that means every

foreigner in Shanghai capable of holding a gun, had been mobilised at eight o'clock and the block houses at the corners were manned and they are little hell boxes at the top of a telegraph pole where you are caught sitting, so to speak, pretty. I'm taking a carbon copy of this Laddie if you don't mind because I don't want to forget the sequence so to speak and I feel I'd better write to you some time soon. Down below in the yard there is a disturbance because two Chinese women are screeching their heads off and it sounds like sorrow for something and it's always the poor coolies that get it in the neck. In any case, to revert. The boys were there with a couple of armoured cars and round us there was a silent crowd of Chinese who are never silent usually and behind us stretched the road bright with lights but with nothing else because the district had been evacuated and through the gates down the other end of the road it was dark with the lights off and everybody was looking the same way down it and just across the road were the Japanese holding everything in their tin hats and every now and then an unlit staff car would tear up into the light and literally screech round the corner and every now and then a party of Japs would run crouching across the road as they are taught because of sniping which incidentally I can hear quite plainly as I write mingled with bursts of the good old machine gun. They had the district well in hand with an oddly beautiful sort of efficiency. They had every nook and cranny posted while they waited and their greeny uniforms were almost invisible and we waited until a quarter past twelve too but it just didn't happen until about ten this morning. After, we got tired of doing nothing and Bim had to report and confirm things so we came back through all the side streets walking in the middle of the roadway so he would phone from my flat and we could call at my bar for a long shandy. We had walked about two miles altogether. Outside there were a couple of armoured cars with the boys of the SVC previously mentioned so I thought that that was good enough for me. They're there now and as I look out a party of well-kitted Japs are trotting up the footpath. As I said it's like looking at something pretty striking at the Capitol. Just up from my office window the Chinese sank crowds of junks and a couple of small steamers this morning to form a blockade of the upper reaches of the Whangpoo. They looked rather odd sinking and I didn't do much drafting but went and inspected a job next door where I could go up nine floors and get a really birds' eye view. I'm putting on a new flat roof so it was really OK - very professional. Yesterday there were twenty eight Jap ships of their third fleet but they got wind of the junk idea or some mines and they all went outside overnight and are about five miles away in a strategic position up the Yangse Kiang ready to add a little to the bombardment long distance. I should say they'll start at dawn with the planes from an aircraft carrier which is floating round the river mouth. But I'm beginning to ramble and forecast and above all things we are directed to remain neutral until the last moment ... and that's hard after watching the evacuation over the last fortnight. They've shut off for a while outside but they can't stop the flames. It's extraordinary to hear quietness because this place shouts all day and night usually.

LATER

I've just been down to the bar to have a pot of Ewo, my first for the day and it's eleven o'clock. Bim hasn't telephoned so I suppose he's on something rather close. He will probably drop in later but I'm going to bed to have some sleep. I walked around the block, a very tiny one, to find that the building is surrounded with Japanese bayonets reflecting very odd lights from the traffic lights. The armoured cars of the SVC still point down the road so we seem in for a quiet night if there isn't an 'incident'. The place is as silent as a grave, but the first still burn under the clouds. It's always cloudy and stinking hot there as far as I can see after three months. And now the machine guns have started again and I feel that I’m writing fiction to try and impress you what a paradise for adventurers this place is. Sometimes I like very much and sometimes I hate the Americans. There was a crowd on the doorstep impressing the Russian who opens the taxi doors mixed men and women talking loudly half tight about hot dog let's go up and turn the radio and dance to the machine guns. I felt sick all over that I was white.

Anyway the Russian can't speak a word of English. And yet some of the Americans here are marvellous birds but the wrong sort travel. From the notices in the paper they're all going to be evacuated very soon. I should say that Shanghai is about settled for the white now. They won't be worrying about the Settlement if this goes on and whoever wins will push us out. I don't believe that England will come further north than Hong Kong. Well hell I might as well do this as anything: this is the following morning and believe it or not the Chinese planes are circling overhead and dropping bombs on a Japanese flagship cruiser at a wharf between here and where I live. I could hardly control my natural functions for the first few minutes because I couldn't realise what was going on all I could do was to hang on to the window sill and watch the line of colossal explosions walk over the land and across the water certainly within four hundred yards of where I am: there is absolutely nothing you can do about it so you might as well sit and look about it because there isn't anywhere to run to any better. All they got the last time over were the wharves and a few sampans and the rest of the scavenger boats are about the wreckage like a pack of flies round a spot of treacle. They got within a hundred yards of the ship and believe me there is some activity. Just a little further on are three Jap destroyers who have been answering with shrapnel but none of the planes came down as far as I could see. There are two English warships up the river a few hundred yards and everybody is lining all the decks watching. Whacko! I'm feeling as fit as a fiddle this morning because it is cooler as a typhoon which is only a circular hurricane when all is said and done is expected to pass over this afternoon: this is the season for them of course. It will damp the pilots ardour. Downstairs you can buy babies for two dollars or three shillings each if you want a family and they are dying in the stair-landings next door when I went up to see the job again this morning The only thing I'm frightened about is the effect the probable headliners will have on Mother and Dad: you might tell them everything is pretty good when you get this and I always write every week. They've put three new steamers across the river boom last night and I suppose they will be sunk soon. Outside my place the Japs have built their sandbag strongholds across the footpath and at the entrance but the rickshaw boys still hang around so I don't have to walk to the office. The Americans are coming up well with ambulances all well equipped and they are tearing down the Bund now. I wish you and Bill (8) were here with me: you'd enjoy it in a horrified sort of way it's so incredible. By god the Japs will have their planes over soon to retaliate and then they will be cleaning out a district or so. I was to play tennis with a friend of mine this afternoon who lives outside Shanghai a bit along Hungjao Road but when I rang him this morning to ask whether it was possible to get there still he told me that when he finally got through and home last night there wasn't the house. He had a little difficulty in finding the place and he got a cold in the head. It was a grand sort of place too with a very decent grass court where little Chinese boys run after the balls for you and you have tea on the lawns and then go and have a look at the paintings after dusk just before you have the last one before going home to dinner and change. I don't think I'll come back here for that partnership after all if I get away. I would find it a bit of a strain I think. Well I am now to make an attempt to get home to rid myself of my typewriter, thence to go to Headquarters to watch the affair from their comfortable bar and lounge on the 8th floor.

Yours, Laddie

Alec, the proprietor of the Union Bar, and his family.

Chapter 25

CHAPTER 25

The conflict of August 1937 was probably the first purely western war in the East. The instruments were ours, only the combatants were theirs. In the morning, through your bedroom window, you could see the Japanese aeroplanes come down through the blue sky like wasps. In a few seconds, owing to the distance, the sound of the dive reached its high intense whine. It finished with a low drone as the zoom finished. Then there was a tremendous thud, roar and cr-r-r-rump as the bomb, or aerial torpedo, exploded and the house shook and the windows rattled in their frames and the bed shuddered and you might also if you hadn't been expecting it. After a while a little scrap of brownish smoke floated up above the jagged horizon of intervening houses and stained the blue sky. With a few dives the whole sky was a mass of brown fire. Because there was practically no anti-aircraft firing by the Chinese, the passage of the Japanese planes was smooth. When there were a few bursts of machine gun fire, this did not tape the planes down so much as Japanese anti-aircraft fire taping down the Chinese positions. At night a plane's position could be seen by the jerking streaks of tracer bullets, some from the diving planes and some from the ground nests.

It was on one of these mornings that the paper stated that the Minister of Finance of the National Government "on the advice of doctors" had postponed his departure from Europe for war-torn China indefinitely. Is it too harsh to say this was the typical gesture of the safe Chinese? It was only the day before that I had been on duty outside a rice shop with five Chinese policemen, and a quarter-Eurasian, to prevent the recurrence of rice riots. Luxurious cars passed through this poor quarter of the International Settlement - a part called Sinza - carrying very superior Chinese persons clad in silk gowns. It was very hot in uniform on the streets. Those in the limousines were the Chinese who were always trying to push the foreigners out of China. Questioned as to the propriety of flouting luxury in front of the starving refugees while we were trying to restore order, the Eurasian said that in China it is always every man for himself. Then the second evacuation list of British residents of Shanghai, published that same day, read like some Chinese "Who's Who". At least sixty percent were Chinese names. Rats leaving the ship without thanks? It wasn't very hard to become a British subject.

The Shanghai newspapers were down to a skeleton owing to a lack of gas to run the machines. But what you didn't read and hear you saw and smelt. After the bombing of Bloody Saturday August the 12th, the bodies stank along Racecourse Road for three days. Some were in open cheap pine coffins without lids, some in shining and curved black ones with lids, and others just piled in filthy heaps of stench. The hundreds of bodies were white blanched, bellies were distended, and they make odd noises - sighing sometimes, sometimes a throaty rattle - most were naked and all stank like common meat gone bad. Even the Chinese, walking past and milling round in curiosity, held their hands to their nose. When an odour is apparent and unpleasant to a Chinese it is some odour. Fluid crept out from each corpse, or pile of fragments, as they began to fall apart. The explosions had blown the clothes off, leaving scraps tied round the hands and feet or neck, but more often than not there was nothing. There was a rickshaw coolie eighty yards away from a hole in the road in the French Concession. He was dead without a mark and naked as he was born.

At the corner of the Bund that day the street was a shambles. Outside the Palace and Cathay Hotels, in Nanking Road, slabs of human liver were wiped across the pavement. The indignity of this sort of death. Some were only scraps, or not even that. A foreign girl's dress hung from the parapet eight floors up. There was nothing in it. A motor car was burnt out as clean as a whistle. It rested, seemingly untouched, on its rims. The thing at the wheel was a skeleton with attenuated flesh; wool skeins draped around the bone cinders. It still grasped the wheel. A closer inspection showed holes in the burnt car's body from bullets or fragments. The upholstery had incinerated leaving only the spiral springs. This happened in a hot second or so. It was a Lincoln Zephyr.

When the Chinese planes suddenly appeared in the cloud rift that afternoon, the three visible

looked as wicked as a set of sliding snakes and as beautiful and as efficient as three sharks. The bombs fell away in a set of four. Slow at first falling, they quickly formed a parabolic arc until they vanished in the enormous cloud of dust and flame that marked the Palace and Cathay Hotels. The dust came over the flat roof of the Police headquarters where we were watching, billiard cues in hand. It filled our eyes and nostrils. We finished our game before we went down to see the damage. We were very close; almost as close as the ones that morning. As always, they were preceded by an enormous barrage of Japanese anti-aircraft shells, a chattering series of roars. Staccato marked the bursting of shrapnel over the area raked. The bangs and puffs of black smoke emanated from the Japanese, the white from the Chinese. All rained bits of shrapnel and shining bullets along the roof tops. Those bombs struck near the Japanese flagship, Idzuma, tied up near the Soochow Creek. The first one went off before I knew what was to be expected. The enormous explosion, flame and shattering roar, mushroomed along the river front. I had to hold in horror the window sill to keep myself upright. The others walked steadily and slowly across the river and only sent up great gouts of water and fragments of sampans. The remaining river sampans were round the pieces of wreckage within a few minutes. It was probable that less time was wasted looking for human fragments than was spent in collecting the more valuable pieces of wood. Certainly the Whangpoo was very quickly swept clean and its yellow tide slid slowly upstream without a mark. It was after that afternoon affair that I hurriedly evacuated my flat, carrying my own bags across the Garden Bridge and past the deserted British Consulate. By then, bombs had fallen on both sides of my place and it was rumoured that another attack was expected that night. They came within an hour.

The thing seemed too close to say who was right and who was wrong. Only was it essential in Shanghai minds for the war to stop or move along a little. At night, on curfew duty, I observed the Chinese streets were strangely quiet. The moon came up over the scene of drunken houses and narrow winding streets polished of traffic; and each change of breeze brought a different stink from the Soochow, or from the back alleys. All of them were Chinese and unpleasant. But for them you would have thought you were on a stage set. After a while you didn't notice, and when you left China you probably asked what the strange smell was before you realised that it was just fresh air.

It was dangerous to sit down against a shop shuttered to the footpath because the fleas hopped along the stone entrance step. There were millions in the rice shops, clambering all over the bins. The narrow gutters were also within their range. The traffic islands were safest, because there you could see the cockroaches slide quickly across the surface of the bitumen. Although they avoided you, you could shove or stamp them away. In any case, you shouldn't have been sitting down. From the narrow overhanging Gardens of Babylon, which were the verandahs cantilevering out in odd Chinese curves and manners, people peered over at you. If they saw you watching they ducked down. You were the foreign member with a party of five Chinese police; and you yawned most of the night unless you were near a Settlement boundary. There the courageous looters came over the bridges half doped with opium. The Chinese police rushed, stripped them and searched them. They almost always had an enormous bunch of rusty keys and some opium wrapped in a piece of grease-proof paper. Inside their bundles were the scraps and miscellany of household objects which looters take. After you had collected four or five, they were taken to the Station with a short rope around their arms. One looter was tied to each Chinese policeman. They carried the spoils as evidence and the whole moonlit caravan was escorted by a foreigner to ensure that there might be no collusion. At the station they were kicked into the cells and you were instructed to shoot next time and not to bother bringing them in. In any case, they were handed over to the Chinese authorities outside the Settlement for summary execution in the morning.

Sometimes they nearly got away with things of value. If they had been able to break into a store, perhaps this was rice; sometimes it was a box of silvery paper stuff that is burnt for the propitiation of spirits; and sometimes just candlesticks or a broken metal clock. That they were half-crazed there was no doubt, for how else could they summon up the courage

necessary to risk the constant sniping of both Japanese and Chinese marksmen, and the almost sure police detection over the bridges. Silently, the odd bullet came over the bridges into the Settlement. You could only hear the ‘pi-i-i-ing' as they passed you, before they smacked into some building along the road. The remarkable thing about these people was their apparent stoicism. They seldom gave voluble explanations when caught and they almost always resigned peaceably. They were beggars with nothing to lose. They had been caught in the act and what else. To eat they had to do something. And if paid, they would naturally carry poison or germs into the Settlement to drop into the tea urns of the shops, into the water troughs of the rickshaw coolies or the public water supplies. If they tried it during the day, they were sometimes caught by the crowd. The remains, after the mob had finished with the alleged culprit, were difficult to remove from the footpath. The police usually got there within a minute or so, but it was always far too late. Perhaps half the time it was a genuine poisoner who got caught. Half the time it was some poor unfortunate who gave offence to some passerby. The dreaded shout had the crowd about in a second or so, a mob of two thousand forms before you can turn your back. Other unfortunates, who looked like Japanese, had a similar fate if they ventured out of doors. Here the shout was 'Japanese eyes'. As often as not, the victim would be a Chinese against whom someone had a grudge. Unless the police arrived, this was an opportunity to eliminate them without danger to yourself.

The first night of curfew duty found one of these ‘poisoners’ standing against a wall. Because our party proceeded very slowly along the deserted streets - we had at least eight hours to fill - the sharp eyes of the Chinese policeman saw the fellow drop a piece of paper rolled into a ball. He stood quite still and waited. Under interrogation, and the flat slaps from the Chinese police, he pretended to be dumb. He was stripped and searched and found to be carrying several packets of whitish powder. It was only after two or three suspects had been found that it was suggested that they should be made to eat the powder. The beating proceeded slowly and methodically. It left practically no mark. Finally he talked, the paper that had been dropped contained an address and a telephone number in Hongkew. It was damning. He said that he was paid sixteen dollars a month for the work. It was with difficulty that the Chinese were prevailed upon to take him to the Station rather than execute summary justice on the street. During the half hour that the interrogation lasted many heads peered out. Two policemen searched the shop outside which he was standing. A tremendously serious pantomime was made over pretending to shoot the traitor. Mausers were ostensibly loaded - although they were already crammed with cartridges - the man was forced to kneel while cold muzzles were forced into the back of his neck and into his ribs. His composure could have been nothing but a drugged one.

It was brutal, it was, unashamedly, horrible. But it was, to the Chinese and to every other person living in the Settlement, treason. He was endangering the lives of the people that crowded into Shanghai. Inside the Station the treatment was the same, only more direct. Later that night, at four in the morning, we slept for half an hour on the floor of a large bank building on Peking Road. The janitor had let us in the back. Stretched out, it was remarkably comfortable on the linoleum after seven hours on the slow beat without a break. Inside the metallic knocking of the machine guns was not so apparent. At night, when all is still within a city crammed with people, these guns have a beautiful and mad rhythm. Sometimes, when they were red hot or incendiary, you could see the shells passing over the Settlement. With terrible swiftness, the short matt-red streak was immediately followed by a flash which lit the entirely clear sky. It is easy to light a cloudy sky, but to light a clear one you need a large gun. In five or six seconds there was the explosion that gave the shell its flash and its shuddering whistle. It had already broken and killed and had passed. An elementary knowledge of acoustics told you how near you were. It was just across the Whangpoo in Pootung.

Standing-by at the Station meant lying on the lawn in full uniform, .45 mauser with extra clips, and riot baton. The canvas-covered steel bullet-proof vests hung along the racks. A bell gave the warning of armed robbery, looters, or rice riot. The streamlined crimson red Riot

Van was quickly filled and you raced away to the scene. As you arrived, the two or three thousand rioters scattered down the roads and alleyways. A few couldn't get away quickly enough to escape the batons. They were all hungry. In the early stages of the war there was shooting only when you were fired upon. Here you used your baton. In a very short time the district would be cleared temporarily, and the shaking rice-shop proprietor would be tearfully explaining just what had happened. You knew that if he could possibly have gotten away with it, he would be attempting to profiteer. That was probably the basis of the trouble in the first place. The individual Chinese is the most callous person on this earth. If he can cling on someone's back and kick him for a few cents, and get away with it, he'll do it. This war brought out this trait. It was the foreigners who were looking after their wounded; and it was the foreigners who were trying to look after the millions of refugees who literally owned nothing but the sore flesh in which they stood or lay. The Japanese, on the other hand, had the most marvellous organisation for the evacuation and care of their nationals and their wounded. It had been a joy to watch them at work.

One very interesting feature, which seemed to have gradually evolved, was the ascendancy of the anti-aircraft gun over the airplane. A warship, adequately armed, was perfectly capable of defending itself against several attacking planes. In the beginning this was not so. But as the accuracy of the fire from the warships increased, puffs and bangs gradually surrounded the planes and the Chinese came over very seldom. The 'artificial ears' proved most efficient, and the barrage commenced before any sound of the approaching aircraft was heard by an observer.

‘Shanghai in Torment’ 14th August 1937. (source: *Oriental Affairs*. Third (Emergency) Edition. Vol. 8 No 3 September 1937.)

Chapter 26

Shanghai policeman relaxing at Alec's Union Bar. Best Overend - in bow tie and cream silk shirt, what became his everyday mode of dress for the rest of his life - Mah Lih, Bim and Neil Pharazyer.

CHAPTER 26

The introduction of queuing was always considered an unwarranted interference by the Chinese pushing for their rice. Yet, if this was not strictly enforced, the crowd very quickly became unmanageable and there was always trouble. The five Chinese policemen patrolled in the front of the rice shop armed with .38 colt automatics, the foreigner with a .45 colt automatic. The .45 was preferred because of what is known in police circles as the 'stopping power'. With the .38, the bullet passed through the man. It did not necessarily stop him or bring him down. With the .45, in addition to nearly breaking the arm of the firer, the enormous bullet would, even if it only struck the arm of a looter, spin him around and around and throw him to the ground. It would also probably render the victim unconscious by concussion. In a hostile crowd this made him manageable.

Seemingly oblivious to war, thousands of people milled in the streets. Pigs were driven along and pregnant women passed in rags.In the French Concession, a mother was stripped and the child forcibly born by the detonation of a bomb. Reports stated that the child was doing well, but that the mother was killed by the explosion. The poorer people - and these were inconceivably poor, for the average Chinese family income is one and a half pence per week - swept up the grains of rice from the filthy footpath in front of the rice shops. Very little fell from the frugal hands of the owner and the Chinese purchaser. One has to have only heard the Chinese national anthem of hawking throats to appreciate the probable condition of the rice mixed with street dust.

The Chinese medical missions deserve tremendous respect, a respect and an honour which they certainly didn't get from the natives. The ambulances rushed past, horns blowing continuously. Open trucks, covered with branches for protection from planes and from the sun, were loaded with the dead and dying. It seemed that the foreigner in the Settlement was left with the care of the Chinese wounded. There was little or no provision for them in the arrangements of the Chinese army in Shanghai. Hospitals were naturally full to overflowing, the steady stream never stopped. Most of the trucks went back piled high with coffins. The Chinese stretcher bearers sat on these talking and laughing as they went about their errand of help.

And all the while the letter writer sat and droned in front of his tray of writing utensils. The librarian, with his stock of paper covered books, leant against his rack leaning on the wall. The cook shops continued to do their savoury and transient business in the gutters. The Chinese boys and girls crowded along too, watching curiously through their dark eyes. Their heads were more often than not covered with festering sores. The barber, a boy, walked slowly through the crowd with his little stool and basin slung over his back. The street sweet man, always followed by a gang of urchins, sometimes set down his portable counter with its doubtful gambling games for children to risk their pennies for equally doubtful sweets. The pastry cooks kept their sweet-smelling fires crackling under their portable bamboo shelters. The tinsmiths banged and clattered by the side of the roadway with the rickshaw coolies shouting and cursing each other. Lone women burnt joss papers on the footpath in front of the joss shop. Everybody shouted and spat, and the guns were almost deafened by the clamour. But above it all was the steady droning of the planes, and every now and then everybody stopped to watch the anti-aircraft shells bursting overhead. Then there was a rush for the empty shell when it fell on the road freakishly missing the milling peoples. More often than not it hit someone, and then a wailing went up. You had to break up the gathering, perhaps exercising your baton as well as your prerogative to obtain the evidence for the Station. Or do you collect souvenirs too? All the coffin shops were open in Shanghai. There was no whisper of a depression amongst their proprietors

Chapter 27

Bim, Neil, Mah and Best.

CHAPTER 27

The Japanese flagship, Idzuma, had an ironic history. She had been built in England in 1898, and captured in 1905, at Tsushima, by the Japanese from the Russian ‘purchasers'. In Shanghai she sat facing the Chinese and foreign men-of-war assembled to protect the Concessions. The Japanese anchored her at the head of the line. Afterwards, they put out torpedo nets; you could see the bobbing line of buoys. The Chinese made many abortive attempts to get her. This culminated at 4 a.m. one morning with some sort of floating mine. It went off about a hundred yards before it hit the ship. The incredible roar woke all those in Shanghai sleeping, and broke a lot of windows along the Bund.

In the middle of the turmoil, Madame Chiang Kai-shek made an urgent appeal to the world for medical supplies. China would bleed the world dry with an inward smile if the world was fool enough to permit it. The propaganda that we saw reprinted from overseas journals were sickeningly pro-Chinese. The way in which she had enlisted the sympathy of the world was to be admired. What they forgot to mention was Japan's scrupulous care for foreigners and foreign property. They would have given us time to get our coats on before they shelled the Bund. The Chinese would not. Their idea of a joke would have been to mash the lot of us together. Everyone got a warning from the Japanese, two or three days before. For a while, I found that I had more and more time for them. They got a shockingly bad spin in the Shanghai papers. It was a paradox. All the killing and trouble within the Settlement, all the buildings razed - thousands in Hongkew, Wayside and Yangsepoo, so flat that you couldn't find the roads - had been done directly by Chinese bombs and Chinese shells. China resorted to anything to bring in other Powers. Her quick, and apparently sincere, apologies after the bombing of the liner, President Hoover, sounded rather good. But these were becoming too frequent and the strikes selected with too much care.

Although persistently offered at the beginning, it was becoming increasingly difficult to buy babies for two dollars. The refugees were either moving slowly out into the back country, or were becoming used to their misery and to the war. They lived and stank in every alley. In the morning, every patch of bare ground was covered with their excrement. This was unavoidable. There is little dignity in being a refugee. After you have lost everything which you and your family have ever owned, and you are getting old and tired, only a full belly and some sort of shelter for the night seems really important. Even tomorrow doesn't matter as much as today. As one would expect, the children enjoyed the crowding and the noises and the smells. For a foreigner, it was extraordinary to see that it can even be dignified to be seen at one's stool. Miss Kuo-Min, of Hopei, was still offering herself for sale to help fill the war chest of the National Government. She was guaranteed to be beautiful and a good companion. Every evening, on curfew duty, you watched the drone of the raiders round the sky followed by the anti-aircraft shells. Other times it was quite silent, except for the pour of the Chinese Police Constables talking, the odd official cars passing, or the crickets in the gardens of the houses left. The fighting glow from the Hongkew fires filled the sky for weeks. A reporter, flushed from some bar, was stopped for interrogation. His car was travelling early in the morning at curfew time. He asked if there was another raid. You envied his freedom. The raiders came over again and again and you sent your 5 C.P.Cs over to the shadow of the brick wall for some small protection from the flying fragments. You always had strict instructions to look after them. For yourself, you probably peered out from behind a tree because the show was far better than any firework display. The tracers climbed up in dull red curves, quite slowly. Then the red fell away, and above the shells darted fiery white stars, vicious against the dark summer sky. Although we had it on excellent authority that the quality of mercy was not strained, and that it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven, my immediate companion one evening had his helmet ruined by this gentle rain of night shrapnel. A small piece struck through, just shaving a portion of hair. There was mercy, but he was more than strained. He went home to change.

The shores of the Whangpoo River, along the Bund and down to the Yangtze, were lined with horror. As the warm summertime passed the horror got worse. Floating in long lines, moving slowly up and down with the tide, were disintegrating bodies. Most of them were

the product of mass execution by the Japanese. Some had heads, some had eyes bandaged, and some their hands tied behind their backs. Down in Wayside and Hongkew you could easily collect what souvenirs you wished, assuming that you could do so unobserved by official eyes. There you could take, if you so desired, the German style helmets worn by the Chinese troops. Just empty the rotting head from within and shake vigorously. This rid the thing of the loose scalp, clinging hairs and roots. All the Japanese dead, by contrast, were systematically removed. It was only when the stink of the Chinese became too severe for the Nipponese that they sallied forth to drag a few together and set them alight. There were also revolvers and field glasses and rifles to be had, but the stink more than anything permitted the dead their useless belongings.

Aerial Bombing Shanghai.
(source: *New York Journal and American*. February 10th 1938.)

Chapter 28

Bloody Saturday. 14th August 1937.
(source: *The Shanghai Evening Post & Mercury*.
Pictorial Review. Vol. 1 No 1 September 6th 1937)

CHAPTER 28

Japan is out to conquer the world. Can you imagine as crazy and as medieval an idea? A perusal of the "Secret Memorandum concerning Manchuria, Mongolia, China, The United States of America, and the World", presented to the Emperor of Japan on the 27th July 1927, by General Tanaka, then Japanese Premier, makes mad reading. Although the Japanese asserted it was a Chinese forgery, it certainly foresaw this war. Consider the following:

> "Japan must adopt a policy of Blood and Iron. In order to conquer the world Japan must conquer Europe and Asia; in order to conquer Europe and Asia, Japan must conquer China, and in order to conquer China, Japan must conquer Manchuria and Mongolia. Japan expects to fulfil this programme in 10 years".

The tenth year was 1937. If false, it was a convincing document. It goes on:

> "Having China's entire resources at our disposal, we shall proceed to conquer India, the Archipelago, Asia Minor, Central Asia and Europe".

Even the Wool Board of Australia was not entirely overlooked in this world conquest:

> "Wool also is a special product. While sheep in Japan yield only two catties of wool per head per year, the sheep in Mongolia can yield six catties. The South Manchurian Railway has made many experiments, all of which confirm this fact. Besides, this wool is many times better than that of Australia. It's low cost and high quality combined with it's abundance in quantity make Mongolia a potential source of great wealth. When this industry is enhanced with the facilities of railway development, the total production will increase at least tenfold. We have withheld this knowledge from the rest of the world, least England and America compete with us for it…we can develop the wool industry not only for our own use but also for exporting to Europe and America".

