



Robert Russell: Artist of Early Melbourne

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Edited by Fay Woodhouse

Trained in Edinburgh as a surveyor and architect, Robert Russell came to Australia in 1833 and immediately found work in Sydney in the Surveyor-General's office. In 1836 he was appointed Chief Surveyor and Commissioner of Crown Lands in the Port Phillip District; in 1838 he was appointed Clerk of Works. His lackadaisical manner and disrespectful attitude to his superiors resulted in his dismissal from all official posts. Despite this setback, he lived and worked in Melbourne for almost the entire Victorian era. In 1837, Governor Bourke replaced Russell and appointed Robert Hoddle as Chief Surveyor. However, Russell was also a talented architect and artist. He designed Melbourne's first church, St James Cathedral and other residential properties. What many people are unaware of is his extraordinary talent as an artist. As Melbourne grew from a small settlement to a major metropolis, Robert Russell recorded its development through pen & ink drawings, watercolours and portraits.

Patricia Hawkins' enthusiasm for Russell's work and her defence of his name and reputation is infectious. Her argument that his paintings have been overlooked and should not have been is quite compelling. His distinctive contribution to Melbourne during the period 1836-1900 is brought to life in this lively biography.

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