The retreat of the Chinese troops from the Shanghai area was not beneficial to Japan. With her mechanised army, she found advancement by tanks and lorries costly. The perpetually waterlogged paddy fields, creeks and family grave mounds were as difficult, in their own way, as Italy found in her campaign against Abyssinia. Moreover, the cost to Japan proved more. Her front was vast and her supply lines long. As the Chinese retreated, all bridges were mined then blown up; it was a tougher proposition than Abyssinia. Japan had to decide between the water buffalo, the tank, and the plane. Naturally she chose the plane. The Japanese air arm climbed this natural obstacle of land and water by the wholesale destruction of China and the mass murder of thousands of non-combatants. But if there are a million born in Japan each year, there is probably seven or eight million born in China. She couldn't kill them all. China is enormous, and it is doubtful whether any nation but Japan would attempt this subjugation. Prince Konoye found it costly, indeed, to "beat her to her knees".

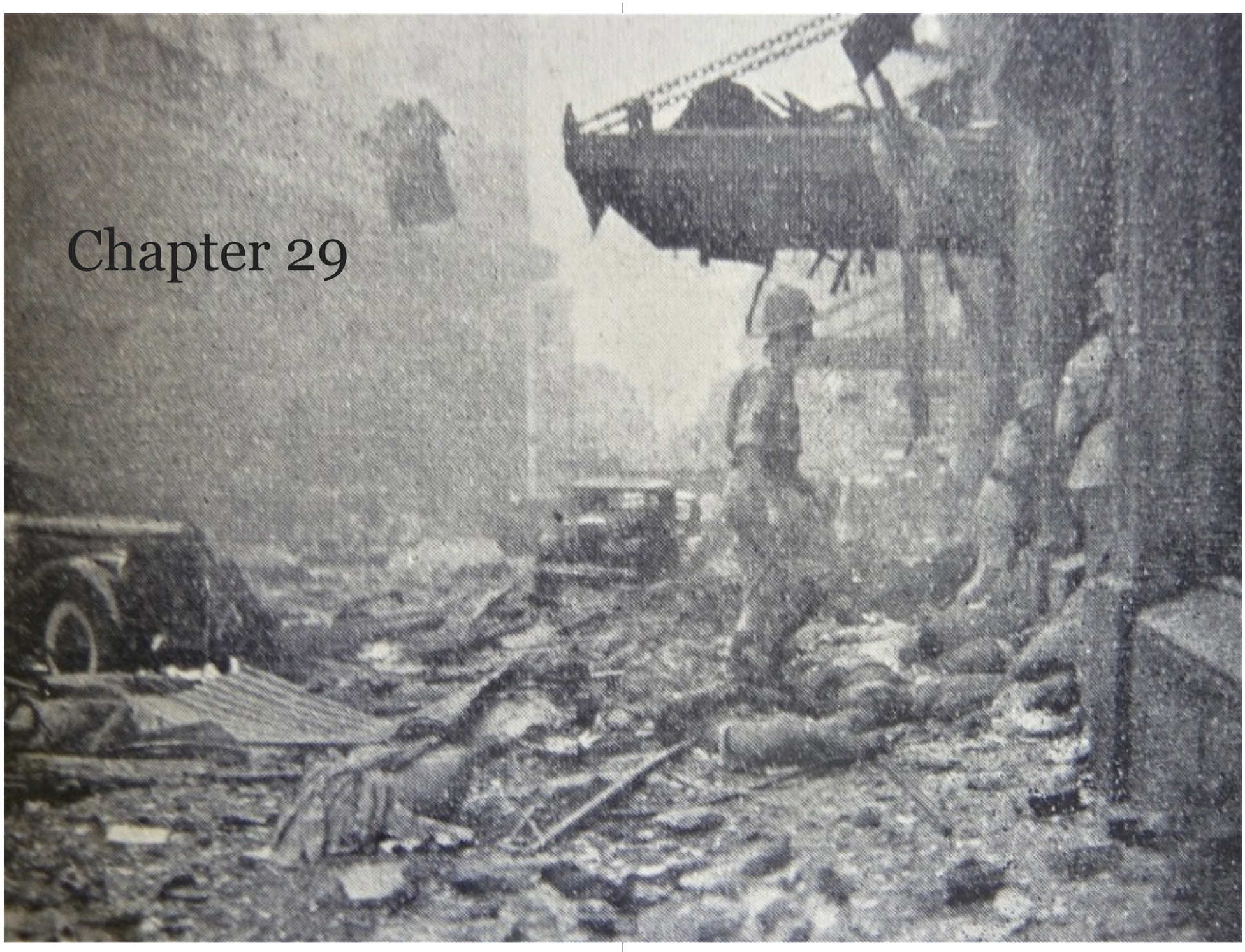
When you've finished with the roast chicken for dinner you will understand precisely how Japan will feel when she has finished with China. Contemplating a plate of bones, her people will be fed up. She will have to start again with this broken skeleton. Sentiment will be overwhelmingly against her. Wherever she goes, either in China or outside, finance and control will be hard. There is one thing certain about this war, it will be more expensive than Japan ever dreamt. Tenacity reached the heights of stupidity. If it was decided that a certain point must be taken, the plan would not be altered an iota, even if it was found impossible or perhaps foolish to achieve. The biggest factor forming this tenacity was that thing called 'face'. Even a strategic retreat, or a diplomatic retraction, would mean a loss of face. Conciliation spells weakness, something that is at last being realised in Government circles in England. They will never learn in America. Japan's army and navy might still be dominated by the Spirit of the Samurai, but surely Togo must be writhing in his grave with the terrible civilian destruction. No matter what provocation, and no matter what extenuating circumstances, nothing can excuse the mass murder by modern warfare.

Sometimes singly, sometimes in groups, the Chinese raiders came over in their bravery at

twelve, twelve-thirty, and at one o'clock each evening. You stood along the boundary in the dead evening silence. The shining creek called Soochow separated you from the Chinese lines. Only now and then could you catch glimpses of white-clad figures flitting to and fro, half-clothed, for the night. Away, and slowly upon your consciousness, was a fleeting hum, slightly duller or rougher than the higher pitched hum of Japanese planes. When they were almost overhead, the Japanese anti-aircraft units opened up with a suddenness that was almost deafening. From both naval and land nests, their cross scissor fire startled, even though you were expecting it. This stuttering hell of sound was rendered the more frantic by the crossing spears of searchlights. Then came the enormous flashes, following the drone of the diving raiders, and the shocking CR-R-R-R-RRUMP as each bomb was laid. The fleeing raider screamed back low; there was a dare-devilry about these Chinese air raids. The only lack of imagination was in the times for the staging. The Japanese usually finished the entertainment by a heavy bombardment of Chinese lines. It almost seemed that this was done to dampen any enthusiasm which the Chinese troops might have accrued with the thrill of seeing their own raiders. They returned in twenty or thirty minutes, and the whole performance was gone through again. Within the Settlement, on average only about twenty four people were injured by the spurting anti-aircraft shrapnel. You could see this sometimes falling in jagged redhot lines. Others heard, whis-whis-whistle-WHUS-WHURR-WHIS-PLONK. After, the machine guns chattered amongst themselves of the event.

The individual dogfights, sometimes witnessed when the Chinese came over in the day, were fascinating to watch. Like eagles climbing higher and higher, stabbing in odd movements at each other, ever-circling and climbing until one or other swooped down and away, sometimes like a falling torch. And there was also a sort of fearful bravery in the way the Japanese planes came over to drop their bombs. There were between three and four hundred thousand Chinese troops massed round Shanghai, and it was the published statement that these were the targets of the Japanese. You could see these droning round all day amid the sound of the bomb explosions. The Chinese would not use their anti-aircraft units against them for fear of disclosing their positions. It was as though they were carrying out continuous afternoon-tea flights. The bombs, when you could see where they landed between intervening houses, lay murderously blinding suns beneath the dead day moon, and then the fire-fury and destruction came in billows of smoke and sound.

Chapter 29



The Cathay Hotel. 14th August 1937.

(source: *Oriental Affairs*. Vol. 8 No 3 September 1937.

CHAPTER 29

The reaction of the External Powers was instructive. Concern for their nationals in Shanghai also meant their investments in China. America, the modern Nelson, consistently and smoothly said that she hoped that every British citizen in the East would carry out his duty. The Philippines were naturally concerned with this peculiar pacifist attitude, for theirs was the independence that must turn to ashes when Japan completed her control of China and the East. Self-government does not always mean self-protection. Throughout this prolonged crisis in Shanghai, however, the attitude of the American Commandant was firm and scrupulously clean, as befits the senior man of all the assembled services in East Asia. The American marines, who were already in Shanghai, were fine types. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the American organisation lay in the quality and quantity of their foodstuffs. In whatever part of the world the marines operate, food is brought from the United States in such vast quantities that each marine ate enough in a day to feed a Chinese family for a week. One of their more interesting units was the travelling-lorry-cook-shop. This proceeded between the posts quite blithely. In the open, white capped cooks prepared the food as it moved along the road scattered with anti-aircraft litter. Nowhere was the innate courtesy and efficiency of the true American shown more clearly than in the operations of their military police. In the arrest, one military policeman lifted the tin helmet of the offender while the other struck the uncovered head with the baton. The hat was then courteously replaced by the first officer as the body slid down.

To watch the reaction of the Chinese to this war boiling over the gates of Shanghai was also instructive. Almost without exception, they considered discretion the better part of valour. They made no bones about it. There was little false bravery. If one felt too frightened to go to the office, desiring the inviolate privacy and comparative comfort of home, then a polite message arrived mentioning a slight fever. No one was deceived because everyone recognised the fellow as being exceedingly sensible. There was a lot of that sickness about in the staff working along the Bund. Several times we attempted to re-open our office there, but in every case, at the last minute, many ingenious excuses were offered why we should not. Yet, strangely fatalistic was their attitude to cholera - a death as horrible as any which war has to offer. The third office boy went down to that dreaded thing one evening. He complained of feeling ill as he left the office. He was dead with this terrible plague when the office opened next morning. Perhaps everyone mourned him, but it seemed to cause only a slight ripple. His three wives called round the day after. Smiling youthful girls, as attractive as the Chinese are, slim and lovely, without even the mourning of the eye. They received the wages of the month and departed, hoping for a later settlement when the war was over. This, so I am told on excellent authority, is why no Chinese will be the good Samaritan. If he betrays the slightest interest in a man having a fit on the footpath, for example, he is considered saving a life. And if the person ultimately recovers, then he is supposed to be his slave for life. But if the man dies, the most likely contingency, then the Samaritan is morally bound to keep the widow, or widows, for the rest of their lives.

Perhaps this explains the inexplicable callousness of the Chinese person. It certainly threw light on the behaviour of a contractor whom I was trying to persuade to work during the 1937 trouble. His work involved roofing, and two large contracts were under way when hostilities broke out. One was on the Bund, within a hundred feet or so of the lodging place of the larger Chinese bombs, and the other a Medical Institute well within the Settlement. We scarcely expected the work carried out on the Bund, eight stories up and within range of all the bullets of curious snipers. But we did expect work on the Institute job. He had perhaps fifty men, and said that should one man lose his life or sustain injury, then he would have the pleasure of being their benefactor for ever. He did not care to take the risk. Upon my assurance, however, that the Japanese planes constantly circling overhead would not drop any missiles upon the Medical Institute, he put his men to work. This confidence, which some Chinese still have in the white man , overcame his self-interest.

In an architectural practice in the East, the white man has as good a chance as any. Retaining some semblance of natural honesty, he distinguishes himself from both the yellow men. For

architecture requires an honesty, of both mind and purpose, impossible to compute. The client gives you, actually and figuratively, his purse. He is unwilling to give it to either the Japanese or the Chinese, even though the purse may be of Japanese or Chinese origin. This motif of honesty remains, notwithstanding the many, many examples to the contrary provided by the White Russians. The prestige of the white man fell with the advent of these penniless people. This is the aristocracy of the coin, even if all worldly aristocracies are of coin. If "the poor white" was a term of the early American, today it has emigrated to Shanghai.

The only successful Chinese fighters were those captured before the age of puberty and trained in blood lust. It is as natural for the Chinese to avoid a fight as it is for them to put up an umbrella in a rainstorm. For centuries the profession of soldiery has been held in low regard. All are professional diplomats, with the exception of the lower classes where those with the loudest voices and the fiercest gestures are the acknowledged rulers. It is difficult for those who come to their country - those with a liking for these most lovable of people - to recognise that they will worship only the strong man. They may laugh at him behind their long sleeves, they may strive and most often outwit him in a sly and wholly affectionate manner, but they will follow the strong man wherever he goes. Chiang Kai-shek is their strong man. If they were to defeat the Japanese – which by all common denominators of war they should, but by which they will not - they would be the most insufferable of all peoples. This can be seen by all those having anything to do with their authorities. The Chinese police will follow wherever you lead, do whatever you do; but, given the upper hand, they would as soon baton you as any wrongdoer. Be strong, and they will follow and like you. This reflection must be shocking for a pacifist, of whom the Chinese are the most ardent. It must also be shocking for the foreign missionaries with their rice converts. Give them power and they will kill with the pleasure of a child experimenting with nature. They enjoy it. They are the most natural of bullies. Watch a gang of Chinese police working on a coolie and you'll see what I mean.

Of the Japanese, it is sufficient to say that they all considered it an honour to die for Japan. Theirs was the arrogance of the undefeated. They have never had that indignity. Notwithstanding their cultural background – one that the Chinese consider superficial and borrowed from their own - they are a youthful nation in their intolerance. Perhaps terrible indeed will be the spiritual humiliation when they meet some superior force. The Chinese can lose face with an apparent equanimity - an external smile with murder in his heart, reckoning all the while his inviolable superiority - but the Japanese with his undoubted inferiority complex and sturdy self-fear, is to have the hardest of rows to hoe.

Best Overend's typewriter and manuscript drafts.
Leather dice and 'clickers' from Alec's Union Bar.

Chapter 30

The Palace Hotel. 14th August 1937.

(source: *Oriental Affairs*. Vol. 8 No 3 September 1937)

CHAPTER 30

The Shanghai Shakes came in the early morning. It was then, when the Japanese planes came over for their first exercise. You lay in bed and listened to the droning, coming and receding, and when it seemed the loudest, climbing up a never ending scale, there was the sudden complex CR-CR-CR-CR-CRUMP as the three planes dropped three bombs. The house shook, the doors and windows rattled ,and you shivered in your bed as the machine guns of the Chinese staccato Da Da Da Da Da, sounding all the world like the bottom bar of a typewriter spacing. The bombs had a sort of heartening sound about them because they were so enormous. But that drumming of the small things was as devilish as any drum of any headhunter.

The shells punctuated the early morning droning of the planes and the tall white hospital ships of the Japanese came up quietly in the night and left just after the morning hate. As I have said, when the bombs landed in a building it was rather a CR-CR-CR-CR-CR-CRUMP, with the vowel deadened, but the sirens of the ambulance cried through the streets all the time. If you looked out, the planes in the distance were exactly like mosquitoes. When they circled round the lines and came over again, they were very large and inhuman and very beautiful in their steady flight. You could see the bombs leave the planes and you watched, waited and listened. The sound came after you saw the mushroom explosions. You could get the shakes later in the day if anyone dropped anything. Then everyone said "THESE SUDDEN NOISES!"

SHANGHAI, 8th September, 1937

Dear Bill, (9)

I have just concluded dinner, having dined well and wisely as I have to report for duty in one hour. I am entirely alone in a residence of one of Shanghai's millionaires and I can't help but say that your presence would have made the meal a positive joy. When I evacuated my own flat I came directly here, the bird owning the house, and for whom incidentally I work, being up in Weihaiwei with his family upon his annual two months vacation. There is sufficient a skeleton staff to provide me with a valet who acts as butler for meals. There are forty refugees in the back quarters and that may perhaps indicate to you the size of the property. I dine in candlelight, clad in khaki shorts, white shoes and shirt and nothing else for it is still bloody hot, every day verging on the hundred mark with the humidity practically the same in percentage. You must know that every gentleman in Shanghai has as an essential to his attire a small towel suspended and folded at his belt, under the coat or uniform as the case may be, an indication of the sweated brow even at dinner. There is no dryness to take the moisture away. This heat, with only two other things, remind one that this is not England. And although there is the candlelight and the dark wood panelling and the tremendous dining table and portraits of ancestors, these make it indubitably the East, the other two are formed by the presence of a completely equipped bar filling one corner of the room, complete with brass bar and well filled shelves behind, and the pervasive odour and swills of incense, burning in a sort of spittoon under the table. The mosquitoes are incredibly vicious and cunning and it is seldom you see them, but without this slow burning stuff your ankles spite and swell and every atom of spare flesh hurts and irritates like hell. Outside, where the mosquitoes make love and breed their broods and teach their young is a large lawn filled garden, and on the verandah you have your evening gins before dinner. The Japanese have been extremely active tonight and they are still going hell for leather with their big guns. These are certainly within one mile from where I type and the bloody windows rattle every minute or so as they send some big stuff at pointblank range into the Chinese. Earlier, while I was upon the verandah and for the first time for about a week, some Chinese planes came over and what a hullabaloo they cause. There are eighty Japanese men-of-war in the river and they are equipped

with these artificial ears which automatically direct the anti-aircraft fire at the point from which the sound of the planes come. These all seemed to open fire at once for the first time for the week, the sound being like enormous machine guns as against the deeper and more seldom boom of the bigger guns. Above the house the red tracers came in scores and were immediately followed with the bright sparkle of dashing explosives. You could hear the fragments as they came down in jagged falls and Best moved inside. There is a certain amount of comfort in a few brick walls and I have to be well and truly out on the boundary at ten-thirty for four hours in the open. I have lost my zest for sightseeing. You see some great shows during the day. The whole office staff were out in the garden this morning watching a dogfight between a couple of slow Jap bombers and three Chinese pursuit planes: we have moved the office here as the staff refuse to go to the Bund office. Yesterday a lucky machine gun bullet got one of these Jap bombers just as it was starting its power dive, about three thousand feet directly above me and it fell just like an enormous torch held at an angle. There was a burst of flame just aft the wings and down she came with engine full and the bomb rack. I had watched it plant two, for there were eight operating in couples in the little school of bastards, planting them just across the Foochow Creek from the Settlement boundary upon which I was having the pleasure of patrolling, and that meant seeing them leave the planes directly over your head and falling in a slow parabolic arc across the creek. But as I say, I had watched it plant two and that meant that there were two left. Boy they lifted me about four feet directly in the air and my mauser wrapped itself around my shoulder instead of hanging round my waist - Christ what an incredible row they made. I usually have two bearded Sikhs and five Chinese constables with me and it is only these people who make possible my strained look of unconcern: and the bloody milling thousands of Chinese in the streets. This was Sinza Road, Bim was stationed at Sinza Station if you want to check up and my number 986. This must all sound bloody silly after a sherry party in Melbourne. I doubt if I have had a glass of sherry in three months. It is far too hot here for it. All my personal places of delight have been either burnt or blown to smithereens down Nth Szetchuen Road, but we have about one game a week down Love Lane which is within a hundred yards of this place. I am looking forward to having something when I get plenty of time. We try to keep clean, you know, but in this time when everybody is making their wills, just in case, one rather snatches at things. The bastards have also lost me a nice a half-dozen silk shirts as ever had the initials printed upon the left breast under a pagoda, two silk suits and various other oddments, lost when I evacuated. There was also a bottle of gin and my old overcoat and in my hurry I brought four shoes and left what I thought were two old pairs. When I settled down to look at the remnants, I discovered that I had two new shoes and two old shoes, and so now I have no shoes at all which match. That is just a minor incident. One thing which has pleased me enormously is my relative indifference to gunfire, shells, and bombs - after the first baptism, so to speak. I had difficulty in holding my water the first time I saw a bomb fall close, as I informed Bob, but I hadn't the vaguest idea what it was at the time. I have also become accustomed to blood and plenty of it. I have picked up scraps of liver and odd limbs and skinned heads by themselves and other gross fragments all stinking with hot blood and dripping and loaded vans but there was always, I must confess, the comfortable feeling that another never drops in precisely the same place and I didn't like leaving the bloody locality again. Architecture, as you can image, still remains my love but there is little of it. I'm very anxious to leave this place at the end of this month, but with the blockade no ships come or leave and there are none here so it may prove impossible. The Russian people tell me that they might have a ship going up to Vladivostok in which case I will take it, but, if not, then I will have to forgo a dream again and forget Siberia for a year or so (for I can't understand how I will every settle down again) and take the next cheapest way through Genoa in Italy. I wish I could afford to go through America but it is just twenty quid more than I own that way third class. Whacco, Old

boy, some time I'll get back to peace and quietness and the nervousness of a settled business. Just now nothing matters at all and it is the fine and proper way to live. I dread the dreary competition and administration of possible suburban contracts. I think I would rather be a poet than anything but you must keep that very dark because I doubt if I have ever admitted that to myself even. A week or so ago, fearing that the genius would be lost to humanity for ever if I didn't do something about it, I mustered enough courage and energy to collate forty which I have carried round for years or have produced on this trip (these latter being about four), and these, having been properly edited, bound, and contented, so to speak, have been despatched under registered mail to the publishers in London just before hostilities broke out. Wouldn't it be amusing if they were published, even posthumously. Well, Laddie, I must move along and push a willing baton: the only trouble is that they sometimes die on you and you have to wait for an ambulance.

Yours ever, Laddie.

Shanghai August 14th 1937 'Gruesome scenes on Bloody Saturday' (source. *The Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury. Pictorial Review of Local Hostilities* . Vol.1 No.1 September 6th 1937

ARCHITECTURAL POSTSCRIPT

Reinforced concrete stairs at ‘Cairo’. Publicity photo published in The *Herald* 17th October 1935. The head lines read: ‘No visible means of support’. ‘Young Architect’s Triumph’. The article, with not a little hyperbole, continued, ‘ An unsupported staircase believed to be unique in the world.’ ‘I could not induce any engineer to trust my idea…it will enable architects to give full expression…to the modern conception of building, which aims at eliminating everything unessential.’

Modernism in the Work of Best Overend.

Best Overend never became a poet. The closest he came to being a writer was the occasional piece for The Melbourne *Herald,* though quite glowing encouragement came from its offices. As the editor, Archer Thomas, wrote:

> "Re that article of yours on Saturday. It leaps about the place from one thing to another like the jeep I bought the other day. It races and bounces and stops and starts with a rare mixture of fancy and simple writing. It was, I thought, also vigorous, picturesque, fast-moving, showing rare observation - I mean observantness -good spirit and judgement. In other works, it was a bloody good story... I only wish to Christ we'd had the sense to use it smartly and not make you talk about the spring in mid-summer. . . .' (Letter 3rd August 1949)

If his "Tramp to Shanghai" was also "a bloody good story", he never managed to publish it. After Shanghai, his return was to architecture, to his architectural friends Bill Hansom and Bob Eggleston, and their "Sherry parties" in Melbourne. If there was the "dreary competition… of suburban Contracts" there was also, before the war, the excitement of bringing to Melbourne a new *Weltanschauung*. With a select band of others, he helped make known the revolutionary world-view of Modernism.

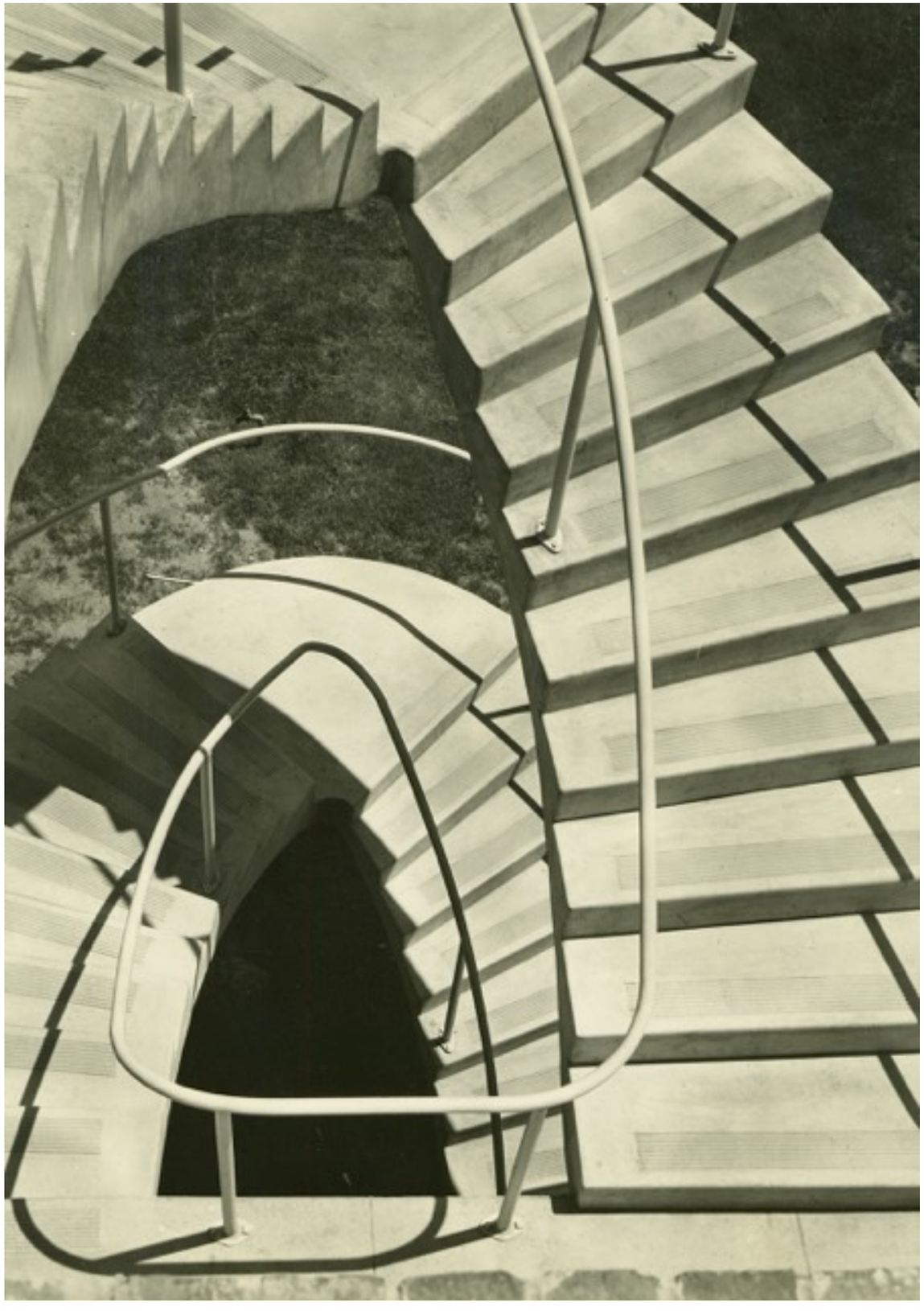
Soon after the war, in 1947, Robin Boyd published his first book, Victorian Modern. It was conceived of as an enlarged version of Lines and Smudges, and a first hand account of this revolution. In a recently discovered Introduction for an aborted second edition, written just before his death in 1971, he remarks that Victoria was 'the birthplace of Australia Modern' because there was no other 'comparable progressive movement in any other state'. From his immediate post war perspective, the arrival of Modernism in Melbourne can be explained by the return, with considerable overseas experience, of young architects such as Best Overend and Roy Grounds to a home soil already tilled by their old Principals in the main Schools of Architecture. Robert Haddin at RMIT, Leighton Irwin at Melbourne University, Arthur Stephenson at Swinburne. Although the Gordon Institute, in Geelong, was directed by the Classicist G R King, he also turned out a surprising, and disproportionate number of Modernists. Many, such as Keith Mackay, started out with the progressive Geelong practice of Buchan Laird and Buchan. In the early 1930's and though out the war years – they were too old to enlist – these Principals also designed large Modernist hospitals, with streamline balconies, commercial buildings and factories. The returning students started with domestic houses and flats. The older generation secured the big contracts – Leslie Perrott, the Matear's Hotel Australia on Collins Street. Best Overend, the more modest interior design of it's cafe, the Red Hen, or Keith Mackay, a job in Perrott's drafting office.

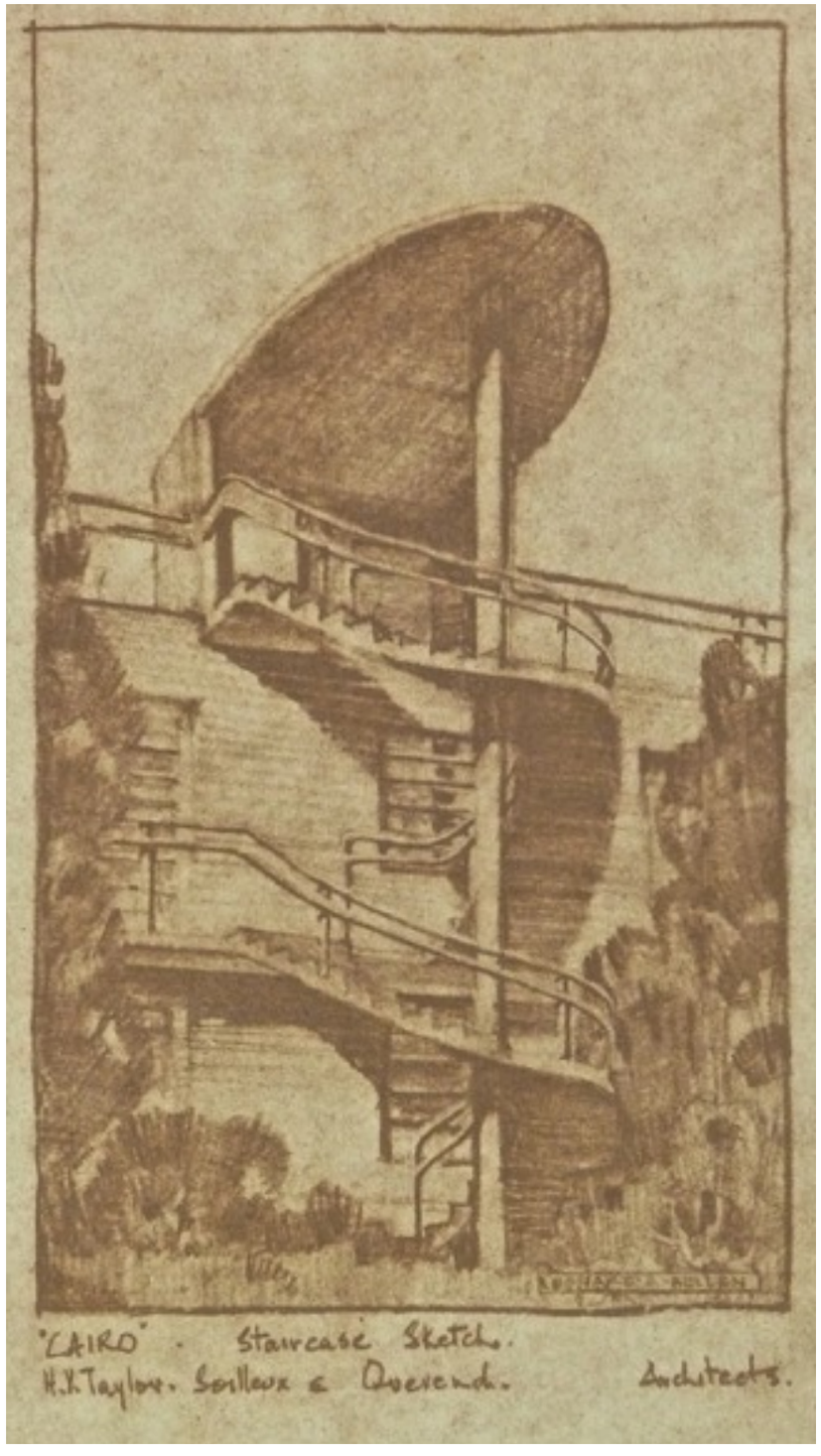
Prior to all this was a second contributing factor. Modernism's fertility was also enhanced in 1915 by Walter Burley Griffen, and his wife Marion Mahony, settling in Melbourne. This was to be their base for the design of Canberra, and other contracts around Melbourne. Earlier still, was the work of Harold Desbrowe Annear. He experimented with open plan living as early as 1900. With a house on the Eyrie, in Eaglemont, he was, according to Boyd, 'the first Australian–born architect to produce original architecture'. In 1918 he designed 'Broceliande', later called 'Troon', in Toorak. This was 'Melbourne's first modern house'.(10)

The world-view of Modernism - what Boyd describes as 'the flashing light of total revolution ahead' - was discovered by Best Overend, and many of his peers, in London. Here, The Office of Wells Coates was imbued with this aesthetic, the 'utter simplicity of form and detail'.

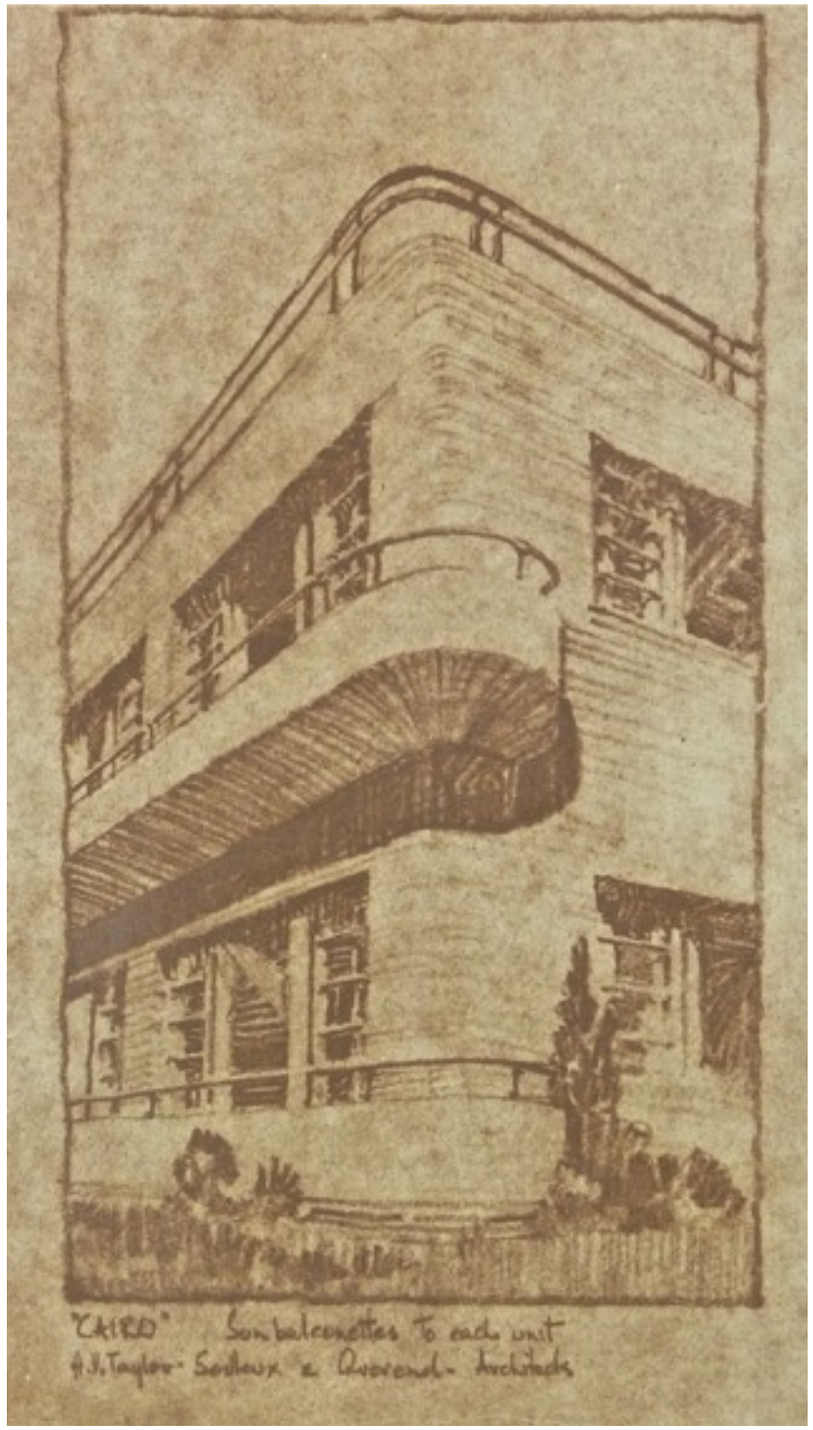
‘Cairo’. Staircase detail. 1937. Today O.H&S. would be questioning the paucity of hand rails, especially on the second floor balconies! In the planning approval by the Fitzroy Council, however, Cr Baker said ‘… he was pleased …the proposition was altogether different to other…flats…where there was only one bathroom to every fifteen or sixteen residents.’ The *Age* 11th December 1935. Consistent with Modernist preaching on hygiene, each flat had a separate bathroom and toilet.

‘Cairo’ publicity photo showing the view from the residents dinning room. The fourty ‘bachelor flats’ were let for 26 Shillings a week for a ‘bedsit’, 36 Shillings for a separate lounge and bedroom. The estimated cost was 25,000 Pounds, providing a handsome return for the developer.

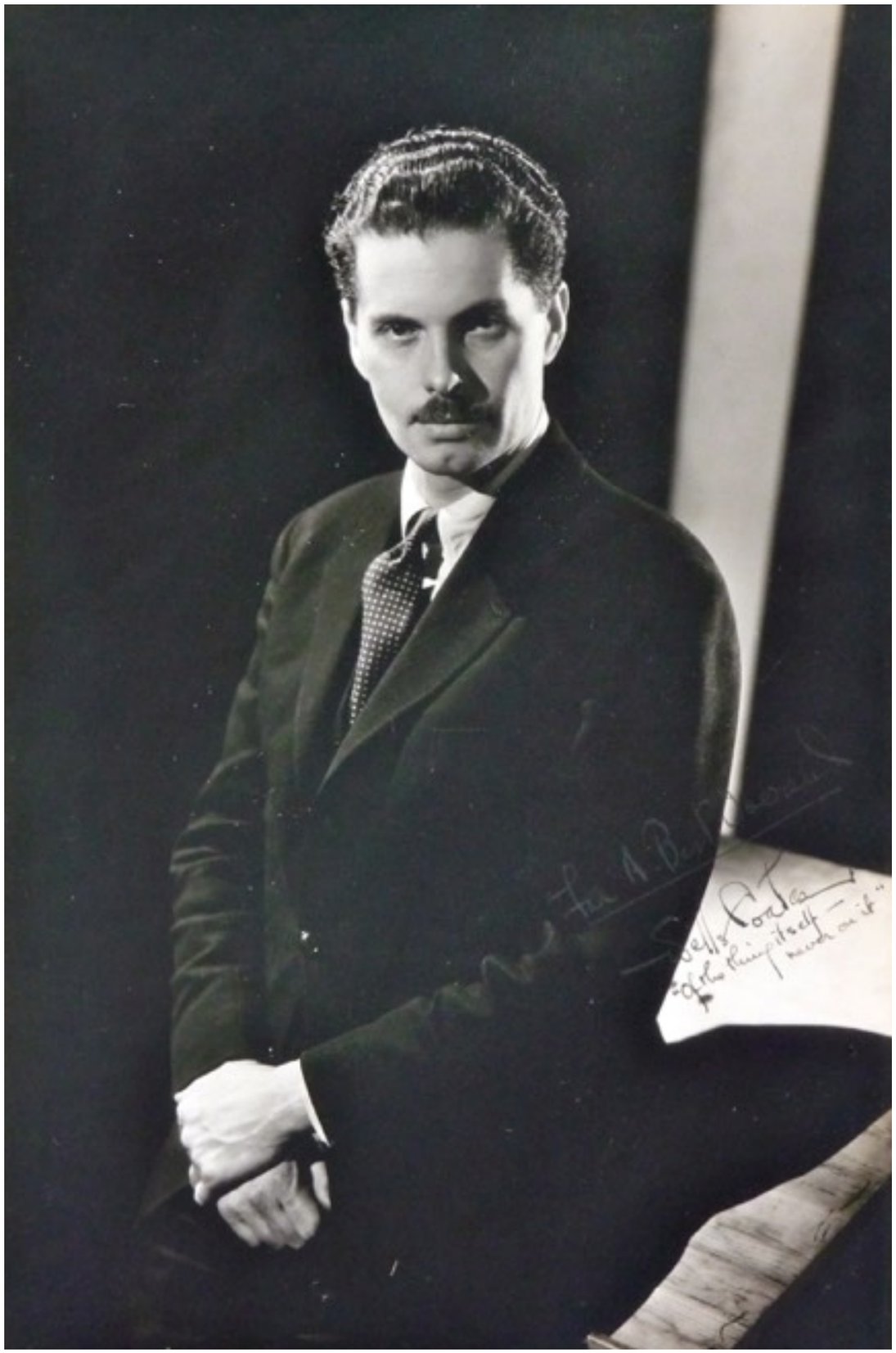




Staircase detail. Publicity photo. Perspective by Best Overend. The ‘angle blade‘ (fifty years before Denton Corker Marshall!) and the supporting column was not built. The same detail was incorporated in ‘The Home of the Future’ at the 1939 Ideal Home and Building Exhibition, Melbourne.



Detail of the ‘Sun balconies’ to each unit of ‘Cairo’. Drawing by Best Overend. Publicity photo of the completed work. Note ‘OH&S’ balcony rails in original drawing, but note built.



Wells Coates. Publicity Portrait, London 1934. Inscribed: “ For A. Best Overend - Wells Coates. ‘ Of the thing itself - never on it.’ ” This was a Japanese aphorism.

Wells Coates and Modernism.

Wells Coates' creed was epitomised by a Japanese aphorism he inscribed on a large photo of himself given to Best Overend "of the thing itself, never on it." Born in Tokyo in 1895, the son of a Methodist missionary, he was personally tutored there for his first seventeen years. Later he won a scholarship to McGill University, in Canada, where his early training was in Engineering. Wells Coates later developed an interested in Architecture. He became a critic, and intellectual, and wrote extensively on the nature of Modernism and its connection to the philosophy of aesthetics.

His article "Materials for Architecture", published in *The Architect's Journal* in 1931, outlines the tenets of Modernism.

> "Concerning Architecture, what can be stated can be stated clearly. All that can be stated is included in the materials for Architecture. For the rest, architecture is shown, seen and used."

By materials, Wells Coates meant two things. First, human customs, activities, habits and needs which gives rise to building per se. Second, the constituents found in nature useful for building. At the end of the nineteenth century

> "the discovery of new materials brought with it... new principles of construction inherent in the material. When man discovered steel, he did not think to made bricks of it, but he did, later fashion it into Corinthian columns!"

Wells Coates's first principle of Modernism, then, was the contention that new forms in Architecture are inherent in its material. These

> "..new forms made it possible to cater more perfectly for human needs. Conversely, new human needs were created, new habits, new activities were made possible by the new forms."

So the forms of twentieth century Architecture are certainly not the forms of the past. Steel has caused the greatest revolution in the history of Architecture. "The principle of the cantilever finds its true free form when expressed in terms of steel, steel-concrete, and steel-glass". Most importantly of all, the wall is no longer an essential element of structure. In the past great buildings

> "...were really "stately piles" raised up and supported by heavy masonry walls". In the age of science and steel they are "...no longer an essential element of structure", but rather "...an expression of its thermal and other insulating functions - to include or exclude the light, the view, the weather, or the public..."

Internal walls, again, have no structural significance and, as in Japan, became screens for thermal, acoustic and other functions. For Wells Coates, and the Modernist, one is presented with a choice. One can

> "...use the new resources of materials as the prisoners - the slaves - of old habits, old social prejudices, old visual prejudices..." or one can use them as a "...means to new forms, new habits of life, a new vision..."

The phrase "of the thing itself" then, is the prescription that particular materials lend themselves to particular forms. Steel enables the form of cantilever and glass walls. The rider "never on it" is the proscription that these pure forms remain unadulterated. Although stone columns require a capital - such as a Corinthian head - to hold the lintel, steel does not. To adulterate a steel column with a head is to attach to it a form that the material does not require. This would be to give the steel column the shape of stone. And this, for Wells Coates, was the "misalliance of forms". Other apt examples today are the many expressions found in post-modern architecture. The tacking on of steel pediments and stylised classical facades to the main structure of the building would be to break the Modernist proscription of "never on it."

Wells Coates' "Principle of Integration" is not an unrelated point to these refutations. Instead of adding onto the finished building the services of heating, refrigeration etc. these are integrated within, just as the extremely complex acoustic requirements of Broadcast House

were integrated into its form. Indeed, this can be "...extended to include furniture designed in the house as part of architecture..." For Wells Coates,

> "very soon it will be considered quite as fantastic to move accompanied by wardrobes, tables and beds as it would seem today to remove the bath or the heating system, including all the pipes." (Furniture Today-Furniture Tomorrow. Leaves from a Meta-Technical Notebook. *Architectural Review*. July 1932.)

Clearly, somewhere along the road, Wells Coates got his sociology wrong. Speaking in the next century, we can say the logical conclusion to the "Principle of Integration" either remains extremely futuristic or modern, or his reading of the "new habits" and "new needs", that is to say the norms that would arise with Modernism, were wrong. But these sociological conjectures were really only asides. Wells Coates' main concern, as a critic, was to work out the philosophical underpinning to Modernism; to provide an aesthetic justification for his position. In a somewhat more dense article, "Response to Tradition", published in 1932 in *The Architectural Review*, and neatly catalogued by Best Overend in his compendium of autographed off-prints of Wells Coates, the views in I.A. Richards Principles of Literary Criticism and James Joyce's The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man are taken as bolster.

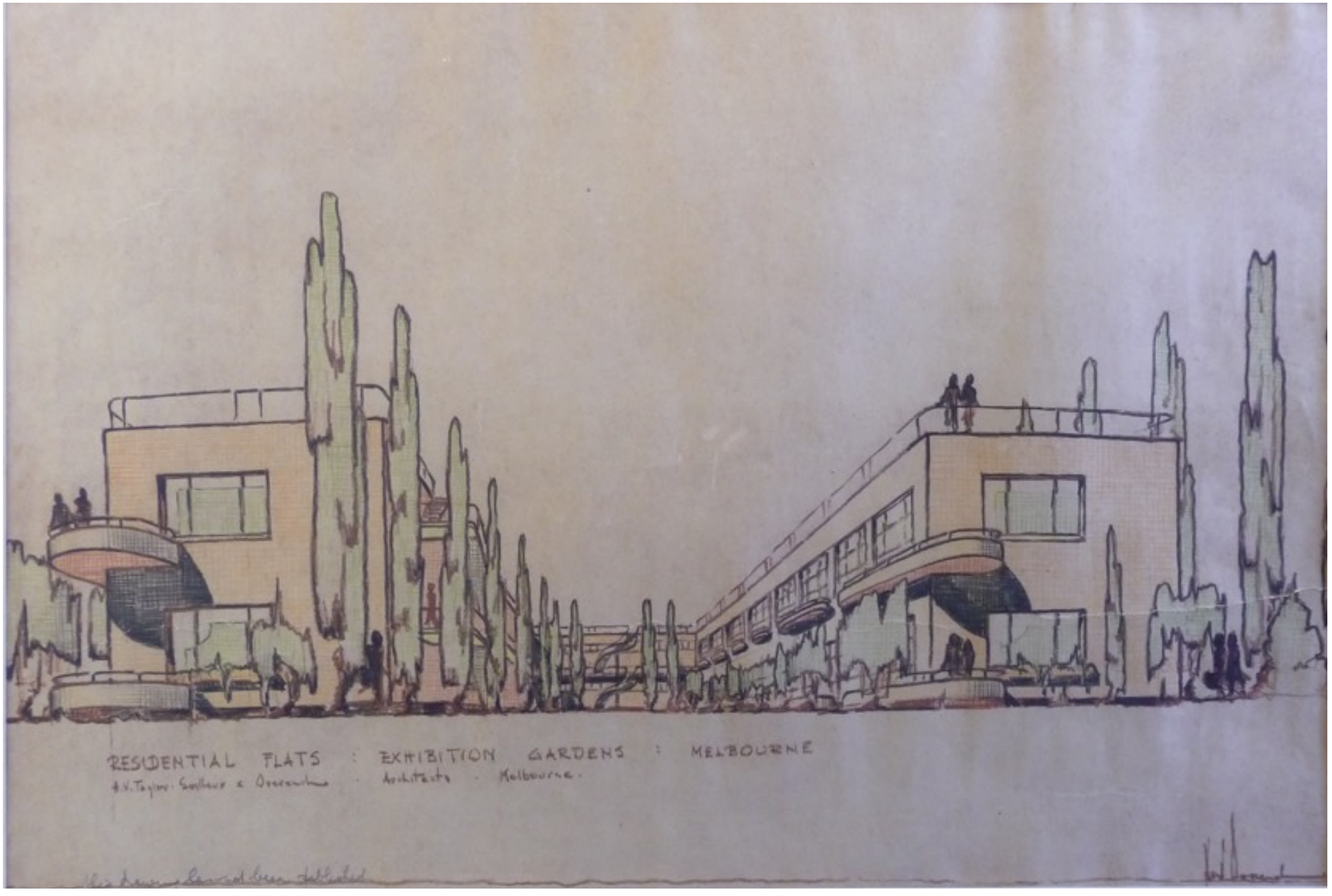
Mentioning this difficult piece to his parents, at the end of 1931, Best Overend had this to say:

> "Coates has just written a long article - by request - for a prominent architectural journal here, and within a week or so I shall send a proof of it for your edification. From his style you'll be able to see Coates himself as he is quite a unique personage." (Letter to parents, 8th November 1931)

The starting point is the apparent fact that architectural criticism had been reduced to the banter of "mere opinions". This is because "...there is no common norm of speech about architecture". For example, Broadcast House, the then new home of the BBC, could be termed an example of asymmetrical design, or that which looks like a ship, or a building whose form is an expression of its function or purpose. Like disparate languages talking through each other, as opposed to between each ether, no agreement can be reached on the architectural meaning of Broadcast House, let alone whether it is good architecture. By this example, Wells Coates dismisses the British philosophical method of linguistic analysis - of what do particular words mean - as a method for aesthetics and architectural criticism. In its place he proposes Richard's distinction between the technical and the critical. Architectural criticism is the objective investigation of technical facts - such as the materials on the surface of the building, the images these convey to the observer, the perspective and spaces of the building. The critical question is the value judgement on what one likes or dislikes.

> "The fallacies of contemporary architectural criticism are contained in the process by which mental effects are projected and made to appear as qualities of the object seen".

In making this distinction - the distinction broadly between facts and values - and aligning architectural criticism in general, and the defence of Modernism in particular, with the "technical" questions of facts, it is never at all clear how the value judgements of Modernism are ultimately justified. There is a suggestion, like Joyce's aesthetic intuition of the artist, that certitude is expressed in terms of that which is "...logically and aesthetically permissible. You see that it is that thing which it is and no other thing". But this does not get us much past Intuitionism and the irreconcilable conflict between intuitions - much like the incommensurate conflict between languages, and the meaning of architectural speech with which Wells Coates began.



‘Cairo’ Residential Flats. Exhibition Gardens. Melbourne. H Vivian Taylor, Soilleux and Overend. Perspective drawn by Best Overend. 1935. Built on the site of Uxbridge House, the old mansion’s high brick walls and gardens were preserved.

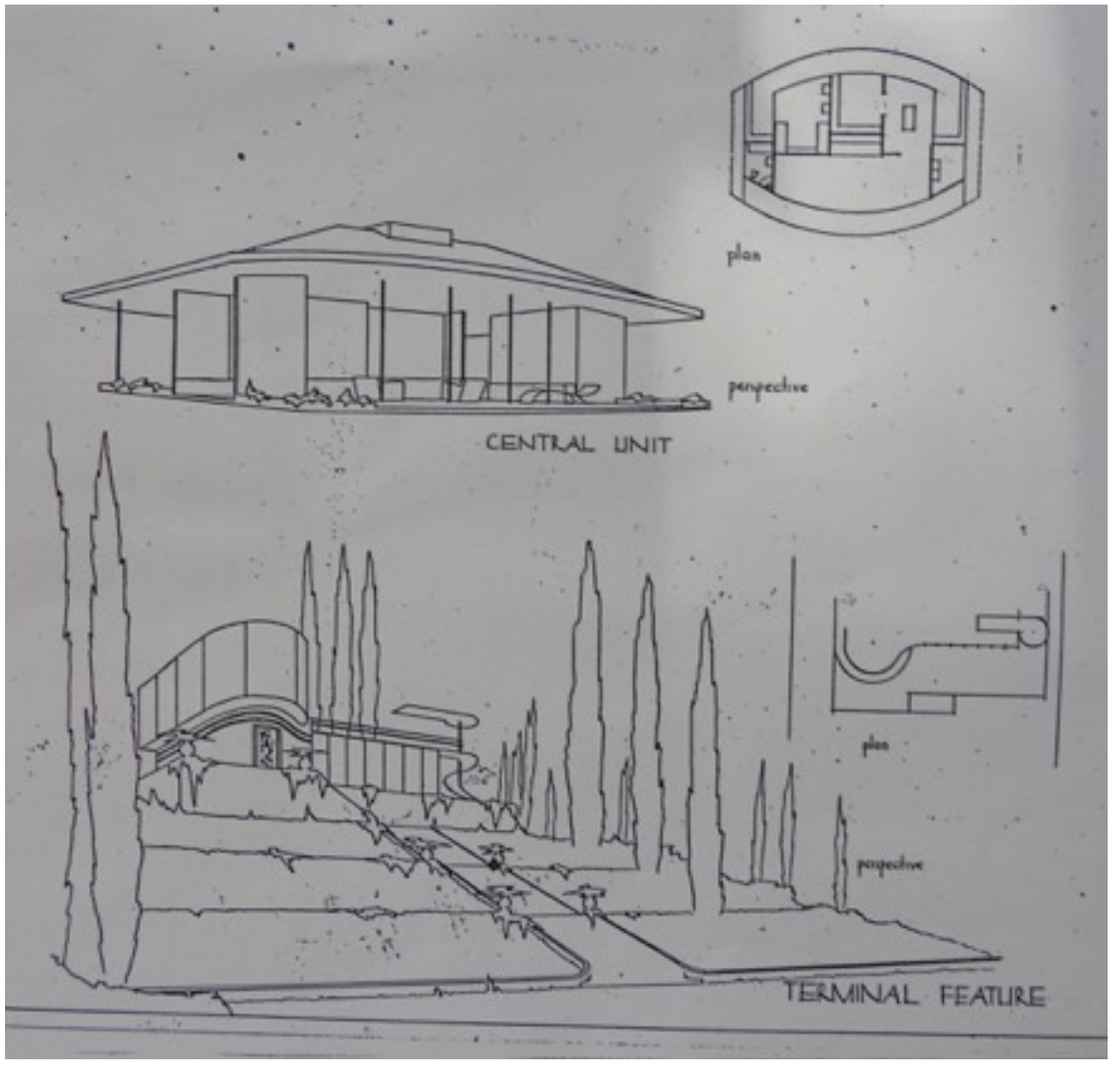
Motifs of Modernism.

If Best Overend was any example, however, such purely philosophical problems did not unduly trouble Wells Coates' disciples. They were, after all, architects not philosophers. What Wells Coates provided was a totally new way of looking at building and design. When Best returned to Australia in 1933, this overseas experience completed his formal education. In that year he was elected an Associate of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects and in 1934, by examination, admitted an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects. It also equipped him to help carry the banner of Modernism to Melbourne. He became part of a new movement whose small band included his friends Geoffrey Mewton and Roy Grounds. Also welcoming him back was his old boss H. Vivian Taylor. Between 1933 and 1937 - the period leading up to his "Tramp to Shanghai" - he became a partner in the Melbourne firm H. Vivian Taylor, Soilleux and Overend, Architects and Acoustic Consultants. Presumably Vivian Taylor revised his grading from "a fair knowledge of design" to something more distinguished! Certainly the practice took on board the creed of Modernism plus Best's special experience in acoustics. It received much publicity for its work, just asBest honed his skills as a publicist for Modernism.

In terms of the development of Modernism in his architecture, the most important period for Best Overend was as a young man before the war. First as a partner of Vivian Taylor, then after his return from Shanghai, from 1938 to 1942, in private practice by himself as Best Overend, Architect. In his writing for the popular press, advancing, as he did, the case for Modernist principles in design, and in his commissioned work for clients, practical considerations in design were reciprocally related to a theory, or at least a position, in aesthetics. The consistency of this approach for the practising architect, and the interconnections between these aesthetic ideas, can be described in the following way.

Wells Coates practical observation that new materials – such as steel and plate glass – enable a new form of architecture is consistent with the elevation of integrity as an aesthetic theory. The new forms constructed by these new materials do not require supplementary ornamentation. They are unnecessary to the structure. An aesthetic of minimalism – that is to say simplicity – is an extension of this idea of pruning things down to the essential. The modern man does not require the clutter of a Victorian drawing room. Artifacts are superfluous because, according to Coates, the only real works of art are already in museums. Miles van der Rohe's prescription, 'less is more', epitomized this aesthetic. Practically, this also lends itself to production based on repetition; the use of modules, and ultimately standardization, for mass production. Recalling Le Corbusiers 1923 dictum ' the house is a machine for living in', it is not too big a step from here to consider architecture as just another department of industrial design. Shelter can be produced, like cars, on a production line. The aesthetics in this design process becomes the utility or purpose of the object. From this is derived a theory of building, where function is the key element of design. And if these principles lead to a monotony of like objects, there is the design motif of integration. Link the shelter to its botanical setting. Relate the building to its garden. Connect inside and out. And, on the inside, nail the furniture to the floor. Built-in wardrobes become sound baffles and walls. Beds become bunks. Tables and chairs become benches and pews. For the wealthy, the furniture might remain separate, and a Walter Burley Griffin or a Frank Lloyd Wright could extend the themes of the structure to the most uncomfortable and odd looking chairs and tables! The practical striving for integration also involves the elimination of the 'caves and tunnels' of what went before – the Edwardian and Victorian. The plan was compact, and, not unnaturally, this aesthetic of consistency was once again consistent with a theory of simplicity or minimalism. All this may be summed up by saying there is a happy synthesis between theory and practice with Modernism. There is a consistency between the aesthetic principles – integrity, consistency, simplicity and industry – and the practical design motifs - of material as form, integration, repetition, and function.

The Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS) held their 'First Exhibition of Modern Architecture' at New Burlington Galleries, Bond Street, in June 1937. Arriving in London some months later, Best Overend, inculcated with their principles, brought these back to Melbourne for the Ideal Home and Building Exhibition in 1939. As Architect in Charge, this is his rough sketch of the 'House of the Future'.



Final perspective for The House Without Walls - the Central Unit - and the Terminal Feature in the Exhibition Building. 'The Home of the Future and Garden of Lovers.' "Absolutely inspirational in design! Colourful! Spectacular!" "Constructed of prefabricated glass and gleaming metal - flat roofed, wide-patioed (sic) - possible erection in 7 days!"
Herald 18th February 1939

Material as Form.

Best Overend's article, "The Modern Architect, the Modern Engineer, the Modern Material and their Correlations" (published in *Manuscripts*. May, 1934) was based on his thesis for the Institute exams earlier in London

> "I have been working every night on my thesis . . . but everyone who has read it tells me that it will not do. Coates has yet to see it, and if he likes it, I will send it in... [Keith] Mackay tells me that there is a boot in the pants for the Institute in every paragraph and that I ought to tone it down a bit. This I may do as it will appear a trifle dogmatic beside the usual sentimental thesis on an old church." (Letter to his mother, 13th May 1932)

Undoubtedly Wells Coates was very happy with the content. Following the Master, Best Overend contends:

> "All the great styles of Architecture have been the outcome of a definite knowledge of the structural necessity of their age and this knowledge has formed the foundation for the definition of the Aesthetic." Modernism as the new form, is a direct upshot of steel, concrete and glass: "... the introduction of the modern medium steel and its satellite materials..." have enabled us to evolve to another Architecture. Part and parcel with steel, "The modern plate glass is one of the finest materials now available for the use of the Architect. . . its architectural quality is Light, and Light is infinitely preferable to the architectural perversion of shadow". (*Manuscripts*.May, 1934)

In June 1937, The Modern Architectural Research Group – MARS – held the 'First Exhibition of Modern Architecture' at New Burlington Galleries, Bond Street, London. Little more than a year later, Best Overend was at work drafting the same aesthetic for Melbourne. In 1938, he was elected by the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects as Architect in Charge of the Home and Building Exhibition. The two centre pieces for the 1939 Home Show were called "The House of the Modern Age" and "The Home of Tomorrow" -

> "Absolutely inspirational in Design! Colourful! Spectacular! Constructed of prefabricated glass and gleaming metals, flat roofed, wide patio - possible of erection in 7 days!"... so the extensive advertisement went in The *Herald*.
>
> "Brilliantly designed by Best Overend, this airy yet logical conception of the home of tomorrow at once startles and stimulates the imagination. The terraced "Garden of the Lovers" where fountains play and soft changing lights simulate dawns and sunsets -a patio with bright green furniture and a front door painted a brilliant blue guarded by two silver Chinese dragons. Walls of sheet glass and concrete and a spiral staircase winding up to a flat roof, fascinating suggestions made possible by the progress and development of modern building science" (*Exhibition booklet*)

The House of the Modern Age, also referred to as The House Without Walls, was illustrative of the cantilever effects of steel. It was also

> "..almost circular in design with all rooms leading onto a five foot wide patio verandah. If constructed on a suburban allotment it would have quickly removable glass exterior walls for all rooms." (*Herald.* 4th February 1939).

If these two buildings epitomised Modernism, the fallacy of the "misalliance of forms" is ironically described, by my father, as if Mr. C.W.A. Scott arranged

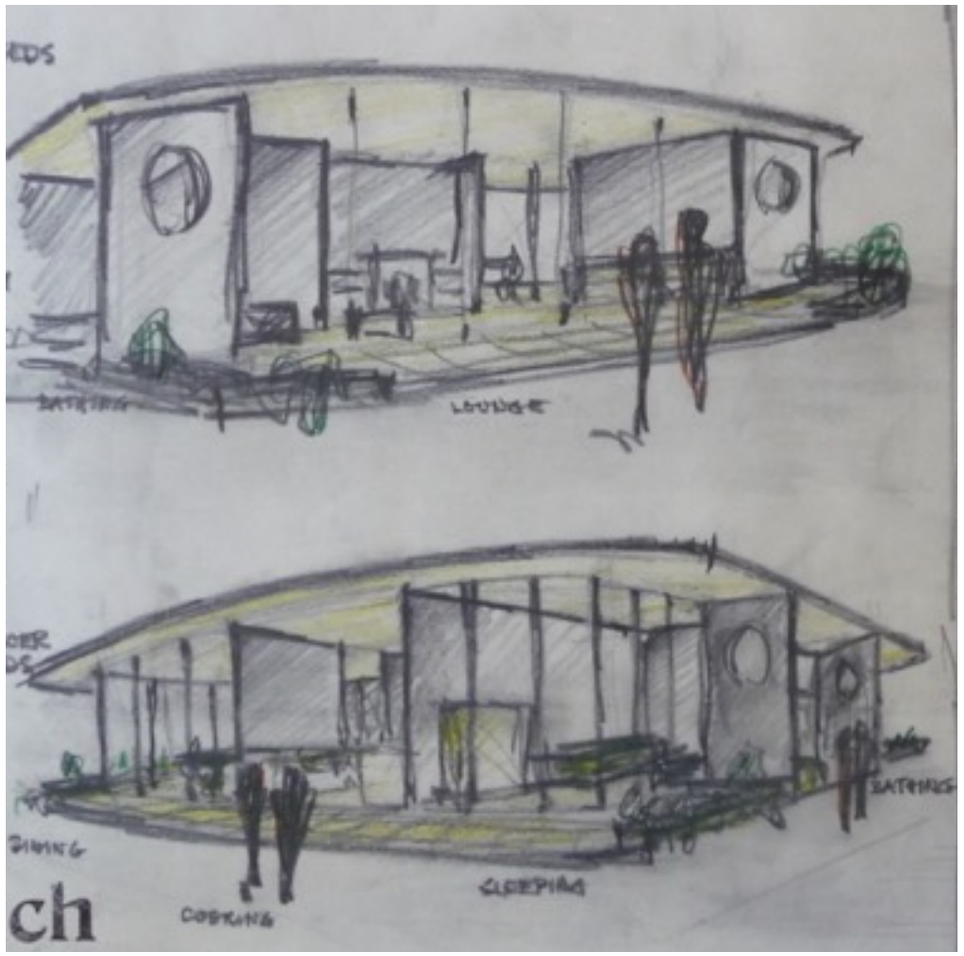
> ".. to have his Comet aeroplane fitted with criss-cross leadlights, a curious oversight in a plane designed in the country whose earlier principles of design we follow so assiduously, admire so much and endeavour to emulate so painfully." ("This Worship of Decay", *Manuscripts*. February 1935).

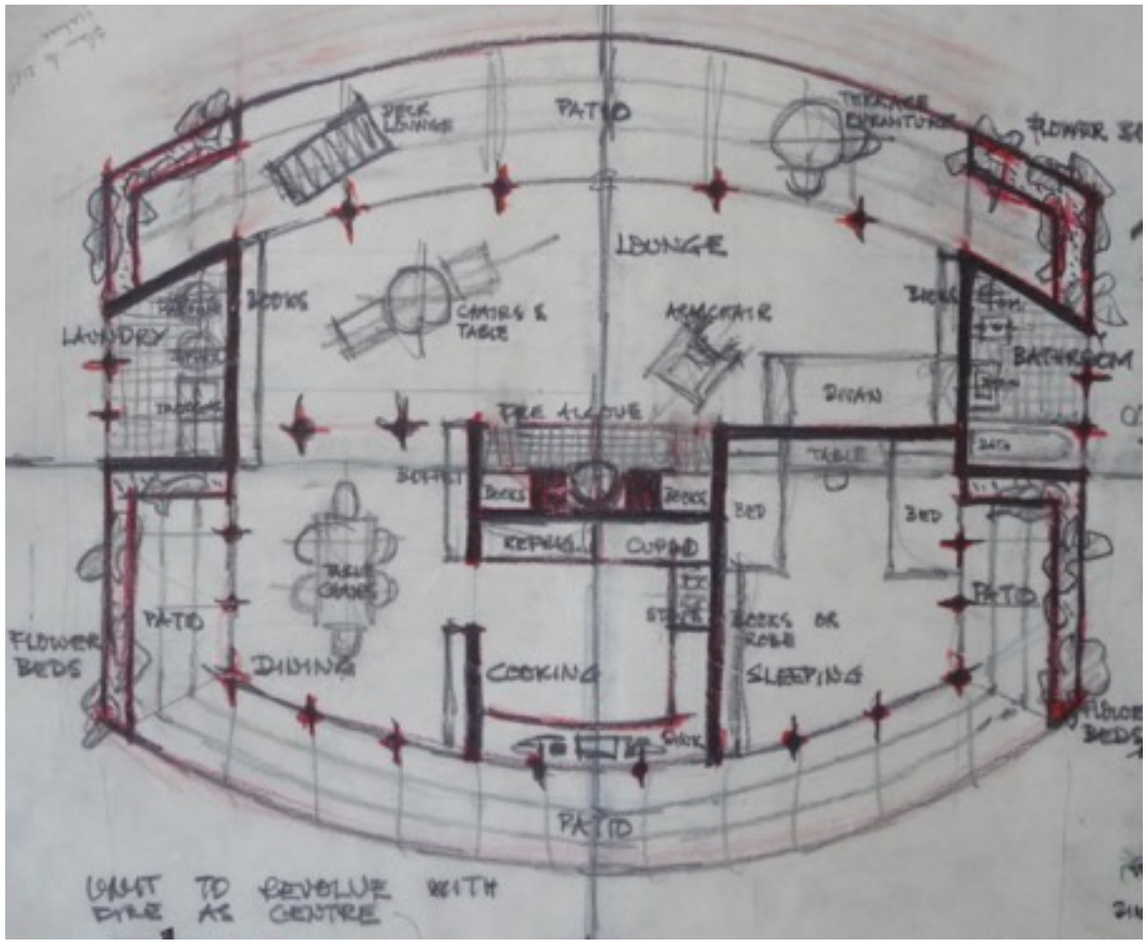
The Interior Design of the House without Walls was, of course, consistent with the tenets of Modernism. For Best Overend:

> "The period furniture which fills the average house would

be loathed by the men who evolved the original. For them an actual purpose was served in a manner which suited the material and the construction knowledge of the time" ("This Worship of Decay", *Manuscripts*,. February 1935)

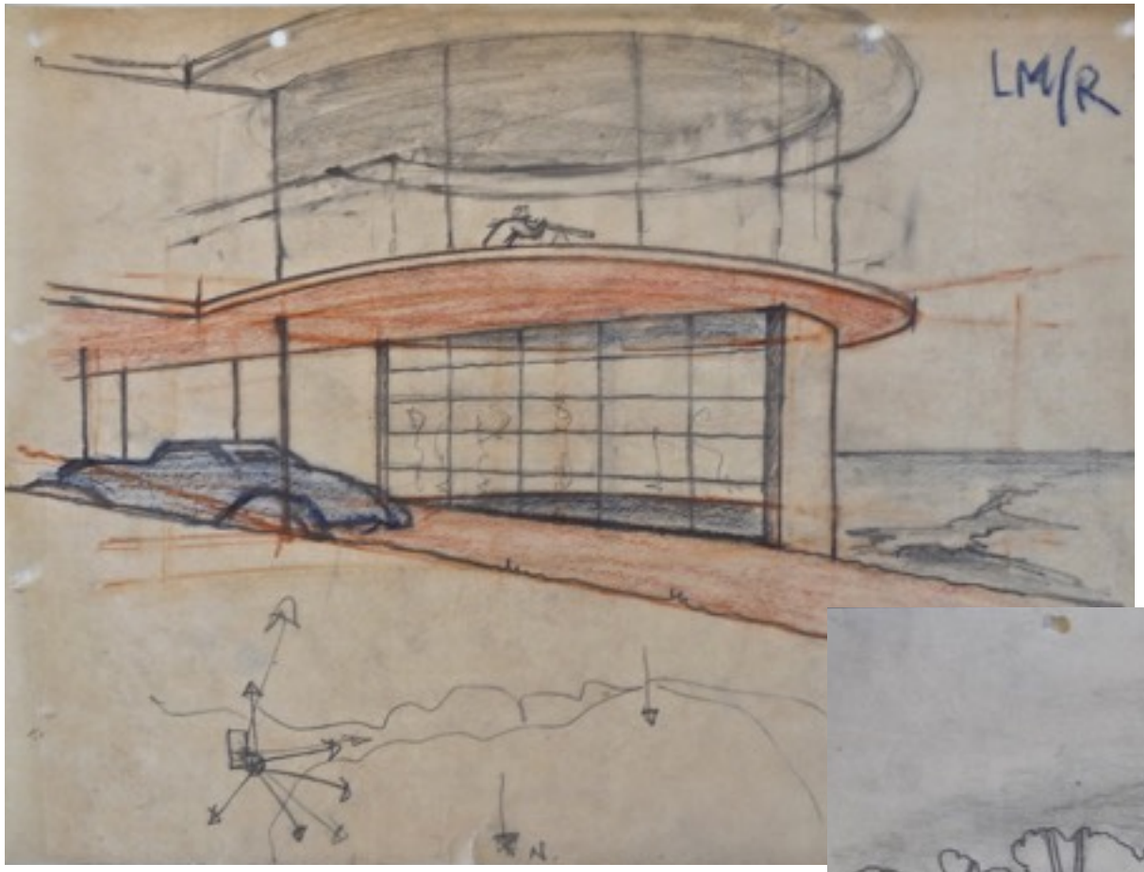
The House of the Future must have impressed Leonard Moran - a director of the Merchants, Moran and Cato. Two months after the Exhibition, Best Overend, Architects, began detailed drawings for a Modernist manor house, 'Carrington Hall', on his 200 acre estate at Rosebud. Over two years every conceivable detail, from paneling to plaster mouldings, was documented. Although the observation den and roundhouse - overlooking Port Phillip Bay and featured in Robin Boyd's first book, Victoria Modern - might very well have come from the Exhibition, a flat roof could be avoided, given the slope of the ground. And construction took considerably longer than seven days.



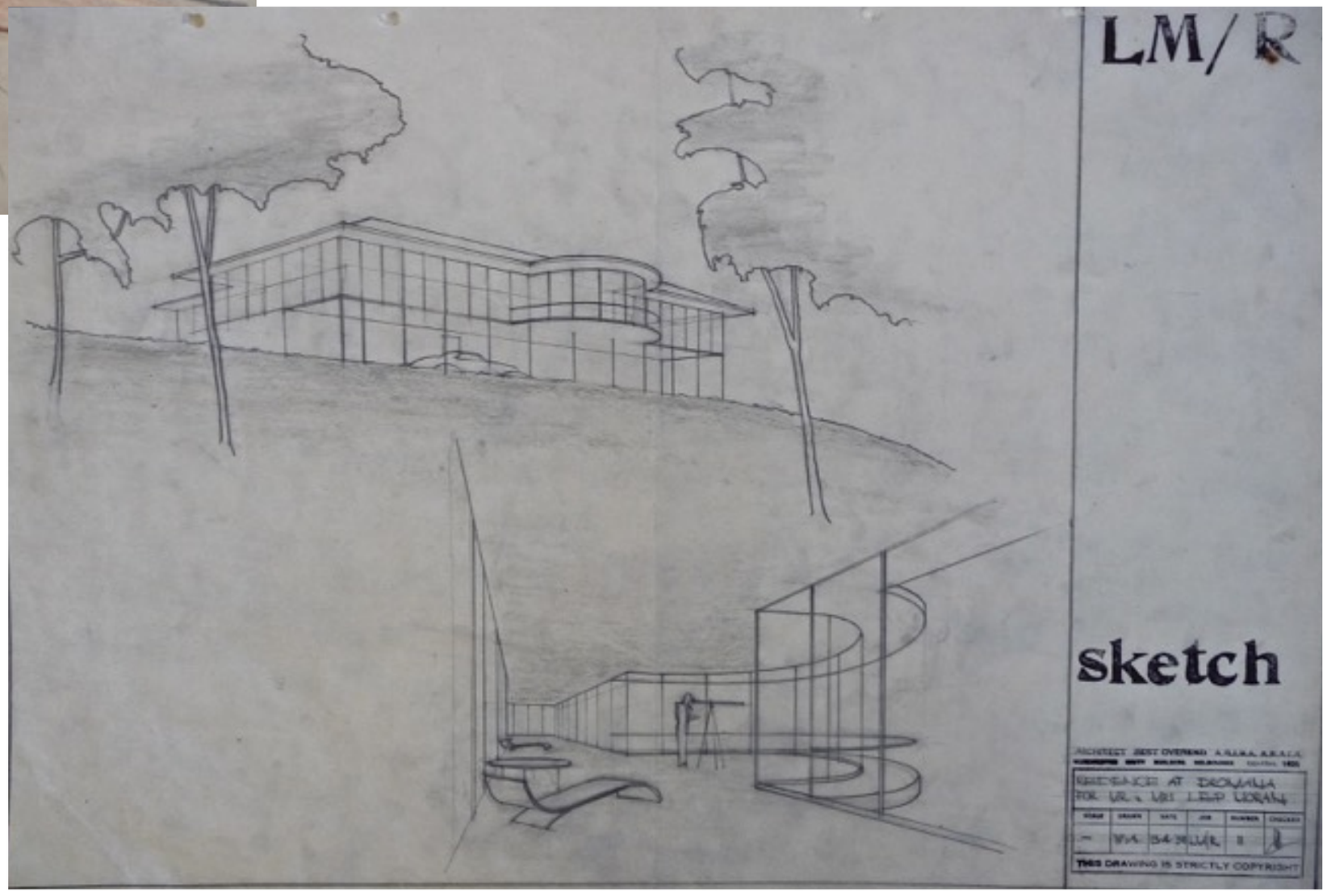


Rough sketch plan of 'The House without walls'. Sliding glass walls take the place of windows. "Beautiful with green-toned Glass Bricks…Mirror-walled bathroom…Practical, with its Model Kitchen and Laundry." The *Herald* 18th February 1939.

Rough sketch, by Best Overend, for 'The House Without Walls', which was the central unit in the exhibition. "The application of Art and Commonsense," "…a gem of scientific planning - no waste space - no unnecessary passages to weary the housewife." The *Herald* 18th February 1939.



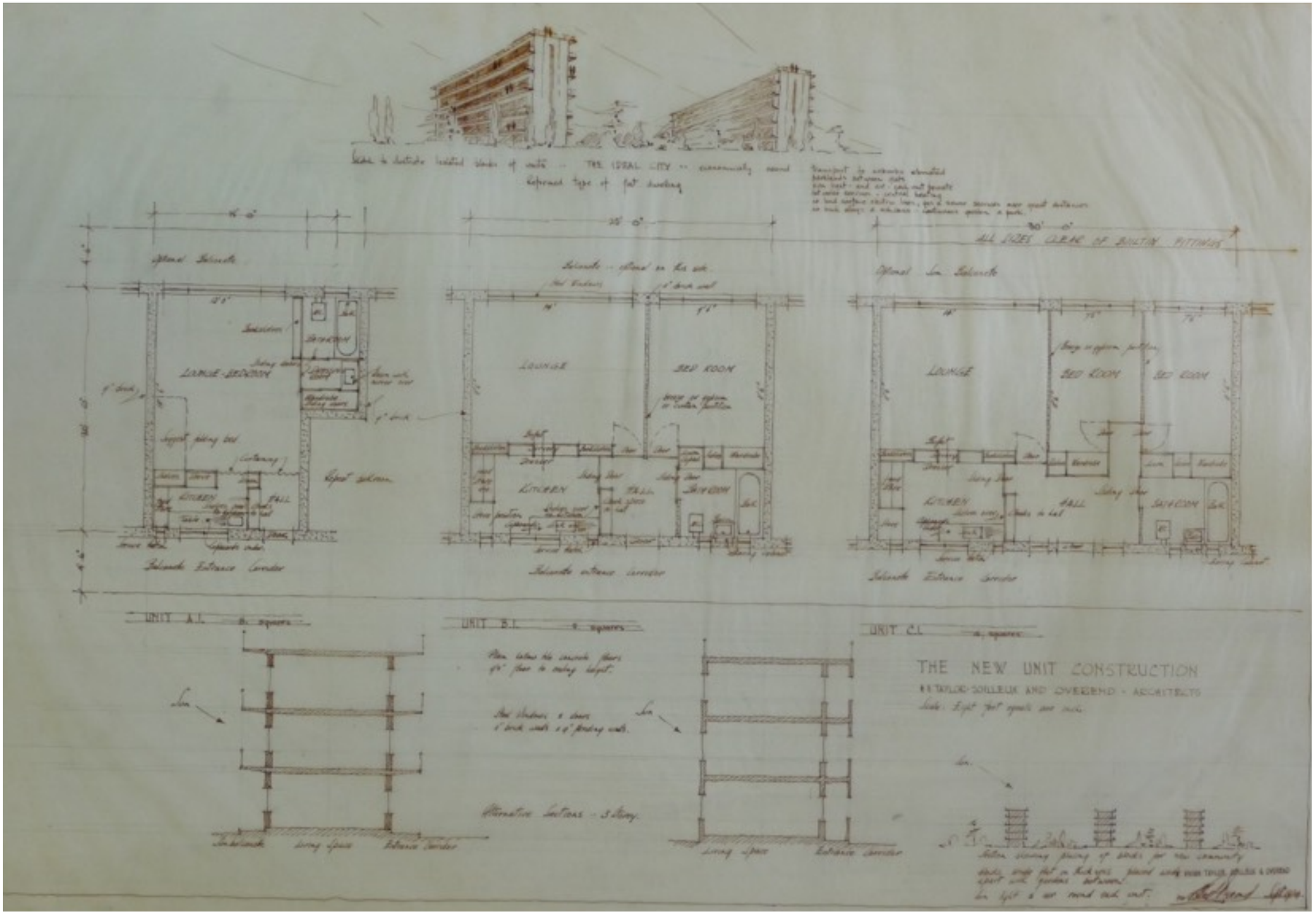
Leonard Moran must have liked the shape of ‘The House of the Future’. Two months after the exhibition, Best Overend, began a protracted two year project of producing highly detailed drawings for ‘Carrington Hall’:a Modernist manor house , complete with servants quarters, on his two hundred acre estate at Rosebud, overlooking Port Phillip Bay. Conceptual drawing by Best Overend, 1939.



Two detailed perspectives of ‘Carrington Hall’. The bottom is the observation den and roundhouse. Residence for Mr & Mrs LEP Moran. Dated 13th April 1939. “Possible erection in 7 days was not achieved! Nor did he trust a flat roof.

View from the promenade deck. A photo featured in Robin Boyd's, *Victorian Modern*.

Near completion, 1941. The Architect's Packard Clipper is parked on the driveway under the promenade deck. At the entrance, 'green toned Glass Bricks' surround the substantial caste bronze doors. On entering, to the left, an impressive paneled billiard room. A reinforced concrete spiral staircase led to the reception rooms. Both these features, too hard to destroy, are the few remaining details that survive today. Now a Club House for a golf course, the Moran's did not enjoy the house for long. It was sold , in March 1945, before the end of the War.



Following the ideology of the MARS group in Britain, Best Overend's version of the modern flat in 'The Ideal City'. 'The New unit construction' of reinforced concrete, was economically sound, socially desirable. 'Transport to suburbs eliminated; continuous garden and parklands between flats; sun ,light and air ; each unit private; hot water...central heating, no electric lines and services over great distances;no back alleys and ash cans' H Vivian Taylor, Soilleux and Overend. Drawing by Best Overend. Dated Sept. 1934.

The Principle of Integration

Consistency of internal furnishing with external structure was only a part of the principle of integration. The whole interior space, the allocation and arrangement of rooms, changed with Modernism. Just as glass took the place of masonry walls,

> ". . .unnecessary walls separating small cave-rooms should be removed..." "Why should you have that collection of small caves connected with dark tunnels of which most houses consist. Light, air, freedom and space form the natural ideal. Enlarge the living space and contract your sleeping space". ("New Homes for Old" and "New Dream House" *ABC. Broadcast* by Best Overend, September 1935).

In this scheme of things,

> "the bedrooms will be practically cubicles set with built-in beds (and wardrobes) . The walls will be formed of sliding screens and the external walling will slide away and leave the room opening onto the patio, unroofed, extending into the garden." (my elaboration, "The Lounge" *ABC. Broadcast*, September 1935).

In the dining room, the glass topped table, like an enlarged tubular steel butler's tray, can be wheeled in from the kitchen where it is already set. Here the outside is brought inside through the use of sliding glass screens, permitting direct access from the patio and garden to the dining space.

In "The House of 1960", a futuristic article and drawings written for the *Australian Home Beautiful* in 1938, again walls, as one would traditionally understand them, are absent. As with some high rise buildings of today, everything is cantilevered from a central core. The core integrates all the services required in a domestic house, some of which are obvious, others of which are a little alarming. Coupled with the airconditioning, water, refrigeration, telephone, radio and T.V., the air raid alarm, the gas masks, sterilising equipment, central vacuum cleaning unit, with extensions over the whole floor area, and a concealed sprinkler system are also found. Rooms attached to this core rotate to catch the sun. Finally, within the core,

> "we shall see the incorporation of the special accommodation required for your autogyro. Flying is the only sensible means of travel and the perfect autogyro will most certainly transfer into the wider sphere of the Middle Air the carnage of the present roads".

My wife used to live in a house supervised by Bernie Joyce, of Bogle and Banfield. It was built in I960. Toward the end of the evolution of Modernism, it was the most up-to-date of its type in Melbourne. This was almost a family tradition, as her aunt and uncle, in 1935, commissioned Geoffrey Mewton to build what later became known as the "The Stooke House", one of the first thorough-going pieces of Modernism in Melbourne. The closest the Corrigan 1960 house got to Best's conception was suspended (though non-rotating!) reinforced concrete slab construction, flat roof and built in furniture, external floor to ceiling glass windows and internal glass partitions. One could see through all the separate living and dining areas to the outside deck. However, central vacuum cleaning hadn't quite arrived; thankfully nor had the gas masks, and the autogyro certainly hadn't yet replaced the E Type Jaguar parked under the cantilevered bedrooms above.

Underpinning the notion of integration is the aesthetic of minimalism. In 1934 Wells Coates published an article on his Lawn Road Flats, in Hampstead, entitled "The Minimum Flat" (*The Architects Journal*). The analogue in Australia was Best Overend's "A Minimum Flat with Maximum Comfort" published in 1933 in the *Australian Home Beautiful*. It is apparent that *The Architects Journal* must have had a greater backlog of accepted articles! Best Overend's Bachelor Flats in Fitzroy - named Cairo - were the instantiation. Flat roof construction, where badminton could be played and where the view of the city was superb; large windows facing north; communal dining and washing facilities; and reinforced concrete staircase with "no visible means of support". The Melbourne *Herald's* other bi-lines were "Young Architect's Triumph" and "Builders Intrigued" (*Herald*, 17th October

1936). It was four years earlier - four years before the foundations of Cairo were laid - that Best Overend first tried to outline some of the radical tenants of minimalism.

> "... incidentally, mother, we are ... perfecting an altogether new way of building ... a really new way . . . all a very dead secret at the moment, but we are starting to build very shortly and I will send you the explanation when it is published for if it is a success ... I shall be able to build you a house ... for an extremely low figure . . . and one that will work better . . . and one far more convenient than the usual. Each bedroom has ... an extraordinary amount of cupboard space .. a box mattress ... a separate basin with hot and cold water. . . and a nice large mirror . . glass wall opening onto a garden ... but each bedroom is really only a cabin - 7 feet by 14 feet with the cupboards forming the partitions between the neighbouring bedroom ..." (Letter from The London Office, 15th August 1932)

Although minimalism was a position in aesthetics, it was also embedded within Wells Coates' mistaken sociology. Just as Modernism was seen as part of a new social order, minimalism was seen as one of the new "needs" and "habits", the norms, of post capitalist society. Misjudging the half life, as it were, of capitalism, Best Overend was also to write in 1934 that "it seems certain that the home of the future will be communistic." ("The Modern Architect..” *Manuscripts*. May, 1934).

In a dialogue with his cousin, Bob Eggleston, also a young architect, broadcast on the ABC. in 1935, this theme was developed. Considering State housing for the working class they contended:

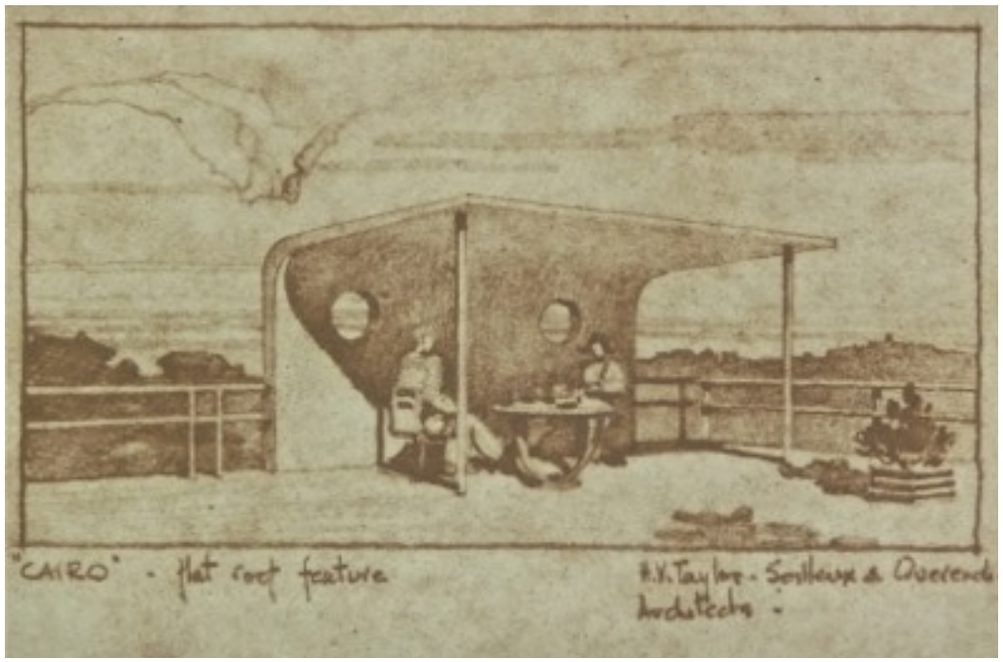
> "The small house is the world of toil. Individuality of castle, the boast of the Englishman, can be realised only by a few individuals. It can be, and will be, the prerogative of the few. Standardised cottages, one only needs to walk in any of our industrial suburbs, have standardised and filthy backyards, enclosed with bent galvanised iron, and their many dustbins scent the breeze." ("Poverty with Dignity") .

For them the block building was the only sensible economic solution. Here "...women will be unemployed... as these flats are so compacted that their day's work will be finished in the first hour". In the back of their minds was their old boss, Wells Coates, and his client Jack Pritchard, and their notion of prefabricated housing types they called ‘Isotypes’. The ‘Isokon flats’, on Lawn Road, had been opened a year earlier.

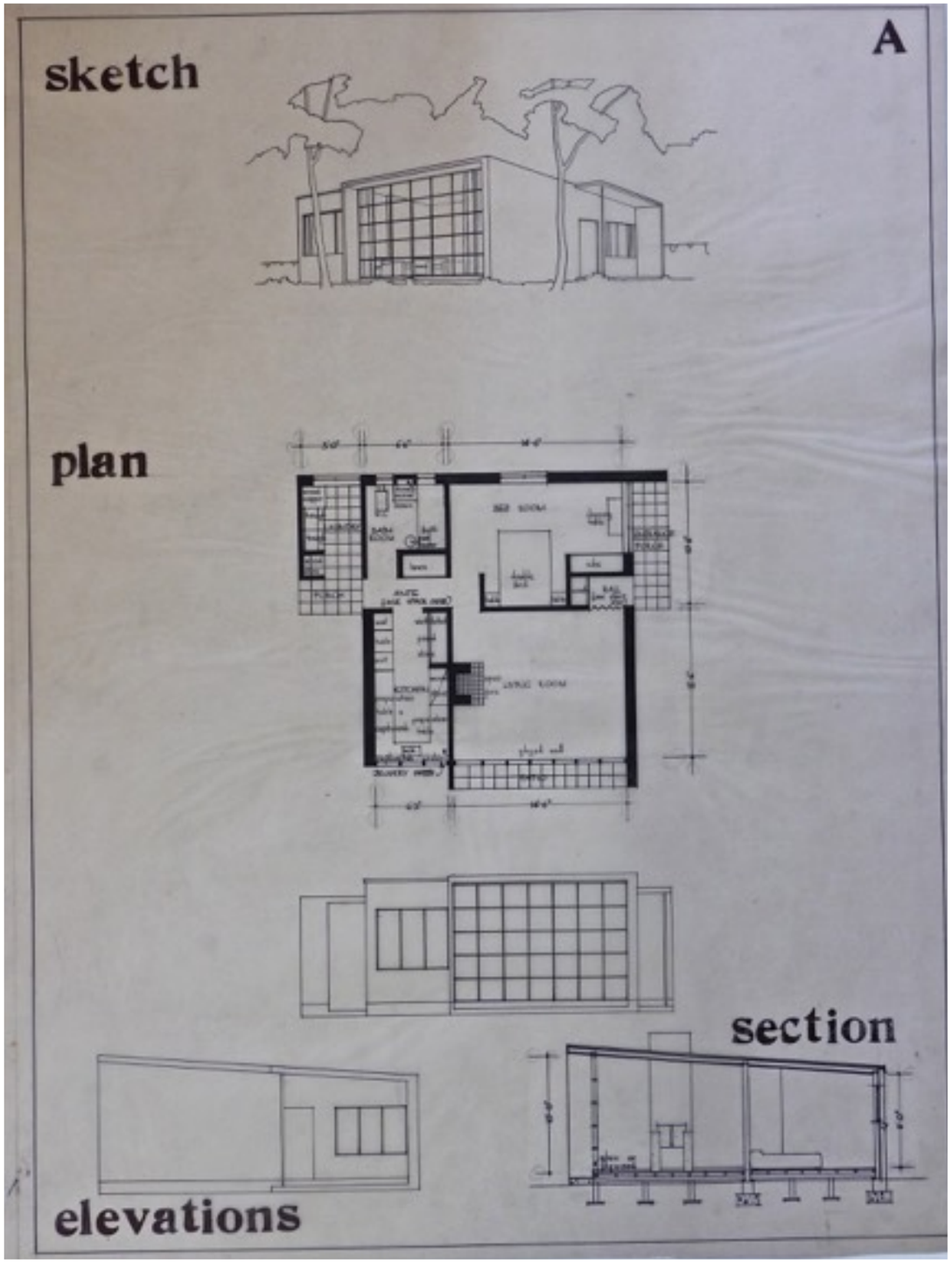
The minimalist creed of Modernism for the middle class, on the other hand, was underlined in the subtitle to his article "The House of 1960". It continued with the phrase: "Let us consider it merely as shelter."

> "There will, I hope, be that quality and chastity in shelter that there is in some other mass produced economic products where everything is cut to the minimum except the material. There are no gable fronts on Boeing Bombers." ("The House of 1960").

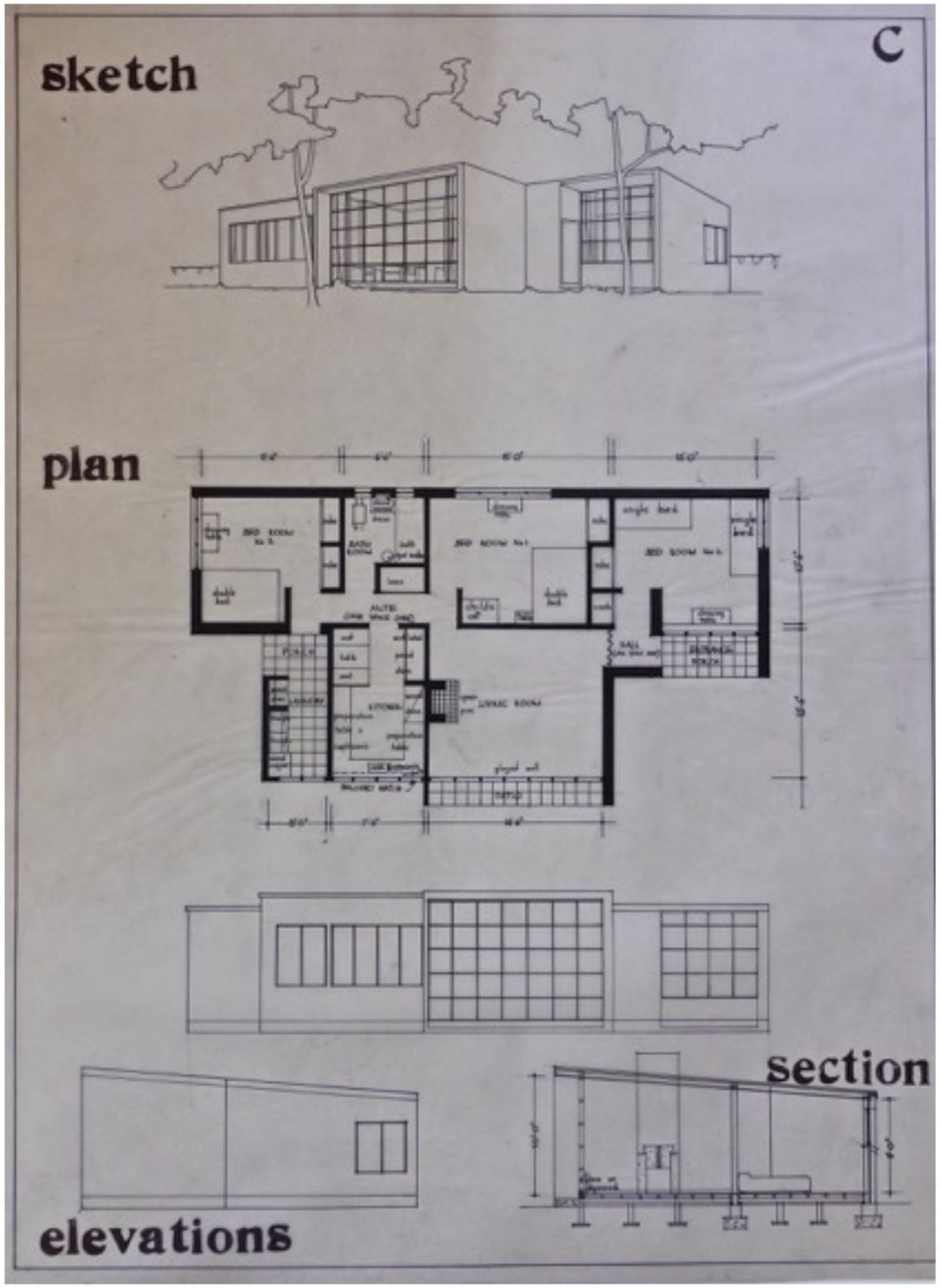
In the Cairo flats everything was minimal and integrated. For the middle class bachelor, wardrobes, dressing tables, cupboards, shelves, kitchen tables and chairs were all built-in. The bed might very well have been built-in also, in which case it would have required no separate furnishing at all.



‘Cairo’. ‘New Design for Living’ Flat roof feature. Sketch by Best Overend.



Sketch, Plan and Elevation of a one bedroom house for the Fishermans Bend Competition. The Housing Commission of Victoria. 1939. Best Overend's scheme was not dissimilar to 'The House of 1960'



A three bedroom house for the 'Fishermans Bend' project. The competition won him the position of Deputy Chairman of The Architects Panel. This group, of private practitioners, supervised the design and construction of public housing in the State till 1955. Their ultimate solutions required compromises and more conventional housing.

Unitary Construction

> "In the house you will be living in, in 1960, there won't be any bricks at all. In Babylon some four thousand years ago we used bricks in our houses in the same way we use them today, but in 1960 the house will be built in much the same way that motor bodies are built today." ("The House of 1960").

As a prelude to this development, many of my Best's schemes were built around the notion of a module. Accordingly, extensions or alterations in the future could be easily incorporated into the initial concept. A set of designs for the Australian Home Beautiful Competition of 1938 - where he received a consolation prize - embodied this principle. Mass housing projects for the working class, on the other hand, more clearly lent themselves to standardisation.

In 1939, Best Overend's career took an important step forward. With Arthur Leith, John Scarborough and Frank Heath, he was appointed to the Architect's Panel of the Victorian Housing Commission. Their task was the design and construction of thousands of urgently needed dwellings for Melbourne's "baby boomers". A competition had been organised for 400 houses in the first project at Fishermans Bend. Because no winner was selected, the final design incorporated "the best features of all entries" (*Herald*," 13th June 1939). Best Overend's submission was not unlike "The House of 1960". Huge floor to ceiling glass walls orientated to the north. What the workers ended up with was something less adventurous. Where the houses of the Architect's Panel more clearly embodied the principles of Modernism was the development of pre-cast concrete slab construction as manufactured at the Commission's factory, Holmesglen. Although not quite "car bodies", these component parts were trucked all over Victoria in the late 1940's and 1950's.

Even for the middle class, Best always had a belief "... that the factory-built shelter will out-advertise the standard car and stock soup of today's national picture magazine" ("The House of 1960"). In "The Influence of Architecture Upon Society" (*Pax*. 1938), he argued

> "standard metal and glass unit walls will ultimately give us cheaper houses... one tangible product of this standardisation is to be seen already in today's mass produced cars and planes; not those of a snobbish and delightful uniqueness for the favoured, but the cheap off-the-line V8 - essential in every respect and economic and architectural merely because there has been some basic vision and it is profitable for them to do so. These are truly fine examples of Architecture"

There was always in his mind a close practical and aesthetic connection between the car and the house. Its logical extension was the aesthetic belief that architecture was reducible to industrial design.

> "If there is logic and necessity in Architecture then it is good. You will see these things exemplified in the beautiful moulded handles of the latest electric household irons, the sprung wheel of the racing car, the balanced aerodynamic design of the rudder of a plane". ("The Influence of Architecture on Society").

Reflecting on his career fifty years later, and what had become of Modernism, he contended:

> "As an art, Architecture escaped the clutches of the Architects after its rebirth in the 1920's. It dodged into industrial design and was reborn in the artless beauty of the A model Ford, the Bugatti and the 40/50 Rolls. It has persisted in the first Ferguson tractor, the Comet aircraft, the fighter plane and a Japanese destroyer and Concorde. I thought the first E Type was pretty good too and I had four of them before my Ford Utility which after 60,000 miles and 30,000 bales of hay, I still can't hear the engine and don't know what gear it is in" (*R.V.I.A. Journal*. 1976).

His experience of industrial design was always direct. All these cars he, or our family, owned. The planes and the ships were those that had particularly impressed him in the war and after. Indeed, after the war, he was State Chairman of the Industrial Design Council of Australia. But it was both before and during the war that this belief was sown.

In a bulletin for the Housing Commission, entitled Shelter - published in August 1941 and just before his enlistment - he begins with an aphorism of Disraeli: 'Suppose an Architect were Hanged'. The enigmatic quote draws attention to Disraeli's contention that no profession has 'done it's duty until it has furnished a victim'. Just as the Royal Navy had to shoot an Admiral to achieve victory, so will architecture. According to Best Overend, industry can only'conquer building', and provide shelter, by prefabrication. This victory will be achieved, no doubt, by eliminating a good number of architects. The mass production of dwelling units could be based on off-the-shelf 1¼ inch steel water pipe, of standard lengths. With standard elbows, the whole frame for the house

> 'would be simply screwed up by ordinary labour, with the flanges of the vertical pipes being bolted down into concrete blocks.'

The steel frame would be held together with removable U shaped clips. External walls, corrugated asbestos sheets screwed by U bolts to the piping. Roofing, corrugated asbestos or iron. Lining, plywood or Masonite tap screwed to the frame. Windows and door jams, pressed metal, and also screwed into position. All materials in widths of three feet to match the standardized three foot square grid plan of the building. A series of module units could be expanded from a bedroom to a dormitory, from a house to a hostel. As an amusing aside, it is observed:

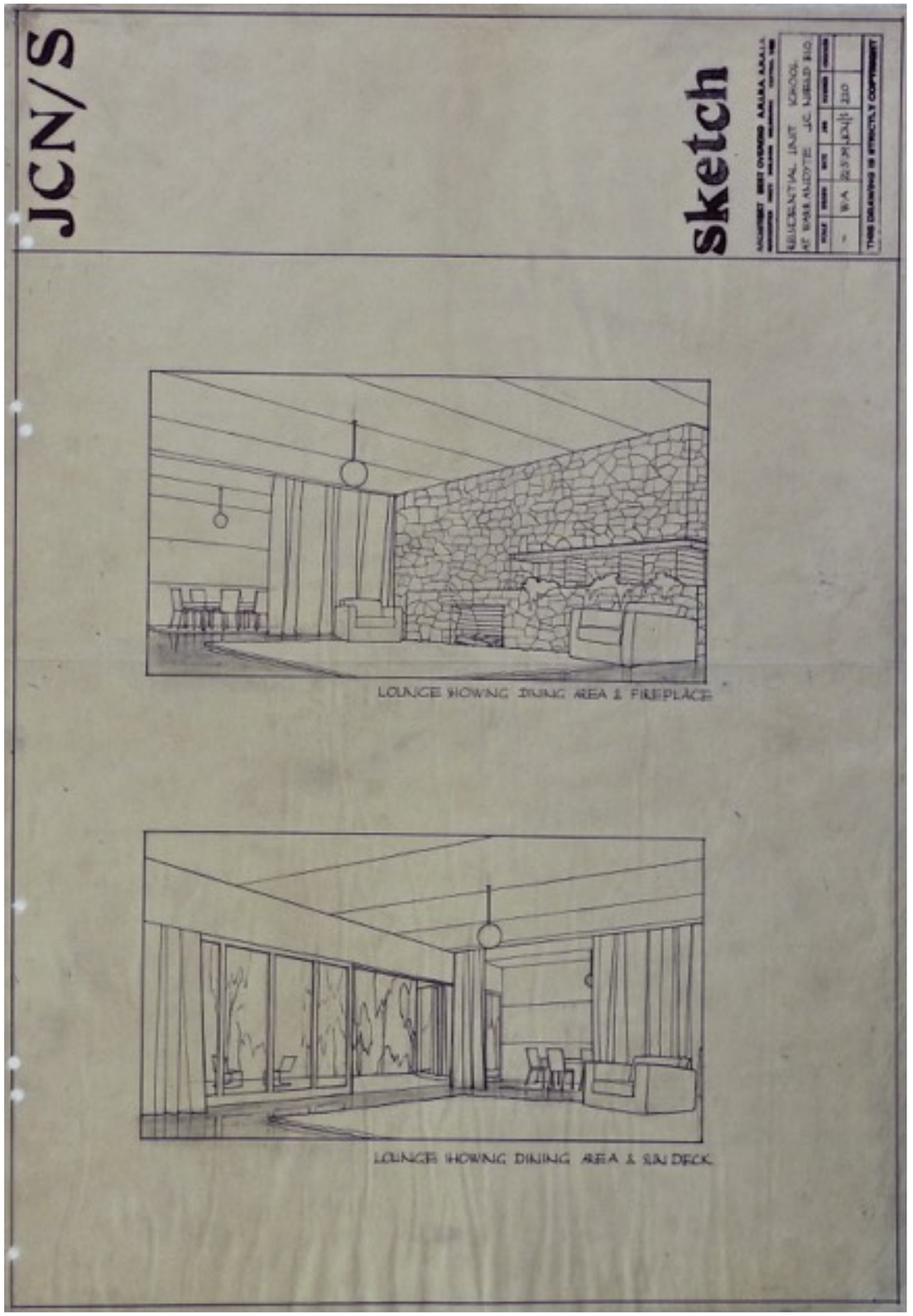
> "The one point to be noted about the construction is that, insofar as it is easy to put it together, so, unless care is taken in the design of the clips, it may be easily taken apart. If not, it might be a simple matter one evening, to remove the roof from someone's house, to remove certain of the walls, or, if there was need, to remove a complete room."

This was the upshot of what he called the 'high re-sale or demolition value' of this building type! Some months later, now posted to Adelaide River, in the Northern Territory, Best Overend revised his cogitations for the Architects Panel. With the materials on hand, asbestos and steel are replaced by iron and wood. In 1942, as The *Sun* war correspondent reports 'Somewhere in Australia' – a subterfuge against the enemy! - 'Supply Unit Prepares Ready–made Camps'

> " In charge of the new unit is Flight Lieutenant A. Best Overend, well known Melbourne Architect who has worked wonders in two months, since the unit's establishment. He has paved the way for an important post-war timber industry in the territory. 'even the most simple fellow will be able to erect these pre-fabricated camps without blueprints or other aid', said Flight Lieutenant Overend. 'The camps will become standardised and with adequate labour could be erected almost overnight.'

BOFOCO. Best Overend Flying Officer Commanding Officer of the 11th Works Squadron, 61st Airfield Construction Wing. Katherine River, Northern Territory. 1942. Cartoon by, Architect, John Mockridge.

A synthesis of Organic Architecture and Modernism. A perspective of the combined dormitory-dining-kitchen unit of ‘Koornong’, drawn by Best Overend. Built in 1940, the illustration was used by Best, Bernice and Loftus for their 1940 Christmas Greetings.



Interior details of ‘Koornong’. Top. Lounge, showing dinning area and fire place. Bottom. Lounge, showing dinning and sun deck.

Utility and Purpose.

> "The art of building is circumscribed by utility; and this to the philosophic architect must be his creed....". "...specific purpose will be his gospel for the revival." ("The Modern Architect…" *Manuscripts* May 1934.).

Fresh from London, and with a specific knowledge of acoustics, Best helped design a series of picture theatres for Hoyts. Other consultancy work for this practice was at Pagewood Studios Sydney, Parliament House Adelaide, and 250 auditoriums and theatres in Australia and New Zealand. In 1936, the Windsor Theatre was completed at a cost of fifty thousand pounds. Others he took a direct hand in design were built at Hartwell, Brunswick and Albury. At the time he was to write:

> "The Architect must be a nice blend of the businessman, the artist, and the engineer if his profession is to persist. He must make economics his study as well as purpose and material".("The Modern Architect…" *Manuscripts*. May 1934).

In 1941 he proposed the construction of a "sound shell" on the principle of the famous Hollywood Bowl. Although primarily for the Botanic Gardens, Hector Crawford, the conductor of the Melbourne Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra, remarked "..we shall find it particularly useful in our country concerts which are to be a feature of plans for the future" (*Sun* 19th April 1941) . Made of silver ash, the collapsible and portable shell was to measure 80 feet in length and 38 feet deep.

> "Depth is determined by acoustical conditions, and the maximum possible to permit sound travelling to the rear and back again without lingering too long on the way is 35-40 feet." (*Sun* 19th April 1941).

Transportable on the back of two "motor trucks", the estimated cost was under one thousand pounds.

His most acclaimed work, however, where use and purpose were clear determinants of design, was the first progressive school in Melbourne. Called "Koornong", it was built in stages for Mr. and Mrs. Clive Neild between 1938 and 1940 on the steep banks of the Yarra River at Warrandyte. Similar in philosophy to A.S. Neill's "Summerhill", in less than ten years it's doors closed.. In 1947, a contributor to Smudges, the Architectural Student's Society of the R.V.I.A., wrote:

> "Koornong is still magnificent architecture. Lack of maintenance, desertion and decay cannot detract from the simple beauty which Best Overend created beyond Warrandyte. The stained, unlined boarding, exposed studding and shed roofs all have a depth and simplicity rarely approached, never excelled. The studs uncannily echoing, enhancing the familiar verticality of the encroaching eucalypts." "Koornong pioneered a new spirit of education in Victoria and it pioneered a new Architecture." (*Smuges* Vol. 6(46) 1947. Edited by Neil Clerehan).

As Robin Boyd remarked in 1952,

"Two Victorian Architects experimented with simplified timber framing exposed externally: H. Desbrowe-Annear for a holiday home in 1922. , Best Overend for School Pavilions at Koornong, Warrandyte 1939" Australia's Home (11)

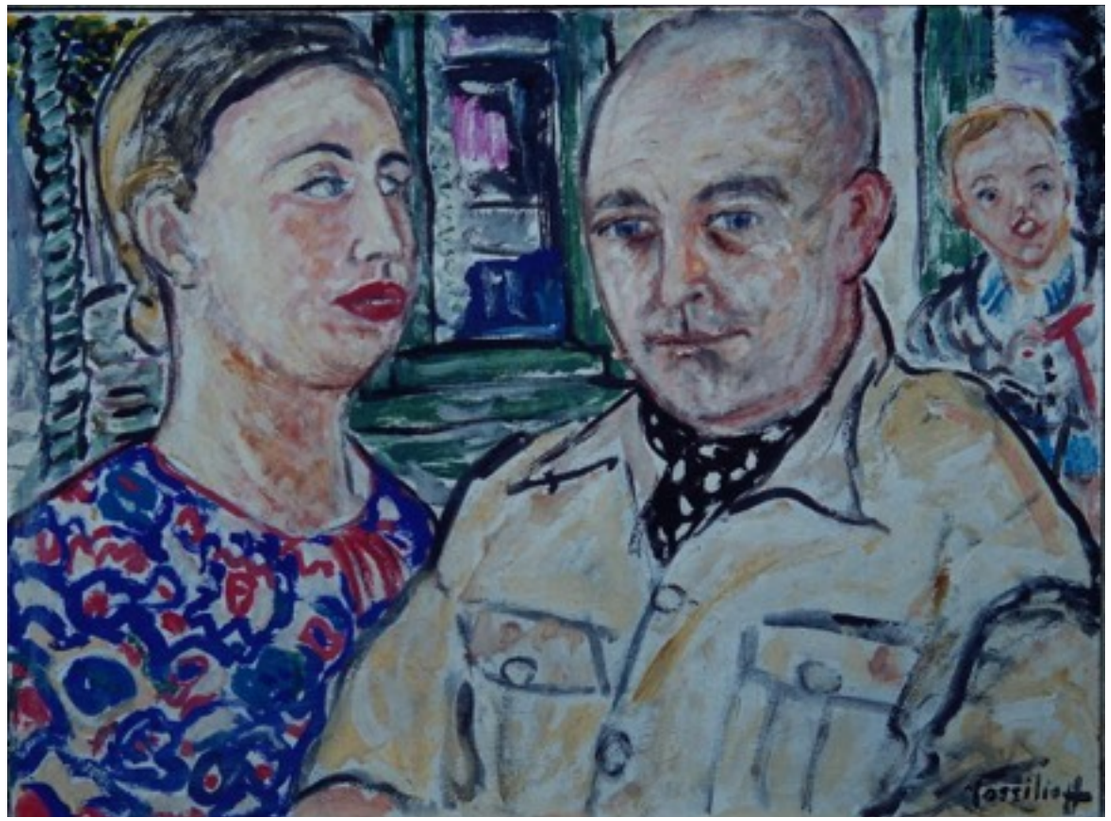
At the time, The *Herald* went on to point out that the buildings are

> "... framed up in wooden studs left exposed as a structural "skeleton" painted cream." "It is hoped by this interesting use of actual structure as, final Architecture, that the children will have an understanding of building problems and perhaps even the essence of modern Architecture" (*Herald*. 20th September 1939).

Timber, sliding glass screens facing north for light and air, plus the natural rock of the area, were the 'materials for Architecture' at "Koornong". Obviously the roof was flat This also had the practical advantage that class work could be extended outside and upon them. In case of fire, punctured pipe handrails on these roofs, linked to sprays under the eaves, meant the roof and walls could be covered with water at a moment's notice. Much of the interior furnishing, following the "principle of integration", was built-in.

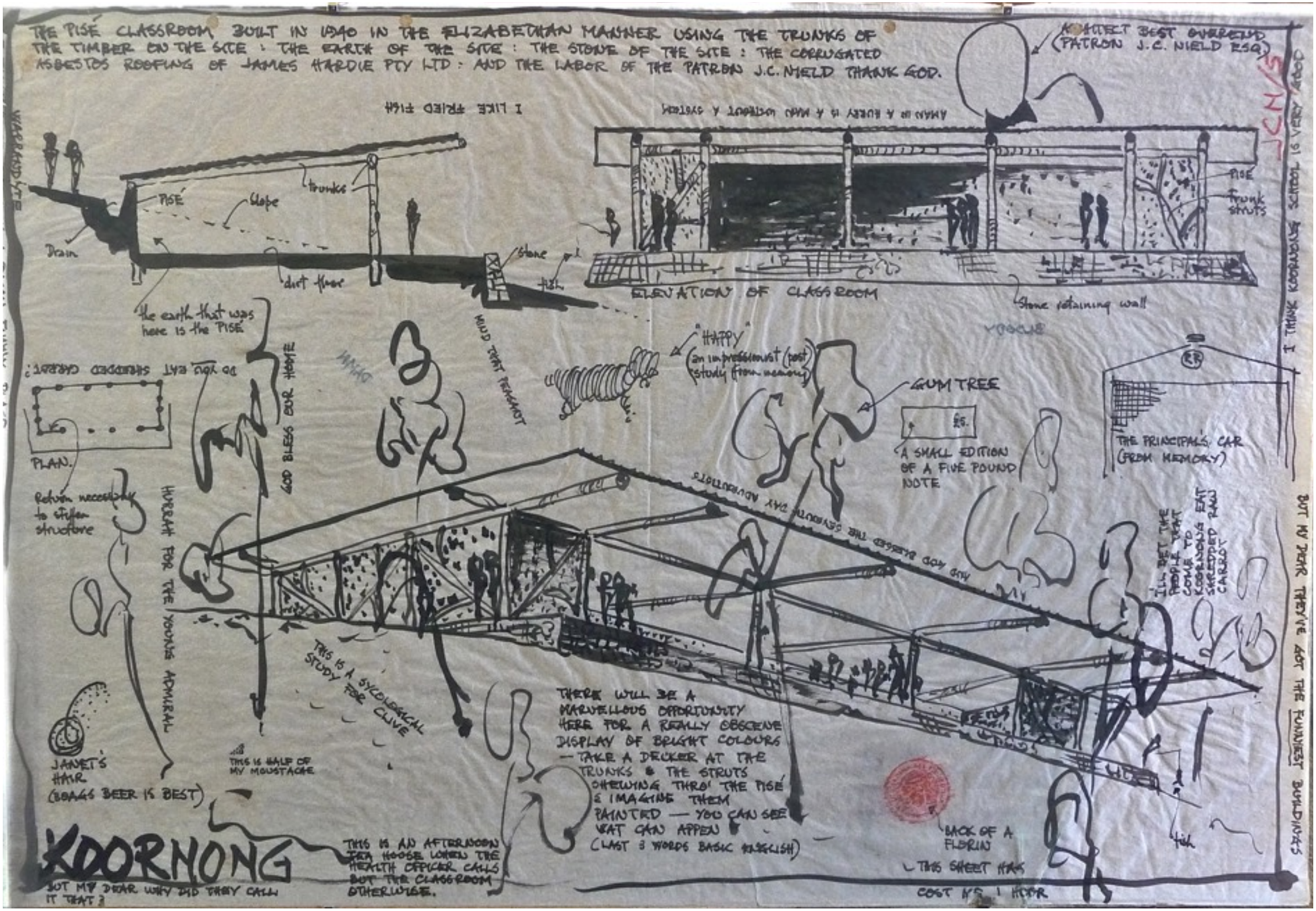
> "... filing accommodation, cupboards, drawers, typing table and vertical files, all arranged actually to form walls..." (*Herald*. 26th April 1939). "Inside and out each door and rafter has been painted a different colour decided by the pupils" (*Smudges*, Vol. 3(26) 1941, edited by R. Penleigh Boyd).

This internal colour scheme continued to evolve under the free expression of the students and the resident art teacher – a White Russian Cossack, and Expressionist - Danila Vassilieff.



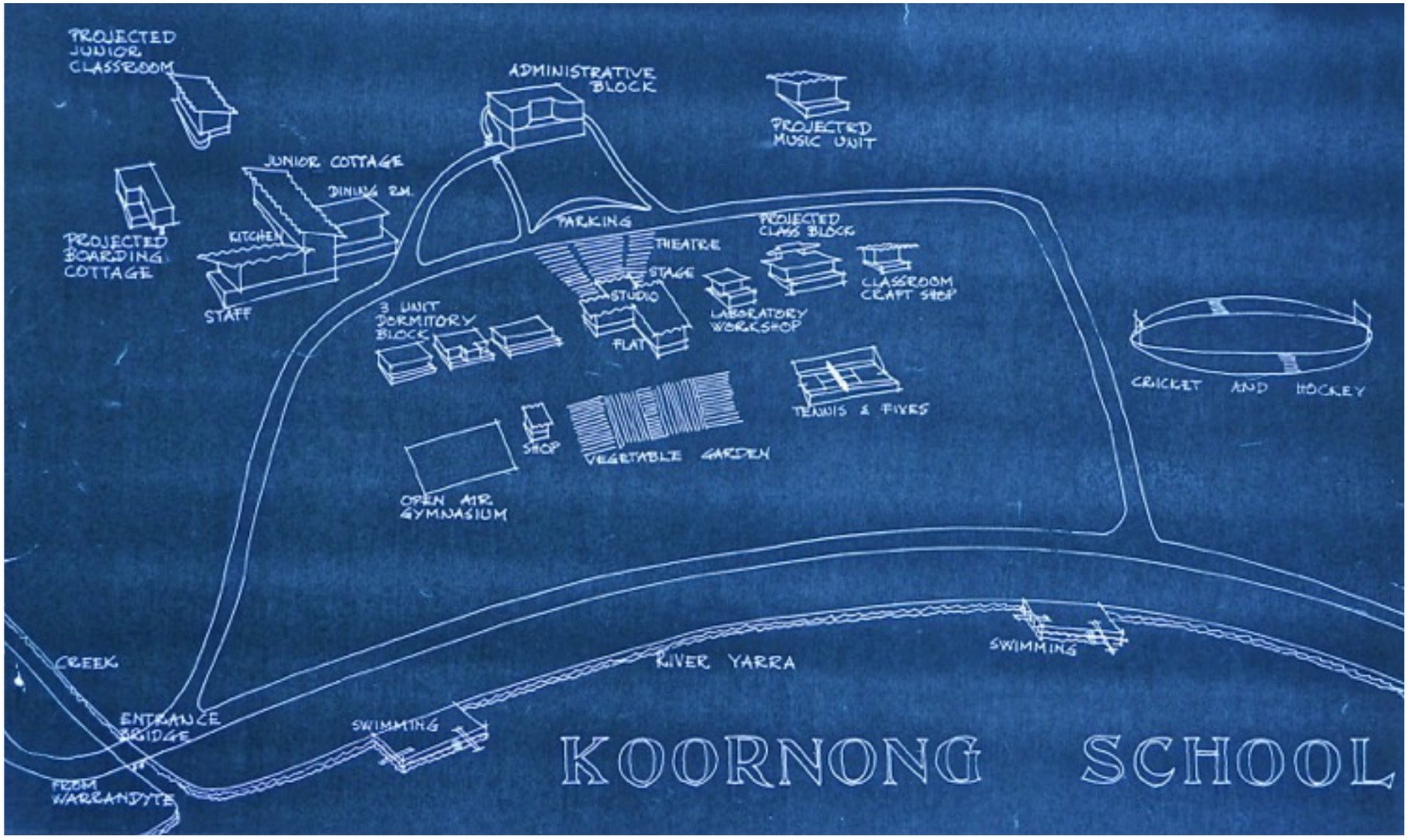
The Overend Family.(Bernice, Best and Loftus.) by Danila Vassilieff. 1940. Oil on asbestos. Off-cuts of cement sheet from the 'Koornong' school site? Bernice was not a fan. The painting was never hung at the family home"Lochiel". Before the war, as part of the Establishment and the Academy, Jock Frater was a critic of the 'intuitive and instinctive' Heide Group. He dismissed Vassilieff as no more than ' a pavement artist'

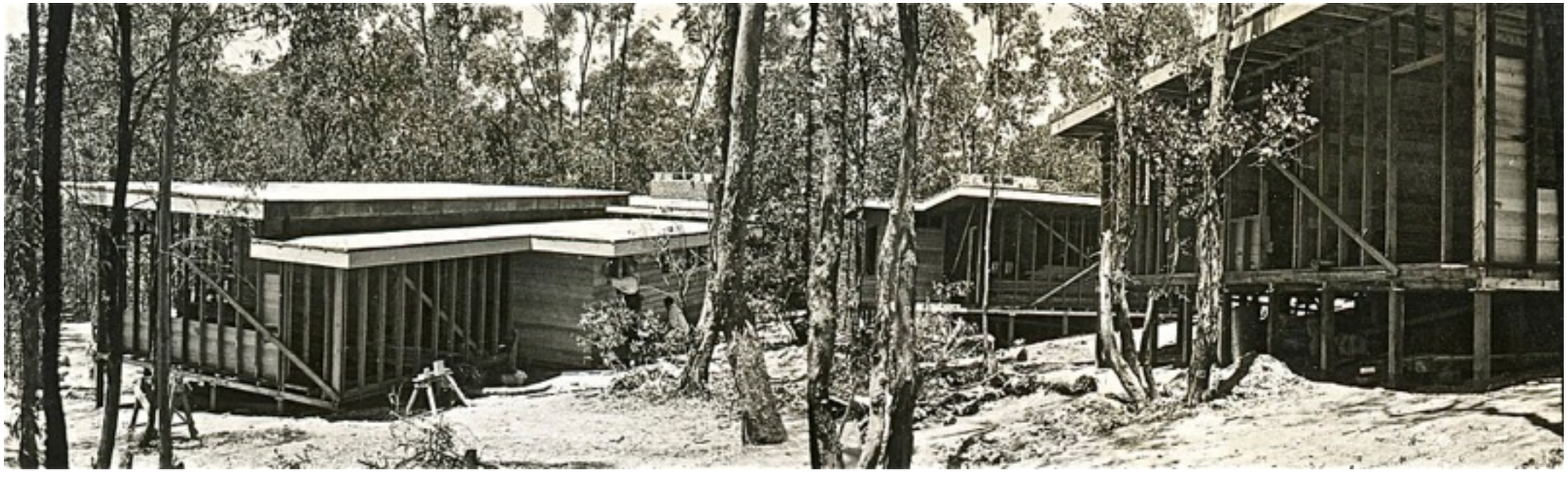
Stream Line Architecture. Hartwell Picture Theatre.
H. Vivian Taylor, Soilleux and Overend. Architects.
Perspective drawn by Best Overend.



The Architect selling his wares. A humorous conceptual scheme for “Koornong”, drawn for Janet and Clive Neild, by Best Overend. Architect.1938

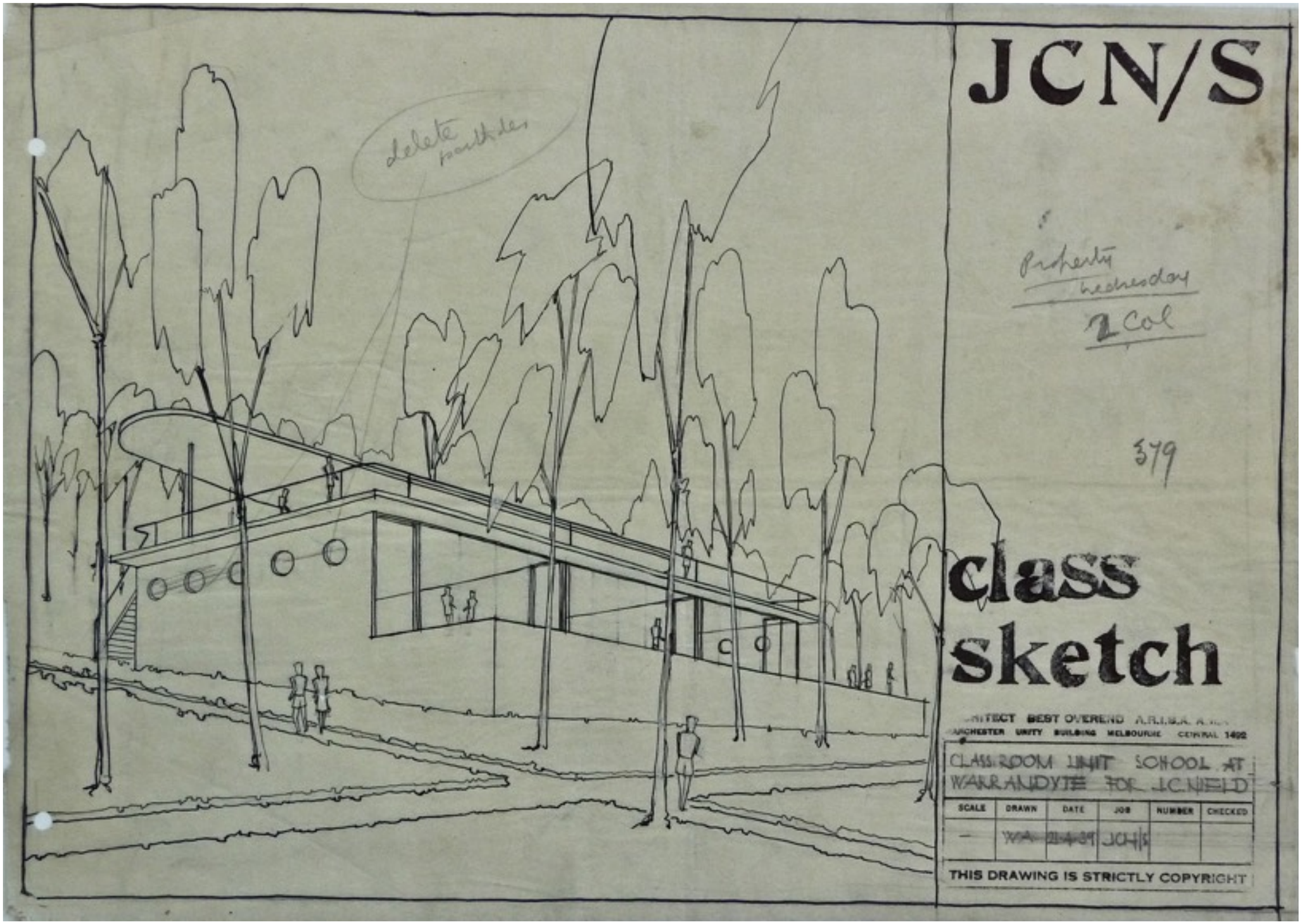
Site Plan. “Koornong” Progressive School, on the banks of the Yarra River, Warrandyte. 1938.



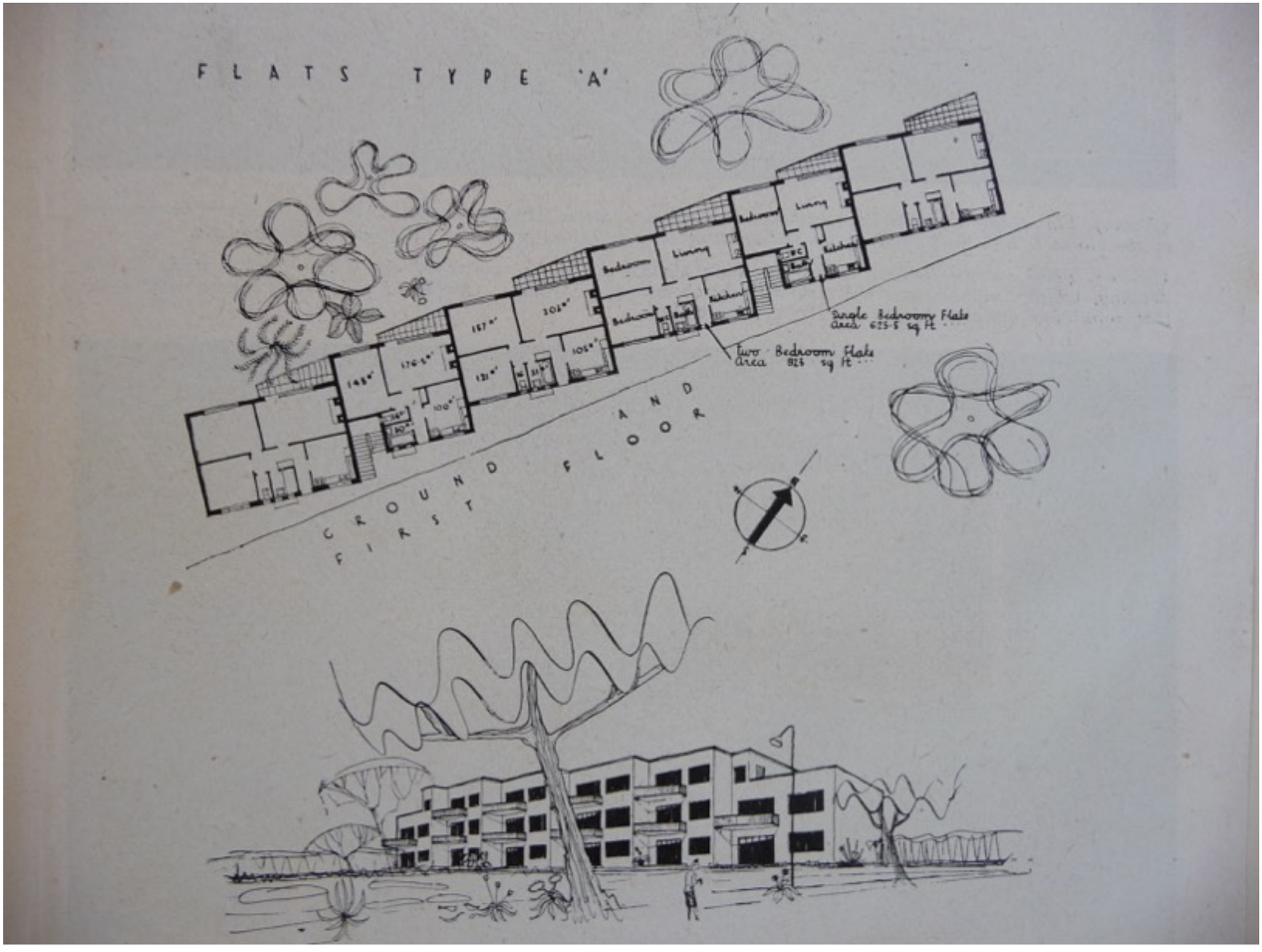


Construction begins. Flat asbestos cement roofs. The class rooms were framed up with timber studs left exposed. These were later painted cream.

Children on the building site! The Art Room, with Vassilieff watching the children drawing.



“Koornoong”. Class Sketch. Janet and Clive Neild’s School. JCN/S



By 1948, as Deputy Chairman of The Architect's Panel, for the Housing Commission, Best Overend's conception of 'The Ideal City' began to take concrete form. Although The Epsom Estate, at Ascot Vale, was brick, not reinforced concrete, a tiled and pitched roof, not a flat one that leaked, it was economically and socially rational. Standardised *existenz-minimum* plans, sunlight and fresh air, hygienic and private. It was also surrounded by parkland, with not a 'back alley or ash can' to be seen. Drawing. Ron Lyon.

After the War

Having given an account of Best's professional life leading up to the war - the architectural context in which his book was written - I might briefly conclude with an outline of it after the war. All worthwhile tales have a resolution. This was where his 'tale of adventure', and the profession of Architecture, took him. As the expression sometimes goes, he had a good war. He rose to the rank of Squadron Leader and was Mentioned in Dispatches whilst engaged, as a forward scout, in airfield construction in the Philippines. The War Staff Courses impressed him immensely. Thereafter, each point in his written word was invariably presented in numeric order. This mimicked the precision of a dispatch, or military appreciation. He remarked to me, on more than one occasion, that he would have quite happily remained in the Services after the war and worked his way up the ranks. So he wasn't a silent victim. He never tired of reading about, talking , or reliving his experience. As his fourth son, he also joined me in quite elaborate board games of 'Strategy' that I had devised and built.

Upon his return to civilian life the most obvious observation is that, despite being a leader of Modernism before the war, he did not go on and advance the movement. This is not to say his work after the war became inconsistent with Modernism. The subscription to minimalism remained; but its social form changed. At the 'Cairo' bachelor flats it was predicated on a lifestyle for the middle class. At Fishermans Bend, and subsequent Housing Commission developments, it was predicated on the economic necessities of the working class. His interest in factory design was also based on the tenets of use and purpose. As Deputy Chairman of the Architect's Panel between 1945 and 1955, his Housing Commission work was Modernist in striving for solutions in unitary and mass production. As Elizabeth Darling has recently pointed out, this was also the direction of English Modernism after the war – she called it the 're-forming of Britain'. (12) It was consistent with the career of Wells Coates and, in Best's case, the basis for a large and prosperous practice. Indeed, he fared better than most of the English Modernists. Some faced bankruptcy, others thin pickings, or, in the case of Raymond McGrath, the amusing observation by Stephen, McNamara and Goad, that he

> "…emigrated to Dublin…in 1940 to take up an appointment in the Office of Public Works, after which his career stood still for the next twenty eight years until he retired in 1968." (13)

Rebuilding his practice after the war, Best Overend returned to the theme he had been addressing before it. In 1934, he had championed and extended the modernist creed behind 'Cairo' as a solution to the problem of working class housing.

> "There is not the slightest doubt that with this form of communal living, workers and their families could be housed comfortably for 10 shillings a week…" *Herald*. 11th December, 1935.

At 'Cairo', a one bedroom apartment let for 36 shillings. But with larger multi-storied reinforced concrete structures, significant economies could be gained. In his regular column, Architecture and Property, in the *Argus*, he addressed the 'social implications' of the 'Housing Question' and 'the dearth…of suitable housing for the small wage earners'. Exploring two possible resolutions, the 'unit dwelling' and the 'block apartment', the first is dismissed as uneconomic, because of the cost of infrastructure.

> "Suburbs become far flung, sprawling unevenly over the countryside…The business centre becomes surrounded by a grid of dusty roads and mean streets dotted with unpainted and untidy houses. There is much to balance that individuality of castle, the boast of the Englishman so seldom realized…In that small toil web, the cottage, the women slave has her time fully occupied. And the small garden, if tended, fills the leisure hours of the male with lawn-mowing and with weeding. Standardized cottages have standardized and dusty back yards, and many dust-bins and rubbish men scatter the largesse of household filth." *Argus*. 20th December,1934.

Just as Modernists in Britain believed the chief social problem between the wars was the health of the working class, the spectre of 'hygiene' was always part of his rhetoric. Slums

were unhealthy. We must clear such darkness with sunlight, fresh air and a bath! Every standardized *existenz-minimum* flat had a bath room, as well as a separate toilet. Taylorist principles of 'Scientific Management' would involve the promotion of labour saving devices in the kitchen and laundry. The 'Ideal City' would be a 'Garden City'.

> "The tall block buildings would be only one flat thickness, so that each room would have perfect light and air…" These would be "… separated by wide parklands, sheer walls of glass (and private balconies) overlooking tended trees and gardens, with no outlook that need be anything but beautiful…" *Argus*. 20th December 1934. (my elaboration)

In solving the social problems of the slum, the new challenges of leisure would have to be addressed. Best Overend concludes with the observation that

> "Temporary social disorder may be bred; there would most certainly be no more than an hours work to complete the daily housework. The women would become free – perhaps too free… It seems that success…will depend upon the education of the people themselves and upon the type of life they desire to live." *Argus*. 20th December, 1934.

Arriving back after the War, Best Overend resumed his position with the Victorian Housing Commission, and was able to help realize an imperfect representation of some of these ideas. From the start, the Architect's Panel experimented with a variety of materials, from pre-cast concrete walls to concrete bricks. The austerity of post-war shortages was a limiting factor. Costs were also strictly controlled by a State Government policy that rents could be no more than twenty percent of the total family income or a 6.5% return on the total building expenditure, including land and roads. Whichever of these two computations turned out the least, became the budget for the housing project.

From the outset, at Fishermans Bend, some politicians and unionists thought their efforts 'cheap and nasty', 'glorified cowsheds' or 'concrete houses not fit for a dogs to live in'. In the robust debate, the Commission held its ground. In 1948, Best Overend was defending their case to architecture students in the Melbourne University Magazine. In "A Letter from a Down Town Architect", a detailed reply is made of their aesthetic critique. The large Ascot Estate – some 750 dwellings in Ascot Vale designed and supervised by his office - was his case study. Again, costs dictated 'the permanent red of raw bricks', not 'the transient beauty of white paint'. Further,

> "The so-called 'open plan' which can look so well for Wright's "Falling Water' is unrelated to the lives our ordinary people live,…with their standard bedroom and lounge, suits bought from standard stores as an inevitable accompaniment to suburban marriage." P.30

Despite these concessions, many of his modernist precepts of the 'Ideal City' were met. Within the estate there was even "…an ambition to have a 'Treasury Garden' (14) between the dwellings.

> "Actually, one can drive around the estate and see children tumbling everywhere in their own gardens and see the washing on the line and know that at least they are living in soundly built shelters capable of lasting 200 years." And, "With this goes as few flat roofs as possible." (P.30.)

This was his barbed rider to the architecture students.

Within the plans for the Ascot Estate, there was also the modernist provision for elegant, slightly 'S' shaped, 13 story 'flatette units'. Although this was a harbinger of hideous things to come, in 1948 it was pure 'Cairo'. Compact apartments for single people, certainly not families; ten flats a floor; each flat extending through the width of the building, affording perfect sunlight, air and a view down the Maribyrnong Valley. Alas, these were never built. And with the demise of the Architect's Panel, in 1956, these ideals of modernism escaped the imagination of the bureaucratic elite that was left. In its place, a *reductio ad absurdum*: Thirty story pre-cast concrete boxes; no balconies, no privacy and no place for raising children. Here, the problem for women was not some futuristic one of 'perhaps too much' freedom, but something altogether more alarming. Just recently, an unobtrusive metal bar

has been attached to all the windows of these monstrosities that are scattered around Melbourne. It is to restrict the opening; to prevent people from jumping. This was not the social pathology Best Overend imagined in 1934.

The attempted application of modernist principles in the work of the Architect's Panel is not the same as a consistent development of these ideas in pure architectural form. Certainly the factory at Holmesglen was based on prefabrication, and experimented with modular construction, but this rather led, in the 1960's, and after he had left the Housing Commission, to the blight of the thirty story towers. A further regressive element was the belief in Industrial Design. It was as if within his conception of Modernism was the seed of its own destruction. Architecture became no more than Industrial Design. Disraeli's dictum, 'suppose an architect were hanged', became closer to 'suppose all architects were hung'. Of his contemporaries who appeared to make some progress - such as Robin Boyd or Roy Grounds - the individual, not the mass-produced, domestic house remained important. The atrium plan of the Victorian Arts Centre in Melbourne was an idea Grounds experimented with for years. It was really only an enlargement of the floor plan of his own house. By contrast, private domestic work for Best had lost its appeal. Time intensive and fee lean, it was clearly not the way to make a good living. Even as a twenty eight year old he wrote in this book that the cow shed or a factory was just as important, and just as satisfying, architecturally. By the time I came along he certainly didn't appreciate phone calls at home, after work, if a client's flat roof started to leak. His normal reply was "so is ours!" The 1950's were a time before ribbed steel, a material that overcame most of the problems of flat roofs, malthoid and the future horrors of asbestos cement sheeting.

The lack of any systematic development in the ideas of modernism was also endemic within modernism itself. By the early 1930's - before it had even evolved in Australia - most of the progress had already been made. No one has advanced much upon the clean lines and simplicity of Ludwig Miles van der Rohe's Garden House at the Barcelona Exposition of 1929. The ideas on unitary construction, in Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion Houses of 1932, has yet to be achieved. The production of domestic housing has never been automated like a car plant and cost accounted at 50 cents a kilo! The materials and conception of the Centre Point Tower in Sydney are positively antiquated compared to his multi-storey Dymaxion buildings. Although the steel cables are there, the new materials of the aircraft industry are not, and the structure does not rotate with changes in wind direction! By 1932, the London trained New Zealander, Amyas Connell, had even gone beyond Modernism. "Pollard" is indistinguishable from the off-balanced boxes of post-modernism. As Raymond McGrath remarked at the time, it was "... more like an invention by Picasso than a house." (15) .

The regress in modernism was no more clearly seen than in the careers of its participants. As many of the founders of this tradition were not merely architects, they simply returned to their roots. Miles van der Rohe went back to furniture design, Serge Chermayeff to the arts and academia, Wells Coates to engineering and industrial design.

After the war there was an interesting parallel between Best Overend's career and that of Wells Coates. Both went into public housing. Wells Coates became Chief Designer for what was called the Permanent Aluminium Bungalow (PAB) , whilst Best, in a less Buckminster Fuller mode, worked on the Pre-fabricated Utility Block (PUB), for the Victorian Housing Commission. In a letter to Best in June 1945, Wells Coates recounted his RAF experience. In the First World War he had been a pilot. In the Second, he was a "Technical Staff Officer of the Air Staff, attached to aircraft development…" And so, not immodestly, he goes on:

> "Fairly naturally I found myself commanding the unit controlling the design and development of fighters and everything that went into them… We started work on the stuff for D-Day in August 1940." Delisted, he then became "Chief Designer for a permanent pre-fabricated… house to be made in aluminium alloy…and delivered complete in three…(parts)…fully finished" Then "… connect up to electricity, water… gas and sewer…and hand over the key to the little woman to cook the dinner." (Letter 3rd June 1945)

Wells Coates own wife had left him in 1935! Later, in August 1948, his news was still up beat, even if nothing tangible had been achieved.

> "The Aircraft Industries Research Organisation on Housing (AIROH) did not follow the main lines of the report I prepared for them during 1944, when I received three months leave to undertake a survey: but the result of their setting up a line production of the AIROH bungalow (now called the PAB or Permanent Aluminium Bungalow) is that new possibilities for line production of housing and other buildings have been established in a way even the Americans would not believe." "The line is capable of producing complete houses …every 12 minutes 24 hours a day." Now, Wells Coates was seeking export markets in Brazil, the Argentine "…and it is in … (this)… program that I may be sent to Australia to seek similar markets…(with a view to)…setting up of assembly plants 'down under'…" He concludes by remarking, " I can think of nothing more important than to capture the potential of industry as applied to building, and not leave it, as it has been for too long, to production engineers alone."(Letter 15th August 1948 My elaboration.)

I think there might have been a smile on Best's face when he replied, twelve days later:

> "…as Deputy Chairman of The Architect's Panel…we have investigated well over fifty sources of prefabricated dwelling units from England and the Continent in the last two or three years…At the same time we think we have tried about everything here, and have found it very difficult indeed to improve upon a man with a bag of nails when timber is so readily obtainable." "However, our current projects include:(a) the production of reinforced concrete walls etc. from a factory some 1,500 feet x 300feet. (This was 'Holmesglen'),(b) the production of complete half houses built on stocks and shipped by road to all places in the state , some exceedingly remote, and (c) smaller prefabricating of …box units comprising bathrooms, kitchenette, and WC fitted complete." (Letter 27th August 1948 . My elaboration.)

He then goes on to state "We normally complete 3000 dwellings per year", with his own architectural practice "…currently supervising 1,500 dwellings under contract and 800 under construction." He concluded with the remark: "I would be very glad to get some details of your PAB as against our PUB (Prefabricated Utility Block). We have given the metal house away completely for a variety of reasons".

Wells Coates, the salesman, never arrived in Australia. His 1956 Christmas card read, 'a little closer to you now'. He had returned to Canada, to Vancouver in British Columbia. In a letter in February 1957 my father wrote:

> "I gather that in Canada now all you have to do is stick your walking stick in the ground to strike an oil well and when you pull it out again it is covered in uranium dust." (Letter 6th February 1957)

Little more than a year later Wells Coates was dead. At only sixty three years of age he had tragically failed to fully realize his design brilliance. His 'dream ship' - described in a letter, 3rd June 1945 - was a 48 foot yacht of light alloys and plastics. 'Called FEY LOONG , which means Flying Dragon in Chinese.', it remained a dream.

By contrast, his first chief draftsman ,Best Overend, had his feet firmly on the ground. In 1948, Best Overend became a member of the Royal Australian Planning Institute. The competition for the Fishermans Bend development was not merely house design but also town planning. This included the layout of roads, a shopping centre, sport and cultural facilities. Earlier, in 1939, he had developed a scheme, with Garnet Alsop, for the transformation of Fishermans Bend into a transportation centre incorporating a new Melbourne airport for 'land planes' and 'flying boats'. There was provision for three more wharves at Port Melbourne and the construction of an underground railway to link the complex to the city. Future development included a two mile channel connecting the bay to a pleasure boat Harbour west of Spencer Street bridge and an amusement Garden to the north, where the World Trade Centre is now located. A bold city square - yes, another scheme! - swallowed two city blocks. It reached from Collins Street to the Yarra and was

boarded by William Street in the west and Queen Street in the east. Whereas the Docklands Project, first proposed for the Olympics in the 1990's, and what has now been subsequently built, is primarily a residential and commercial scheme, Best's was a thorough-going industrial development. Factories were to surround the Yarra river and docklands, leaving Port Melbourne and South Melbourne earmarked for 'Workers' Housing'. What an alarming thought for Veblen's leisured class who now reside there. Today this is a streetscape of renovated Victorian and Edwardian residences, and some of the more expensive real estate in Melbourne.

If this, like many schemes for the area, did not get off the ground, much of his town planning for the Housing Commission, did. It might appear ironic today, but in 1956 his practice was presented with a Bronze Medal, by the Melbourne Olympic Committee, for the Olympic Village at Heidelberg. Later, in the 1960's, he designed the new town of Churchill, in the La Trobe Valley, for the Commission. For whatever reason, then, town planning plus the politics of architecture interested him more than Modernism after the war. He was not, however, beyond penning the odd polemic for the local press and achieving some notoriety. In 1948, he joined Frederick Romberg, in calling for The Royal Exhibition Building to be pulled down. It had 'outlived its usefulness'. Earlier, in May 1947,

> "The office of Best Overend, architects…(presented)… drawings of Melbourne of the future at the request of The *Herald*".

Based on the newly discussed concept of a plot ratio, whereby a building may increase in height if the area it occupies decreases, the scheme envisaged a series of one or two towers on each city block. The effect was not unlike Brazilia. Best Overend's comments, as reported in The Herald, included:

> "This proposal could make Melbourne potentially one of the most beautiful cities in the world and the present City Council of historic interest and world famous overnight."

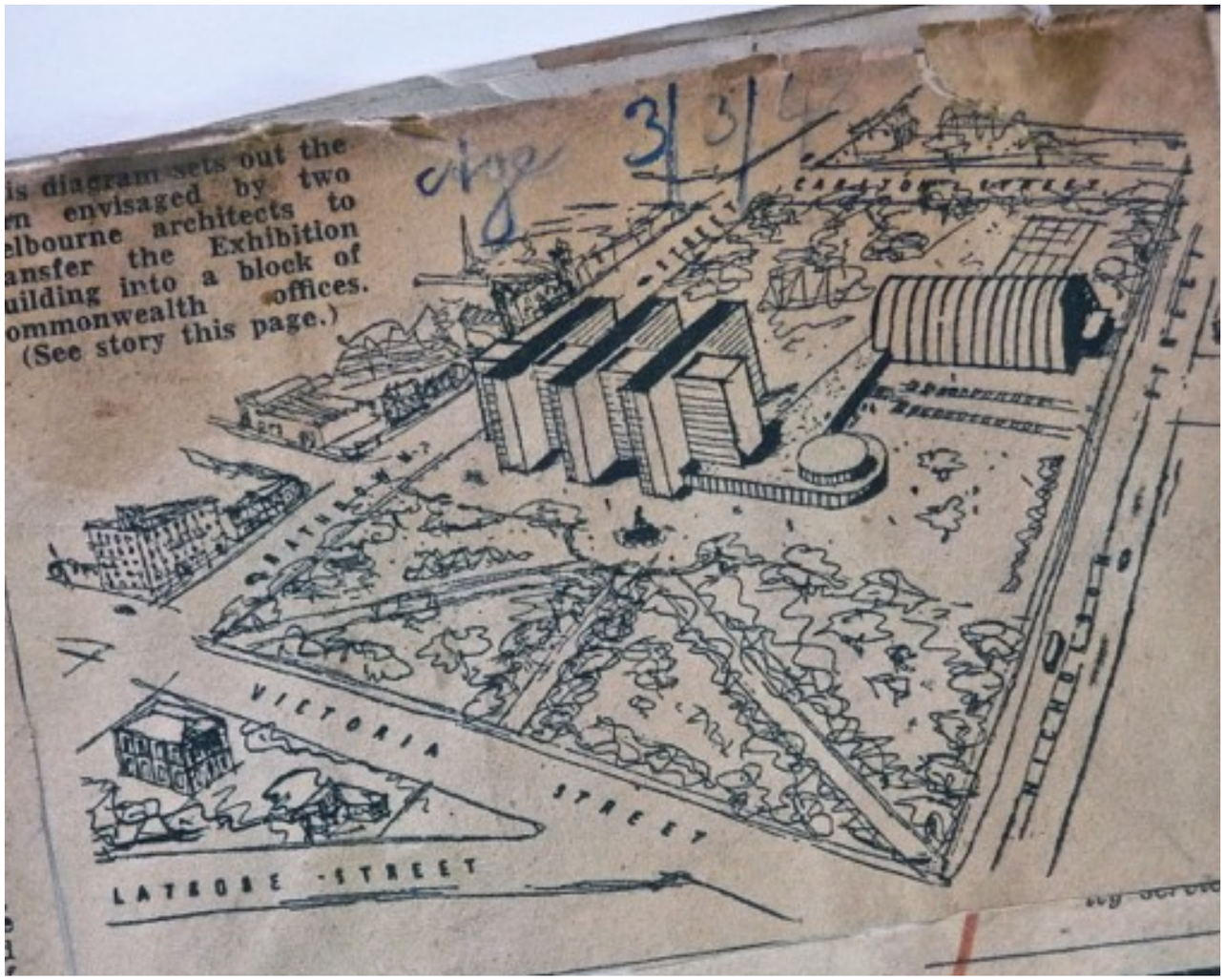
With "...garden belts throughout the whole area of the city", the apparent width of all streets would increase. There would be no need for a city square.

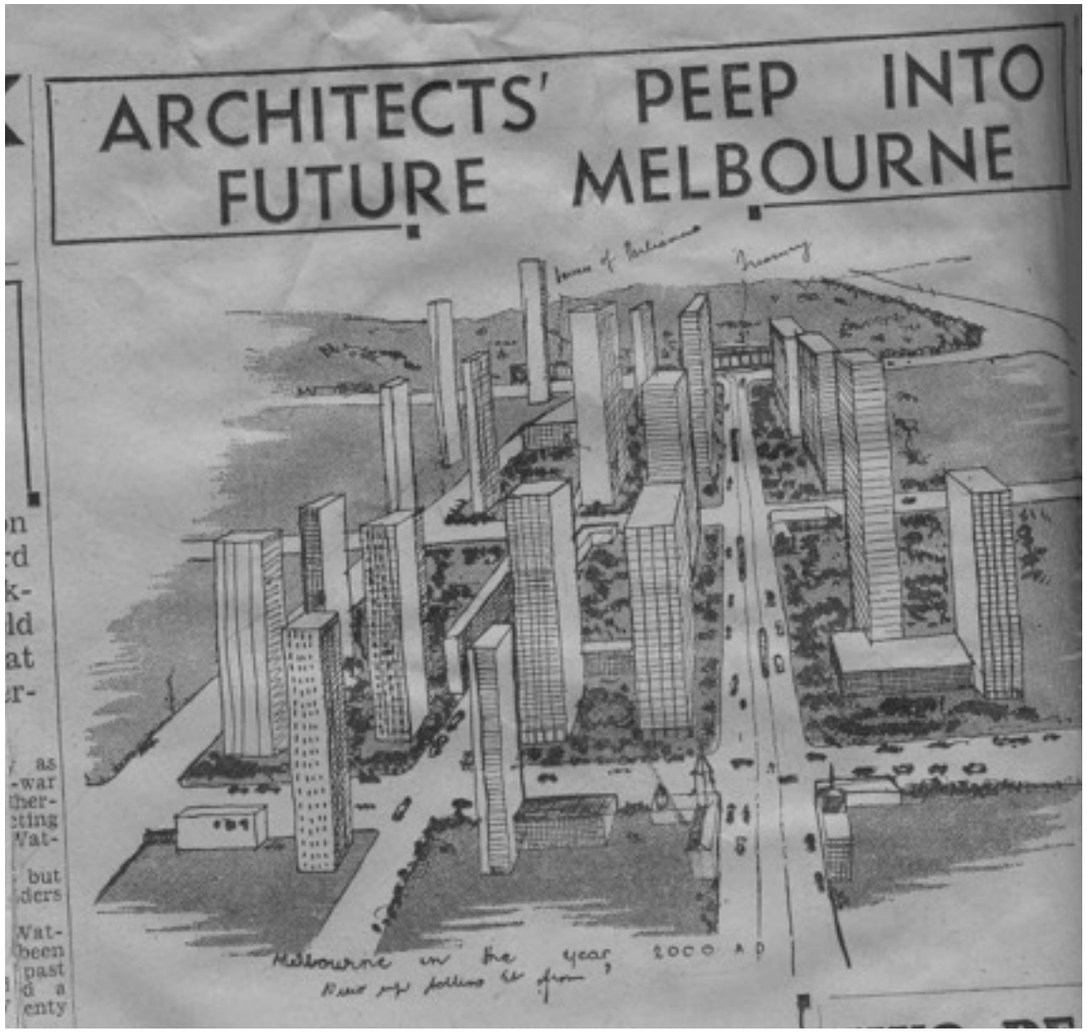
> "All the buildings would have light and air and sunlight and (a) view would be obtained from every office". "It would reduce the areas of roofs likely to leak"!

In 1961 he was elected President of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects. In 1967 he was elected President of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. In 1970, he was elected to a Life Fellowship of the R.A.I.A. Between 1964 and 1974 he was Chairman of the Industrial Design Council of Australia (Victorian division). By this time he had also become very much a nine to five Architect. He wasn't interested at all in touting for work after hours and far preferred breeding Angus beef cattle at his property at Officer, in Gippsland. If the T Square Club was his reference group in the 1940's and early 50's - it broke away from the Savage Club in 1949 - another unique, and far less known Melbourne institution, The West Brighton Club, replaced it in the 1960's and 70's. In this way, the artists were supplanted by the captains of industry. It was, after all, for these captains that he built factories. Indeed, his last Modernist entries for 'The House of the Future' was for The Ideal Home Shows of 1955 and 1956.

He died in 1977. Yet his practice lived on in the work of two of his sons. Seventy years after Best was busy tearing down the verandahs and eliminating the "caves" and "tunnels" of "Duneira", the Alcock's splendid summer retreat on Mount Macedon, Loftus and Darren were engaged, as Conservation Architects, restoring Melbourne's Victorian past. Today, young at heart, but as old men, they practice as 'one man bands'. Darren returned to Collins Street to be next door to his Club, The Athenaeum. Loftus 'retired' to Port Douglas, in Far North Queensland. Together with his wife, Shirley, he works on remote schools, and indigenous projects.

Best Overend and Partners. Architects. Loftus, Darren and Best. Sometime earlier, in 1962, the E Type was the first imported into Australia by his friend, Jack Bryson, the Melbourne Jaguar distributor. The car had just replaced his C Type modified XK 140. (repurchased by Darren in the 1980's.)



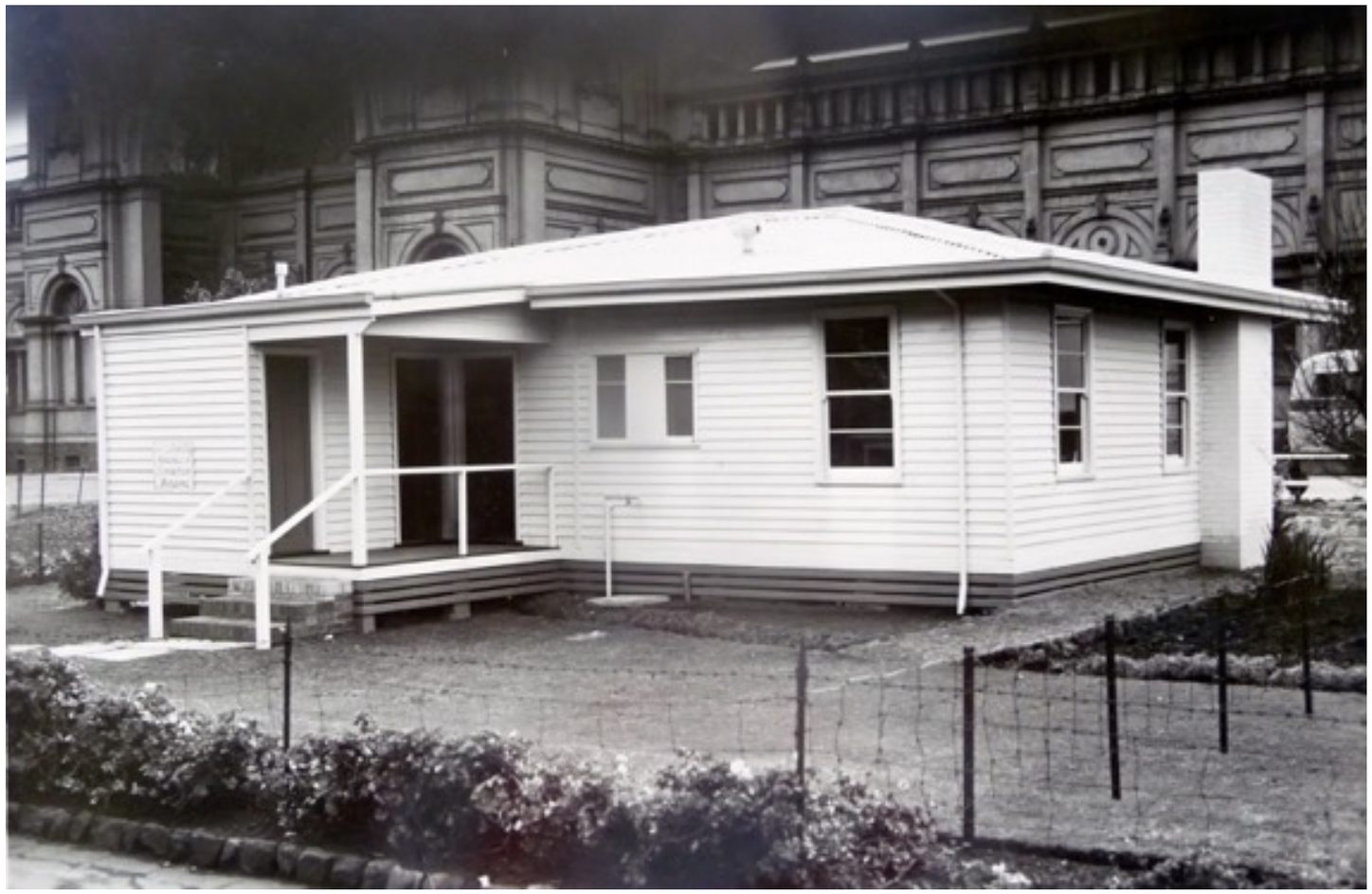


A horrifying Modernist image of Melbourne's only World Heritage Site. Best Overend and Fredrick Romberg's scheme for the redevelopment of the Exhibition Buildings precinct. Comforting words included, 'without so much as cutting a blade of grass or removing a tree...a modern building could be erected.' It could 'contain 24 acres of office space for 20,000 civil servants'; underground parking for 3,000 cars. They 'would stake their architectural reputations on the Exhibition site being much healthier, cleaner and more attractive...'
The *Age* 3rd March 1948.

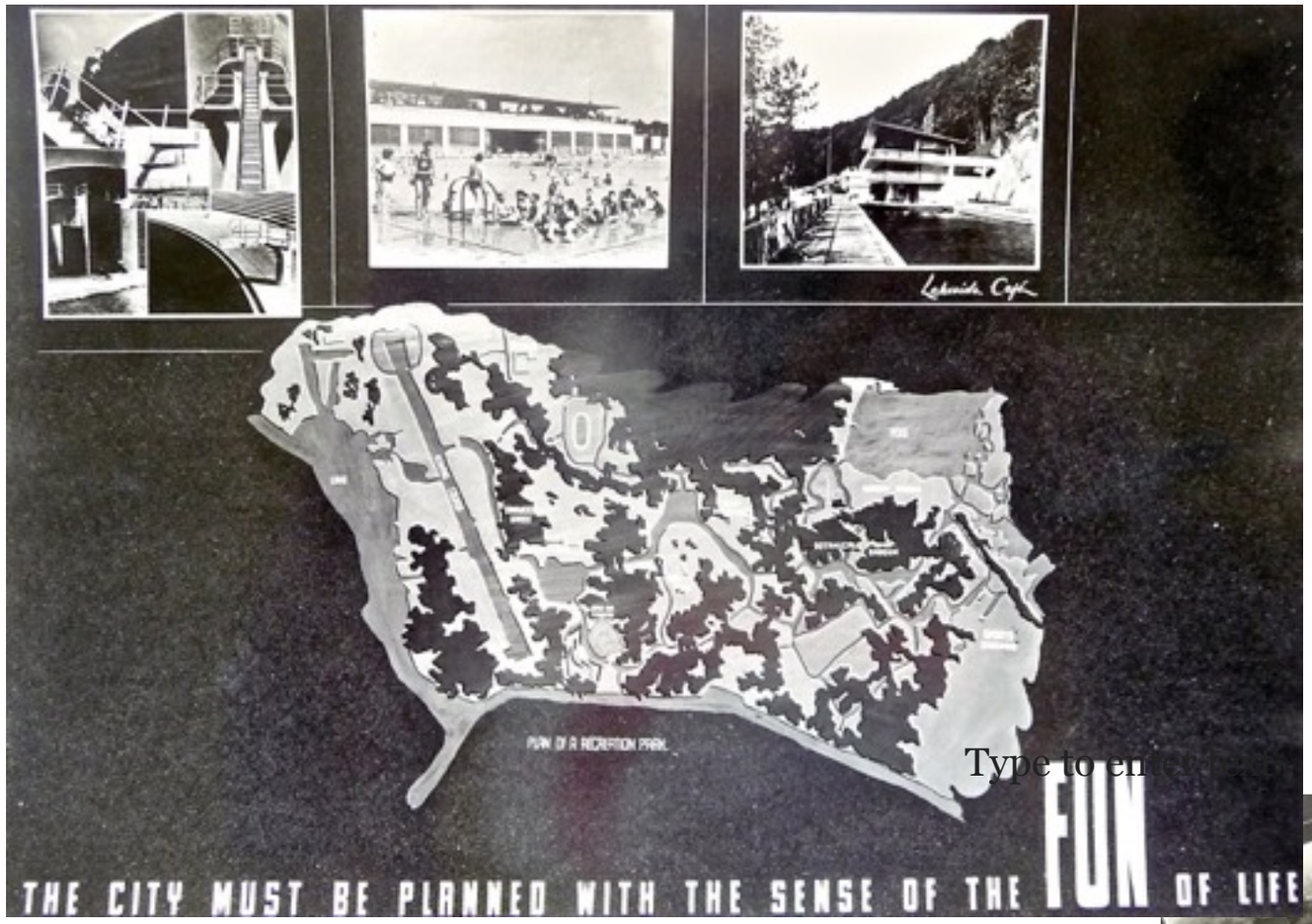
Best Overend's Le Corbusier inspired view of Melbourne in the year 2000. The perspective is looking East up Collins Street to The Treasury. Consistent with the Modernist mantra of 'light, air and sun' all the, now, cherished lanes and alley ways are eliminated. But it would enable more trees in the Paris End. And , on a more pragmatic level, it 'would render the city less liable to destruction by bomb blast' and 'please the Fire Brigades by reducing the fire hazards.' The Melbourne *Herald* 31st May 1947

With the economies of scale, Best Overend's scheme to bring the Bachelor Flats of Fitzroy to Ascot Vale. Although an elegant example of Modernist thinking, they were never built. Some ten years later, however, The Victorian Housing Commission embarked on the very negation of these design principles. These are the multi-story tower boxes, to accommodate families, that are doted around Melbourne.

Ascot Estate. Publicity photos taken in 1955, a few years after completion.Below, sixty years later, and in good shape for another one hundred and forty! Appropriate landscaping - another Treasury Gardens - was never achieved. Fortunately, with cars still at bay, there remains the potential for extensive communal gardens.



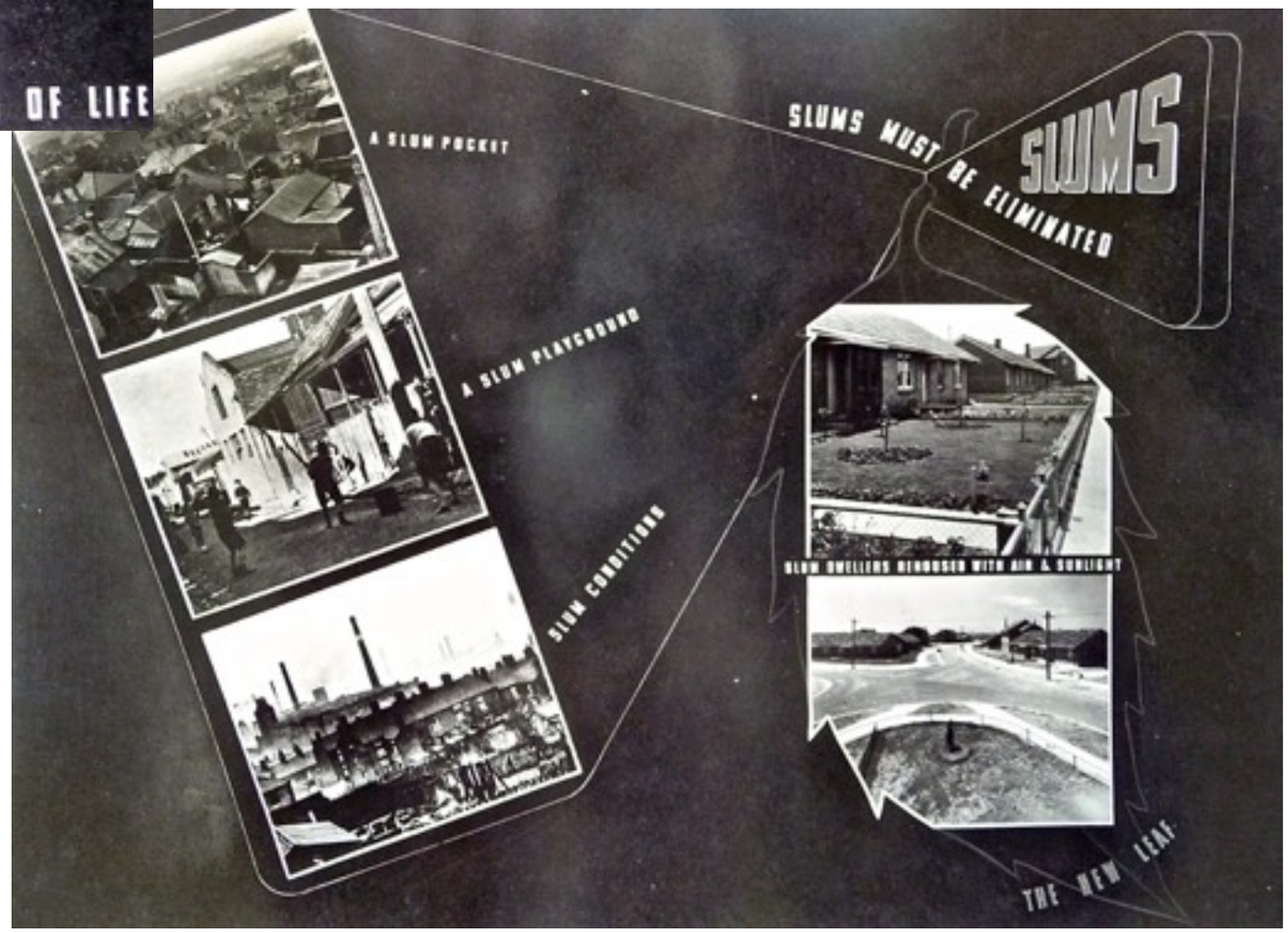
Pre-Fabricated Utility Blocks on trucks to somewhere in country Victoria. A separate module for outside laundry and second toilet.The rear view of a completed display home erected in front of the now destroyed annex to The Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne.

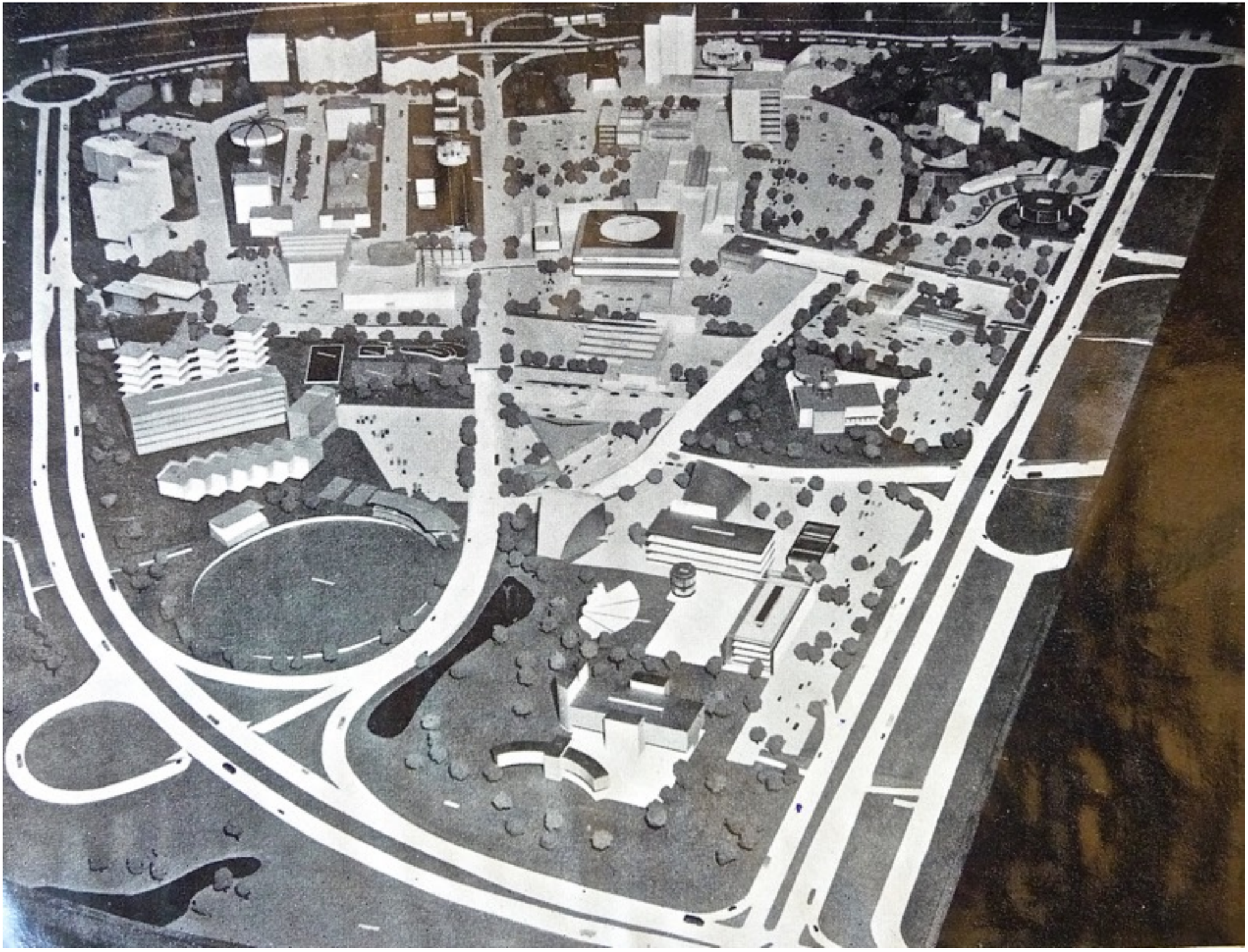


“A city must be planned with the sense of the FUN of life” -

“ A slum pocket. A slum playground. Slum conditions. Slums must be eliminated. Slum dwellers rehoused with air and sunlight. The new leaf.”!

The ideology behind the Architects Panel’s Town Planning Exhibitions after the war.





Best Overend's town planning scheme for the Housing Commission in the late 1960's.This is Hazelwood, later called Churchill, in Gippsland. Regarded at the time as Victoria's 'Ruhr Valley', the elaborate roads were built, and a university, but not much else.

A composite portrait of Bernice and Best Overend, painted by their friend - and fellow T Square Club member - Jock Frater. Exhibited at the 31st Annual Exhibition of Melbourne Painters. The Sedon Galleries. Melbourne 1949. Along with Max Meldrum, Frater - the Scottish Colourist- commanded the highest prices of over one hundred Guineas.

Best and Bernice Overend on the veranda of their home"Lochiel", in Brighton. Photographic portrait by Helmut Newton. The occasion was a Ball at Government House, for the Royal Visit, 1954.

Coda.

In 1949, Archer Thomas, the editor of the Melbourne *Herald*, published two feature articles by Best Overend. To paraphrase his editorial comment, mentioned at the beginning of this Postscript, Thomas thought his writing raced, bounced and stopped, like his new jeep; but it was also vigorous, picturesque and fast moving; and had a rare mixture of fancy and simple writing. Between April and June that year he had accompanied his client and friend Gordon Coulter – chairman of United Distillers, and a board member of Carton and United Brewery – on a study tour of the United States and Europe. The articles were based on his impressions. Best Overend's expenses for the seven week trip were 1,568 pounds - around three years of an average man's wage. Of this cost sixty percent was picked up by United Distillers, twenty percent by the Victorian Housing Commission and twenty percent by Lawrence Hartnett, a Melbourne industrialist and creator of the Holden car. The first architectural impression was of America.

> "Best Overend, well known Melbourne architect, back from New York, gives a picture of a Glittering generous 'city of tomorrow'…and you don't have to like it either." (The *Herald.* July 30th 1949.)

America had confirmed his long held belief that the solution to the monotony of public housing was what is now called landscape architecture.

> "The outer suburban subdivisions of New York are park like. The absence of front fences and proper street tree planting accentuates this. Less happy, as yet, are the newer subdivisions, planned along lines well known in Melbourne and adopted by the Victorian Housing Commission. The beauty of suburbs ultimately depends upon the planting, and as in Victoria, time has not yet permitted the necessary growth."

A few years later, in a Moorabbin subdivision for the Housing Commission, he replaced the conventional shopping strip with isolated shops, each separated by a garden and house. Although this secured some aesthetic success, it was accompanied by commercial failure. It meant shoppers had twice as far to walk, and no cover from the elements. A further pointed defence of unitary construction went along the following lines.

> "As in Melbourne, there is a universal dislike for standardised housing, yet people seem satisfied to accept that very standardization as far as personal transport is concerned…Only the blessing of gardens and street planting can save these suburbs, as with our own."

Even then, many decades before the democratisation of flight, it was his impression that "Airports in the States operate on the well known stockyard principle, cattle runs and loud-speakers and a milling mob." Assuming the Modernist precept that material determines form, and that this form ought be simple and unadulterated, the beauty of downtown New York is in its "…materials unadorned – marble, glass, aluminium, all clean and eternal." Others

> "…have achieved the lovely and gracious patina of middle age. The city itself is now a combination of golden greyish stone and textured brick, the early spring of street trees, the smooth asphalt of avenues and the weathered verdigris green of copper downpipes, copings, flashings and roofs, all beautiful in the sunshine."

As a Packard owner, he was also impressed with, what was to be, the second last flowering of the American automotive industry.

> "The cars are huge, sleek, heavy, beautiful and of almost equal consequence (to the skyscraper). The low wide bodies and hidden wheels make them look like beetled motor launches without bow wave or wake." (my elaboration)

In contrast to the special bodied, thoroughbred, English car, this also means, "Individuality is lost. There is little that is slender or gracious". The ubiquitous six by six Studebaker truck of the Second World War no doubt helped finance the last Packard in the fifties. Thereafter, with steel several grades thinner, the car industry was left with only one bloom. The General and Ford went on with fins in the sixties; and that was that.

Finally, there were the social observations – some accurate and some inaccurate - that

> "Television is everywhere, and 'sellivision' is about to assail us. In three years it is forecast ordinary radio will be out. Our cautious ABC might be more canny than we think in delaying F.M. It might be by-passed."

As it happened, Australia just waited another twenty six years! But the Brewery, and Gordon, would have been happier with his final comment:

> "…the liquor stores stand out in brilliance of lighting. Open day and night, competition is terrific and there are no drunks at all. Surely it is time some Victorian government ceased the shams and follies of the six o'clock swill. Surely there is less danger in an open shop; and we have outgrown the harness of the horse-and–sulky age."

Just prior to the 1956 Olympic Game's in Melbourne, Best Overend completed the Graham Hotel, in Swanston Street, for Carlton and United. Above the main bar, witnessing this swill, hung a marvelous mural of many shaped and coloured alcohol bottles. Painted by fellow *Manuscripts* contributor Harry De Hartog, some of these, no doubt, were from the United Distillers range. So this was not some sort of abstract expression – Albert Tucker's 'images of modern evil' - but the George Bell School of realism. With the end to the swill, some twenty years later, the mural came down. The hotel had to be 'modernised'; the integrity of the building ruined. Fortunately this was by the original architect. And, this time, with the help of his two sons. Thereafter, the mural he had commissioned hung over the desk in his office.

The second *Herald* article addressed Europe, and started with the impression that "the most remarkable thing about the new architecture in the New Europe is that there has been practically no new building at all…". Consistent with his tongue-in-cheek call for the pulling down of Melbourne's beloved Exhibition Building, is the observation that damage from the recent war

> "…is obvious, because the repairs have worn better than the initial fabric. The carved façade of Rheims Cathedral is so worn with history and time and lack of maintenance that the building might well be a stack of old sand bags."

Reminders of his draughtsman days, working on Cresta shop fronts for Wells Coates, is the contention that "probably the best architecture is in the shop displays…". France, however, was an exception.

> "The George Cinq Hotel in Paris is a fine example of expensive art, with a lovely internal courtyard full of flowers and pools, separated from the lounges and dinning rooms with great glass screens. The heavy carpets and deep fur lounges extend to the terraces and inside, very properly, sport the most delicate of womanhood, fine and as petulant as the rose petals of a Melbourne June."

The French have absorbed and adopted the best of every culture and every generation. The results are "…as effervescent as champagne."

> "One new house owner I have in mind considered suburban fences inadequate. To ensure privacy with glass walls, he used a bulldozer to push up artificial hills within his garden. He also employed, with glorious abandon and complete mastery, a mixture of East and West in mosaic floors and walls in lavatory and bathroom blocks, and on odd sections of outside walls where he felt a little colour might be good. His house had classical balustrades married to stolid Egyptian columns, pure glass walls behind the columns, and rococo fish-ponds complete with carp for lunch."

The rest of Europe was less impressive. There is little modern architecture.

> "…only an unwashed, unpainted status quo, here and there dotted with a poor attempt to imitate the new Moorabbin factory of cement blocks and second-hand steel frames."

It is significant that in his diaries there are no appointments to visit the Office of Wells Coates in London. No discussions on PAB housing. In England

> "There are vast areas that would be classified as slums in Melbourne. Manual workers live in their hundreds of thousands in conditions… not tolerated here. The Glasgow tenements, in the most dreadfully dilapidated state, are multiplied in there hundreds in the larger European cities. Bathrooms and kitchens, if any, open on to enclosed corridors – you walk up seven stories – the places haven't been painted for generations. "

Was it now the Deputy Chairman of The Architect's Panel making the following 'disinterested' conclusion? "A few Australian Housing Commissions at work in Europe would soothe many a savage European breast"!

The Festival of Britain opened in May 1951, exactly two years after Best's visit. As Elizabeth Darling has observed : It was conceived by Modernists '… most of whom were card-carrying members of the MARS Group.'(16) Although disaffected and disenfranchised from the architectural establishment of Britain by this time, Wells Coates got a significant commission, the 'Telekinema'. This was a four hundred seat auditorium, that, as the neologism suggests, was a cross between cinema and television. Pulled down in 1957, when the National Film Theatre moved to a nearby site, it was to last longer than any of the other exhibits, apart from the 'egg in a box' - the Royal Festival Hall. This remained, and was the first post World War building to achieve a Grade 1 listing by the National Trust. None of these modernist structures were evident in 1949. But, in his report to Herald readers, Best Overend concludes by saying:

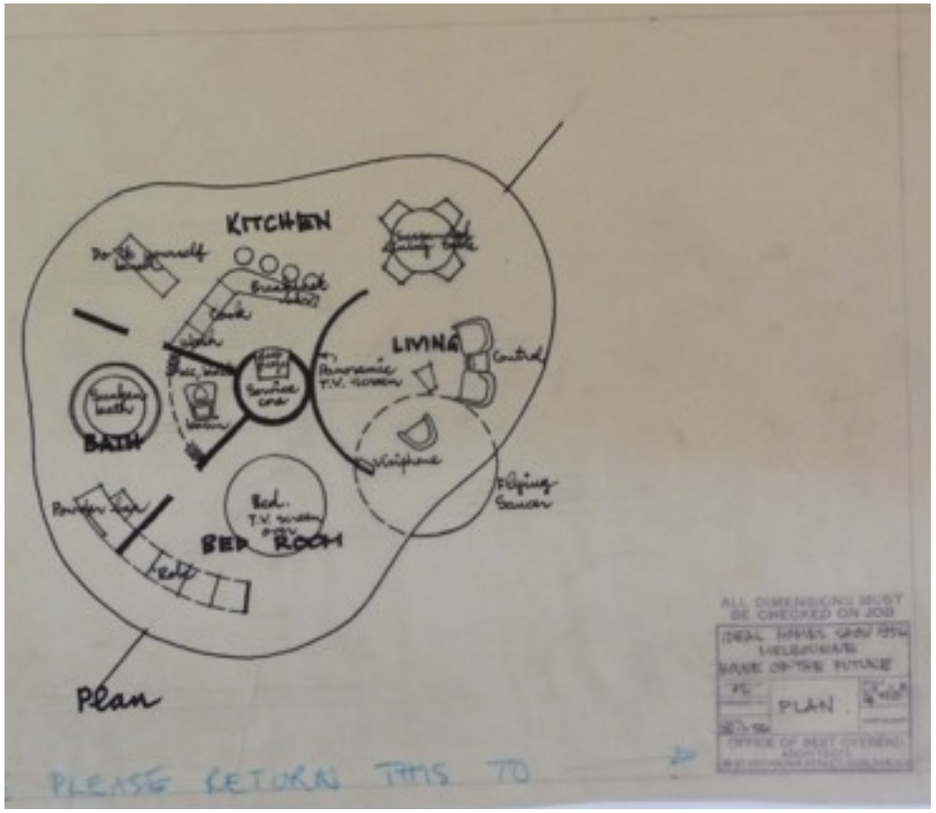
> "The New Architecture of Europe will be the Government Office and those lengthening shadows around the London Olympia housing the British Industries Fair forecast the size of the accommodation required. The steelwork for the new Government Offices there stands 10 stories high over a city block. Shades of the new Latrobe Street!" (this refers to the Police Headquarters - D24 – built, in 1943, on the corner of Russell and Latrobe Street.)

When he next returned to London in 1953 - again for the Brewery, and this time as a guest to attend the Coronation - Winston Churchill was Prime Minister. He had made sure the South Bank structures were demolished. In his eyes they were no more than 'socialist folly'. It remains unclear whether Best Overend saw what remained. Did he inspect Wells Coates' Telekinema? Even if he had, I doubt that he would have revised his 1949 opinion:

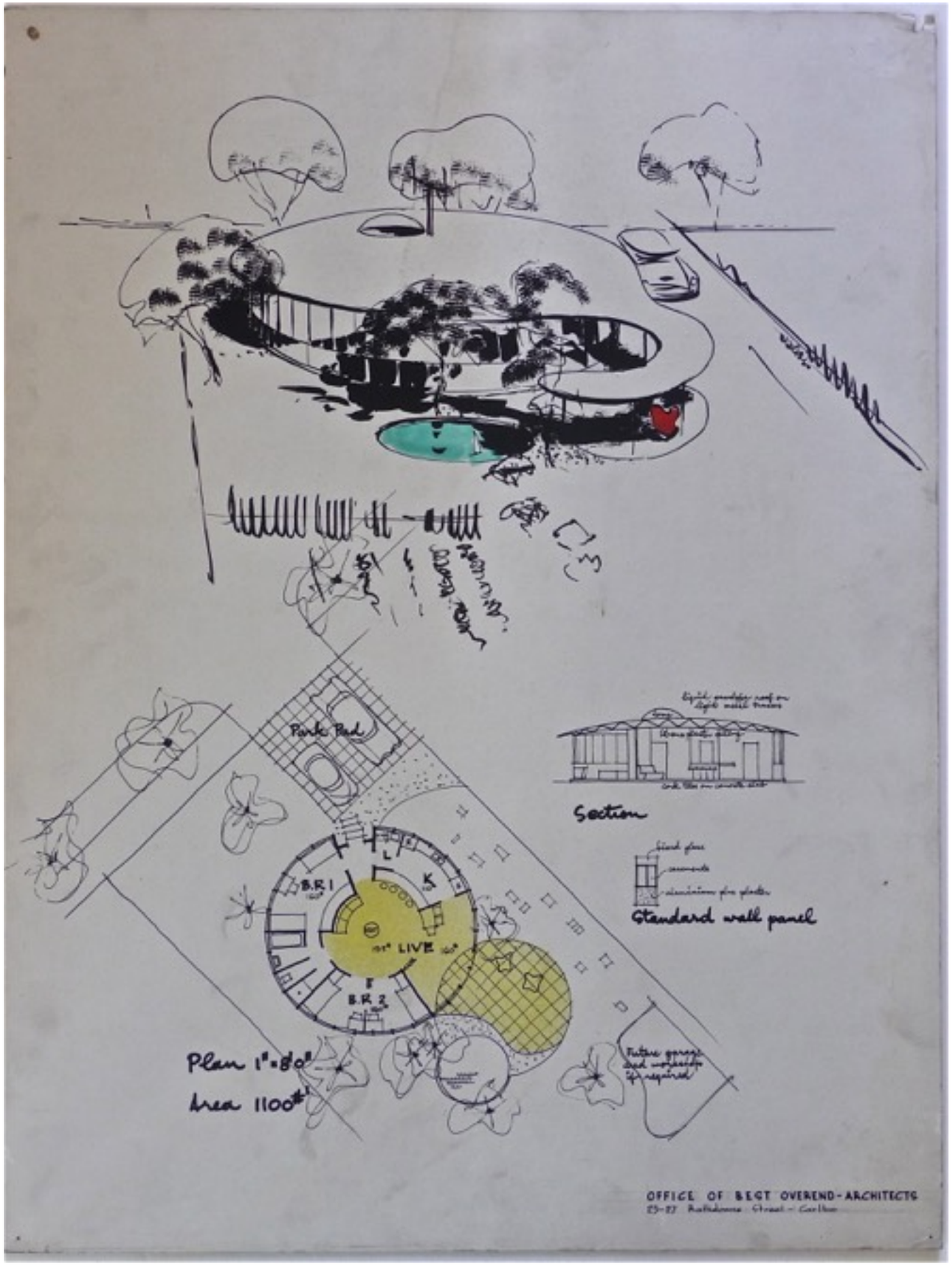
> "It will be for the future to advise us whether this architecture is to be any better than that based upon the fantastic individual wealth of a land owner or a church."

Modernism was 'shelter'; as temporary as everything else.

Perspective of a one bedroom 'House of the Future', for the Ideal Home Show. Melbourne, 1956.



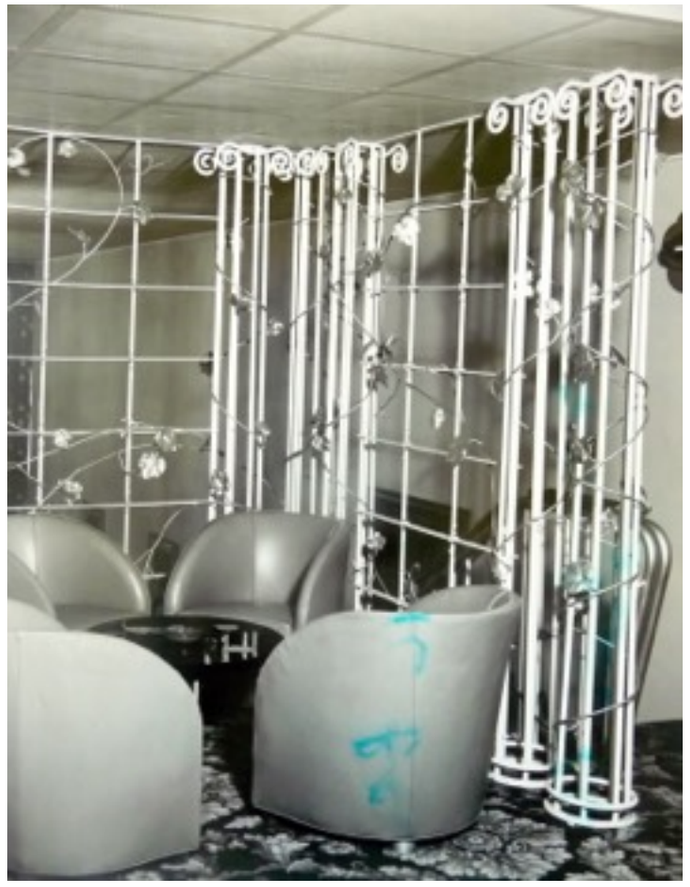
Plan. ‘House of the Future‘1956. In July of that year, the final report of The Royal Commission into the Housing Acts was presented to parliament. Soon after , the Architect’s Panel was disbanded, and control of the Housing Commission reverted to public servants, not private enterprise.



A larger two bedroom ‘House of the Future’, 1956, the last presented by The Office of Best Overend. Architects. After being ‘sacked’, his practice only accepted commissions for private houses in exceptional circumstances, and only for very good friends.

The Graham Hotel. Publicity photos, 1953. Facade: Terra Cotta tiles and Stainless Steel Cladding. Interior stair detail, with extensive use of peach hue mirrors. This gave a commodious feel to small spaces and a healthy complexion to patrons.

The Graham. A Small Hotel. Reception area at the foot of stairs, looking up to the cocktail lounge mezzanine. Below. The cocktail lounge.



Wrought iron detail. From flowering vines on the stairs, to abstract Corinthian columns and screens for toilets

Harry DeHartog’s , still life with bottles. The perspective was for an elevated position, high above the main bar at the Graham. It now hangs in the Lindrum Hotel.

The 1956 Olympic Village at Heidelberg. The Office ofBest Overend was awarded The Bronze Medal.

A fine ink rendering of the proposed State Public Officers, Treasury Place, Melbourne. One of a dozen architects invited to enter the 1962 competition, Best Overend believed he had won because, at a cocktail party, the results were announced, from Third place to First. Keith Mackay received a consolation prize, and a large contract for another government building - the State Insurance Office. Bitter disappointment, Yunken Freeman Architects, First. Artist. Len Annois - fellow member of The T Square Club.

Notes

1. Completed in 1938, the iconic Bentley Wood House, in Sussex, bankrupted Chermayeff. Selling it shortly after moving in, he left England for America, and ultimately professorships at Harvard and Yale. He died in 1996.

2. At the time, the Rev. H A Overend was President of The Methodist Conference of Victoria and Tasmania.

3. In the early 1930's, whilst in London studying Architecture, my father also attended a course in Phrenology.

4. Upon his return from Shanghai, in 1938, Best Overend elaborated on these ideas in three articles for the *Australian Home Beautiful.* 'The Desirable House: With Some Thoughts to the Source and Success of Modernism', 'The Desirable House (part two)' and 'The House of 1960: Let us Consider it Merely as Shelter', reprinted in Ann Stephen, Andrew McNamara, Philip Goad, *Modernism and Australia: Documents on Art, Design and Architecture 1917-1967.* The Miegunyah Press. Melbourne 2006. and in Michael Bogle, *Designing Australia*. *Readings in the History of Design.* Pluto Press Australia. Annandale 2002.

5. Married in Melbourne, a few years later, Best Overend settled for Brighton Beach. Here in a Victorian Italianate residence called 'Lochiel' – not an amalgam of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright – he lived the rest of his life. After the war, however, he purchased properties alluded too here. Arthurs Seat was a 'small mountain range' above Mornington and Dromana overlooking Port Phillip Bay. In 1949, he started purchasing land in the Strzlecki Ranges, Gippsland, where he found the 'desperately torn country', overlooking Wilsons Promontory and the Ninety Mile Beach. This was an hour drive from his Morwell office, which he visited every Wednesday. For images of this property go to: www.madalya.com.au

6. For a contemporary analysis of the importance of gold, and Japan's plunder of the East – orchestrated by the Emperor's Household - see Sterling and Peggy Seagrave *Gold Warriors: America's Secret Recovery of Yamashita's Gold.* Verso. 2003.

7. Bob Eggleston was my father's cousin. He was also a young Architect in Melbourne and had followed my father, by working for Wells Coates in London. I have left the letter unedited.

8. Bill Hanson was their mutual friend. In the early 1930's he completed his articles with Alex Eggleston – Bob's father . After the war, he spent the rest of his life as a friend and confidant in my father's Architectural practice. He retired in 1980, and died in September 1984.

9. This is an unedited letter to Bill Hanson, a lifelong friend and colleague of my father. Reference is made to him in the earlier letter to Bob Eggleston.

10. Robin Boyd. *Victorian Modern.* Renown Press. Melbourne .1947. Facsimile. The Robin Boyd Foundation. 2011.

11. Robin Boyd. *Australia's Home*. Melbourne University Press. Carlton. 1952. P 128.

12. Elizabeth Darling. *Re-Forming Britain. Narratives of Modernity before Reconstruction.* Routledge . Abingdon. 2007.

13. *Modernism and Australia*. P 299.

14. The Treasury Gardens, in the centre of Melbourne, are across the road from the extensive Fitzroy Gardens, and surround The Treasury Building.

15. Raymond McGrath . *Twentieth Century Houses*. Faber & Faber. London. First Edition. No date. P 96.

16. Elizabeth Darling. *Wells Coates*. Chapter 4. An Architect of our Times. RIBA Publishing. London. 2012

‘Golden Haired Boy’
by William Frater.1954.

‘Bald Headed Photographer’ by Rod Coats. 2011. (Seated at a table overlooking the ‘desperately torn country’.

Dr Tronn Overend is the ‘favourite fourth son’ of Best and Bernice Overend. Born in 1950, he was educated at Wesley College, Melbourne. In 1971 he graduated from The University of New England, with majors in Philosophy and Sociology. In 1972 he received First Class Honours in Sociology. His Doctorate was conferred in 1979, from LaTrobe University, where he tutored, in The Department of Sociology, for nine years. The author of *Social Idealism and the Problem of Objectivity* (Queensland University Press, 1983), he is also the author of numerous articles in leading International Journals on Social Theory and the Philosophy of the Social Sciences. Extracts from *Tramp to Shanghai* have been published in **Quadrant**, along with other contributions in the field of aesthetics.He is married to Elizabeth Corrigan. They have a Boxer, a Spoodle, and three children.

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This book is dedicated to Libby, again.